

A
DISPENSATIONAL
SYNOPSIS
OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT

CHARLES F. BAKER

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FOREWORD

The contents of this book first appeared several years ago as a series of articles in the Grace Gospel Fellowship publication TRUTH magazine. While these articles have been slightly reworked for this book-length format, they are virtually the same as their original presentation, with two exceptions. Portions of the Galatians text have been expanded and the material on Revelation has been greatly enlarged and almost completely rewritten. In fact, Mr. Baker's comments on Revelation (which he compiled in the spring of this year) are more extensive than his remarks for any other New Testament book.

At the time of the original writing, Mr. Baker tells me, there was significant concern in our fellowship about an erroneous form of dispensationalism commonly called "Acts 28." Rather than cull out the several references which offer refutations to this extreme position, they have been left in the current text. There is very little else published which challenges this extreme view and I believe Mr. Baker's comments herein are keen and corrective regarding this false teaching.

The idea of a dispensational synopsis which highlights key dispensational features in each New Testament book is most worthy indeed. Those new to rightly dividing the Word will find great help in this study of integrating right division principles throughout the Scriptures. More seasoned students will not only be confirmed in their dispensational approach to the Word, but will undoubtedly discover fresh insights into familiar as well as not-so-familiar passages.

As a resource in the teaching ministry of the local church, *A Dispensational Synopsis* is a blessing. Sunday School teachers especially will find it remarkably helpful in familiarizing themselves with dispensational distinctives. However, this book makes a wonderful contribution to the understanding of anyone in the church who desires to know the Bible better. It has my highest recommendation.

Timothy F. Conklin
Autumn, 1989

MATTHEW

The purpose, in this series of studies is by no means to give a complete exposition of every New Testament book, but to briefly show the dispensational structure and relationship of the subjects within each book.

Matthew is the first book in our New Testament canon. Actually Matthew is a part of the Old Testament--it is evident the New Testament could not have come into being until after the death of Christ, and this event is not recorded until chapter 27. Christ Himself made it plain that His blood was to inaugurate the New Testament ([26:28](#)). Therefore we should not expect to find in Matthew any distinctive truth concerning God's way of salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ, especially since this truth was hidden from the disciples at that time (see [Luke 18:31-34](#)).

This Gospel record begins:

The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Hence, the purpose of Matthew is to deal with Jesus Christ in this two-fold relationship:

- As the son of David.
- As the son of Abraham.

David was the great king of Israel with whom God made a covenant to establish a kingdom upon this earth which should endure forever ([2 Samuel 7](#)). This fact is emphasized in the question of the wise men, "Where is he that is born king of the Jews?" ([2:2](#)), and in the fact that the message Jesus preached at that time is called "the gospel of the kingdom" ([4:23](#)).

The emphasis upon this earthly, Messianic kingdom can be seen further in the fact that Matthew uses the word "kingdom" fifty-five times, Mark twenty times, and Luke forty-four times. This is a total of 119 times in the Synoptics, as compared with only five times in John and sixteen times in all of Paul's epistles, where the reference is generally to the spiritual kingdom of God in its wider sense.

Jesus Christ is also set forth in Matthew as the son of Abraham. His genealogy is traced from Abraham, who was the father of the circumcision people ([Romans 4:12](#)). Paul makes a great distinction between Abram in uncircumcision and Abraham in circumcision. The gospel Christ gave Paul to preach was related to Abram in uncircumcision, whereas the one given to Peter was called "the gospel of the circumcision" ([Galatians 2:7-9](#)). There can be no doubt that the gospel of Christ's earthly ministry was *both* the gospel of the circumcision *and* the gospel of

the kingdom, for Christ forbade His disciples to even preach to the uncircumcision (10:5; 15:24). When we once grasp the fact that Matthew's record is based upon this two-fold relationship---the promise to bless all nations through Abraham's seed; and to establish a worldwide kingdom of righteousness and peace in fulfillment of the covenant with David -- we will have no problem reconciling the many differences between Matthew and Paul.

Matthew's Gospel falls naturally into two divisions, each beginning with the expression "From that time:"

- From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (4:17).
- From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day (16:21).

The sufferings of Christ and the glories of the millennial kingdom have been the two main topics of all prophecy since the world began (1 Peter 1:11). The first part of Christ's ministry was occupied with announcing that the glories of that kingdom were near at hand, and then in revealing to His disciples that He must first suffer on the cross before the kingdom could become a reality (Luke 24:25-27; Acts 3:18-26). However, as we have seen, the disciples did not then understand anything of the meaning of His impending death. Peter even goes so far as to boast he would never let anything like that happen to Jesus (16:22-23).

After reciting the genealogy of Jesus, His virgin birth, the flight into Egypt, Herod's slaughter of the children, and His return from Egypt, all in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, Matthew introduces us to John the Baptist, the forerunner of the king. John's responsibility was to prepare the hearts of the people of Israel to receive their king. His ministry was the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. John showed it was not sufficient to only be fleshly descendants of Abraham; they must also bring forth works worthy of repentance.

But in order to qualify as king, Jesus must be tested to prove He would not disobey God. Hence, after identifying Himself with His people by receiving John's baptism, He is led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness where He is tested by Satan forty days. Coming forth victorious from this test He begins His public ministry with the announcement that the kingdom of heaven is at hand (4:17).

In the next three chapters, Matthew records Jesus' sermon on the mount. This sermon has been called the Magna Charta of the kingdom. The beatitudes, the so-called Lord's prayer, and the golden rule are the main features of this sermon. The kingdom was not yet established; it was only at hand. Hence, the beatitudes pronounce blessing on peacemakers and upon those that go through the troubles leading up to the establishment of the kingdom. The main petition of the prayer is for his long-promised kingdom to be set up, so God's will might be done on earth

as it is in heaven. The golden rule, which is but a restatement of the Law (7:12), is the principle by which life will be lived in the kingdom.

Of course, this kingdom has not yet begun; neither will its principles for living operate successfully until Jesus returns and reigns as King. We will be sadly disappointed if we try to work the golden rule today on ungodly neighbors or on atheistic communist dictators.

After Jesus had done certain miracles He called twelve of His disciples to be His apostles and commissioned them, as recorded in chapter 10. The reason for the number twelve was doubtless because Israel is composed of twelve tribes, and in the regeneration of this earth when Christ sits on His throne, these twelve will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (19:28). He commissioned them to:

- Go only to Israel.
- Announce that the kingdom is at hand.
- Perform certain miracles.

They were thus to duplicate His ministry throughout the cities of Israel. The purpose of this ministry was to prove He and His disciples possessed the necessary powers and credentials to establish the kingdom by removing sickness and death from the human scene.

However, by this time it was becoming apparent that the religious rulers were rejecting Jesus and even plotting to destroy him. John the Baptist was imprisoned (chapter 11), and Jesus announced the unpardonable sin (12:31, 32). He said God would forgive the sins they were committing against the Son of man, but they would not be forgiven blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was not given until the festival of Pentecost after His death, and it was there Israel committed this unpardonable sin. Luke tells us Jesus prayed for the forgiveness of those who crucified Him (23:34), but they could not be forgiven of their sin against the Holy Spirit. It was because of this the promises to national Israel were set aside in the Acts period and a new dispensation was inaugurated under the apostle Paul.

In view of His rejection He related the parables of the mysteries of the kingdom in chapter 13. All of the Old Testament prophecies seemed to indicate the kingdom would be established immediately after His sufferings, but these parables reveal the secret that there was to be a period of seed sowing before the end of the age. This is the period of the first part of the book of Acts. Through the apostle Paul's writings we understand this kingdom program has been interrupted in favor of the present Dispensation of the Mystery.

Upon Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lord reveals the truth concerning the kingdom church (16:16-19). Just as there was a church in the Old Testament (Acts 7:38), so there will be a church in the

coming kingdom. This church is associated with the keys of the kingdom of the heavens, which is without doubt the earthly, millennial kingdom. The church of our dispensation is called the Body of Christ. It is heavenly in character and calling and is therefore a different company of saints from that of the church spoken of here.

Only six days after Christ's words about the kingdom church, He went up into a high mountain with Peter, James, and John and was transfigured (16:28-17:13). Peter makes it plain this experience was a foreview of the revelation of Christ in glory when He comes in His kingdom (2 Peter 1:16-18).

Numerous other events show that Matthew's gospel concerns the prophetically foretold millennial kingdom. We have already referred to the Twelve sitting on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (19:28). The request of the mother of Zebedee's children, that her two sons might sit on the right and the left hand of Christ in His kingdom (20:21), surely points to that future coming of Christ. Christ's riding into Jerusalem on an ass is said to be the fulfillment of the prophecy:

Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy king cometh unto thee ... (21:4, 5).

Finally, when Jesus lamented over Jerusalem for their rejection of Him, He said:

Your house is left unto you desolate... and He went out, and departed from the temple (23:37 -- 24:1).

Israel's temple was indeed desolate without the presence of the Messiah. Jesus then told His disciples how the temple would be destroyed, and they asked Him when this would happen, and what would be the sign of His coming and of the end of the age (24:2, 3). Chapters 24 and 25 give us His Olivet discourse as the answer to these questions.

Wars and rumors of war and persecutions will lead up to the time of the great Tribulation, which will climax the world's worst time of trouble. Immediately after this period will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and all the tribes of earth will see Him coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. This will be His second coming to earth. But according to Paul, prior to this and before the Tribulation period He will come in the air to take the saints of this dispensation out of this earth to be with Him in glory (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). When He comes to earth He will gather all nations before Him and judge them as He prepares to set up His kingdom of righteousness and peace.

The concluding chapters tell of Christ's betrayal and arrest, His trial, crucifixion, and resurrection. Pilate placed this inscription over the head of Christ on the cross:

This is JESUS the King of the Jews

Thus, even in His death He dies as Israel's king. And significantly the record closes with Christ still on the earth, meeting with His disciples on a mountain ("mountain" in Scripture often represents kingship and government; compare [Jeremiah 51:25](#); [Daniel 2:35](#); [Micah 4:1,2](#)), and commissioning them to make disciples of all nations ([28:19, 20](#)). His final promise to them is that He will be with them even unto the end of the age. This will be literally true, for He will reign upon the earth for the whole of that millennial age.

MARK

Although there are a number of differences in characteristics between the Synoptic Gospels, the dispensational pattern is the same throughout. It has often been pointed out that Matthew presents Christ as King, Mark as Servant, Luke as Son of Man, and John as Son of God. To phrase it more closely in scriptural terminology:

- Matthew presents Jesus as "the Branch of David" (Jeremiah 23:5)
- Mark as Jehovah's "Servant the Branch" (Zechariah 3:8),
- Luke as "the Man whose name is the Branch" (Zechariah 6:12)
- John as "the Branch of Jehovah" (Isaiah 4:20).

Each writer records words and incidents which especially contribute to this fourfold characterization of Christ, but none of them records anything about the dispensation of the Mystery which Christ later revealed from heaven through the apostle Paul. However, it should be understood that the Gospel records are essential to Paul's message; they give us the historical basis both for the Person and the work of Christ.

The first three Gospels are very similar and are therefore called the synoptics (which means, seen together). John's Gospel is very dissimilar. When we come to consider John's book we will have more to say about its special character. The important dispensational point to note here is that all four of the Gospels are concerned primarily with the message of the messianic kingdom. Mark is as much concerned with the establishment of the earthly kingdom as is Matthew, and Mark presents Jesus as the Son of God, the same as John does. In fact, Mark opens with:

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The differences between the four Gospels is simply a matter of emphasis. It is the same Lord Jesus Christ in all, portrayed in His fourfold character in relationship to the long prophesied millennial kingdom.

Whereas Matthew introduced Jesus as the Son of Abraham and the Son of David, Mark omits all reference to His genealogy. The proof of His kingship lay in His genealogy, but the proof of His servanthood lay in His service. Mark, therefore, has no need of a genealogical table, although, as we have seen, he begins with the assumption that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and therefore the Servant of God.

His servanthood is emphasized by Mark in the use of the little Greek word *euthus*, which is variously translated "immediately," "straightway," and "forthwith." In the first chapter alone he uses this expression eleven times. Mark gives the distinct impression of Jesus as the One who is always on the go, constantly doing

the work God sent Him to do. This is the main thrust in Mark, although surely the other Gospel records present Him in the same role, namely, doing the Father's will. Luke records His words in the temple as a twelve year old lad, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). John has numerous references to the same subject, culminating in His high-priestly prayer, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4).

Besides Mark's oft repeated use of the word "straightaway," implying the immediacy of Christ's work, his Gospel is the shortest of the four records, which fact again indicates the fast moving action of the Servant of the Lord. Because of its brevity, Mark is often chosen by missionary linguists as the first book to translate.

While this is doubtless sound practice to provide the unevangelized with the historical foundation for the gospel of salvation, it should be remembered that the message of the gospel which must be believed in order to be saved today, the gospel of the grace of God, is not to be found in Mark. Mark tells of Jesus' ministry to none but the lost sheep of the house of Israel while they were still under the Law, even as Matthew does. It should be remembered that in the Synoptic Gospels water baptism is included along with believing for salvation, and that miraculous signs are promised to follow the believing of the gospel of the kingdom, which is the subject of the commission of [16:15-18](#). Unless the translator gives the unevangelized the Pauline gospel that Christ died for our sins and rose again for our justification, they have no real basis for their salvation.

It has been suggested Matthew was written especially for Jewish readers, Mark for Romans, and Luke for Greeks. However that might be, and there seems to be some evidence for this view, it must be understood that exactly the same message is conveyed in all three Gospels, and that that message was sent only to the people of Israel.

LUKE

Since the contents of the Synoptics are so similar, it will not be necessary to repeat the comments which were made on Matthew in considering Mark and Luke. Hence, we have noted only those dispensationally significant things which are peculiar to these two records.

Luke was a very close companion and fellow-worker with Paul. Paul, in setting forth his message of reconciliation, goes all the way back to Adam to show how the human race became alienated from God in the first man, Adam, and how the world has been reconciled to God through the second Man, "the last Adam" ([1 Corinthians 15:45](#)). Matthew, it will be remembered, went back to David and Abraham in presenting the gospel of the kingdom. It appears significant that Luke in his Gospel also goes all the way back to the first Adam in tracing the genealogy of Jesus Christ. This is not to say the Gospel of Luke sets forth the message of reconciliation which Paul preached, but it does mean Luke lays a foundation for Paul's message in proving Jesus Christ was an actual descendant of Adam, and that being truly one of the human race, He was qualified to do this work of reconciliation.

Some have thought Luke was a Greek. If he was, he was the only Gentile writer of Scripture. His name may have been Greek, even as Paul's and Mark's names were, but his close acquaintance with things Jewish seems to indicate he too was Jewish. For example, the first chapter gives exact details of the courses of the Jewish priesthood in introducing Zacharias and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist. Luke alone relates these details, along with the angelic annunciation to Mary and the visit of Elizabeth with Mary.

There are several important dispensational features in Luke's opening chapter. The first is Gabriel's words to Mary:

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

This is one of the plainest statements in Scripture concerning the purpose of Christ's coming. He was born to sit on David's throne and to rule over the house of Jacob. This He has never yet done. David's throne has been unoccupied since the days of Zedekiah ([2 Chronicles 36:11](#)). Its establishment was considered still future in [Acts 15:16](#). Amillennialists argue that the Old Testament prophecies of the kingdom must be spiritualized, but here is a statement in the New Testament defying such treatment. His sitting upon David's throne must be yet future, and awaits His second coming as King of kings.

Also in the first chapter, the prophecy of Zacharias indicates the dispensational significance of Christ's coming. It was first of all in accordance with that spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began, in contrast with that which was never before revealed ([Colossians 1:26](#)). Its message was not only one of a spiritual nature, namely forgiveness of sins (v. 77), but of deliverance from physical and political enemies (vv. 71-75). The gospel of the grace of God contains no promise of physical or material or political blessing.

In chapter 2 the shepherds hear the angelic hosts saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (v. 14). Here is another evidence that one of the purposes in Christ's coming was to bring peace on earth. Since the gospel has never brought peace to earth, there must be a reason why it has not. We have only to look at chapter 12:49-51 to find the answer. In view of His rejection by Israel Christ asks, "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division." Some day the following prayer will be answered, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Until Christ returns and is acknowledged by Israel, however, this earth will know no lasting peace.

Closely connected with the above truth is the word of Simeon to Mary in chapter 2:34:

Behold, this child is set for the falling and the rising of many in Israel.

He did not mean, as the A.V. reads, the fall and rising of the same ones, but the fall of some and the rising of others. Paul speaks of the fall of Israel in [Romans 11: 11, 12](#), which had already taken place at the time of the writing of John's Gospel; but he also mentions the rising or fullness of that nation when the Deliverer comes forth out of Zion (vv. 12-15, 26-27).

A very distinct dispensational touch occurs in Chapter 4:16-21, where Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth reads from Isaiah 61 concerning "the acceptable year of the Lord," *and then closes the book in the middle of the sentence!* The emphasis of the first part of the sentence, "the acceptable year of the Lord," was the subject of His first coming, while the emphasis of the second part of the sentence, "the day of vengeance of our God," will be the subject of His second coming. Christ here practiced the principle of rightly dividing the Word by ending the reading where He did, thus only calling attention to His first coming.

Chapter 9:6 says Jesus sent His disciples forth "preaching the gospel." Several years later in chapter 18:31-34 He told these same disciples about His impending death and resurrection, but strangely enough we read:

And they understood none of these things, and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.

How could they preach the gospel without even knowing that Christ was to die and rise again? No man could preach the gospel today and be ignorant of these

facts, for Paul says the gospel is that Christ died for our sins and rose again the third day ([1 Corinthians 15:1-4](#)). Apparently it was possible to preach what was called the gospel while Christ was on earth without once referring to Christ's death. This fact serves to show the difference between the kingdom gospel message and the grace gospel message which God has revealed for today.

In 12:31-33 Jesus refers to His disciples as "the little flock," and says it is the Father's good pleasure to give to them the kingdom. The rulers of the existing nation of Israel were doomed to be overthrown because of their rejection of the Messiah, but the Messiah's disciples were to form the nucleus of the new nation to whom the kingdom would be given. In another place Jesus said, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" ([Matthew 21:43](#)). The little flock was that nation.

The Body of Christ is never called a nation and surely the kingdom (the earthly, millennial one) has never been given to us. Neither has the program of that kingdom been given to us: "Sell that ye have, and give alms." Having all things in common ([Acts 4:32](#)) is contrary to God's instruction for today. Paul plainly tells us to work and to eat our own bread ([2 Thessalonians 3:12](#)), and if any provide not for his own he is worse than an infidel ([1 Timothy 5:8](#)).

The parable of the barren fig tree in chapter 13:6-9 clearly teaches that Israel was not cast aside at the Cross. Jesus said:

Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and found none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?

These were the three years of His ministry. But the vine-dresser said

Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it; and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then *after that* thou shalt cut it down.

The "*after that*" refers to Pentecost and a period thereafter. This parable proves God did not cast Israel aside and begin a new thing (namely, the Body of Christ) at Pentecost. This setting aside and the new beginning came with Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles.

Luke records a number of parables not mentioned by the other Gospel writers. Some teach practical and spiritual truths, while others are dispensational in character, such as the one in Chapter 19. This parable was spoken because Jesus was near to Jerusalem and because his disciples thought the kingdom of God should immediately appear. Earlier in chapter 17:20, 21 Jesus had answered the question of when the kingdom of God should come and He had said:

The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you [more literally, in your midst].

It could be said that the kingdom of God was then in their midst because the king was in their midst.

The burden of the preaching at that time was, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 10:7). But the kingdom was not yet established. Our present parable teaches clearly that before that event could occur, the King would have to go away into the far country, there to receive the kingdom, and then return to establish it. This parable overthrows both the Post and the A-millennial views. The kingdom could not come while Christ was on earth, for He had to first suffer and be rejected by that generation (17:25). Neither could it come while He was away in the far country. He must return before the kingdom can appear (19:12).

The next item of dispensational significance is found in the Olivet discourse where Jesus says:

Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled (21:24).

These times of Gentile domination over Israel began with the Babylonian captivity, continued to the present, and will have a continual fulfillment until the end of the Tribulation period. They will end only when the Lord returns to the mount of Olives and fights against those nations (Zechariah 14:3, 4).

Finally, there is a statement of Christ in chapter 22:35, 36 which plainly illustrates one of the basic principles of dispensationalism---God's program does go through a series of changes. Many Christians find it difficult to believe Christ would give what has been called the Great Commission (Mark 16:15-18), and then just a few years later supplant it with a different commission through Paul. Notice our present text:

And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.

It had been only three years before when Jesus had commanded them to do the very opposite. Had it not been for the "but now" of His statement, we would have to conclude that the disciples were disobedient in taking "purse" and "scrip" (money) and in going to Gentiles when He had earlier commanded them to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. In Paul's epistles there are also several important "but now" or similar expressions, such as Romans 3:21 and 2 Corinthians 5:20.

A great deal happened in the interval between the giving of the so-called Great Commission and the beginning of the new dispensation under Paul. Israel had been offered the kingdom. They had rejected it and it had been set aside. A

considerably longer time interval had intervened than the period between the commissions of Matthew 10 and Matthew 28. If Christ could change His orders in so brief a time, why could He not make the change that we see in the Pauline revelation of the Mystery? We believe He did, and that the recognition of this fact is basic to the understanding of God's purpose and program for the Body of Christ.

JOHN

There is a vast difference, dispensationally, between John and the Synoptic Gospels. It is not that John belongs to or records a different dispensation of things, but rather whereas the Synoptics begin with Jesus announcing the kingdom to Israel, John begins with Israel's rejection of the kingdom. John sums up the Synoptics, as it were, in this word:

He came unto His own and His own received Him not (1:11).

He then proceeds to tell us:

But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name, which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

In other words, the dispensational viewpoint from which John is written is that Israel is now rejected and flesh and blood (which represent the prerogatives of Israel by reason of their covenants) are no longer a consideration, and the message of Christ is now open to as many as receive Him.

This view is in keeping with the fact that John's gospel was written quite late, probably after the death of Paul. It is my conviction John was written to be a sort of bridge between Christ's earthly ministry and that of Paul. In saying this, we must be very careful not to infer too much. Neither are we inferring there was any revelation of the secret truth for this dispensation made during the earthly ministry of Christ. We are only saying John is much more compatible with our dispensation than the synoptics. Neither are we saying Jesus had a double ministry while on earth--one to the Jews only, as recorded by the synoptics; and another to the whole wide world, as recorded in John. We are saying the Holy Spirit apparently led John to record statements and principles from our Lord's ministry to Israel which are compatible with truth for this dispensation.

Let us consider a few of these principles. Whereas in the Synoptics we have one or two statements of the fact the Jews were going to put Christ to death (compare [Luke 18:31-34](#)), His death is never related to believing and to eternal life. Just the opposite is true in John.

To begin with, the word "believe" is used ninety-nine times in John and only eleven times in Matthew, fifteen in Mark, and nine in Luke. The word "life" is used thirty-six times in John and only seven times in Matthew, four in Mark, and six in Luke. The word "world" is used seventy-nine times in John and only nine times in Matthew, three in Mark, and three in Luke.

To go a little further, notice the several references in John to believing and to receiving eternal life. What is it that is to be believed? There is no intimation in the synoptics that believing in the death and resurrection of Christ is the basis for salvation. Even these very facts were hidden from the disciples, we are told. But notice what John says.

In the very familiar John 3:16 there are two significant facts. First, this verse is prefaced by the statement:

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.

There can be no doubt the "lifting up" of the Son of Man refers to His being lifted up on the cross, and that faith in Him thus lifted up is made the basis of salvation.

The other fact is seen in the word "gave." God gave His Son. This word also must point to His death. This is the only sense in which God gave His Son. The apostle Paul uses this same word when he says, "Who gave himself for our sins" (Galatians 1:4), and "Who gave himself a ransom for all" (1 Timothy 2:6).

In the discourse on the bread of life we see another clear intimation of the relationship of Christ's death to believing unto eternal life. In verse 51 we read:

I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of this world.

Clearly the giving of His flesh is a reference to His death, which was given for the life of the world.

We see the same truth in Chapter 12. "Certain Greeks" wanted to see Jesus. In keeping with the dispensational program of that day, Jesus did not grant the interview, but He did say:

Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit... And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This He said, signifying what death He should die (12:24, 32, 33).

Let us understand that Paul's Mystery is not the fact Christ died for our sins and rose again the third day. Paul says all of this was according to the Scripture ([1 Corinthians 15:3, 4](#)). This truth, however, is most basic to Paul's message of salvation. It was given to Paul to expound and develop this wonderful doctrine. We see none of it in the synoptics, except it be for Christ's words at the last supper ([Matthew 26:28](#)), but we do see it all through John.

The gospel of the kingdom, as it was preached while Christ was on earth, had no announcement about His death and resurrection, but that does not mean the death of Christ is not basic to that gospel. It is, but the fact was progressively revealed so that it was not understood until after Christ's death and resurrection. Doubtless in the coming kingdom-age men will have to believe in the death and resurrection of Christ for salvation just the same as we do today.

Another important emphasis in doctrine should also be noticed. The words "repent" and "repentance" are used eleven times in Matthew, four times in Mark, and fourteen times in Luke, but not once in John. The kingdom message, if it was characterized by any one word, was by "repentance." The complete omission of this word from John's Gospel is surely significant.

It must be remembered that part of John is written from the standpoint of the time when John wrote and not from the actual time of Christ's earthly ministry. When John says, "For the Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (1:17), he is not speaking of Christ in His earthly ministry merely, but doubtless of the grace manifested through His substitutionary death.

It is difficult to always ascertain where the words of Christ end and where John's begin. For example, in Chapter 3:13 we read:

And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven.

Did Jesus speak these words and those that follow after, including John 3:16, to Nicodemus or did John give this commentary after ending the Nicodemus dialogue? Most commentators take the position these are the words of Christ, and that Christ told Nicodemus He was on earth as a man and at the same time in heaven as God.

While we believe in the omnipresence of the second Person of the Godhead, we do not believe Scripture teaches the ubiquity of His human body. Christ as the Son of Man is not present on earth now. He has not been on earth since His ascension. When John wrote, the Son of Man was in heaven; He was not on the earth. Besides, this verse says no man has ascended up to heaven except the One who came down from heaven. Christ in His divine nature was always in heaven. As such He never descended or ascended, but as man He did ascend into heaven several years after His discourse with Nicodemus. If this be true, then the verse about Moses lifting up the serpent and the well-known John 3: 16, all the way down to verse 21, are John 's words based upon the further revelation which Christ promised to His disciples in [John 16:13](#).

God had not given His Son at the time Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, but when John wrote he could say that God gave (past tense) His Son. To place these words of John 3:16 on the lips of Jesus, while at the same time having Him forbid His disciples to go to the Gentiles, and Jesus Himself refusing to minister to a Gentile, creates insurmountable problems.

In comparing John with the synoptics we might say John is more of a doctrinal treatment on the life and ministry of Christ, whereas the synoptics are mainly dispensational. Jesus Christ is introduced in John as the eternal God and Creator, and not in a dispensational relationship as son of Abraham or son of David. John's Gospel consists of eight great signs which prove that Jesus is God' s Anointed One, to the end that people might receive life through believing in Him (Chapter [20:31](#)). These signs were:

- The turning of water into wine (2:1-11).
- The healing of the impotent man (5:1-47).
- The feeding of the five thousand (6:1-14).
- The walking on the sea (6:15-21).
- The healing of the man born blind (9:1-41).
- The raising of Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44).
- The miraculous draught of fishes (21:1-14).

No doubt these signs had a specific reference to Israel, but their main purpose was to manifest the Deity of Jesus Christ.

As one reads John 's Gospel, one gets the impression John is not writing *for* the Jews but *about* them. In the Synoptics the word "Jew" is used a total of seventeen times, and in twelve of these occurrences we find the expression "King of the Jews" in reference to Christ. These books are so thoroughly Jewish that no explanations about the Jews or their customs seem necessary. But in John the word "Jew" occurs seventy-one times. Many of these explain something about the Jews, as though John's intended readers were ignorant of this people. This fact gives added weight to the idea that John is a more general and doctrinal presentation of Christ' s ministry.

Another emphasis seen in John is on the Holy Spirit. Matthew refers to the Spirit three times, Mark once, and Luke five times, most of the references being to the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus. John refers to the Holy Spirit eleven times (on the basis of capitalized words in the A.V.), and his emphasis is upon the then future impartation of the Spirit to believers and His making known to the disciples the further things of Christ which Christ was unable to reveal to them while He was yet with them ([16:12-14](#)). The Spirit' s ministry to the world, that of convicting the world of sin because they believe not on Christ, is given in the verses just preceding the above statement.

This emphasis on the Spirit's work is part of a larger context which is unique to John's Gospel, namely, the upper room discourse in chapters 13-17. Everything in these chapters is looking beyond the Cross. It is a mistake to suppose Jesus was here giving a preview of the dispensation of the Mystery. God kept this present dispensation a secret until He revealed it to and through Paul. However, because

John gives us more of the doctrinal or horizontal truth about Christ and His work, we can apply much of the truth of these chapters to our present dispensation.

The disciples knew nothing about the Rapture, but 14:1-6 so sets forth the Lord's coming for His own as a very blessed hope so that most expositors haven't seen any difference. The abiding indwelling of the Holy Spirit within the believer is promised in 14:16-20, and this is also a fact in our present dispensation. In-ness in Christ, which is so emphasized by Paul, is promised in 14:20 -- "ye in me, and I in you." The vine relationship refers to Israel, but there is a great similarity between the idea of vine and branches and body and head. Both are vital processes and are relationships which necessitate an "in Christ" condition.

We have already commented on the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, which we feel is still going on today. And the prayer of intercession which ends the upper room discourse surely fits in with the present ministry of Christ in heaven for us. Paul asks:

Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us (Romans 8:34).

In conclusion we may say that John's is the truly evangelical Gospel. (Of course, our word evangelical comes from the word gospel, so that actually "evangelical evangel" sounds tautological.) In contrast with the synoptics, John's Gospel tells the sinner how to have eternal life. For that reason it has been more widely used in distribution as a single book of the Bible in evangelizing work than any other portion of God's Word. It comes nearer to dovetailing with Paul's message than any of the other Gospels.

ACTS

The Book of Acts is one of the most important books dispensationally as far as we are concerned in this present dispensation. It has often been pointed out that one should not base his doctrine on the Acts, but on the epistles, because everything is in a flux in Acts; and that is the very reason why this book is so significant dispensationally. When a message or program of the Bible is in a state of change we are especially confronted with dispensational truth, for dispensational truth is most clearly seen in the distinctions between God' s various spiritual programs.

Some people suppose the book of Acts begins with an abrupt change from the program of the Gospels. This view is doubtless due to several factors. The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ are such basic truths in Paul' s declaration of the gospel that it seems only natural to begin this new program expounded by Paul immediately after Christ's death and resurrection, which, of course, means at the beginning of the Acts. Also, the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, and in a unique way our dispensation is characterized by the Holy Spirit; hence it seems reasonable that Pentecost should mark the beginning of a new program.

However, when one carefully compares the message and the program of the Gospels with that of the Acts, one discovers much more similarity than contrast. The message:

- Is still directed only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel ([Matthew 10:5](#), compare [Acts 2:5, 14, 22, 36](#)).
- Still has to do with the establishment of the millennial kingdom ([Matthew 4:17, 23; 10:7](#), compare [Acts 1:6; 2:16, 30; 3:19-26](#)).
- Still includes miracles, signs, and wonders ([Matthew 10:8; Mark 16:17, 18](#) compare, [Acts 4:30](#)).
- Is still the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins ([Luke 3:3](#), compare [Acts 2:38](#)).

The only difference one observes when going from the Gospels into the Acts is that there is an advance or development, but not a new message or a new program. Christ has died and has been raised from the dead, He has ascended and has poured out the Spirit in accordance with prophecy, but these events only prepare the way for the maturation of the kingdom program. There could be no *bona fide* offer of the kingdom to Israel until after Christ' s suffering. Consequently we see Peter first making this offer in [Acts 3:17-26](#).

While we may see intimations of change in Acts 9 or 10, we do not observe an actual change until we come to chapter 13. The period of change, or transition as some prefer to call it, takes place in the latter half of the Acts. The change is away from the nation of Israel and the program of Pentecost to the church which is the Body of Christ and the program of the Mystery. In order to see all that is involved in this change, it is necessary to correlate the history of the latter half of Acts with Paul's epistles written during that time.

The book of Acts opens with the account of the ascension. After Jesus had taught the disciples during the forty days of His post-resurrection ministry the disciples asked, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (1:6). This question indicates the theme of Christ's teaching, namely, "the kingdom" (1:3). Had Jesus told them Israel had been set aside and the dispensation of the Mystery was to be ushered in, they would never have asked such a question. He had evidently taught them the kingdom would be restored to Israel but had not revealed the time. Although known to God, the time could not as yet be made known to man, for it was contingent upon Israel's response to God's offer of the kingdom.

The choice of a twelfth apostle to take the place of Judas is also significant. This shows the message still concerns Israel, for the Twelve are to sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel in the kingdom ([Matthew 19:28](#)). One of the biggest dispensational blunders would be to suppose Paul was intended by God to be the twelfth apostle, and that the disciples erred in choosing Matthias.

The apostles had been instructed to tarry in Jerusalem and wait for the promised out-pouring of the Holy Spirit. This took place ten days later on the day of Pentecost. This experience is described in a number of ways:

- It was Christ baptizing with the Holy Spirit ([1:5](#)).
- It was being endued with power from on high ([Luke 24:49](#); [Acts 1:8](#)).
- It was a filling of all concerned with the fullness of the Holy Spirit ([2:4](#)).
- It was a pouring out of the Spirit ([2:18](#)).
- It was that which was spoken by Joel the prophet ([2:16](#)).

There is not the slightest intimation here that this baptizing work of Christ with the Spirit was to form a new unprophesied body of believers, as described in [1 Corinthians 12:13](#). In the Corinthian passage it is the Holy Spirit who is baptizing believers into the Body of Christ, whereas at Pentecost it was Christ enduing the disciples with miraculous powers, powers which will characterize the millennial kingdom.

Pentecost, of course, was one of the seven great annual feasts in Israel ([Leviticus 23](#)). It was not a Gentile feast. Israelites from all over the world were present in Jerusalem for its observance ([2:5-11](#)).

The message of Peter at Pentecost is also highly significant. It concerned Jesus Christ raised from the dead to sit on David's throne (2:30). While awaiting His second coming, He was seated on His Father's throne (2:34, 35). When the Jews heard and believed that this One whom they had crucified as a blasphemer was actually their Messiah, they enquired of Peter what they must do. His word was that they must repent (of their sin of having crucified the Messiah) and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and if they did this they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This was God's message to His covenant people Israel--who were near to God by reason of the covenants--not to Gentiles, who were far off ([Ephesians 2:17](#)).

There are further evidences of the kingdom nature of those Pentecostal days. The disciples were practising kingdom communism ([2:44, 45](#)), and they continued to worship in the Jewish temple ([3:1](#)). It was not until the book of Hebrews was written that they were told to go forth unto Christ outside the camp (Hebrews 13:13).

