



THE TWO-FOLD PURPOSE OF GOD

C. R. STAM

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By

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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever noticed the wording of the majestic statement with which the Bible opens?

“In the beginning God created the HEAVEN and the EARTH.” (Gen. 1:1).

It does not say that God created "the universe," but *"the heaven"* and *"the earth."*

This is because God had a special purpose for the earth quite distinct from His purpose for the rest of the universe. This purpose concerning the earth and the nations to dwell upon it is progressively revealed in the Scripture. We look forward to its glorious consummation when *"the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea"*-when the Christ who was crucified here shall come into His right, reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords.

But God also had a very special purpose concerning *heaven* which He kept hidden in His own heart of love until man's sin and rebellion had reached its climax. Then He stooped down, saved the "chief of sinners" and used him to make known the wondrous secret of His purpose to offer to sinners everywhere, salvation by grace through faith alone, reconciling them to Himself in one body by the cross and giving them a present position and a future prospect in the highest heavens.

God's purpose concerning the *earth* and Christ's reign upon it is the subject of *"prophecy."* (II Pet. 1:16-19). His purpose concerning *heaven* and our exaltation there with Christ is the subject of *"the mystery."* (Eph. 2:4-10, 3:1-4). Into these two great subjects the Scriptures are basically divided.

Those who would "rightly divide the Word of truth" must begin here. The primary division of Scripture is *not* between the Old and New Testaments, nor between law and grace, nor between prophecy and its fulfillment, but between *prophecy* and *the mystery-that* which was *"spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began"* and that which was *"kept secret since the world began"* until revealed through the Apostle Paul.

Those who would work for God must see this division clearly or they will never be really competent to proclaim *God's message for today* - that which Paul, by the Spirit, calls *"my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ ACCORDING TO THE REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY."*

But while there is a *distinction* between these two purposes, there is also a *connection*, for the prophetic program could not be fulfilled until the mystery had been revealed.. We find much gospel (good news) in the prophetic Word but not until Paul do we learn *"the secret of the gospel."* (Eph. 6:19, 20.)

And the connection between prophecy and the mystery is even more vital than this for *both purposes center in Christ*. While *prophecy* centers in Christ as King of Israel and the world, the *mystery* centers in Christ as the glorious Head of the Body, God's heavenly people.

The great two-fold purpose of God will not have been accomplished until all heaven and earth have been gathered together as one in Christ.

"In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace;

Wherein He hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

"Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself:

"That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in Heaven and which are on earth; even in Him." (Eph. 1:7-10).

**CORNELIUS R. STAM,
Milwaukee, June 24, 1947.**

The Two-fold Purpose of the Incarnation

THE INCARNATION AND PROPHECY

A MARRIAGE IN JUDAEA

Faith and hope were fading.

Many glowing promises had been made concerning a coming Redeemer, yes, but what had become of them?

The prophets, one after another, had prophesied of Messiah and the glories of His kingdom, but it was nearly four hundred years now since the voice of the last one had died away and still there was little indication that all these promises were any nearer fulfillment.

Then, one day, something interesting took place in the land of [Judaea](#). It was a wedding in which a Judaeen priest named *Zacharias* was married to a woman named *Elisabeth*.

A striking combination this, for Zacharias means "Jehovah hath remembered," while *Elisabeth* means "God is Swearer." Hence every time the Judaeen priest and his bride were mentioned by name it was stated again that God had sworn and He would not forget.

To believing hearts Zacharias and Elisabeth were living reminders of a fact supported, even then, by an overwhelming volume of evidence that God is faithful and keeps His promises.

Zacharias and Elisabeth were a godly couple and their having thus been brought together may well have encouraged them to greater faith and even to hope that through them the fulfillment of God's promises might be furthered. (See [Luke 1:6,13](#)).

If so, their faith and hope were to be tested too, for as Israel had waited long for Messiah's appearing, so this couple had to wait long and seemingly in vain for the babe for which they had so earnestly prayed. They "*had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.*" ([Luke 1:7](#)).

Then another striking thing happened which proved that the marriage of Zacharias to Elisabeth had been more than a mere co-incidence.

As Zacharias burned incense in the temple, one day, the angel Gabriel appeared to him with the announcement that his wife was to bear him a son - a son who should turn out to be no one less than *the forerunner of Messiah*.

This seemed too much for Zacharias to believe, even in the presence of an angel.

"And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.

"And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God: and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings.

"And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.

"And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple.

"And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless." (Luke 1:18-22).

JOHN THE BAPTIST BORN

In due time the babe was born.

"And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people,

"And hath raised up as horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David;

"As He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began:

"That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;

"To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant.

"The oath which He swore to our father Abraham,

"That He would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear,

"In holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life.

"And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways."(Luke 1:67-76).

PROPHETIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INCARNATION

In this inspired utterance Zacharias summed up exactly what the Old Testament prophets had predicted as to the significance of Messiah's coming.

Son of David as well as Son of God, He was coming to redeem His people Israel and fulfill God's great covenant with Abraham to bless Israel and make her a blessing to the world.

It will be noticed that besides the name of Christ, two other names are prominently mentioned here - David and Abraham. Nor are they mentioned merely in a casual way. Indeed, these two names are so closely bound up with Messiah's coming and kingdom, that the very opening words of the New Testament read:

"The book of the generation of JESUS CHRIST, the son of DAVID, the son of ABRAHAM." (Matt. 1:1).

The reason for this is that the kingdom had been promised to David's seed and the land to Abraham's seed and to redeem the inheritance for Israel Christ must be the Son of *both*. (See [II Sam. 7:12-16](#), [Gen. 15:18](#)).

It will be further noticed that all here has to do with the *earth* - *not heaven*.

According to prophecy God's ancient people were to be gathered to their promised *land* ([Ezek. 37:14,21](#)) and exalted above the *nations* ([Isa. 2:1-2](#)) with Messiah as their *King* ([Zeph. 3:15](#)) and through them all nations of the *earth* were to be blessed. ([Zech. 8:13](#), [Mal. 3:12](#)).

The prophets had said nothing whatever of Christ bringing His people to heaven. They had predicted His coming to *earth* to reign over them.

Isaiah had said,

"Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is. GOD WITH US." Matt. 1:23).

Jeremiah, too, had described Him as the God-man to reign on earth:

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice IN THE EARTH.

"In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is the name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." (Jer. 23:5,6).

True, the King from heaven and the kingdom of heaven have since been rejected and the fulfillment of the prophetic program had been held in abeyance while God unfolds the mystery of His purpose and grace, but let us not read Ephesians into Isaiah or even into Matthew, or we will confuse prophecy with the mystery - what had been predicted with what had been kept secret.

The Son of God had come according to prophecy, as the Son of David and of Abraham, in order to reign in glory over Israel and the world. His being stricken for the transgression of His people ([Isa. 53:8](#)). His bearing away the sin of the world ([John 1:29](#)), His crushing the head of the serpent ([Gen. 3:15](#)) all form part of this great prophetic purpose.

This is why the angel said to Mary,

"the Lord GOD shall give Unto Him THE THRONE OF HIS FATHER DAVID" (Luke 1:32).

This is why the angels proclaimed,

"Glory to God in the highest, and ON EARTH peace, good will toward men." (Luke 2:14).

This is why our Lord Himself said,

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit THE EARTH." (Matt. 5:5).

This is why He taught His disciples to pray,

"Thy kingdom COME. Thy will be done IN EARTH, as it is in heaven." (Matt. 6:10).

This is why He promised the twelve,

"...ye also shall Sit upon twelve thrones, JUDGING THE TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL." (Matt. 19:28).

This is why God moved Pilate to write over the Crucified,

"THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS." (Matt. 27:37).

This is why Peter, by the Holy Spirit, made this proposition to Christ's rejectors:

"REPENT ... THE TIMES OF REFRESHING SHALL COME FROM THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD; AND HE SHALL SEND JESUS CHRIST, WHICH BEFORE WAS PREACHED UNTO YOU." (Acts 3:19,20).

THE INCARNATION AND THE MYSTERY

Not until we open our Bibles to the epistles of Paul do we find another and greater purpose in the incarnation-a purpose which had been kept secret since the world began.

That God the Son should become one with the human race was in itself, of course, no secret. The prophets had, as we have seen, predicted this.

But the prophetic purpose in the incarnation was that the Son of God might ultimately reign over Israel and bring peace and blessing to the world, while the *secret* purpose had to do with the world's rejection of Christ and was only made known when Israel turned in rebellion against her risen, glorified Messiah.

To understand it we must first see how completely our Lord was identified with the human race.

HIS BAPTISM INTO HUMANITY

"THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH..." (John 1:14).

"AND WITHOUT CONTROVERSY GREAT IS THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS: GOD WAS MANIFEST IN THE FLESH . (I Tim. 3:16).

"FOR VERILY HE TOOK NOT ON HIM THE NATURE OF ANGELS: BUT HE TOOK ON HIM THE SEED OF ABRAHAM." (Heb. 2:16).

See Him! - God the Son, Creator of all, born as a tiny babe under the rule of a great Roman emperor.

Man had, at the first, been made in God's glorious likeness, but had fallen through sin. Now the Son of God comes down "in *the likeness of sinful flesh.*" Note: only in the *likeness* of sinful flesh. As man had once been made in the likeness of God so God was now made in the likeness of man - sin apart. He did not take part in man's iniquities but He partook of his *infirmities*. He was *true man*. One whole

book of the Bible, the Gospel according to Luke, the beloved physician, was written to set forth this wonderful fact.

