

# Christ and the Church

**The Fulfillment of  
Purpose and Prophecy**

**Edward C. Wharton**

**CHRIST  
AND THE  
CHURCH**



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**EDWARD C. WHARTON**



3728 34th Street ♦ Lubbock, Texas ♦ 79410  
1 (800) 687-2121 ♦ Email: [extschool@sibi.cc](mailto:extschool@sibi.cc)

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# Dedicated to:

*Gary and Kathy Walker*  
and

*Victor and Ruby Ellison*  
and

*Charles and Tamara Cook*

Because of their long-term commitment to  
evangelizing the millions of lost souls  
in the nation of India.

and to my students in the  
Sunset International Bible Institute



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# Design of the Course

This study will be a consideration of the history and doctrine of God's plan for human redemption, as it extends from eternity before the foundation of the world, when it was originally conceived in the mind of God, to its fulfillment in Christ and the church. The study is systematized into three major divisions: historical, doctrinal, and eschatological.

## **Historical Division**

This section traces God's twofold promise to Abraham through Israel's history to its redemptive fulfillment in Christ and in his church. This division takes into account (1) the land promise to Israel, the possession of the land, Israel's apostasy, expulsion from the land, captivity, return to the land, and the implications all this has upon redemption and (2) the spiritual seed promise and its fulfillment in Christ and salvation.

## **Doctrinal Division**

This section considers the place of Christ and the church in the eternal purpose of God as revealed in the books of Ephesians and Colossians. In Colossians the sovereign rulership and preeminence of Christ over all created things is emphasized, while the origin, constitution, and place of the church in history and in eternity is emphasized in Ephesians.

## **Eschatological Division**

This division guides the student through the premillennial theory of interpretation, which many equate with the correct view of eschatology, and into a study of those guidelines essential for a correct interpretation of prophecy.



# Introduction

## Historical Overview

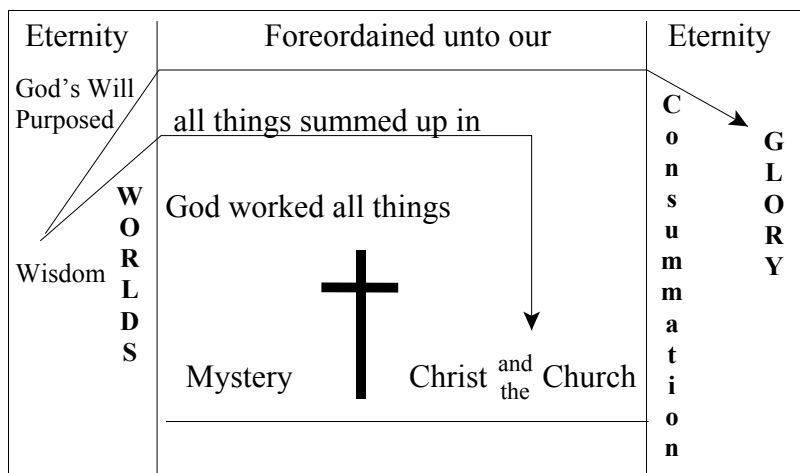
This introduction relates God's scheme of redemption to the grand purpose of history. God is working out the destiny of humanity according to his own purpose from eternity. History under his sovereign direction is therefore on a meaningful course and is to be consummated in the return of Christ for his church.

The following two viewpoints emphasize the redemptive nature of history and the historical significance of every human being.

### **I. THE VIEW FROM ETERNITY TO ETERNITY**

God purposed that the redemption and glorification of mankind be accomplished in Christ and in his church. The entire scope of that purpose, as presented in the Scriptures, extends from eternity before time began to eternity after the second coming of Christ. This purpose was a mystery to mankind until revealed by the Holy Spirit to the apostles. During the great span of time from creation to Christ, God was working in history to bring about its fulfillment. Your Bible is the revelation of God's intervention into the affairs of men to bring his purpose to a historical reality in Christ and the church. This is the viewpoint of Paul as he describes it in Ephesians 1:9-11; 3:10-11, 21; 1 Corinthians 2:6-10; and Romans 8:28-30.

This view can be diagrammatically illustrated as follows:



## II. THE VIEW OF THE SEED PROMISE FROM ADAM TO CHRIST

This section traces the progress of the seed-line from Adam through the flood to Abraham. It was to Abraham that the great promise of redemption was made. This brief overview of the seed promise should enable the student to see at a glance the Lord's orchestration of history for man's salvation from sin, death, and hell. To the Christian, all history is salvation history.

### A. The Original Statement of the Seed Promise

*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel (Genesis 3:15).*

In the garden after the fall, God foretold the bruising of the serpent's head by the seed of the woman. This initial prophecy of the promised seed to destroy Satan's power is traced historically

throughout the Bible to Christ.

## **B. Tracing the Seed from Seth to Noah**

Cain, Satan's henchman in his attempt to stop the progress of the seed-line, murdered Abel (Genesis 4:1-2, 8). Seth was then chosen through whom the seed should come (Genesis 4:25). That the Bible intends us to view the lineage of Christ from this early point in time is seen from the direction the lineage extends from Seth to Noah. Consider that progression of the seed line as recorded in Genesis 5:1-32.

Seth . . . begat Enosh,  
Enosh . . . begat Kenan,  
Kenan . . . begat Mahalalel,  
Mahalalel . . . begat Jared,  
Jared . . . begat Enoch,  
Enoch . . . begat Methuselah,  
Methuselah . . . begat Lamech,  
Lamech . . . begat Noah,  
and Noah . . . begat Shem, Ham,  
and Japheth.

Chapter five traces the promised seed from Seth to Noah. The historical seed-line, not time, is to be emphasized.

## **C. The Seed Spans the Flood Tide (Genesis 6-9)**

In the loins of Shem, one of Abraham's sons, the promised seed rode out the great flood. This historical account of Noah and the ark should be viewed as a redemptive act of God. Had Noah and his sons and their wives not been preserved in the ark

the entire human race would have perished in the flood and Christ would not have been born to his destiny at the cross. As a consequence, all men from Noah back to Adam would have been lost.

#### **D. The Seed from Noah to Abraham (Genesis 11:10-26)**

After the flood God chose Abraham through whom the seed should come. His lineage is traced from Shem, as recorded in Genesis 11:10-26, “These are the generations of Shem. Shem was a hundred years old, and begat Arpachshad two years after the flood.”

*And Arpachshad . . . begat Shelah,  
and Shelah . . . begat Eber,  
and Eber . . . begat Peleg,  
and Peleg . . . begat Reu,  
and Reu . . . begat Serug  
and Serug . . . begat Nahor,  
and Nahor . . . begat Terah,  
and Terah lived seventy years  
and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran.*

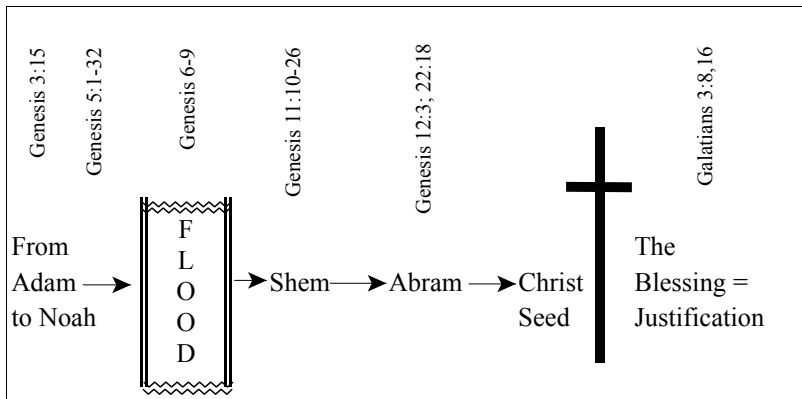
The author of Genesis has traced the seed-line from Adam through Seth, Noah, and Shem to the old patriarch Abram. It is through Abram the seed is to continue.

#### **E. The Seed from Abraham to Christ (Genesis 12:3, 22:18; Galatians 3:8,16)**

The promised seed has been historically traced from Adam to Abram. Now God speaks to Abram, promising him that “*in thee shall all the families of*

*the earth be blessed*” (Genesis 12:3). Later, the Lord renewed the promise stating, *“in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed”* (Genesis 22:18). In Galatians, the apostle Paul quotes these promises interpreting for us that the “seed” is Christ (Galatians 3:16), and that the promised blessing is justification by faith in Christ (Galatians 3:8). Thus God’s promise to Abraham, that in his seed would come worldwide blessing, was fulfilled in Christ and in redemption from sin.

This overview shows the historical progression of the Lord’s redemptive purpose. The messianic seed-line, from Adam to Christ, is the thread that connects history to the scheme of redemption. Your Bible, from Genesis 12:3, is the revelation of the historical outworking of God in the affairs of men to bring that purpose in Christ to its predestined fulfillment. This allows some insight into Paul’s statement that *“all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose”* (Romans 8:28). The reason is that God is the great force in history working out man’s eternal “good” according to his purpose.







# Part One

## **Historical Division**

The Twofold Promise  
to Abraham

*and*

The Fulfillment of the Promises  
in Christ, the Church, and  
Remission of Sins

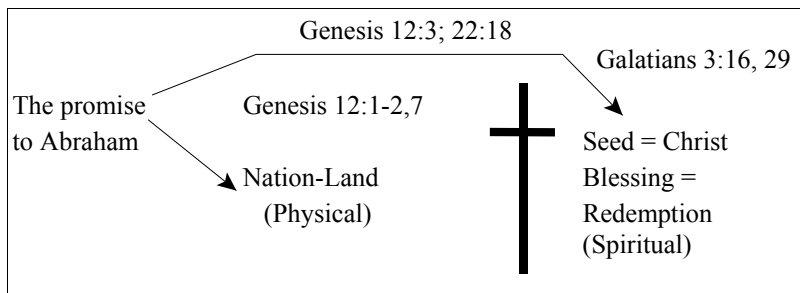


# The Two-Fold Promise To Abraham

*Now Jehovah said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And Jehovah appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto Jehovah, who appeared unto him. (Genesis 12:1-3, 7)*

## I. THE NATION - LAND PROMISE

God would make of Abraham a great nation and give to that nation the land of his sojourn (vs. 1-2, 7).



## **II. THE SPIRITUAL - SEED PROMISE**

After the flood, when the world was plunged into idolatry, God chose Abram through whom the seed of Genesis 3:15 should come. Christ would fulfill his seed promise and bring the worldwide blessing of redemption from sin (Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:16, 29).

# The Fulfillment of the Promises

## I. THE FULFILLMENT OF THE NATION-LAND PROMISE

### A. The Promise From Abraham To Moses At Sinai

The following seven points present the historical progress of the Abrahamic promise to its development at the time the Law was given at Sinai.

1. The promise to Abram (Genesis 12:1-2, 7).  
He is not yet called Abraham. The command was to go. The promise was to make of him a great nation (vs. 1-2 ). He obeyed (v 4 ) and came into the land of Canaan (vs. 5-6) where God appeared once again. This time God promised to give that land to his seed (v. 7). The importance of this promise can be seen in God's renewal of it to Abraham – once at Beth-el (Genesis 13:14-17) and twice at Hebron (Genesis 15:7, 18; 17:1-2, 8).
2. The promise takes the form of a covenant (Genesis 15:1-21). Consider the following:
  - a. *Israel to sojourn in Egypt for 400 years* (Genesis 15:13-14). Afterward they would return to the land promised “in the fourth generation.” (This will be considered again at its fulfillment.)
  - b. *The promise confirmed as a covenant* (Genesis 15:17-18). Notice the renewal of the land promise (v. 7) and the halving and

placement of the covenant sacrifices in verses 7-11, followed by the flaming torch that passed between these pieces (v 17). In antiquity men confirmed important covenants by halving sacrificial animals and passing between the pieces (Jeremiah 34:18-19). When Philip of Macedon was murdered, Alexander made a covenant with Philip's army to become his own army and remain loyal to him. Robert Lane Fox writes in "Alexander the Great":

*Then, the army would be purified by ancient ritual, being led by Alexander between two halves of a dog's corpse. The ritual would bind them to him. (Pg. 39, The Dial Press, 1974)*

In the incident in Genesis 15, the fire of God passed between the covenant sacrifices confirming the covenant to Abraham and answering his question, "Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" (v 8). The land promise had thus taken the form of a covenant. So it was written: "In that day Jehovah made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates."

- c. *The extent of the land to be received* (Genesis 15:18-21). From the Euphrates to the river of Egypt (not the Nile, but the little wadi-el-arish in the middle of the wilderness, as shown on Bible maps). A

total of some 60,000 square miles. Also referred to as the dominion of Solomon. The extent of the promised land should also be studied from Exodus 23:31; Deuteronomy 1:7; Joshua 1:14.

3. The covenant of circumcision as it pertained to the land (Genesis 17:1-14).
  - a. *Note the divisions* of the covenant: (1) God's part: "As for me" (v 4) and (2) Abraham's part and his seed: "And as for thee, thou shalt keep my covenant, thou, and thy seed after thee throughout their generations" (v 9).
  - b. *The covenant with Abraham* and his seed (as specified in vs. 7-10). It should be emphasized that the covenant was made not only with Abraham, but also with his seed. At the time the covenant was made, the seed was yet in Abraham. Therefore every descendant of Abraham, whether male or female, entered into covenant relationship with the Lord by birth. Israelites were not circumcised into covenant relationship. This would forbid females who were also Abraham's seed. Circumcision was but the "token" of the covenant (v 11) to be performed on the male seed on the eighth day after his birth. Circumcision was essential in the economy of God in order to keep covenant faithfulness with the Lord and to have the right to eat the Passover (Exodus 12:48).
  - c. *The name change* from Abram to Abraham (v 5) was commensurate with the nature of



the promise to make Abraham a great nation. Hence, Abraham, “father of a multitude.”

4. The Abrahamic promise was renewed to Isaac and Jacob.
  - a. “to Isaac” (Genesis 26:1-4).
  - b. “to Jacob” (Genesis 28:3-4). This is the Patriarch from whom Israel received her name. The story of Jacob’s struggle with the angel and his consequent name change is recorded in Genesis 32. The angel stated, “Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel” (v 28). Israel begat twelve sons who became the twelve tribes of Israel.
5. The descent into Egypt where the twelve tribes became a nation (Genesis 46:1-3; Deuteronomy 26:5).
6. The exodus out of Egypt toward Canaan in “the fourth generation” (Exodus 6:16-20, 25-26).

Moses and Aaron were the fourth generation removed from the time the Patriarchs went down into Egypt. This fulfills Genesis 15:14-16, which promised that the seed of Abraham would return to the promised land “in the fourth generation.” Since there were six generations from Abraham to Moses—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Kohath, Amram, and Moses – it appears that the Lord’s meaning in Genesis 15:16 was that their return would be in the fourth generation from the time they went down into Egypt, which would have commenced at the generation of Levi (Exodus 6:16-20; 12:40-41).

7. Sinai where the Law was given to Israel as a nation (Exodus 19:1-6; 20:1-17; 34:27-28). Three things are required to make a nation: a people, a land, and a law. The land had already been given in promise (Genesis 15:18). With the receiving of the Law, Israel became a nation. At Sinai, the Lord's promise to make Abraham a nation was fulfilled. It only remained for the nation to go in and possess the land.

## **B. The Covenant At Moab: The Covenant Of Blessing And Cursing (Deuteronomy 28-30)**

1. The blessing (Deuteronomy 28:1-14) and the curse (Deuteronomy 28:15-68).

Study this carefully. The promise to receive the land had been unconditional. The actual receiving of the land was due to the promise made to Abraham, but the condition for retaining the land was to keep the covenant, the Law of Moses. The ultimate penalty for disobedience was the destruction of the nation and her scattering out of the land into the captive land of a foreign nation (Deuteronomy 28:63-64).

2. The provision for the return to the land (Deuteronomy 30:1-10) was conditional.

*If* they returned to Jehovah by obedience to the Law with all their heart, *then* God would cause them to return to the land. He would "turn [their] captivity" and bring them back into the land which their fathers possessed and they would repossess it. Remember these conditions.

**C. The Inheriting Of The Land**

1. Under Joshua, God gave Israel “all the land” which he had promised, and Israel “possessed it and dwelt therein” (Joshua 21:43-45).

Not one thing, said Joshua, had failed of all the Lord had promised concerning the land; all had come to pass (Joshua 23:14-16; 2 Chronicles 20:7-8; Jeremiah 32:22-23).

2. Solomon ruled over all the land (1 Kings 4:21; 2 Chronicles 9:26).

These boundaries are the very ones stated in Genesis 15:18-21.

3. God fulfilled his promise to Abraham concerning the nation and the land (Nehemiah 9:7-8). At this point, it should be observed that the blessing, as promised by Moses, did indeed come to Israel (Deuteronomy 28:1-14).

**D. The Division Of The Kingdom: Assyrian And Babylonian Captivity**

1. At the death of Solomon (c. 945-975 B.C.), the great United Kingdom divided in two. Israel inhabited the north, and Judah the south (1 Kings 11-12). Read these chapters carefully taking special note that this records the apostasy that the writer of 1 and 2 Kings continually refers to as “the sin of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat.”
2. The northern tribes (Israel), with their capital at Samaria, continued as a separate nation.

Israel continued in the apostasy of Jeroboam the son of Nebat until God raised up the Assyrians to carry her into captivity (about 722-21 B.C.-2 Kings 17-18).

3. Judah continued as a separate nation with her capital at Jerusalem.

But the work of Isaiah, Hezekiah, Jeremiah, and Josiah did not effect a permanent change in Judah's heart. She apostatized through idolatry. At last, Nebuchadnezzar (who came to power in 606 B.C.) mercilessly put down the Judaeen rebellion against him and carried Judah off into captivity to Babylon in 586 B.C. (2 Chronicles 36:11-21).

The curse of Deuteronomy 28:15-68 had come!

#### **E. God's Promise Concerning The Salvation Of A Remnant**

1. Only a "remnant" of the ones carried off into captivity would return to possess the land (See Isaiah 10:20-22; Jeremiah 23:3).
2. The time for the return.
  - a. *Jeremiah foretold that the length of Babylonian sovereignty would be seventy years* (Jeremiah 25:8-12). This was foretold in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, 606 B.C. (Jeremiah 25:1-3).
  - b. *Jeremiah also foretold that God's "good word" that Israel would return to Jerusalem* (originally stated in Deuteronomy 30:1-5) would be fulfilled "after seventy years are accomplished for Babylon" (Jeremiah 29:10-14). Thus at the end of Babylon's seventieth year of sovereignty God would cause his people to return to their homeland.