As mentioned earlier, Acts 3:17-26 is the official offer of the kingdom to Israel. This offer could not have been made earlier, for the Scripture is very clear in its teaching that Christ must first suffer before the kingdom could be established. The kingdom was near at hand in the Gospels ([Matthew 4:17](#)); now in Acts it is actually offered. Peter tells the people of Israel everything concerning the sufferings of Christ had now been fulfilled. Therefore, he says:

Repent and be converted so that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and He shall send Jesus Christ, who before was preached unto you.

Chapter 4 gives us the response of the rulers to this offer. They arrested the apostles and threatened them, forbidding them to speak any more in the name of Jesus. This Chapter also relates the fact that the disciples were practicing kingdom communism. Many gullible church members of our day have been drawn into the camp of socialists and communists on the alleged basis that the Bible teaches communism. A knowledge of dispensational truth would have saved them from this fatal error. Communism would work in a society where every one was completely filled with the Holy Spirit, as the disciples were at Pentecost, but by chapter 5 of Acts we see this kingdom program disintegrating due to the rejection of the kingdom offer by the rulers, and Ananias and his wife are smitten dead for lying to the Holy Spirit.

When we come to chapter 11 we see these same people, who lacked nothing in 4:34, now in such great straits that the church at Antioch had to send them relief. If communism didn't work in a society where the very apostles of Christ were the leaders, what chance has it of working in a society of greedy, godless, depraved humanity whose chief virtue is lying and betraying?

Chapters five and six tell of mounting opposition to the message of the apostles on the part of the rulers, in spite of the fact that the number of disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly, including a great company of the priests (6:7). The apostles were imprisoned but were miraculously delivered, and then beaten. Stephen, one of the first deacons, was arrested and brought before the high priest. Chapter 7 relates his great defense before the highest council which resulted in his being stoned to death.

The Jews had killed Jesus, but this had been forgiven them in answer to the prayer of Jesus (Luke 23:34). Now they were resisting and blaspheming the Holy Spirit (see Matthew 12:31, 32). This sin would not be forgiven. Jerusalem had given its final answer to God's gracious offer of the kingdom. It is significant that Saul, who was to become the apostle of the new dispensation, is first introduced to us in this context. He had been consenting to Stephen's death and now he heads up a great persecution against the Jerusalem assembly (8:1-3).

Chapter 8 tells how this persecution caused the dispersion of the disciples over a wide area, with the exception of the apostles who remained in Jerusalem. These saints went everywhere preaching the word (8:4), but 11:19 makes it plain they preached the word "to none but the Jews only."

In Chapter 9 God miraculously strikes down Saul as he was going about to persecute the disciples at Damascus, saves him, and commissions him as a chosen vessel to bear Christ's name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel (9:15). Paul immediately preached Christ in the synagogues, then went to Jerusalem, and finally returned to his home city of Tarsus in Cilicia. According to Galatians 1:17, he must have gone to Arabia and returned to Damascus before going to Jerusalem.

The narrative now leaves Saul and returns to Peter. Here we come to the conversion of the first Gentile in the book of Acts. This was probably some eight years after Pentecost. It is quite evident from such verses as 11:1, 18 and 15:7 that Cornelius was the first Gentile convert in Acts. This in itself is strong evidence there was no joint-body of Jews and Gentiles before Acts 10. And even in the case of this Roman centurion we see something very unusual. He was a just man, one that feared God, of good report among the whole nation of the Jews. He gave much alms to the people, he prayed to God always, and his prayers and alms came up for a memorial before God (10:2, 4, 22). He was vastly different from the godless, heathen Gentiles to whom Paul was sent. Cornelius seems to be representative of Gentile salvation in the coming kingdom.

Chapter 11 introduces us to the church at Antioch, founded by saints from Jerusalem, to which Paul was called to minister along with Barnabas. Antioch was destined to become the home base for Paul's missionary journeys. But before introducing us to Paul's ministry Luke returns to the scene in Jerusalem where another persecution is in progress which results in the martyrdom of James the brother of John and the arrest of Peter (Chapter 12).

Chapter 13 is the great dispensational dividing point in Acts. It is here that Paul is separated unto the ministry to which God had called him. He had been preaching for approximately ten years since his conversion, apparently to Jewish audiences. At least we know the door of faith to the Gentiles was not opened until his first missionary journey (14:27). This official beginning of his Gentile ministry is looked upon by many as the historical beginning of the new dispensation which concerns the church which is the Body of Christ.

There was a church or assembly of Jewish believers in Jerusalem, and there had been many such assemblies established throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (9:31). However, the church of which Paul was made the administrator was not simply a local assembly, but the very Body of Christ. Its unique feature was its composition of Jew and Gentile in a joint relationship; hence it could hardly have begun before the door was opened to the Gentiles. And since it was a mystery and not the subject of prophecy, and since its truth was committed to Paul, it is reasonable and logical to believe this new Body and new dispensation began with Paul at Antioch and not with Peter at Pentecost.

Paul's method when arriving in a population center, as seen in his various missionary journeys, was to go to the Jewish synagogue first, if there was one, and persuade the Jews from the Old Testament that the Messiah must first suffer and then arise from the dead. Having done this he would then preach Jesus to them as their Messiah (see 17:2, 3). Some would believe but the majority would reject and blaspheme. He would then do as he did in 13:46-49 and 18:4-6 turn from the Jews to the Gentiles.

It is significant that Paul's first recorded encounter on his new ministry was with a Gentile, Sergius Paulus, and a false Jewish teacher, Bar-Jesus, who opposed strongly Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. The apostle Paul pronounced blindness for a season on the Jew and brought salvation to the Gentile. This highly graphic action characterized Paul's ministry throughout the latter half of the Acts. He went to the Jew, not to offer the kingdom, as Peter had, but to give opportunity for individual salvation, and then to pronounce blindness upon those who rejected the message, after which he announced his turning to the Gentiles. This type of ministry continued until his final pronouncement of blindness in Acts 28:25-28, ending with the statement to Israel:

Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God *has been sent* [2nd aorist indicative passive] unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.

We must take note of several of the more outstanding dispensational features in the latter half of the book. Chapter 15 compared with Galatians 2:1-10 is very important in showing that Paul's ministry was distinct from that of the Twelve, and that his Gentile converts had absolutely no obligation to observe the Law of Moses. Dispensationally it was agreed the Jewish believers should continue in the Jewish customs, but that the Gentiles should not. This arrangement is referred to again in

21:24, 25. Paul himself, when he went back to Jerusalem, observed these customs, which he forbade the Gentiles to do (compare [16:3](#); [18: 18, 21](#); [21:26](#)). This was a temporary or transitional arrangement which lasted only until the end of the Acts period.

During this time Paul also practiced water baptism ([16:15, 33](#); [18:8](#)). Water baptism was not a part of Paul's commission ([1 Corinthians 1:17](#)), but was one of several things he practiced during this transition which was later to pass away.

We do not learn anything of the Mystery from the book of Acts itself, but we do from the epistles written by Paul during this period of time. The purpose of Acts is not to give the history of the founding of the Christian church so much as it is to be a bridge between the kingdom ministry of the Twelve and the Body ministry of Paul. The first half explains how God offered the kingdom to Israel and how Israel rejected it. The latter half explains how God, instead of bringing judgment upon the world for rejecting His Son both in incarnation and in resurrection, turned to the Gentiles in grace and ushered in the new dispensation under the apostleship of Paul. The book concludes with the end of the transition period and God's final witness to Israel.

ROMANS

Romans is the first book in our Bibles which is addressed specifically to members of the Body of Christ, although it was not the first epistle Paul wrote. It is not addressed to a church as such, but:

... to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called saints (1:7).

In fact, Paul does not apply the word "church" to those at Rome at all. His only references to "church" are in his salutations in chapter 16, where he mentions the church at Cenchrea, the churches of the Gentiles, the church in the house of Priscilla and Aquila, the churches of Christ, and the whole church. Perhaps the reason for this is that Paul had never been to Rome and so was not the founder of the church in that city. However, in chapter 12:5 Paul makes it plain that he considers all of those whom he addresses as being members of the Body of Christ.

Romans was written very near the end of the Acts period. Paul was on his way to Jerusalem to deliver the contribution which he had raised among the Gentile churches for the poor saints (15:25), after which he purposed to visit Rome. As we know, Paul became a prisoner when he reached Jerusalem, was kept in jail for two years in Caesarea, and then was taken to Rome to have his case tried before Caesar.

Romans is the great doctrinal epistle on the subject of justification by faith. While much in the book is dispensational in character, chapters 9, 10, and 11 are especially so, as they give the explanation of why the Jewish nation failed to enter into its kingdom blessings, what God is doing through the Gentiles in the interim, and how God will yet fulfill all of his promises to His chosen nation.

Remembering the purpose of this present study is not to give a doctrinal exposition or verse by verse exegesis of the epistle, but rather to point out briefly those things which are especially related to dispensational truth, we will begin by looking at the introduction and conclusion. Paul begins by speaking of himself as having been:

Separated unto the gospel of God, which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead (1:1-4).

He ends the epistle with the contrasting statement:

Now to Him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was

kept secret since the world began, but is now made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith (16:25,26).

It is necessary to see connections as well as distinctions when studying dispensational math. Paul here shows there is a connection between the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the Mystery and the prophetic predictions concerning Jesus Christ who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh. The Mystery is truth never before made known to or by the prophets; however, this truth has a historical connection with the incarnation and death of Israel's Messiah as predicted by the prophets (see also [1 Corinthians 15:1-4](#)).

The gospel being to the Jew first ([1:16](#)) and the advantages in being a Jew ([3:1](#)) and the profit of circumcision ([3:1](#)) naturally raise dispensational questions. These statements must be considered in the light of other statements in the epistles, such as:

- "There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek" ([10:12](#)).
- "We have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin" ([3:9](#)).
- "As concerning the gospel they [Israel] are enemies for your sakes" ([11:28](#)).

Paul is not declaring that the Jew has any spiritual priority over the Gentile. The fact of the matter is the gospel went to the Jew only at the beginning; God did send it first to that people ([Acts 3:26; 13:46](#)). This does not mean the preacher of today must continue to go to Jews first before he can go to the Gentiles. Romans 1:16 is simply a statement of historical fact. The gospel is now going to everyone, but it went to the Jew first historically.

Every one who was a descendant of Judah, or who adopted the Jew's religion, was known as a Jew. However, in [2:29](#) Paul narrows his definition of a Jew to one who is such inwardly, and then he asks, "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?" And he answers, "Much every way: chiefly, because unto them were committed the oracles of God."

We might ask, what spiritual advantage does a child have who is reared in a godly Christian home by godly parents over one who is born into a godless, heathen home with unsaved parents? This child has much the same advantage Jews of Paul's day had over Gentiles. The Jews had the Word of God which was able to make them wise unto salvation. But neither the Jew at the time Romans was written nor the child in a Christian home today has a favored position with God above other people.

The subjects of Law and Grace can be understood only in the light of dispensational truth. And Romans has more to say about these two subjects than perhaps any other New Testament book. "Law" is mentioned seventy-one times

and "grace" twenty-seven times. Another word closely connected with both Law and grace is "righteousness," which occurs some thirty-eight times.

Paul begins in chapter 2 by stating certain principles, such as, "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the Law shall be judged by the Law" (2:12). The Jews were the only ones who had been given the Law, but "when the Gentiles, which have not the Law, do by nature the things contained in the Law, these, having not the Law, are a law unto themselves" (2:14).

In chapter 3 he explains why God gave the Law to Israel. He tested this people for fifteen centuries under His perfect law and they all failed the test. This fact proved both Jews and Gentiles were all under sin (3:9) and that the whole world is guilty before God (3:19). "Therefore by the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified before God: for by the Law is the knowledge of sin" (3:20). His next words are, "But now." This shows the great dispensational change. Now instead of a person trying to produce righteousness by the works of the flesh, God is bestowing His own righteousness as a gift by faith in Jesus Christ (3:22).

It might almost seem that Paul contradicts himself in 3:31, after having said we are justified entirely apart from the Law now to say, "Do we then make void the Law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the Law." But Paul does not establish the Law either by seeking to be justified by the Law, or by putting himself under the Law after he is justified by faith (compare 6:14, 15, "ye are not under the Law"). He establishes the Law on the basis of the propitiatory work of Christ (3:25), by which His death satisfied every righteous claim of the broken Law, so God can now be just in justifying every one who believes in Jesus.

Chapter 4 deals with three different dispensations:

- Promise
- Law
- Grace

Abraham lived before the Law, David lived under the Law, and Paul lived after the Law. How was Abraham justified? It could not have been by the Law, for he lived some four hundred years before the Law was given. Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 in answer:

Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

And although David lived under the Law, Paul quotes him as saying, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Therefore David must have approached God upon the principle of faith and not upon the principle of the works of the Law. Israel as a nation did not emulate David in this matter, according to 9:31, 32.

In Paul's thinking Abraham became the father of two groups: of the uncircumcision, for he was justified as an uncircumcised Gentile; and of the circumcision, for he later received the covenant of circumcision ([Genesis 17](#)). This fact explains Paul's terminology in Galatians 2:7, "the gospel of the uncircumcision," which was committed to him, and "the gospel of the circumcision," which was committed to Peter.

Chapter 5 also deals with several dispensations. In the dispensation of grace which was committed to Paul, the heart of the message was reconciliation of mankind to God. Alienation precedes reconciliation. The Gentiles were alienated very early ([1:24, 26, 28](#)). But from Abraham to Paul there was one nation which was not alienated from God, and that was Israel. Finally, Israel too became alienated through the rejection of the Holy Spirit in the early chapters of Acts. (This truth is enlarged upon in Romans 11.) Now there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, all are alienated.

In the chapter before us Paul goes all the way back to Adam as the head of the human race and shows how sin and death, with the attendant condemnation, came upon all through the one man's sin. Then he shows how, through another Man and His one act of righteousness, God has brought justification of life to all who believe. Alienation came by Adam; reconciliation came by Jesus Christ. In verses 12-14 Paul explains that although sin is not imputed where there is no law, nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses. He thus proves Adam's sin had been imputed to all of his descendants, even though they had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression.

Chapter 6, as we have already pointed out, proves we are not under the Law in this dispensation. The remainder of the chapter shows how the believer today is identified with Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. And this identification is not by or through the means of ceremonial baptism. Spirit baptism is the only work able to accomplish such a tremendous work as putting a person into Christ.

Chapter 7 refers to the Law twenty-one times. It first explains how a person who was once under the Law can be freed from that relationship, using marriage as an illustration. A woman becomes free from the law of her husband if the husband dies. Death is the only thing which frees from the Law. Likewise, we have become dead to the Law by the body of Christ--by being identified with Him when His body hung upon the cross. We were also raised up with Christ, and it is this new life on this side of the Cross which is under grace.

Paul next exonerates the Law by showing that although the Law brought condemnation and death to mankind, the fault did not lie in the Law, but in the nature of indwelling sin. Even after one is saved and receives a new nature there is still the opposition of the sin nature which may bring defeat. Chapter 8 shows victory over the sin nature can come only through the operation of the law of the

Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. This new principle of life does what the Mosaic Law could never do--sets us free from the law of sin and death and fulfills all of the righteous demands of the Law. This chapter contains some of the most precious truth for the believer in this dispensation, but space will not permit further comment.

The next three chapters are usually considered to be the dispensational section of the epistle, even as the first eight chapters are doctrinal and the last five are practical. Basically, the question which Paul now tackles is this: How does it happen that the people of Israel have failed to get what God promised them, and instead, the Gentiles to whom God had made no promises, were now being blessed? Has the Word of God failed? Has there been unrighteousness with God? Of course, the answer is an emphatic NO!

In the first place, not every physical descendant of Abraham was a child of God -- "They are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (9:6). Furthermore, the nation as a whole was ignorant of the righteousness of God and was going about to establish their own righteousness, so they stumbled at that stumbling stone, which was Christ (9:33). Finally, Paul declares God has not once and for all cast away His people (11:1). At that time there was a remnant according to the election of grace which had obtained salvation (Paul was one of them), and the rest were blinded.

Right here a very important dispensational principle is evident. Whereas the prophets had declared God would bless all nations through the instrumentality of Israel, Paul shows that in this dispensation salvation has come to the Gentiles through Israel's fall (11:11).

Next Paul talks about God's olive tree, which represents God's witness to this world. Israel had been the natural branches of that tree, but now most of these had been broken off and wild branches (Gentiles) had been grafted in. Another way of saying this is that blindness in part has happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in (11:25). After this present dispensation is past God will graft the natural branches back in; he will take away the blindness, and all Israel shall be saved (11:26). Thus, God's covenant will finally be fulfilled to Israel. There is a great deal concerning God's counsels which is incomprehensible to us, and so Paul ends this section with the cry:

O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out (11:33).

Chapters twelve, thirteen, and fourteen are largely practical in nature and contain little if any dispensational truth. While chapter 15 is also practical, a word should be said about Paul's quotations from the Old Testament in verses 9-12. Paul introduces these quotations with the statement:

I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers.

This statement was no doubt intended to contrast with his words in verse 16:

That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles.

In between he quotes the prophets concerning Gentile salvation. It should be noted Paul does not say these prophecies are being fulfilled in God's present program, but rather that he is using them by way of illustration or secondary application.

The epistle ends with a reference to what Paul calls "my gospel," and "the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the Mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (16:25). It is important to see Paul had received the revelation of the Mystery before the end of the Acts period, which fact is a sufficient answer to what is called Acts 28 dispensationalism. The Mystery is mentioned but not fully developed at this point. For further development we must go to his prison epistles, Ephesians and Colossians.

1 CORINTHIANS

This New Testament book is primarily a book of correction concerning Christian behavior. However, practical truth has its roots in that which is doctrinal and dispensational, as we shall see in going through the book chapter by chapter. The Corinthian church was marked by divisions. The corrective truth which Paul uses to remedy this situation is the unity of believers as members of the Body of Christ. The epistle was written during what is generally termed the transition period. There exists a difference of opinion among the brethren whether the circumcision believers in Christ at this time were members of the Body, but it is important to see that Paul, in speaking of Peter and others of the circumcision, contends for a very close unity of all believers in Christ. This fact is plainly seen in the first three chapters.

The letter is addressed to:

... the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord (1:2).

To all of these he says:

... that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment (1:10).

Then, speaking about circumcision leaders, he asks:

Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed...? I have planted, Apollos watered... Now he that planteth, and he that watereth are one" (3:5-8).

He says to all who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus:

For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas ... (3:21, 22).

Thus at this time of dispensational changeover from the kingdom to the Body program, Paul insists on a very close unity of all believers, whether or not we understand that all had become members of the Body of Christ.

In connection with the divisions which plagued this church Paul mentions a practice which, in a sense, had produced some of the divisions--water baptism. Paul had practiced water baptism in his early ministry and had baptized a few of these Corinthians, but his response to these people was:

Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel (1:17).

The Twelve had surely been sent to baptize ([Mark 16:15, 16](#)), but not so Paul. Regardless of the circumstances, Paul could never have made such a statement had Christ commissioned him to practice this ceremony. But this is simply a negative aspect of Paul's ministry. Positively, he was commissioned to preach the gospel, which he calls, "the preaching of the cross" (1:18).

There are a number of messages in the Bible called by the name of gospel which are not the preaching of the Cross. This was not simply a preaching about a crucified Christ, although, of course, it included that. The prophets predicted the crucifixion and the Twelve preached about the death and resurrection of their Messiah, but to Paul was made known "the mystery of the gospel" ([Ephesians 6:19](#)). Paul speaks of this mystery in [1 Corinthians 2:7](#), and enlarges upon the truth in [2 Corinthians 5:14-21](#). Paul preached the Cross as good news, in contrast with what Peter preached in Acts 2:23 and 3:14, 15. The secret of all of God's redemptive work through the death of Christ was made known to Paul.

The distinctiveness of Paul's ministry is again seen in chapter 3:10, 11:

According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation

God made Paul the chief architect of this dispensation. Paul laid the foundation. Others build upon that foundation. Christ is the foundation of this dispensation, just as He will also be of the kingdom dispensation.

It is essential to distinguish between the coming millennial kingdom dispensation and the kingdom of God, as Paul uses the term five times in this epistle. He says in 4:20, "For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." He is here referring to the spiritual operation of God, as he is in Romans 14:17, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink (regulations); but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." In 6:10 he speaks of those who shall not inherit the kingdom of God, as he also does in Galatians 5:21 and Ephesians 5:5. These passages refer to the future but not to the earthly aspect of the Messianic kingdom. There are two other references in chapter 15 which will be dealt with later.

In 4:1 Paul says, "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." It would be interesting to know who Paul intended to include in the "us." Two verses before he had mentioned Apollos and Cephas, in the salutation he mentioned Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue at Corinth (1:1), and in the conclusion he names Aquila and Priscilla. Paul had several mysteries made known to him, which are in a sense various aspects of the dispensation of the Mystery. The mystery of the Body of Christ, of Israel's blindness, of the Rapture, and of the gospel are all related to the dispensation of the Mystery.

Paul has several references to physical judgments upon the bodies of the saints which must be considered in a dispensational light. In 5:5 he speaks of delivering one of the Corinthians to Satan "for the destruction of the flesh," that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. There may be a reference to the same thing in 3:17---"If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy [mar]; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." The individual believer' s body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (6:19), but here the reference seems to point to the assembly of believers as being the temple.

In connection with the dishonoring of Christ at the Lord' s table, Paul says: For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh condemnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body [some manuscripts omit "Lord's," thus making the passage refer to the Mystery Body]. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep (vv. 11:29-30).

It seems to be a principle in all dispensations that God demonstrates in no uncertain terms His attitude toward sin and disobedience at the beginning, then later on permits man to apparently get away with murder.

The day the Law was given, for example, three thousand Israelites were slain because of their idolatry. Later, under the same dispensation the Israelites murdered God's Son and nothing happened until some forty years afterward. Just because God does not strike dead those who misuse the Lord' s Supper today is no sign God is not just as displeased as He was in Paul' s day. Neither is it a proof that the Lord' s Supper is not to be practiced in this dispensation, as some contend. The Supper was given to members of the Body of Christ as a part of Paul's revelation for the Body (12:27, compare 11:26) to observe until He comes.

In correcting the immorality at Corinth, Paul refers to the fact that "Christ our Passover" is sacrificed for us (5:7). Since the Passover was a Jewish feast, the question of whether this applies to the Mystery Body of Christ may arise. Were the Corinthians Jewish? Were they part of the kingdom rather than the Body? The same questions arise when we come to the Lord's Supper in chapter 11, for the Supper was very closely connected with the Passover. Dispensationalists who rule out the practice of the Lord' s Supper for today suppose the above questions should be answered in the affirmative.

But what are the facts? Immediately after discussing the Lord's Supper Paul tells the Corinthians, "Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led" (12:2). While there were some Jews in the Corinthian church, it is evident from these words that it was predominantly Gentile. And later on in the same chapter he says of these believers, "Now ye are the Body of Christ, and members in particular" (12:27). Failure to see connections as well as distinctions can cause distortions of truth.

At the time Christ died and made every provision for us as members of the Body, He was a Jew ministering only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel under

the kingdom program; He was fulfilling all of the types and shadows of the Law, such as the Levitical offerings and Passover; He was shedding the blood of the New Covenant. It is evident Christ died but once, that He shed but one blood. He died as the Passover; His blood was that of the New Covenant. While we are not Jews and not part of the kingdom program, we do share in every spiritual value that inheres in Christ's death under that program.

Chapter 6 points out the dispensational truth of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the body of the believer (6:19). This is not unique to this dispensation, however. Christ plainly told His kingdom disciples concerning the Spirit, "He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:17). This ministry of the Spirit was not the lot of believers in past dispensations. The Spirit was given to kings and certain special ministers in olden times, and might be taken away from them (Exodus 31:3; Judges 3:10; 1 Samuel 11:6; 16:12, 14; Psalms 51:11). In this dispensation the Spirit permanently abides in every believer from the very moment of salvation.

Chapter 7 deals largely with the marriage relationship under grace. The basic principle is that the wife should not leave her husband and the husband should not put away (divorce) his wife. If she does leave, she is to remain unmarried. Under the Mosaic permission, which Christ said was due to the hardness of heart of the people, a man could put away his wife if he found some indecency in her, and she was free to marry another man, but she could never return to her former husband (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Under the Law a woman could never divorce her husband. Under Christ's earthly teaching divorce was permitted in case of fornication (not adultery). Divorce and remarriage for any other reason would result in the sin of adultery (Matthew 19:3-12). Under grace Paul makes no allowance for divorce and remarriage. Twice he restates the principle:

The wife is bound by the Law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord (v. 39; Romans 7:2).

Some people think the standards of grace are higher than those of the Law, and therefore do not allow for divorce and remarriage under any circumstances; others think that because we are not under the Law but under grace there are no such restrictions; and still others hold an in-between view. Perhaps those who are troubled about this question should note Christ's word in Matthew 19:11 and 12:

All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given... He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

Chapter 8 and the last half of chapter 10 deal with the eating of meats sacrificed to idols. This question is not so much dispensational as it is a matter of conscience. Our life under grace in which all things are lawful needs to be tempered with love for others, so that the employment of our liberties does not

cause others to stumble. Paul refers to the "conscience" nine times in these two passages.

In Chapter 9 Paul defends his ministry and apostleship. A dispensation of the gospel had been committed to him. In his ministry he had to deal with Jews under the Law and Gentiles without the Law. He adapted himself and his ministry to all such classes; he was made all things to all men, that he might by all means save some (v. 22). This principle no doubt explains some of Paul's actions in the Acts, such as circumcising Timothy (16:3), taking a vow (18:18), and taking part in the temple service (21:26).

Chapter 10:1-4 should be compared with 12:13. As Israel was baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea, so we are baptized by the Spirit into the Body of Christ. Neither of these baptisms involved the use of water, and surely not immersion. In the former case baptism was purely figurative; in the latter it was spiritual. The first formed the people of Israel into a nation with Moses as its outward head. The second formed true believers into a vital spiritual organism with Christ as its Head. Paul mentions these truths, not simply to teach doctrine, but to correct the errors at Corinth. We should learn spiritual lessons from Israel's experiences (10:11), and we should recognize the need and the place of every fellow-member of the Body (12:21, 25).

Chapters 13 and 14 are very important dispensationally regarding the purpose and continuance of the sign gifts which were in evidence during the transition period. By transition we do not mean that the Messianic kingdom gradually turned into the Body of Christ, but that the religious program which accompanied the kingdom message gradually gave way to the new program for the Body. It is clear from 14:21,22 that these gifts were signs to Israel ("the Jews require a sign," 1:22), and from 13:8-11 that these gifts were temporary and were to pass away when their purpose was fulfilled. All during the Acts period God was still preserving Israel as a nation in His longsuffering, and hence the signs continued. The "all day long" of Romans 10:21 finally came to an end with the destruction of Jerusalem, and since that time there has been no place or purpose for the sign gifts.

Chapter 15 is the great treatise on the resurrections. Aside from showing the necessity and the fact of the resurrection of Christ, and the order of the future resurrections, Paul concludes with the mystery concerning the Rapture of the Body of Christ. Believers who are alive at this time will be changed from mortal to immortal, but when Christ returns to earth to establish His kingdom, the living will continue to live upon the earth in mortal bodies. At the Rapture the dead in Christ will be changed from corruptible to incorruptible, and together with the living will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. No such event can be found in the prophetic Scripture. Hence, Paul refers to it as a mystery or secret. Paul's reference to the Mystery here and in 2:7, and his positive statement, "Now ye are the Body of Christ, and members in particular" (12:27), are a sufficient answer to the claims of some that the Mystery and the Body of Christ did not appear until after Acts 28.

There are doubtless many other dispensational overtones in this epistle which space forbids mentioning. And, of course, there are many practical truths which are beyond the scope of a simple dispensational synopsis. But the important thing to see is that dispensational and doctrinal truth provide the corrective for errors in both behavior and religious practice.

2 CORINTHIANS

Both of the Corinthian epistles are largely corrective in nature. Both were written during the latter half of the Acts period, probably within a year of each other. Both are concerned with the offering which Paul was taking up from the Gentile churches for the relief of the poor saints at Jerusalem. In both Paul spends considerable time in defending his apostleship and the distinctiveness of the revelation which was given to him.

Actually there are only two Chapters (3 and 5) which are distinctly dispensational in character, although there are a few scattered ideas in other chapters having a dispensational bearing which we shall consider first of all. The first is that which we have already mentioned, Paul's defense of his unique apostleship. The very fact God called another apostle, separate and distinct from the Twelve, is in itself an evidence of dispensational change. Paul was not called, as some suppose, because the Twelve had failed, or to take the place of Judas and thus become one of the Twelve, in which case there would have been no dispensational change intimated. Paul speaks of himself as separate from the Twelve ([1 Corinthians 15:5](#)). In writing to the Galatians he makes the distinction by referring to the two apostleships, that of the circumcision and that of the uncircumcision ([Galatians 2:8](#)).

Closely connected with Paul's distinctive apostleship is the fact of the special revelations God gave to him. Chapter [12:1-4](#) tells of one of these revelations. Acts [26:16](#) makes it clear Paul did not get all of his revelation on the road to Damascus, but that the Lord appeared to him on various occasions. Thus, we can expect some progression from his earlier to his later epistles. There is no indication, however, that at a later date God revealed an entirely new body of truth to him, as claimed by the Acts 28 people.

In this second epistle to the Corinthians we get the proof Paul's epistles are in reality Christ speaking through Paul:

Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me ([13:3](#)).

There are many expositors of the Word who, while claiming to believe in the inspiration of the Scriptures, suppose the words of Christ are to be found only in the four Gospels. Much is made over the so-called Great Commission as being the last words of Christ. These men seem to forget Christ told His disciples He had many things to say unto them which He could not as yet tell them, but that the Holy Spirit would make these things known to them after He had ascended to heaven ([John 16:12](#)). Even further, Paul claimed that Christ personally appeared to him and gave him His word ([Galatians 1:12](#)). The so-called Great Commission was the last word of Christ *on earth* to His kingdom disciples, but Paul's epistles contain the

last word of *Christ from heaven* for members of His Body. We will see more of this when we comment on chapter 5.

Paul has a number of Old Testament quotations in this epistle, such as [6:2](#); [6:16-18](#); [8:15](#); [9:9](#). Since this present dispensation is said to have been a secret which was not made known to the sons of men in other ages and generations, the question naturally arises, is Paul actually dealing with the truth of the Mystery when he is quoting Old Testament prophecies? Those who begin the present dispensation after Acts 28 argue that 2 Corinthians belongs to the kingdom and not to the Body dispensation because of these Old Testament quotations, and also because of Paul's reference to the New Covenant in chapter 3. It is our conviction 2 Corinthians is definitely truth for members of the Body.

Paul does not say his ministry is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies; he quotes these passages simply for illustration. For example, in dealing with equality in Christian giving he illustrates the point by referring to Exodus 16:18, "*As it is written*. He that had gathered much had nothing over, and he that had gathered little had no lack." In illustrating how God is able to make all grace abound toward us he quotes Psalms 112:9, "*As it is written*, he hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever." There is nothing here which denies the distinctive and unique revelation of the Mystery.

Chapter 3 of this epistle does pose some very definite dispensational problems. Paul says in 3:6, "Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament." The New Testament or Covenant was promised to the house of Israel and the house of Judah in [Jeremiah 31:31](#). If Paul was an able minister of this New Covenant, and if the covenants pertain to Israel ([Romans 9:4](#)), how then could Paul be at the same time the minister of the Mystery? The New Covenant was foretold in the Old Testament and the Mystery was not.

Our previous comments on the Lord's Supper and the blood of the New Covenant in 1 Corinthians 11 will be helpful here. To begin with, the New Covenants completely spiritual in character. It is just the opposite of the Old Covenant made at Sinai. It is entirely unconditional, whereas the Mosaic covenant was entirely conditional upon man's works. Furthermore, in 2 Corinthians 3 Paul points to other contrasts--the Old was a ministration of death written upon tables of stone; the New is a ministration of the Spirit written upon the fleshly tables of the heart. The Old had a certain glory, but in comparison with the New it had no glory by reason of the exceeding glory of the New. The Old was temporary; the New was to abide for ever.

The Bible plainly teaches the only thing having sufficient efficacy to cleanse from the guilt and penalty of sin is the blood of Christ. But the blood of Christ is the blood of the New Covenant. Therefore, if any one is to be saved in any dispensation, it must be through the blood of the New Covenant. We must understand that the Mystery is not simply the fact God is saving Gentiles, and likewise that the Mystery is not opposed to or isolated from the salvation provided in the Savior Who

was prophesied from the foundation of the world. The gospel of the grace of God which Paul preached was based upon the fact Christ died for our sins "according to the Scriptures." Any one who preaches this gospel is ministering the New Covenant, whether he understands it or not. God made a number of covenants with Israel, but this is the only one which is spiritual in character, and Paul says we have been made partakers of Israel's spiritual things ([Romans 15:27](#)).

Beside this foundational, basic truth about personal salvation, Paul had revealed to him the secret of the gospel ([Ephesians 6:19](#)), and the secret of what God is doing with saved Jews and Gentiles in this dispensation of the Secret ([Ephesians 3:3-6](#)). To take away the blood of the New Covenant from Paul's message is to remove the foundation and to leave the Mystery suspended in mid-air.

Chapter 5 contains two dispensational subjects, the first having to do with our blessed hope and the second with our commission. After reminding the Corinthians we have this treasure (New Covenant ministry) in earthen vessels, which are subject to trouble, perplexity, persecution, and death, he turns to the blessed truth of the unseen and eternal realities which concern our inward man. He does the same thing in [Romans 8:18-25](#).

I believe Paul speaks of three distinct things in 5:1-10.

- First, he speaks of death, which he calls the dissolution of our earthly tabernacle and a state of being naked or unclothed or absent from the body.
- Next, he speaks of the intermediate state, in case death overtakes us as "absent from the body... present with the Lord."
- Finally, he speaks of the translation of those in the mortal state who are alive at the coming of Christ for the church--"being clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."

Paul distinguishes between the mortal and the corruptible, and the immortal and the incorruptible. Mortals are living people who are capable of death. They will put on immortality at the time of the Rapture. The corruptible are those who have died. These will put on incorruption at the same time ([1 Corinthians 15:52, 53](#)). Mortality being swallowed up of life is the picture of a living saint in a mortal body being translated into immortality without passing through death. This was the experience Paul was earnestly desiring, but the Lord has not yet come and Paul had to go through the experience of death and separation from the body.

The latter half of Chapter 5 gives us the true commission for members of the Body of Christ. In fact, we have the word "commit" in this commission whereas it is not found in the so-called Great Commission in the Gospel records. There is nothing amiss with this latter commission. It was given by Christ to His disciples for the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom with the miracles and outward physical signs which were to follow them that believe ([Mark 16:15-18](#)). The only thing it has

in common with our commission is that it was world-wide in its proclamation. In contrast, its message was the gospel of the kingdom with water baptism for the remission of sins, whereas our commission is the message of reconciliation apart from water baptism (1 [Corinthians 1:17](#)). The acceptance of this message of reconciliation brings one into the new creation. I take it that this new creation is identical with the one new man of Ephesians 2:15. Also Paul's message of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians is surely the same as that in [Colossians 1:20-22](#), thus showing that Paul's message was the same before and after Acts 28.