Our Lord's baptism with water was part of His complete identification with man.

Water baptism was the outward expression of the psalmist's cry:

"WASH ME THOROUGHLY FROM MINE INIQUITY, AND CLEANSE ME FROM MY SIN. FOR I ACKNOWLEDGE MY TRANSGRESSIONS: AND MY SIN IS EVER BEFORE ME." (Psa. 51:2,3).

This is why we read in Mark 1:4 that John preached "THE BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS." And this is why the multitudes "*were baptized of him in Jordan, CONFESSING THEIR SINS.*" (Matt. 3:6).

But what is this?

"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John to be baptized of Him." (Matt. 3:13).

Did He have sins to confess? Did He need cleansing? Certainly not. Hear John protest: "*I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?*" (Matt. 3:14).

Why then did He come to be baptized? His own answer will explain:

"THUS IT BECOMETH US TO FULFIL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS."

As Isaiah had prophesied, "*He was numbered with the transgressors.*" More than that: As Paul later taught, by the Holy Spirit, He was *made one* with the transgressors. There He came as a guilty sinner to the baptismal waters - coming *as us*.

And He did not stop there. See him before Caiaphas and Pilate, the Jewish and Gentile judges, charged with sins He had never committed.

"AND THE HIGH PRIEST AROSE, AND SAID UNTO HIM, ANSWEREST THOU NOTHING? WHAT IS IT WHICH THESE WITNESS AGAINST THEE? BUT JESUS HELD HIS PEACE..." (Matt. 26:62,63).

"THEN SAID PILATE UNTO HIM, HEAREST THOU NOT HOW MANY THINGS THEY WITNESS AGAINST THEE?

"AND HE ANSWERED HIM TO NEVER A WORD; INSOMUCH THAT THE GOVERNOR MARVELLED GREATLY." (Matt. 27:13,14).

Why did He stand there speechless? Why did He not answer His accusers? Ah, He *could* not answer. He stood there guilty and condemned because He stood there *as us*. Had they charged Him that day with every sin which you and I have ever committed, He would still have remained speechless, for the Creator had become one with His fallen creatures to take the blame for all their sins. It was part of His baptism into the human race.

And this is not all.

HIS BAPTISM INTO OUR DEATH

Sometime after He had been baptized with water He said,

"But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened until it be accomplished." (Luke 12:50).

He referred, of course, to His baptism of death on the cross, for in Mark 10:38 we find Him asking two of his disciples, "*Can ye ... be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?*"

He could not become one of us in our *sinning* (or He could not have paid for our sins) but that was not necessary for full identification. Our sins are but the *fruit* - the outward thing. But He was made *sin* for us. (II Cor. 5:21). He came to be baptized of John, stood before Jew and Gentile (whom He could have condemned!) as a guilty one and was finally *nailed* to a *cross to die as a criminal in agony and shame*. So fully did He identify Himself with sinful man.

OUR BAPTISM INTO CHRIST

The fuller, deeper meaning of our Lord's identification with humanity is explained for us by the Apostle Paul, to whom was revealed the mystery of God's purpose and grace.

The Son of God became the Son of man that the sons of men might become the sons of God. He partook of humanity so that we might be eternally and inseparably united with Him.

"FOR YE ARE ALL THE CHILDREN OF GOD BY FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS.

"FOR AS MANY OF YOU AS HAVE BEEN BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST HAVE PUT ON CHRIST." (Gal. 3:26,27).

How disappointing it is to find so many of God's people injecting water into this verse and so missing the whole point of the precious passage.

They suppose that the baptism here referred to must mean *water* baptism, yet the passage itself insists that this baptism into Christ is effected by *faith*, not water, and that by it Christ is *put on*.

Just as surely as Christ became one with the sinner, so surely the sinner who believes becomes one with Christ.

***"For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones."
(Eph. 5:30).***

But how is this brought about?

OUR BAPTISM INTO HIS DEATH

"KNOW YE NOT THAT SO MANY OF US AS WERE BAPTIZED INTO JESUS CHRIST WERE BAPTIZED INTO HIS DEATH?" (Rom. 6:3).

*"The wages of sin is death." (Rom. 6:23). "Sin when it is finished bringeth forth death." (Jas. 1:15). Did Christ sin? No, but He died. Whose death, then, did He die? Not His own, surely, but yours and mine. When we see this and accept it by faith; when we exclaim with Paul, "He loved me and gave Himself for me;" when we cry, "Lord Jesus, that death was not Thy due, but mine," the Holy Spirit seals the transaction and we become identified with Christ; *baptized into* His death; *baptized into* Himself.*

The cross is ever the meeting place. When we acknowledge His death as *ours*, the penalty for *our* sins, we are baptized, by faith, into His death and so into Christ Himself. Not until we have looked in faith to Calvary can we say with Paul, "I AM CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST".

A STRIKING ANALOGY

How did the Son of God become the Son of man? *How* was He baptized into the human race?

To this question we can only answer that He was begotten of the Holy Spirit. (Luke 1:35). His was a supernatural birth. He was not begotten by the will of man, but from above.

And so it is with our baptism into Christ. It too, is entirely the work of the Holy Spirit. The second birth is supernatural. We are begotten from above, by the grace and power of God.

The incarnation, then, finds its counterpart in our identification with the blessed Son of God.

True, He came as the Son of man to sit on the throne of David and bring peace and blessing to this world, but God has reserved a special blessing for those who trust Him now, in this time of His rejection - a blessing not possible, had our Lord not become one with us in incarnation. To the simplest believer in "this present evil age" goes the high honor of a position in Christ, at the Father's right hand. By grace he is *"accepted in the Beloved"* and *"complete in Him."*

"Now we see not yet all things put under Him.

"But we see Jesus, who was made [for] a little [while] lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man." (Heb. 2:8,9.)

Yes, dear reader, and for you; that you might be *"crucified with Christ"* (Gal. 2:20), *"buried with Him"* (Col. 2:12), *"quickened together with Him"* (Col. 2:13), *"risen with Him"* (Col. 2:12), *"made to sit together in heavenly places"* (Eph. 2:6), and *"blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."* (Eph. 1:3).

The Two-fold Purpose of the Crucifixion

How easily an unscriptural notion can become a deep-rooted tradition! And how certainly any unscriptural tradition will warp our viewpoint and hinder us from clearly understanding God's purposes and dispensations!

One such unscriptural notion is the idea that the Old Testament saints and even those living from Adam to Moses were saved by faith in the death of a coming Christ.

This idea, in one form or another has been so often repeated that it has come to be accepted as Bible truth, yet it is wholly unsupported by Scripture, indeed is definitely and conclusively denied by Scripture.

If this assertion shocks some of our readers let us remember that such shocks are sometimes needed to drive us to the Scriptures again to examine the foundations of our beliefs.

Let us not be misunderstood, however. We fully agree that it is *now* known that the saints of old were saved by the merits of Christ. The point is that this was *not manifested* until due time. Saints who lived before Calvary were not saved by *faith in* the shed blood of Christ as we are today, for not until Paul did the world hear what is called "*the preaching of the cross.*"

Simply because Paul declares in I Cor. 15:3 that "Christ died for our sins *according to the Scriptures,*" many have concluded that the Old Testament saints trusted in His death for salvation, but this is *reading into* the passage something which it does not say, nor is there any warrant for this assumption in the Old Testament itself.

What Paul says here is simply that Christ's death for our sins was in accordance with Scripture, not that faith in Christ's death was offered or even prophesied as a means of salvation in Old Testament times, much less that Old Testament saints were saved by faith in the shed blood.

Furthermore, we should not overlook what Paul says about this "gospel ... that Christ died for our sins." He calls it "*the gospel which I preached unto you*" and adds "*I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received.*"

His presentation of the cross was part of the special revelation given to him by the glorified Lord and was distinct from that which the twelve had preached but it did not *conflict* with - was rather in accordance with the prophetic Scriptures.

THE CRUCIFIXION AND PROPHECY

It is very difficult to keep most students of the Bible from anticipating revelation. They read Paul's epistles into the Old Testament, as though Abraham and Moses and David must have understood what was later revealed about Christ.

ABRAHAM

Some will come forward, for example, with John 8:56 and offer that as proof that Abraham understood all about Christ and His finished work. We quote it:

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad."

This Scripture neither says nor implies that Abraham understood anything about the finished work of Christ and this idea should not be read into the passage.

But, it is argued, when Abraham and others offered blood sacrifices they most have understood that these sacrifices were types of Christ. Our answer is that this again is *reading into* the Scriptures, for the Word itself says nothing of the kind. Search and see.

MOSES

In one of a series of open discussions on this: question a pastor rose to ask the writer whether it was possible that God had given to Moses all the directions for the building of tabernacle with its great "door", its brazen golden altars, its laver, its golden lampstands table of showbread, its exquisite curtains and its ark of the covenant, *without explaining to him that these things were symbolic of person and work of Christ*. We replied that was not only possible but very evident from the record.

Since *he* believed that God *at that time* revealed the typical significance of these things we asked him to give us one Scripture to prove his point. The pastor sat down again for he had no Scripture to offer, yet if his argument had been sound we should expect to find explaining to Moses with every new piece furniture how it spoke of the coming Christ. But instead the silence as to this is profound and unbroken.