3. A remnant did return under Zerubbabel the governor, and Joshua the high priest in 536 B.C.

Ezra records that in the first year of Cyrus, the king of Persia, Jehovah stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus to proclaim release to the captives of Babylon to return to their homeland (Ezra 1). This came about that the word of Jehovah, by the mouth of Jeremiah, might be accomplished (See also 2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 9:8, 13-15; Nehemiah 1:3-11; Haggai 1:12-14; 2:2-3). Another group returned under Ezra the Scribe in 458 B.C. (Ezra 7:1-8). It is conclusive that the prophesied remnant did return.

Keep in mind these three scriptural elements for the return:

- a. *The condition for the return:* Keep the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 30:1-10).
- b. *The number of Jews that would return:* Only “a remnant” (Isaiah 10:20-22; Jeremiah 23:3).
- c. *The time for the return:* At the end of the Babylonian rule (Jeremiah 29:10-14).

### **Special Note On Millennial Claim**

Premillennialists believe that the Jews will yet return to the promised land, according to prophecy. But in order for that return to take place, they would have to meet the condition for that return by returning to Jehovah according to the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 30:1-5). But, inasmuch as that law has been “*done away in Christ*” (2 Corinthians 3:14), or “abolished” (Ephesians 2:15), it is impossible for that return to be accomplished according to the condition stipulated.

Again, the premillennialist believes the entire nation of the Jews will return to the land. But only a remnant was promised to return, and that return was fulfilled in 536 B.C. and 458 B.C.

Finally, the premillennial doctrine is that this return to repossess the land is yet future. But the time for the return was stated to be at the end of Babylonian sovereignty, which was accomplished in 536 B.C. when the Medes and the Persians came to power and overthrew Babylon.

### **Conclusion**

God's promise to Abraham concerning the nation and the land has been fulfilled. He has also fulfilled his pledge to the nation to bring them back to repossess the land after their captivity. There are no more promises to Abraham or to the nation of Israel concerning the land that are yet to be fulfilled literally and physically. All prophecies made by the Old Testament prophets concerning the return and reunification of Israel under the Messiah are fulfilled in Christ and in redemption from sin. This is to be considered fully in the third division of the course.

## **II. THE FULFILLMENT OF THE SPIRITUAL SEED PROMISE**

The nation-land promise was fulfilled to Abraham in the development of Israel as a nation and in the preservation of the nation in the land. The grand purpose for which this was prerequisite is now ready for its historical development: the coming of the messianic seed and the fulfilling of the redemptive part of the two-fold promise.

### **A. Tracing The Seed Promise From Adam To Abraham**

1. The promised seed of Genesis 3:15 is traced from Seth to Noah (Genesis 4:25-5:32), as

- already seen in the historical overview (p. 5).
2. After the flood, the seed-line is traced from Shem to Abram (Genesis 11:10-31), as seen in the historical overview (p. 6).

### **B. Tracing The Promise From Abraham To Judah**

1. The seed promise of Genesis 3:15 was to come through Abraham (Genesis 12:3, 22:18).
2. The promise was renewed to Isaac (Genesis 26:4).
3. The promise was renewed to Jacob (Genesis 28:10-14).
4. The seed was to come through the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10).

James D. Bales said that:

*Genesis 49:10 means that authority, symbolized by the rod or sceptre, would not depart from Judah, until Shiloh should come. 'The majority of Hebraists have rightly understood by 'Shiloh' a personal name, and one of the same import with Isaiah 9:6. 'The Prince of Peace,' unto this one would be the gathering or homage of the people. The words 'suit a voluntary rule far more than a conquest' (Cairns). Some authority remained with Judah even in the first part of the first century, as the New Testament and Josephus, a Jewish historian, show. But what took place in the first century? Christ the prince of peace came before authority completely departed from Israel in the destruction of their city in A.D. 70. His rule is a voluntary one and it is over more than one race of people. (Gospel Treasures Graded Bible Lessons, p. 24)*

### C. Tracing The Promise From David To Jesus

1. The house of David of the tribe of Judah selected through whom the seed should come (2 Samuel 7:11-16).

An important passage. Study it carefully noting the following:

- a. *God would make of David a house – not material, but physical – of his descendants, his family. Note the use of Noah’s “house” which speaks of his family (Hebrews 11:7).*
  - b. *When David would sleep with his fathers.*
  - c. *God would of his seed set one on David’s throne.*
  - d. *David’s house, throne, and kingdom to be established forever through the establishment of the seed’s kingdom.*
  - e. *That this is speaking of Jesus. See Hebrews 1:5, 8; 2 Samuel 7:14, “I will be his father.” See Psalms 89:3-4, 26-37.*
2. The seed in prophecy.
  - a. *To be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-23).*
  - b. *The “prince of peace,” a son on David’s throne, the government on his shoulders (Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 2:13-14); the song of peace at Christ’s birth (Ephesians 2:14-17), “He is our peace.”*
  - c. *A righteous branch to reign as king (Jeremiah 23:5). A “shoot out of the stock of Jesse. . . a branch out of his roots” (Isaiah 11:1). This figure used in keeping with the seed-line.*
  - d. *To be a priest on his throne (Zechariah 6:13).*



## D. The Promise Fulfilled In Jesus Christ

1. The promise of the angel to Mary, “a virgin” (Luke 1:26-33).  
*“The Son of the Most High,” “the throne of his father David,” “reign over the house of Jacob for ever,” “of his kingdom there shall be no end”*— all applied to Christ.
2. Born of the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:14).  
*“Our Lord hath sprung out of Judah.”*
3. Peter claims for Christ what Nathan promised David (Acts 2:22-37). See 2 Samuel 7:11-16; Psalms 110:1, 16:8-10. Jesus, according to prophecy, was raised to sit on David’s throne, says Peter.

Consider that the throne of David was Jehovah’s throne (1 Kings 2:12; 1 Chronicles 29:23) and that Jesus is now sitting on the Father’s throne (Revelation 3:21). Also, it is claimed that the Son is God on his eternal throne (Hebrews 1:8). Since Jesus is “*King of kings*” (Revelation 19:16), it is conclusive that he is on his throne, ruling over the nations in behalf of his kingdom. See Psalms 2:7-12; Acts 13:33; 1 Timothy 6:14-15; Hebrews 12:28-29; Revelation 1:5-6, 19:11-16. Hallelujah: for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth!

4. Paul claims for Christ that he is the seed promised to Abraham (Galatians 3:16).

He also claims that he fulfills the promised blessing of justification by faith (Galatians 3:6-9, 29).

5. Jesus is the priest-king upon his throne (Hebrews 6:20, 7:17, 7:26-8:1). He is now interceding for his saints (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 9:24).

## Conclusion

Jesus is the redemptive fulfillment of the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15), the seed of Abraham (Genesis 12:3), and the seed of David (2 Samuel 7:11-16). In Jesus is fulfilled the redemptive promises in the law, the prophets, and the psalms (Luke 24:44). There is nothing more for man beyond what God has provided for him in Jesus Christ.

From this let the Christian learn two things: First, history has meaning, and human beings have eternal significance. The history of Israel and the life, death, and resurrection of Christ in the fullness of time reveal a redemptive purpose in history. The Bible directs all men to look at history from this vantage point, to accept Christ as Saviour, and to pass our time in preparation for his return. Second, outside Christ there is no hope for mankind (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5). Sin separates and kills (Isaiah 59:2; Ephesians 2:1). Since all have sinned (Romans 3:23, 5:12), all are lost, dead in sin. It is not that God is unmerciful to pass condemnation on those who have had no opportunity to hear the gospel; they are already condemned through their sin (Romans 6:23), and without Christ will remain in their state of condemnation eternally. Thus, the church, under the great commission, has received the task of world evangelism until Jesus comes again (Matthew 28:18-20).



# Part Two

## **Doctrinal Division**

Christ and the Church  
as seen in

The Epistle to the Colossians  
and  
The Epistle to the Ephesians



# The Epistle to the Colossians

## The Sovereignty and Preeminence Of Christ Over All Things

### The Theme Of The Epistle

The universal sovereignty and preeminence of Christ over all things emerges as the theme of the letter to the Colossians. Paul's exposition of this majestic theme was designed to meet a hybrid of influences at Colossae which threatened to dilute the faith of the church in the lordship of Christ. As we shall see, this theme, when applied to the Colossian problem, would head off both division in the church and apostasy from Christ (2:19). The doctrine of the preeminence and sovereign reign of Christ over all created things (Colossians 1:14-2:7) is directly related to a refutation of the problem (Colossians 2:8-23) and becomes the consequent purpose of the letter.

### The Background

Colossae was situated in the midst of a totally pagan society. Pagan religions were not concerned with morals, but with appeasing the anger of the gods or gaining special favors from them. Those ancient people believed that powerful, controlling spirits were back of the planetary systems and that their destinies were determined by the stars. Some claimed to read celestial messages – hence astrology. Others dealt in spiritualism claiming to know how to conciliate the spirits through special knowledge. Mystery religions abounded,

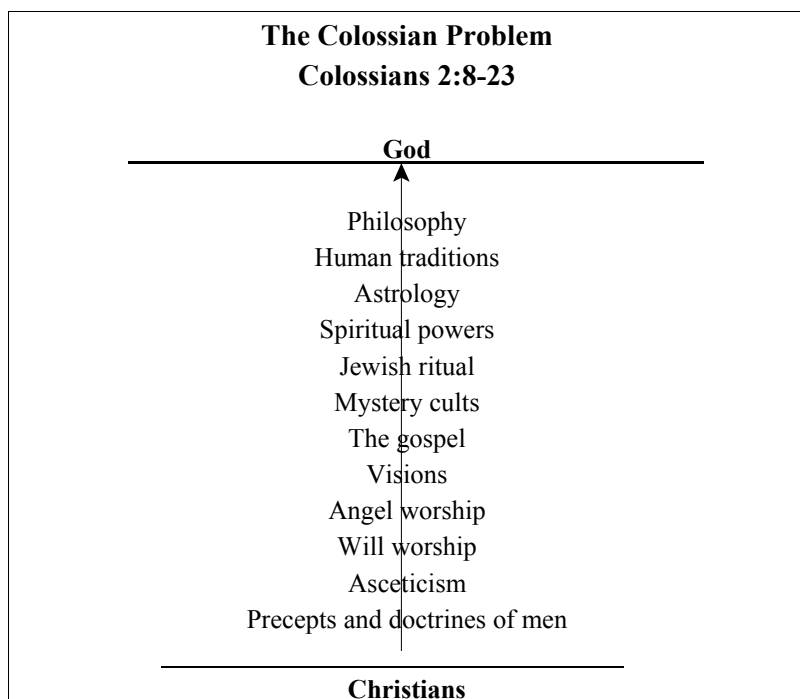
offering their initiates special knowledge by which they could appease these stellar powers and achieve some fortunate access to the gods. Philosophers were found on every street corner, offering their particular slant on life's purpose and destiny. Angels were worshipped. The people were very religious, searching for any reality that might appear to give meaning to life. It was in this pagan atmosphere that the Colossian church had been recently established!

### **The Problem: Syncretism In The Church At Colossae**

The letter reveals the hybrid nature of their problem. They had not rejected Christ as Lord. There is no indication of any attempt to throw out any Christian teaching. As new Christians they simply had not thought out the implications of Christ's lordship – that he alone is our access unto God (Ephesians 2:18). They were attaching their former pagan beliefs and practices to their faith. This would reduce Christ to merely one lord among many. This would strike at the all-sufficiency of Christ's power to save and the Colossian's faith in Christ alone as Lord. An appeal to such a philosophy would mitigate gospel truth. The old problem of Judaistic legalism was also present. Jews, who knew neither the nature of the Law of Moses (that it could not justify, Acts 13:38-39) nor the sufficiency of God's grace, would bind the law on Gentiles as necessary to salvation (Colossians 2:11-17). This would mitigate their faith in Christ by turning their trust legalistically inward upon themselves (cf. Luke 18:9) and away from total trust in Christ as Saviour. Consequently, the all-sufficiency of Christ and the gospel were threatened, and, in turn, the faith and salvation of the church at Colossae was threatened.

This describes something of the hybrid problem at Colossae. The theological term for this amalgamation of different beliefs is *syncretism*, a coalition of conflicting doctrines. This conglomerate is detailed in Colossians 2:8-23.

It consisted of mere speculations from philosophy which were based on human traditions and imaginative observations about “the rudiments of the world” (2:8), Jewish ritual (2:11-17), asceticism (2:18a, 20-23), visions and angel worship (2:18), and principalities and powers (2:10, 15). These were placed alongside Jesus as additional access routes to God and good fortune, just as spiritualism and the horoscope are invoked today by some whose faith is yet immature. The Colossians were being judged (put on trial) by the false teachers and were



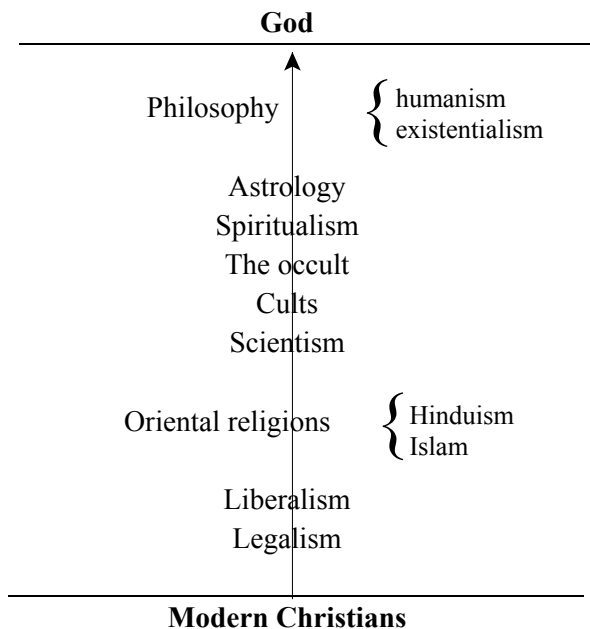
being told that they would be disqualified from salvation if they did not conform (2:16-18). It is indicated that some in the church had already yielded to self-imposed worship and man-made rules of asceticism (2:20-23). The church seems to have been fairly new (1:5-9; 2: 6-7) and dangerously



threatened. Paul set himself to the task of explaining that Christ is our only access to God and salvation, and these other doctrines were in fact not realities, but specious inventions of men totally without saving value (2:23). “Take heed!” said Paul (2:8). Watch out!

### **The Modern Christian’s Challenge**

Not to allow the influences of human wisdom to delude the knowledge and saving power of the gospel.



Modern Christians, like the ancient Colossians, often do not trust Christ to provide salvation, fulfillment, and help for all needs and challenges in this life.

The issue before the church at Colossae and the issue before us today are the same: Is Christ adequate, totally

sufficient to provide salvation from sin, death, and hell, and to lead us triumphantly through the total combination of evil forces which set themselves against us? (cf. Ephesians 6:12). Or are there creatures in heaven and on earth that can provide earthly providences and assist us to attain good fortune here and eternal life hereafter? Paul states that Christ is creator and controller of the universe, head of the church, reconciler to God, and the hope of our glory. He is to have the preeminence in everything. He alone is our good fortune (Colossians 2:10) and our hope of glory (1:27).

### **The Seriousness Of The Problem**

*It was a delusion* (Colossians 2:2-4). When we were baptized into Christ, we espoused him as Lord. We believe that in Christ is all of God's wise plan of salvation and all the knowledge of that plan (cf. 2 Peter 1:3). Consequently, we died to all worldly wisdom, human philosophy, and man-made doctrines as any access to God. Any confidence in such teachings is but a delusion.

*It would produce division* (2:19). This is clear from the statement that holding to Christ as head, the body would be supplied and knit together (unified) with all spiritual increase. "Not holding fast the Head" (2:19) was the root of their problem. If members of the body gave their allegiance, first to one teaching then to another, division would be the natural result.

*It would make spoil of them* (2:8). That is, they would be carried off as captives by false teachers, as booty, as the spoils of war. This is tantamount to loss of salvation.

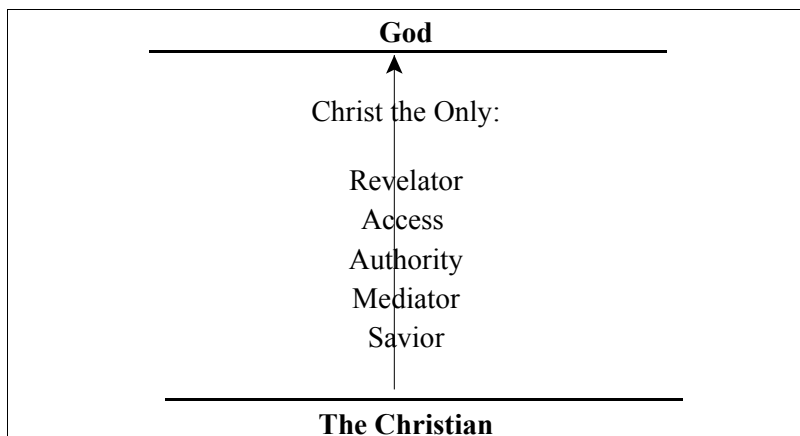
### **The Purpose Of The Letter**

Paul's presentation of Christ's preeminence in all things was designed to counter this threat. He presents Christ as the all-powerful, creator-God who controls all things in his

universe, and maintains that from him alone comes salvation and all spiritual resources (Colossians 1:28; 2:7). Christ is the only access to God (Colossians 1:20; 3:17; Matthew 11:27; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:18; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 7:25). He is the only redeemer (Colossians 1:14) and reconciler to God (1:20). In him only the Christian finds his fulfillment in life (2:10). From him alone is the hope of glory (1:27). Therefore he alone is to receive the fullness of preeminence in all things (1:18-19).