One further dispensational comment should be made on Chapter 11:2, where Paul says:

I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

A perennial question is, who is the Bride of Christ? The Bride, the Lamb's wife, in Revelation 21 is clearly identified as the New Jerusalem with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on the gates and the names of the Twelve apostles upon the foundations. But Paul is not here talking about the New Jerusalem.

Throughout the Bible in all dispensations God's relationship to His people is one of love and is often pictured in the metaphor of husband and wife. In Romans 7 Paul has us already married to Christ. Here he is going to present us to Christ as a chaste virgin. In Romans Paul is illustrating our identification with Christ and the bearing of fruit in this new relationship. Here he is concerned with the fidelity of the believer to Christ and the singleness of relationship which should exist, even as a woman breaks all other ties she may have had and becomes entirely and thoroughly devoted to the one man to whom she is now engaged.

If Satan cannot keep people from getting saved he will do everything in his power to corrupt their minds from a single-hearted devotion to Christ through some kind of false teaching which inevitably leads to abnormal living. Satan can even use the Bible by applying it undispensationally to accomplish this end, and it is for this reason we would stress the importance of understanding all Scripture in the light of God's special revelation for this dispensation as found in the Pauline epistles.

GALATIANS

Although the word "dispensation" does not occur in Galatians, this epistle is one of the most important dispensational epistles of Paul as far as giving us the uniqueness of the revelation of his gospel is concerned. The epistle does not give us any truth concerning the Body of Christ as such, but there is no doubt it was written to members of the Body. The purpose of the letter is to correct doctrinal aberrations caused by the injection of legalistic principles into the gospel of the grace of God.

Galatians is a pre-prison epistle. It must have been written after Paul's first missionary journey and before his imprisonment in Acts 21. There are some dispensational problems connected with the time elements in the book. Two theories have evolved concerning the identity of the Galatian churches. The South Galatian theory holds that Galatia refers to the Roman province as a whole and the churches are those established on Paul's first journey--Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch. This theory sets the date of the epistle at the end of the first missionary journey and thus identifies the Jerusalem visit of Galatians 2 with the famine visit of [Acts 11:27-30](#).

The North Galatian theory assumes Paul's visit to Galatia began in [Acts 16:6](#) on his second journey, after revisiting the churches to the south, and that he made a return trip to these churches in the north of Galatia, according to [Acts 18:23](#). This theory admits of a later date for the letter and is favorable to the view which says the Jerusalem visit was that of Acts 15. Further comment on the implications of these views will be made when we consider Chapter 2 in detail.

Doubtless one of the key words of this epistle is "gospel," which is used twelve times. This compares with thirteen times in Romans and twelve in 1 Corinthians, both much larger epistles. Ephesians uses the word only four times and Colossians twice. Paul defines the gospel in his introduction ([1:1-5](#)) before naming it:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins... and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.

He also defends his unique apostleship, which is most important if we are to understand the Pauline dispensation:

Paul, an apostle (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ ...).

Next, Paul introduces his surprise at how soon the Galatians had turned away from him who had called them into the grace of Christ to "another gospel" ([1:6-9](#)). Practically all commentaries take the "him" of verse 6 to refer to God, but I believe it may well refer to Paul himself. Paul was surely the human instrument through whom they had been called and just as surely they had removed or turned away

from Paul. They had not turned away from Jesus, but from Paul and the revelation of grace through him.

The two-fold pronouncement of the anathema of God upon those who preach any other gospel than that which Paul preached is a very strong evidence that there is but one true gospel, such as, "the gospel of the Kingdom" ([Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14](#)), Paul's "my gospel" ([Rom. 16:25](#)), or "that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles" ([Gal. 2:2](#)), which Paul communicated to the other apostles at Jerusalem. Are all such qualifications simply qualifications of one and the same gospel, or do they refer to distinct and separate gospels? This question becomes very pertinent in understanding Galatians 2:7-9, where we find the results of his meeting with the other apostles in Jerusalem.

He said they did not add one bit to his knowledge of the gospel:

But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter (for he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles)... they gave to me and Barnabas the fight hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

This is the only scriptural occurrence of the expressions, "the gospel of the circumcision" and "the gospel of the uncircumcision." These words are in the genitive case in the Greek.

The most simple and ordinary use of the genitive is to place a substantive [e. g., gospel] in immediate construction with another substantive [e.g., circumcision]. This construction is an expression of some simple and obvious relation between the things signified by the two substantives; and thus the substantive in the genitive comes variously to signify a possessor, origin, cause, matter, object, etc. (*The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, London, Samuel Baxter and Sons, p. xiv).

It would thus appear from Paul's use of the genitive that he intended to convey the idea there was a gospel *belonging to* the circumcision and a gospel *belonging to* the uncircumcision. This in itself does not prove a difference in these two messages, but neither does it prove identity. We could speak of candy belonging to two children, but that would not tell us whether both had the same kind or kinds of candy.

The A.V. and the A.S.V. both translate these words as genitives, but to do so seems to indicate there was some kind of difference between the gospel Peter preached and that which Paul preached. Therefore, practically all of the modern speech versions translate these words as datives: the gospel *to* the circumcision and the gospel *to* the uncircumcision. But why did Paul use the genitive if he meant to signify the ones to whom the gospel was sent? At the end of verse 9 where he

speaks of the gospel going *to* these two groups he uses the preposition *eis*. Why did he not use the same preposition in verse 7 to express that idea?

Going a little deeper into the context indicates there must be some difference in content between the ministries and preaching of Peter and Paul. In Chapter 1 Paul goes to great lengths to show that he did not get his gospel from those who were apostles before him, neither was he taught it, but it was given to him by direct revelation from the ascended Lord Jesus Christ. If Paul was preaching the same identical gospel that Peter was preaching, why did he have to go to Jerusalem by special revelation to communicate his gospel to them? Why all of the arguing and hassle in conference if there were no differences?

In Chapter 1:6-9 Paul speaks of "another gospel" (*heteros*), which is "not another" (*allos*). How can another not be another? Paul did not make such a contradictory statement. He used two different Greek words, as indicated. Vine, in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, states:

Allos expresses a numerical difference and denotes another of the same sort; *heteros* expresses a qualitative difference and denotes another of a different sort (p. 60).

Paul in Galatians was combating a heterodox gospel which had invaded the churches of Galatia which he had established. This false gospel preached in the name of Jesus predicated salvation upon keeping the Law of Moses. They were saying, "Except ye be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses ye cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). It was upon the preachers of this heterodox gospel that Paul pronounced the anathema of God.

But Paul said this gospel of a completely different sort was not a gospel of the same sort--it was not an *allos* gospel. He then distinguishes between the gospel of the circumcision and the gospel of the uncircumcision which were gospels of the same sort. They were of the same sort because they were both based upon faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ for eternal salvation from sin (Acts 4:12; 10:39-43; 15:7-11; Gal. 2:15,16). The gospel of salvation had been promised beforehand by the prophets in the Old Testament (Rom. 1:1). It was based upon the prophesied death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Both Peter and Paul preached that gospel. In that sense there is only one gospel in the Bible.

However, the Bible plainly shows there were differences both to whom and in what manner the gospel would be administered. If we go back to the point in time when the gospel was first committed to the apostles we discover it was called the gospel of the kingdom (Matt. 4:23; 9:35); that at the time it should be preached only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:5,6); that at the time they were preaching the gospel they did not yet know or understand Christ had to die and be raised as the basis for the gospel (Lk. 18:31-34). The gospel of the kingdom was based upon the promise in the Davidic covenant to establish Israel's kingdom on

earth under David' s Seed, the Messiah (2 [Sam. 7:12-16](#); [Lk. 1:32,33](#)). The gospel of the circumcision was further based upon the covenant of circumcision which God made with Abraham ([Gen. 17:1-8](#)), in which God promised to give his seed all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession.

It should be evident without quoting Scripture that the good news which we today are to proclaim is not the establishment of Israel' s kingdom over the Gentile nations of the earth. The Body of Christ is not Israel. The truth about the Body, the "one new man," was a secret hidden in God--not hidden in the Scripture--and was therefore unsearchable, or more accurately, untrackable, impossible to be traced out in the prophetic Scriptures ([Eph. 3:8,9](#)).

What Paul calls "my gospel" is the preaching of Jesus Christ (whose coming was predicted in the Old Testament) according to the revelation of the Mystery ([Rom. 16:25](#)). The Mystery concerns chiefly the new joint-relationship of Jews and Gentiles in the Body of Christ along with the spiritual program of the Church. There is no question but that Christ not only gave the revelation of the Mystery concerning the Body of Christ but also a great deal of teaching about justification by faith which we closely associate with Paul's gospel. But justification by faith was not a mystery. Abraham was justified by faith in [Genesis 15:6](#) fourteen years before he entered into the covenant of circumcision. Paul emphasizes this fact in [Romans 4:10](#) as scriptural ground for his preaching of justification by faith for uncircumcised Gentile believers; for Abram was justified while he was as yet an uncircumcised Gentile.

Considerable space has been given to these distinctions between the kingdom and Pauline gospels because we believe it is very important to recognize these distinctions in rightly dividing the Word of truth.

From [Chapter 1:11](#) -- 2:9 Paul makes a further defense of his unique ministry and of the special revelation which was given to him. Here Paul proves he got none of his message from the Twelve apostles, nor from any other man, nor did he get it from being taught, but he received it by a direct revelation from Jesus Christ. According to [Ephesians 3:5](#), the other apostles and prophets got this message by the Holy Spirit' s ministry, but Paul got it first by the direct and personal appearance of Jesus Christ. The others did not get it in some mystical way; Paul went up and communicated it to them (2:2), and the Holy Spirit showed it to them just as He does to us today.

In this section Paul refers to two visits to Jerusalem. The first was three years after his conversion (1:18), when he abode with Peter fifteen days. The second was fourteen years later when he communicated his gospel to them and had the agreement that he should go to the Gentiles, and they should go to the Circumcision.

Those who hold to the early date of Galatians say this second visit was that of [Acts 11:30](#). While the chronology of this period is admittedly difficult, it is hard to

see how one can get seventeen or even fourteen years between Paul's conversion and Acts 11:30. *The Companion Bible* dates Paul's conversion at 37 A.D., his first visit to Jerusalem in 40 A.D., and his visit in 11:30 at 45 A.D., only eight years after his conversion.

There are other technical objections to this theory, but there is also a dispensational one. This theory demands that Paul must have had a widespread Gentile ministry before Acts 11, for he says he went up and communicated unto them "that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles" (2:2). In fact, it is supposed Paul had established Gentile churches in Syria and Cilicia before ever he went to Antioch (see [Acts 15:41](#)). If Paul had been engaged for some years in establishing Gentile churches, what is the meaning of Acts 13:2, which declares Paul is there and then to be separated unto his Gentile ministry? And what of Acts 14:27, which declares the door of faith had just now been opened to the Gentiles?

The Jerusalem visit of Galatians 2 seems to me to best fit in with Acts 15. We do not know who founded the churches of Syria and Cilicia, neither are we told whether they were Jewish or Gentile. We can't even be sure of the constituency of the church at Antioch, for some manuscripts read "Greeks" (Gentiles) and some "Grecians" (Greek speaking Jews) in Acts 11:20. We do know the previous verse states that those who were scattered from Jerusalem preached the word "to none but unto the Jews only." Besides, if the controversy over circumcision and Law-keeping had been settled in Acts 11, why should Paul go up again in Acts 15 to settle the same matter? Acts 11 contains no hint of a council or controversy. It seems to me Acts 13 plainly marks the beginning of Paul's special ministry. Before this he was no doubt ministering to Jews, as in [Acts 9:20](#), and doubtless to proselytes.

We have already remarked on Paul's censure of Peter in [2:11-21](#). The principle which Paul elucidates is that if a man tears down a thing and then rebuilds it, he is proven wrong in having torn it down in the first place. Peter in the early part of Acts ministered the kingdom message to Jews only. At Antioch he tore down the wall between Jews and Gentiles, and when certain came from Jerusalem he built up the wall again and separated himself from the Gentiles. Either Peter was wrong in the first place in numbering himself with Paul's Gentile converts, or he was wrong in separating himself. One thing at least seems certain, if Peter was not by this time a member of the Body of Christ, he was expected to live in full fellowship with those who were members.

This brings up the question of whether Peter was still preaching the gospel of the circumcision as he did at Pentecost, or whether his message had been altered by Paul's revelation. The latter position, it seems to me, is clearly indicated by the context.

Chapters three and four have a great deal to say about the relation of Paul's believers to Abraham. He is mentioned by name nine times. This portion should be compared with Romans 4. Paul has just asked the Galatians whether they had

received the Spirit by or from Law-works or from faith-hearing, and whether they were so foolish, having begun in the Spirit, to suppose they could be made perfect by the flesh. (Here "flesh" is synonymous with Law-works, and "Spirit" with faith-hearing.) He then brings in Abraham to illustrate his point.

Some anti-dispensationalists claim we are Abraham's seed in the sense that we have taken Israel's place in the covenants. On the other hand, some dispensationalists disclaim any relationship whatsoever with Abraham. I believe both of these positions are wrong. Paul simply states the proposition that anyone (in any dispensation) who is of faith is a son of Abraham (3:7).

In [Romans 4:11, 12, 16](#) Paul declares that Abraham is the "father" of us all (both the circumcision and the uncircumcision). This statement in no way contradicts the truth of the Mystery. The Mystery is not the fact we are justified by the hearing of faith. If it were, then Abraham had the Mystery. Abraham was the first man to whom God gave the promise of justification by faith alone, and in this sense he is the father of all who become justified by this means.

This is a very common usage of the term father. We speak of William Carey as the father of modern missions, and of George Washington as the father of our country. Modern missionaries are not literal descendants of Carey, nor are all Americans descendants of Washington. But neither this fact nor the fact that these men belonged to another generation keeps us from owning them as fathers.

In connection with this truth Paul says:

The Scriptures, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham (3:8).

Again, we have many conflicting ideas about the gospel. Some declare there is only one gospel in the Bible from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, and others claim there are several distinct gospels with nothing in common between them. And again, both of these positions are wrong.

Paul is here equating gospel with justification by faith. Since no one in any dispensation will be saved in any way but by faith, we can say that there is a gospel which is common to all dispensations. But if we assert that men in all dispensations have been called upon to exercise faith in the same message, we are mistaken. We do not read in Genesis 15:5, 6 that God said to Abram, "Look forward to Calvary and see Jesus Christ dying for your sins and rising again for your justification," but rather, "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be." This latter is what Abraham believed as the basis of his justification. Likewise the disciples believed and preached the gospel for three years and were all the while ignorant of the fact Jesus was to die and rise again ([Luke 9:6](#), compare [18:31-34](#)). So there is a sense in which there is just one gospel, and yet there is another sense in which there are a number of distinct gospel messages in the Bible. Only one of these

messages is God' s Word for today, and that message is the one He gave to Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles.

Paul speaks of Israel under the Law dispensation using the figure of a child in the family under tutors during the years of his minority. In Bible times the son who one day would become heir of all his father possessed was treated no differently from a servant during his earlier years (4:1). When he became of age he went through the ceremony of adoption, at which time he became free from the jurisdiction of tutors and entered into all the privileges of sonship. Until Christ came and provided redemption, Israel was in the position of a child under the bondage of the Law. But now that He has come and the revelation of the gospel of the grace of God has been given (called "the faith" in 3:23, 25), we are no longer under the tutelage of the Law, but under grace.

In the latter pan of Chapter 4 Paul shows the foolishness of going back to the Law after being saved by grace. It is like a son who has gained adoption returning to his childhood status as a servant under tutors. It is like a university graduate going back to play with his alphabetical blocks. It is like Isaac, the son of the freewoman, trading places with Ishmael, the son of the bondwoman. The fact that God told Abraham to cast out the bondwoman and her son (4:30) is used by Paul to show that the dispensations of Law and Grace cannot coexist.

Chapters 5 and 6 give the application of the doctrine of grace to life. The section begins with the exhortation to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us flee. Since Law brings us into the realm of the flesh, and grace into the realm of the Spirit, the appeal is to walk in the Spirit so we will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. The Law commanded, yea demanded, but could not produce righteousness because of the weakness of the flesh. The believer is not to walk merely apart from the Law (that would be lawlessness), but he is to walk in the Spirit, and there is no law against any product of the Spirit (5:23).

In Paul' s concluding remark (6:16) there is a reference to "the Israel of God." This is the only occurrence of this expression in the New Testament and it is almost impossible to dogmatically assert just who is intended. Some think Paul means the circumcision believers as a separate group from the Body of Christ; others think he means the Jewish believers who lived in the land and were not under his ministry; still others suppose Paul is simply uttering a prayer for Israel as such, for we know his heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel was that they might be saved (Romans 10:10).

EPHESIANS

Dispensational truth has been defined as vertical truth in contrast to horizontal truth. Horizontal truth consists in those great underlying principles which never change in God's dealings with mankind. Vertical truth deals with principles which do change. Thus two vertical principles placed side by side may be direct opposites. As an example, consider Luke 22:35, 36:

And he [Jesus] said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip [money] and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.

Many such contrasting and contradictory statements can be found in the Bible. Besides "*don't* take a purse," and "*take* a purse," note the following:

- "Eat the herb of the field," and eat "every moving thing that liveth" ([Genesis 3:18](#); [9:3](#)).
- "Every male child among you shall be circumcised," and "If ye be circumcised Christ shall profit you nothing" ([Genesis 17:10](#); [Galatians 5:2](#)).
- Christ sent the apostles to baptize, and "Christ sent me not to baptize" ([Matthew 28:19](#); [1 Corinthians 1:17](#)).
- "Go not unto the Gentiles," and "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." ([Matthew 10:5](#); [Mark 16:15](#)).
- "Heal the sick," and "Take a remedy" ([Matthew 10:8](#); [1 Timothy 5:23](#)).
- "Have all things common," and "provide for your own" ([Acts 2:44](#); [1 Timothy 5:8](#)).

It is to be understood, of course, that a new principle which is injected in one dispensation may continue to operate in succeeding dispensations. For example, the kingdom commission was to all the world ([Mark 16:15](#)) and so is Paul's ([Romans 16:26](#)), but the same kingdom commission commanded water baptism while Paul's didn't ([1 Corinthians 1:17](#)). Perhaps this brief review will serve to remind us of our objectives in this series of dispensational synopses of New Testament books.

As Romans expounds the doctrine of justification by faith, so Ephesians reveals especially the doctrine of the church which is Christ's Body. Most commentators acknowledge that this epistle gives us the most exalted revelation of heavenly truth in all the Bible. However, comparatively few sense the uniqueness of this revelation as having to do with a divine purpose which was kept secret from all ages and generations past until it was finally revealed to and through the apostle Paul. The traditional interpretation makes the epistle to be simply an elevation to greater spiritual heights of truth prophesied in the Old Testament. The church, in this view, is the same church as in the Old Testament, with the exception that

Gentiles are now incorporated into it. No distinction is made between the Body of Christ and the messianic kingdom.

There are, nonetheless, a number of premillennial commentaries which do admit the uniqueness of this revelation to Paul and also the fact that the Body of Christ is a new entity distinct and different from the prophesied kingdom, but they negate nine-tenths of the truth by claiming this new thing began at Pentecost. For example, Dr. Arno C. Gaebeline in his exposition on Ephesians, *Unsearchable Riches*, after contending for the uniqueness of the present dispensation, says:

On the day of Pentecost the church came into existence. The assembled believers in Jerusalem were not alone filled with the Spirit, but also baptized by the Spirit into one body. But even on that glorious day, when the evidence was so wonderfully given that the One who had died on the Cross is risen, and at God's right hand, the truth concerning the church, the Mystery was not made known. Peter did not preach a word about the church. The Lord chose Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor of the church, as steward of this hidden Mystery. It was revealed to him. When he states, "it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit," there is no clash whatever with the previous claims of the Apostle, "He made known unto me the Mystery." The apostles and prophets (New Testament prophets and teachers) also received the truth concerning the Mystery, but as under him, to whom the Lord gave the revelation first of all. They were acquainted through Paul's revelation with the Mystery, and the Holy Spirit led them into the knowledge of it (pp. 84, 85)

We can heartily concur with everything in this statement with the one exception that this new dispensation began at Pentecost. I, too, once held this identical view, that God began the Mystery at Pentecost but the apostles were ignorant of what God was doing until he revealed it to Paul some years later. Further study, however, convinced me that Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, knew exactly what God was doing at Pentecost and told us in no uncertain words that what was taking place was in accordance with what all the prophets of old had predicted ([see Acts 3:21-24](#)). If this be true, then it is not possible God was there beginning the Mystery, about which the prophets were completely in the dark. And, of course, to claim the Holy Spirit was baptizing Jews and Gentiles into one Body at Pentecost is contrary to history, since no Gentiles as such were saved until several years after Pentecost (Acts 10).

In introducing us to the distinctive truth for this dispensation in this epistle, Paul takes us back to the time before the foundation of the world ([1:4](#)) to show us that this newly revealed truth about which no former prophet ever had any knowledge, was not, in fact, something new as an afterthought on God's part, nor simply a minor addition to truth already revealed. This whole dispensation, with all of the people involved in it, was a part of God's original plan and purpose. In fact, it is called His "eternal purpose" in chapter 3:11. Notice the terms which Paul uses in this connection:

- *Chosen* in him before the foundation of the world.
- Having *predestinated* us unto the adoption of sons; according to the *good pleasure* of his will.
- According to the *riches of his grace*; having made known unto us the *mystery of his will*.
- Which he hath *purposed in himself*.
- Being *predestinated*.
- According to the *purpose* of him.
- Who worketh all things after the *counsel of his own will*.

By taking us back before there was anything but God, and showing us that this whole program of the Mystery was planned, elected, and predestinated at that time, Paul makes it abundantly clear this is indeed a dispensation of grace for it was all consummated in the mind of God before He ever created mankind.

This is not the place to elucidate on election, but how foolish to deny or oppose this wonderful truth which is so clearly set forth here (and set forth for our comfort and encouragement) simply because we can't fully comprehend it. No man has ever comprehended the Trinity or the hypostatic union of the two natures in the one Person of Christ, but we fully believe these truths which are basic to our whole Christian system of doctrine.

It doesn't solve anything to say God did not choose or elect individuals but only the corporate Body of Christ, for the Body is made up of individuals. He couldn't choose one without the other. Such reasoning is akin to saying Jesus did not choose individuals to be apostles, He only chose to have twelve apostles. Did Jesus say, "I have chosen that there shall be twelve apostles. Now, anyone who wants to be an apostle can choose to be one?" (compare [John 15:16](#)). Many people say election is simply man choosing Christ. But how could this be true in [Ephesians 1:4](#), when the choice was made before God ever created man?

Neither does it solve any difficulty to say God simply foreknew who would be saved but He exercised no choice in the matter; for by choosing to implement the plan which is now being carried out, foreknowing you would be saved and your neighbor lost, He sealed and made certain that such should be the case. What is the difference between choosing you to be saved and choosing a plan in which He knows you will be saved? And, of course, to deny the foreknowledge and omniscience of God is to deny Scripture, just as it is a denial of Scripture to deny the doctrine of election. And, I might add, to go beyond Scripture and frame theories which deny human free-will and responsibility is also to deny Scripture.

If we believe the Scriptures we will rest content with Paul that these truths transcend human understanding ([Romans 11:33-36](#)). We will believe them, we will enjoy them, and we will stop our arguments and dissensions which give the impression we can't trust God to make the right decisions apart from our detective

work. It has always been difficult for me to understand why some Christians are so violently opposed to permitting God to make a choice, especially when we know His choices are always right and always for the benefit and blessing of mankind. If people could only see that election is presented in Scripture, not as a bone of contention or as an unjust and capricious act of sovereignty, but as a comforting assurance for God's people so that once a person is saved he knows he is eternally saved, this would become one of the best loved doctrines of the Bible.

In the first fourteen verses of chapter 1 Paul shows how the entire Trinity is involved in this divine plan and purpose.

- The Father has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. He has done this by choosing us before the foundation of the world, predestinating us unto sonship, and making us accepted in the Beloved.
- The Son has provided redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins. He has made known the Mystery of His will and has given us an inheritance in Himself.
- The Holy Spirit has sealed us and has become the earnest of our inheritance until the day of redemption (see also [4:30](#)).

It is most enlightening to see that while this whole work is predicated of God, the converse is also true:

That we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation (1:12, 13).

Salvation is wholly of God and it is wholly dependent upon man's hearing the gospel of salvation and trusting in Christ. The same truth is presented in 2 Thessalonians 2: 13:

But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.

There is no doubt here that election is unto salvation, but notice this election is through the means of the work of the Spirit and our belief of the truth. Since there is not even one human being who has sought after God ([Romans 3:10-12](#)), none would ever have been saved apart from God's election and the work of the Spirit. But it is equally true that none would ever have been saved apart from the belief of the gospel, and Scripture never presents election as forcing the elect to believe or of making it impossible for the non-elect to believe. Right in the midst of an outstanding passage on election Paul says, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13). Let us not dishonor God's Word by reading into it some distorted figment of human reasoning. Let us not be guilty of replying against God ([Romans 9:20](#)). Just because our puny minds cannot

reconcile a whosoever will message with God's election before the foundation of the world is no proof God's omniscience is thereby stymied.

God's election and foreknowledge is not limited to God's purpose in this present dispensation. There is much revelation of these things in relation to His kingdom purpose.

- He chose Israel ([Ezekiel 20:5](#); [Deuteronomy 7:7](#)).
- He chose Abraham ([Nehemiah 9:7](#)).
- He chose David ([1 Kings 8:16](#)).
- Dozens of times Jacob and Israel are called God's chosen ones.

The Old Testament also has much to say about the purpose of God, just as Paul does:

The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass: as I have purposed, so shall it stand. For the Lord of hosts hath purposed, who shall disannul it? his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back? ([Isaiah 14:24, 27](#)).

It is not only unscriptural but utterly unthinkable that God should be ignorant of any thing past, present, or future.

I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure... I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it ([Isaiah 46:9-11](#)).

We discover through the Scriptures that God has a twofold purpose: In the Old Testament His focus concerns the earth and the messianic kingdom; In Ephesians and the other of Paul's epistles the focus is the heavenly out-calling, the church which is His Body.

Paul refers to "the heavenlies" five times in this epistle:

- "All spiritual blessings in the heavenlies" ([1:3](#)).
- Christ at the right hand of God in the heavenlies ([1:20](#)).
- Believers "made to sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus" ([2:6](#)).
- "Principalities and powers in the heavenlies" ([3:10](#)).
- "Spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies" ([6:12](#)).

This word "heavenlies" is really an adjective made up of the word for heaven with the prefix "upon." It occurs in the plural in Ephesians and most translators have supplied the word "places," making it "heavenly places." Some understand it to mean, among celestial beings. Others think it refers to a super-heavenly sphere. Still others claim it refers to a region above or on top of heaven. Since the same

word is used in Hebrews of "the heavenly calling" (3:1), "the heavenly gift" (6:4), "the heavenly things" (11:16), and "the heavenly Jerusalem" (12:22), it is evident it doesn't mean something above or outside of heaven. The Ephesian references make it plain that Christ is now seated at the right hand of God in this place, that angelic principalities and powers are there, and that our warfare against the Satanic forces of spiritual wickedness are also there. It would thus appear Paul is referring to the heavenly regions, and since the Body of Christ is to be caught up and not to be left upon the earth, it is our belief that our destiny will be heavenly in character.

But God will have a people upon the redeemed earth also. While this kingdom is heavenly in origin (John 18:36, compare Luke 19:12; Matthew 4:17), it will be set up on earth. Apparently in that future day there will be very close communication between heaven and earth. At least Ephesians 1:10 tells us that in the final dispensation -- The Fullness of Times -- God will head up in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth.

The last nine verses of Chapter 1 contain Paul's prayer for those to whom God has revealed the Mystery of His will. The burden of the prayer is that all such may be given the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ in His exalted position as Head of the church which is His Body, and that they might be enlightened to understand what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward those who believe. It seems Paul realized that which appears so evident to us today, namely, that with all of the Satanic opposition to this truth of the revelation of the Mystery it is essential that God's Spirit open the eyes of the understanding and give the spirit of revelation in the knowledge of Him if God's people are to grasp this truth. It is one thing to have an impersonal knowledge of the facts, which even an unsaved person might have, and it is quite another thing to have acknowledged the truth of the Mystery (Colossians 2:2) so that this truth becomes vital and compelling in the life.

Chapter 1 of Ephesians ends by introducing us to "the church which is His Body." The next reference to this Body is in Chapter 2:16. Further references are in 3:6; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23, 30. Chapter 1 emphasizes the fact that Christ is the Head of the church which is His Body. Chapter 2 shows the means whereby God reconciles Jews and Gentiles in this one Body. Chapter 3 reveals the fact this Body was a secret hidden in God and never before revealed to the sons of men. Chapter 4 sets forth the unity and growth of the Body.

Chapter 2 compares the Gentiles with the Jews as to their nature and position before God, both in the past and in the present. Paul shows that both Jews and Gentiles were children of wrath by nature (v. 3). However, as to position before God the Jew was near by reason of the covenants of promise (vv. 12, 17); whereas the Gentiles were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, hopeless, Godless, and far off (v. 12, 13). It is most important to keep these two facts in mind.

The Jews as a people were made out of the same kind of flesh as were the Gentiles, but as a nation God had placed them in a special covenant relationship with Himself. They had a position and privilege which the Gentile did not share. And God purposed that any blessing for the Gentile must go through the Jew. That purpose, of course, was according to Old Testament prophecy.

But in Ephesians we see God's purpose according to the Mystery, and that is to save both Jew *and* Gentile by grace (we have already seen in Romans that God has for the time being cast Israel aside, so there is now no difference between Jew and Gentile), and reconcile both in one Body by means of the Cross (v. 16). The main point Paul is making in verses 14-18 is not simply that we have peace with God individually, as in [Romans 5:1](#), but that Christ made peace between Jew *and* Gentile, having broken down the middle wall of partition which was between them, and has made *out of the two one new man*, so making peace.

This "one new man" is another name for the church which is Christ's Body. This statement of the apostle should silence forever the claim that the same church has existed in all generations and that the Mystery is simply the message that God is making Gentiles members of that church. The Body of Christ is *one new man*. This one new man did not begin historically *at* the Cross, as some have taught from verse 16. God is now reconciling Jews and Gentiles *by* the Cross, that is, by means of what Christ accomplished at the Cross.

Having shown the membership of the Body, the one new man, to be composed of reconciled Jews and Gentiles, Paul continues to speak to these Gentiles in verse 19:

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.

These verses have bothered some dispensationalists who cannot imagine any connection whatsoever between members of this new Body with the saints who were alive at the time the Body began. And so they have to make the saints here to be people saved under Paul's ministry, and the apostles and prophets have to be a completely new set, separate and distinct from the Twelve. Eight new apostles are usually listed:

Barnabas, Andronicus, Junia, Apollos, Sosthenes, Silas, Timothy, and Paul.

These brethren do not seem to see their inconsistency, for five of these men were dispensationally on exactly the same ground as the Twelve. If members of the Body can have no relationship with the Twelve, how can they have relationship with those who were dispensationally one with the Twelve? If Barnabas and Silas, chief men among the kingdom saints at Jerusalem ([Acts 15:22; 4:36](#)), could

become members of the new Body, why should it be impossible for others of these saints to also become one with the Gentiles in this new Body?

The natural sense of the passage before us is surely that Paul is telling these Gentiles that they become joint-citizens with the saints. The saints in this passage must describe a different group from those whom Paul is addressing, and since the immediate context has been speaking of the saints who were near by reason of the covenants, there is no one else to whom Paul could be referring. After all, this is what Paul describes as the Mystery- God now bringing the Gentile believers into a joint-relationship with the Jewish believers in the one new man.

In the concluding three verses of chapter 2, Paul speaks of this one new man, the Body of Christ, as a holy temple in the Lord. We are not only a joint Body, but also a holy temple, and the members are considered as spiritual stones in the process of being builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. In every dispensation God's purpose has been to dwell with His people ([Exodus 25:8](#) -- "Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them"). In this dispensation God is making the Body of Christ to be His sanctuary. "Temple" is literally innermost shrine or sanctuary.

As stated before, chapter 3 reveals the secret character of the Body. I take it Paul is here saying the dispensation of the grace of God is also the dispensation of the Mystery. These two terms may be used interchangeably. By comparing 3:5 with other of Paul's statements about the Mystery it is evident he is not here saying that the Mystery was revealed in a limited way to the sons of men in past ages, as some expositors have taught, but that it was not revealed at all. "As it is now revealed" is not a comparison. If we say men in past ages knew nothing about the atomic bomb as we know today, we don't mean they knew a little about it. The plain, unqualified parallel statement in [Colossians 1:26](#) should settle this point:

Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints.

The holy apostles and prophets come before us again in verse 5----"as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." These must be the same ones which were mentioned in 2:20. Paul mentions the other apostles a number of times (see [1 Corinthians 1:12](#); [3:4-8](#); [4:9](#); [9:5](#); [12:28](#); [15:5-7](#); [2 Corinthians 11:5](#); [12:11](#); [Galatians 1: 17-19](#); [2:1-16](#)). There can be no doubt Paul is talking about the Twelve in all of these references and it would be contrary to every law of hermeneutics to claim that in Ephesians he is completely excluding the Twelve when he uses the same appellation without any qualification whatsoever. I agree with Dr. Gaebeline, whom we quoted earlier, to the effect that Paul was given this revelation first of an directly from Jesus Christ, and that then the Holy Spirit revealed it to the other apostles through Paul.

An attempt has been made to make the joint-body of 3:6 to be only a joint relationship between Christ and the Gentiles, omitting the Jews altogether. It is

wonderfully true that every believer is a joint-heir with Christ ([Romans 8:17](#)), but this is not what Paul is talking about here. We have just seen from the context of chapter 2 that Paul is talking about God making out of the twain, Jew and Gentile, one new man, reconciling them in one Body. Surely the one Body of 3:6 and 4:4 must be the same Body as 2:16. Christ is the Head of the Body, not merely one of the joint-members. It is the Jew and the Gentile who comprise the joint-relationship in the Body. This is the unique relationship which characterizes the Mystery.

The truth of the Mystery as being something previously hidden is further set forth by Paul' s use of the expression, "the unsearchable riches of Christ." This is a compound word meaning untrackable or untraceable. It is translated "past finding out" in [Romans 11:33](#). These riches of Christ cannot be traced out in any former revelation of God.

God' s intention is that all may be enlightened concerning the dispensation of the Mystery (v. 9), and that the principalities and powers in the heavenlies may have the manifold wisdom of God made known unto them through the church (v. 10). It is believed by many that the Body of Christ will one day supplant these heavenly powers which are now under Satanic control. In the meantime God is teaching them through the church His matchless wisdom as the very secret of all of His plan and purpose is being revealed in this dispensation.