THE PROPHETS

Another pastor asked whether it was not evident that the prophets must have understood, since in their own writings we find such passages as Isaiah 53. We replied, and reply again, that it is plain they did *not* understand.

Isaiah 53 is a prophetic utterance. He wrote as he was moved by the Holy Spirit and did not necessarily understand what he wrote. Indeed, I Pet. 1:10,11

states clearly that the prophets did *not* understand their own prophecies concerning the sufferings and glory of Christ. There we read that they "INQUIRED AND SEARCHED DILIGENTLY,"

"Searching WHAT, or WHAT MANNER OF TIME the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."

Mark well; they did not only inquire and search as to the *time* in which these things should take place, but also as to WHAT the Spirit which was in them signified when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow.

Could anything be plainer? According to this passage they did not know what the Spirit meant by the prophecies of Christ's sufferings and glory, and were told they could not know, since they were ministering to a future generation. (See [1 Peter 1:12](#)).

But let us pause here to consider Isaiah 53, for from here on the prophetic purpose of the crucifixion becomes steadily clearer.

ISAIAH FIFTY-THREE

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." (Isa. 53:6).

Some time ago we heard a dear Christian worker comment on the above passage, saying, "If you will go in at the first 'all' you can come out at the last," explaining that "all" meant "everybody" and that while *all* had gone astray, thank God Christ died for *all*.

It is true that NOW we may say that God in grace has also laid *our* iniquities upon Christ, but to teach that Isaiah in this passage actually referred to the laying of our sins upon Christ would be very poor exegesis indeed, for a glance at the context will reveal that he spoke exclusively as a Hebrew prophet. When he says "All *we* ... have gone astray," the just and careful interpreter of Scripture will next ask "All *who*?" The plain answer will be found not only in the prophecy as a whole but even in the immediate context, for in verse 8 he makes it clear that he refers to his own nation when he says,

"For the transgression of MY PEOPLE was he stricken."

Moreover, the *tone* of Isaiah 53 must not be overlooked. The prophet does not *offer* salvation through the Crucified as it is our joy to do today. On the contrary, he begins with a tone of disappointment. Who will believe his report? "*A tender plant ... a root out of a dry ground . . . no form nor comeliness . . . no beauty that we should desire Him . . . despised . . . rejected . . . a man of sorrows and*

acquainted with grief." Who would believe that such would be the long promised Savior of Israel? "But," continues the prophet, "He is bearing the guilt for us. We are the guilty ones, yet He goes as a lamb to the slaughter for us. But God will reward Him and he will yet see glorious results from His humble submission." This Scripture is typical of Old Testament prophecy. The prophet points out, indeed, that when Messiah comes He will be rejected and slain-taking the blame for them, but this is still quite different from proclaiming faith in the merits of His death as the way of salvation. Had Isaiah understood this as we now do, his book would surely have been filled with it.

Isaiah's prophecy is in line with God's prophetic purpose in the crucifixion. As a lamb Messiah would submit to the cruelty of His people in order that some day the nation, condemned by that cruel murder and touched by His gentle submission to it, might turn to Him.

A similar passage is found in John 11:47-52, where the unbelieving high priest, feeling it was time to talk bluntly about Christ, derided the council for its hesitancy, saying,

"...Ye know nothing at all,

"Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." (Vss. 49,50).

It is quite clear how Caiaphas meant this. "Whether He is innocent or not doesn't matter," he reasoned, "We must get rid of Him or the whole nation will perish."

The strange part is that in the next two verses we read,

"And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, HE PROPHESED THAT JESUS SHOULD DIE FOR THAT NATION;

"AND NOT FOR THAT NATION ONLY. BUT THAT ALSO HE SHOULD GATHER TOGETHER IN ONE ALL THE CHILDREN OF GOD THAT WERE SCATTERED ABROAD." (Vss. 51,52).

Yes, Caiaphas spoke both for himself and for God that day. Even though Christ was innocent, both Caiaphas and God proposed that He should be put to death for the sake of the nation. Howbeit in Caiaphas this was cruel injustice, while in God it was abounding mercy.

John 1:29 comes under the same category.

There are many who suppose that John preached the gospel of the grace of God and salvation through the blood because of his one statement:

"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh [beareth] away the sin of the world."

If this is so, pray, why did he preach *"the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins?"* (Mark 1:4). And why did he refuse to baptize the Pharisees for not bringing forth fruits meet for repentance? (See Matt. 3:7-10). Was this the gospel of the grace of God?

We *now* know that it is impossible to bring forth good fruit unless we have already received the remission of sins. Had John known what we now know about the cross his whole message would surely have been very different, but God was then in process of demonstrating that man cannot bring forth good fruit apart from the grace of God. That is what the Law had been given for.

What, then, did John mean by his utterance about the Lamb of God? He meant just what Isaiah and the prophets before him had meant.

Do not forget that the Lord Himself had appeared among those who had come to John's baptism *confessing their sins*. There He was, numbered with the transgressors, and though John "forbad him," saying that he, John, should be baptized and not Christ, the Lord insisted. Though He had no sin He took the blame for it upon Him there. Hence John points out that this gentle One, the Lamb of God, is bearing away the sin of the world.

THE TWELVE APOSTLES

That John the Baptist did not see in his own inspired statement what we now see in it is perhaps best proved by turning to the record of our Lord's first announcement of His suffering and death.

"Then He took unto Him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished.

"For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on:

"And they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death; and the third day He shall rise again.

"AND THEY UNDERSTOOD NONE OF THESE THINGS: AND THIS SAYING WAS HID FROM THEM, NEITHER KNEW THEY THE THINGS WHICH WERE SPOKEN." (Luke 18:31-34 and cf Matt. 16:21).

Now consider the inconsistency of the notion that Abraham, Moses, the prophets and John the Baptist understood and taught God's plan of salvation through faith in the blood of Christ, when the twelve, whom the Lord Himself had

appointed to preach the gospel of the kingdom ([Luke 9:1-6](#)), did not, after some two years of preaching, know that Christ would even die, a fact which the prophets, as we have seen, had clearly prophesied.

If it is true that believers before Calvary were saved by trusting in the death of a coming Christ, is it possible that with all this wealth of background, the apostles of Christ would not even know that He was to die? Indeed, if faith in that death had all along been necessary for salvation, would our Lord have chosen such men to proclaim the gospel for Him?

Whatever we may *now* see in John's utterance, let us remember this - that if John himself meant it as a prophecy of the death of Christ he certainly understood much more than the very apostles who were with Christ Himself and had been authorized by Him to go about preaching the gospel of the kingdom, for with a three-fold emphasis God's Word insists that they did not have the least idea that He would even be put to death.

PETER AT PENTECOST

Many believers look upon the cross as the great dividing line and suppose that after that faith in the death of Christ must surely have been proclaimed for salvation, but even this is not so, for not until Paul do we have the cross proclaimed as the great remedy for sin.

In the open discussion mentioned above our opponent said in effect: "Surely you will agree that Peter at Pentecost preached the gospel of the grace of God!"

We denied this emphatically, asking him what the gospel of the grace of God was. "Well", he replied, "simply that we are sinners, that Christ died for our sins and that if we trust in Him as our Savior God accepts us by grace through faith."

We then asked him whether this was the plan of salvation Peter offered at Pentecost. He was amazed that the question should even be asked, but when we pressed him for Scriptural proof he searched for it in vain.

Yes. Peter at Pentecost spoke of the cross, but *how*. He *blamed* his hearers for the crucifixion of Christ, seeking to bring them to conviction and confession. (See [Acts 2:23-36](#) and cf. [3:13-15](#), [4:10,11](#), [5:28-31](#)). When they cried, "*What shall we do?*" the apostle told them what was required.

"Then Peter said unto them, REPENT, AND BE BAPTIZED EVERY ONE OF YOU IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS, AND YE SHALL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST." (Acts 2:38).

This was all in harmony with God's prophesied purpose in the death of Christ. Indeed, it is not until Israel, as a nation, confesses her guilt in the crucifixion that she will be saved.

Let us see what the prophet Zechariah says about this:

Zech. 12:10-14, "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

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

"And the land shall mourn, every family apart . . .

" . . . every family apart, and their wives apart."

Here we find the prophetic purpose of the crucifixion fulfilled in Israel's conversion. Face to face with their Messiah and finally convicted of their national guilt, their shame will be so great that no one will want to look another in the face. Each will seek a place to mourn in bitterness alone, "every family apart, and their wives apart."

"And one shall say Unto Him, What are these wounds, in thine hands? Then He shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends." (Zech. 13:6).

Thus the crucifixion will have accomplished what the revelation of Christ in glory, apart from the crucifixion, could never have brought about, for their *hearts* will be touched and changed.

HOW WERE THE PATRIARCHS SAVED

Before viewing the cross in the light of the mystery revealed to Paul, let us take up briefly the salvation of those who lived before he was raised up to usher in the dispensation of the grace of God.

Should we be asked how "the elders obtained a good report." we would reply, "By faith." Should we be further asked "By faith in *whom* and *what*?" we would reply, "By faith in God and His Word." That the saints of old were responsible to believe only what had been revealed to them is sound reasoning and is abundantly confirmed by the Scriptures. Hebrews 11 tells us exactly how various individuals among them were saved. Examples:

Heb. 11:4, "By faith ABEL offered unto God a MORE EXCELLENT SACRIFICE than Cain, BY WHICH he obtained witness that he was righteous, GOD TESTIFYING OF HIS GIFTS: and by it he being dead yet speaketh."