The Christian who exalts Christ to his rightful place of preeminence will not allow his confidence to be misplaced in nonrealities. The one who understands that Christ is creator, lord, head of his church, ruler of his kingdom, and the answer to the mystery of our origin, purpose, and destiny, will not easily be victimized by speculations about life's mysteries. He will know that all other claims as access routes to God – whether intellectual (philosophy, human wisdom), occultic (astrology, spiritualism), religious (modern revelations), or legalistic (Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism), are powerless to save.

See the diagram below of the view the church must have of Christ.



# **OUTLINE OF COLOSSIANS**

## **Introduction: chapter 1:1-14**

1. Greeting, 1-2.
2. Thanksgiving for faith, love, & hope due to the gospel, 3-8.
3. Intercession for knowledge and strengthening power, 9-11.
4. Thanksgiving for our enlightenment & inheritance, for our deliverance from the dark power, and for our translation into the kingdom, 12-14.

## **I. THE SOVEREIGNTY AND PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST OVER ALL THINGS: The Ground of Paul's Solution to the Colossian Problem, 1:15 - 2:7.**

- A. Christ's Relation to God: Deity, 1:15a**
- B. Christ's Relation to Creation: Creator, 1:15b-17**
- C. Christ's Relation to the Church: Beginner and Head, 1:18**
- D. Christ's Relation to Sinful Man: Reconciler, 1:19-23**
- E. Christ's Relation to the Mystery of God: the Hope of Glory, the Treasury of all Redemptive Wisdom and Knowledge, 1:24-2:5**
- F. Exhortation to Walk in Christ as they were Taught, 2:6-7**

## **II. THE COLOSSIAN PROBLEM: Exposed and Refuted, Colossians 2:8-23**

- A. Philosophy Based on Human Traditions and Worldly Rudiments, 2:8**
- B. Principalities and Powers (spirit beings), 2:10,15**
- C. Judaism (Legalism, circumcision required for salvation), 2:11-17**
- D. Visions and Angel Worship, 2:18,19**
- E. Man made Doctrines, Self-imposed Worship, Asceticism, 2:20-23**

## **III. THE CHRISTIAN'S NEW LIFE BASED ON CHRIST AS LORD, 3:1-4:6**

- A. Seek the New Life in Christ, 3:1-4**
- B. Put off the Old Man, Put on the New, 3:5-14**
- C. Christ's Peace, Let it Rule in Your Hearts, 3:15**
- D. Christ's Word, Let it Dwell in You Richly, 3:16**
- E. Christ's Authority, Obey it, 3:17**
- F. Domestic and Social Relationships, 3:18-4:1 (these are our relationships to others because of our relationship to Christ):**
  - 1. Wives, 3:18**
  - 2. Husbands, 3:19**

3. Children, 3:20
4. Fathers, 3:21
5. Bondslaves, 3:22-25
6. Masters (slave owners), 4:1

**G. Encouragement to pray, 4:2-4**

**H. Exercise Wisdom in Conduct and Speech, 4:5-6**

#### **IV. CLOSING INSTRUCTIONS AND PERSONAL GREETINGS, 4:7-18**

**A. Endorsement of Tychicus and Onesimus as message bearers, vs.7-9**

**B. Greetings from other Christians, 10:15**

**C. Paul's Command concerning the Colossian and Laodicean Letters, v. 16**

**D. Command to Archippus, v. 17**

**E. Paul's handwritten Salutation, v. 18**

# COLOSSIANS

## Introduction

### A. Background of the City of Colossae

1. Geographically: Colossae in New Testament times was located in Asia Minor, present day Turkey. It was situated on the main trade route connecting Phrygia in the east, with Ephesus about 150 miles slightly northwest. The city was located at the central southern end of Phrygia. Laodicea was some 10 miles northwest of Colossians, and Hierapolis was about 16 miles north-northwest.
2. Historically:
  - a. *About 400 BC the city of Colossians was a major commercial city in the Lycus River Valley. But by Paul's time was the least important city in the area. Diminished in importance and devastated by an earthquake in 61 AD, it was never rebuilt.*
  - b. *The Jewish population around Colossae is a significant corroboration of the Jewish theological influence on the church mentioned by Paul in Colossians 2:11-16. "The Jewish population was due in part to Antiochus III, who settled about two thousand Jews from Mesopotamia and Babylon in that area around 200 BC . . . According to Cicero, there may have been as many as ten thousand Jews living in that area of Phrygia" in New Testament times (Arthur G. Patzia, Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, New International Biblical*

Commentary, 3).

- B. Establishment of the Church:** Some have speculated that Paul could have established the church on his third missionary journey as he “went through the region of Galatia and Phrygia” (Acts 18:23), in which “region” was Colossae. However, the internal evidence in the letter to the Colossians seems to be very clear that Epaphras, himself a Colossian (Colossians 4:12), established the church (Colossians 1:7). This could well have been following Paul’s evangelistic stint at Ephesus, during which time he “*reasoned daily in the school of Tyrannus*” for two years “*so that all of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks*” (Acts 19:9-10). At the time Paul wrote the Colossian letter he was in prison. Epaphras was with him, probably as Paul’s source of information concerning the problems at Colossae, being deeply concerned over the state of the churches in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis (Colossians 4:12-13). It is not inconceivable that Epaphras attended Paul’s classes at the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus and was among those who saw to it that “*all of Asia heard the word of the Lord.*” At any rate, Epaphras was the one from whom the Colossians “*heard and knew the grace of God in truth*” (Colossians 1:6-7).
- C. Authorship of the Colossian Letter:** Universally accepted as Pauline until the close of the 19th century. Not challenged by the early church. Ignatius, in the early 2nd century, in his letter to the Ephesian church, uses the language of Colossians 1:23 when he exhorts the church, “*be ye steadfast in*



*the faith*” (Epistle of St. Ignatius, To The Ephesians, 10). His use of the Colossian language carried its own authority to the Ephesians.

- D. Dating the Letter:** The internal evidence from Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon gives a strong, almost certain conclusion, that all three of these letters were written at the same time by Paul while in prison, which is traditionally and with good reason, viewed as his Roman imprisonment c. 60-62 AD (Colossians 4:10,18; Philemon 1, 9-10; Ephesians 3:1; 6:20). Both the Colossian and Ephesian letters were delivered by Tychicus (Colossians 4:7; Ephesians 6:21), who had an identical assignment to the recipients of both letters (Colossians 4:7-8; Ephesians 6:21-22), nullifying the modern idea that Ephesians was written many years later by a disciple of Paul. Also, since Colossians says Archippus was at Colossae (Colossians 4:17) and the Philemon epistle is addressed to Archippus as well (Philemon 2), and since Onesimus, the subject of the letter to Philemon (Philemon 8-20), is also mentioned as a Colossian who was sent to Colossae together with Tychicus (Colossians 4:10), it seems conclusive that Colossians and Philemon were written by Paul at the same time and were entrusted to Tychicus and Onesimus as postmen together with the Ephesian letter. Therefore to date one of these letters is to date each of them at the same time, sometime during his imprisonment at Rome c. 60-62 AD.
- E. The Colossian Heresy:** Paul does not detail the problem explicitly; it is inferred from his statements in opposition to the false teaching. The heresy was

syncretistic in nature; there was a hybrid of religious and philosophical influences and teachings from Greek, Roman, and Jewish cultures, that Paul exposes as heretical. There was:

1. Philosophy – Colossians 2:8. Mere human wisdom, a man-made philosophy that was based on mere human traditions and worldly rudiments. It was “vain deceit,” empty, without substance, and deceitful as it stood in opposition to the “wisdom and knowledge” that are in Christ as revealed in the gospel (2:1-4).
  - a. *Human traditions.* Which could have been Jewish traditions, as well as Gentile, in the form of legalism and angel worship (where angels were involved in delivering the law to Israel (Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19) and were considered later by some Jews to be worthy of veneration.
  - b. *The Rudiments of the world* – Worldly rudiments (or, “the basic principles of this world,” NIV translation). From *stoichea*, denoting fundamental principles of creation and of knowledge. These “worldly rudiments,” or principles, seem to have been elevated to the status of spirits, cosmic rulers. Hence the translation in some versions, “the elemental spirits of the universe” (NEB). These spiritual beings were called “*principalities and powers*” (cf. 2:9,15), which to the pagan mind of the Graeco-Roman world were perceived to be evil spiritual beings that capriciously controlled the lives and destinies of men (cf. Patzia, pp. 4-7). To offset the influence

of these spirit beings, as those pagans perceived the matter, they would engage in worshiping those beings, or in magical practices and pagan rites and sorcery, to call the pagan deities to deliver them from the evil spirits.

Astrology. This would include astrology which taught (teaches) that there is a correspondence between the movements of the gods above and the alterations that take place on earth. Patzia says, “Some of the beliefs and practices that Paul exposes in the epistle are related to astrology. Even the worship of angels may come from the idea that these are powers that control one’s destiny (fate) and need to be venerated. Lohse suggests that in some strands of Jewish speculation the stars themselves were thought of as a distinct class of angels” (Patzia, 5).<sup>1</sup>

2. Principalities and powers—Colossians 1: 15-17; 2:9, 15. The evil spirits just mentioned.
3. Jewish ritual – (perhaps Hellenized, itself syncretistic), Colossians 2:11-17. Like circumcision, abstinence from meats, observation of special days like Sabbath days and feast days.
4. Visions – Colossians 2:18, “dwelling in things which he hath seen, vainly puffed up in his fleshly mind.”

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<sup>1</sup>For a thorough study of *stoichea tou kosmou*, Elements of the Universe, and its possible meaning in Colossians see, Peter T. Obrien, Colossians, Philemon, Word Biblical Commentary., p. 129-134.

5. Asceticism – Colossians 2:20-23. Self imposed worship, harsh treatment of the body.
6. Gnosticism – While gnosticism was not fully developed until the second century it may have manifested itself incipiently in this syncretism at Colossae (see Patzia, *ibid.*, 5-6).
7. Mystery religions<sup>2</sup> – Colossians 1:25-2:5, cf. Ephesians 3:3-6; Romans 16:25-26; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16.

#### **F. Purpose of the Letter**

It appears from the high Christology of Colossians 1:15-2:7 and the false teachings described in Colossians 2:8-23 that Paul is setting in superior contrast the inherent implications of the exalted Christ and the gospel over against the weakness of created spiritual beings now under Christ's control and the inherent powerlessness and ephemeral nature of mere man made doctrines and rites. He is explaining how Christ and the gospel, when understood and practiced, frees men from the tyranny of pagan philosophies and spiritualism and the invented precepts and doctrines of mere men, which in fact have no value against indulging the flesh in sinful practice. He says Christ's sovereign power, as creator and controller of all things, visible and invisible, has subdued all spiritual beings (real and imaginary), and that all man-made rites and practices of both Jews and Pagans are of no value

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<sup>2</sup>For a possible relationship between the mystery religions and Paul's use of the term in his epistles refer to Peter T. Obrien, *Ibid.*, pp.83-85.

whatever, that only in Christ is found salvation (Colossians 1:19-23; 2:11-14; 3:1-4), human completeness, fulfillment (Colossians 2:10), and security from evil spiritual powers (1:15-17; 2:9,15-23).

This teaching is relevant to the needs of the church today around the world.

# EXPOSITION OF COLOSSIANS

## I. THE GROUND OF PAUL'S SOLUTION TO THE COLOSSIAN PROBLEM

The Sovereignty and Preeminence of Christ Over All Things (Colossians 1:14-2:7)

In order to instruct the Colossian Christians to trust Christ as the only sovereign Lord and the only access to God and to give Christ his rightful place of preeminence, Paul set forth Christ's five-fold relationship to God, to creation, to the church, to sinful man, and to the mystery of redemption. This presentation would make an immediate impact upon the church to exalt Christ as the only lord and mediator.

### A. Christ's Relationship to God (Colossians 1:15a) He "is the image of the invisible God."

#### 1. Image, representation, and manifestation.

Not only a representation, but the very substance of deity. Christ is himself God (John 1:1, 14; Romans 9:5), hence, a manifestation of God.

#### 2. Invisible God.

Man cannot see God (1 Timothy 6:16), but Christ has "declared him" (John 1:18). "Declared," from *exegeomai*, to make known, to reveal; hence, Christ reveals God. "He that hath seen me hath seen then Father" (John 14:9). Since God is invisible, reason asks, What have we seen? We have seen in Christ the attributes of God. Christ himself in the flesh manifested the nature and attributes of the Father.

3. “In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” (Colossians 2:9)

Jesus is himself God, that is, deity. While not the Father, he is everything the Father is. He is in his nature deity.

- a. “*fullness*” – *pleroma*, fullness without any lack.
- b. “*Godhead*” – *theotetos*, defined as all the essence, quality, character, and being of God or deity. He is therefore what God is. God became flesh, the only begotten from the Father (John 1:1, 14). As Matthew explained, Jesus is Immanuel, “*God with us*” (Matthew 1:23), deity with humanity. He existed “in the form of God” (Philippians 2:6), “form” is from *morphe*, not a bodily configuration, but nature (so translated in the NIV). The Hebrew writer describes Christ as God: “*but of the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever . . . And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth*” (Hebrews 1:8-12). Jesus is said to be the “God” of Psalm 45:6, and “the Lord” (Jehovah) of Psalm 102:1, 25-27.

### Application to the Colossian Problem

Paul’s teaching that Jesus is God is intended to centralize our faith in Christ alone. Any attempt to access God by any other means reduces Christ to merely one access among many, and could result in setting Christ aside entirely. It must be understood that Christ is our only access to God’s saving and helping grace. Remember John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:18, 3:12; and 1 Timothy 2:5.

## B. Christ's Relationship to Creation (Colossians 1:15b-17)

*"The firstborn of all creation; for in him were all things created."*

1. *"firstborn of all creation."*

"Firstborn" – *prototokos*, the idea is that of primacy (so translated in NEB), prominence, preeminence. *Does not refer to time.* The following word study shows that "firstborn" carries the idea of primacy, top priority, first place.

- a. *Deuteronomy 21:15-17*, where the firstborn son in the Hebrew family received a double portion of the inheritance; that is, he received a preeminent place of honor among his brethren. While firstborn in point of time, he received the honor of preeminence. This is the idea.
- b. *Exodus 4:22*, *"Israel is my son, my first-born,"* said the Lord. Obviously this is not referring to time since Egypt was ancient when Israel was an infant. The point is Israel sustained a place of priority with the Lord among all the nations of the earth.
- c. *Psalms 89:27*, where the Messiah, called "the first-born," is declared to be *"the highest of the kings of the earth."* Not a time reference, but one of highest rank. The psalmist used the term firstborn and explains that he means "the highest."
- d. *Romans 8:29*, Jesus is said to occupy a place of preeminence among all the sons of



God. Hence, our elder brother, since he is “first-born among many brethren.” Deuteronomy 21:15-17 is here recalled.

- e. *1 Timothy 1:15*, Paul said he was the “chief” of sinners. From *protos*, first, but not first in point of time since Adam sinned first (Romans 5:12). Paul was the “foremost” sinner (so translated in NASV).

What Paul is saying to the Colossians is that Christ has a preeminent relationship to the creation, since “*in him were all things created.*” The creator is superior to the creation.

So John writes of Christ as, “*the beginning of the creation of God*” (Revelation 3:14). Beginning – *arche*, meaning source (from *archo*, the verb, “I rule,” in active voice, “I begin,” in middle voice). This word has no reference to time. The idea is that Christ is the source from whom all creation began. He is the firstborn, the beginner, of all creation. This does not say that Christ is a created being who created all other things, but that he’s the source of all things created.

- 2. The creator of all creation.

“*For in him were all things created.*”

- a. “*For*” – *hoti*, meaning, because. This is the reason for Christ’s preeminence in all things. Such primacy is due to the fact that he created all things.
- b. “*in him were all things created.*” (See also John 1:1-3; Hebrews 1:2; Revelation 3:14 [as explained above].) Christ brought all

things into existence. Nothing came into existence that he himself did not create. Therefore, he could not have been created without having created himself. This is contrary to the teaching that Christ is a created being.

- c. *“before all things.”* He is before all things created. In order to have created all things he had to have existed prior to all things created. We should speak not merely of the preexistence of Christ, but of his eternal preexistence (cf. John 8:58; 17:5,14).
- d. *“in him all things consist,”* or hold together. As in, “upholding all things by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:3). He is the sustainer of the universe. “The permanence of the universe rests on Christ. It is a ‘Christo-centric universe’” says Robertson (Word Pictures, Vol. IV, p. 478).

### **Application to the Colossian Problem**

An appeal seems to have been made to astrology (the rudiments of the world, Colossians 2:8) as an access to God. But in whom would we trust? In the stars, or in him who made the stars? Angel worship and spiritualism were a part of mediatorial accesses which the false teachers held out to the Colossians. But Christ, as creator of all things, is supremely above all things created. Thus, attempts to reach God through such mere creations are futile. The Christian is to see Christ as totally sufficient to attain to God and salvation.

### **C. Christ’s Relationship to the Church (Colossians 1:18)**

*“He is the head of the body, the church.”*

1. “The head.” The head has all authority, because it controls the body (cf. 1:24, 2:19; Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 5:22-23). The saints have been delivered from the power of darkness to the reigning power of Christ (Colossians 1:13). The Colossian Christians were in danger of turning loose of the head (2:19) as the only authority (cf. Colossians 3:17) and providential controller of their destinies. They would cease to hold fast to the head if they turned from the objective truth revealed in the word to subjective speculations based on nothing more than the claims of mere men.
2. “The beginning.” Arche, noun, meaning ruler or source or beginner. Since it is stated that Christ is head of the church, it would be redundant to translate “ruler.” Therefore, “beginning” or “beginner” is accurate. Christ began the church and is its head.
3. “Firstborn from the dead.” Again, the word is *prototokos*, meaning preeminent. Christ is preeminent among all those who have been raised. “Firstborn” has no reference to time in this usage, as though Jesus were the first in time to rise from the dead never to die again. This statement relates to the church. The confidence of the church is in the risen Christ with emphasis on risen, not in mortals, dead men, spirits of the dead, or any other who has been raised. He has primacy among all the dead inasmuch as he has conquered death in his resurrection. The resurrection is the supreme sign of Christ’s deity. He is the object of our

total trust.