Chapter 3 ends with the second great prayer of this epistle. The first prayer was for knowledge, the second is for experience. Specifically, to comprehend what is the breadth, length, depth, and height of the Mystery, and to know through experience the love of Christ in order to be filled with all the fullness of God.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 comprise the practical portion of the epistle. We will touch mainly on the dispensational features. The word "walk" is used seven times, twice in the second Chapter to describe our walk in time past as children of disobedience, and five times in chapter 4 and 5 to describe our present walk as children of God. We are to walk:

- Worthily ([4:1-16](#))
- Differently ([4:17-32](#))
- Lovingly ([5:1-7](#))
- Acceptably ([5:8-10](#))
- Circumspectly ([5:11-17](#))

We are to walk worthy of our calling (4:1). We have already read about the hope of His calling (1:18), and we read in 4:4, "even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." His calling is in contrast to man' s calling. God' s calling is always effectual. All of those whom God calls are justified ([Romans 8:30](#)). Many are called through man 's preaching, yet few are chosen ([Matthew 20:16](#)), but all who are called of God are chosen. God' s call is unto salvation and glory as members of the Body of Christ. His calling becomes our calling, and the hope of this calling may be

considered dispensationally as the Rapture. However, it is not certain Paul has this in mind in this passage. Paul talks a great deal in the latter part of Acts about the hope of Israel, but he is not thinking of the dispensational hope of the millennial kingdom, but rather of the hope of resurrection ([Acts 28:20](#), compare [24:15](#), [16](#); [26:6](#), [7](#); [Jeremiah 14:8](#); [17:13](#)).

This worthy walk consists of at least two things--an attitude and an endeavor. The attitude must be one of lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, and forbearance in love. The endeavor must be to keep the unity of the Spirit; that is, the unity which the Spirit Himself has already established. This is a seven-fold unity.

This is not a doctrinal statement. It does not include everything essential to our belief. Neither are the seven parts of this unity necessarily distinctive to the truth for the Body of Christ. The one Spirit, the one Lord, the one God and Father of all belong to Israel as well as to the Body. I am quite sure the one faith includes that whole body of truth revealed to Paul as the object of our faith. The one Body and the one baptism are, of course, also unique to this dispensation. We have commented sufficiently on the one Body in chapter 3.

The one baptism has been understood in various ways. Most commentators do not even consider it could mean anything but ceremonial baptism, which they suppose makes one a member of the Body. Others who recognize a difference between Spirit baptism and water baptism try to have one baptism while actually holding to two baptisms. They do this by either saying Paul means by the one Spirit, one Spirit baptism, and by the one baptism, one water baptism, or by saying that the one baptism includes the real or Spirit baptism and its shadow, water baptism. The late Dr. Ironside espoused the former of these views, and the late Dr. L. S. Chafer apparently held to the latter. While not agreeing with either of these explanations I do heartily agree with these words of Dr. Chafer:

Certainly this all-important real (spirit) baptism is not here set aside as unworthy of consideration and as secondary to ritual baptism; nor could it be said of any form of ritual baptism that it is a unifying agency. The history of the church is a counter-witness to this. However, the real (spirit) baptism which joins all believers to Christ is certainly a unifying agency beyond measure (*The Ephesian Letter*, p. 125.)

Since ritual baptism was not even a part of Paul's commission, and since Paul never once gives any instruction about ritual baptism in his epistles, and since he is here talking about a spiritual unity, I take it Paul is referring to real or Spirit baptism by which we become members of the Body, and not in any sense to ritual baptism.

The list of ministry gifts which the ascended Christ gave for His Body church is significant by the omission of the so-called sign gifts, which are included in the list in [1 Corinthians 12:28](#). Both lists include apostles, prophets, and teachers. Ephesians adds evangelists and pastors. These gifts are men rather than miraculous powers. The sign gifts were temporary and are not therefore mentioned

in Ephesians, which gives us the settled order for the Body. The apostles and prophets have passed off the scene too, but the revelation which was given through them remains with us in the Pauline Scriptures. These gifts have been given with a view to adjusting the saints to the work of ministering. Thus the Body of Christ is growing and increasing and coming more and more to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto the perfect man.

The other items about the walk of the Body of Christ are important and of great practical value, but there is not much of dispensational distinction to note. Paul's words are plain and we will leave it to our readers to heed his admonitions.

In the latter part of chapter 5 and the first part of chapter 6, Paul speaks of family relationships--husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants. Considerable discussion has arisen over the interpretation of the section on husbands and wives since in concluding the discussion Paul says, "This is a great Mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (v. 32). Is Paul saying the relationship of husband and wife exists between Christ and the church, or is he teaching the Headship of Christ over the Body by comparing it with the headship of the husband over the wife?

It is argued that Paul speaks of the church as one new man, therefore he could not be likening it to a woman. One thing seems certain--the church of this dispensation is not the Bride of [Revelation 21:9-21](#). However, it does seem Paul's terminology in 5:27 likens the presentation of the perfected church to Christ as a bride is presented to the bridegroom:

That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

The immediate context about which the statement "This is a great mystery" is made, is this:

For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This [man and woman becoming one flesh] is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

No doubt the Headship of Christ is here taught, but so is the love of Christ for the church, and the union of the church with Christ which makes us one flesh. While the church is distinctively the Body of Christ, this epistle also speaks of it as a building, a sanctuary for the habitation of God's Spirit, a new man, and a beloved one who is joined to the Lord. And the epistle concludes with the church under the figure of a warrior in full armor.

Israel's enemies were largely political in nature, and God promised deliverance from them ([Luke 1:74](#)). Our enemies are spiritual in nature, and God has provided the necessary armor to stand against them. Our enemies are in high places (elsewhere translated "heavenly places"). They are called the cosmocrats of this

darkness ("rulers of the darkness of this world"). It is no wonder ninety-nine percent of Christians are living defeated lives. These powerful spiritual enemies infest the very region where all of our blessings lie, and most Christians don't even know where that is, to say nothing of realizing a contest has to be waged with Satanic powers before these blessings can be appropriated. God grant that we might awaken and put on the whole armor of God, even as Paul commands us to do.

The epistle ends with a request for prayer; prayer that Paul might open his mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which he is an ambassador in bonds. If Paul needed such prayer, how much more do we!

This concluding remark, showing that Paul was a prisoner on account of the Mystery, is a sufficient answer to the Acts 28 theory, which contends Paul received the Mystery after Acts 28 while he was in prison. Paul was a prisoner from Acts 21 to two years after Acts 28, and he wrote this epistle during those last two years. If he was jailed for preaching the Mystery, he must have had it before Acts 21, and, of course, the proof of this is the fact he speaks of both the Mystery and the Body of Christ in his epistles written before Acts 21.

PHILIPPIANS

Philippians was written at the same time as Ephesians and Colossians, and therefore fits into the same dispensational situation as these other two epistles. All three were written during the two years of Acts 28:30 while Paul was held a prisoner at Rome awaiting his trial. I believe Paul was acquitted and released from prison; that he went about further missionary work; was later imprisoned again at Rome, at which time he wrote his second letter to Timothy; that this second imprisonment ended in his martyrdom.

Philippians is a practical epistle. It does not contain a great deal of doctrinal and dispensational math, as do Ephesians and Colossians. The tone of the letter is one of joy. The words "joy" and "rejoice" occur thirteen times in the Greek text. The theme is that of unity of mind, or to be more exact, like-mindedness to Christ.

The central passage is Chapter 2:5:

Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus.

The verb translated to be like minded, to think, to mind, is used twelve times. It was suggested in a previous study that as Colossians emphasizes Christ as the Head, and Ephesians emphasizes we ourselves as members of His Body, so Philippians emphasizes the mind of Christ, the Head which is in every member of the Body.

The prison epistles of Paul become very valuable dispensationally when compared with the pre-prison epistles. Such comparison will help us to ascertain whether any dispensational change took place between the two groups of epistles, that is, at the end of the Acts period. One system of dispensationalism is based upon the thesis that both Paul and the Twelve ministered the kingdom gospel until [Acts 28:28](#), after which God revealed the dispensation of the Mystery to Paul, and at which time the Body of Christ had its beginnings. This is generally called the Acts 28 theory. Some call it hyperdispensationalism, either because it begins the Body at the latest date of any dispensational scheme, or because it is considered to be extreme in pushing supposed dispensational distinctions. What does Philippians have to contribute to this question?

The church of Philippi was founded by Paul during the Acts period, according to Acts 16. This church had kept close contact with Paul and it should be very revealing to read this letter written after the Acts period if, in fact, a complete change of dispensation had occurred in the meantime. Is there indication of this in the epistle? Does Paul tell the Philippians a new dispensation has come in since their church was founded, that they are members of the old kingdom church, not members of the new Body? And does he instruct them to get out of the old and into the new church? Let us see.

Among the things for which Paul is grateful is listed theft "fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now" (1:5). The "first day" was Acts 16 and the "now" was almost two years after Acts 28:28. A similar statement, showing the unbroken continuity of cooperation in the same message and ministry is seen in 4:15. If Paul had received a completely new and different gospel since that "first day" at Philippi, how could he have thanked God for the continued fellowship in the same gospel from the beginning? No, this little historical note makes it quite clear that Paul was preaching the same gospel after Acts 28 as he was before that time. The very next verse reinforces this conclusion:

Being confident of this very thing, he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (1:6).

Not only was Paul preaching the same gospel, but the work which God had begun in placing these believers in the church of Acts 16 He was continuing and would continue until its completion in "the day of Jesus Christ." How could Paul have made it plainer that the people were still in the same church or Body in which they had been saved?

One of the arguments used by the Acts 28 people in trying to prove the pre-prison epistles are on kingdom ground is Paul's use of such an expression as "the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Corinthians 5:5), which they claim is the same as "the day of the Lord," so prominent in Old Testament prophecy. But the Philippian letter points the believers forward to the day of Jesus Christ (1:6), or the day of Christ (1:10 and 2:16). Apparently the day of the Lord Jesus, the day of Jesus Christ, and the day of Christ are synonymous terms. When compared, the characteristics of the long-prophesied day of Jehovah and the day of which Paul speaks are completely different.

Paul's statement, "that ye may approve things that are excellent" (1:10), has been used as a key text by dispensationalists, who refer to the marginal reading of the ASV--"may approve the things that differ." While it is true this principle may properly be applied to rightly dividing the Word of truth, the context here is not speaking about this subject. Paul told the Jews in Romans 2:18 that they boasted in the fact they approved the things which were excellent (the very same expression in the Greek), but surely Paul was not saying the Jews were making claims that they were rightly dividing the Word of truth. All of God's Word is excellent, but there are many differences contained in it, and dispensational teaching does distinguish the things that differ.

Skipping over much valuable experiential truth we come to a statement in 2:9-11:

Wherefore God hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in

heaven, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Some of the Acts 28 people argue there are actually three outcallings of the redeemed:

- Israel and the nations who will inherit the earth.
- The saints of the Acts period who will inherit heaven.
- The Body of Christ which will be on top of heaven in a sort of super-heaven.

They argue that Christ ascended into heaven in Acts 1, but at Acts 28 He went up further to a location far above heaven. Some of their argument is based upon the meaning of the word translated "heavenly places" in Ephesians. It is the word *epi* (upon) *ouranion* (heaven). These people seem to overlook the fact Christ is said to be seated at the same place both during and after the Acts (see [Acts 2:33, 34; 7:55; Romans 8:34](#), and compare [Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2](#)). They also overlook the fact that in Hebrews the word *epouranios* is used a number of times to describe the location of the pattern after which the Tabernacle was made (see [3:1; 6:4; 8:5; 9:23; 11:16; 12:22](#)).

What interests us in particular here in Philippians is that Paul does mention three spheres when he makes a universal statement, but they are not earth, heaven, and super-heaven. They are heaven, earth, and subterranean. Even more interesting, Paul uses the word *epouranios* to describe the things which are in heaven, and the counterpart word *epigeios* (upon earth) to describe the things in earth and under the earth. If the first word means super-heavenly or a place far above all heavens, then the latter must mean super-earthly or a place far above the earth. Also, if the so-called three spheres of blessing theory is correct, then Paul forgot to mention one of these very important spheres where every knee will bow to Jesus Christ.

In the latter part of chapter 2 Paul deals with the subject of healing. During the Acts period the gift of healing was very much in manifestation, but Paul taught these gifts were to pass away. Hem, in the case of Epaphroditus, who was sick nigh unto death, it seems the gift had passed away. Paul did not heal him miraculously, but instead thanks God for having had mercy upon him, restoring him to health. This is what we might call elective healing. We can appeal to God for His mercy in such cases today, and often He sees fit to grant special mercy to us.

It seems strange after reading in Galatians, "If ye be circumcised Christ shall profit you nothing," to now read, "We are the circumcision" (3:3). We must read [Colossians 2:11](#) to get the full significance of this. In this context Paul refers to ritual circumcision as merely concision (3:2), which is really mutilation or butchering. We who have been circumcised with the circumcision made without hands have been circumcised with Christ when His flesh was cut off in death. This

act brings an end to the flesh, so that there is no longer any place for fleshly circumcision, and now it can be said we are the tree circumcision who worship God in the Spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus having no more confidence in the flesh. Paul, more than any man of his day, could have boasted in the flesh, but he counted all of his fleshly gains but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord (3:4-9).

Some extreme dispensationalists have tried to make Paul say in the verses which follow that he had not yet attained to membership in the new Body of Christ, but that he was striving to get out of the old Body of the Acts period and to get into the new one. Members of this new, Mystery Body, they say, will not experience the Rapture of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, but will all eventually die and then experience the out-resurrection from among the dead of Philippians 3:11.

The notes in the *Companion Bible* on Philippians, purportedly written by Dr. Bullinger, take this position, asserting that Paul may have gotten the assurance of being in the Body by the time he wrote 2 Timothy 4:7. [Ed. note--Some say Charles Welch, Bullinger's disciple, who edited this portion of the *Companion Bible* after Bullinger's death and before its publication, inserted this notion here to represent his, but perhaps not Bullinger's, teaching on the subject.]

However, in Dr. Bullinger's book, *The Church Epistles*, pp. 164-174, the opposite view is taken, namely, that the out-resurrection from the dead of Philippians 3:11 is that which is described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Members of the Body of Christ will be raised first, leaving everyone outside the Body still in the grave. That is why it is called a resurrection out from among the dead.

I cannot believe Paul, at this late date, was expressing doubts that he might not be resurrected with other members of the Body of Christ. Therefore his statement, "If by any means I might attain" is not an expression of doubt, or if it is, the out-resurrection must refer to a reward some members of the Body may attain and others miss. Some think Paul was striving to attain an experimental reality of resurrection power in this present life. Others think he wanted to attain to the first ranks of those who would partake in the resurrection of the members of the Body. Many commentators think Paul was not sure of his salvation and was expressing the possibility of apostasy before his life was over. I believe there is abundant evidence in Paul's epistles that he knew he was eternally saved and that he would be raised with other members of the Body.

It would appear verses 12-19 are parenthetical, so that we should read right out of verse 11 into verse 20:

If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection [out from among the dead]. For our citizenship is in heaven from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

This passage shows Paul was still expecting the Lord Jesus to come out of heaven, as in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, and not simply to be resurrected and taken to heaven.

It is important to be correct in our understanding of these dispensational principles, but there is something even more important which Paul states in these words:

I follow after [pursue, press] if that I may also lay hold of that for which Christ has laid hold of me. I press toward the mark for the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Chapter 4 contains further appeals for unity of mind, for prayer, for a virtuous life, and ends with thanksgiving for the generosity of the Philippians in once and again supplying his needs, and in the ability of God to supply all of their needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

COLOSSIANS

Colossians is the third of the prison epistles of Paul in the order found in our Bible. The prison epistles, written after the transition period covered by the latter half of the Acts period, contain the settled and final dispensational order for the Body of Christ in this dispensation of the Mystery. It seems evident from chapter [2:1](#) that Paul had never preached in Colosse. The church there was probably founded by Epaphras ([1:7](#); [4:12](#)), who was in Rome at the time of Paul's imprisonment and had informed Paul of the condition of the believers back in Colosse. Apparently certain gnostic-like teachings had crept into the church and Paul writes this letter to warn and correct the saints.

Our purpose in this study is to point out the main dispensational features of the book and not to give a verse by verse exegesis. The letter is addressed to:

The saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse ([1:2](#)).

An attempt has been made by Acts 28 dispensationalists to make this mean two distinct groups:

- "The saints," being the believers of the Acts period who were still clinging to the kingdom hopes.
- "The faithful," being those who had accepted the new teaching concerning the Mystery.

It may be true that not all saints are equally faithful, but the fact that Paul tells the stewards of the mysteries of God during the Acts period they were required to be faithful rules out this distinction. There were saints and faithful brethren both during and after Acts.

In [1:5](#) Paul speaks of the hope of these believers. What is this hope? While Paul never speaks of our hopes, plural, the word hope is qualified in different ways. Paul speaks of:

- "The hope of the glory of God" ([Romans 5:2](#)).
- "The hope of righteousness" ([Galatians 5:5](#)).
- "The hope of his calling" ([Ephesians 1:18](#)).
- "The hope of your calling" ([Ephesians 4:4](#)).
- "The hope of the gospel" ([Colossians 1:23](#)).
- "The hope of salvation" ([1 Thessalonians 5:8](#)).
- "The hope of eternal life" ([Titus 1:2](#); [3:7](#)).

He also speaks of Jesus Christ as our hope ([1 Timothy 1:1](#)), and in [Titus 2:13](#) he speaks of "that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of the great God, even our Savior Jesus Christ." In the three occurrences of the word in Colossians it is "the

hope laid up for you in heaven" (1:5); "the hope of the gospel" (1:23), and "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (1:27). In Romans 8:24 Paul says we are saved in hope of the redemption of our body, "but hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?"

It would appear, therefore, when Paul speaks of our hope he is thinking of all of these various aspects of our salvation which are yet future and which will be realized at the time of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

The word "kingdom" is a dispensationally slanted word. We often distinguish between kingdom truth and Body truth. But in writing to members of the Body, Paul says God has "translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (1:13). How can members of the Mystery Body be put into the kingdom? To answer this question it is necessary to understand the qualified way in which Paul used the term.

The word "kingdom" is used 120 times in the Synoptics, five times in John, eight times in Acts, five times in Hebrews and the General Epistles, seven times in Revelation, and fourteen times in Paul's epistles (nine times in the pre-prison and five times in the prison epistles). In the Old Testament and Gospels, the earthly, Messianic kingdom is usually in view, as in [Daniel 2:35 and 44](#) where the smiting stone which becomes a mountain and fills the whole earth is identified as the kingdom which the God of heaven shall set up; and also as in the so-called Lord's prayer where the coming of the kingdom results in God's will being done in earth as it is in heaven ([Matthew 6:10](#)). But in Paul's epistles the kingdoms spiritual and heavenly ([2 Timothy 4:18](#)). Paul says the kingdom of God is not meat and drink ([Romans 14:17](#)), but compare this with Luke 22:30--"That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." While we must distinguish between these various aspects of the kingdom of God, we should not make the mistake of supposing there are several distinct kingdoms of God. God has only one kingdom, but it has its earthly and its heavenly, its material and its spiritual counterparts.

In our dispensational synopsis of Philippians we said the theme of Colossians is the Headship of Christ over the Body. This fact is stated in chapter 1:18, 24; 2:17, 19; and 3:15. There are numerous errors concerning the Body. The Corinthians were guilty of trying to split the Body into factions. The Ephesians apparently needed to be reminded that while there may be many local assemblies of believers, there is only one Body. The fault of the Colossians was that they gave themselves to gnostic-like speculations concerning the worship of angels and were not holding fast the Head, which is Christ ([2:19](#)). Christ is not only the Head of the church which is His Body, He is also the Head of all principality and power ([2:9](#)).

Gnostic thought tried to make Christ to be but an emanation from God, a created eon, but Paul answers this heresy by showing He is none other than the Creator and Sustainer of the universe ([1:15-17](#)), and that "all the fullness of the Godhead" resides in Him bodily ([2:9](#)), and further, that the believer is made

complete in Him apart from all of the ceremonial practices of a legalistic religion such as he mentions in the remainder of chapter 2.

Perhaps next in importance to Romans 6 on the subject of baptism is Paul's statement in chapter 2:12. Paul mentions baptism in eight different passages, but in only one of them does he refer to water baptism ([1 Corinthians 1:13-17](#)). In five of them he speaks of the work of the Spirit in baptizing us into Christ ([Romans 6:3, 4](#); [1 Corinthians 12:13](#); [Galatians 3:27](#); [Ephesians 4:5](#); [Colossians 2:12](#)). That this latter reference does not refer to a physical ceremony is evident from its relation to the circumcision which is made without hands (2:11). M. R. Vincent points out that the word "buried" (verse 12) is in the aorist tense (past finished action), which makes the burial contemporaneous with the circumcision. And since the circumcision took place at the Cross, so also must the baptism. To get the proper sense he suggests we supply three words between verse 11 and 12:

In whom ye were circumcised [*when ye were*] buried with him in baptism.

As we saw from Romans 6, baptism is not called a burial, but is rather the instrument through which we were entombed with Christ. It does not say that we are baptized *in water*, but *into Christ*.

The whole second Chapter is a sufficient answer to any message which is founded upon merely the enticing words of human wisdom, philosophy, traditionalism, sacramentalism, ceremonialism, legalism, and mysticism. All of these things belong to the world of the flesh, and Paul's teaching is that the believer has died with Christ to all of these things and has risen with Christ to live on a spiritual and heavenly plane.

In the admonitions for a godly life which follow in Chapter 3, Paul mentions that the believer has put off the old man and has put on the new. The same truth is taught in [Ephesians 4:22-24](#). Here the old man and new man refer to the two natures of the believer. But in [Ephesians 2:15](#) the one new man refers to the one new Body, the church, which God is forming of believing Jews and Gentiles.

There is another reference to the believer's hope in chapter 3:4 -- "When Christ who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." There are several words which are used to describe the Lord's coming. Here it is *phaneroo*, which comes from a root meaning to lighten, to shine. It expresses the idea that Christ is going to be manifested to creation in shining glory. Another word from the same root is *epiphaneia*, used in [1 Timothy 6:14](#); [2 Timothy 1:10](#); [4:1, 8](#); [Titus 2:13](#); and translated "brightness" in [2 Thessalonians 2:8](#). Still another word is *parousia*, used in [1 Corinthians 15:23](#); [2 Thessalonians 2:19](#); [3:13](#); [4:15](#); [5:23](#); [2 Thessalonians 2:1, 8](#). This word means the personal presence (compare [Philippians 2:12](#) - "as in my presence"). Paul also uses the word *apocalupsis* in [1 Corinthians 1:7](#) for Christ's coming (this is the Greek name for the last book of the Bible), but in almost every other case he refers to the impartation of a divine revelation of truth, as in [Ephesians 3:3](#).

It is my personal belief we shall be caught up to meet the Lord before the Tribulation period. Then after the Tribulation the Lord will be manifested in His glory when He comes as King of kings and we will be manifested with Him in His glory. Jesus Christ has been in the glory of the Father's presence for the past nineteen centuries ([John 17:5](#)), but He hasn't yet been manifested in glory. His being manifested must be something more than His being in heaven. It must refer to His second coming when He receives universal glory. So, while we will be Raptured before His second coming, we will still share in all of the glory which is His.

The word "dispensation" occurs once in the epistle (1:25), where it is termed "the dispensation of God... even the Mystery." "Mystery" occurs four times: [1:26](#), [27](#); [2:2](#); and [4:3](#). The following declarations about the Mystery are made:

- It was given to Paul.
- It was hidden from past ages and generations.
- It is now revealed.
- It fulfills or completes the Word of God.
- It is Christ in you, the hope of glory.
- It is that for which Paul was in bonds.

Paul had prayed in the first chapter that the believers might be filled with the knowledge of His will concerning these truths, and now he asks for their prayers in the last chapter for an open door of utterance, that he might make the Mystery manifest, as he ought to do.

There remains but one statement which may have a dispensational significance, and that is in [4:11](#) where Paul speaks of Aristarcus, Marcus, and Jesus who is called Justus, whom Paul says are of the circumcision. Some may feel these men, being of the circumcision, could not have been members of the Body of Christ. However, Aristarchus seems to have been a convert of Paul ([Acts 19:29](#); [20:4](#)), and John Mark, the nephew of Barnabas, had accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey. It would seem strange for Paul to pick men as his fellow workers who were not even members of the Body of Christ. Also, the word Paul uses for fellow workers in [Colossians 4:11](#) is literally "joint-workers," having the same significance as joint-heirs, joint-body, and joint-partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel. It is difficult to see how Paul could have this joint relationship with these men without being jointly related to them in Christ.

It is my feeling Paul refers to these men as being of the circumcision, not to distinguish them from members of the Body, but to indicate their Jewish origin. The Colossians were largely Gentiles, Paul was a prisoner on account of the Gentiles, and he was the apostle of the Gentiles. Yet his only fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God who had been a comfort unto him were these few Jews.

1 THESSALONIANS

This is Paul's first epistle. It is easy to date this letter from the facts given in chapter 3 and the account in Acts 17 and 18. Paul founded the church at Thessalonica and shortly thereafter was driven out by persecution. He went to Berea, then to Athens, and then sent back word for Silas and Timothy to join him ([Acts 17:15](#)). After preaching in Athens Paul went on to Corinth, where Timothy and Silas rejoined him ([Acts 18:5](#)).

From [1 Thessalonians 3:2](#) we learn that Paul's message to Timothy was not simply to rejoin him, but to first establish the Thessalonians. Timothy's return with the good news that the Thessalonians were standing fast in the Lord in spite of the persecution called forth this first letter. It was written while Paul was in Corinth in Acts 18.

The fact that this was Paul's first letter is of dispensational importance. We have often expressed the belief that the Body of Christ had its historical beginning with Paul before he wrote his first epistle, which means this letter was written to members of the Body of Christ. This fact is of course denied by those who would begin the Body after Acts 28.

It is true the Body of Christ is not mentioned in 1 Thessalonians, but neither is it mentioned in Galatians, 2 Corinthians, Philippians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Paul addresses the letter to the local assembly at Thessalonica. A number of his epistles are similarly addressed (see [1 Corinthians 1:2](#); [2 Corinthians 1:1](#); [Galatians 1:2](#); [2 Thessalonians 1:1](#)). Romans is addressed to all the saints in Rome; Ephesians and Colossians to the saints and the faithful; and Philippians to the saints, with the bishops and deacons. So while Paul does not address any of his letters specifically to the Body of Christ, even the most extreme dispensationalist will agree that the prison epistles were surely addressed to believers who were in fact members of the Body. And we believe all of his epistles were addressed to members of the Body.

How can we be so sure the Thessalonians were members of the Body? There are at least two lines of approach which indicate Paul established the church at Corinth very shortly after he had established the one at Thessalonica. He plainly tells the Corinthians they are members of the Body ([1 Corinthians 12:27](#)). Surely no great dispensational change could have taken place between Acts 17 and 18. If the Corinthians were members of the Body, so were the Thessalonians. The Philippians are admitted by all to have been members of the Body, but the church at **Philippi** was founded in Acts 16 before the one at **Thessalonica**. Again, if the Philippians were members of the Body, so were the Thessalonians.

The other line of reasoning is based upon the fact that it was through the fall of Israel that reconciliation was sent to the Gentiles ([Romans 11:12, 15](#)). In other

words, God began the new dispensation which concerns the Body of Christ with the casting away of Israel. When did He cast Israel away? When Paul preached at Thessalonica was Israel still in the place of favor with God, and did he offer them the earthly, millennial kingdom as Peter did in [Acts 3:19-21](#)? No, Paul plainly states concerning Israel that "the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost" (2:16), and instead of offering them an earthly kingdom, he holds out the hope of being caught up out of this earth to meet the Lord in the air (4:13-17).

It is for these reasons we believe the Body had its beginning some time before Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians, and for reasons stated in other epistles we believe the Body began with Paul's ministry, not with Peter's.

Thus we see Paul's written ministry begins with Israel's downfall. With Israel under God's wrath, even to the uttermost, there can surely be no valid reason to believe God is still holding out the offer of the restoration of the kingdom to that nation. However, it does appear, for the remainder of the Acts period at least, that God is withholding the infliction of His wrath and through Paul fulfilling some kind of ministry to Israel. Of course, we know He is offering salvation to both Jew and Gentile, but there appears to be more to it than that. When Paul begins his Gentile ministry he tells the Jews:

It was *necessary* that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46).

There was a necessity for Paul's ministry to unbelieving Israel, in spite of God's wrath being pronounced against them.

It would seem from the verse just quoted and from the highly symbolic act of Paul a few days earlier at Paphos in pronouncing blindness upon the apostate Jew, Bar-Jesus, that God was using Paul to bring the testimony of Jesus to all of the Jews of the dispersion so that they would be without excuse. Paul was pronouncing blindness upon Israel as a judgment of God and thus providing a sufficient reason for casting them aside and for sending salvation to the Gentiles. It certainly appears the book of Acts ends with a crisis in Israel's history and that this crisis closes this phase of Paul's ministry. But notice, Acts 28:27, 28 is not the first time blindness is pronounced upon Israel and salvation is sent to the Gentiles, as the Acts 28 people contend. This is the culmination of what had been going on all during Paul's ministry up to this time.

There are several expressions in Thessalonians which some have tried to use as a fulcrum to overthrow the evidence we have already given for identifying the people here addressed as members of the Body of Christ. Paul says God "hath called you unto his kingdom and glory" (2:12). If the word "kingdom" bothers you here, just remember Paul also uses the word in [Ephesians 5:5](#); [Colossians 1:13](#); [4:11](#); and [2 Timothy 4: 1, 18](#), which all must admit were written to members of the Body.

Another statement is found in 3:4, "we told you before that we should suffer tribulation." Is this a linking up of the Tribulation with the Body of Christ? Not at all. Paul is not talking about the Great Tribulation but simply about persecution. The remainder of the verse indicates the tribulation Paul is talking about was a past experience; "even as it came to pass."

In chapter 5:1-3 Paul speaks about "the times and seasons," which are definitely associated with Israel's kingdom (compare [Acts 1:6, 7](#)), and about the day of the Lord, which is the great prophesied event prior to the establishment of the kingdom on earth. No doubt Paul had fully instructed these believers about these prophetic events, as any good Bible teacher will do today, but this does not mean Paul was putting these people in the day of the Lord. In fact, verse 4 indicates the very opposite, "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief." And verse 9 says, "For God hath not appointed us to wrath;" but the day of the Lord, if it is anything, is the day of His wrath.

Perhaps the biggest objection raised by the Acts 28 position concerns the word Paul uses for the coming of the Lord in this epistle. It is the Greek word, *parousia*. This word is used of the Lord's coming in [Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39](#); [1 Corinthians 15:23](#); [1 Thessalonians 2:19](#); [3:13](#); [4:15](#); [5:23](#); [2 Thessalonians 2:1, 8, 9](#); [James 5:7, 8](#); [2 Peter 1:16](#); [3:4, 12](#); [1 John 2:28](#). It is argued that since *parousia* is used of the Lord's coming back to the earth, and since it is not used in the prison epistles, this coming of the Lord can have nothing to do with members of the Mystery Body. Since the Rapture of chapter 4 is associated with the Lord's *parousia*, we can have nothing to do with this Rapture. I feel this is a false assumption.

There is no precedent for limiting this word to this one event of Christ's second coming to earth. It is used of others in [2 Corinthians 7:6, 7](#); [10:10](#); [Philippians 1:26](#); [2:12](#). The word simply means "to be present" or "presence." The idea of "coming" is not even in the word. If one is not present there must of necessity be some kind of a coming in order to be present. The simple fact is that Christ is going to be personally present with the saints at the time of the Rapture and also at the second advent. I know of no other word Paul could have used to express the idea of Christ's personal presence. Besides, there is no event in all of Old Testament prophecy which corresponds with the Rapture here described by Paul.

E. W. Bullinger held the extreme view that the Rapture of 1 Thessalonians is not for the Body of Christ, but having relinquished this hope he was hard pressed to find a way to get the Body of Christ to heaven. He wrote:

[The Rapture] may, after all, be the pattern of our hope, as presented later in [Philippians 3:11, 14](#). The realization of our hope may be framed on the same model as theirs. The order of the two events may well be the very same (*Foundations of Dispensational Truth*, p. 112).

All he has left is a string of "maybes." Some of his followers are a little more logical and teach that the Body of Christ will finally die out until there is not one member left on the earth, and then a secret resurrection will transport them to heaven. If this is true, then no one can be quite sure this event has not already occurred. Consequently, we may not even be in the Body and we may be headed for the Great Tribulation.

It should be pointed out in conclusion that each of the five Chapters ends with a reference to the *parousia* of the Lord.

- In chapter 1 they were waiting for God's Son from heaven.
- In chapter 2 Paul says the Thessalonian saints would be his crown of rejoicing before the face of the Lord Jesus Christ at His *parousia*.
- Chapter 3 ends with the intention that the saints' hearts might be established in holiness before the Father at the *parousia* of Christ with all of His saints.
- Chapter 4 ends with words of comfort concerning those who had died, with the knowledge they would be raised first and that together with the living saints they would be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and so forever be with the Lord.
- And the epistle ends in chapter 5 with the petition for the saints that their whole body, soul, and spirit be preserved blameless unto the *parousia* of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Would it not seem strange if Paul, after having written all of this about his part in the *parousia* of the Lord, should, after all, not even be present at this event, and not have the joy of seeing these Thessalonians in the presence of Christ, as Buninger and other Acts 28 interpreters allow? If Paul had had this earlier hope taken from him and had been given another hope, is it not strange that in writing to believers who shared this earlier hope he did not plainly tell them he was now in a different program and would not meet them in that future day?

In closing, may I quote one verse (5:21) which I believe is of special importance in Bible study:

**PROVE ALL THINGS;
HOLD FAST THAT WHICH IS GOOD**

2 THESSALONIANS

There is no mention in this epistle of anything which would help us in determining the date of writing. It was probably written shortly after Paul received further news from Thessalonica from the one who delivered his first epistle. In any event, there is no doubt it was one of Paul's earlier letters.

If we consider the truth of the Second Coming to be dispensational, then the epistle is about two-thirds dispensational. The theme of the first two chapters is the day of the Lord. The situation which occasioned the writing was the rumor spread abroad that Paul was teaching the day of the Lord had already set in. Naturally, if this had been true the saints would have had many questions in their minds.

We believe Paul had taught these people the events of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 would precede the day of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:2). Why had they not then been Raptured? Or had the Rapture taken place secretly and had they been left behind? If that day had set in, what were they to look for next?

The Thessalonians had had outward circumstances which provided fertile soil for speculations about the Great Tribulation and the day of the Lord, for they had endured much persecution and tribulation (1:4). Their tribulation was great and doubtless some of them thought it was the Great Tribulation. Very simply stated, this letter is Paul's assurance to the Thessalonians that their present tribulation was not the Great Tribulation of prophecy. He had told them in his first letter:

That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know (1 Thessalonians 3:3, 4).

In the latter part of chapter 1 Paul comforts these saints by referring to what will be both their portion and the portion of those who have persecuted them. Phillips translates 1:6, 7:

Yet his justice will one day repay trouble to those who troubled you, and peace to all of us who, like you, have suffered.

This, Paul says, is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God. In the execution of this judgment certain dispensational questions arise. These are seen especially in verse 7-10:

To you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord,

and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe in that day.

The main problem concerns the *when* of this passage. Is Paul here saying, as some think, that the saints and their persecutors are going to be on the earth at the time the Lord comes in flaming fire, and that He will then deliver the saints but rain destruction upon His enemies? In other words, is he saying the Rapture of which he spoke in his first epistle would occur at the time He comes in flaming fire? If this is so, then, of course, the last generation of the Body of Christ to be on earth will go through the period of Great Tribulation. A cursory glance at the passage might give this impression, but we believe the passage needs to be interpreted in the light, not only of the immediate context, but of the entire Pauline revelation.