Heb. 11:7, "By faith NOAH, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, PREPARED AN ARK, to the saving of his house: BY THE WHICH he condemned the world, and BE. CAME AN HEIR OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS BY FAITH."

And what about Abraham?

"What saith the scripture? ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS COUNTED UNTO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS." (Rom. 4:3).

But let us go to the passage quoted here and see *just what it was* that Abraham believed. Did God tell him that Christ was to come and die for him? No, indeed.

Gen. 15:5,6, "And He [the Lord] brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be.

"AND HE BELIEVED IN THE LORD; AND HE COUNTED IT TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS."

As late as John the Baptist - even as late as Peter at Pentecost (not including his epistles, of course), God's secret purpose in the cross still remained hidden, for as we have seen, John and Peter proclaimed repentance and baptism, not the merits of the cross, for the remission of sins.

THE CRUCIFIXION AND THE MYSTERY

Christian friend, how were you saved? Did someone *blame* you for your part in the crucifixion of Christ? We could have been blamed, for our sins too helped to nail Him there. But that is not how we were saved, nor were we told to do anything to rid ourselves of the guilt of that death. No, it was when, convicted of our sins, someone came with the *glad news* that Christ died for our sins that we were saved.

What a revelation as we view the cross in the light of the Pauline epistles! Now, suddenly, it becomes an object of glory - something to rejoice about! We sing about it in our churches and send missionaries into heathen lands to tell the lost about it.

THE SECRET OF THE GOOD NEWS

According to the revelation of the glorified Lord to Paul the cross is the basis for the dispensation of the grace of God. Through its merits God can righteously

bestow the exceeding riches of His grace upon the vilest sinner who will accept it by faith,

"Being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 3:24).

"In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." (Eph. 1:7).

In the cross lies "the secret of the good news." (Eph. 6:19).

When God told His people that the offering of blood sacrifices would admit them into His presence, that was gospel - good news. When He invited them to "repent and be baptized for the remission of sins," that too was good news. But what was the secret of this good news? How could God justly make such terms of salvation?

Surely "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins," (Heb. 10:4), nor could oceans of water wash one sin away. The secret lay in *what God was to accomplish at Calvary.*

And now that the chief of sinners has been saved and it has been demonstrated what was accomplished at Calvary, God no longer proclaims repentance and baptism for the remission of sins as at Pentecost. "*When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.*" (1 Cor. 13:10). Now Paul, the great example of grace, declares it is his God - given commission to proclaim *Christ's righteousness for the remission of sins*, to be received solely by *faith in the shed blood.*

"Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS that are past, through the forbearance of God.

"To declare, I say, AT THIS TIME, His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Rom. 3:25,26).

The crucifixion of Christ, then, holds the secret of the salvation of saints of ages past as well as of the outpouring of God's grace in this present evil age.

THE GOOD NEWS OF THE SECRET

There is a difference between *the secret of the good news* and *the good news of the secret*, though these two expressions are closely related.

If it was not until Paul that God revealed how it was that He could bring good news of salvation to those of past ages, neither was it until Paul that He made known the best news of all - His secret, eternal purpose to answer the world's

rebellion against His Son by offering to His enemies reconciliation by grace through faith, so forming the body of Christ, the Church of this age. And in this plan again the cross holds the central place.

"That He might reconcile both [Jews and Gentiles] unto God in one body BY THE CROSS, having slain the enmity thereby." (Eph. 2:16).

"And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled.

"IN THE BODY OF HIS FLESH THROUGH DEATH, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight." (Col. 1:21,22).

"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, NAILING IT TO HIS CROSS." (Col 2:14).

OUR BOAST

"Having made peace through the blood of His cross." (Col. 1:20).

"Having slain the enmity thereby." (Eph. 2:16).

Is this not strange and wonderful! One would suppose that the cross would have *broken* the peace and *made* the enmity between God and man. And prophetically and nationally speaking it *did*. See in [Jer. 25:31](#), [Hos. 4:1.12:2](#) and [Mic. 6:2](#), how God has a controversy with the nations and especially with His own nation. and this controversy will not be settled until the cross has been repented of. It was only in God's secret purpose and grace toward a world of individual sinners that the cross was to slay the enmity and seal our peace.

At Pentecost the crucifixion was considered a matter of shame and Peter called upon his nation to repent of the horrible crime. Because Israel would not repent the nation has now been cast out of God's presence.

But here comes Paul boasting in the cross and proclaiming it as the glorious remedy for man's dreadful malady. Hear him cry,

"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."

"Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"

"For the jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom.

"But WE PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED, unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness;

"But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." (I Cor. 1:18. 20, 22-24).

Indeed, this revelation of the cross has eliminated all human works for salvation and with this, all human boasting.

Now salvation is "TO HIM THAT WORKETH NOT, BUT BELIEVETH." (Rom. 4:5). "WHERE IS BOASTING THEN'? IT IS EXCLUDED." (Rom. 3:27).

All we can now boast in is the cross! And that is worth boasting in! What perfect righteousness was there manifested, yet what infinite love! What unfathomable wisdom! What unlimited power!

Little wonder the apostle cries. "Let others glory in the flesh,"

"BUT GOD FORBID THAT I SHOULD GLORY, SAVE IN THE CROSS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. BY WHOM THE WORLD IS CRUCIFIED UNTO ME, AND I UNTO THE WORLD" (Gal. 6.14).

The Two-fold Purpose of the Resurrection

Is it not strange that the very truths which God particularly exhorts His people to consider and remember - that these are the very truths we are so prone to spend *least* time considering, without any thought of even *trying* to remember them!

Such is the case with the exhortation regarding the resurrection of Christ, which Paul, by the Holy Spirit, has left us in the latest of his letters. We refer to II Tim. 2:7-9:

"CONSIDER WHAT I SAY; AND THE LORD GIVE THEE UNDERSTANDING IN ALL THINGS.

"REMEMBER THAT JESUS CHRIST OF THE SEED OF DAVID WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD ACCORDING TO MY GOSPEL:

"WHEREIN I SUFFER TROUBLE, AS AN EVIL DOER, EVEN UNTO BONDS; BUT THE WORD OF GOD IS NOT BOUND."

THE RESURRECTION ITSELF

By the time Paul had written these words, the resurrection of Christ had not only been prophesied in the Old Testament and predicted by the Lord Himself; it was now a well-attested fact of history.

The Lord had "showed Himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs." ([Acts 1:3](#)) He had been seen by Peter and the twelve and others. ([I Cor. 15:5](#), [John 20:18-29](#)). "After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once. ([I Cor. 15:6](#)).

Witnesses everywhere had been testifying of personal contact with the resurrected Christ. Moreover, the Holy Spirit also had borne witness, for great signs and wonders were wrought by the disciples. ([Heb. 2:3,4](#)).

To Paul's statement about five hundred who had seen the risen Lord at one time, he had added, "*of whom the greater part remain unto this present,*" and we may be sure that if there had not been abundant testimony to the resurrection of Christ at that time, this statement would have been widely challenged by contemporary writers and he would have been asked on every hand to produce some of these five hundred witnesses.

And to all of this first-hand testimony Paul had added his own:

I Cor. 15:8, "And last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time."

It would be most unreasonable of all to question this personal testimony of Paul's.

He had once vehemently denied the resurrection of Christ and had opposed the preaching of it as an infamous lie. He had been the arch-enemy of those who sought to persuade Israel to trust in this "resurrected Messiah."

But now He himself had been persuaded and his testimony was added to theirs. Casting aside his reputation and influence as a pharisee, he had suffered great hardships for the Christ he had come to know and love.

He had been beaten and robbed and stoned; had suffered cold and hunger and nakedness had been reviled and scourged and imprisoned for his stand. How could such persistent testimony, borne by such a man at so great a cost, spring from anything but deepest conviction?

The resurrection of Jesus Christ, the seed of David, then, is an historical fact supported by overwhelming evidence.

But is this all the apostle would have us consider and remember - the mere *fact* of the resurrection? No, there is more - much more.

A TWO-FOLD PURPOSE

In his exhortation to Timothy, the apostle seems to take it for granted that the *fact* of the resurrection of Christ will no longer be questioned. It is something *about* the resurrection he would have him understand and never lose sight of.

Requesting particular attention to his words and praying that God will grant the ability to comprehend, he says:

"Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David (This is how He had been preached) WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD ACCORDING TO MY GOSPEL."

The point here is clearly that there was an important message concerning the resurrection which had been committed particularly *to Paul*.

To water down the phrase "my gospel" and make it to refer merely to Paul's proclamation of the resurrection itself, is to rob the passage of the very truth which Paul emphasizes, for surely to such a man of God as Timothy, the exhortation to "Consider what I say," and the prayer for God-given wisdom would not have preceded a mere reminder of the *fact* of the resurrection.

This is one reason why we reject the *Revised Version* rendering: "*Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead . . .*" Here R.V. has again obscured an important truth.

This passage indicates that in the resurrection of Christ, as in His incarnation and His crucifixion, God had a two-fold purpose. There was the preaching of Jesus Christ, "the Seed of David," by the twelve, and the preaching of this same Person according to a special revelation committed to Paul. In a word there was again a prophesied purpose and a secret purpose.