4. “That in all things he might have the preeminence.” That is, all created things, whether physical or spiritual, whether angels or principalities or powers. His is the rightful place of preeminence in the physical universe and in the spiritual realm, in both the physical creation and in the spiritual recreation, the church. Thus, 1:15-18 is a unit. As creator of the universe and beginner of the church, he is to have the preeminence in all things.

### **Application to the Colossian Problem**

The church was to appeal to no other authority (Acts 4:12; Colossians 3:17). They were not to appeal to the realm of the dead. (cf. Luke 24:5; Deuteronomy 18:9-19, where necromancy, appealing to the dead for guidance, is condemned, and Israel is directed to heed only the word of God). In Christ alone – the risen Lord and Creator, God-their faith was to rest. The church is not to recognize the authority of any other, either in heaven (as the principalities and powers) or on earth (as the papacy).

#### **D. Christ’s Relationship to Sinful Man (Colossians 1:19-23)**

*“Through him to reconcile all things unto himself.”*

1. “In him should all the fullness dwell.”

The question rises, The fullness of what? The immediate context is speaking of the preeminence of Christ. Contextually, then, Paul is saying that Christ is to have the fullness of preeminence. This preeminence is not to be shared by another or given to another, as the Colossians were being encouraged to do. (This

application fits the context better than equating this reference to his “fullness” to the fullness of his deity in 2:9). In this context, his deity, his creatorial power, and his headship of the church are all offered as reasons for his preeminence in all things. God is pleased, states Paul, that in Christ all the fullness of preeminence is to reside.

2. “Through him to reconcile all things unto himself.”

He is the reconciler (cf. Romans 5:10-11; 2 Corinthians 5:18).

- a. *Reconciliation* – to make friends again. When two are estranged, there must be a reconciliation in order for there to be peace. A reconciliation presupposes peace (cf. Ephesians 2:15-16; Colossians 1:20).
- b. “*through the blood of his cross.*” The reconciliation was accomplished by the blood of his cross (Romans 3:25; 1 Peter 1:18-19). The idea is that back of that shed blood is his death wherein he became our sin-offering and propitiation (Isaiah 53:5-11; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 9:26, 10:14; 1 John 2:1-2). It is solely on the basis of that death and consequent shed blood that our sins can be forgiven.
- c. *peace* – the result of our reconciliation (cf. Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:14-17). All Old Testament peace prophecies are fulfilled in redemption from sin (see Isaiah 2:2-4, 9:6-7; Micah 5:2, 5; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 34:25, 37:26). The Prince of Peace himself declares that such prophecies are

not of world peace (John 14:27). That peace which he gives is not as the world gives. Thus, Hebrews 13:20 answers to the “covenant of peace” prophecies which were fulfilled in the remission of our sins (Jeremiah 31:34; Romans 5:1; Colossians 3:15).

3. Our condition before God (1:21-23).
  - a. *Past condition*: alienated and enemies (cf. Ephesians 2:11-12).
  - b. *Present condition*: now reconciled.
  - c. *Future condition*: to be presented to God holy, without blemish, and unreprouvable.
  - d. *The “if” conditions*: if we continue in the faith (not the act of believing, but the thing believed) and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel.

### **Application to the Colossian Problem**

Christ has provided reconciliation for all men. This is what the Father is pleased to do (v 19). Jesus is the one, the only one, whom God has supplied for our reconciliation. There can be no other (cf. Hebrews 10:14, 26). Therefore, any attempt to be reconciled to God through another would be futile. Neither angels, nor spiritual powers, nor any other creature in creation can gain for us an access to God.

### **E. Christ’s Relationship to the Mystery**

(Colossians 1:24-2:7) Christ is the mystery of God.

1. Mystery (musterion).

As used by Paul, the “mystery” is God’s purpose in Christ for the redemption of man which was once hidden, but now has been revealed. Consider the following study of

“mystery”:

*The meaning of “mystery” in antiquity:* the word meant “a secret imparted only to the initiated, what is unknown until it is revealed” (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia). In ancient religions “the mysteries” stood as a technical term for the secret rites and celebrations known only to those who had been initiated into their particular cult. The mystery cults were marked by strict exclusiveness and secrecy. None but the initiated could be present at the services.

Regarding the debate as to whether Paul’s language reflects the encroachment of the mystery religions on Christianity, we do know that the mystery religions claimed that they offered access to the gods and spiritual powers. This was supposed to bring good fortune to the initiates.

*Paul’s meaning of mystery:* the word is used some twenty-seven or twenty-eight times in the New Testament, twenty or twenty-one times by Paul, and “bears its ancient sense of a revealed secret, not its modern sense of that which cannot be fathomed or comprehended” (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia). Paul used the term in relation to the gospel. In his writings it characteristically meant the divine truth of the gospel of Christ, once hidden from eternity, but now revealed.

Some commentators interpret the mystery as meaning merely that the gospel was to include the Gentiles in the Jewish promises (Barclay). But Paul makes it clear that the

gospel is for all, Jew and Gentile. That was the mystery hidden in the mind of God from eternity. What Paul is saying in Colossians 1:26-27 and Ephesians 3:8-9 is that the gospel, once a mystery since it was hidden from all men, was at last revealed and was now being made known to the Gentiles according to God's plan. That plan called for the gospel to be made known in its order: "*to the Jew first, and also to the Greek*" (Romans 1:16, Acts 13:46).

2. Now manifested to his saints (1:25-26).

The mystery of God's eternal purpose in Christ has now been made known by the apostles and prophets to whom God had revealed the mystery. The following is an exposition of the meaning of "the mystery of God," as Paul referred to it in Colossians and Ephesians. Read the following passages:

- a. *Ephesians 1:9-11; 3:10-11*. God's great purpose (his will) for human redemption was planned to be summed up in Christ at a time in history predetermined by God (Ephesians 1:9-10). This would be the fulfillment of the outworking of God in all preceding ages (1:9). Paul teaches that what God purposed in Christ is exactly what God accomplished, and that he did it on schedule according to his purpose, "*in the fullness of the time*" (Galatians 4:4). The motto of the business world is: plan your work and work your plan. That is what Paul said God did for our salvation: he purposed to sum up all things in Christ and he worked that purpose to its

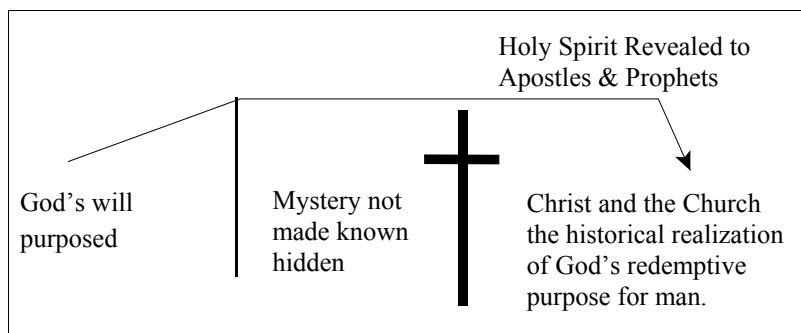


fulfillment.

The church is also a part of that purpose:

*To the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God. (3:10-11)*

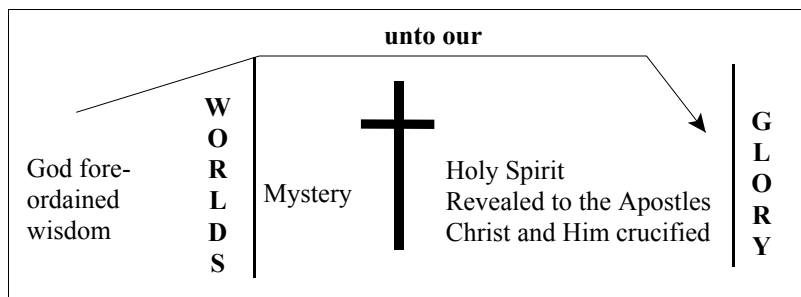
Therefore we are to glorify God “*in the church and in Christ Jesus*” (3:21). This is God’s plan for the redemption of man.



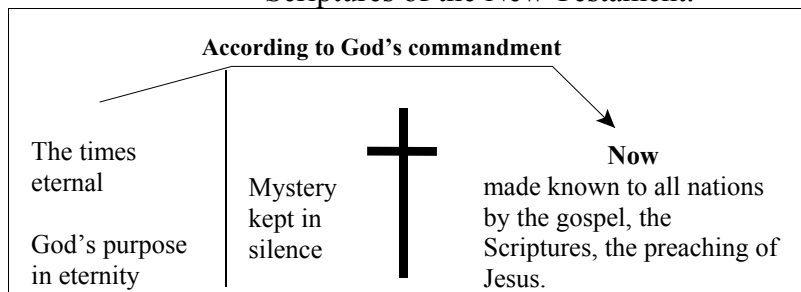
But at one time, all of this purpose was a mystery, hidden from both angels and men (Ephesians 3:8, 11; 1 Peter 1:12). Thus, Paul looks back to the eternity before time when God’s redemptive plan was but a silent thought in the divine mind, unexecuted and unrevealed. He teaches that Christ has now fulfilled that hidden purpose and that God has revealed it to the apostles and prophets by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:3-6).

- b. 1 Corinthians 2:6-13.* Paul explains that the gospel mystery, though once hidden from the eyes, ears, and heart-thoughts of

mankind, was what God foreordained before the worlds for our glorification. Paul refers to this mystery as God's wisdom, that is, his wise plan for the redemption of man in contradistinction to the wisdom of the world. He reminds the Corinthians that this hidden wisdom is precisely what was spoken to them when he first came to Corinth (vs. 6-7), *"proclaiming to you the testimony of God"* and having *"determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified"* (1-2). He explains that our eternal glorification, though once a mystery inasmuch as it was foreordained before the worlds and kept hidden until that time, was now fulfilled in Christ. Then it was revealed by the Holy Spirit to the apostles who then spoke it in words that made it known. Thus, what God foreordained, Christ fulfilled, the Holy Spirit revealed, the apostles preached, and the Corinthians heard and believed. This is what is meant by the revelation of the mystery of Christ.

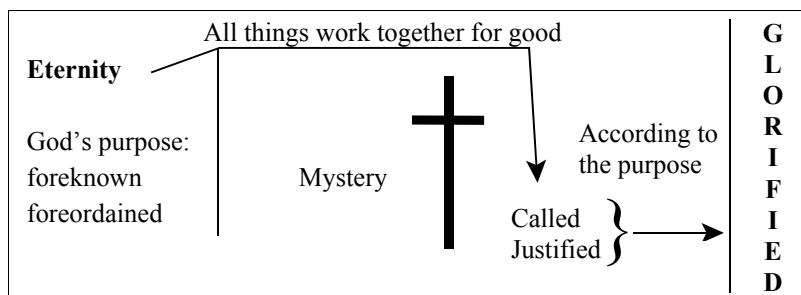


- c. *Romans 16:25-26*. Paul equated the gospel with “*the preaching of Jesus Christ*” – which was itself “*according to the revelation of the mystery,*” which had been kept silent until his day but “*now is manifested*” through the Scriptures of the New Testament prophets according to God’s commandment. Thus, the mystery of Christ, once hidden, has now been made known through gospel preaching and the Scriptures of the New Testament.



The following diagram allows a view of the full scope of Paul’s presentation of the grace of God as it extends from eternity to eternity:

*And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose. For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained . . . and whom he foreordained, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Romans 8:28-30).*



3. God made known His mystery among the Gentiles (1:27).

God's purpose in Christ included the Gentiles as well as Jews (Romans 1:16, 9:22-24; Ephesians 3:3-6), and Paul had a stewardship (translated "dispensation") from God to make that mystery known to all men (Ephesians 3:8-9, particularly to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13, 15:16; Ephesians 3:1).

4. Christ in you, the hope of glory (1:27).

God's purpose from eternity is the eternal glorification of man. Christ is the summing up of that purpose. Outside Christ there is no hope for human flesh (cf. Ephesians 2:11-12). There is only one hope for Gentiles (Ephesians 4:4-6), and for Israel (Acts 26:6-7, 28:20). "*Christ in you the hope of glory*" is a significant statement for those who hold that there may be other powers yet unknown which we may eventually be able to access for our eternal welfare. But Paul teaches that Christ is the only hope of eternal glory. There is no wisdom or knowledge from the ancients or in the future, that man is yet to discover, that can solve man's plight of sin, corruption, and death. Nor can any powers,

yet unknown, in hell or in the universe or in the spiritual realm separate the faithful Christian from God's redemptive love and his purpose for our eternal glorification. Christ as creator and controller of the universe is head of all principalities and powers (Colossians 2:10).

*For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)*

Though Christ is Savior, salvation comes only when we take him into our hearts and lives. Another has observed that, "*Christ is not the hope of glory, but Christ **in you** is the hope of glory.*"

5. Presenting every man perfect in Christ (1:28).  
God's mystery of redemption is not for the few. It is for all. Whether they can read or write is of no consequence, as long as they can hear and believe. Christ is sufficient for "every man." Every man can be presented to the Father "perfect," or full-grown, if he is "in Christ." There is no lack for another to fill.
6. Christ in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden (2:1-7).

In Christ, through the revealed knowledge of the gospel as preached by Epaphras (1:6-7), God's redemptive mystery can be fully known. For in him are:

- a. “*all treasures*” – from *thesauros*, treasure box or chest, treasure storehouse.
- b. “*of wisdom*,” God’s purpose from eternity, his wise plan to save man (cf. Ephesians 3:10-11; 1 Corinthians 2:6-7).
- c. “*knowledge*,” the objective knowledge of the revealed gospel. (Study 1 Corinthians 2:10-13; Ephesians 3:3-5; 2 Peter 1:3.) This knowledge was in turn made known to all men by the apostles. Be careful to equate the wisdom of God in Christ with the purposed plan from eternity. His wise plan was always there, but none had knowledge of it until the Holy Spirit revealed it from Pentecost. This gospel knowledge is now a mystery only to those who have not heard it.

### Application to the Colossian Problem

Paul’s use of the well-known meaning of “mystery,” in reference to Christ, suggests that the Colossians were tempted to mix the teachings of the pagan mystery religions with the truth of the gospel. The exclusive nature of the mystery cults together with their “special knowledge,” when amalgamated into the gospel, would bear its natural fruit of pride and make Christianity at Colossae a haughty, exclusive intellectualism. Paul taught that Christ is for all, not merely for an intelligentsia or an otherwise select few. His application of God’s mystery for all men would strike at the exclusivism of the mystery cults, as well as the specious fallacies of their pagan teachings. So he wrote, “*This I say, that no one may delude you with persuasiveness of speech*” (2:4).

It is the same for modern man. In Christ is all the wise plan of salvation and all the knowledge of it. No other branch of

learning can provide anything spiritually or eternally beneficial beyond what we have in Christ through the gospel. No mysteries, whether cultic or occultic, whether past or present, will be revealed that can add to the Christians' knowledge of God's purpose and destiny as revealed in the gospel. We need no modern visions or revelations, no more prophets, no special guidance from the Holy Spirit in addition to what has been revealed. In the gospel, Christ has revealed all things from the father (Matthew 11:27). The gospel of Christ is therefore sufficient to "present every man perfect in Christ" (1:28).

## **II. THE COLOSSIAN PROBLEM (Colossians 2:8-23)**

The real reason behind the epistle and the elaborate presentation of Paul's Christology in Colossians 1:15-2:7 now becomes clear. Paul addresses the errors threatening the Colossians (and Laodiceans as well, cf. 2:4, 4:16) and warns them against any claims for access to God other than Christ through the gospel.

### **A. Philosophies Based on Human Traditions and Rudiments of the World (Colossians 2:8)**

Paul tells the Colossians to beware of philosophy and vain deceit.

1. "Take heed," beware – This is a warning that these errors are pernicious. Christians are to be educated to the nature of Christ and redemption by faith in him and to the nature of the errors threatening them.
2. "Make spoil of you." – This refers to those who, through false teaching, would carry them away captive as the "*spoils of war*." "*See to it that no one takes you away captive*" (NIV), that is, by these persuasive doctrines.
3. "Philosophy" – That branch of study which

seeks to determine by human wisdom the origin, purpose, and destiny of the universe. Paul acknowledged man's ability to determine the existence of God by what he sees in nature (Romans 1:18-20; Acts 14:17, 17:24-28). But apart from God's special revelation through Scripture and the historical Christ, any ideas of man's responsibility to God and other men or to his duty and destiny would be reduced to mere conjecture.

4. "Vain deceit" – All philosophies of life based on human traditions and worldly rudiments are deceptive. They lack the wisdom contained only in the gospel (cf. Colossians 2:3; 1 Corinthians 1:21). They are vain in that they are unable to achieve God's desire for man.
5. "Traditions of men" – These traditions have their origin in human wisdom. See Christ's evaluation of such in Matthew 15:6-9 and Mark 7:6-9. These are opposed to the traditions of the apostles (1 Corinthians 11:23, 2; 2 Thessalonians 2:15).
6. "Rudiments of the world" – This phrase does not seem to refer to the carnal ordinances of the law of Moses (Galatians 4:3, 9; Hebrews 9:1, 9), since these were Gentiles who had never been under the law. Paul says that they "*died with Christ from the rudiments of the world*" (Colossians 2:20). This particular reference to worldly rudiments is to those elemental principles which were pagan in nature rather than Jewish.

"Rudiments" or "elements," from *stoicheia*, means "things which are set out in a



row” It was the word for the letters of the alphabet, probably because they can be set out in a row. Thus, rudiments could mean elementary instruction in any subject. Perhaps, then, “rudiments of the world” referred to the so-called wisdom of Gentile philosophies. False teachers advanced this “wisdom” to the Colossians as profound and needful for salvation. Another, and preferable, translation is “the elements of the world.” This translation seems likely to refer to the elemental spirits of the universe or to the pagan perception of those spirit beings back of the stars and planetary systems. This would be a direct reference to astrology. Barclay comments that,

It is almost impossible for us to realize how dominated the ancient world was by the idea of the influence of the elemental spirits and the stars. Astrology was then, as someone has said, the queen of the sciences. Even men so great as Julius Caesar and Augustus, so cynical as Tiberius, so level-headed as Vespasian would take no step without consulting the stars. Alexander the Great believed implicitly in the influence of the stars. Men and women believed their whole lives were fixed by them. (Barclay on Colossians, The Daily Study Bible)

Today’s horoscope mania is not all fun and games. Some are quite conquered by the mystique of their destiny among the stars. No

doubt much of this star gazing is connected to the Eastern Oriental influence presently in the Western world. But it is based on subjective feelings and experiences and is totally devoid of objective proof.