It is not at all necessary to make the time of the Rapture and the time of the second coming synchronize. The reason Paul mentions the day of wrath in this connection is simply that God is not going to punish the ungodly persecutors at the time of the Rapture but at the second coming. His purpose is not to state the time of the Rapture but the time of the punishment of the ungodly. The saints will be enjoying rest and peace with Christ during the time the ungodly are suffering God's judgments in the day of the Lord.

Young's Literal Translation suggests the same thing, "In the revelation of the Lord Jesus," instead of "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed." There is no "when" in the Greek text. It is simply the preposition *en* meaning "in." It is in or during the time of the revelation that the saints will be resting.

Another "when" is [1:10](#), "When he shall come to be glorified in his saints." Here the Greek does have *hotan*, the word for "when." In this statement the verb "shall come" is the second aorist subjunctive and not the simple future. Alford renders this verb, "when he shall have come." Bullinger also contends that this construction always denotes the "shall have" idea (*The Church Epistles*, p. 242). Thayer states this meaning when *hotan* is followed by the aorist subjunctive, as here. The point is, Christ shall have come first to be glorified in his saints before He inflicts punishment on the ungodly.

It is interesting to note that Bullinger in one of his earlier works (*The Church Epistles*, p. 241) argues conclusively for a pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Body of Christ from this rendering, "when He shall have come." Yet later on, when he switched to the Acts 28 position for the beginning of the Body, he still contends this should be translated, "when he shall have come," even though he then believed this Rapture is after the Great Tribulation (*Companion Bible*, p. 1796).

It seems to me the construction of this passage indicates the Rapture will precede the coming in judgment, but by itself it does not indicate how long before it will be.

Chapter 2 is mainly occupied with the rumor that "the day of the Lord"--the period of Great Tribulation--had already set in. The Authorized Version is incorrect in verse 2 on two counts. The better Greek texts and the revised versions read "the day of the Lord" instead of the "day of Christ." The "day of Christ" is a Pauline expression indicating the time when the Body of Christ shall be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ. The "day of the Lord" is the time of great trouble, mentioned dozens of times by the Old Testament prophets and connected with the Great Tribulation. Furthermore, Paul did not say the rumor was that the day of the Lord was at hand, in the not far distant future, but that it had already set in.

If Paul had taught the day of the Lord must come before the Rapture, as Post-Tribulationists claim, why should the Thessalonians be so troubled and shaken in mind in supposing that day had begun? The reason they were so shaken was because the Rapture had not occurred and they thought the Tribulation had already begun. This fact seems to indicate these people were pre-Tribulationists under Paul's teaching, and the rumor which troubled them so much was based upon a post-Tribulation theory.

Paul next mentions two things which must occur before the day of the Lord begins. The "falling away" or the departure must first come, and the man of sin must be revealed. But what does Paul mean by the departure? the departure of or from what? The usual sense of this word is departure from the truth of God, in which case we call it apostasy. The noun form is used only twice in the New Testament--here and in Acts 21:21, where it is apostasy from Moses. The verb form is used fifteen times and is eleven times translated "depart," once "fall away," once "drew away," and once "refrain." In only three cases does it refer to departing from the truth.

There are some who believe the departure in this passage is the departure of the Body of Christ to meet the Lord in the air. C. R. Stam has a very complete exposition of this view in *the Berean Searchlight*, October, 1959 in an article entitled, "First the Departure." If this meaning could be dogmatically affirmed it would settle forever the controversy on the time of the Rapture. But since Paul did not state the subject of the departure, we cannot dogmatically affirm it is the Rapture. From verse 5 it is apparent the Thessalonians knew exactly what Paul meant by the *apostasia*, although we do not.

The Thessalonians also knew something else we do not know for sure. Paul says:

And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the Mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.

The words "withholdeth" and "letteth" are the same in the original and are usually translated in modern versions "restrain." Many pre-Tribulation premillenarians believe this restraining power is the Holy Spirit as he indwells

believers. Since believers will be taken out of the world by the Rapture, the Holy Spirit in this sense would also be removed from the world. This fact is no doubt true, but I would not be dogmatic that this is what Paul means in this text. If the reference is to the Rapture and the removing of the Holy Spirit, then this would be another clear evidence that the Rapture must occur before the revelation of the man of sin in the Great Tribulation.

While certain details of this section may be unclear to us, the main drift is clear enough. The Day of the Lord has not yet come and it will not come until the Rapture of the Body of Christ takes place, after which the man of sin, the son of perdition will come and set himself up in the temple at Jerusalem and will be worshipped as God. But at the present there is a power which is holding this full manifestation of iniquity in check. When that power is removed, then that wicked one shall be revealed. And after his brief reign the Lord will come and destroy him with the spirit of His mouth and the brightness of His coming.

It is very doubtful whether God revealed to Paul in detail all of the events of the Great Tribulation as He revealed them to John in the book of Revelation, so we should not look for too much correlation. Paul's "man of sin" is probably to be identified with one of the beasts of Revelation 13; most likely with the one who is called the beast out of the sea, for the second beast caused the whole earth to worship the first beast.

One thing is certain from the book of Revelation--there is no reference to a Rapture of living and resurrected saints at the end of the Tribulation. It is unthinkable that so important an event would be omitted, if indeed, the Bible taught such a thing. If the post-Tribulationists are correct, that the church will be Raptured to meet the Lord as He is on His way down from heaven to judge the world, why do we not read about it in the most complete record of the second coming in Revelation 19? The simple answer is that the Rapture doesn't take place at that time.

It seems certain from 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 that those who enter the Tribulation knowingly rejecting the truth of the gospel will have no further opportunity to be saved, for God will send them a strong delusion so they will believe the Devil's lie. We know a great multitude will be saved during the Tribulation, but apparently these are among those who had never actually heard and rejected the truth.

The remainder of the epistle is practical in nature, but we should notice even here a dispensational feature. Whereas the Jewish believers in the early Acts period sold their possessions and had every thing in common, Paul instructed the Thessalonians that they should work and make their own living and eat their own bread, and if one failed to do this, he shouldn't be given anything to eat. This fact is just one of many which indicates Paul's ministry, even in his earliest epistles, was not upon kingdom ground. The new dispensation had begun by the time Paul wrote these Thessalonian letters.

1 TIMOTHY

I feel I must remind the reader of these synopses that my objective is not to give an exposition of the book but to comment upon words, expressions, or subjects which fall within a dispensational frame of reference. Therefore not every verse will be treated and the treatment will not necessarily be in chronological order.

Paul addresses Timothy as:

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Savior, and Lord Jesus Christ, our hope (1:1).

He uses a very strong statement here in defense of his distinctive apostleship, "by the commandment of God." It is not without significance that he uses this very same expression in referring to the propagation of his distinctive preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the Mystery in [Romans 16:26](#).

The word "hope" is both a significant, important word and a distinctly dispensationally oriented word. If we ask, what is our hope? the answer most often given is, the Rapture. If we ask, what is Israel's hope? we are told it is the millennial kingdom. In a certain context these answers are correct, but they are not universally true. If we are not careful, we are in danger of placing more emphasis upon an event rather than upon the Person Who makes the event possible. Paul did not say, "and the Rapture, which is our hope," but, "the Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope." Even the Old Testament prophet in describing the hope of Israel does not say it is the kingdom but, "O hope of Israel, the Savior thereof" (Jeremiah 14:8). And when Paul refers to the hope of Israel he does not have in mind the earthly kingdom, but the Lord Jesus Christ in resurrection ([Acts 28:20](#), compare [26:6-15](#)). Hope may have reference to:

- The Rapture ([Titus 2:13](#)).
- Eternal life ([Titus 1:2](#)).
- The glory of God ([Romans 5:2](#)).
- The redemption of the body ([Romans 8:23, 24](#)).
- The deliverance of creation from the bondage of corruption ([Romans 8:20, 21](#)).
- The calling of God ([Ephesians 1:18](#)).
- And many other things.

But we have all of these things in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is our hope.

In 1:4 the word "edifying" occurs in the Authorized Version. The better texts read "dispensation." These two words in the Greek are spelled exactly the same

except for one letter. Paul tells Timothy to warn his people not to give heed to fables and endless genealogies, but rather to give heed to the *dispensation* of God which is in faith. Is it not strange that so many Bible expositors reject dispensational truth when Paul gives us such a charge as this?

Paul speaks in 1:5 of "the end of the commandment." However, the word for commandment here is not the usual one. It is the same word as found in [1:3](#); [1:18](#); [5:7](#); [6:13](#), [17](#) and translated "charge." There may be a question whether Paul is referring to the charge which he gave to Timothy, or to the Mosaic Law. The verses which follow seem to indicate the latter. However it is not necessary to equate the "charge" in verse 5 with the "law" in verse 7. The end to be realized in the charge Paul gave to Timothy was love out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned. Some had turned aside from Paul's charge and had set themselves up as teachers of the Law. Any one who tries to put God's people under the Law in this dispensation falls under Paul's description, "understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm."

Paul never berates or belittles the Law. It is holy, just, and good ([Romans 7:12](#)). Paul's gospel really established the Law ([Romans 3:31](#)); not by putting believers under it, but by righteously meeting its every demand in the death of Christ and by delivering the believer from its bondage. The Law is not made for the righteous, and that is what we are in Christ. The Law was made for the unrighteous ([1:8-10](#)).

Chapter 1:15 is a very familiar and favorite verse:

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

What does Paul mean, when he says he was "chief?." Does he mean he had committed more sins than anyone else? Hardly, for in Philippians 3:4-6 he could boast in the flesh that he was blameless as touching the righteousness which is in the Law. True, he severely persecuted the early believers, as he confesses in [Acts 26:9-11](#), but he did this ignorantly in unbelief, supposing he was serving God, and it was for this reason he obtained mercy.

The word translated "chief" in verse 15 is the same word translated "first" in verse 16:

That in me *first* Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

The word *protos* may mean first in time or place or rank. Paul was foremost or chief as the leader of the opposition against Jesus Christ and His followers, and of course there is a sense in which persecuting Christ ([Acts 9:4](#)) is the chief of sins.

But what does Paul mean by, "in me first?" Had not many others been saved before Paul? Yes, but their salvation was not a pattern for us in this dispensation of

grace. Their salvation, while entirely gracious, was based upon the covenants of promise. Paul the persecutor had violated God's covenant and his salvation was a matter of pure grace and mercy. As such he is the pattern for all who today believe.

Some dispensationalists are afraid to speak of Jesus as King for fear they will be undispensational. However, there is at present and always has been a kingdom of God, and a kingdom must have a king. In [1:17](#) Paul ascribes honor and glory to the King of the ages. In [6:15](#) he calls Him King of kings and Lord of lords. We must carefully distinguish the earthly, millennial kingship of Christ but not to the extent of denying the existence of the kingdom of God today.

A need for dispensational understanding is seen in the way Jehovah Witnesses handle chapter 2:5, 6:

For them 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.

They claim that Paul means there will be a future day when all men will be raised to live on earth again, at which time this ransom will be proclaimed and men will have another chance to be saved.

Weymouth translates this verse:

Who gave Himself a ransom for all--a fact testified to at its own appointed time. Of this fact I have been made a herald and an apostle.

The R.S.V. translates it:

Who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle.

Christ said He was going to give His life as a ransom for many ([Matthew 20:28](#)), but surely this fact was not witnessed to all mankind in the Pentecostal preaching. As late as [Acts 11:19](#) the word was being preached to none but to the Jews only. Then in the duly appointed time, Paul was sent forth as the apostle of the Gentiles to make known the fact that Christ had provided a ransom for all. The due time for the proclamation of this glorious truth began with Paul, and it is still due time to make this message known.

Chapter 3 deals with the government of the assembly. Paul mentions two offices:

- Bishop (or overseer)
- Deacon (or servant)

In giving similar instruction to Titus he mentions elders (1:5). Elders and bishops are not two separate offices, as is clear from Acts 20:17 and 28, where

Paul tells the elders from Ephesus that God had made them overseers or bishops of the flock.

No doubt the role in the churches grew out of the Jewish order, at least as far as elders were concerned. Elders are mentioned over 125 times in the Old Testament and some forty-five times in the Gospels and Acts. The word for deacon is used twenty times in the New Testament, but is translated "deacon" only three times. It is usually translated "minister" or "servant." We think of ministers and the ministry as the clergy but in the New Testament the minister is simply a servant, and all believers are thus in the ministry. In Paul's epistles only do we find the appointment to a special office of deacon in the church. Paul never refers to the ministry in the church as a priesthood.

"The mystery of godliness" in 3:16 poses some dispensational questions. The A.V. reads, "*God was manifest in the flesh;*" but the correct reading is "*Who was manifested in the flesh.*"

Because of the order of events which follow, some dispensationalists have endeavored to make the subject to be the Mystery, that of the church which is His Body. This interpretation is quite unnatural. The order of events may be satisfactorily explained as referring to Christ personally. Manifested in the flesh and justified in the spirit, seen of angels and preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world and received up into glory is manifestly not a chronological order. Rather, it seems, the apostle is making great contrasts to show the magnitude of the mystery of godliness. Flesh and spirit, angels and Gentiles, the world and glory are all poles apart. The chronological order would be: manifested in the flesh, seen of angels, justified in the spirit, received up into glory, preached unto Gentiles, and believed on in the world.

Chapter 4 is a contrast between the doctrine of demons and the doctrine of Scripture (verses 1, 6, 13, 16). Paul refers to doctrine or teaching some twelve times in this epistle. He indicates the doctrine of demons will be manifested especially in the latter times. In [2 Timothy 3:1](#) he speaks of "the last days." The last days of the prophetic Scriptures deal with the Great Tribulation with its cosmic and political signs. Paul's last days deal only with spiritual and moral declension. We believe the last days of his epistles precede those of the prophetic Scriptures, but since the Tribulation will apparently follow immediately after the Rapture, it is evident the two sets of days coalesce. The main point to remember is that in Paul there are no political or cosmic signs which must be fulfilled before the Rapture; otherwise it would be illogical to speak of an imminent coming of Christ for the church.

Among other things, the doctrine of demons involves a teaching to abstain from meats. At one time this was a divine command. Before Genesis 9:3 man was permitted to eat only fruits and vegetables (this is not to say man did not eat animal flesh before, for since the fall man has been disobeying God), and after Leviticus 11 Israelites were commanded to abstain from many kinds of meat. Now Paul says

all such commands are doctrines of demons. Thus, a divine command, if not interpreted dispensationally, may become a doctrine of demons.

It is evident from chapter 5 that Paul did not practice the communism which was connected with the kingdom gospel ([Acts 4:32-35](#)). Paul says if any provide not for his own, and especially those of his own house, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (verse 8). He does, however, teach that the church should care for certain widows who could qualify. They had to be over sixty years, married only once, and known for good works of every kind. But if they had relatives who were able to support them, the church was to be relieved of any obligation (verse 16).

One dispensational distinction often made is that today there are no angelic visitations as in previous days. While this is true, it is not to be supposed God has put all of His angels in cold storage awaiting the resumption of the kingdom program. In verse 21 Paul gives a charge to Timothy before the elect angels, and in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 he says the voice of the archangel will accompany the Rapture. An angel ministered to Paul as late as [Acts 27:23](#). There was still a manifestation of signs at least to the end of the book of Acts. And surely Satan and his angels are still in business ([2 Corinthians 11:13-15](#)). Sir Robert Anderson's thesis in his famous book *The Silence of God* is no doubt correct, namely, that during this dispensation of the grace of God (which is actually an amnesty on God's part toward a world that is deserving of judgment) the heavens are silent, and the next time God speaks from heaven it will be in terrible judgment.

Paul's instruction to Timothy to stop drinking water only, but to take a little wine for his stomach's sake is another indication of the cessation of the sign gift of healing. Why the "no longer water" if there had been no change? Apparently before this Timothy had been drinking only water and had been relying upon some form of divine healing for his oft recurring illnesses. Now Paul prescribes a remedy.

Some who have opposed the distinctiveness of the Pauline revelation have quoted [6:3](#) to try to prove that Paul referred his readers to the Gospel records where the words of Jesus Christ are recorded, and that he made no claims for any distinctive revelation. This assertion, of course, is completely unfounded. The Corinthians tried to deny Paul's authority and he wrote to them these words:

Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me.

To the Galatians he wrote:

But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Jesus appeared to the Twelve for forty days after His resurrection, but Paul says after that He was seen of me last of all ([1 Corinthians 15:8](#)). Over and over

Paul makes claim to be speaking not only the word of Christ, but distinctively a word of Christ which had not been previously vouchsafed to any other man. So in [1 Timothy 6:3](#) the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus Christ are the words He spoke from heaven through revelation to Paul.

This is not to depreciate the gracious words which Christ spoke while on earth, nor is it to say that much of what He said on earth cannot be applied to us today. As our late brother J. C. O'Hair used to say, we must use the Pauline "sifter" in applying the rest of the Scripture. Everything that goes through the sifter, that is, everything that is in agreement with the present dispensation, is to be applied to ourselves just the same as the Pauline epistles. But there are a number of things which won't go through the sifter, such as the command to baptize for the remission of sins, to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, to bring our gift to the altar, to raise the dead, to provide neither gold nor brass in our purses but instead to have all things common. And there are other teachings of Christ which place His believers in the midst of the Great Tribulation and relate them to the earthly kingdom of Israel. All of these things remain in the sifter, for they are distinctive to the earthly kingdom program.

2 TIMOTHY

This is generally conceded to be the last epistle Paul wrote. It is my conviction that Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon were written during Paul's first imprisonment at Rome, as recorded in Acts 28. And thereafter that Paul was freed and went about in further missionary travels, was then imprisoned the second time at Rome, where he wrote 2 Timothy and where he was finally executed. Anyone interested in examining the scriptural evidence for a second imprisonment will find a good treatment of it in Conybeare and Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, Vol. II, pp. 535-599 [Ed. note--also in the more recent work by F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, pp. 441-455].

While God has required faith as the basis for salvation in all dispensations, it is very interesting to consider the salvation experience of Timothy, his mother, and his grandmother, as recorded in 1:5. From Acts 16:1 and 2 we learn that Timothy's mother was a Jewess who believed, but his father was a Greek. When Paul reached Lystra, Timothy was already a disciple. Who, then, had been responsible for Timothy's conversion?

There seems to be two answers to this question. Paul says that Timothy from his childhood had known the holy Scriptures, which were able to make him wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus ([2 Timothy 3:15](#)), but it seems very likely that Timothy was actually converted when Paul came to Lystra on his first missionary journey, for Paul calls him his faithful and beloved son in the Lord ([1 Corinthians 4:17](#)), his true child in faith ([1 Timothy 1:2](#)), and his beloved child ([2 Timothy 1:2](#)).

When Paul speaks of the faith which dwelt first in Timothy's grandmother Lois it is difficult to know whether he is talking about faith in the Old Testament Scriptures which she had passed on to Timothy's mother and then to Timothy, or whether he means Lois was the first one to believe the gospel when it was first preached at Lystra. I prefer the later view, although it seems evident these godly women were well acquainted with the Old Testament Scripture and that they had been faithful in teaching it to Timothy.

It is difficult to describe the position of godly Jews outside the land of Palestine in the dispersion, such as Timothy's mother and grandmother, before they heard the gospel. They surely must have been saved, since they believed the revelation God had given them, and all such must surely have believed the gospel of Christ when it was preached unto them. But there must have come a cut-off time when no one could be considered a child of God apart from faith in Jesus Christ. This condition was peculiar to the apostle's day.

Hence, it appears that Timothy and his mother and his grandmother were converted to Christ in Acts 14, and then some seven years later when Paul

returned to Lystra he found Timothy was well reported by the brethren of Lystra and Iconium, and he ordained him to the ministry ([2 Timothy 1:6](#)) and decided Timothy should travel with him. First, however, Paul had Timothy circumcised ([Acts 16:3](#)) because of the Jews which were in those quarters. Timothy's Gentile father had apparently refused to have him circumcised, but Paul knew Timothy could have no ministry among the unbelieving Jews in uncircumcision, and hence his action.

Paul would never have circumcised a Gentile, but during this period of transition he did not oppose Jewish circumcision. This is very evident from the fact he circumcised Timothy and from the further fact that in Acts 21:21 he entered the temple at Jerusalem to prove he had not taught the Jews of the dispersion to forsake circumcision. Of course, Paul did not tell the Jews circumcision availed anything toward salvation ([Galatians 5:6](#)), and he strictly contended that Gentiles should not be circumcised ([Galatians 2:3; 5:2](#)).

Many expositors have failed to see these facts and have therefore severely censured Paul for circumcising Timothy and engaging in other Jewish rituals. When Paul said, "If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing," he was not talking to Jews, for Jews were circumcised already by virtue of being Jews; he was addressing Gentiles. Thus, during this period of transition while God still had some official dealings with the Jewish nation, circumcision was still permitted for the Jews; and this young man, Timothy, half Jew and half Gentile, stands as a symbol of that unique period when God began making of both Jew and Gentile the "one new man," the Body of Christ.

In 1:16 Paul speaks of the gift of God which was in Timothy by the putting on of his hands.

- The laying on of hands was practiced in the Old Testament when the Israelite offered his sacrifice, thus identifying himself with the animal ([Leviticus 4:4, 15](#)).
- The Levites also had hands laid on them ([Numbers 8:10, 12](#)).
- Jesus laid hands upon the people He healed ([Mark 6:5; Luke 4:40](#)).
- The apostles laid their hands on the seven deacons in [Acts 6:6](#).
- Peter and John laid hands on the Samaritan believers and they received the Holy Spirit ([Acts 8:17](#)).
- Paul was ordained to his missionary ministry by the laying on of hands ([Acts 13:3](#)).
- Paul in 1 Timothy 4:14 tells Timothy not to neglect the gift that is in him, which was given by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.
- He also tells Timothy not to lay hands on any one hastily ([1 Timothy 5:22](#)).

Finally, in Hebrews 6:1, 2 we read:

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands.

Many denominational groups today practice the laying on of hands when ordaining a man to the ministry. However, since the days of the apostles no one has had apostolic authority to impart the Holy Spirit or such a gift as Timothy received by the laying on of Paul's hands.

Although the word "mystery" does not occur in this epistle, we do see a reference to Paul's distinctive ministry in the following verses: [1:9-12](#); [2:8, 9](#); [3:10](#); [4:17](#). In these verses we read of God's purpose and grace in Christ Jesus before the world began, Paul's appointment as apostle and teacher of the Gentiles, Paul's "my gospel," and Paul's doctrine. When these expressions are considered in other of Paul's epistles, the unique character of Paul's ministry becomes very evident.

Those who do not recognize the uniqueness of the Pauline revelation put a great deal of stress upon the words of Christ to His disciples as recorded at the end of the Gospel records, the so-called Great Commission. In contrast, Paul speaks of the word of reconciliation which is "committed" to us ([2 Corinthians 5:19](#)), and in writing to Timothy he speaks of that good thing which was "committed" to him ([1:14](#)). The thing committed here is more literally a deposit.

The Berkeley Version has the last clause of verse 12:

... and am convinced that He is able to guard safely my deposit, entrusted to Him against that day.

And verse 14:

Guard that precious entrusted deposit by the help of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Weymouth has it:

That precious truth which is entrusted to you guard through the Holy Spirit who has His home in our hearts.

Every believer today has had this deposit of truth concerning the dispensation of the grace of God committed to him, but it seems that Timothy took over the torch of truth from Paul in a special sense. Paul committed this truth to Timothy, and then told him:

And the things which thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also ([2:2](#)).

Since Paul was ministering the Mystery, it might seem strange he would tell Timothy to remember that Jesus Christ "of the seed of David" was raised from the

dead "according to my gospel" (2:8). This, however, is very similar to Romans 1:2. While it is not as David's seed that we have relationship to Christ, yet it was as David's seed Christ came into the world and died for our sins. Christ did not die as Head of the Body, for the Body was non-existent at the time of His death. Such a reference to Christ as the seed of David in Paul's final epistle seems to reinforce the idea that what Paul is talking about in 2 Corinthians 5:16 is knowing no man from a fleshly viewpoint, not even Christ, rather than having no knowledge whatsoever of Christ according to His relationship in the flesh. We are not to follow in all respects the earthly ministry of Christ, but it was the earthly Christ who died for us and rose again, and Paul makes this the vital content of his gospel in his last epistle.

It might seem strange the apostle of grace should write:

If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny Him, He also will deny us (2:12).

This sounds much like Matthew 10:33:

But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my father which is in heaven.

Does Christ or Paul mean a believer may lose his salvation by denying Christ? Hardly, for Peter denied the Lord three times (and the same word for deny is used in all of these passages), yet the Lord told Peter He had prayed for him that his faith fail not. What, then, do these statements mean?

The unbeliever denies or rejects Christ altogether. The believer accepts Christ completely, but it is possible under certain stresses or temptations they may momentarily deny their Savior, even as Peter did, or they may commit the same sins as the unsaved. This possibility is everywhere recognized and warned against in Paul's epistles, but since our salvation does not depend on our faithfulness we read in the next verse of this chapter:

If we are unfaithful, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

2 Timothy 2:15 is probably the most quoted verse on dispensationalism. This verse does give us the basic principle of dispensationalism--rightly dividing the Word of truth. However, it has even a wider application, for many truths within the boundaries of a single dispensation need to be rightly divided. We must divide between standing and state, salvation and rewards, and numerous other truths.

The character of the last days of this dispensation is discussed in the first part of chapter 3. This subject was treated previously under [1 Timothy 4:1-6](#). It is most difficult to understand how anyone could ever adopt the post-millennial interpretation in the light of a passage such as this. How could anyone visualize a convalescent world when the very last days bring in perilous times, when mankind will

indulge in all manner of sin and be lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, when evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceived and being deceived? These conditions will prevail at the time of the Rapture. Immediately following the Rapture, the last days of this dispensation will coalesce with the last days of prophecy during the Tribulation period.

Chapter 3 ends with the chief text of the Bible on inspiration. The text not only states all Scripture is God-breathed, but that it is all profitable to the man of God. Dispensationally, not all Scripture is addressed directly to us, and some that is addressed to us instructs us not to obey parts of that which is not addressed to us. But in a very real sense all Scripture is profitable for us. Paul mentions four categories in which Scripture is profitable:

- Doctrine
- Reproof
- Correction
- Instruction in righteousness

When the entire Scripture is studied and rightly divided in this manner, the man of God is thoroughly furnished unto every good work.

Paul's last charge to Timothy is to preach the Word in view of that day when the Lord Jesus will judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom (4:1, 2). A question naturally arises about Paul's use of the word "kingdom." Does he mean the earthly, millennial kingdom, or is he thinking about the heavenly kingdom? In verse 18 he speaks of being preserved unto His heavenly kingdom, although it is a little difficult to associate the judgment of the living and the dead with the Body of Christ in heaven, unless we refer it to the *bema* (Judgment Seat) of Christ, which will take place at the time of the Rapture. If Paul means to associate in time the judgment of the living and the dead with the appearing of Christ in His kingdom, we can automatically eliminate the judgment of the unsaved at the Great White Throne, for that involves only the dead and there is no establishment of a kingdom at that time. This would leave as the only other possibility the events at the second coming of Christ when the living nations will be judged (Matthew 25:32) and the righteous dead who come forth in the resurrection of the just (Revelation 20:5, 6).

We today are prone to make very sharp distinctions between a heavenly kingdom and an earthly one, and we are sometimes perturbed because Paul doesn't seem to do the same. We might well ask, how many kingdoms does Christ have? Actually, He has only one kingdom, but there are various aspects of it, and I think we are going beyond the teaching of Scripture to suppose the Body of Christ will be reigning over a heavenly kingdom of Christ which is separate and distinct from the earthly kingdom of Christ. If we recognize the unity of Christ's kingdom, the statement of chapter 4:1 should not cause too much difficulty.

Above all, we should not permit the technical difficulties we may have in understanding certain details about the Lord' s coming to so absorb our attention that we lose our love for His appearing. If we do not look forward with loving and burning expectation to His glorious appearing, all of our arguments and comments about it are meaningless.

TITUS

This brief epistle was apparently written about the same time as 1 Timothy and is very similar in content. Timothy was the pastor in Ephesus and Titus was commissioned to work among the assemblies in **Crete**. There is no reference in the book of Acts to any ministry of Paul in Crete, and while it is possible Paul could have taken a side trip from Corinth to that island which Luke did not record, it is more likely Paul visited Crete after release from his first imprisonment at Rome and then left Titus behind to organize the new churches (**1:5**). Being a pastoral letter, the epistle is largely of a practical nature, having to do with the officers of the church and the maintenance of good works among the believers.

A basic dispensational principle can be observed in the first three verses of the epistle. Dispensationalism is concerned with God's revelation and program during various stages of history. Here Paul speaks of the time before the world began, or more literally, before age-times. At that point there was only the promise of eternal life. This promise must have been made within the Godhead, for there was as yet no mankind. Paul does not mention anything about the time of Old Testament prophecy, probably because his distinctive message was not a part of prophecy, having been hid from ages and from generations.

Next, he mentions the "due time" in which this word was manifested through preaching. This "due time" reminds us of **1 Timothy 2:6**. The "due time" was not some future era, as Jehovah Witnesses say, but Paul's own day. It refers to that which was committed to Paul according to the commandment of God (**1:3**). It is most important to observe that this message of Paul not only concerned the faith of God's elect, but the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness (**1:1**).

We can perhaps detect a change in emphasis on the subject of works from Paul's early to his later epistles. In the early letters Paul's attitude is almost always negative. Romans and Galatians stress over and over again the fact that a man cannot be justified by works, and of course this is still true in Titus, for he says in **3:5**, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us." But this emphasis is on the works of the Law and the works of the flesh, whereas in Ephesians the emphasis is upon the good works unto which we have been created in Christ Jesus (**Ephesians 2:10**). Paul exhorts us to good works in **Titus 1:16; 2:14; 3:8 and 14**. In these days of what is called the New Morality, which would better be described as Non-Morality, when even Christians seem to find it so easy to conform to the world, we need to re-emphasize Paul's words:

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men (**3:8**).

This statement is a summary of practically all Paul has said in chapters two and three. It takes in everyone from the youth to the aged, from the free man to the slave. It is all based upon the grace of God that has brought salvation to us, for grace teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age, looking for the glorious appearing of the great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. This appearing is doubtless the appearing at the time of the Rapture. Paul uses the word *epiphania* here to describe Christ's coming. This word has in it the idea of shining, giving light, becoming visible. Paul uses this same word in [2 Thessalonians 2:8](#); [1 Timothy 6:14](#); [2 Timothy 1:10](#); [4:1, 8](#). Another word used of the Lord's coming is *parousia*, which connotes a personal presence. These two terms do not designate two separate comings of Christ, for both are used of the Rapture as well as Christ's second coming to earth. The 2 Thessalonians 2:8 passage is especially interesting, as it speaks of the *epiphania* of his *parousia* Christ will destroy the man of sin with the "brightness" (K.J.V.), "radiance" (Phillips; N.E.B.) of his personal presence.

One further passage in the epistle has a dispensational bearing, chapter 3:5:

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.

What does Paul mean by "the washing of regeneration?" Many commentators say Paul is referring to water baptism. I believe this is an impossible interpretation of Paul's words. Paul has just stated that God has not saved us by any works of righteousness which we have done. Water baptism is a religious work of righteousness, therefore he could not be saying God has saved us by water baptism. In the second place, the whole tenor of Paul's writings indicate that water baptism was not even a part of his commission. The only place he mentions it in his epistles is to thank God he had baptized so few. The Judaizers made circumcision a saving ordinance and Paul said they frustrated the grace of God and made the Cross of Christ of none effect. To make water baptism a saving ordinance in this dispensation would be no different.

Finally, it is essential to understand what Paul means by "washing." The word is *loutron*, the same word the translators of the Septuagint used for "the laver" in such passages as [Exodus 38:8](#) and [Leviticus 8:11](#). The laver was a basin in the courtyard of the Tabernacle at which the priests purified themselves with various ablutions. The book of Hebrews makes it abundantly plain that the sacrifices and washings of the Levitical system were only shadows of good things to come, which could never take away sins (see [Hebrews 9:8-12](#) and [10:1](#)). Now surely the antitype, the reality of which the laver was but a shadow, is not itself another shadow. Water is not a type of water, but the water of the laver is a type of the regenerating work of the Spirit of God which now saves us.

It is sometimes said Paul does not use the term "born again," and therefore some have tried to make this to be an experience unique to the kingdom saints. However, the term Paul uses for "regeneration" (*palin* - again + *genesia* - birth)

means literally to be born again, whereas the expression in [John 3:3](#) translated "born again" (*anōthen*) is more literally born from above or born anew. Paul's epistles definitely teach a spiritual rebirth for those who become members of the Body of Christ. Besides the Titus passage, see [Galatians 4:19, 29](#); [1 Corinthians 4:15](#); [Philemon 10](#); [1 Corinthians 15:8](#). Furthermore, Paul uses over and over such expressions as children and sons, relating us to the family of God and to God as Father, and these relationships presuppose a birth.

PHILEMON

Paul's letter to Philemon was doubtless written from his Roman prison, as were Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. He begins by calling himself a "prisoner," in [verse 10](#) he speaks of his "bonds," and in [verse 22](#) he says, "I trust through your prayers I shall be given unto you." This brief epistle is strictly personal in nature, containing nothing of a doctrinal or dispensational nature. Paul's attitude, however, in relation to the runaway slave, Onesimus, does represent and reflect in a remarkable way the Grace message which Paul preached.

The name "Onesimus" means profitable, but like Adam he had become unprofitable ([verse 11](#)) through sin. Paul had found this renegade and had begotten him through the gospel into the family of God, even as in a truer sense Christ today seeks out and finds sinners and regenerates them. Paul then sends Onesimus back to his master, no longer to be merely a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, even as Christ presents us to the Father as beloved sons. And just as Christ took all of our sins upon himself and completely paid our debt of sin, so Paul tells Philemon:

If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account... I will repay it.

Surely we could find no greater exemplification of grace in the life of a believer than Paul manifested here.

We might well ask ourselves which is preferable:

- To profess the grace message and fail to demonstrate it in life situations;
- Or to be ignorant of the distinctiveness of the grace message but show forth the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in our relations with others?

Of course, there is no need to take either alternative. We can be like Paul and stand both for the distinctive message of Grace and demonstrate the marvelous grace of God.

HEBREWS

The author and the time of writing are both important to the understanding of the dispensational application of an epistle. And both of these items are moot subjects when the Hebrew epistle is under consideration. The eastern division of the church has held almost unanimously that Paul was the author. The western division largely rejected the Pauline authorship and suggested such men as Luke, Barnabas, Clement, and Apollos as possible authors. The literary style of the epistle is different from Paul's other writings, and there are a few statements in the epistle which on the surface seem to argue against the Pauline authorship. Great scholars are to be found on both sides of the authorship question. For example, Franz Delitzsch, though holding to the Lukan authorship, states in the introduction of his commentary:

The epistle has no apostolic name attached to it, while it produces throughout the impression of the presence of the original and creative force of apostolic spirit. And if written by an Apostle, who could have been its author but St. Paul? True, till towards the end it does not make the impression upon us of being of his authorship; its form is not Pauline, and the thoughts, though never un-Pauline, yet often go beyond the Pauline type of doctrine as made known to us in the other epistles, and even where this is not the case they seem to be peculiarly placed and applied; but towards the close, when the epistle takes the epistolary form, we seem to hear St. Paul himself, and no one else.