THE RESURRECTION AND PROPHECY

Jesus Christ, the Son of David, is the central Character in God's prophetic purpose.

Had our Lord not been the Son of David, His claims to Messiahship would have been hollow and empty.

It is with David that God had made the great covenant of the glorious kingdom to come. It was of David's seed that the great King should rise. ([II Sam. 7:12-16](#), [Psa. 89:35-37](#)).

The prophets with one accord had joined in such prophecies as Jer. 23:5:

"BEHOLD, THE DAYS COME, SAITH THE LORD. THAT I WILL RAISE UNTO DAVID A RIGHTEOUS BRANCH, AND A KING SHALL REIGN AND PROSPER, AND SHALL EXECUTE JUDGMENT AND JUSTICE IN THE EARTH."

It was as the Son of David that the New Testament introduced Him ([Matt. 1:1](#)), that angels and men announced him ([Luke 1:32,68, 69](#)), that His followers addressed Him ([Matt. 15:22](#), [21:9, 15](#).)

It was as the Son of David that He pressed His claims to Messiahship ([Matt. 22:42-45](#)) and it was as the Son of David that He was recognized as Messiah by His own. ([Matt. 12:23](#)).

True, in spite of all this He had been crucified and Pilate had hung over His head His "accusation." "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS." ([Matt. 27:37](#)), hut this was no breakdown in the prophetic program for the prophets had clearly predicted "*the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should FOLLOW.*" ([I Pet. 1:11](#)). Indeed, that it was the *resurrected* Christ who should reign over Israel and the nations was a fact which the prophets, including David himself, had woven into many of their writings.

Thus it is that Peter, at Pentecost, quotes from the 16th Psalm, pointing out that David did not refer to himself, but spoke as a prophet when he said,

"For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [sheol]; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."

And it is with this argument that He presses home the claims of the risen Christ to Israel's throne.

Acts 2:29-31, "Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.

"Therefore being a prophet. and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, HE WOULD RAISE UP CHRIST TO SIT ON HIS THRONE."

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

This was God's great prophetic purpose in the resurrection of Christ as Peter preached it. *He had been raised from the dead to sit on the throne of His father David.* And it was on this basis that Peter called upon the nation to repent, saying:

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

"And He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you." (Acts 3:19,20.)

As we know, Israel did not repent and the times of refreshing did not - have not yet, come from the presence of the Lord and God did not - has not yet, sent Jesus back.

But here is where the revelation of the mystery comes in, for when man's sin had risen to its height, God was ready to save the chief of sinners and send him forth with the most glorious news concerning the resurrection of Christ.

THE RESURRECTION AND THE MYSTERY

Was Paul's preaching of the resurrection indeed different from that of the twelve? Tradition may deny that it was, but even a casual review of the record should prove to the honest inquirer that there was a vast difference.

JUSTIFICATION

First of all, with the gradual unfolding of the mystery through Paul, we learn for the first time that

"[Jesus our Lord] was delivered for our offences, and was RAISED AGAIN FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION." (Rom. 4:25).

Had Peter at Pentecost or anyone before Paul proclaimed this glorious truth? Those who will search the Scriptures will find they had not. This was part of "the secret of the good news" committed by revelation to Paul.

Justification itself was of course, no secret, but *the secret of the sinner's justification* is to be found in the resurrection of Christ and this was first proclaimed by Paul.

So important is this fact, that belief in the resurrection of Christ is now an integral part of saving faith. We read in Rom. 4:24 that righteousness will be imputed to us "IF WE BELIEVE ON HIM THAT RAISED UP JESUS OUR LORD FROM THE DEAD."

In Rom. 10:9 it is outlined as *"the word of faith which we preach."*

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus. and shalt BELIEVE IN THINE HEART THAT GOD HATH RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD, thou shalt be saved."

IDENTIFICATION

Then there is the great truth of *identification* with the Lord in His resurrection.

When, before Paul, did anyone ever proclaim a baptism wherein believers are *"risen with [Christ] through the faith of the operation of God?"* Yet this is exactly what the apostle teaches in Col. 2:12.

In Eph. 2:5,6 he goes into greater detail:

"Even when we were dead in sins, [God] hath quickened us together with Christ, by grace ye are saved;)

"And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

And in Eph. 1:3 the apostle breaks out into a doxology:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

Again in Col. 3:1 he says:

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God."

How much higher and greater are our blessings than anything that was ever promised or offered to Israel! And thus God has demonstrated the "exceeding riches of His grace," for it was upon the *rejection* of the Son of David that God raised up Paul to proclaim these glorious truths, offering a heavenly position and heavenly blessings to those who place their trust in the Royal Exile in "this present evil age." Surely, "*Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.*"

VICTORY OVER SIN

This identification with Christ in His resurrection affects our daily lives too, for in the measure that we *occupy* our position and *appropriate* our blessings in Christ, in that exact measure we shall overcome the sins of the old nature. The apostle stresses this point again and again.

Rom. 8.11,12, "BUT IF THE SPIRIT OF HIM THAT RAISED UP JESUS FROM THE DEAD DWELL IN YOU, HE THAT RAISED UP CHRIST FROM THE DEAD SHALL ALSO QUICKEN YOUR MORTAL BODIES BY HIS SPIRIT THAT DWELLETH IN YOU.

"THEREFORE, BRETHREN, YE ARE DEBTORS, NOT TO THE FLESH, TO LIVE AFTER THE FLESH."

This passage does not deal with the future resurrection of the dead, but with the quickening power of the Spirit, the power that can help us here and now to "walk in newness of life." It is just this that the apostle means when he gives expression to his heart's desire:

"THAT I MAY KNOW HIM, AND THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION ... IF BY ANY MEANS I MIGHT ATTAIN UNTO THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD." (Phil. 3:10,11).

Here again the apostle refers, not to a future resurrection of the body, but to the believer's resurrection with Christ to walk in newness of life. This is evident from the fact that it is his desire *now* to know "*the power of His resurrection,*" that it is something to "*attain unto*" and that he confesses: "*Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.*" (Phil. 3:10-12).

Nevertheless, this is what he has already, in some measure, experienced and by God's grace and through the power of the Spirit who quickened and raised

Christ from the dead, we may experience it too, for "the law of the Spirit," the law of "life in Christ Jesus, hath made us free from the law of sin and death." (Rom. 8:2).

CONSIDER-REMEMBER

This and much more is what Paul meant to emphasize when he said

"Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.

"Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel:

"Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the Word of God is not bound."

Shall we pass lightly over a truth so graciously revealed and delivered to us at so great a cost - and a truth so specifically intended for *us*? Or, having learned it shall we forget it or give it up for a little earthly gain or a few earthly friendships?

No, let us be true Bereans and consider most carefully and prayerfully what God has to say to us, and having been given the grace to understand it, let us hold it dear and stand faithfully for it no matter what the cost.

The Two-fold Purpose of the Ascension

The Scripture has much to say about the ascension of our Lord into glory and it is not our purpose here to even try to treat the subject exhaustively.

Our one aim in this chapter is to show *how* the subject must be studied; that as in the incarnation, the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ, so in His ascension too, God had a twofold purpose - one made known in prophecy, the other kept secret until revealed by the ascended Lord Himself through the Apostle Paul.

We *now* know, for example, that our Lord ascended into heaven to become the glorious Head of the Church, which is His Body. Indeed that is all-important to us as members of that body. But where, before Paul, do we find this purpose revealed?

Yea, where, before Paul, do we read of the Body of Christ at all? Let us then learn the lesson not to anticipate revelation; not to let our studies in the Scriptures be influenced by a vague notion that saints living before the revelation of some particular truth "must have understood" all about it nevertheless.

THE ASCENSION AND PROPHECY

What, then, did the ascension of Christ mean to those who lived before the revelation of the mystery? What significance did the *prophets* attach to it and what about our Lord Himself and His twelve apostles? Did they give it the same significance?

SIT THOU AT MY RIGHT HAND

One of the most comprehensive prophecies in all the Word of God concerns the ascension of Christ. It is Psalm 110:1, where the Father invites the Son to a place at His right hand:

"THE LORD SAID UNTO MY LORD, SIT THOU AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE THINE ENEMIES THY FOOSTOOL."

In this one verse we find that

1. Our Lord was to be rejected by His enemies on earth.
2. He was to be honored and exalted by His Father in heaven.

3. His enemies were to be punished.
4. This punishment was to begin during His absence.
5. It was to end with His enemies under His feet.

This is perhaps the clearest Old Testament prophecy of the ascension and the reason behind it. [Psa. 68:18](#) is another well known reference, but much controversy still centers around that passage. There is no such difficulty with Psa. 110:1. There, in the clearest language, the Psalmist indicates the Father's displeasure over the rejection of His Son and His determination to punish His enemies. (Cf. [Psa. 2](#)). It is as if the Father had said to the Son, "They will not have Thee on earth. Come then, and sit at My right hand, until I punish them for rejecting Thee."

"But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;

"FROM HENCEFORTH EXPECTING TILL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE HIS FOOTSTOOL."

I WILL SEND MY SPIRIT

In line with the prophetic purpose there was another reason, however, why our Lord ascended into heaven. It was that He might send the Holy Spirit in preparation for His return in glory.

We must not forget that in prophecy the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was to precede the punishment of Christ's enemies and the ushering in of the day of the Lord (See Joel 2:28-31).