The rendering, “*elemental spirits of the world*,” seems to be in keeping with Paul’s emphasis on Christ as creator of all things. It is also consistent with his caution to beware of such worldly rudiments, inasmuch as Christ is “*the head of all principality and power*” and has “*despoiled the principalities and the powers*” (Colossians 2:10, 15). It seems, then, that Paul is warning the Colossians to beware of philosophies which are based on trust in astrology and other cosmic powers for their good fortune and salvation. What comes through clearly is that Christ is the only access to God and redemption.

**B. Principalities and Powers (Colossians 2:10,15)  
Christ Is Sufficient (Colossians 2:9-10)**

1. “In him ye are made full” – This is the reason given for not trusting in human philosophies. Christ is the Christian’s fullness. Since Christ is the very essence of deity, the believer lacks nothing. Our purpose and destiny are complete in him. We need look no further. No other can supply man’s needs; God supplied no other.
2. “Head of all principality and power” – There are spiritual beings both good and evil (Ephesians 3:10; 6:12). Created beings (Colossians 1:16), who rebelled against God, were divinely disempowered for having left

their proper habitation (Jude 6; 2 Peter 2:4). In Christ's vicarious sacrifice he triumphed over these evil forces, despoiling or disarming them of any power over the saints (Colossians 2:15). With these we wrestle (Ephesians 6:10-16). But those who wear the Christian armor and wield the Spirit's sword can "withstand" their influence. For those of us who by faith and obedience hold fast the head (2:19), these spiritual powers are powerless. Thus Paul's majestic declaration that no force from hell or on earth or in the heavens or in the future can conquer the Christian! (Romans 8:31-39).

How they work is not impossible to answer. As God's Spirit leads us by his word, so Satan's henchmen employ their false doctrines (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). They attempt to corrupt the church's mind by lying to us about the word of God (John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 11:3), even as Satan did originally when he plotted against Eve (Genesis 2:17, 3:4).

The ancient heresy of gnosticism taught that a series of powerful emanations existed between God and man and that, in order to have access to God, these first had to be placated by special knowledge. Whether or not Paul had reference to such is not certain, but the idea that special access knowledge was available from these cosmic powers seems to be implied by his several references to the wisdom and knowledge in Christ which stands in opposition to the wisdom of the world (Colossians 1:25-2:4, 2:8, 3:1-2).

But Paul declares that whatever knowledge these spirits have of God's plan for man, they must themselves learn of it from the church! (Ephesians 3:10-11). Peter tells us that the knowledge of salvation that Christians have, which was "*announced unto you through them that preached the gospel unto you by the Holy Spirit,*" is the very thing that "*angels desire to look into*" (1 Peter 1:12). Neither angels, nor principalities, nor powers are to be sought out for special knowledge. They have nothing we need. And what we need, they have to learn from us as God works it out in history according to his eternal purpose. Therefore, any appeal to angels, spirit beings, astrology, fortune tellers, clairvoyants, and mediums is futile, as well as faithless.

### C. **Judaism (legalism)** (Colossians 2:11-17)

The problem at Colossae was hybrid in nature (syncretistic, a mixture of several doctrines). Judaism, which sought to bind the Law of Moses on Gentile Christians as essential to salvation (Acts 15:1, 5), was in the mixture.

1. "Circumcision" – Not necessary for Christians since we were spiritually circumcised ("not made with hands") when God cut off the body of sinful flesh.
2. "Baptism" – Christian circumcision is not baptism, it is putting off sin. However, it is God who does the work of cutting off sin when one by faith in Christ is baptized. Baptism is when God circumcises. It is in baptism that one expresses his faith in Christ to cut off sin. We

are justified by faith (Romans 5:1), but baptism is an obedience of faith (Romans 16:26). Thus baptism must be rendered as an act of faith in Christ to forgive sin. That kind of faith is accounted for righteousness (James 2:21-23).

**D. Visions and Angel Worship** (Colossians 2:18-19)

Christ's triumph through the cross (Colossians 2:13-15) – vision and angel worship are unnecessary

1. “Blotted out the bond” – The word *bond* is equivalent to an IOU. It means the record of a debt (cf. Luke 16:5-7). When the debt was paid, it was then cancelled by a mark written across the face of the bond, the Greek letter *chi* (resembling an x). But blotting out the bond would be even stronger than cancelling the debt. Vellum (the thin membrane of the antelope) was often used in ancient writings for professional purposes. The ink used had no acid in it and did not “take a bite” out of the writing material when it made contact; it merely dried on the surface. Therefore, when the valuable vellum was to be used again, a rag or sponge would blot out the writing, thus blotting out the record of the debt. So Christ's work at Calvary was sufficient to blot out our sin debt, as well as remove the law which held us as sinners.
2. “Despoiled the principalities and the powers” That is, they were divested of their power and rendered harmless.

Demons, principalities, and spiritual powers – both good and evil – are very real. Jesus treated them as real; they spoke to him, acknowledging him to be the son of God; he

cast them out. He gave his apostles power to cast out demons (Mark 16:17-20), which we see them doing in Acts 5:12, 8:6-7, 16:16-18, etc. Jesus allowed them to operate in the first century, with a power that they had not been allowed before and have not been allowed since, in order to show his truth and power. The apostles spoke the word of truth and destroyed the power of darkness (Acts 26:18). Our warfare is against these evil spirits (Ephesians 6:12), but the Christian's offensive weapon, the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, breaks their power. They cannot impose their will on those who have been enlightened (Ephesians 6:14-16; Colossians 1:12-13). Satan cannot penetrate the barrier of the faithful Christian (Ephesians 6:10-16; 1 Peter 5:8-9).

The power of these Satanic forces is deception (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12). God will stand back and allow strong delusion to attack those who do not want to do God's will (see Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 2 Corinthians 11:3, 14-15). But Christ's vicarious death for our sins and his resurrection confirming that victory declare who it is that has power over life and death (Revelation 1:18). Those who are thus enlightened are delivered out of the power of darkness and bondage to principalities and powers (Colossians 1:12-13, 2:15; Hebrews 2:14-15). Hence the faithful Christian cannot be conquered by either sin or Satanic spirits. In this way Christ has "despoiled the principalities and powers."

3. "Triumphing over them in it" – The "it" is the

cross. Through his sin-offering, Christ delivered us from our sins, removed the Law's ability to curse (cf. Galatians 3:13), and thus rendered Satan unable to condemn us (cf. Romans 8:33-34; Revelation 12:10; 1 John 3:8; 5:18). Christ has triumphed over the Law's power to curse, and the underworld's power to delude.

**E. Human Teachings, Self-imposed Worship, and Asceticism (Colossians 2:20-23)**

Christ is triumphant and sufficient, therefore the church is to hold fast to the head (Colossians 2:16-23).

1. "Therefore," coming out of the preceding
2. "Let no man therefore judge you" – Christians are not to let anyone take them to task (condemn them) over observing the Law of Moses. Jewish practices were removed at the cross (cf. Romans 7:4, 6; 2 Corinthians 3:14; Ephesians 2:15; Hebrews 7:12). They were but the shadow cast by Christ. He was "the body" that cast the shadow. He is the substance, the reality to remove sin, which was only prefigured by Jewish ritual. The law has no more power than a shadow to forgive sin.
3. "Let no man rob you" or disqualify you – This is an athletic term carrying the idea of disqualification because of an infraction of the rules. The Colossian saints were being told that if they did not accept visions and engage in angel worship they would lose their souls. Paul taught them not to pay any attention to such intermediaries or such indictments because they were false. The truth is that Christ is our only

and sufficient access unto God; we need no other mediator. Those Christians who would be duped into such practices are not “*holding fast the Head*” (2:19).

4. Dead to worldly rudiments (vs. 20-23)

“*If ye died with Christ*” refers to our burial at baptism, as in verse 12. At that point, we renounced allegiance to all else and died to whatever trust we may have had in either Jewish ritual, cosmic powers, or human ability.

a. “*precepts and doctrines of men*” mere human regulations. Christians are no longer subject to such. They are vain (Matthew 15:6-9), merely the product of human wisdom.

b. “*of no value*” The following “have the appearance of wisdom” (NIV) but are of no value to combat sin or gain forgiveness.

1) “rudiments of the world,” that is, the pagan perception of the evil spirits that dominated their lives; astrology.

2) “will-worship,” self-imposed worship. Not that which is specifically forbidden, but that which is not authorized by the word of God (Colossians 3:17). One’s choice. This is “voluntary humility.”

3) “severity to the body,” asceticism.

These are but specious inventions of the imagination, held onto by pride “*vainly puffed up in their fleshly mind.*” They are but man-made ordinances that are absolutely worthless to gain any access unto God. It should be understood that at



baptism we are to die to all such worldly rudiments.

### **III. THE CHRISTIAN'S NEW LIFE: BASED ON CHRIST THE LORD** (Colossians 3:1-4:6)

In this section Christ is called Lord eight times. He is said to be “our life” (3:4) and our “Master” (4:1). Such terms held meaningfully by Christians will produce the natural fruit of a life fashioned in his image.

#### **A. Seek the New Life in Christ (Colossians 3:1-4)**

1. “Raised” from the waters of baptism (cf. 2:12; Romans 6:3-4, “raised to walk in newness of life.”)
2. Christ our life

After whose image we are to be conformed. The new life is requisite for eternal glorification (3:4; Romans 8:29-30). There is now a radically different life to be lived. It is patterned after Christ, who, though divine, humbled himself to service and death. Discipleship requires an imitation of this (Philippians 2:1-8; Luke 14:26-33; 1 Peter 5:5). Paul teaches that we are to “seek” this life and “set” our minds on it to achieve it. Such can only be compared to a new birth (John 3:3, 5; 2 Corinthians 5:17). Thus the following:

#### **B. Put off the Old Man, Put on the New**

(Colossians 3:5-17) This is the growth process.

1. “Put to death therefore” – The “therefore” here and in verse 12 comes out of the foregoing. All immorality and otherwise ungodliness is contrary to “*the new man that is being renewed*

- unto knowledge after the image*” of Christ.
2. “Put on therefore” (3:12-17) – Giving up sin is right. But something must be put in its place. Hence, the old man is put off and the new man is put on. Here is re-creation. This is the new life. The result is “peace” (3:15), confidence, and security. Walking in “wisdom” (3:16) by the authority of Christ (3:17) is the law for the Christian. Paul’s instruction to the Christian, “*and whatsoever you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus,*” is not to be treated as a formula of words which one repeats before engaging in some Christian activity, whether authorized or not. To do *anything* “*in the name of the Lord*” is to do it by his authorization. This statement must not be viewed as an orphan, as if it stands alone in the letter, as if to apply this teaching to Christian worship we would make too much of its meaning. Paul has shown that Christ is head, has executive authority over all things since he is the Lord and creator of all things (Colossians 1:18). Christians, having been delivered out of the dominion of darkness into the reign of Christ (Colossians 1:12-13), now pledge their loyalty to him alone. We acknowledge him only as our authority in worship and life. When we were baptized we died with Christ to human authorities, we are to seek the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, that is the right hand of authority (Colossians 3:1-2). To be acceptable to God, our worship sacrifices, our lifestyle, and our prayers are to be “through him” (1 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 13:15).

### C. Domestic and Social Relationships

(Colossians 3:18-4:1)

The relationship the Christian sustains to his Lord vitally effects his relationship to others. The following are commandments for Christians whose relationship to others is due to their relationship to Christ the Lord, not because of what the other person is or does.

1. “Wives” – This is speaking of Christian wives whose husbands could have been pagans. The “submission” of these wives is due to what is right “*in the Lord*” (cf. Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:1-6). This conduct is not conditioned on any response by the husband; it is due to the fact that Christ is the Lord of this Christian woman. Keep Luke 6:46 in mind.
2. “Husbands” – This is speaking of Christian husbands whose wives may have been pagans. Their conduct toward their wives is not due to any response from their wives, but is due to the fact that the Lord intended husbands to so care for their wives.
3. “Children” – That is, Christians, are to obey their parents even though they are not Christians. This is what is right for those who are “*in the Lord*” (cf. Ephesians 6:1).
4. “Fathers” – Fathers are to treat their children correctly due to their respect for Christ as well as their love for their children.
5. “Servants” – This is referring to Christians who were bondslaves. Forty percent of the Roman world was in slavery. Horrible! Yet, they were to work “*as unto the Lord*” (cf. Ephesians 6:5-8; 1 Timothy 6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10).

6. “Masters” – These instructions are to Christian slave owners.

#### **D. The Daily Walk (Colossians 4:2-6)**

1. “Prayer” – To be steadfast in prayer, not haphazard (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:17).
2. “Wisdom” – Our conduct is not to be foolish, but according to an understanding of the Lord’s will (Ephesians 5:15-17).
3. “Speech” – Our speech is to preserve the moment and reserve the future. It is not to be crude, but gracious (Ephesians 4:29). We may not know *what* to answer, but we can know *how* to answer.

### **Conclusion**

For those who believe on Christ as Lord and Savior and exalt him in their lives, there is deliverance from sin and death, from fear and despair, and from corruption and waste. Such a person’s life is fruitful and fulfilled. He knows who he is, what he is doing here, and where he is going. That gives him confidence, purpose in life, and courage to pursue it unstintingly. According to Colossians, Christ is the ground of our pardon, the basis of our peace, the source of our power, the basis of our authority, and the motivation for our righteous life. Truly, Christ is our life (3:4), for “in him ye are made full” (2:10).



# The Epistle to the Ephesians

## The Place of Christ and the Church In the Eternal Purpose of God

Unique to the Ephesian letter is the vivid presentation of God's eternal purpose as historically realized in Christ and the church for the redemption of mankind. This purpose is seen to extend from eternity before the foundation of the world to eternity after its consummation at the end of the ages. It is in this framework that the apostle Paul develops the place of Christ and the church as the complete and final fulfillment of God's redemptive activity to reunite lost humanity back to himself to his everlasting glory.

To strengthen Paul's message to believers there are some matters that should precede the study of the text.

### **Authenticity of Ephesians**

Authenticity regards the authority of the letter. Is the Ephesian letter indeed from the hand of the apostle Paul as the writer affirms (1:1; 3:1)? Are its contents inspired by the Holy Spirit, as the author claims (Eph.3:3-5)? Can we have confidence that it is equal with the divine authority of those writings we call Scripture? Preceding an impressive list of literary evidence from the early church fathers the **International Standard Bible Encyclopedia** says, "None of the epistles which are ascribed to St. Paul have a stronger chain of evidence to their early and continued use than that which we know as the Epistle to the Ephesians" (Vol.II, p.956). It is

quoted as Scriptural authority by such early church fathers as Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, Tertullian and Irenaeus. It was considered to be the work of the apostle Paul until the eighteenth century.

It was necessary that the New Testament letters were received by the early church as authentic productions of inspired apostles or New Testament prophets in order to have carried authority as the very word of God, and therefore to have secured a rightful place in the canon of the New Testament.

#### **A. Modern Scholarship's View of the Authorship of Ephesians**

The authorship of some of the epistles that bear Paul's name was not challenged until the rise of critical Bible scholarship in the eighteenth century. Scholars who doubt Paul's authorship of such letters as Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, claim that some later disciple of Paul at some post-apostolic time wrote in his name in an attempt to communicate the message and authority of Paul to succeeding generations. It is conjectured that writing "in the apostle's name would have given their letters the stamp of apostolic authority, especially where false teaching was threatening the church" (Arthur G. Patzia, *New International Biblical Commentary, Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon*, p.123). Such an author is called a "deutero," or second Paul.

Unfortunately this view has been imported into what is represented as modern conservative scholarship. Representative of this view is Andrew T. Lincoln, advertised as "one of the best in evangelical scholarship for a new generation." He states his position that the "authorship of Ephesians by a follower of Paul is being

presupposed.” He says that Ephesians “is the work of a later follower of Paul . . . In all probability, it is submitted, a later follower of Paul writing in his name is responsible for the portrait of Paul that can be constructed from the letter by the reader . . . For what it is worth, this is the consensus view of NT scholarship” (*Word Biblical Commentary, Ephesians, Vol. 42, lxii*).

## **B. Modern Scholarship’s View of the Purpose and Value of Pseudonymity**

Arthur G. Patzia, Associate Professor of New Testament and Director of the Fuller Theological Seminary’s Extended Education Program, in his commentary on Ephesians, which his publisher says, “represents solid evangelical scholarship,” writes, “it is quite possible that the practice of pseudonymity (writing in the name of someone else) in the first century included some of the letters that make up the canon of the NT” (Patzia, *ibid*, p.122).

Patzia further says that while some “see it a constituting forgery or fraud,” that “such is not the case: anyone writing in Paul’s name could have done so out of sincere motives and believed that he or she would not dishonor God or the apostle or deceive readers (*ibid*) . . . It is even possible that Paul may have led some kind of theological school “in the lecture hall of Tyrannus” while he was in Ephesus, where his ideas were presented and continued to be discussed even after his death (Acts 19:9). Some of his pupils could have felt responsible to interpret, reinterpret, and apply their master’s theology to new situations in the post-apostolic period. Writing in Paul’s name would have given their letters the stamp of apostolic authority, especially where false teaching was threatening the church” (*ibid*.)123.



Referring to the authority and consequent value of such pseudonymity Patzia says, “Above all, one should avoid concluding that deuterio-Pauline authorship of Ephesians makes this a false document that, consequently, has no inspiration, validity, or authority for the church today. Once the motives of a deuterio-Paulinist are properly understood and appreciated, Ephesians can speak to the church with the same authority as Paul himself. The church retained and canonized the Epistle to the Hebrews, for example, even though its author is anonymous” (ibid) 128.