Of course, our King James Version gives this book the title, "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews," but biblical book titles are not part of the inspired text.

Those who do hold to the Pauline authorship (such as C. I. Scofield, Sir Robert Anderson, Arthur W. Pink, E. W. Bullinger) usually give as their main argument the fact that we know from [2 Peter 3:15](#) that Paul did write a letter to the Hebrews which Peter calls Scripture, and therefore if this Hebrew letter is not that epistle then part of the inspired Scripture has been lost and the Bible is incomplete. Other scholars, such as Adolph Saphir, state:

The opinion that the apostle Paul is the author, though not the writer and composer, seems on the whole most probable (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Vol. I, p. 16).

One of the objections to the Pauline authorship is the statements in 1:2 and 2: "Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him." How could Paul have written these words when he elsewhere declares:

But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ?

Sir Robert Anderson offers what appears to be a very legitimate answer, that Paul was not only the apostle of the Gentiles, but also a special witness to Israel, and it is in this latter role he is here writing to the Hebrews.

Writing as an Israelite to Israelites, the words of Hebrews 2:2 are just what we should expect from the apostle Paul. They are the precise counterpart of his words recorded in Acts 13:26, 33. And if one passage be proof that he could not have been the author of Hebrews, the other is equal proof that he could not have been the preacher at Antioch. We thus see that what appeared to be a fatal bar to the Pauline authorship of Hebrews admits of a solution which is both simple and adequate (*The Hebrews Epistle*, p. 10).

Anderson also points out other facts worth noting. The fact that the church of Rome denied the Pauline authorship (and as Westcott points out, "... by consequence, as it seems, it was not held to be canonical," *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. lxiv) can best be explained by recognizing the contradiction between the doctrinal teachings of Hebrews and the claims of the church of Rome.

On the matter of style, Anderson points out that Hebrews is actually a treatise plus a covering letter. When the apostle states in 13:22, "For I have written a letter unto you in few words," he could not be speaking of the entire book of Hebrews but only of the last chapter, which has a strictly epistolary character. He asks:

Will any student of literature maintain that so great a master of the literary art as the apostle Paul might not, in penning a treatise such as Hebrews, display peculiarities and elegancies of style which do not appear in his epistolary writings! (ibid, p. 13).

Anderson suggests it is possible Luke was with him and could very well have assisted him in composing the treatise, which might also account for differences in style.

It is my opinion that Paul was the inspired writer of the Hebrews epistle. Dispensationally it would appear there was a need for Paul to write such a letter in view of the fact Paul did have a special ministry toward Israel and in the light of the further fact that a change in dispensation was taking place. Believing Israelites, who at Pentecost and under the early ministry of the Twelve continued to practise the Mosaic customs in view of the millennial kingdom, needed to be shown there was a complete termination of that order if they were to go on in the truth of this dispensation.

This is not to say Hebrews in any sense of the word is a revelation of the dispensation of the Mystery. But the Mystery begins with the cessation of the

Mosaic dispensation and the setting aside of the millennial kingdom program, and the Hebrew letter brings the Israelite up to this point. It is surely significant that the epistle ends, not with an exhortation to continue zealous for the Law or to be expecting the establishment of the messianic kingdom, but rather to leave Judaism behind completely:

Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach (13:13).

The epistle does not envision a restored Israel established in the kingdom as its immediate object, but rather a rejected and apostate nation with only a remnant standing with the Savior on the outside of Israel's camp, even as is seen in Romans 11.

The epistle dispensationally goes no farther than Paul did in his synagogue ministry. We do not read anywhere in Acts that Paul went into the synagogue and preached the Mystery, but rather:

As his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging, that the Messiah must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is the Messiah (Acts 17:2, 3).

The Jew had to be brought to a recognition of Jesus as the Messiah who had died and risen again in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and types before there could be any presentation of the further truth of the Mystery. It is my belief this was the purpose of Paul's synagogue ministry as well that of the Hebrew epistle.

There are several internal evidences for the period of time in which the epistle was written. From such statements as:

Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions (10:32).

Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty (13:23).

We can be quite sure the epistle was not written very early, at least not before Acts 16 where Timothy is first mentioned. Since there is no record in the Acts of Timothy being imprisoned, we may surmise the writing took place after Acts 28.

However, it appears from comments in [8:4](#); [10: 1-3](#); [13:10](#) that the temple was still standing and the Levitical ceremonies were still being carried out. This would place it before 70 A.D. Since the Jewish war began in 70 A.D. it is inconceivable, as Westcott points out (*ibid.* p. xlii), that such a national calamity should not be mentioned if it had already broken out or flit had been decided.

Thus it would appear the book was written between 63 and 67 A.D. This date dovetails perfectly with the dispensational facts presented earlier. Acts closes out God's dealings with national Israel. The transition period is ended and the permanent program for this dispensation of grace comes into full force. Believing Israelites now must forsake Judaism and go forth outside the camp.

The first two Verses teach that the Bible is a progressive revelation, and this fact is itself basic to dispensational truth. Had God revealed everything at one time there would have been no place for dispensations. It is because of the sundry times and divers manners in which God spoke in times past that we see the various dispensations running their courses down through the centuries. The book as a whole, however, is a contrast of the Old Covenant dispensation with that of the New, something on the order of 2 Corinthians 3. In this contrast the Person of Jesus Christ stands out in bold relief as being better than everything that ever went before. Specifically, Christ is shown to be:

- Better than the angels (1:4-2:18).
- Better than Moses (3:1-19).
- Better than the Sabbath day (4:1-13).
- Better than Aaron (4:14-8:6).
- Better than the Old Covenant (8:7-10:39).

Chapter 11 reveals that in every dispensation faith was the principle which pleased God:

- Abel showed his faith by offering the sacrifice God had demanded.
- Noah manifested his faith by building the ark.
- Abraham's faith was evidenced by leaving his own country and by offering up his son Isaac.
- By faith Moses' parents hid him after he was born, and Moses showed his faith in various ways, such as refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, by keeping the Passover, and by passing through the Red Sea on dry land.

Many other examples of faith are given, but the main point to be observed is that faith has been manifested in different ways in different dispensations. Of course, faith in this dispensation is manifested by the personal acceptance of the gospel that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and arose the third day as the only requirement of God for eternal salvation. Faith brought a sacrifice in Old Testament times; today it accepts the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ as all-sufficient.

Having seen that faith was required in every dispensation but that faith did not require the same response in every dispensation, we turn now to consider the more important dispensational references in the epistle.

The Hebrews writer speaks of the great salvation which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord (2:3). There were many prophecies, types, and symbols in the Old Testament, but as far as actual salvation is concerned the Lord Jesus was the first, according to this statement, to begin to speak about this great truth. If this be true, then it must follow that the Old Testament did not preach the same message of salvation. It was never "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" in Old Testament times. While it is true Jesus lived under the dispensation of the Law ([Galatians 4:4](#)), it is also true there was a change of message with His incarnation. Before Christ's coming, faith in God was a requirement, but after the Son came into the world He said:

That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father (John 5:23).

Salvation for the messianic kingdom which Christ preached while on earth has much in common with our salvation today, although we must realize the basis for salvation through the death and resurrection was not preached until after the Cross.

The writer also speaks of having this message of the Lord confirmed unto him and the readers by them who had heard the Lord and that God bore them witness by signs, wonders, various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Some have thought these facts would exclude Paul as the possible author, but this does not necessarily follow. Paul received the message of the Mystery by direct revelation but he must have received the knowledge of the Lord's earthly ministry by confirmation of those who had been the earthly disciples of the Lord. Remember too, that the signs and wonders and gifts of the Holy Spirit lapped over into Paul's ministry to members of the Body, as indicated in 1 Corinthians 12--14. These supernatural manifestations were not a completely new set of activities designed for the Body of Christ; they were a continuation of the signs of Pentecost and what is spoken of here in Hebrews. Acts 28 dispensationalism mistakenly uses this fact as an argument that Paul did not minister the Mystery or truth concerning the Body of Christ until after Acts 28, but in so doing they must deny Paul's plain statements to the contrary ([Romans 12:5; 16:25; 1 Corinthians 12: 13, 27](#)).

Whatever dispensational view we may hold regarding the Hebrews epistle, we must agree that the writer gave a Pauline interpretation to the death of Christ. It might be profitable at this point to go through the entire letter and trace the writer's statements on this subject, quoting only the pertinent phrases.

- "Who... when he had himself purged our sins" (1:3).
- "That he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (2:9).
- "That through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (2:14, 15).

- "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (9:14)?
- "Once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (9:26).
- "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (10:10).
- "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (10:14).

There are those who feel Hebrews, by its very title, must be a book of kingdom truth which is not related to truth for the present dispensation. The book makes no mention of the Mystery or of the dispensation of the grace of God or of the church which is His Body. We may ask, however, were the original readers to whom this letter was addressed looking for the establishment of the earthly, millennial kingdom? Is the message of the epistle "repent and be baptized for the remission of sins?" Is it more in harmony with the so-called Great Commission and Pentecost or with Paul's epistles?

In answer to these question it may be pointed out that practically all of the standard commentaries on Hebrews, regardless of who they make the author to be, agree its theology is Pauline. The verses given above on the meaning of Christ's death bring out this point.

And what about baptism, which was a significant feature of the kingdom gospel? Baptism is mentioned only twice--once in [9:10](#) where a sharp contrast is made between the message of this epistle and the many baptisms of the Law, and once in [6:2](#) where the message is, "leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on to perfection; not laying again the foundation... of the doctrine of baptisms." If water baptism is to again be a part of the kingdom gospel, surely the writer of this epistle was not preparing them for the kingdom.

Most students of the Word will agree that the last nine chapters of Ezekiel's prophecy have never been fulfilled, and if they are ever to be fulfilled it must be in the future earthly kingdom. These chapters tell of a restored temple in Jerusalem with its altar, priesthood, sacrifices, Levitical service, and sanctuary. Does the book of Hebrews point forward to these things? [Hebrews 7:11-12](#) states the Levitical priesthood has been changed and that there has been a change of law. Hebrews says the Levitical priesthood has been abrogated and that there is no more place for sacrifices.

We may not be able to explain in what sense sacrifices will be offered by Levitical priests in the millennial kingdom, but surely the book of Hebrews cannot be appealed to for this aspect of kingdom teaching. In fact, there is no reference in the epistle to any kind of ceremonialism or liturgy enjoined upon the readers, but instead the worship is purely spiritual. They are called upon to offer the sacrifices

of praise and of sharing, even as Paul enjoins in his epistles to the churches ([Hebrews 13:15, 16](#); compare [Philippians 4:18](#); [Romans 12:1](#)). Some might contend that [Hebrews 10:22](#) has reference to ceremonial cleansing:

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

But the impossibility of this has already been stated in [9:10-14](#) and [10:4](#). The Jordan was a favorite place for baptizing, but we may well ask, did its water meet the test of purity demanded by this verse?

We have already made allusion to chapter [13:13](#) where the readers are enjoined to forsake the camp of Israel and go forth unto Christ outside the camp, bearing His reproach. This passage surely indicates the fall of Israel, even as Paul teaches in [Romans 11](#). And while no statement about the Gentiles is made here, we know from Paul that the fall of Israel resulted in the sending of reconciliation to the Gentiles, which is another way of saying the dispensation of the grace of God was inaugurated.

It is true the word "kingdom" is used twice in [Hebrews](#), but this does not necessarily mean it is a kingdom epistle in the sense of being addressed to citizens of the millennial kingdom; for Paul in writing to the Body of Christ identifies the Body with the kingdom of God on fourteen different occasions. [Hebrews 1:8](#) states:

But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.

Here it would seem improper to limit "kingdom" to only the earthly phase of God's kingdom. The other reference is:

Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear ([12:28](#)).

Here it is a kingdom which has already been received, so it could hardly refer to the future millennial kingdom.

In introducing Christ as "a priest after the order of Melchisedec," reference is made to Melchisedec as meaning by interpretation, king of righteousness, and after that also king of Salem, which is king of peace ([7:2](#)), but here again no more of a dispensational emphasis can be placed on this use of king than on Paul's reference to Christ as king in [1 Timothy 1:17](#) and [6:15](#).

It is to be expected that a letter addressed to [Hebrews](#) would be based largely upon the Old Testament Scriptures. When Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, which apparently had a number of Jewish members, he made considerable reference to the Old Testament. He there refers to Christ our Passover being sacrificed for us, to keeping the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and

truth, to what is written in the Law of Moses, to the crossing of the Red Sea, to the Rock in the wilderness, in fact, to all of the things that happened to Israel (1 [Corinthians 10:11](#)). When Paul went into the synagogues he confined himself entirely to the Old Testament and to Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of its types and shadows ([Acts 17:2, 3](#)). Because Paul made reference to these things during the Acts period, our Acts 28 brethren argue that he could not have been preaching the Mystery. This is a mistake.

There is surely no difference between the gospel of the grace of God ([Acts 20:24](#)) and the gospel of 1 [Corinthians 15:1-4](#), which was according to the Scriptures, and it was surely this same gospel that Paul was preaching in his post-Acts ministry (compare [Colossians 1:23](#)). It is very important to see distinctions, but it is just as important to see connections. The Mystery is not an isolated truth hanging in mid-air. It is a part of the eternal purpose of God and is therefore definitely related to the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ when He died as a sacrifice for sin in fulfillment of the Old Testament types as revealed in the book of Hebrews.

A definite allusion is made in [3:7--4:11](#) to Kadesh-barnea, where the people of Israel refused to enter into the promised land through unbelief and were turned back to wander for forty years in the wilderness. After the death and resurrection of Christ, Israel came to a greater Kadesh-barnea when the long-promised messianic kingdom was offered to them ([Acts 3:19-21](#)), and again they turned back in unbelief. No doubt the writer still had this in mind when he wrote the first part of chapter 6. After Israel turned back in Moses' day, in spite of the report of the two faithful spies and their seeing and tasting of the wonderful fruits of the land, God told that generation they would die in the wilderness. They seemingly repented and said, "We will go up and fight," but God said, "Go not up neither fight; for I am not among you." They presumed to go up, again in rebellion against Jehovah, and were smitten by the Amorites ([Deuteronomy 1:32-44](#)). After they had made their decision in unbelief it was impossible to renew them again unto repentance.

This whole story is analogous to what happened at Pentecost and afterward. Israel had been enlightened, had tasted of the heavenly gift, and had been made partakers of the Holy Ghost in the early chapters of Acts, but turned back in unbelief, and the apostle says it is impossible to renew such unto repentance. We believe this is the true import of these words which have been misused by certain men to teach the possibility of losing personal salvation. One thing is certain, if they do teach this they also teach the impossibility of ever being saved again. But is it not significant that in this very chapter is found one of the strongest arguments for eternal security, based upon two immutable things in the which it was impossible for God to lie ([6:17-20](#))?

It appears evident then, from the impossibility stated in chapter [6:4](#), that this epistle could not have been written with a view toward urging the Hebrews to accept the offer of the kingdom. The kingdom had been rejected and Israel as a nation had been set aside to wander throughout the nations during this whole

dispensation. These Hebrew believers therefore had no prospects for entering the messianic kingdom in their generation.

The question naturally arises, will all of those addressed in the epistle arise from the dead to inherit the millennial kingdom, or did these believers become members of the Body of Christ? One thing is sure--the author of the epistle identifies himself with these believers. If we contend for the Pauline authorship, in order to be consistent, we would have to believe these Hebrew saints did become members of the Body since Paul was a member. The Body of Christ is not mentioned by name in Hebrews (we are not talking about the human body, but the church which is His Body), but neither is it mentioned by name in 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon; so the non-mention of the term is not a positive argument that some of these Hebrews could not have been members of the Body.

The word "church" does occur twice in Hebrews ([2:12](#) and [12:23](#)). The first is a quotation from Psalm 22:22:

In the midst of the church [congregation] will I sing praise unto thee.

The Hebrew word, *kahal*, usually translated "congregation," is many times translated *ekklesia* (church) in the Greek Septuagint. Therefore Psalm 22, being prophetic, speaks of Israel in the future as being a church. This prophetic church is not the same company of redeemed as the Mystery church, although Christ will be in the midst of both.

The other passage says these Hebrew believers had not now come to Mt. Sinai, but:

... unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant

Commentaries are in considerable disagreement on the translation and meaning of the part of this passage which has to do with the church. Some take "the general assembly" and "church of the firstborn" to refer only to angels. Others take "the general assembly" to refer to angels and the "church" to redeemed men. Still others identify "the general assembly" with the "church." There is no other occurrence of the expression "the church of the firstborn" in Scripture; hence, it is not possible to learn its exact meaning by comparison.

The firstborn is, of course, a very familiar Old Testament expression occurring over one hundred times. In Paul's epistles the word always refers to Jesus Christ ([Romans 8:29](#); [Colossians 1:15, 18](#)). As used in connection with Christ, "firstborn" does not have a relationship to an order in time but to an order in position. He is

"the firstborn of all creation," that is, he has a position of headship over creation, such as a firstborn son had over his father's inheritance. It must be in this sense, as given a position in Christ, that these redeemed ones are called the church of the firstborn. It is almost equivalent to saying, the church of Jesus Christ.

This passage is admittedly on contested dispensational ground, but in conclusion there is one observation we would like to make. Most of us agree the expression "kingdom of God" is usually used as a general, covering term which includes all of God's domain in all dispensations and that there are distinct groupings within that kingdom, so any of its parts may also be the kingdom of God. Also, the "gospel of God" is a general term for God's good news in any dispensation, so the gospel which Paul preached may be called the gospel of God. Since both Israel and the Body are called by the name church, may it not be possible that we find in some passages, such as here, a general covering term for all of the redeemed of all dispensations constituting the church of Christ, within which there are distinctive churches?

JAMES

Up to this point in this series of dispensational synopses we have been dealing with epistles written by Paul, with the possible exception of Hebrews. All of Paul's epistles, we believe, were written to people who were members of the Body of Christ. We come now to consider epistles written by others whose specific ministry was not to minister the truth of the Mystery. Naturally, then, the question arises whether these General Epistles were addressed to members of the Body of Christ or to those whose expectation was to inherit the earthly, millennial kingdom. It is up to the individual reader to determine the issue for themselves before they can say these epistles were or were not intended for their obedience today.

Those who believe Christ came to earth to found the church naturally believe everything from Matthew to Revelation is for and concerning the Body of Christ. Those who begin the church at Pentecost would say everything from Acts to Revelation is for us today. Those who begin the Body after Acts 28 say only the prison epistles of Paul directly concern us today. Finally, those who see the Body beginning with Paul somewhere between Acts 9 and 13 are divided in their opinion, some saying only Paul's epistles were addressed to members of the Body, and others feeling that by the time the General Epistles were written these believers had become members of the Body, so that while these epistles do not contain any distinctive truths of the Mystery, they were nonetheless addressed to members of the Body.

The date of James' epistle has been set by various authorities from rather late in the apostolic age to perhaps the earliest of the New Testament writings. The *Davis Dictionary of the Bible* states:

The letter bears a distinct flavor of primitiveness: the Christian place of worship is stir spoken of as a synagogue (2:2); Christians are not sharply discriminated from Jews (1:1); the sins rebuked and errors corrected are such as would naturally spring up in a Jewish soil; while there is not a trace of the controversies which already in the sixth decade of the first Christian century were distracting the whole church. It is, therefore, usually dated about 45 A.D., and considered the earliest of the New Testament writings (p. 353).

If James wrote in 45 A.D., this would correspond with Acts 13, the time Paul was separated unto his special ministry. There is, of course, no mention in the book of Acts of the actual terms "the Body of Christ" and "the dispensation of the Mystery." We don't read about the Body of Christ before 1 Corinthians, which was written about Acts 20, some fifteen years after Acts 13. However, we have no reason to suppose the Body began only with the first written record of it. Hence, most Grace believers are quite sure the Body was in existence at least by Acts 13, when Paul was separated to his special ministry unto which God had called him.

Thus it appears James wrote before Paul wrote any of his epistles, and probably before there had been any dissemination of the distinctive truth of the Mystery which God had begun to reveal to Paul. Dispensationally, then, it is rather easy to see that James' letter must be quite in harmony with the Pentecostal message. This fact is not so apparent with the other General Epistles, since they were likely written after the Pauline revelation had been given.

The epistle is addressed to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (1:1). The twelve tribes are mentioned only three other times in the New Testament:

- With the apostles sitting upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes in the kingdom ([Matthew 19:28](#)).
- By Paul where he says that the twelve tribes are "instantly serving God day and night" ([Acts 26:7](#)).
- In [Revelation 21:12](#) where the names of the twelve tribes are inscribed on the gates of the New Jerusalem.

It is a problem to understand in what sense Paul could say in the Acts passage that the twelve tribes were at that time instantly serving God day and night, when as a whole they had rejected Christ and when he had already written [Romans 10:1-3](#) and [11:7-28](#).

James writes to the twelve tribes in the *diaspora* or dispersion, for the tribes had been dispersed from their homeland. Some commentators think James is using this term in a figurative sense "of Christians who live in dispersion in the world, far from their heavenly home" (*Greek-English Lexicon*, Arndt and Gingrich). Scofield says James does not mean Jews, but Christian Jews of the dispersion who had been scattered from Jerusalem (*Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1306). Had James used the expression Peter used in his first epistle, "strangers scattered," or more literally, sojourners of the dispersion, such a figurative meaning might have been a possibility, but James addresses "the twelve tribes" of the dispersion, and it is difficult to see how this could refer to any one but the whole nation of Israel.

The author of this epistle is generally taken to be the James of [Acts 15:13](#); [21:18](#); [Galatians 1:19](#); and 2:9, 12, whom Paul calls "the Lord's brother." He was recognized as the head of the Jerusalem church and was apparently very zealous of the Law. It is on this account some people feel that James and Paul were at odds, one being zealous of the Law and the other of grace. However, Paul says James, Cephas, and John extended to him the right hand of fellowship, and James himself in [Acts 21:25](#) explains that he had no intentions of placing Paul's Gentile converts under the Law ([Acts 15:24](#)). There was full agreement and cooperation between Paul and James, but both they and the Holy Spirit recognized a dispensational distinction between the Jews who believed and the Gentiles who believed during that time of transition. James did hold the Jewish believers to the Law, and it is therefore only natural he speaks of the Law some nine times in his epistle.

However, in all fairness to James it must be said that James did not hold out Law keeping as a means of salvation. It must be remembered James had been begotten according to the will of God with the word of truth (1:18), and that he had been given the gift of the indwelling Spirit of God ([Acts 1:13; 2:4](#)), and that he had come under the New Covenant law. Whereas Peter spoke of the old Law as "a yoke of bondage which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear" ([Acts 15:10](#)), James speaks of "the perfect law of liberty" (1:25; 2:12). There is surely a difference between a yoke of bondage and a law of liberty. The Law on tables of stone was a yoke of bondage. The law written on the fleshly tables of the heart is a law of liberty. One is external; the other internal. The Jewish believers continued to observe the Mosaic customs, not as the Judaizers did ([Acts 15:1, 24](#)), but simply as a heart-obedience to the Word of God. It was not until the writing of the Hebrews epistle that the Jews were definitely instructed to leave behind the Mosaic Law.

The fact that James placed this spiritual significance upon the Law is borne out further by his use of the word "faith" some sixteen times. He must have been a man of faith, for he speaks of the "testing of faith" (1:13) and the faith necessary for prayer (1:6). He further speaks of "having the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2:1), by which he means professing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Then he enters into his discussion of faith and works in chapter 2, where it seems he contradicts what we have been saying when he asks, "Can faith save him?" and by his further assertion, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only."

If James is diametrically opposed to Paul's teaching of justification by faith apart from works, we are forced to ask several questions. Did Peter share this view with James, and if so what about [Galatians 2:14-16](#)? If Peter knew, as Paul said he did, that a man is not justified by works but by faith, then was James wrong in his assertions? And if he was wrong, should his epistle be recognized as a part of the canon? On the other hand we might ask, what kind of works is James talking about--the works of the Law, the works of the flesh, dead works, or the works of faith? Paul speaks of all four of these kinds of works. It should be evident from James' statement--"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead"--that he is talking about the works of faith. He declares that faith is dead, just as dead as a corpse without breath, if it isn't accompanied by works.

Paul says it is possible to believe in vain, or more literally, to have an empty faith ([1 Corinthians 15:2](#)). Is this Paul's way of expressing the same thought? Is dead faith actually faith any more than a corpse is a man? Is not James saying:

What some of you call faith, simply asserting that you believe in the existence of God, which even the demons do, is not at all what I mean by faith. Faith that can save is an active commitment of self to God and not a mere passive mental assent to a set of facts.

That this is what James is saying can be further seen by what he gives as examples of "works." His first example is Abraham. He quotes the same Scripture as Paul does in [Romans 4:3](#), showing that Abraham received the imputed righteousness of God when he did nothing but believe God. But how do we know Abraham's faith was a living faith and not a dead faith? James tells us to look at what happened some forty years later in Abraham's life--he offered Isaac his son upon the altar. This was surely proof positive Abraham had a genuine faith in God. [Genesis 15:6](#) is vindicated, or as James says, "this scripture was fulfilled." We might illustrate this truth by an analogy.

Here are a number of electrical batteries on the shelf. Batteries are made, not to be kept on the shelf, but to power equipment. We place one of these batteries in a flashlight and press the button. Nothing happens. There is total darkness. We say the battery is dead. We put another battery in the compartment, and a powerful beam of light floods the room. Now we are justified in calling this latter one a battery. The only way we can tell the battery is alive is to subject it to such a test.

Faith is of the same nature. James says, "I will show thee my faith by my works," and that is the only way of showing the reality of faith. This is in perfect harmony with what Paul said in Titus 1:16:

They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

James gives another example of works in the case of Rahab the harlot. Does he say she was saved by living a pure, clean life? Of course not; she was a harlot. Was she saved by going through all the ritual of the Law? No! Her faith in God caused her to turn traitor to her nation by receiving the Israelite spies and protecting them from detection.

What kind of good works are these- offering your son on an altar and betraying your country? The world would surely not call these good works. But they were actions generated by the faith these persons had in God. And this is what James means--works or actions which justified these people before the world as being men and women of faith.

The seeming difference, then, between Paul and James on faith and works is not to be explained simply upon a dispensational basis, as though James were going about preaching as a messenger of the kingdom gospel saying that in order to be saved one must do good works, live clean, keep the Law, observe the ceremonials, develop character, pray; whereas Paul in preaching grace tells us we don't need to do anything to be saved but to believe.

We have already indicated that the Jewish and the Gentile believers did have different dispensational programs as far as religious observances were concerned, but James is not talking about religious observances. James is talking about a living faith in God which has been a requirement of God in every dispensation.

Faith brought animal sacrifices in the Old Testament and submitted to water baptism at Pentecost, but these are not the kinds of works James is talking about. He is saying what any grace preacher ought to be saying to a person who has to admit his so-called faith has never affected in the slightest any action or decision which he has made, namely, "Are you sure you ever really trusted Christ?" An unchanged life does not give very much assurance of a saving faith in the Savior.

The major part of James letter is of the nature of practical godliness which might apply in any dispensation. Even his references to the Law are similar to Paul's (compare [Romans 13:8-10](#); [Galatians 3:10](#)), although, of course, Paul's revelation goes far beyond anything in James concerning the work of Christ in relation to the Law. James speaks of the last days and the coming of the Lord in [5:2, 7](#), which in his thinking doubtless referred to the end of the age and the return of Christ to earth, and as in Paul and other New Testament writers this coming loomed as a possibility to that generation (5:8).

There is just one item in chapter 5 which has a distinct dispensational setting:

Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith shall heal the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him (5:14, 15).

James had spoken of the assembly of these people in [2:2](#) where he used the word "synagogue." Here he uses the word *ecclesia*. We would find no fault in a person inviting the elders of the church to come and pray, but we would ask a question about anointing him with oil and about the prayer of faith that heals the sick. Anointing with oil was definitely a part of the Mosaic Law ([Exodus 25:6](#); [29:7, 21](#); [30:25](#)). There are over ninety references to oil in Exodus and Leviticus.

This same James who is here telling his fellow-Israelites to anoint with oil writes a letter to Paul's Gentile converts in Acts 15 telling them to observe no such things as the Jews observe. This should settle the question once for all as to whether we should anoint the sick with oil, and especially since Paul is completely silent on the point. Likewise, we know at the time James wrote there were special gifts of the Spirit--healings, miracles, tongues, etc.--which Paul declared would pass away when they had accomplished their purpose. This case provides an illustration of how dispensational truth works. Some things change and some things remain. The ministry of prayer continues, but the ceremonial and the temporary gifts pass away.

1 PETER

There are several internal evidences which indicate roughly the time of the writing of 1 Peter. Since the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch, and since Peter calls his readers Christians ([Acts 11:26](#), [1 Peter 4:16](#)), we can be sure he wrote sometime after Acts 11. Further, we know Peter remained in Jerusalem at least until Acts 15, but when he wrote this epistle he was in Babylon; hence it must have been written after Acts 15. When Peter wrote there were apparently churches established in Bithynia, but in [Acts 16:7](#) this region was as yet unevangelized. Silvanus was with Peter and carried this letter to those addressed ([5:12](#)), but we know he was Paul's traveling companion at least up to Acts 18:5. These facts would place the letter later than Acts 18. There is no mention of Peter in Acts 21 when Paul last visited Jerusalem in 60 A.D., and since many scholars believe Peter wrote around the year 60 A.D., this may explain his absence.

Besides knowing the approximate time of the writing, the standing of the people addressed is of importance dispensationally. The letter is addressed to "the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." These strangers, or sojourners of the dispersion, were no doubt Jewish believers in Jesus Christ, but were they Jews who had been saved with the earthly kingdom in view, or were they members of the Body of Christ? The *Companion Bible* gives an interesting observation regarding those addressed:

So far as is known, he had never seen those to whom he wrote, nor does he make reference to a single one of those "strangers" who had doubtless been taught by Paul and his fellow-workers in their "journeyings often." Thus the teaching delivered to them by "our beloved brother Paul" is that to which Peter refers as "the true grace of God wherein ye stand" (1 Corinthians 15:1).

These remarks are based upon the fact it was Paul and his fellow-workers, not the Twelve Apostles, who evangelized this region of Asia Minor. Some Jews from this region could possibly have been saved at Pentecost ([Acts 2:9, 10](#)), but had there been such Paul would have done with them as he did with those twelve disciples at Ephesus ([Acts 19:1-7](#)). He would have brought them into the knowledge of his gospel, even as Aquila and Priscilla did with Apollos ([Acts 18:24-28](#)).

Those who exclude the believers who were saved at Pentecost from later becoming members of the Body of Christ generally agree everyone saved after Acts 13 did become members of the Body. Can we assert dogmatically that none of Peter's readers were saved after Acts 13? Since this region was evangelized by Paul after Acts 13 it would surely seem reasonable to suppose at least some, if not the great majority, of the believers of that region had been saved after Acts 13 and were therefore members of the Body of Christ.

Peter makes it plain that Paul's epistles were well known to his readers and that Paul himself had addressed an epistle to them (2 Peter 3:15). The fact also that Silas, Paul's close companion in his ministry, was carrying Peter's letter to these people is a strong indication that many of these people had been saved under the ministry of Paul and Silas. Our interpretation of the book will depend to a great extent on whether we contend that all of those addressed by Peter were saved before the Body began and that they were therefore looking only for the Great Tribulation and the millennial kingdom.

It is evident that no writer but Paul mentions the Mystery, the Body of Christ, and the Rapture, but it does appear that Peter had learned quite a bit from Paul's epistles. As mentioned earlier, Bullinger thinks Peter is talking about Paul's message when he speaks of "the true grace of God wherein ye stand." He begins his epistle in 1:3 with exactly the same words as Paul uses in Ephesians 1:3. He refers to God as "the God of all grace" (5:10). Paul talks about "the glory that shall be revealed" (Romans 8:18) and so does Peter (5:1). Paul said, "the time is short" and "the ends of the ages" have come upon us (1 Corinthians 6:29; 10:11), and Peter wrote, "But the end of all things is at hand" (4:7).

Surely we see quite an advance in Peter's teaching over that of the day of Pentecost. At Pentecost Peter preached water baptism for the remission of sins and proclaimed the death of Christ as a crime for which Israel was guilty. In his first epistle he proclaims the death of Christ in the same manner as does Paul:

- Redeemed with the precious blood of Christ (1:18).
- Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree (2:24).
- For Christ hath also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust" (3:18).

J. H. B. Masterman notes this development:

While thus closely resembling the discourses in Acts, the Epistle shows a more developed theology, due in part to the character of the readers for whom it was intended, and in part, no doubt, to the ripening experience of age, and the influence of St. Paul's more profound doctrinal perception. We detect a deeper realization of the significance of the death of Christ, and a clearer conception of the nature of the blessed hope of His appearing. The keen sense of resentment against those who had "killed the Prince of life," so marked a feature of the speeches, is absent in the Epistle (*The First Epistle of St. Peter*, p. 43).

Going now to the content of the epistle we will look first at those passages which seem to identify its message with kingdom or circumcision truth. Peter speaks of "salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1:5) and of "hoping to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:13) and "the end of all things is at hand" (4:7). These statements seem to point to the second coming of Christ to earth and not to the Rapture. We have

already noted the similarity between 4:7 and 1 Corinthians 7:29. Since the word "revelation" is the title of the book which tells of His coming to earth, we usually apply this term to the second coming to distinguish it from His coming at the Rapture. However, the book of Revelation was not written until after both Paul and Peter wrote their epistles, and Paul himself uses the word in addressing his converts in 1 Corinthians 1:6 --"So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the *coming* (revelation) of our Lord Jesus Christ." We cannot dogmatically assert on the basis of the word "revelation" that Peter is talking about the second coming of Christ to earth without asserting that Paul is pointing Body-members to the same event.

Also, Peter's message is directly linked to prophecy and not to Mystery: Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you" (1:10).

The salvation of which Peter speaks is in verse 9 called "the salvation of your souls." He is not here speaking of the salvation from the Great Tribulation, which, of course, is also a subject of prophecy. In this regard it should be remembered that while the Body of Christ is not a subject of prophecy, the gospel of salvation is. Paul's preaching and writings make this latter fact clear ([Acts 13:26-39](#); [1 Corinthians 15:1-4](#); [Romans 1: 1-4](#)).

Probably the outstanding passage which identifies Peter's readers with Israel is found in the second chapter:

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded (2:5, 6).

However, Paul uses very similar terminology in describing members of the Body of Christ:

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Christ is the "chief corner stone" and believers are a "spiritual house" in both passages. The spiritual sacrifices are not the animal sacrifices which will be offered in the kingdom (Ezekiel 46), and the priesthood of Peter's epistle is not the Levitical priesthood. Paul also has believers offering spiritual sacrifices ([Philippians 4:18](#); [Hebrews 13:15, 16](#)).