Our Lord was to send His Spirit to empower the feeble remnant who were to bear witness to His Messiahship during these momentous days.

John 16:7, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you."

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

I GO TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU

There is one passage in the New Testament with which a great deal of unscriptural sentiment has long been associated. It is John 14:2,3:

"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so. I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

These words are still interpreted by many to mean that in some way the ascended Lord is now preparing mansions in heaven for His people to dwell in and that when these mansions are ready He will return to catch away His own and bring them to heaven to the places prepared for them. And this is believed by thousands of Premillenarian Fundamentalists.

But have our Premillenarian brethren forgotten that the rapture of the Body was a mystery revealed years later through Paul? (I Cor. 15:51,52). Our Lord told His disciples nothing of this present age of grace or of the catching away of the Church of this age. He prepared them for the great tribulation and His return to earth to reign with them. He said,

"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

"But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues;

"And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.

"But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.

"For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.

"And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.

"And ye shall be hated of all men for My name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

"But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, YE SHALL NOT HAVE GONE OVER THE CITIES OF ISRAEL, TILL THE SON OF MAN BE COME." (Matt. 10:16-23).

"For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth oven unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

"For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." (Matt. 24:27-30).

A comparison of these words with Peter's Pentecostal address should make it very clear that the apostles were not looking for the rapture, but for the return of Christ to reign. They knew only the prophetic program: Pentecost, the tribulation and the return of Christ.

They began their ministry at Jerusalem as they were commanded, but never succeeded in covering the cities of rebellious Israel. Indeed, God in matchless love interrupted the program, postponed the judgment and ushered in the day of grace.

After this parenthetical dispensation is over. God will take up His work with the favored nation again and when the cities of Israel have received the message, Messiah will return to reign over them. But this is *prophecy* concerning Israel and the nations, not the *mystery* of the Body of Christ.

If we believed, as so many do, that the body of Christ began at Pentecost under the so-called "great commission," we could find no justification whatever for the doctrine of the rapture. This blessed doctrine rests squarely upon the mystery revealed to Paul.

Our Lord promised the twelve a kingdom on earth, not a home in heaven nor did the saints before that time look forward to going to heaven. This is a hope reserved for members of the Body of Christ.

This is a simple, Scriptural fact, yet thousands of believers need to learn it. Search the Old Testament or the gospel records for any indication that the saints of those days were promised a home in heaven and you will search in vain. The *blessings* of heaven *on earth* were what they looked forward to.

Job expected to see His Redeemer UPON THE EARTH. ([Job 19:25,26](#)).

David sang in many of his Psalms about Israel and the redeemed nations rejoicing ON EARTH. ([Psa. 96](#), etc.).

Jeremiah predicted the reign of Messiah IN THE EARTH, ([Jer. 23:5](#)).

Our Lord promised the meek that they should inherit THE EARTH. ([Matt. 5:5](#)).

He instructed His disciples to pray for the coming of the kingdom ON EARTH. ([Matt. 6:10](#)).

He promised the twelve that they would reign with Him ON EARTH. ([Matt. 19:28](#)).

True, He urged them to lay up treasures in heaven. He exhorted them to trust their Father in heaven, He promised to send the Spirit from heaven, He went to heaven to "receive a kingdom" for Himself and for them, but He made no promise whatever of taking them there.

"*My Father's house,*" in John fourteen, is not heaven; it is the millennial temple.

Those who are willing to learn the meaning of this phrase from the Scriptures need not search far, for in this same book we find our Lord saying, "*Make not MY FATHER'S HOUSE an house of merchandise,*" ([John 2:16](#)), and many times in the Old Testament God calls the temple "*My house.*" (See [Isa. 56:7](#). [Ezek. 44:7](#), etc.).

The word "mansions" should have been rendered "abodes" or "abiding places," as Darby's translation and several other fine versions have it, for into the very walls of the temple were built the abodes of those who ministered there.

The phrase "*I go to prepare a place for you,*" has a moral and spiritual, rather than a physical connotation. Our Lord was to go and "receive for Himself a kingdom" ([Luke 19:11,12](#)), preparing also a place for them. (Verses 16-19, cf. [Matt. 19:28](#)).

As to His coming again to receive them to Himself, this passage says nothing about their being caught up nor can we divorce it from the angelic promise made later to the same apostles.

"THIS SAME JESUS, WHICH IS TAKEN UP FROM YOU INTO HEAVEN, SHALL SO COME IN LIKE MANNER AS YE HAVE SEEN HIM GO INTO HEAVEN." (Acts 1:11).

This, of course, does not refer to the rapture, but to the revelation, when He shall return in the same manner as He ascended, and even to the same place.

"And His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives...." (Zech. 14:4).

When our Lord returns in glory, He will not forget His promise to the twelve apostles. Having returned as He said, He will receive them to Himself in resurrection glory and reign with them.

THE ASCENSION AND THE MYSTERY

Not until Paul do we read of "THE HOPE WHICH IS LAID UP FOR YOU IN HEAVEN." (Col. 1:5).

This hope is reserved for those who trust Christ now in this age of His rejection. It is because the King and His kingdom have been refused that God in grace has given believers today something better - a heavenly position and prospect.

And we begin to come into this as we accept God's simple, wonderful message of salvation by grace through faith.

"BUT TO HIM THAT WORKETH NOT, BUT BELIEVETH ON HIM THAT JUSTIFIETH THE UNGODLY, HIS FAITH IS COUNTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS." (Rom. 4:5).

"TO THE PRAISE OF THE GLORY OF HIS GRACE, WHEREIN HE HATH MADE US ACCEPTED IN THE BELOVED [ONE]." (Eph. 1:6).

ENTERING INTO HIS REST

Among the overwhelming proofs of the Pauline authorship of the book of Hebrews is its clear call to ascend into the heavenlies and rest with Christ in His finished work.

In Heb. 1:3 we read concerning Christ that

"WHEN HE HAD BY HIMSELF PURGED OUR SINS, [HE] SAT DOWN ON THE RIGHT HAND OF THE MAJESTY ON HIGH."

Heb. 10:11-14 tells us *why* He sat down, contrasting His glorious accomplished work with the never-finished work of the Old Testament priest.

"AND EVERY PRIEST STANDETH DAILY MINISTERING AND OFFERING OFTENTIMES THE SAME SACRIFICES, WHICH CAN NEVER TAKE AWAY SINS:

"BUT THIS MAN, AFTER HE HAD OFFERED ONE SACRIFICE FOR SINS FOR EVER, SAT DOWN ON THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD...."

"FOR BY ONE OFFERING HE HATH PERFECTED FOR EVER THEM THAT ARE SANCTIFIED."

The work of redemption having been accomplished, the Father and the Son sat down and entered into a sabbath rest. Moreover, since the work is finished, there remains nothing for *us* to do but to believe and rejoice.

"THERE REMAINETH THEREFORE A REST TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

"FOR HE THAT IS ENTERED INTO HIS REST, HE ALSO HATH CEASED FROM HIS OWN WORKS, AS GOD DID FROM HIS" (Heb 4:9.10).

Wonderful truth! The debt of sin fully paid, the Son ascended into heaven to sit down at the Father's right hand. And now God, fully satisfied, would have *us* enter into that rest and take our places too, by faith, at His right hand.

Thus resting in the finished work of Christ all the blessings of heaven are already ours. This is why the believers of Heb. 3:1 and all believers in this dispensation of the grace of God are called "PARTAKERS OF THE HEAVENLY CALLING."

OUR POSITION IN CHRIST

How earnestly the apostle prays that we might know the power which can lift us to the highest place of exaltation in Christ! Hear him pray "that ye may know,"

"WHAT IS THE EXCEEDING GREATNESS OF HIS POWER TO USWARD WHO BELIEVE, ACCORDING TO THE WORKING OF HIS MIGHTY POWER,

"WHICH HE WROUGHT IN CHRIST, WHEN HE RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD, AND SET HIM AT HIS OWN RIGHT HAND IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES.

"FAR ABOVE ALL PRINCIPALITY, AND POWER, AND MIGHT, AND DOMINION, AND EVERY NAME THAT IS NAMED, NOT ONLY IN THIS WORLD, BUT ALSO IN THAT WHICH IS TO COME:

"AND HATH PUT ALL THINGS UNDER HIS FEET. AND GAVE HIM TO BE THE HEAD OVER ALL THINGS TO THE CHURCH.

"WHICH IS HIS BODY, THE FULNESS OF HIM THAT FILLETH ALL IN ALL." (Eph. 1:19-23).

Members of Christ's Body!

Seated already at God's right hand in Christ!

We were the "*children of disobedience*" and therefore "*by nature the children of wrath, even as others,*"

"BUT GOD, WHO IS RICH IN MERCY, FOR HIS GREAT LOVE WHEREWITH HE LOVED US,

"EVEN WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN SINS, HATH QUICKENED US TOGETHER WITH CHRIST, (BY GRACE YE ARE SAVED);

"AND HATH RAISED US UP TOGETHER, AND MADE US SIT TOGETHER IN HEAVENLY PLACES IN CHRIST JESUS:

"THAT IN THE AGES TO COME HE MIGHT SHOW THE EXCEEDING RICHES OF HIS GRACE IN HIS KINDNESS TOWARD US THROUGH CHRIST JESUS." (Eph. 2:4-7).