### **C. Recent Scholastic Observations On Pseudonymity (Pseude-pigraphy)**

“Some scholars believe that pseudepigraphy (attributing one’s work to another person) was accepted in the ancient world and that it would not have been considered deception. Certainly some forms of pseudepigraphy were practiced in the ancient world, yet with some possible exceptions . . . the evidence is that pseudepigraphy was not accepted practice. That is, the person who wrote a pseudepigraphical work normally was trying to deceive others to get an authority for his or her work that it would not otherwise have had. Also, when such letters or acts were exposed they were quickly rejected and, in some cases, the author was punished. Thus the evidence does not support the idea that an author could use the name of another and expect others in the church to understand that he or she was not trying to deceive them. It does appear that the accuracy and nondeceptive character of the biblical books is at stake on this point” (*Hard Saying of the Bible*, Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Peter H. Davids, F. F. Bruce, Manfred T. Brauch, IVP) 38.

## D. Reasons For Rejecting Claims for the Inspiration and Authority of Non-Apostolic Writings

1. Paul's warnings to the Thessalonian Church included a caution against receiving an "epistle as from us" (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2), that is, a letter alleged to have come from an apostle. Paul said that such has the potential to "shake" or to "unsettle" Christians from their apostolic mind-set.
2. Christ stated that our faith is to rest on the word of his apostles (John 17:20). The writings of Mark, Luke, James and Jude are the products of inspired men, prophets, duly empowered by the Holy Spirit by the imposition of apostolic hands, as stated by Paul: "how that by revelation was made known unto me the mystery . . . as it hath now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit" (Ephesians 3:3-5). The inspired authority of such apostolic men as these prophets was recognized by the early church (e.g. Acts 13:1-3) and therefore they had no need to write in the name of an apostle to "give their word the stamp of apostolic authority."
3. Requirement of Canonization. A basic principle required for canonization of a New Testament writing is, *authority precedes canonicity*. The early church, those in receipt of the New Testament writings, received them as authentically apostolic. Had "the words of the Lord and his apostles not been accorded supreme authority, the written record of their words would never have been canonized" (F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*) 123.

As for the book of Hebrews, it was received by the early church, even though hesitantly at first in one region, as divinely authoritative. Without doubt those to whom the epistle was originally addressed knew

- the author and attributed to him the authority of inspiration. On that ground it received canonicity.
4. The motives of a deutero-Paulinist, however pure, cannot be equated with the inspiration and authority of Spirit-guided apostles and prophets. The apostles of Christ needed divine guidance by the Holy Spirit in order to know all gospel truth and to speak it and write it without error (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:10-13; 11:23; 1 Thessalonians 4:15a; 2 Timothy 3:16). Paul himself states the purity of his motives in his persecution of the church prior to conversion (e.g. Acts 23:1; 26:9). But his pure motives and good conscience were no guarantee of correct theology. In good conscience his theology while in Judaism led him to persecute Christ and the church.
  5. What shall we make of the claims of the Ephesian author if he was not an apostle? The author claims to be Paul the apostle (1:1; 3:1). He claims to have received a special commission to the Gentiles (3:1-2, 8), agreeing with Paul's appointment by the Lord to "be apostle of Gentiles" (Romans 11:13, cf. Acts 9:15; Galatians 2:8). He claims to be in prison at the time of writing (3:1; 4:1; 6:20), corresponding to the evidence that Paul was in prison at Rome at the time of writing, 60-62 AD. He claims his message was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, and proceeds to say that such revelations are confined to apostles and prophets (3:3-5). He then interprets his theme of Christ and the church as the revelation of the mystery that God had kept hidden from former generations, and defines the mystery to include Gentiles in the promises God made to Israel (3:6). He further claims to be an ambassador for Christ (6:20. cf. 2

Corinthians 5:20). An ambassador was an official representative of a king or government. He was duly endowed with credentials. Paul appealed to the signs and wonders and mighty works he had worked as evidence of his ambassadorial authority (2 Corinthians 12:12; Acts 15:12). If the author of Ephesians was but a later disciple of Paul did he have the moral right to claim that he was a Spirit-guided apostle with ambassadorial authority to represent Christ, and to give his uninspired interpretation of the great mystery of God (3:3-6; 6:20)? Could an uninspired, non-apostolic disciple of Paul, removed by a generation from the apostle himself, legitimately lay claim to divine guidance by the Holy Spirit as does the author of Ephesians? Such claims go beyond the bounds of a sincere Christian whose purpose was but to apply Paul's doctrine to false teachings that were threatening the church. And by what authority would Tychicus, the letter bearer (6:21-22), be obligated to trek his way to Ephesus to deliver such a letter when he would have known that the authority of an apostle simply did not accompany the letter? If Paul was not the author, was the author actually in prison at the time of the writing (3:1; 6:20)? And if so, was his standing and importance to the churches adequate to cause them to faint at his tribulations (3:12) and to be in great anxiety to the point of needing reassurance from Tychicus as to the well being of the author (6:21-22)? If, on the other hand, the recipients of "Ephesians" attributed such authority to the author, knowing he was not an apostle, that they felt obligated to give heed to the contents of the letter, even to the point of preserving it and copying it for

Christian posterity, as was the case, would it have been at all necessary to write in the name of an apostle anymore than did Mark, Luke, James or Jude?

**E. The Close Connection Between Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon** argues for their authenticity. Patzia observes for the Colossians authorship that, “Another argument in favor of Pauline authorship is the close connection between Colossians and Philemon. Since the Pauline authorship of Philemon is rarely questioned, it would follow that Colossians comes from Paul as well” (Patzia, *ibid*, 10). But this same “close connection” exists between all three of these epistles, having been written in prison and sent by the same letter-bearers, Tychicus and Onesimus, Tychicus being charged with the responsibility to both churches “to make known to you all things: whom I have sent unto you for this very purpose, that you may know our state, and that he may comfort your hearts” (Ephesians 6:21-22; Colossian 4:7-8).

**F. The Writer of Ephesians Had Apostolic Authority**

1. He had authority to send other Christians on errands for him and to report on his well being while in prison (Ephesians 6:21-22). Tychicus and Onesimus were the letter-bearers. What was their motivation for such a journey from Rome to Ephesus in Western Asia Minor, and then on to Southern Phrygia to Colossae only to carry three letters, and to report on Paul’s well-being, if not by apostolic request and the realization of the importance of the content of those letters?
2. He assumed the apostolic right to “enjoin” Philemon to do his bidding and to receive Onesimus,

Philemon's former slave, back again without reprisal (Philemon 8-16). This letter to Philemon, usually accepted as authored by Paul, together with Ephesians and Colossians, was one of the three prison epistles delivered by Tychicus. The authenticity of this letter recommends the authenticity of the other two. Also, note the imperatives in Ephesians (cf. 4:17-5:21; 22-33; 6:1, 5, 9). The fact that Ephesians was preserved by the early church and was received immediately as apostolic indicates the recipients of the letter submitted to the authority of the author's instructions.

## **Dating Ephesians**

### **A. A Prison Epistle (3:1; 4:1; 6:20)**

1. There are two recorded imprisonments of Paul: at Caesarea (Acts 23:23-24; 24:27) dating from c. 59-60 AD, and at Rome (Acts 28:16-31) dating from c.60-62 AD.
2. A third imprisonment is implied by some from 1 Corinthians 15:32.

### **B. The weight of evidence falls toward the Roman imprisonment, c. 60-62 AD**

## **Destination of Ephesians**

From the second century the phrase, "to the Ephesians," was generally accepted, but the words, "at Ephesus," is not found in some the most ancient manuscripts, e.g., the Sinaiticus and Vaticanus dating from c. 350 AD, the Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri, c. 220 AD. Origen says it was not found in the manuscripts he knew, c.180 AD. Basil and Jerome in the fourth

century say the same. However, many ancient manuscripts do have the phrase, “at Ephesus.”

Perhaps the letter was an encyclical that was intended to be circulated among the churches in Western Asia Minor, beginning from Ephesus and returning to Ephesus. This could explain why there are no problems of doctrine specified and denounced as in the Colossian letter. This could also explain why there are no personal greetings or messages to particular persons at Ephesus where Paul ministered for three years (Acts 20:17, 31). This is the case in the Galatian letter which has the appearance of an encyclical (Galatians 1:1-2).

### **Purpose of the Ephesian Letter**

The purpose of this letter is not specifically revealed by Paul as in most all his other letters (excepting Romans). When not stated, the purpose for the letter must be implied from its content. The following may help to determine the reasons for the writing of Ephesians:

#### **A. An Emphasis On Christ**

1. As the one in whom all spiritual blessings are to be realized (1:3-14).
2. As the Sovereign Cosmic Lord who exercises supreme power over all things in heaven and on earth in behalf of the church (1:15-23).

#### **B. An Emphasis On the Unity and Fellowship of Christian Jews and Gentiles: 1:12-13; 2:11-18; 3:1-9; 4:3, 11-13, 16. What historical, societal, and/or theological factors gave rise to this emphasis?**

#### **C. An Emphasis On the Church**

1. In the eternal purpose of God (1:3-3:21).
2. The unity and maturity of the church (4:1-16).

3. Her lifestyle in a pagan world (4:17-6:20).

**D. An Emphasis On the Spiritual “Powers,” (1:20-21; 2:1-3, 6; 3:10; 4:8-10; 6:10-16)**

Paul presents these unseen “powers” as realities who stand opposed to Christ, and with whom his people do mortal battle.

The letter’s purpose, or purposes, seem to be multiple. (1) Paul’s purpose in the first chapter, with its emphasis on Christ as the one in whom God is uniting the redeemed back to Himself, and his cosmic sovereign reign over the spiritual powers, may be connected to those Christians in Western Asia Minor who had reverted back to their old practice of employing pagan magical arts (as in Acts 19:11-20) that were supposed to deliver them from what they perceived to be the evil spirits that dominated their lives. Paul’s exaltation of Christ’s sovereignty over these powers in Ephesians 1:18-23 and his insistence that only the name of Christ carries the authority for deliverance from whatever forces affect our lives, may be due to these Christians being seduced yet once again to return to seeking supernatural help from the practice of those magical arts. (2) Chapters two and three stresses the fact that Gentile Christians share with Jewish Christians the same God-given blessings in the body of Christ. This emphasis on unity seems to address a division that exists between Jewish and Gentile Christians. (3) Chapter 4:1-16 details the spirit essential to Christian unity, the doctrinal facts upon which unity is based, the “gifts” given to the church by which she can attain to the maturity and the doctrinal stability essential to her spiritual growth and development. (4) From 4:17 to 6:20 Paul expounds on the Christian’s relationship to the world, to other Christians, and to the spirit powers as a result of our new relationship with Christ as Sovereign Lord.



# **OUTLINE OF EPHESIANS**

## **PART ONE**

Christ and the Church  
In the Eternal  
Purpose of God, 1:3-3:21

The historical realization of God's eternal purpose in Christ and the church to unite all things in heaven and on earth back to God.

- I. PRAISE TO GOD FOR THE BLESSINGS IN CHRIST ACCORDING TO GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE, 1:3-14 (esp. vs. 6, 12, 14)**
- II. PRAYER FOR CHRISTIANS TO PERCEIVE THE POWER GOD EXERTS THROUGH CHRIST IN BEHALF OF HIS CHURCH, 1:15-23**
- III. THE CHURCH: GOD'S NEW CREATION FOR JEWS AND GENTILES ALIKE, 2:1-22**
- IV. PAUL'S SPECIAL STEWARDSHIP TO THE GENTILES, 3:1-13**
- V. PAUL'S SPECIAL PRAYER FOR THE EPHESIANS, 3:14-19**
- VI. THEREFORE, ALL GLORY TO BE GIVEN TO GOD IN THE CHURCH AND IN CHRIST, 3:20-21**

## **PART TWO**

### **The Unity of the Church, 4:1-16**

Fundamentals By Which We Attain and Maintain The Unity of the Church:

- I. THE TWOFOLD BASIS OF UNITY, 4:1-6**
  - A. The Spirit/Attitudes of Unity, 4:1-3**
  - B. The Facts/Absolutes of Unity, 4:4-6**
- II. THE GIFTS/AGENTS OF UNITY, 4:7-11**
- III. THE DESIRED RESULTS OF /ATTAINMENT OF UNITY, 4:12-16**

## **PART THREE**

### **The Life of the Church In a Pagan World, 4:17-6:20**

An appeal to the church to live in loving unity in this present world and not to merge with its ignorance of darkness, or be intimidated by the spiritual powers.

- I. THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH IN A PAGAN WORLD, 4:17-5:14 (LIGHT vs. DARKNESS)**
- II. THE LIFE OF SUBJECTION, 5:15-6:9 (THE DEATH OF HUMAN PRIDE)**
- III. THE LIFE OF WARFARE, 6:10-20 (THE TRIUMPHANT CHRISTIAN SOLDIER)**
- IV. CLOSING REMARKS**

# EXPOSITION OF EPHESIANS

## PART ONE

### Christ and the Church in the Eternal Purpose of God, 1:3-3:21

Chapters One through Three of Ephesians is Paul's explanation that in Christ and the church is the historical realization of God's purpose from eternity to redeem sinful humanity to his own eternal glory. A fitting close to this division is Paul's ascription of praise to God that amounts to an assignment to his people:

*Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever. Amen (3:20-21).*

#### **I. PRAISE TO GOD FOR ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS IN CHRIST ACCORDING TO GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE, 1:3-14**

##### **A. All Things Of God's Purpose Summed Up In Christ, 1:9-11**

The key to opening up the grand purpose for the letter.

1. God's "purpose." The divine plan from eternity. This sets the framework in which the message of Ephesians is couched. The word "purpose" is used in both the verb form, "he purposed" (1:9;

3:11), and the noun form, “*according to the purpose of him*” (1:11) and, “*according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus*” (3:11). This purpose is equated with His “will” (v. 9), and is called “his *eternal* purpose” (3:10-11). The framework of God’s redemptive plan thus extends from eternity before time began to eternity after the consummation of the present age at the return of Christ.

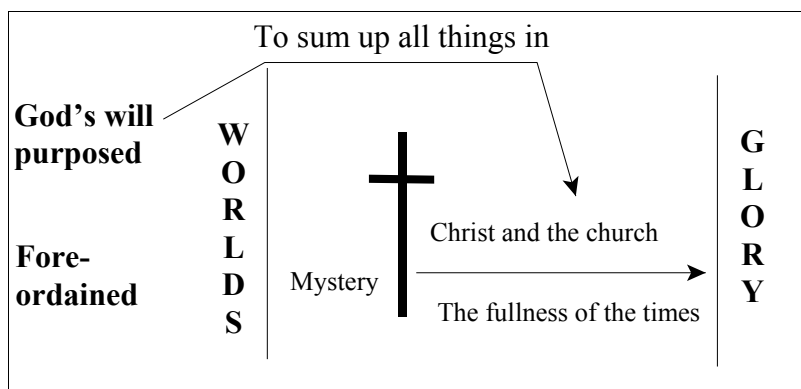
2. “making known unto us the mystery of his will,” v. 9. God’s purpose was once a mystery, kept secret from the minds of men until fulfilled in Christ and the church and revealed by the Holy Spirit through his apostles. Christ promised the apostles the Holy Spirit would remind them of all he had earlier taught, and would further teach them and guide them into all gospel truth (John 14:26; 16:13). Paul now affirms this has been accomplished (Ephesians 3:3-6; Romans 16:25-26; 1 Corinthians 2:6-13. See also Acts 2:1-47; 1 Peter 1:12; 1 John 2:20-21). God’s purpose, once a mystery, sufficient to save us, has now been fulfilled in Christ and the church, revealed by the Spirit, preached by the apostles, and recorded in the New Testament. God’s revelation and the record of it is sufficient for our salvation. There is therefore no need for further visions and revelations.
3. “unto a dispensation of the fullness of the times,” v. 10.
  - a. “*dispensation*,” from *oikonomia*, a stewardship or administration. The noun speaks of one who had oversight, or the

management or administration of another's property (cf. Luke 16:1-4). Paul transfers the word to Christ's appointed task by the Father to administer this redemptive purpose. Later the word is used of the special assignment given to Paul to take the gospel to the Gentile world (3:1-2), and further, to "make all men see what is the stewardship of the mystery," as Christ is now administering it for our salvation (3:9).

- b. "*the fullness of the times*," seems to speak of the significance of those historical events that preceded Christ's coming which the Father overruled until the administration of God's purpose was transferred to the Son. If this is so, the plural use of "times" may be distinguished from the singular use of the term where Paul speaks of Christ's birth in "the fullness of the time" (Galatians 4:4). This singular use of the term "time" would then speak of that particular moment in history which was right for the Son to assume the administration of God's purpose for our redemption.
- 4. "to sum up all things in Christ," v. 10. Or, to "unite all things in Him" (RSV). God, knowing that man would rupture his relationship with him, purposed to re-unite sinful man back to Himself in Christ. As translated in the NIV, "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."
- 5. "who worketh all things after the counsel of his

will,” v. 11.

God both purposed his redemptive plan to be fulfilled in Christ and the church and worked it out in history according to his will. Christ’s mission to fulfill that purpose was neither interrupted nor postponed by his rejection and crucifixion by the Jews. That rejection rather became the means by which “the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” was accomplished (Acts 2:23). God planned his work, and he worked his plan. Nothing of his purpose to be fulfilled at Christ’s first coming is now lacking or postponed to be fulfilled at some future time.



## **B. Praise For All Spiritual Blessings “in Christ” to the Glory of God the Father, vs. 3-14**

1. “every spiritual blessing . . . in Christ,” 3. Every blessing God has purposed for his redeemed people are to be obtained only “in Christ . . . in him . . . in the Beloved.” None of these spiritual blessings are to be located in another.
2. “in the heavenly places,” 3. This phrase is used

only here in Ephesians. This is a specific location, the reality of a spiritual realm, where Christ now sits at God's right hand (1:20, cf. Psalm 110:1), whereunto God's redeemed people have been raised from the waters of baptism to sit with him and share his power (2:6), where dwell the principalities and powers, spiritual beings (3:10), some of whom are now in league with Satan and with whom Christians must do battle on a daily basis (6:12).