Peter further identifies his readers in 2:9, 10:

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: which in time past were not a people, but now are the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

This statement is cast in the framework of Exodus 19:5, 6:

Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.

God will yet make the nation of Israel to fulfill this promise, but at the time Peter wrote, the nation had already been cast aside ([Romans 11:15](#)).

Peter says his readers in time past were not the people of God. Paul refers to the same prophecy ([Hosea 2:10](#)) in [Romans 9:24-26](#), but he makes these "no people" who have now become "the people of God" to be the Gentiles as well as the Jews, for in verse 24 he says, "Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles." Hosea's prophecy primarily refers to Israel who were at one time *ammi* (my people), but who through the breaking of God's covenant had become *Lo-ammi* (not my people). The prediction is that they would in a future day again become the people of God. Paul applies Hosea's words primarily to the Gentiles. No doubt Peter applies it primarily to the Jewish believers, since he addresses the *diaspora*, which is generally interpreted to be the scattered people of Israel.

Peter makes two references to the Gentiles:

- "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles" (2:12).
- "For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine" (4:3).

Some have supposed these verses indicate Peter was addressing Gentile believers. Masterman, for example, says:

This exhortation seems to be addressed rather to converts from heathenism than to Jewish Christians (*Ibid.*, p. 140).

However, if these words would exclude Jews, then Peter could have been writing only to Gentiles and this is unthinkable. Peter and Paul had agreed in [Galatians 2:7-9](#) to go to the circumcision and the uncircumcision respectively, but this did not mean Peter could not minister to Gentiles, nor that Paul could not minister to Jews. Paul continued to go to Jewish synagogues long after Acts 15, although his special calling was that of apostle to the Gentiles. God used Peter to first bring the message to the Gentiles ([Acts 15:7](#)), but Peter turned this ministry

over to Paul and from then on ministered mainly to the circumcision. There is no reason to suppose, however, that after this Peter never ministered to Gentiles, for [Galatians 2:14](#) shows that he did. I take it, therefore, that Peter is here not ministering to any particular church composed wholly of Jews, but to Jewish believers in general among the dispersion who would of necessity have a number of Gentile believers in their ranks.

While it is no doubt true that Jewish saints in the Tribulation period may find special help and comfort from Peter's epistles, we can hardly say they were written primarily for that period, for he exhorts his readers:

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well (2:13, 14).

When the Antichrist is the supreme ruler during the Tribulation, God will not tell His saints to submit to and honor this incarnation of Satan. Likewise such statements as are found in [3:10 and 13](#) hardly seem apropos for the Tribulation -- "For he that will love life, and see good days, let him," and "Who is he that will harm you.?"

Peter surely knew by this time a new dispensation had been inaugurated under Paul and the kingdom hopes had been deferred; in fact, that seems to be the main thrust of his second epistle where he speaks about the longsuffering of the Lord in connection with Paul's ministry ([2 Peter 3:9-15](#)). It seems unlikely, therefore, that he is referring directly to the Great Tribulation when he speaks of the manifold temptations and the fiery trial which was to try them. Paul warned his readers of similar sufferings, as for example in 1 Thessalonians 3:4--"we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know."

Peter's reference to baptism in [3:21](#) presents a definite dispensational problem. Is Peter here speaking of water baptism when he says, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us?" Some dispensationalists feel this is what Peter means and that this message is in accord with [Mark 16:16](#) and [Acts 2:38](#), and, of course, all sacramentalists believe the same. However, there are problems with this view.

First, it is questionable whether it could be said of the Pentecostal message that it was water baptism that saved. Baptism was a requirement, even as sacrifices were in the Old Testament, but neither sacrifices nor baptism had any saving virtues in themselves. Next, it appears there was a change in order when Peter went to Cornelius, for Cornelius was saved and received the Holy Spirit apart from water baptism. And lastly, Peter makes it plain he is not talking about a washing which merely takes away the filth of the flesh. Christ Himself had taught Peter that His death was to be a baptism ([Luke 12:50](#)), and if we understand the death of

Christ to be the antitype of the flood waters which bore up Noah's ark, then it is plain that it is Christ's baptism in death that saves us.

If we agree Peter wrote after the Body of Christ began and that all who were saved after that time became members of the Body, it would surely be a very strange thing to find people being saved into the Body of Christ by water baptism as late as the "now" of [1 Peter 3:21](#). If we contend people were being saved by water baptism as late as 60 A.D., we can hardly contend at the same time they were becoming members of the Body of Christ.

There remains one further dispensational problem in this epistle, and that is Peter's references to the coming again of Christ. Does he refer to the Rapture or to the coming back to earth in the following:

- "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time... might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1:5-7).
- "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:13).
- "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (4:13).
- "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (5:4).

In the first three references above, Peter uses the word *apokalupsis* or revelation. In the latter he uses *phaneroo*, the same word Paul uses twice in [Colossians 3:4](#). However, we have already seen that we cannot determine which of the aspects of Christ's coming is in view by the words which are used, for Paul uses at least four different words to describe the Rapture which are used elsewhere of Christ's coming to earth.

We have also seen the evidence that doubtless among Peter's readers were some who had been saved since Acts 13, if not some of Paul's own converts, and the question arises therefore whether Peter would hold out to them the kingdom hope rather than the Body hope. The fact that Peter does not use the expression Rapture or caught up is no proof, for Paul uses the words caught up only once, and yet he refers to the same event dozens of times under different terminology. We have often expressed our conviction that Paul alone writes about the distinctive truths of the Mystery. If we accept Dr. Scofield's statement in his reference Bible--"In his [Paul's] writings alone we find the doctrine, position, walk, and destiny of the church"--we must conclude that Peter does not give us any distinctive teaching about the Rapture.

There are two facts we should consider. The first is that members of the Body do have some relationship to the Second Coming. Body members alone will share

in the prior event of the Rapture, but all of the redeemed will share in the glory of Christ at His revelation. An illustration may be helpful.

I was once invited to participate in the installation services of a new college President. A dinner was provided for a few selected guests, after which there was an academic convocation for the public. I was invited to take part in both functions. Those of us who gathered for the banquet did not just sit around the tables all evening after the public meeting convened. We donned our caps and gowns and marched in the procession. We were a part of the public program.

Just so, Body-members will be caught up first to be with Christ, and then we will be manifested with Him in His glorious revelation to the universe. Peter may be speaking only of the Revelation, but he does not say anything inconsistent with what Paul says we too shall share when Christ comes in power and glory.

The other fact is that Paul often refers Old Testament prophecies to the present dispensation (as in [Romans 15:9-12](#)), not in the sense that these prophecies are now being fulfilled in their primary significance, but simply as illustrations. When he says:

And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.

He is simply saying that since God had a plan to bless Gentiles in the prophetic program, it should not be thought a strange thing that He is blessing them today through the gospel of the grace of God. This same principle of Scripture usage may apply to the subject of the Rapture. Paul applies [Isaiah 25:8](#) to the Rapture in [1 Corinthians 15:54](#); not that the Rapture fulfills Isaiah's prophecy, but that which the prophecy predicts (victory over death) is also accomplished in the Rapture. Likewise, Peter refers his readers to the revelation of Christ, but he mentions only those things which could apply equally to the Rapture. He says nothing about his readers being under Antichrist or the Great Tribulation or the wrath of God or the flaming fire, which will all accompany His second coming.

EVIDENCE FOR AN EARLY DATE FOR 1 PETER

While I have espoused the view 1 Peter was written no earlier than 60 A.D., I must in fairness present evidence for an earlier date. This earlier date--before Paul began his first missionary journey--might affect the dispensational position of the Jews to whom Peter wrote this epistle.

Since Peter was still in Jerusalem in Acts 15, I have reasoned that although he did take a trip to Lydda, Joppa, and Caesarea in Acts 8--10, he did stay in the land of Israel. However, after his miraculous delivery from prison in [Acts 12:17](#), when "he departed, and went into another place," he could have fled to Babylon, taking Mark and Silas with him. Thus he could have written this letter from Babylon before

any Gentile work had been done by Paul at Antioch or on Paul's first missionary journey in Acts 13; and he could have commissioned Silas and Mark to carry the letter to the Jewish believers in the areas addressed in 1:1. Incidentally, since Bithynia is among the addressees, some conclude Peter was later ministering in that very area and this is why Paul was forbidden to take his ministry into that region ([Acts 16:7](#)).

If Peter did indeed write his first epistle from Babylon at this early date, this would mean Peter had not been made aware of Paul's special ministry of the gospel of the uncircumcision until Acts 15, when Paul and Silas went to Jerusalem to settle the circumcision question with Peter and the other circumcision leaders. Thus, according to this view, when Peter wrote of "the fiery trial" ([1 Peter 4:12](#)), he was writing about the Great Tribulation which he thought was imminent.

This view makes Peter's letter especially applicable to the Jewish believers who will yet live in the coming Tribulation. By the time Peter wrote his Second Epistle, he had become acquainted with Paul's teachings about the new dispensation and spoke of them as "the longsuffering of the Lord is salvation" ([2 Peter 3:15, 16](#)). Instead of God judging the world and bringing Israel through the Tribulation for the rejection of His Son, God has delayed this judgment and has revealed His longsuffering in bringing in the dispensation of Grace.

2 PETER

In our discussion of 1 Peter we concluded it was written no earlier than 60 A.D. 2 Peter must have been written several years later. Since Peter makes mention of Paul (3:15), it is almost certain Paul was still alive. Since Paul was executed in about 68 A.D., the date of 2 Peter would fall between 60 and 68 A.D. Thus it is likely that 2 Peter was written after the close of the Acts period.

It is evident the epistle was addressed to the same group of believers addressed in the first epistle, for he states in 3:1:

This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you.

These believers were scattered throughout Pontus, Asia, and Bithynia, regions where Paul had done a great deal of evangelizing. He simply addresses his letter:

. . . to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our savior Jesus Christ.

It would appear from this statement about faith through the righteousness of God that Peter is here standing upon the ground of Romans 3:21:

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.

This is more evidence that Peter came to acknowledge the further truths of the gospel as revealed through Paul.

It might seem Peter is not preaching salvation by grace through faith alone when he speaks about adding certain things to faith (1:5). However, as Vincent in his *Word Studies* points out:

The A.V. is entirely wrong... The verb originally means 'to bear the expense of a chorus.'

In the N.T. the word has lost this technical sense and is used in the general sense of supplying or providing. The A.V. exhorts "to add" one virtue to another; but the Greek literally says, to develop one virtue in the exercise of another. Peter has already said God has given us all things which pertain to life and godliness (1:3), and now he tells us to exercise these gifts. It is much the same as Paul's statement, "Work out your own salvation, for it is God that worketh in you."

Again, it might seem from 1:10 - "give diligence to make your calling and election sure" -- that Peter is saying we must do certain work to be certain we are

saved. The expression, "to make sure," is better translated, "to confirm." This is the same word as used in [Romans 15:8](#), where we read that Christ came to confirm the promises made unto the fathers. There was no question or doubt concerning the reality or faithfulness of these promises; Christ's ministry simply confirmed or established these promises. So it is that Peter is here saying the believer confirms his calling and election by a life of godliness. This word is used by Peter again in 1:19 where we read of "a more sure word of prophecy." The word of prophecy was never unsure, but rather Peter's experience on the mount of transfiguration was confirmation of the word of prophecy; the prophecy was confirmed.

Peter speaks of an entrance being administered into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ([1:11](#)). To what aspect of the kingdom is Peter here referring? The earthly, messianic kingdom was promised in Old Testament times; it was proclaimed as "at hand" from John the Baptist to beyond Pentecost; it was suspended with the out-calling of Paul, some twenty years before the time of Peter's writing. Therefore it would seem unlikely that Peter is telling these people, the majority of whom were saved after the earthly kingdom was set aside, that an entrance into that kingdom is being ministered to them. The expression "everlasting kingdom" does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament. Paul speaks of the kingdom of Christ ([Ephesians 5:5](#)). It would seem Peter is speaking of a much broader aspect of the kingdom than the 1000 year earthly reign.

Some have thought Peter's reference to "the present truth" indicates the new revelation through Paul which was then in effect. The word "present" (*pareimi*) means to be, by, be at hand, to have arrived, to be present. Thayer says Peter means:

The truth which ye now hold, so that there is no need of words to call it to your remembrance.

W. E. Vine in his *Expository Dictionary* says:

2 Peter 1:12, of the truth '(which) is with (you)' (not as the A.V., 'the present truth,' as if of special doctrines applicable to a particular time).

Peter would probably have used a different word had he been contrasting truth for a former dispensation with that of the present. However, it is surely true that the math Peter was talking about was math for that present time and not math for some other dispensation.

Peter knew from the time of [John 21:19](#) that he would not live to see the second coming of Christ. He refers to this in [1:14](#). This fact must modify our thinking about the possibility of the kingdom being set up had the message of Pentecost been accepted by the nation of Israel. We believe there was the possibility of that event in that generation, but even if Israel had repented, certain other events would of necessity have intervened. There had to be the carrying out of the mysteries of the kingdom (Matthew 13), and Peter had to grow old and be martyred.

There is no doubt Peter is speaking of Christ's return in glory in [1:16](#). Some commentators have taught that Peter is speaking of the Rapture when he speaks of Christ as the "day star" ([1:19](#)). This word is the *Greek phosphorus*, and the Latin *Lucifer*, meaning light-bearer. It was the name given to the planet Venus, the morning star. The reasoning is that the morning star arises first, followed by the rising of the sun. So Christ will come as the Morning Star to catch away his people while it is still night, and then will return as the Sun of Righteousness to establish His kingdom. It is doubtful Peter had this rather involved figurative meaning in mind.

A word should be said about "private interpretation" ([1:20](#)), although the subject is not particularly dispensational. Rome has made this to mean no private individual has the ability to interpret the Scripture; therefore we must depend upon the pronouncements of the church of Rome. To begin with, Peter does not use the word for interpretation (*hermenia*), but the word *epiluseos*, loosening, untying. The cognate verb occurs in [Mark 4:34](#) and [Acts 19:39](#), translated "expounded" and "determined." Peter is not talking about our understanding of Scripture but rather of the origin of Scripture. He is saying no prophecy of Scripture was self-originated by the speaker, but that holy men of God spake as they were borne along by the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 2 is very similar to the epistle of Jude, dealing as it does with the apostasy of the last days. We will deal more particularly with this subject in our analysis of that epistle.

Chapter 3 deals with the longsuffering of God. Scoffers in the last days will come with their mockery, "Where is the promise of His coming?" It is apparently evident to Peter that the Lord's coming had been delayed, and that the possibility of [Acts 3:20](#) being realized in the near future is now past. The dispensation of the Mystery which was committed to Paul had now been revealed for a number of years and this dispensation must run its course before the Lord's return. These mockers will claim God has never intervened in human affairs and that the promise of Christ's coming is a myth. But Peter says they are willingly ignorant of, or as the R.V. has it, this they willfully forget that God has in the past overthrown the world in a great cataclysmic flood.

What men interpret as either gullibility on the part of the Christian or a slackness on the part of God, Peter explains as the longsuffering of God. Why has God not fulfilled His promise to bring judgment upon this ungodly world? Does the long delay mean He has forgotten His promise or that He is slack in fulfilling it? No, Peter says, remember God is not a creature of time. A day or a thousand years are the same to Him. God is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish.

From Peter's standpoint we might call this present dispensation of the grace of God, the dispensation of the longsuffering of God. He says in [3:15](#) that our beloved brother Paul has written about this longsuffering of God in all of his epistles. What

is the explanation of this longsuffering from Paul's viewpoint? Why does Peter refer to Paul's epistles in this connection? There are at least two reasons.

- His readers must have been well acquainted with Paul's writings, therefore he can appeal to them as evidence in his argument.
- The only explanation why God did not send His judgment upon the world is the fact He has instituted a dispensation of grace.

From one point of view, that of the Mystery, God is today doing an unpropheesied thing, calling out the Body of Christ for a heavenly inheritance. From another point of view, that of the grace of God, God is simply delaying His just judgment because He is not willing that any should perish, but that all might come to repentance. Had God not interposed this dispensation of His grace He would long ago have brought His fiery judgments on the world. This dispensation of grace does not mean God will never bring judgment; it means God is giving an extended opportunity to undeserving mankind to be saved before the judgment falls.

The time when this judgment falls is called the day of the Lord (3:10). This day is predicted dozens of times in the Old Testament prophets. Paul mentions it in [1 Thessalonians 5:2](#) and [2 Thessalonians 2:2](#) (R.V.). It is the day in which the Lord comes personally to take over the rulership of this world. Most of the prophecies are concerned with the judgments related to His second coming. However, some predictions refer to the entire period of His earthly reign. Peter seems to relate the day of the Lord with the events which will terminate the millennial reign and to equate that day with the day of God (3:10 and 12). We believe the burning up of the present heavens and earth and the creation of new heavens and earth will occur after the millennium. This is clearly the order in Revelation 20 -- 21.

When Peter says his readers are looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, he is not presenting what might be called their immediate hope. Before the day of God comes, the Rapture of the Body will occur, followed by the second coming of Christ to earth, followed by the one-thousand year reign of Christ. Peter is talking about the grand consummation which will concern all created intelligences. He does not tell his readers they are looking simply for a new earth. He says we are looking for new heavens and a new earth. Members of the Body are looking for the new heavens and new earth just as much as is redeemed Israel.

It was apparently not given to Peter to write about any of the distinctive truths of the Mystery, but in referring his readers to Paul's epistles he is surely referring them to those distinctive truths. Whether Peter is referring to the Hebrew epistle, as some think, or to those epistles addressed to the saints in that region, as others think, we cannot say dogmatically. In any case, we know Paul had addressed at least one epistle directly to Peter's readers, and that they had Pauline truth ministered unto them.

It would be interesting to know just what subjects Peter had in mind when he referred to those things in Paul's epistles which are hard to understand. Was it such truth as is set forth in Romans 9 -- 11, about which Paul himself cries out:

O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out?

Or was it some dispensational truth concerning the Mystery, or Israel and the Body of Christ? We cannot say for sure, but it is at least comforting to know that even Peter recognized the difficulty of understanding certain truths in the revelation given to Paul. According to [Ephesians 1:17, 18](#), our ability to grasp these truths does not originate with our reasoning powers but with the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. Men have evolved many theories, often extreme and self contradictory. May our prayer be that of Paul--that God would enlighten the eyes of our understanding, that we may know.

1 JOHN

There is no statement in this epistle as to the author, the time, the place of writing, or the particular people addressed. A comparison of the epistle with the Gospel of John makes it quite evident, however, that both books were written by the same man, even as unbroken tradition affirms. Books on New Testament introduction give quotations from Polycarp, Papias, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and other subapostolic writers who bear witness to John's authorship. Similarity of vocabulary and style also attest to the Johanine authorship. The writer represents himself as an eyewitness of Jesus Christ (1:1-4; 4:14), and thus most likely one of the apostles.

The only internal evidence concerning the date is the fact one of the purposes of its writing was apparently to refute gnostic-like errors which had arisen in the church. Irenaeus says John wrote against the gnostic heretic Cerinthus (*Against Heresies* III. xi. 1), and this would place the epistle late in the 1st century. Gnosticism had begun to gain ground by the time Paul wrote Colossians (about 64 A.D.). The traditional date of 1 John is 85-95 A.D.

We do not know from where John wrote, but if we accept the testimony of Irenaeus we would suppose it was from Ephesus, where John took up residence after the destruction of Jerusalem and where he ministered until the time of the emperor Trajan. John apparently had a close relationship with a number of churches in Asia Minor, including the one at Ephesus (Revelation 2 and 3). His readers are addressed simply as "little children." He also mentions fathers and young men, but there is no indication whether they were Jews or Gentiles or both.

John, of course, was one of the Twelve, and as such was classified by Paul as a minister to the circumcision, having had committed to him originally "the gospel of the circumcision" ([Galatians 2:7-9](#)). The first question which comes to mind dispensationally is to ask whether John, some thirty years after the death of Paul, was still ministering the message of [Acts 2:38](#) and [3:19-21](#) to the Jews only, or whether he had fitted himself into the new dispensation.

Some of the brethren hold that none of those who were saved in the early chapters of Acts ever became members of the Body of Christ, but that some of these non-members did become fellow-workers with Paul and preached Paul's message, even though that message did not apply to themselves. If Barnabas, Silas, Apollos, and others could do this, then we see no reason why John reciprocally could not minister to members of the Body at this late date, even though he was not a member himself.

Others, of course, hold that when the Body did begin under Paul's ministry the Holy Spirit baptized all believers who were alive at that time into the Body, and if this be the case then John was most surely writing to members of the Body. It

would seem very strange to find a divinely inspired apostle propagating a message which had been set aside by God thirty to forty years before. This does not necessarily mean John writes about any distinctive truths concerning the Mystery, for he doesn't. All we are saying is that it seems evident to us, if John wrote about 90 A.D., that he must have been writing to people who were members of the Body, whether they were Jews or Gentiles. If the traditional date and the historical evidence can be overthrown and a very early date be established, then it might be proved John wrote only to Jews who were outside the Body of Christ.

Beginning with the first verse of the epistle it has been argued that John is concerned with Christ after the flesh--since he speaks of having heard, seen, looked upon, and handled Him but we as members of the Body are not related to Christ after the flesh ([2 Corinthians 5:16](#)). Therefore John could not be writing to members of the Body. Our position on this point will be determined by what we understand to be the meaning of not knowing Christ after the flesh.

Does this phrase mean not knowing Christ as a man? Hardly, for Paul says He is still "the man" at God's right hand ([1 Timothy 2:5](#)). Does it mean having no relationship with Christ in a body of flesh? Hardly, for Christ arose with a body of flesh. It could hardly mean we as members of the Body of Christ are not under the earthly ministry of Christ, for it would be impossible for anyone to be under that ministry since His ascension. This idea is further excluded by the fact Paul associates himself with those who had once known Christ after the flesh, but as far as we know Paul never knew Christ in His earthly ministry. It is abundantly evident we in this dispensation are not under the kingdom Gospel which Christ proclaimed to Israel while He was on earth, but is this the subject of [2 Corinthians 5:16](#)?

Whatever Paul means, we must make it mean the same thing in his knowledge of every other man, for he says, "we know no man after the flesh." That can surely not mean Paul knew no man in a human body or in a human relationship. Rather, it seems to me, Paul is saying we no longer recognize any fleshly distinctions among mankind as having any spiritual significance. It is no longer a matter of being a Jew or a Gentile, bond or free, rich or poor, black, white, or yellow, for our spiritual experience in salvation has brought us through death (by identification with Christ) to a new life on resurrection ground in which we are part of a new creation.

Paul does not say we have nothing to do with Christ in His fleshly body, for he is careful to tell us how and when He became incarnate (as in [Romans 1:1-3](#) and [Galatians 4:4](#)), and we should recognize the fact that the death of Christ, which Paul so faithfully proclaimed, was accomplished in His body of flesh upon the cross. The record of His earthly birth, life, and ministry is absolutely essential and preliminary to the further revelation which was given through Paul.

The conclusion of chapter 1 also has dispensational overtones. Confession for the forgiveness of sins appears to be foreign to Paul's message. Does not Paul tell us God has already forgiven us all trespasses ([Colossians 2:13](#); [Ephesians 4:32](#))? Where is the place, then, for confession and further forgiveness? Actually, Paul

mentions God's forgiveness only six times in his epistles and it is evident he deals with forgiveness as the counterpart of justification, which is a once-for-all act on the part of God.

It would seem John too recognizes this aspect of forgiveness, for he says in 2:12, "your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake." In 1:9 I believe John is dealing with precisely the same aspect of the subject which Paul treats in [1 Corinthians 11:31, 32](#). Granted, Paul does not say, "If we confess our sins He will forgive us." However, he does say, "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged," which amounts to exactly the same thing. Judging one's self results in the confessing of one's sins to God. This is forgiveness within the family of God between Father and son. The once-for-all forgiveness of justification is between Judge and sinner. John does not say we must pray for forgiveness, but that when we confess our sin--say the same thing about it that God does--He is just and faithful to cleanse us.

In the first two verses of chapter 2 John deals with two themes very prominent in Paul's epistles--Christ as our propitiation and Christ as our Advocate or intercessor. Some dispensationalists have the mistaken idea that because we are under the dispensation of the Mystery we can therefore have nothing to do with the types and shadows of the Old Testament. True, we are not under these types and shadows, but we--and not the people of the Old Testament--are the ones to whom the types are addressed; "they are written for *our* admonition" (1 Corinthians 10:11). The Passover, the Levitical sacrifices, the mercy seat (the place of propitiation), the priesthood are all expounded by Paul as illustrating the finished work of Christ, which was the basis of his gospel. We scuttle the gospel itself if we say we have nothing to do with Christ's death as the Passover, or as a mercy seat, or as a sin offering, or if we deny we have any need of His intercessory work at the right hand of God. It is possible to be so afraid of compromising the message of the Mystery that we throw out the proverbial baby with the bath-water. Our acceptance with God depends upon the propitiatory work of Christ ([Romans 3:25](#)) and our eternal security depends upon His intercessory work ([Romans 8:33, 34](#)).

Next, we may ask, what does John mean by the statement: It is the last time: and as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now there are many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time (2:18).

Since John wrote well after this present dispensation began, and since almost nineteen hundred years have elapsed to the present, in what sense could John say it was then the last time? We can also deduce from his words that he was looking for the Antichrist and not for the Rapture. Most of the New Testament writers have something to say about the last days or times ([1 Timothy 4:1](#); [2 Timothy 3:1](#); [James 5:3](#); [Hebrews 1:2](#); [1 Peter 15, 20](#); [2 Peter 3:3](#)).

It seems this expression must be interpreted by its context, because in some of the above passages the last times were then fully present and in others these times were yet future. Paul told the Corinthians "*the end of the ages*" had come

upon them ([1 Corinthians 10:11](#)). Hebrews 9:26 tells us, "but now once in *the end of the ages* hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." In a sense the end of the ages occurred two thousand years ago, but in another sense the end of the ages stretches out into eternity. Williams, in his *Student's Commentary*, states:

It was "the last time" because Christ had already been manifested, and until He had come the advent of an Antichrist was impossible... All the period, therefore, from the First to the Second advent may, in this sense, truly be called the last time (p. 1012).

The question of whether John was looking for the Antichrist in the Tribulation or looking for the Rapture before the Tribulation should be considered in connection with Chapter [3:1-3](#). The question cannot be answered from the context. Our answer will depend upon our dispensational conclusions on this passage. If we have concluded John never became a member of the Body of Christ then it is most unlikely he would mention the Rapture, to say nothing of holding it out as his hope. If we believe John did become a member of the Body after it came into being under Paul's ministry, then we can grant John the same liberty we do Paul to write about the Antichrist and the second coming of Christ in judgment without insisting he must have been waiting for the Antichrist instead of the Rapture. What John says about hope in this passage could apply equally well to saints of any dispensation.

It is contended by some that distinctive words are used for the hope of Israel and for the hope of the Body; hence because Christ spoke of His *parousia* (coming or presence) in Matthew 24, Paul must be speaking of that same coming at the end of the Tribulation in 1 Thessalonians 4. But what would such say of John's word for the appearing of Christ (*phanerothe*), which is the identical word used by Paul in Colossians 3:4? Would this be positive proof John was looking for the same appearing as was Paul? We do not believe, however, this is a valid method of interpretation. John surely does not describe a Rapture here any more than Paul does in [Romans 8:18](#) or [1 Corinthians 15:51](#) or [Philippians 3:20](#) or [Titus 2:13](#), but we believe in all of these passages Paul is speaking about the same event, namely that of [1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#). It is surely true of us as members of the Body of Christ that we are sons of God, and that when He appears we are going to be like Him. And it should also be true of us that if we have this hope we should purify ourselves, even as He is pure.

The question of the dispensational place of prayer arises in chapter 3:22:

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight (see [also 5:14, 15](#)).

Is this a promise for today? We recognize at Pentecost when they were all filled with the Holy Spirit there were unconditional prayer promises, but that situation soon broke down with Israel's rejection of the kingdom gospel, and surely by the

time Paul began his ministry it could not be said every believer among the Jews was completely filled with the Spirit. And surely the fact that John's readers would have been deceived and also liars if they had claimed they were without sin, would be proof they were not all filled with the Spirit.

John does attach certain conditions to receiving whatsoever we ask, namely keeping his commandments, doing those things pleasing in His sight, and having no consciousness of anything which would cause our hem to condemn us. Even when James wrote his epistle, which was very early, it is evident believers were asking and not receiving ([James 1:5-7](#)). Hence we can safely say that from the time of the writing of the first New Testament epistles there was no such thing in operation as an *unconditional* prayer promise.

There is nothing particularly dispensational in chapter 4, but in chapter 5:8 there is a reference to a three-fold witness in earth; the Spirit and the water and the blood. What is this water? Phillips renders this, "the Spirit in our hearts, the signs of the water of baptism, and the blood of atonement." This is interpretation and not translation. John says nothing about "in our hems" or "signs of baptism" or "atonement." John introduces the subject of water in verse 6, "This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ," so that the water in this context refers to Jesus Christ, just as much as the blood does, and not to a baptism ceremony practiced upon a believer. To understand what John means it is most natural to go back to his Gospel, chapter 19:34:

But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe.

One final subject with dispensational implications is "the sin unto death" ([5:16](#)). This has been linked by some to [1 Corinthians 11:30](#), where some were weak and sickly and many slept because of misconduct at the Lord's table, and also with the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. It has been argued that since these death-judgments do not occur today, therefore we must be living in a different dispensation. This is urged as proof the Lord's Supper is not for our practice. However, the Law dispensation was ushered in by mighty signs and wonders, but these signs did not continue throughout the whole dispensation. Therefore, the cessation of the signs is not proof of a change of dispensation. Further, if we accept the late date for this epistle, it is difficult to argue John is talking about sign gifts which passed away over twenty years prior to this.

It does not seem possible to determine from the context just what sin John is talking about. It was evidently a sin or crime involving the penalty of physical death, whether enforced by human authorities or by God. This has been identified by some as the unpardonable sin, but what is the unpardonable sin which a brother can commit? It is apparently unpardonable as far as the death penalty is concerned, but does this mean God cannot pardon it? Moses committed a sin which resulted in his death, yet he was a saved man. About all we can say is that if

God had intended for us to be governed by this passage, He would have made plain the meaning of the particular sin involved.

2 & 3 JOHN

We shall consider these two brief epistles together. The first was written to "the elect lady" (*kyria*) and the other to "well beloved Gaius." They are both short personal letters which contain very little of a dispensational nature. As to date, it would seem they were written quite late, because apparently the gnostic-like heresy had had time to develop. John says:

For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

1 John warns against the same heresy ([2:22](#), [23](#); [4:1-3](#)). This heresy did not infiltrate Christian teaching until some years after the message began to be preached to the Gentiles. No names are mentioned in 2 John, but the third epistle names three men and they all have Greek names; Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius. John also mentions the Gentiles in this epistle (verse 7):

Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles.

Is John speaking about Gentile believers, or Gentiles as distinct from the believers whether Jews or Gentiles, as Paul does in 1 Corinthians 10:32:

Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God!

The context does not definitely answer the question, but from the fact that Greeks were apparently in the church to which John wrote (verse 9), it would seem the latter would be more likely.

John does not enunciate the gospel of salvation as such, but he does speak of "the doctrine of Christ" and "the truth," both of which have to do more with the Person of Christ than with the work He accomplished. Therefore it is difficult to identify John's message dispensationally at the time of his writing.

There is nothing in either epistle to identify the place of the writing. Neither Diotrephes nor Demetrius is mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, but there is a Gaius who was a traveling companion of Paul and who was at Ephesus in [Acts 20:4](#), whose home was in Derbe, and another Gaius from Macedonia ([Acts 19:29](#), [1 Corinthians 1:14](#)). There is no way of telling whether either of these men is the Gaius mentioned in 3 John.

Spiritual conditions in John's day were not much different from those of today. There were faithful women, many deceivers, those who liked to have the preeminence in the church, and some men of good report.

JUDE

The writer of this epistle is usually identified with the Judas of [Matthew 13:55](#), a brother of James and of Jesus. James, Jude, and John were all ministers to the circumcision primarily, although this epistle does not reveal the people or the place to which it was addressed. It would seem Jude had taken his pen in hand to write of the common, or as some might call it, basic salvation, but that the Spirit constrained him to exhort his readers instead to contend earnestly for "the faith once delivered to the saints." The word "once" does not mean once upon a time, but once for all. The expression, "the faith," means the sum total of what we believe. The word is used with this meaning as early as [Acts 6:7](#). Paul uses it in the same way in [Galatians 1:23; 3:23, 25; Colossians 1:23; 2:7; 1 Timothy 4:1; 5:8; 6:10, 12, 21; 2 Timothy 3:8; 4:7; Titus 1:4](#).

Jude speaks of "the common salvation" and Paul, in the last passage above, speaks of "the common faith." Common means shared by all. There was much truth that was shared alike by the Jewish apostles and Paul. Dispensational study looks for the differences, but it is most important to see that not everything was different.

It is difficult to set a date for the writing of Jude. Apparently quite a bit of apostasy from the faith had developed, which would require some time, but probably the most significant fact is the great similarity of the epistle to 2 Peter chapter 2. Many scholars think either Peter drew upon Jude, or Jude upon Peter, although it is possible that under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit both men could have written identical words without the one even being aware of what the other had written. If Jude based his epistle on 2 Peter, then, of course, the writing would be well past the close of the Acts. Jude's statement in verses 17, 18 might point in that direction:

But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how that they told you there should be mockers in the last time...

After uncovering the apostasy which had already set in, Jude gives a number of examples of God's judgment upon apostates in the Old Testament, and then shows how Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of the future coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to execute judgment. He concludes with an exhortation to his readers to build themselves up in the faith, to pray in the Spirit, and to keep themselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. His benediction is one which we too can use:

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

REVELATION

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This the final book of the Bible is the Grand Central Station into which flow all of the lines of Old Testament prophecy, finding their grand consummation in the Lord Jesus Christ. The name of the book is *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. It is not *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, as indicated in the King James Version. As clearly stated in [1:1](#), it is the revelation of Jesus Christ which God sent and signified by His angel unto His servant John. The revelation concerns "things which must shortly come to pass." "Shortly" does not mean immediately. The same word is used in [Luke 18:8](#), where it is translated "speedily."

The revelation was "signified" to John. This means the message was given by signs or symbolic language. For example, when John saw seven stars in the hand of Jesus, he didn't mean he saw literal stars, for we are told the seven stars are the angels or messengers of the seven churches.

The book is addressed to seven churches which are in Asia. Of these seven churches, only two are mentioned by Paul; the Ephesian ([Ephesians 1:1](#); [Acts 19:20:17](#)) and Laodicean ([Colossians 4:16](#)). The only thing we know biblically about the other five churches biblically is what is found in the book of Revelation. It seems evident John received the revelations recorded in this book after the Acts period. Tradition tells us that after Paul's death John went to Asia and became bishop of the church at Ephesus and was banished to the Isle of Patmos about 95. A.D. **Patmos** is a small island in the Aegean Sea not far from Ephesus and the other six churches which were located in the surrounding area. If tradition is true, this would explain why John addressed the book to these churches. Dispensationally there seems to be no reason why these particular churches are addressed. Seven churches are named in keeping with the "sevens" in the book.