Thus we have been made one with Christ in His death, burial, resurrection and *ascension*.

CHRIST'S MINISTRY FOR US

This is not to deny, of course, that while *positionally* we are seated with Christ in the heavenlies, blessed with all spiritual blessings, we are nevertheless still here in the flesh, surrounded by trouble and temptation and sin.

How blessed then, to know that our Lord has ascended into the heavens to represent us and intercede for us there!

"For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, NOW TO APPEAR IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD FOR US." (Heb. 9:24).

"For us." Blessed words! Could we be more perfectly safe?

We regret that some who make divisions where there are none, have taught that believers before Acts 28 still needed our Lord's intercession, while we as the members of His Body do not, since we are already seated in the heavenlies in Him.

But were not the believers under Paul's early ministry members of the Body of Christ? He says that they were, for in his early epistles he writes:

"NOW YE ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST, AND MEMBERS IN PARTICULAR." (I Cor. 12:27 and cf. I Cor. 12:12,13 and Rom. 12:5).

These dear brethren seem to forget the distinction between the believer's *standing* and his *state*. If the truth about our position in Christ is *all the truth*, then why all the exhortations to holiness in Paul's *later* epistles? Were it not for Christ's intercession at the Father's right hand, even now, we would not only fail utterly to

appropriate any of our spiritual blessings we would be lost! But, thank God. He is there in our behalf.

"Five bleeding wounds He bears, received on Calvary.
They pour effectual prayers. They strongly plead for me.

'Forgive him. O, forgive,' they cry,
'Nor let that ransomed sinner die.'

It is because of this *practical* ministry of Christ in our behalf that we may *appropriate*, even now, the position and the blessings which God has declared ours through the merits of Christ. And what enemy can rob us of this while He sits at the Father's right hand?

"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!" (Rom. 8:34).

Hallelujah!

The Two-fold Purpose of the Second Coming

"They answered and said, He is guilty of death.

"Then did they spit in His face, and buffeted Him; and others smote Him with the palms of their hands." (Matt, 26:66,67).

"Let Him be crucified! ...His blood be on us, and on our children." (Matt. 27:23-25).

"And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head, and a reed in His right hand: and they bowed the knee before Him, and mocked Him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!

"And they spit upon Him, and took the reed, and smote Him on the head.

"And after that they had mocked Him, they took the robe off from Him, and put His own raiment on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him." (Matt. 27:29-31).

"And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left." (Luke 23:33).

Thus did wicked men deal with the blessed, holy Son of God, who had come from heaven into a sin-cursed world to do them naught but good.

"He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not.

"He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." (John 1:10,11).

Little wonder that David prophesied of the coming Christ,

"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." (Psa. 110:1).

Little wonder that we read in the prophets that God has a controversy with the nations and even with the favored nation.

Not immediately, however, did God visit the rejectors of His Son with judgment.

The Crucified, even in the agony of His suffering, had cried,

"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34).

The Father had heard the prayer, for at Pentecost the Spirit came to fill and empower the believers as they called upon Israel to repent, offering her the return of Christ and the long-promised "times of refreshing." (See [Acts 2](#) and [Acts 3](#)).

But when we come to Acts 7 we find Stephen (on trial for preaching Christ) looking up into heaven and exclaiming,

"Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man **STANDING** on the right hand of God." ([Acts 7:56](#)).

At our Lord's rejection by Israel. the Father had said to Him,

"SIT THOU at My right hand, UNTIL I MAKE THINE ENEMIES THY FOOTSTOOL." (Psa. 110:1).

When the cup of iniquity had been filled, therefore, the rejected Son and His Father were to arise again in judgment, and it seemed that that time had now arrived, for Stephen saw the Lord *standing at the right hand of God*. It seemed now that the only remedy was judgment; that the prophetic prayer: "*Arise, O Lord, in anger*" ([Psa. 7:6](#)) was being fulfilled. His enemies must be subjugated and made His footstool. They have declared war upon the Godhead.

"The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His Anointed, saying,

"Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.

"HE THAT SITTETH IN THE HEAVENS SHALL LAUGH: THE LORD SHALL HAVE THEM IN DERISION.

"THEN SHALL HE SPEAK UNTO THEM IN HIS WRATH, AND VEX THEM IN HIS SORE DISPLEASURE." (Psa. 2:2-5).

This, as far as prophecy is concerned, is God's answer to man's rejection of Christ.

But the amazing thing is that almost two milleniums have passed since all this took place and still the judgment has not come. More than nineteen hundred years ago God's blessed Son left this world as an exile and in those nineteen hundred years the attitude of the human race toward Him has not changed-and yet God has done nothing about it.

But He will.

This wicked world will surely be punished for her sin. The Royal Exile will return, according to prophecy, "to judge and make war," and will reign, not only as "King of the Jews" but as "King of kings and Lord of lords."

The only explanation of the long delay is to be found in the infinite grace of God, as revealed in "the mystery," the wonderful secret committed to Paul by divine revelation. And the mystery, as well as prophecy, is concerned with the return of our Lord.

As in the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection and the ascension, so in the return of Christ also God had a two-fold purpose. Indeed, His return itself is a succession of two events, for before actually returning *to the earth* to judge and reign, the Lord will descend to "the air" to catch away His own. The first stage of His return has been called "the rapture" (of the Body), and the other, "the revelation" of Christ). The one concerns the members of His Body; the other Israel and the nations.

THREE WORDS

There has been a great deal of confusion over the three Greek words chiefly used of the return of Christ (*apokalupsis*, *parousia* and *epiphaneia*), simply because some have supposed that these words must necessarily each refer to *either* the rapture or the revelation.

It is true that "apokalupsis" (*unveiling* or *uncovering*) is used mainly of our Lord's manifestation to the whole world, but will He not be manifested to His own at the rapture? Hence Paul speaks of the Corinthian believers as "waiting for the *coming* (apokalupsis) of our Lord Jesus Christ." ([I Cor. 1:7](#)).

"Parousia" (a *being alongside*, or, *personal presence*) is quite naturally used of the Lord's return in a general way. Paul uses it of His "*coming*" to catch up His own ([I Thes. 4:15](#)), while Peter uses the same word of His "power and *coming*," i.e., to reign on earth. ([II Pet. 1:16](#)).

As to "epiphaneia" (*appearing*) Paul alone uses this word, but it will surprise some to learn that he employs the word in such a general way that it is made to refer even to that appearing of Christ which is already *past*, for he writes of the message now made manifest "by the *appearing* of our Savior Jesus Christ." ([II Tim. 1:10](#)). Besides this he uses the word both of the appearing which we are to be "looking for" ([Tit. 2:23](#)) and in a general way of the appearing at which God will show "who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords." ([I Tim. 6:14,15](#)).

Let us be careful, then, not to impose *particular* meanings upon *general* words. For example, if "parousia" means simply *coming*, do not let us insist that it

must refer to some *particular* coming. All three of the words mentioned above *can* refer to the rapture, the revelation or both and the context must be the deciding factor.

What we need to see clearly is that the coming of Christ *to earth* to reign is the subject of prophecy and of the message which was preached by Peter and the twelve, while His descent to catch away His own "in the air" is a part of the mystery revealed to and through Paul.

THE RETURN OF CHRIST AND PROPHECY

THE OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES

Old Testament prophecy has *nothing* to say about believers being "caught up" at the return of Christ. Instead, we read that Messiah will "*return and build again* the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down." ([Acts 15:16](#), [Amos 9:11](#)). We read that He "*shall suddenly come to His temple.*" ([Mal. 3:1](#)). We read that "*His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives.*" ([Zech. 14:4](#)). We read that "*the Lord shall be King over all the earth*" ([Zech 14:9](#)), but not one word about His people being *caught up into heaven*.

THE GOSPEL RECORDS

In the gospels it is the same, for the subject there is the very kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament.

The twelve apostles are instructed to *pray* for this kingdom ([Matt. 6:10](#)), to *proclaim* it ([Matt. 10:7](#)), and to *practice* it. ([Matt. 10:8-10](#)).

Already promised twelve thrones with Christ in the kingdom, they are given certain signs by which the nearness of His return may be determined. When these signs begin to appear, they are to look for His coming. (See [Luke 21:25-28](#)).

"And when these things begin to come to pass, THEN LOOK UP, and lift up your heads: for your redemption draweth nigh." (Ver. 28).

This prophesied return of Christ is to take place "*immediately after the tribulation,*" and will be visible to all.

"For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west: so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

"For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

"And then shall appear the sign of the Seed of man in heaven and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." (Matt. 24:27-30).

There are many who feel that John 14:3 speaks of the rapture. They argue that since John was apparently written even after Paul's epistles, he must have known the mystery revealed through Paul in I Cor. 15:51,52. But John (in John 14) merely *records* what our Lord said to His apostles *while still on earth* and this agrees and must agree with what He had been telling these same apostles all along about His return to reign as King.

We quote from our chapter on the Ascension:

"These words (of John 14) are still interpreted by many to mean that in some way the ascended Lord is now preparing mansions in heaven for His people to dwell in and that when these mansions are ready He will return to catch away His own and bring them to heaven to the places prepared for them. And this is believed by thousands of Premillenarian Fundamentalists.

"But have our Premillenarian brethren forgotten that the rapture of the Body was a mystery revealed years later through Paul? ([I Cor. 15:51,52](#)). Our Lord laid His disciples nothing of this present age of grace or of the catching away off the Church of this age. He prepared them for the tribulation and His return to earth to reign with them.