3. "he chose us in him," 4, from *eklektos*, signifies the chosen, the elect. God's election of the redeemed takes place "in Christ." The church constitutes the entire body of the elect, the chosen ones. Hence, the church is the "elect race" (1 Peter 2:9). Keep in mind that the choosing takes place according to God's purpose and foreknowledge.
4. This choosing was "before the foundation of the world," 4. "Foundation," *katabole*, a casting down, is used of a foundation that is laid down, of something that is established. The "world," from *kosmos*, the cosmos, is the inhabited earth. "Before the foundation of the world" looks back to the past eternity. Thus God's choosing "before the foundation of the world" took place according to God's purpose in Christ, and according to his foreknowledge of those who would receive Christ. This choosing was not arbitrary; it does not affect man's free choice. There is a distinction between God's foreknowledge and His foreordaining (cf. Romans 8:28-30). First, God foreknew man

would sin, then he foreordained his redemption to be in Christ; then he called him by the gospel and justified him by faith according as he had foreordained. These are the glorified ones, (1 Corinthians 2:6-7; 1 Peter 1:20; Titus 1:2-3). God foreordained that men would be saved by faith in Christ, he foreknew those who of their own free will would accept Christ, and chose them according to that foreknowledge.

5. “made a heritage,” 11. What God has made us to be in Christ. Paul’s following prayer is that we may know “the riches of the glory of *his* inheritance in the saints” (1:18). God’s heritage from the Christian era is his church. After the Lord returns to gather his people home he will destroy this present order of things (1 Corinthians 15:23-24; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Peter 3) and receive his heritage unto himself for the rest of eternity. Meanwhile he is enlarging his heritage.
6. “the Holy Spirit,” 13-14.
  - a. “*sealed with the Holy Spirit.*” “Sealed” from *sphragizo*, indicating those who are Christ’s (cf. 4:30; Revelation 7:1-8). Shows “ownership and security together with destination . . . the same three indications are conveyed in Ephesians 1:13” (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of NT Words).
  - b. “*of promise.*” That is, the promised Holy Spirit, who is received at baptism (e.g. Ezekiel 36:27; Joel 2:28; Acts 2:16-17, 38-39; 5:32).
  - c. “*an earnest of our inheritance.*”



“Earnest,” *arrabon*, used of earnest money that is paid down by a purchaser as a guarantee of intent to return and pay the full purchase price. Here it is used of the Lord’s guarantee to return for his purchased possession, the church (cf. Acts 20:28). “*Ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price*” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Christ came to “*purify unto himself a people for his own possession*” (Titus 2:14). We become his possession when “*baptized into the name of,*” that is, “*into the possession of, the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*” (Matthew 28:19).

7. To the glory of God. God’s eternal purpose for the redemption of humanity in Christ and in the church is “to the praise of the glory of his grace . . . to the end that we should be unto the praise of his glory . . . unto the praise of his glory” (vs. 6, 12, 14). This three-fold ascription of God’s purpose to his eternal glory anticipates Paul’s conclusion to this section of the letter: “*unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever. Amen*” (3:20-21).

## II. PAUL’S PRAYER FOR CHRISTIANS TO PERCEIVE THE POWER GOD EXERTS THROUGH CHRIST IN BEHALF OF HIS CHURCH, 1:15-23

This special prayer is that the church may know that she is the object of special knowledge, wisdom, and power that God extends to her.

**A. “A Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation in the Knowledge of Him,” v. 17**

Paul did not request wisdom or revelation for the church, but for “a *spirit* of wisdom and revelation,” or perception and insight. Later he will exhort them to “be renewed in the *spirit* of your mind” (4:23). This wisdom and revelation issues from the “knowledge of him” as revealed to the apostles and prophets of the New Testament. The Christian’s knowledge of God’s word will deepen through prayer.

**B. Enlightened Eyes, v. 18-23, “having the eyes of your heart enlightened”**

This enlightenment comes with knowledge of the gospel. Paul’s prayer for the Colossian brethren was a prayer of thanksgiving that God had qualified them “to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Colossians 1:12). They had been enlightened by the preaching of the gospel and so were “delivered out of the power of darkness” (v. 13). Paul’s prayer in Ephesians is three-fold: that they would know (1) the incomparable hope of their calling, (2) the riches of the glory they would inherit from God, (3) and the exceeding great power that God exerts in behalf of his church through Christ.

1. “the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward,” 18. This power is not what God gives us, but the power he exerts toward us, in our behalf. The description of that power is portrayed from two vantage points: (1) the power God exercised in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and (2) the setting of Christ at God’s right hand with such power as to exceed

description: “*far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but in that which is to come.*” Once Paul has conveyed a sense of the limitlessness of that power vested in Christ by sitting at God’s right hand (in fulfillment of Psalm 110:1), he then makes a practical application of that power by saying that Christ, to whom God has given all power, has accordingly been made “the head of all things *to the church*, or “*appointed him to be head over all things for the church*” (NIV). While other Scriptures teach that Christ is the head of the church (cf. Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18), this statement teaches that Christ is head of all things in behalf of the church, whether of things on earth or the spiritual powers in the heavenly places.

2. Why such an emphasis on Christ’s sovereign power in behalf of the church? This is particularly significant to Christians who have a daily war with the principalities and powers, the rulers of this world’s darkness (6:10-18). The account of the establishment of the Ephesian church by Paul (Acts 19) tells of a number of Christians at Ephesus who later reverted back to their old pagan practices of calling on the names of their pagan gods to deliver them from what they perceived were evil spirits that dominated their lives. By this means they renounced the sovereign reign of Christ as the One who controls all things in both the physical and the spiritual realms against those forces that affect the lives of his

people. Luke records how Christ intervened through Paul by publically casting out evil spirits in the name of Christ. This exposed the inability of some charlatans, who claiming to be exorcists, were unsuccessful in their attempt to cast out the evil spirits by employing as an incantation the name of Jesus, and were bodily injured by those evil spirits. Luke says that *“this became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, that dwelt at Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified”* (Acts 19:11-17). This incident caused those unfaithful Christians, who had reverted back to their pagan practice of employing magical arts to secure the power of the pagan gods against the evil spirits, to repent and turn their loyalty back to Christ:

*Many also of them that had believed came, confessing and declaring their deeds. And not a few of them that practiced magical arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all . . . So mightily grew the word of the Lord and prevailed* (Acts 19: 18-20).

The Magical Papyri, “original documents and primary sources enhancing our understanding of magical beliefs and practices in the Greco-Roman world” (Clinton E. Arnold, *EPHESIANS, Power and Magic*, p.11), records many of the magical practices and incantations of the Ephesians as recorded in the books of magical arts in Acts 19:19. One of those

practices was the Ephesia Grammata, or the Ephesian Letters. It was a magical spell consisting of six magical terms that, when pronounced accurately and in proper sequence, would obligate the pagan gods to come to the aid of the practitioner. This practice was called “naming the names.”

The significance of Paul’s statement in Ephesians 1:18-21 lies in this pagan practice of “naming the names.” Paul’s prayer for the saints who received the Ephesian letter was that they would “*know the exceeding greatness of the power*” that Christ exercises in behalf of his church. Paul described that power as “far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and *every name that is named*.” Paul uses the very language of the magical practitioners of the Ephesia Grammata. This language was in common use among the pagan population of Western Asia Minor, and especially in the city of Ephesus itself. On this evidence we may fairly entertain the idea that some in the church in Western Asia Minor had once again reverted back to their old magical practices, as Christians today fall prey to former sinful practices. Paul’s purpose, then, for such an emphasis on Christ’s sovereignty over the spiritual “powers” would be to remind those Christians of that sovereignty and that his name alone has the authority to control all powers, whether real or imaginary, that either affect, or are perceived to affect, our lives and destinies.

Thus the church is seen to be the fullness of Christ, the object of his love and providential

care and oversight, the very apple of his eye for which he exercises his sovereign control over all things on earth and in the heavenly realms.

### III. THE CHURCH: GOD'S NEW CREATION FOR JEWS AND GENTILES ALIKE, 2:1-22

Paul's letter may indicate that these Christians had lost their appreciation for their former lost condition under Satan and their present condition of salvation by grace through faith in Christ. Perhaps the lines of distinction between pagans and Christians began to be blurred by their former beliefs. This view would leave the door open for former beliefs to enter into the body of Christ and destroy it. Paul had to restate the distinctive nature of the church, that it was not just another religion among many, that it is the entire body of the saved on earth, God's new creation in the earth for Gentiles as well as for Jews.

#### A. The Gentiles' Former Condition, 2:1-3

1. Outside Christ all men are dead in sin. The universal penalty for sin is separation from God (Isaiah 59:2; Romans 6:23). This is generally referred to as spiritual death. Though not a Bible term it suggests the biblical meaning. Paul would later write of those who are "*alienated from the life of God*" (Ephesians 4:18).
2. Whose lifestyle is "according to the prince of the powers of the air." Jesus, speaking of those Jews who plotted to kill him, identified them as children of the devil, saying,

*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do. He*

*was a murderer from the beginning, and standeth not in the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar and the father thereof* (John 8:44).

Children of the devil are identified by their lifestyle which is the same as “the prince of the powers of the air.” Their spirit is identified with “the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience,” with those who walk in lies and murder, “according to the course of this world.”

3. “By nature are children of wrath.”

**Nature**, defined from the original as “a mode of feeling and acting which by long habit has become nature” (Thayer). This definition of nature is in keeping with Paul’s description of their habitually evil lifestyle that is “*according to the course of this world.*” These, by nature, by habit of evil lifestyle, are continually under the wrath of God. Both this definition and the context of this passage stand in contrast to the theology that incorporates this verse as evidence that men are born in sin with the guilt of Adam, and that by virtue of birth into this condition (nature) can do nothing good until the Holy Spirit moves them to do so.

4. “Even as the rest.” The inspired apostle draws his hand down through the center of the human race and divides all men without exception into two divisions: those who are alive in Christ...and the rest who are dead in sin and under the wrath of God.

**B. The Gentiles' Present Condition, 2:4-22**

1. Raised up to sit with Christ in the heavenly realm, v. 6.

Christ is seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly realm (1:21; Colossians 3:1). This fulfills the prophecy that foresaw the omnipotence of the cosmic sovereign Lord (Psalm 110:1). Christians have been “*baptized into Christ*” (Romans 6:3) and then “*raised to sit with him*” where he sits. We share something of that power through the gospel and prayer. Jesus said those who believe on him will do greater things than he did (John 14:12). Christ raised the dead. Believers can raise the dead in sin by gospel preaching. That is much greater. Christians can exercise the power of Christ through the high privilege of prayer. We can influence the governance of world rulers to affect international conditions of peace to be more conducive to proclaiming the gospel world wide (1 Timothy 2:1-5). Through the mighty power of God Christians change things by prayer.

2. Saved by grace through faith in Christ, v. 8-9. Salvation requires God's part and man's. God's grace is the *ground* of salvation. It includes the atoning work of Christ on the cross and God's offer of the new covenant. This embraces the free and unmerited gifts of God. The *means* of salvation is our human response by faith in Christ. Faith must have an object and a response. Christ and his atoning sacrifice for our justification (Isaiah 53:5-11) is the object of our faith. Our response is an obedience of faith



(Romans 16:25-26) to the conditions of the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 5:8-9; 10:12-17). Hence, grace by faith.

3. The Church: God's New Creation, v.10. God has created twice. He brought the universe into existence by the word of his power (Genesis 1:1ff). Through the cross and gospel preaching he has created a new thing that will outlast the universe: the church of Christ. The emphasis here seems to be what God has done in contrast to man's deadness and consequent inability to extract himself from the wreckage of his own doing. *"We are HIS workmanship, created in CHRIST."* To HIM be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus!
4. "Wherefore remember" what you were and where you are, 11-22. The emphasis in this section on Gentiles participating equally with Jews in the citizenship privileges reserved for God's chosen people may indicate two things: (1) that these Gentile Christians had forgotten, or become lax, in their appreciation of their former condition and the seriousness of the consequences of that condition, and as well the unspeakable good fortune of their salvation, (2) and a lack of unity between them and their Jewish brethren. Paul thus speaks to these Gentile Christians in Western Asia Minor of the contrast between what they once were and their present standing before God in Christ.
  - a. *"At that time,"* before these Gentile Christians had submitted to faith and baptism to enter into covenant relationship with Christ they were separate from Christ,

alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise. As a consequence their condition was that they had no hope and were without God in the world (vs. 11-12). A worse condition cannot be imagined for members of the human race. Such is the condition of all outside of covenant relationship with God. To this former condition Paul calls them to remembrance.

- b. *“But now,”* these Gentiles, once “afar off” (cf. Acts 2:39) in their separation from God, are made near to God by the blood of Christ. By the cross Christ abolished the “enmity,” the ill will, making peace between the races (14-16), “creating” by that means “one new man,” the Christian. They are now reconciled to God in one body, the church (16), and have equal “access” to God with Jewish believers through Christ in the Holy Spirit (18). They are now fellow-citizens with “the saints” (a term that seems to refer to believers from Israel), and members of God’s household, the church (cf. 1 Timothy 3:15), where God’s family resides. And finally they are now a part of the new temple of God which is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, God’s guarantee of his purpose to redeem them to himself for eternity (19-22).

#### IV. PAUL’S SPECIAL STEWARDSHIP TO THE GENTILES, 3:1-13

It would seem from the foregoing that Gentile Christians in Western Asia Minor may have had a low view of their importance to the Lord and of their place in the eternal purpose of God. They needed to see their high standing in the redemptive scheme of things. They were not lesser children among the people of God. They were in every way regarded by the Lord as on an equal footing with those who became Christians from any other nation. Paul's special assignment from the Lord was in behalf of Gentiles, and so has become known throughout the body of Christ as "an apostle of Gentiles" (Romans 11: 13). Christ's purpose in his post-resurrection conversion of Saul was to send him with a life-long commission to the Gentiles (Acts 26:16-18). This was amplified in his Galatians address: "he that wrought for Peter unto the apostleship of the circumcision wrought from me also unto the Gentiles" (2:8).

**A. Paul's Special Commission, vs. 1-2, 8-9**

The term *oikonomia*, variously translated by the words, administration, stewardship, commission, is employed to describe Paul's special assignment "in behalf of [the] Gentiles," and also, "to make all men see" that the present administration of God's eternal purpose is in the capable hands of the sovereign Christ.

**B. The "Mystery" Made Known to Apostles and Prophets, vs. 3-6**

1. The mystery, Used by Paul to describe the plan of salvation that once was hidden from men while God worked it out in history, but now has been made known through revelation of the Holy Spirit through the apostles and New

Testament prophets. Modern scholarship has moved from the idea that Paul's selection of the term "mystery" for God's plan of salvation was taken over as an answer to the mystery religions that abounded in the ancient world. Now the idea is that the term was generated from both the Old Testament that spoke of the mysteries of God (cf. Daniel 2:28, 17-22), and from the Lord's own use of the term (as in Matthew 13:10-11; Luke 8:10).

2. "by revelation was made known." During Jesus' ministry he made special promise to the apostles that the Holy Spirit would remind them of all that he had formerly said, and would also teach them all gospel things, guiding them into all gospel truth (John 14:26; 16:13). Paul here affirms that the Holy Spirit has accomplished that work through the apostles and New Testament prophets. This mystery that was revealed was the "wisdom" that "*God foreordained before the worlds*" for our eternal glorification (1 Corinthians 2:6-13).
3. God's purpose for the church was to make known to the spiritual powers in the heavenly places the wisdom that had been hidden from the minds of men and angels from eternity (Ephesians 3:10-11). See also Romans 16:25-26; Colossians 1:25-2:3. Perhaps it is by observation of the outworking of God's purpose in history that the spiritual powers come to know God's redemptive purpose for mankind. Peter's interesting statement that the salvation foretold by the Old Testament prophets, which was "announced" by inspired gospel preachers,

constituted the very things “*which angels desire to look into*” (1 Peter 1:10-12). Another has observed:

The church is not only a signal trophy of divine counsel, but is discerned to be such by a galaxy of higher intelligence who mark the unfolding of her destiny. The church is a spectacle to angels as well as men. From her chequered story and long-drawn conflict the celestial hosts learn secrets of the Creator’s wisdom not elsewhere divulged (E. K. Simpson, Commentary On The Epistle to the Ephesians p. 75).

Modern cults, pagan superstitions, claims for recent visions and divine revelations, when combined with the mystique of the unknown, is often fashioned into religious promises of special knowledge that can divert the attention away from the gospel among those who are ill-informed of God’s special purpose for sinful man as fulfilled in Christ and the church and made known in the pages of the Bible.

## V. PAUL’S SPECIAL PRAYER, 3:14-19

### A. “Unto the Father, from Whom Every Family in Heaven and on Earth Is Named”

From God’s own creative hands has originated all groups of beings, whether on earth or in the heavens. Paul’s prayer is addressed to “the Father,” *ton patera*, “from whom every family,” *pasa patria*,

is “named.” The play on words is seen in *patria*, “family,” that relates back to *pater*, “father.” Paul is extolling the fatherhood of God from whom all beings, all groups of beings, whether in heaven or on earth, have originated. The phrase, *every family*, “is best taken here in Ephesians as referring to every family or family grouping. The phrase, *pasa patria*, is not to be interpreted as ‘the whole family.’ Normal Greek grammatical usage would require the article for such a meaning” (Andrew T. Lincoln, Word Biblical Commentary, Ephesians, Vol. 42, p. 202; Francis Foulkes, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Ephesians, p. 109). Thus the translation, “every family,” as in the ASV and NASV, is to be preferred to “his whole family,” (NIV). Every group of beings, whether spiritual or human, have originated from God the Father, and bears the identity of the name he has placed upon them. Whether beings righteous or evil, whether in heaven or on earth, owe their being to God the Father. To him this prayer is addressed. Prayer to any other is futile. No one else is there to hear and answer prayer. This seems to hark back to Paul’s earlier prayer in which he extols the limitless power of the sovereign Christ to be “*far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named*” (1:18-21). Only the divine name carries power in behalf of the church (1:22). Peter also speaks to this truth (cf. Acts 4:12; 1 Peter 3:22). If the Christians who received the Ephesian letter were reverting back to their practice of “naming the names” of their old pagan gods through such magical incantations as the Ephesia Grammata, this address to the Father of all created groups of beings in both

heaven and on earth would contradict the practice of calling on any name other than the divine Name in their prayers.