The number seven was regarded by the Hebrews as a sacred number. It occurs over 560 times in the Bible, and forty-four times in Revelation alone, where we find:

Seven churches	1:4
Seven spirits	1:4
Seven candlesticks	1:12
Seven stars	1:16
Seven lamps	4:5
Seven seals	5:1
Seven horns	5:6
Seven eyes	5:6
Seven angels	8:2

Seven trumpets	8:2
Seven plagues	11:13
Seven vials	17:1
Seven mountains	17:9
Seven kings	17:10

The number seven is especially related to God's dealings with the nation of Israel. Vincent remarks:

Seven is the number of every grace and benefit bestowed upon Israel; which is thus marked as flowing out of the covenant, and a consequence of it. The priests compass Jericho seven days, and on the seventh day seven times, that all Israel may know that the city is given into their hands by God, and that its conquest is a direct and immediate result of their covenant relation to Him. Naaman is to dip in Jordan seven times, that he may acknowledge the God of Israel as the author of his cure. It is the number of reward to those who are faithful in the covenant ([Deuteronomy 28:7](#); [1 Samuel 2:5](#)), of punishment of those who are froward in the covenant ([Leviticus 26:21,24, 28](#); [Deuteronomy 28:25](#)), or to those who injure the people in it ([Genesis 4:15, 24](#); [Exodus 7:25](#); [Psalm 79:12](#)). All the feasts are ordered by seven, or else by seven multiplied into seven, and thus made intenser still. Thus it is with the Sabbath, the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Tabernacles, the Sabbath-year, and the Jubilee (*Word Studies in the New Testament*, Vol. 2, p. 410).

This is in contrast with the number one, which is especially associated with the church of our present dispensation. The number seven is not to be found in Paul's epistles, unless the "seven thousand men" ([Romans 11:4](#)) be counted. Oneness, however, is exhibited in a striking way in Ephesians 4:4-6:

There is one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Paul does not use the number seven, but this great unity of the Spirit which members of the Body are urged to keep is a oneness multiplied by seven. Our dispensational interpretation of the first three chapters of Revelation will be determined in part by the distinction between the sevenness of Israel and the oneness of the Body of Christ.

PROPHECY OR MYSTERY

There can be no question that the book of Revelation is prophecy. This fact is plainly stated in chapter [1:3](#) and [22:19](#). Prophecy had to do with God's purpose for His kingdom on this earth which He had made known through the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began ([Acts 3:18-26](#)). Mystery, in contrast to prophecy, has to do with God's purpose in the outcalling of the Body of Christ for a

heavenly inheritance, which He kept secret from before the beginning of the world until He revealed it to and through the apostle Paul. In making this contrast it is of utmost importance to understand that the salvation from the penalty of sin in both of these outcallings is based upon the work of the one and only Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Mystery is not that Christ died for our sins, for that was prophesied, but that God is joining together believing Jews and Gentiles into one Body called the "one new man," which is separate and distinct from Israel and its earthly kingdom promises ([Romans 1:1-6](#)). Thus, members of this new Body of Christ are saved on the basis of the prophesied death of Christ ([1 Corinthians 15:1-4](#)), but their spiritual relationship and program are different from those of the kingdom saints ([Ephesians 2:14--3:12](#)).

INTERPRETATION

While there have been numerous systems of interpretation for this book, there are four main views, only one of which is dispensational in character.

- Idealist view -- claims the events of this book are not statements of fact but are a pictorial unfolding of the principles of good and evil in constant conflict throughout all time. This is basically a spiritualizing, non-literal view.
- Preterit view-- says all of the events of the book were fulfilled in the early church during the times of the apostles, and therefore Revelation has no message directly for today or for the future. The book portrays the victory of Christ over the Roman empire.
- Historical view -- states the book has been in the process of fulfillment since apostolic times up to the present, and that it portrays events yet future until the coming again of Christ.

W. Graham Scroggie characterizes these three views as:

- Idealist / Age-long Spiritual Interpretation.
- Preterit / Contemporary-Historical Interpretation.
- Historicist / Continuously Historical Interpretation.

It will be seen that none of these three views takes into consideration any dispensational principles whatsoever. The fourth and final system of interpretation is:

- Futurist or Eschatological view -- This school is divided into two groups: those who take either the Preterit or the Historical view of the first three chapters and make the remainder of the book to be future; and those who take the entire book to be future, seeing nothing in it whatsoever which refers to this present dispensation of the Mystery.

CHAPTERS 2 & 3 LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

Generally speaking, those dispensationalists who believe the Dispensation of the Mystery and the unprophesied Body of Christ began on the Jewish feast of Pentecost in Acts 2 believe the seven letters addressed to the seven churches in chapters 1 -- 3 apply to members of the Body of Christ and are separate and distinct from the remainder of the book. Most all of them believe the Rapture of the church is represented by John's being taken up to heaven in chapter four. Most of those who hold the Preterit view of these three chapters also hold a historical view of them. That is, they believe each of these churches represents a historical era of the church from apostolic times to the Rapture. This view is presented in the footnotes of the *Scofield Reference Bible*. *Halley's Bible Handbook* discusses the view but thinks it best not to be too dogmatic on such an interpretation. Hal Lindsey states that these seven churches give us a panorama of church history, and he is quite specific in his dating of these eras (*There Is A New World Coming*, Vision House Publishers, Santa Ana, CA):

Church at Ephesus -- A.D. 33 to 100

Characteristics: correct doctrine, circumspect walk, zealous labor, but loss of first love.

Church at Smyrna- A.D. 100 to 312

Characteristics: the period of church persecution

Church at Pergamos -- A.D. 312 to 590

Characteristics: church merged with state and church hierarchy began with Bishop of Rome claiming increasing prominence.

Church at Thyatira -- A.D. 590 to 1517

Characteristics: the dominant church fabricated a system that, like Jezebel, bound the people to image worship, superstition, and priestcraft.

Church at Sardis -- A.D. 1517 to 1750 Characteristics: church reformed but not revived. Complacency and a new legalism set it.

Church at Philadelphia -- A.D. 1750 to 1925

Characteristics: great missionary era of the church; zeal began to wane after World War I, but some of this church still in the world today.

Church at Laodicea -- 1900 to Tribulation

Characteristics: higher criticism, compromise and apostasy.

ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST A FUTURIST VIEW

While it is true many spiritual applications can be made of any and all Scriptures, we should always try to discern the primary interpretation. If the above panorama of church history is the intended interpretation of these seven churches, it should be evident that no one could have figured out such an interpretation until the present time, for there is nothing in the context of the passages to indicate it. Further, this interpretation is self-contradictory. Ephesus is supposed to represent the apostolic era when doctrine was pure and behavior was circumspect; but the fact is right next door to it was Laodicea, which was apostate. Among Paul's churches, the Corinthian church was carnal and the churches of Galatia had become legalistic, and the Colossians had become infected with a form of Gnosticism. John, who wrote Revelation, states in his first epistle there were already many antichrists abroad denying the humanity and the deity of Jesus Christ. Paul, in his last epistle, states all those in Asia had forsaken him ([2 Timothy 1:15](#)). In the light of all of these facts, how can it be argued the church from A.D. 33 to 100 was pure in doctrine and circumspect in behavior?

For those who recognize the unique nature of the Mystery revealed to and through Paul, it seems very unlikely that God would have withheld this truth from the apostle to whom He made known the Mystery. While the word "church" appears in Matthew, early Acts, Hebrews, James, and 3 John, there is nothing said in these references about the church being the subject of the Mystery, the Body of Christ. In fact, in the S Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), from which the New Testament writers often quote, the word "church" (*ecclesia*) occurs dozens of times. The "church of God" is mentioned in [Nehemiah 13:1](#), but this is not the same church of God which Paul speaks of in his epistles. There was no mystery about the word church, but there was a mystery about the church which is the Body of Christ.

When one reads the letters of John to the seven churches and then compares the tone of address to dozens of Old Testament passages, such as [Deuteronomy 4:23-31](#), there appears to be a great similarity. But when these passages are compared with Paul's epistles, Ephesians in particular, one sees a completely different tone. There is no threat of being spewed out of the Lord's mouth, of being cast into great tribulation, or of being given power over the nations to rule them with a rod of iron. Also, there is the anomaly that there were in these seven churches those who claimed to be Jews, but instead were the synagogue of Satan ([Revelation 2:9; 3:9](#)). When Paul said there was neither Jew nor Gentiles in the Body of Christ, would we expect to find people in Paul's churches who were trying to prove they were real Jews?

For the above reasons, some dispensationalists believe these seven epistles are addressed to seven churches which will be established during the future period of the Tribulation. There will be churches on earth after all of the truly saved

members of the Body of Christ are raptured to heaven. There will no doubt be many apostate Protestant, Catholic, and cultist churches in operation during the Tribulation. Besides these, God will miraculously save 144,000 Israelites at the beginning of the Tribulation, and through their ministry God will save a numberless multitude of Gentiles ([Revelation 7:3,4](#) and [9--11](#)). Surely there will be many assemblies or churches of these multitudes of saved people during the Tribulation period. The seven churches of Revelation are thought to be representative of all of the churches of that period. Briefly, this is the view of those who believe the entire book of Revelation is yet future.

All saved people will be taken up in the Rapture, but multitudes who are left on earth will be saved during the Tribulation. However, it appears from [2 Thessalonians 2:9-12](#) that those who had previously heard the gospel and had not received the love of the truth will be given a strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all might be damned, because they believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE ALL FUTURE VIEW

Those who argue for the historical interpretation of the first three chapters of Revelation base their view mainly on the statement in chapter 1:19:

Write the things which thou hast seen [past] and the things which are [present] and the things which shall be hereafter [future Tribulation and kingdom].

Thus it is argued that "the things you have seen" refers to the vision of chapter 1; "the things that are" to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3; and "the things which shall be hereafter" to chapters 4 -- 22. Most English versions give this three-fold division, but the *Companion Bible* translates this verse:

Write therefore what things thou sawest and what they are [i.e., what they signify], even what things are about to happen after these things.

Obviously, a correct interpretation of this verse depends upon its proper translation. However, the Futurist might argue that before John wrote this verse he was already in the Spirit in the day of the Lord (v. 10), so everything following verse 10 takes place in the Day of the Lord, which refers primarily to the Tribulation, the time of Jacob's trouble.

Most Acts 2 dispensationalists interpret "the Lord's Day" of verse 10 to mean Sunday. Christians today may speak of Sunday as the Lord's day, but it is never called by that name in the Bible. Sunday was the day for worshipping the Sun. When the Bible speaks of the day we call Sunday, it always calls it "the first day of the week" (compare [Mark 16:1,2](#); [1 Corinthians 16:2](#)). Revelation 1:10 means that John was transported in spirit into the Day of the Lord, one of the main topics of Old Testament prophecy.

Another argument used to support this view is that these seven churches were in existence in Asia Minor when John wrote, and therefore we must apply the letters to the churches of this dispensation.

Likewise, it is argued the word "church" appears many times in the first three chapters of Revelation, but does not once appear in the remaining chapters which describe the terrible judgments of the Tribulation. This is claimed to be proof that the church is raptured to heaven in [chapter 4:1](#) in the person of John. If John personally represents the entire church being raptured to heaven to escape the Tribulation, how is it we find John back on the earth in the midst of the Tribulation?

And I [John] stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea... (13:1).

The meaning of the symbolic language in this book was explained to John, but there is nothing in the context to explain that John's being called up to heaven is symbolic of the Rapture of the entire Body of Christ.

CHAPTER 4 THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS

Those who believe John's being called up into heaven ([4:1](#)) is symbolic of the Rapture of the Body of Christ argue that the twenty-four elders who worship God and sing the song of redemption are also symbolic of both the Old and New Testament saints who have been raptured. This is a little confusing to have both John personally as well as the twenty-four elders symbolizing the church. Jesus never taught His apostles that they would be caught up before the Tribulation. Instead, He told them in Matthew 24:15:

When you therefore shall see the abomination of desolating, spoken of by Daniel the prophet

They would have to be on earth in the Tribulation to see this. But it is argued that these elders must be representative of redeemed mankind, for they sing the song of redemption, and no redemption has been provided for angels; besides, unfallen angels have no need of redemption. This type of interpretation has overlooked the fact that not only the twenty-four elders sing this song, but it is plainly stated:

The four beasts [cherubim] and the four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb... and THEY sang a new song (4:8,9).

How could these cherubim sing redemption's song? This seeming contradiction is solved by the reading of the Revised Greek text. The Received Greek text, from which the King James version is translated, reads: "And has redeemed US ... and

WE shall reign." The Revised text reads: "And has redeemed MEN... and THEY shall reign."

It must be remembered that the Old Testament tabernacle and worship was patterned after the sanctuary in heaven ([Exodus 25:40](#); [Hebrews 8:5](#); [9:23, 24](#)). Therefore there was a heavenly sanctuary in Moses day. Likewise King David set up twenty-four courses of priests to serve in the sanctuary when the Temple was built by Solomon ([1 Chronicles 28:11-13](#)), which was given him by the Spirit after the pattern of the heavenly sanctuary. These courses were still in place a thousand years later, for the father of John the Baptist belonged to the course of Abia (cf. [1 Chronicles 24:10](#)). Therefore it is apparent that the twenty-four elders which John saw were angelic beings corresponding to the twenty-four priestly courses in the earthly tabernacle and who from of old ministered in heaven in the worship of God.

CHAPTERS 5 -- 19 EVENTS OF THE TRIBULATION PERIOD

Because it is not the purpose of this synopsis to give a detailed exposition of each book, I will simply summarize the contents of the remaining chapters in Revelation.

CHAPTER 5 THE SEVEN SEALED BOOK

God holds in His hands a book (*biblion*) or scroll which is written within and on the back side and sealed with seven seals. John weeps bitterly because no one was found in heaven, nor on earth, nor under the earth who was worthy to open the book and read it. Then one of the twenty-four elders told him to stop weeping, for the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, had prevailed to open the book and loose the seven seals. When John turned to see the Lion he saw a Lamb which had been sacrificed, but the Lamb was alive and standing. There can be no doubt this Lion/Lamb is the Lord Jesus Christ. The fact that one of the elders conveyed this message to John indicates he was not a fellow-member of the Body of Christ. When the Lamb took the book, a great heavenly host numbering one hundred million plus thousands of thousands sang a new song, saying:

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.

And all creatures in the universe joined in the song. Some have called this seven sealed book, the Title Deed to the universe.

CHAPTER 6 THE BREAKING OF THE SEALS

The Lamb breaks the first six seals of the book in rapid succession, each depicting a great event of the Tribulation period. The first four reveal riders on horseback, often referred to as the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

1. Rider on a White Horse -- The coming world ruler who will bring a brief period of peace on earth ([1 Thessalonians 5:3](#)). He is the one prophesied in [Daniel 9:27](#) who will make a covenant with Israel and then break it after three and a half years (contrast with rider in [19:11](#)).

2. Rider on a Red Horse -- This rider takes peace from the earth in a war with much blood shed.

3. Rider on a Black Horse--Brings famine because of war.

4. Rider on a Pale (livid colored) Horse--This rider's name was Death, and Hades (the place of the dead personified) followed with him. He had power to kill one fourth of mankind.

5. The Fifth Seal revealed the souls of those who had been slain for the Word of God, crying for vengeance upon their killers. They were told to rest a short time until their brethren were also killed. These souls had not been resurrected, but they were given white robes, which seems to indicate that disembodied souls have some kind of substantial existence.

6. At the breaking of the Sixth Seal there was a violent earthquake (cf. [Zechariah 14:4,5](#)), followed by stellar phenomena affecting the sun, moon, and stars. The stars which fall to the earth are not the fixed stars we observe at night, as they are millions of times the size of the earth and light-years distant from the earth. They will no doubt be showers of meteorites or asteroids which are in orbit around the sun. All mankind will try to hide themselves from the face of the Lamb, for the day of His wrath has come (compare [Joel 2:30, 31; 3:15, 16; Isaiah 13:9-11; Matthew 24:6-8, 27-31](#)).

CHAPTER 7 INTERLUDE

An angel is seen ascending from the east, having the seal of God. The earth was not to be hurt until he had sealed the servants of God in their foreheads. He sealed twelve thousand of each of the twelve tribes of Israel, a total of 144,000. Some teachers think these converted Israelites will evangelize the world during the Tribulation, but this is not stated in the text. John does see a numberless multitude of Gentiles standing before the throne who were saved out of the great Tribulation. How they were evangelized is not stated.

CHAPTER 8 THE BREAKING OF THE SEVENTH SEAL

7. The breaking of the Seventh Seal -- This is followed by an ominous silence in heaven for one-half hour. This seal introduces a series of seven trumpet judgments. Before the First Trumpet sounds, another angel stood before the altar holding a golden censer, offering much incense with the prayers of the saints of the Tribulation ([Matthew 24:20, 21](#)). When the censer was cast onto the earth, retribution fell upon their persecutors in the trumpet judgments.

CHAPTERS 8 & 9 THE TRUMPET JUDGMENTS

1. The First Trumpet resulted in fire mingled with blood which was cast upon the earth, and which burned up one third of the trees and all of the green grass.

2. At the sounding of the Second Trumpet a great burning mountain was cast into the sea, destroying a third of the fish and the ships therein, and turning a third of the sea into "blood," which might be produced by the chemical reaction of the burning mountain.

3. At the sound of the Third Trumpet a flaming star named Wormwood fell upon the rivers and fountains of water, poisoning them, causing the death of many people.

4. When the Fourth Trumpet sounds, the light of all the heavenly bodies was dimmed by a third, followed by an angel proclaiming:

Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, by reason of the three Trumpets that are yet to sound.

5. The Fifth Trumpet brought the first woe. A star fell from heaven having the key to the Abyss ("deep" in [Luke 8:31](#); [Romans 10:7](#)). When he opened the shaft of the Abyss, great clouds of smoke belched forth horrible creatures called locusts, but their bodies were like horses prepared for battle, with faces of men, hair like that of women, teeth like those of a lion, breastplates of iron, and stings like those of scorpions. They were commanded not to hurt any vegetation, but to torment for a period of five months all who did not have the seal of God in their foreheads. The torment will be so great that people will try to kill themselves, but they will not be able to do so. The locusts have a king named Abaddon in Hebrew, or Apollyon (destroyer) in Greek.

6. At the sound of the Sixth Trumpet, four angels were loosed which had been bound by the Euphrates River, the northern boundary of the Promised Land ([Genesis 15:18](#)). The loosing of the angels was minutely planned to the hour, day,

month, and year, to slay a third part of mankind. An army of 200,000,000 from the north invades Israel's land. These warriors are somewhat similar in appearance to the locusts in the first woe. In spite of the severity of these judgments the earth-dwellers refuse to repent.

CHAPTER 10 INTERLUDE

This chapter after the Sixth Trumpet is parenthetical, just as chapter 7 was after the Sixth Seal. John sees another mighty angel come down with a small open book in his hand, who swears by the Creator that "time should be no longer." This does not mean chronological time would cease to exist, for much time is mentioned in the remainder of the book, but rather that there would be no longer any delay in the days of the voice of the seventh angel. When he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God will be finished. There is a mystery concerning God's reason for permitting sin and death to enter His universe which we cannot understand. But God is going to bring an end to this so that all will finally see His wisdom, justice, and reason for His plan of the ages. This mystery of iniquity has nothing to do with the Mystery revealed to the apostle Paul.

John is told to take the little book from the angel and to eat it (compare [Ezekiel 2:8,9](#); [3:1-3](#)). It tastes sweet to his mouth, but became sour in his stomach. The Word is good news to the saved but bad news to the unsaved.

John is told to measure the Temple, but the actual size is not given (compare [2 Chronicles 3](#) and [Ezekiel 40](#) where the size of Solomon's and the Millennial Temple are given). The important measurement is time, for "the times of the Gentiles" are to end in forty-two months. These times began with Nebuchadnezzar and will continue until the end of the Tribulation. Compare these times, when Jerusalem is trodden under the foot of the Gentiles ([Luke 21:24](#)), with what Paul calls "the fullness of the Gentiles" ([Romans 11:25](#)), which speaks of the full number of Gentiles to be saved in the present Dispensation of the Grace of God, and which will end at the Rapture.

The seven year Tribulation is divided into two equal parts of 1260 days, or forty-two months. During one of these periods God will have two witnesses in Jerusalem who will have power to bring famine and plagues upon the earth. They are called the two olive trees and the two lampstands. Zechariah (chapter 4) had a similar vision in his day where Joshua and Zerubbabel are two witnesses. John does not name the witnesses in Revelation, but speculations are they will be Enoch and Elijah because these two never died, or perhaps Moses and Elijah because of similar miraculous deeds between them and the two witnesses in Revelation. Finally, the Beast who ascends out of the Abyss will kill them and their dead bodies will lie in the streets of Jerusalem, spiritually called Sodom and Egypt. The followers of the Beast will celebrate their death for three and a half days, at which time the Spirit of God enters their dead bodies and causes them to stand up and

ascend to heaven. At the same hour there will be a great earthquake which will kill 7,000 people and destroy a tenth of the city.

7. The sounding of the Seventh Trumpet -- [11:15](#). Great voices are heard in heaven saying:

The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever.

This seems to bring us to the end of the Tribulation, although there are still eight chapters of events yet to come before the Second Coming. The Seventh Seal, the Seventh Trumpet, and the Seventh Bowl all seem to occur at the end of the Tribulation ([6:16, 17](#); [10:15](#); [19:11](#)).

It is generally believed among dispensationalists that a great world ruler will come to power at the beginning of the Tribulation, who, after bringing peace to the whole world, will make a pact with the nation of Israel. After three and one-half years he will break this covenant with the Jews, claim to be God, and try to destroy Israel. He will have a False Prophet, described in chapter 13. One of these Beasts will be the Antichrist ([1 John 4:3](#)), although that expression does not occur here. Some suppose the Antichrist will be an apostate Jew who claims to be the Jewish Messiah. But since anti means against, others think Antichrist will simply be a powerful world leader who will lead a worldwide rebellion against Christ.

CHAPTERS 12 & 13 THE SEVEN ACTORS OF THE TRIBULATION PERIOD

These chapters present a great drama. The actors include a **pregnant woman** clothed with the sun with the moon under her feet and wearing a crown of twelve stars, and a **red dragon** having seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his head, whose tail drew a third of the stars and cast them to the earth. The dragon stood ready to devour the child as soon as it was born. The woman gave birth to a **male child** who was destined to rule all nations with a rod of iron. The Child was caught up to heaven and the woman fled into the wilderness, where God had prepared a haven for her for 1260 days. This protection for the remnant of Israel is predicted as far back as [Isaiah 26:17-21](#). The Child, of course, is Jesus Christ. Nothing is said about His death and resurrection here. Satan, the Dragon, has been persecuting Israel through history, but finally war breaks out in heaven between Satan and his angels and **Michael** and his angels. Defeated, Satan and his hosts are cast out of heaven and confined to the earth. This takes place in the Tribulation when Satan comes down in great wrath, knowing his days are numbered. As the woman flees from him he spews out water as a flood to drown her, but the earth helps her by opening its mouth and swallowing the flood. Satan makes war with the **woman's seed** who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Satan embodies himself in two men, the **Beast** and the **False Prophet**. One is a political leader, the other a religious leader. John beholds the first as coming up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten crowned horns. This Beast is the one described in [Daniel 7:7,8](#) and is usually understood to represent the revived Roman Empire. A careful study of the book of Daniel is essential to understanding this section of Revelation. Although Paul's special ministry was preaching Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the Mystery ([Romans 16:25](#)), he also taught about the Tribulation and the Kingdom. He calls this Beast:

The man of sin, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all this is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God (1 Thessalonians 2:3-4; also vv. 9-13).

The second Beast comes up out of the land, which leads some to believe he will be a Jew. He has power to do great miracles, apparently to even give life to an image of the first beast. He legislates that no one can buy or sell unless he worships the first Beast and receives the mark or the name of the Beast, or the number of his name, six hundred threescore and six; the infamous 666.

CHAPTER 14 THE 144,000 ON MOUNT ZION

In contrast with the followers of the Beast with his number in their foreheads, we see the 144,000 again with the Lamb with the name of His Father written in their foreheads. They were standing on Mt. Zion, which is the city of David on the south side of Jerusalem. This vision seems to anticipate the Second Coming. Christ is standing on earth with them. They apparently go through the Tribulation without suffering martyrdom. While they are on earth, the music and the voices come from the throne in heaven.

Next an angel flies in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those of all nations that dwell upon the earth. The view has been expressed that the 144,000 will evangelize the world, although this is not so stated by John. Alternatively, it may be the great multitude of Gentiles who are saved during the Tribulation will be saved through this angelic evangelist. This is the only place the gospel is qualified by the word "everlasting."

A second angel announces that Babylon has fallen, and a third one pronounces doom upon the worshipers of the beast and the blessedness of the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth.

Finally, John saw One like the Son of man sitting on a white cloud with a sickle in his hand. He is told the earth is ripe for harvest and he thrust in his sickle and reaped the earth. Another angel also came with a sharp sickle and gathered the

vine of the earth and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God which was trodden outside the city, and the blood came out rising to the height of a horse's bridle for a distance of about 180 miles. It is difficult to imagine how many millions of people would have to be slaughtered to produce a river of blood that deep and that long. It may mean blood will be spattered on everything to that depth. It will surely be a terrible carnage. We are reminded of Isaiah's description of Messiah's treading the winepress with garments spattered with the blood of His enemies ([Isaiah 63:1-6](#)).

CHAPTERS 15 & 16 THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES

Chapter fifteen introduces the seven last plagues which fill up or complete God's wrath. But before the seven angels are handed the bowls or vials of wrath there is a beautiful scene of those who had gotten victory over the Beast. They were singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb:

Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.

Then the temple of the tabernacle in heaven is opened and one of the living creatures gives the golden bowls full of the wrath of God to the angels.

1. The First Vial produced ugly and painful sores on all who worshipped the Beast.

2. The Second Vial is poured upon the sea, which becomes blood as of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.

3. The Third Vial is poured upon the rivers and fountains of water and they became blood. Then an angel of the waters justified God in His judgments, "for they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou has given them blood to drink."

4. The Fourth Vial is poured upon the sun, causing people to be scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed God, and repented not to give God glory.

5. The Fifth Vial is poured upon the throne of the Beast, and his kingdom became darkened and people gnawed their tongues in pain.

6. The Sixth Vial, is poured upon the great river Euphrates, and the waters were dried up, opening up the way for the kings of the east to invade.

Before the Seventh Vial John sees unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouths of the dragon and the beast and the false prophet. These spirits are

miracle-working demons sent forth to the rulers of the earth to gather them to the battle of God Almighty; Armageddon.

7. The Seventh Vial is poured out into the air, and a great voice came out of the temple of heaven, declaring, "It is done!" There are shoutings, thunders, lightnings, and the most severe earthquake in the history of man. The cities of the nations fell, and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Huge hail stones weighing about one hundred pounds each added to the devastation, causing the ungodly to blaspheme all the more.

CHAPTERS 17 & 18 THE FALL OF BABYLON

Babylon, mentioned previously in chapter [14:8](#) and [16:19](#), now comes into full view. The name appears hundreds of times in the Old Testament (160 times in Jeremiah alone). Here Babylon is represented as a great prostitute riding on the back of the scarlet colored Beast, namely, the anti-Christ world ruler who has a mysterious name written on her forehead: "Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots (*pornon*) and Abominations of the Earth." She is the world apostate religious system, drunk with the blood of the martyrs, supported by the Beast during the first half of the Tribulation. Many details about the Beast and the woman will become clear when the fulfillment occurs. The Beast will turn on the woman and destroy her.

Another mighty angel shouts from heaven, "Babylon the great has fallen." God's people are warned to come out of her. The merchants, ship owners, and the rich lament for her when they see the smoke of her burning. This indicates that Babylon in this chapter is viewed more as a commercial center of world trade. The eternal doom of Babylon is announced as an angel takes up a stone like a mighty millstone and casts it into the sea, causing Babylon never to be seen again.

CHAPTER 19:1-10 THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB

The Tribulation is over. There is great praise and honor and glory. The exclamation is:

Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

The marriage of the Lamb is announced. The Lamb's wife has made herself ready. We do not believe the wife represents the church of our present dispensation. It was not given to John to reveal the mystery of the church. The wife is surely not the twenty-four elders. The wife is described ([chapter 21:9-14](#)) as the great City, the New Jerusalem, with the names of the Twelve Tribes of Israel written on its gates, and the names of the Twelve Apostles on its foundations.

Does it not seem strange, if God made Paul the revelator of the church and used him to establish the church in the world and made him author of all the epistles to the church, that God would not even mention his name in the alleged grand consummation of the church? In a sense we are already married to Christ in a personal relationship ([Romans 7:4](#)). Corporately, as the church, we are the Body of Christ. The church and Israel are two distinct groups of the redeemed. Israel is going to be betrothed to the Lord in the future ([Hosea 2:19-23](#); [Isaiah 54:5](#)). Will Christ have two wives, Israel and the church?

CHAPTER 19:11-21 THE SECOND COMING AND ARMAGEDDON

At the Second Coming of Christ to earth, He comes riding a white horse, His clothing dipped in blood. He comes to judge and make war. He leads the armies of heaven into the great Battle of Armageddon. The Beast and the False Prophet are captured and cast alive into the Lake of Fire burning with brimstone. This is all in direct contrast to what happens at the Rapture. There is no Rapture at the Second Coming recorded in Revelation.

CHAPTER 20

Satan is bound with a great chain and is cast into the Abyss for one thousand years so that he cannot deceive the nations of the earth during the Millennium which follows. The souls of the martyrs are raised bodily to reign with Christ. Although they are not mentioned here, we know from the Old Testament the saints of that period will also be raised at the end of the Tribulation ([Daniel 13:1,2](#)). This is called the first resurrection of prophecy. Members of the Body of Christ will be resurrected and caught up several years before this first resurrection. The Rapture-resurrection is a secret truth not revealed in prophecy ([1 Corinthians 15:51, 52](#)).

Satan is loosed at the end of the Millennium, deceives those among the nations who have been born during that time, and leads a revolt against the beloved city. Fire falls from heaven and destroys his army. Then he is cast into the Lake of Fire, where the Beast and the False Prophet are, and will be tormented for ever and ever.

Then the resurrection of the unjust will occur and all the remainder of the dead will stand before the Great White Throne to be judged according to their works. Whosoever is not found written in the book of life was cast into the Lake of Fire. This is the second death.

CHAPTERS 21 & 22

The old heavens and earth are going to be incinerated ([2 Peter 3:10-13](#)). God will create a new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness. There

will be no more tears or death, sorrow or suffering, crying or pain. All things will be new.

John is then shown that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. It is in the form of a cube, 12,000 furlongs or 1,500 miles in each direction. The city is made of pure gold, with twelve foundations of precious gemstones bearing the names of the twelve apostles. There are twelve gates, each made of a single pearl, bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Twelve angels guard the twelve gates. Israel's number twelve, as well as the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, is stamped on everything in the city. There is no reference to the church, the Body of Christ. How, then, can many dispensationalists who distinguish between Israel and the church, contend that this city, which is the Bride, the Lamb's wife, is the church?

It is difficult to visualize a city in the form a huge cube. Just where would the walls be or where would the gates lead to? The city is made of pure gold, and yet there is a river flowing through it and trees growing. The river originates at the throne of God, but nothing is said of where it empties. There will be no need of the light of the sun or moon, for the glory of God will lighten it, and there will no night. We are not told how time will be reckoned, except that we are told the tree of life will bear twelve kinds of fruit every month.

The city comes out of heaven, so the city is not heaven, and neither is it the renewed earth. Some think it will rest upon the earth, but it is difficult to visualize this object reaching up 1,500 miles into the air. Others suppose the city will be more like a satellite above the earth. The kings of the earth will bring their glory and honor into the city, so there must be some means of travel between the earth and the gates of the city.

There is doubtless a great deal of symbolism in the description of the city. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it. Will this throne be a different one from that which is in heaven, where God now is and where Christ is at God's right hand?

The question naturally arises, if the Body of Christ is not mentioned in relation to this city, where will the church be in eternity? It is certain we will be with the Lord forever ([1 Thessalonians 4:17](#)). Since our citizenship is in heaven, we believe we will be in heaven with the Lord. But when our Lord leaves heaven and comes to earth to reign on David's throne for one thousand years, will we be left in heaven, or will we return with Him?

One of our problems with such questions is that we know very little about the nature of the spiritual creation, and we try to impose on it the laws of the material creation. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body ([1 Corinthians 15:44](#)), and they are different. Christ's resurrection body could pass through walls and locked doors ([John 20:19](#)). He ascended into heaven without the aid of a rocket, and passed through the extreme cold of vacuous space without the protection of a space suit. And how far up did He go? Where is heaven? About the only answer

the Bible gives is that it is "up." But up at the North Pole is the opposite direction from up at the South Pole. And where do the unsaved go? They are always said to go down to the pit ([Job 17:16](#)). Christ descended into the lower pan of the earth after His death ([Ephesians 4:9](#)). There are those under the earth who will some day bow their knee to Christ ([Philippians 2:10](#)). Man can look up millions of light-years into space without seeing the throne of God, and he can drill holes miles deep into the earth without running into hell. Paul tells us in Ephesians that Satan and his hosts are waging war against us in the heavenly places, and yet he is the Prince of the Power of the Air ([Ephesians 4:12; 2:2](#)). At the Rapture it is not said we will meet the Lord in heaven, but in the air. Are all of these places and directions purely unscientific, poetic, figurative language, or could they actually mean literally what they say?

There is a real, substantial spiritual world which is invisible to the human [eye \(2 Corinthians 4:12\)](#). God is invisible ([Colossians 1:15, 16; 1 Timothy 1:17; Hebrews 11:27](#)). If we could have our eyes opened to see the unseen world as Elisha's servants eyes were opened ([2 Kings 6:15,16](#)), what wonders would we see? The fact we cannot see God or His heaven is not because they are so far away, but because our physical senses cannot see the realities of the spiritual world.

Heaven may exist in close proximity to earth. Even in our material creation there are a number of unseen things which exist in the same space: various gaseous elements, magnetic lines of force, gravity, heat, electromagnetic waves, electricity. Modern science tells us there is so much space between the individual atoms of our bodies that cosmic rays can pass through our bodies without striking a single molecule. So it is possible, when we receive our resurrection bodies with eyes that can see the spiritual world, that heaven and earth and the New Jerusalem may not be so far apart as we sometimes imagine, and there may be no problem with our being in heaven with the Lord while He is reigning over the earth in the Millennium. As joint members of His body and joint heirs of Christ, we will share in all the riches of His glory in the ages to come.

THE LAST CHAPTER

Revelation ends with an invitation, a warning, and a prayer. The invitation is:

Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

The warning is against any who would add to or take from the words of the prophecy of this book. The prayer is:

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

The Rapture will not solve any of the world's problems, but will rather increase them. But the personal Second Coming of Christ will solve all of earth's problems.

The Devil will be put in prison, the unrepentant, ungodly sinners will be destroyed, the curse will be lifted from nature, and a government of absolute righteousness will be established. While we, as members of the Body of Christ, will realize our blessed hope when we are raptured to be with Christ, we ought also to join in the prayer for the Lord Jesus to return to earth to put an end to the suffering and injustice of this present evil age.