"True, He urged them to lay up treasures in heaven, He exhorted them to trust their Father in heaven, He promised to send the Spirit from heaven, He went to heaven to 'receive a kingdom' for Himself and for them, but He made no promise whatever of *taking them there...*

"When our Lord returns to earth in glory, He will not forget His promise to the twelve apostles. Having returned as He said, He will receive them to Himself in resurrection glory and reign with them."

THE BOOK OF ACTS

As we open the book of Acts we find the apostles standing with Christ on the mount of Olives, when, to their amazement, He is taken up in a cloud and received out of their sight.

As they stand gazing up into heaven, two shining ones appear to them,

"Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, WHY STAND YE GAZING UP INTO HEAVEN? THIS SAME JESUS, WHICH IS TAKEN UP FROM YOU INTO HEAVEN, SHALL SO COME IN LIKE MANNER AS YE HAVE SEEN HIM GO INTO HEAVEN." (Acts 1:11).

To this we might add that according to Zech. 14:4, He will not only return in the same way, but even to *the same place*.

"AND HIS FEET SHALL STAND IN THAT DAY UPON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES."

This message of the angels to the wondering apostles was delivered some time after our Lord Himself had promised He would return and "receive them unto Himself," yet these angels say nothing about the apostles being "caught away," as so many take the words of John 14 to mean. All here still looks forward to His return *to earth* in the same manner as He left the earth.

Even Pentecost brings no change as to this, for *after* Pentecost we find Peter calling upon Israel to repent so that the rejected Christ might come back and bring with Him the long-promised "times of refreshing." The proposition is:

"REPENT . . . THE TIMES OF REFRESHING SHALL COME AND HE SHALL SEND JESUS CHRIST, WHICH BEFORE WAS PREACHED UNTO YOU." (Acts 3:19.20.)

Even in his first epistle, Peter, the apostle of the circumcision, bids his brethren of the dispersion to "*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.*" (I Pet. 1:13).

It is only when we reach II Peter that we find him explaining the *continued absence* of the Lord.

Predicting that mockers will come discounting any danger of the Lord's return (to judge and reign), Peter explains that the Lord may yet stay away for some considerable time. (See [II Pet. 3:2-8](#)). The reason?

"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is LONGSUFFERING to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (II Pet. 3:9).

But where did Peter learn that the Lord, in longsuffering, might delay his return to judge His enemies?

After telling his readers not to count it "slackness" or tardiness on God's part, he explains how they should consider it:

"AND ACCOUNT THAT THE LONGSUFFERING OF OUR LORD IS SALVATION; EVEN AS OUR BELOVED BROTHER PAUL ALSO ACCORDING TO THE WISDOM GIVEN UNTO HIM HATH WRITTEN UNTO YOU;

"AS ALSO IN ALL HIS EPISTLES, SPEAKING IN THEM OF THESE THINGS; IN WHICH ARE SOME THINGS HARD TO BE UNDERSTOOD, WHICH THEY THAT ARE UNLEARNED AND UNSTABLE WREST, AS THEY DO ALSO THE OTHER SCRIPTURES, UNTO THEIR OWN DESTRUCTION." (II Pet. 3:15-16).

"Speaking in them of these things." Of *what things?* Obviously of the longsuffering and grace which caused our Lord to *delay* His return in judgment.

Peter's ministry, then, had our Lord's return as King in view, while Paul's epistles explain the *delay* in His return to reign.

THE RETURN OF CHRIST AND THE MYSTERY

Paul and Peter did not work in opposition to each other. Paul's was simply a further revelation which God *began* to make known as He *began* to set aside Israel and her kingdom hopes.

As Peter confirmed Paul's message, so Paul confirmed Peter's. He, like Peter, believed that Jesus was the Christ (the Anointed) and proved it from Scripture in many a synagogue. He also believed and taught that Christ would return *to earth* to reign in power and glory.

But it was revealed to him that this was *not yet* to take place ([Heb. 2:8](#)); that concluding Jew and Gentile in unbelief God would usher in a period of grace, offering to all reconciliation by grace through faith in the shed blood of the cross.

"That He might reconcile both [Jews and Gentiles] unto God In one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby." (Eph. 2:16).

It is this new dispensation that God committed to Paul as a complete surprise to a sin-ruined world.

PAUL AND THE RETURN OF CHRIST

This "mystery," or secret, "*which from the beginning of the world (had) been hid in God*" ([Eph. 3:9](#)), centers round the "one new man," the "body of Christ." but many of the details of this great mystery were also individual mysteries until revealed to and through Paul. In I Cor. 4:1, the apostle says.

"LET A MAN SO ACCOUNT OF US, AS THE MINISTERS OF CHRIST, AND STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERIES OF GOD."

And to this he adds, as if anticipating trouble and persecution:

"MOREOVER IT IS REQUIRED IN STEWARDS THAT A MAN BE FOUND FAITHFUL."

One of these mysteries is the dispensation (or dispensing) of grace ([Eph. 3:1-3](#)), another is the blinding and hardening of Israel during this age ([Rom. 11:25](#)), another, the relationship of Christ to His people today ([Eph. 5:25-32](#)), another, our heavenly position in Christ ([Eph. 1:9,15-21](#)), and still another, *the catching away of His own* before the outpouring of His wrath upon the nations. Not until Paul do we read of this.

I Cor. 15:51,52, "Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.

"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

I Thes. 4:15-18. "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not present [precede] them which are asleep.

"For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

"Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

Some are confused because these passages speak of the "last trump" and "the voice of the archangel." They associate the "last trump" with the last of the seven trumpets to be sounded in the great tribulation ([Rev. 11:15-19](#)) and argue from Daniel 12:1 that Michael is associated with Israel and not the Body of Christ.

It is true that while God was dealing with Israel as a nation Michael was her angelic prince, but it must also be noted that Michael is the commander of the heavenly armies, just as Gabriel is God's chief messenger. (See [Dan. 10:13,21, 21:1](#) and [Rev. 12:7-9](#)). Hence it is not strange that Michael should sound the trump of battle to protect us from "the power of the air" ([Eph. 2:2](#)), as we go to meet the Lord "in the air" ([I Thes. 4:17](#)).

As to the phrase, "the last trump," those who insist that this must refer to the last of the seven trumpets of Revelation forget one of the basic rules of Bible

interpretation - *progressive revelation*. Had I Cor. 15 been written *after* Revelation, we might agree that the "last trump" must refer to the last of the seven *already mentioned*. But as it is, the "last trump" evidently means simply the trumpet to be sounded *at the last*, i.e., of this age, there is no evidence that when Paul wrote to the Corinthians they knew anything about any *seven* trumpets to be sounded. Furthermore, in I Thes. 4 this same trumpet is called "THE TRUMP OF GOD," implying that it stands by itself and is not merely one of seven trumpets. It should also be noted that there is no hint that it is Michael, *the archangel*, who holds the last of the seven trumpets in Revelation. Indeed the angel who bears that trumpet is called simply "the seventh angel," as being on a level with the other six.

THE DAY OF HIS WRATH

We know that the return of Christ to earth will terminate the day of God's wrath. He will then come *with* us, for we read in Col. 3:4 that

"When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory."

It seems to us that to appear *with Him* in glory, we must somehow first get to glory. And we will.

We are ambassadors for Christ in a Christ-rejecting world and before He declares war on this world He will recall His ambassadors.

Note the change from "we" to "they" in I Thes. 4 and 5:

"Then WE which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall WE ever be with the Lord.

"Wherefore COMFORT ONE ANOTHER WITH THESE WORDS." (I Thes. 4:17,18).

"But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you...

"For when THEY shall say; Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon THEM as travail upon a woman with child; and THEY shall not escape." (I Thes. 5:1-3).

And the next verse goes on to say, "But YE, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake YOU as a thief."

Psa. 2:5 says of the nations:

"THEN SHALL HE SPEAK UNTO THEM IN HIS WRATH."

But I Thes. 5:9-11 says of us:

"FOR GOD HATH NOT APPPOINTED US TO WRATH, BUT TO OBTAIN SALVATION BY OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST,

"WHO DIED FOR US, THAT WHETHER WE WAKE OR SLEEP, WE SHOULD LIVE TOGETHER WITH HIM.

"WHEREFORE COMFORT YOURSELVES TOGETHER, AND EDIFY ONE ANOTHER, EVEN AS ALSO YE DO."

What a comfort to know that our citizenship is in heaven, from whence we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, not only to change these bodies of our humiliation, but to recall us, His ambassadors, before He declares war on His enemies.

Wonderful, comforting hope for the members of His Body, but to those who reject Christ, the apostle, by the Spirit, says:

"If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema [accursed], Maranatha [Our Lord cometh]." (I Cor. 16:22).

Dear reader, as we bring these messages to a close, let us ask - Are you saved and safe in Christ? Do you rejoice in the Spirit's word of "comfort" or do you come under the "Anathema" which He pronounces upon unbelievers?

The day of grace may close today.

"We then, as workers together with Him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain . . . BEHOLD, NOW IS THE ACCEPTED TIME; BEHOLD, NOW IS THE DAY OF SALVATION." (II Cor. 6:1,2).

God loves you.

Christ died for you.

"BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND THOU SHALT BE SAVED." (Acts 16:31).