**B. “Strengthened with Power Through the Spirit”**

Attention should be given to the Holy Spirit’s own doctrine as to *how* he strengthens one unto faith in Christ. Peter said essentially the same, “*who by the power of God are guarded through faith*” (1 Peter 1:5). The Spirit produces faith through his word (Romans 10:17). This is the only way any man, Christian or alien sinner, can say Jesus is Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3). The word of the Spirit is the agency through which the Spirit generates faith. We all baptized by one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). Yet we are baptized in obedience to the Spirit’s word (Acts 2:38; Ephesians 5:25-26). We are born of the Spirit (John 3:5; Titus 3:4-5), yet we are born by the Spirit’s word when we obey it (1 Corinthians 4:15; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23). We are commanded to “*walk by the Spirit*” (Galatians 5:16). Yet the Spirit tells us that “we walk by faith” (2 Corinthians 5:7). But since “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17) we have to conclude that our faith in Christ comes through the agency of the Spirit’s word that educates us to know just what constitutes the Christian “walk.” What we do by the Spirit we do by faith in obedience to his word. How else could we know that we are walking by the Spirit?

This is not to say the Spirit is absent from the Christian’s walk of faith. When we pray the Spirit intercedes (Romans 8:26). And when we obey the Spirit’s word he strengthens. Our obedience of faith

seems to be the trigger that releases the Spirit's co-operative help. Hence, "*Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might . . . take up the whole armor of God . . . And take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*" (Ephesians 6:10-17).

## **VI. THEREFORE, GLORY ETERNALLY TO GOD IN THE CHURCH AND IN CHRIST (3:20-21)**

With this doxology Paul concludes this first division of the letter. Why is the church placed alongside Christ as the place wherein we are to glorify God? Would it not be for what he has taught regarding the church? According to Paul the church:

1. was purposed by God in eternity for a special assignment relative to making known to the spiritual powers God's eternal purpose for human redemption (3:10-11).
2. is the recipient of all spiritual blessings to be received in Christ (1:3-14).
3. is the object of Christ's sovereign power to control those forces that affect the Christian's life (1:18-21).
4. is God's new creation composed of the redeemed from among both Jews and Gentiles (2:1-10).
5. has access to God through Christ in the Holy Spirit and is God's house in which the Spirit abides (2:14-22).



## PART TWO

### The Unity and Growth of the Church How it Is Achieved and Maintained (Ephesians 4:1-16)

In this section, Paul considers the *attitudes in* which, the *absolutes upon* which, and the *agents through* which the church is to achieve (“attain”) and maintain (“keep”) her unity (vs. 1-11), which is requisite to her spiritual growth and development (vs. 12-16). This is the unity the Spirit has given by revelation (“*the unity of the Spirit*,” v. 3) and which “all” the body of Christ can achieve (“*till we all attain unto the unity of the faith*,” v. 13). The church of Christ can, and must, stand unified in a common faith, in the revealed doctrine of the Christian system. Upon this foundation, the church can successfully shelter herself against “*every wind of doctrine*” and bring her “children” to mature status, making “*the increase of the body*” a continual reality.

#### I. THE TWOFOLD BASIS OF UNITY (Ephesians 4:1-6)

A blending of heart with doctrinal facts has ever been essential to a unified people (cf. Matthew 15:7-9; Mark 7:6-7; John 4:23-24; Romans 6:17-18; Colossians 4:6; 1 Peter 3:15).

##### A. The Attitude of Unity (4:1-3)

This is the spirit, the disposition, in which unity is to be achieved and maintained.

1. “Therefore. . . walk worthily” “Therefore” comes logically out of what Paul has just stated in the first part of the epistle. There he presented the divine origin of the church and her place in history to glorify God. “Therefore,”

there is a life to be lived commensurate with the lofty nature of that “calling.” This life is appropriately expressed in the use of the word “walk”: “*walk worthily of the calling*” (4:1), “no longer walk as the Gentiles also walk” (4:17), “*walk in love*” (5:2), “*walk as children of light*” (5:8), “*Look therefore carefully how ye walk*” (5:15). This expresses the dignity and worth of the Christian faith and hope.

2. “the calling wherewith ye were called” This carries one back to the first three chapters: to the eternal purpose (1:9-11; 3:10-11; Romans 8:28-30), to a heavenly calling (Hebrews 3:1), called by the gospel (Acts 2:39; 2 Thessalonians 2:14), into fellowship with Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9). Our walk is to be worthy of the calling (1 Thessalonians 2:12).
3. “with all lowliness and meekness” These two characteristics and the following list of spiritual attributes must not be merely mouthed out only to be contemned precisely at the moment of need (cf. James 1:22). Here is the very heart of the kingdom of God on earth: lowliness and meekness. Humility comes out of a realization of our worthlessness apart from the grace of Christ, and meekness is that disposition which readily submits to men as well as to God.
4. “longsuffering” This speaks of a disposition that leads to suppression of anger and that is opposed to short temper. When joined with *forebearing with love*, it does not show discontent or irritability.
5. “diligence” Constantly giving application to be, to do, to overcome, to grow in these graces (cf.

2 Peter 1:5, 10).

6. “keep the unity of the Spirit” The capital “S” is correct, that which the Holy Spirit produces by his word – the Christian faith. This is what we are to “keep.” We keep it by objectively knowing it and walking accordingly. By one Spirit we all are baptized into one body (1 Corinthians 12:13), into the same Lord (Romans 6:3-4), for the same reasons (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Galatians 3:26-27; etc.). Thus, the Spirit, through the revelation of the word, has led us all into a new and unique relationship with God, to his glory in the church and in Christ. We are all “called” *with* the same calling, *into* the same calling, or purpose. In this way, the Spirit has created a unity among all those in the earth who are called into Christ and the church. It is that unity of identity and purpose, that unity of work and worship, which we are to “*give diligence to keep . . . in the bond of peace.*” Christians “keep the unity of the Spirit” by maintaining right attitudes as well as intellectually recognizing the sevenfold basis of objective facts upon which the Christian faith is founded. Hence Paul’s, “*I therefore . . . beseech you to walk worthily.*”

## **B. The Absolutes of Unity (4:4-6)**

These are the facts, the objective fundamental truths, by which unity is to be achieved and maintained. True, New Testament Christianity is not a hodge-podge of conjectural miscellanea wherein every man does that which is right in his own eyes

(cf. Judges 17:6; 21:25). “The church rests on the given, not on conjectural or subjective data” (E. K. Simpson, *ibid*, p. 90). Here is the design for the structural unity of the church: one Lord, one faith, one baptism. It produces the identity of the true church of Christ.

1. “one body,” the church (1:22-23). An organism.
2. “one spirit,” the Holy Spirit by which we are led (Romans 8:14; Galatians 5:16, 18; by faith in Christ, Galatians 5:5; as the Spirit directs through his word, John 14:26; 16:13; Romans 10:17). From whom comes only one message for all men.
3. “one hope,” wrought by the calling, laid up in heaven (Colossians 1: 5; 1 Peter 1:13; 3:15, “*the hope*”).
4. “one Lord,” Christ, around whom all revolves (cf. Colossians 1:19).
5. “one faith,” not the act of believing, but the thing believed, the system of salvation by faith in Christ; the Christian religion.
6. “one baptism,” that is, one immersion. There were two immersions in the first century: the immersion of John the Baptist, which was not a baptism of faith *in Christ*. John’s ministry and baptism were incorporated into the law of Moses (Matthew 11:13; Luke 16:16), and the law was not of faith in Christ (Galatians 3:12). John baptized many before he knew that Jesus was the Son of God (Matthew 3:5-6, 13-17; John 1:29-34). This helps explain Paul’s commandment to the Ephesians to be reimmersed, this time by faith in Christ in order to receive salvation and the Holy Spirit (Acts

19:1-5). The second immersion is the baptism of the great commission (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16), which Jesus commanded men to administer to other men in order to receive salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 5:32; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30). By the time Paul wrote Ephesians there was only “one baptism.” John’s had not been acceptable since Pentecost.

But questions arise: Why did Paul say there is one baptism? What was his point? Did the Ephesian church not know this fact? Didn’t they have to know it in order to become Christians? The answer lies, it seems certain, in the need to restate the fundamental identity of God’s people. In pagan Ephesus, there were many religious bodies, and many hopes, many spirits giving many different messages, many religious faiths, many lords, many water rites, baptisms, by which the initiates were ushered into the various religious bodies, and many gods. But God purposed and established only one body, sent but one Spirit with one message, produced but one hope, and acknowledged but one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God. These are seven points of distinction between pagan religions and God’s people.

7. “one God” The author of our salvation in Christ, the fountainhead of all blessings in Christ. He is transcendent, being *“over all, through all, and in all.”*

## II. THE AGENTS OF UNITY (Ephesians 4:7-11)

Here are the agents or gifts Christ has given to the

church through which unity and growth is to be achieved and maintained. These are the “gifts” of verse 8. Note: *“the gift of Christ”* (v. 7), *“And gave gifts unto men”* (v. 8), *“And he gave some to be apostles”* (v. 11). Or as another translation has it, *“And these were his gifts: some to be apostles”* (NEB).

Paul seems to use the analogy of the Sovereign that descends from his place on high (castles were built on high ground for security) into the realm of conflict to wage battle against the enemy. After the victory, he would ascend back to his throne on high and distribute the booty as gifts among the people and gifts of authority to minister among newly acquired territory. Thus, verses 7 through 9 would remind the Ephesians of Christ’s victory over Satan (cf. Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14-15; Revelation 12:10). Now, as sovereign ruler over his kingdom, he distributes his gifts for the administration of his people: *“And these were his gifts: some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers”* (NEB). These are the divine provisions:

### A. Apostles and Prophets

1. Laying the foundation of the church. Both the apostles and the prophets figure in laying the foundation (Ephesians 2:19-20). The foundation, Christ, had to be laid but once (1 Corinthians 3:9-11), hence, no successors in office. The foundation is the deity of Christ (Matthew 16:13-18; 1 Peter 2:3-8), proven in the resurrection (Romans 1:4), and confirmed by signs (Mark 16:19-20; Hebrews 2:1-4). They laid the foundation; we build upon it (1 Corinthians 3:10).
2. Judging the church. The apostles were to sit on

thrones of authority judging Israel in the regeneration (Matthew 19:28). Since we are in the regeneration (John 3:5; Titus 3:4-5; 1 Corinthians 4:15; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23), the apostles are now judging (e.g., 1 Corinthians 5:3-5).

3. Apostles. Apostle – *apostolos*, one sent, messenger, ambassador, envoy. Three kinds:
  - a. *sent from God, i.e.*, Christ (Hebrews 3:1);
  - b. *the original apostles, called “the twelve”* (Acts 6:2), and Paul specially appointed (1 Corinthians 9:1, 15:8-9); and,
  - c. *apostles of the churches* (2 Corinthians 8:23 cf. Acts 13:2-3, 14:4, 14). In Ephesians, it is the apostles of Christ that Paul means, who are specially endowed with eyewitness experience, divine inspiration, and miraculous credentials (Acts 1:8, 21-22; Acts 2:1-4; 1 Corinthians 2:10-13; 2 Corinthians 12:12).

These are “ambassadors . . . of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20), specially appointed and endowed to represent Christ to the world of unbelievers. This is accomplished today, as in the first century, among many by their letters (John 19:35, 20:30-31; Romans 16:25-26; 1 Corinthians 14:37; 2 Thessalonians 2:15, etc.)

4. Prophets. Prophet – *prophetes*, equivalent to *nabi*, prophet in the Old Testament. Not merely a foreteller, but a mouth, a spokesman for the Lord (Exodus 4:15-16; Deuteronomy 18:18-19; Jeremiah 1:4-9). Much more a forth-teller, speaking forth the words God placed in his mouth, whether of past, present, or future

events, an inspired preacher. Both apostles and prophets of Christ figure in making known the mystery of Christ (Ephesians 3:3-5).

These are yet with us directing us in the name of Christ through their writings. They were sufficient to the church in the first century (2 Corinthians 3:4-6, 5:17-19), as are their writings to us today. Their job has been done; we have their writings which are sufficient (2 Peter 1:3-4, 3:1-3; Jude 17); therefore, we need no more apostles and/or prophets until Christ comes.

## **B. Evangelists**

Evangelist – *euangelistes*, a messenger of good tidings. The title given by the Lord to heralds of the gospel (cf. Acts 21:8; 2 Timothy 4:5). These are as essential a part of the structure of the local church for her spiritual economy as apostles to the universal church.

## **C. Pastors and Teachers**

Pastor – *poimein*, a shepherd, one who tends, not merely feeds, flocks. Not evangelists, but elders, also called overseers or bishops (Acts 20:17, 28, Paul called for the elders and addressed them as overseers who “feed” or “shepherd” the church as a spiritual flock). God’s design is for each local church to have a plural number of qualified elders or shepherds (1 Corinthians 4:17, apply this pattern principle to the following: Acts 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22; 20:17; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5). The Greek may indicate that the “teachers” are these pastors (cf. 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9).



These are the “gifts” from Christ for the benefit of his church. They can, through the word of Christ bring the church to maturity, service, unity, sound doctrine, and purpose.

### III. THE DESIRED RESULTS OF UNITY

(Ephesians 4:12-16)

This is the spiritual level which the Lord desires all his saints to achieve and maintain: “*perfecting of the saints*” (maturing) in order to minister to others; “*unto the building up of the body*” – not numerically, that idea is not resident in the passage, but for edification for the church.

#### A. “All Attain unto the Unity of the Faith”

The spiritual provisions (apostles, prophets, etc.), by “*speaking the truth in love,*” bring “all” the church to “*the unity of the faith.*” We “*keep the unity of the Spirit*” which we “attain.” After baptism, the newborn are to be brought on their way to maturity. This is accomplished through education of “the faith” and daily application to the Christian life.

#### B. Maturity

We are to be no longer children tossed to and fro by men and false doctrines, and we are to increase in love for each other, “*unto the building up of itself (the Church) in love.*”

As were the Colossians, so the Ephesian Christians also were bombarded “*with every wind of doctrine*” which Satan would employ against the church. Pagan philosophies, mystery religions, cults, astrology, Judaism, and the Occult, were all vying for their loyalty. Paul has shown the Ephesian church

that God's true and only access to him and to salvation and spiritual growth (cf. Ephesians 2:18) is Christ alone. Now he has pointed the saints toward God's specially provided channels of grace for spiritual education, edification, and consequent growth and increase of the body. These channels for growth are apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors (overseeing shepherds – who are also teachers). And these are helpers of our faith only as they appeal to and make application of the word of the gospel as it has been revealed through the Holy Spirit to the apostles and prophets. The Christian is not to appeal to the wisdom of the world, but only to the wisdom of God as taught by his evangelists, shepherds, and teachers (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:21).

## PART THREE

### The Life of the Church in a Pagan World (Ephesians 4:17-6:20)

An appeal to the church to live in loving unity in this present world and not to merge with its ignorance of darkness, or be intimidated by the spiritual powers. Paul's use of "therefore" shows once again that his appeal to the foregoing instructions are the foundation for his practical instructions. His practical advice is not arbitrary; it rests upon solid ground.

#### I. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE CONTRASTED TO THE PAGAN LIFE – LIGHT VS. DARKNESS (Ephesians 4:17-5:14)

The glaring contrast between Christians and pagans is manifested in their knowledge and their lives. Paul says,

*vanity of their mind . . . darkened in their understanding. . . ignorance . . . hardening of their heart . . . falsehood . . . (anger) . . . wrath . . . (stealing) . . . corrupt speech . . . bitterness and wrath . . . malice . . . fornication . . . uncleanness . . . foolish talking . . . empty words . . . unfruitful works of darkness."*

All who live in this context are alienated from the life of God (4:18, cf. Galatians 5:19-21) and "*waxeth corrupt after the lusts of deceit.*"

This stands in sharp contrast to:

*But ye did not so learn Christ . . . heard him . . . taught in him . . . be renewed in the spirit of your mind . . . put on the new man . . . speak ye*

*truth . . . sin not . . . labor, working with his hands the thing that is good . . . forgiving . . . walk in love . . . walk as children of light . . . have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.*

The contrast is clear, for them . . . and us.

## **II. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE OF SUBJECTION – THE DEATH OF HUMAN PRIDE (Ephesians 5:15-6:9)**

### **A. Walk Knowledgeably in Wisdom and in Mutual Subjection (5:15-21)**

*“Subjecting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ”* (v. 21). This is what Christians *“understand [is] the will of the Lord.”* Forty percent of the Roman world was in slavery in the first century. Submission was a sign of weakness to the worldly minded. But this is the astonishing doctrine of Christ (Matthew 11:28-29, 18:1-3; Luke 6:27-38; 1 Peter 5:5, 6), as well as his life (John 13:3-15; Philippians 2:1-11; 1 Peter 2:20-24). Let preachers and elders especially take heed (2 Timothy 2:24-25; 1 Peter 5:3). This exhortation leads naturally into the following section.

### **B. The Relationship of Christians to Their Husbands and Wives (5:22-33)**

(See the parallel passages in the Colossian’s study.) These are instructions (commandments) which Christians are to observe whether or not their husbands or wives are Christians! It is the relationship they sustain to their spouses precisely because of their relationship to Christ. The Christian

wife is to be in subjection to her husband, though not a Christian and whether he deserves it or not; the Christian husband is to love his wife (a doing, not a feeling), though she is not a Christian, whether she deserves it or not. (See the qualification, Acts 5:29.)

**C. The Relationship of Christian Children to Their Parents (6:1-4)**

This is the respect Christians pay to their parents because of their relationship to Christ.

**D. The Relationship of Christian Slaves to Their Masters (6:5-8)**

This is the service which Christian slaves render to their masters whether those masters are good or bad (cf. 1 Timothy 6:1-2). This is due to the relationship the slave sustains to Christ who is his true master. Though slavery does not exist in many places, the principle of submission is to be applied to all Christians.

**E. The Relationship of Christian Masters to Their Slaves (6:9)**

This is the relationship the slave owner sustains to his slaves because of the relationship which he himself sustains to Christ, who is his own master.

**III. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE OF WARFARE-THE BATTLE TO BE WAGED (Ephesians 6:10-20)**

The fact is that the Christian engages the enemy constantly. It is essential to see the Christian as a soldier, standing battle-ready, with both defensive armor and offensive weaponry. This inspired imagery is very practical because the warfare in heavenly places is very

real. It never ceases until the faithful soldier dies (not defeated) on the field of battle. Then comes the moment of rest.

#### **IV. CLOSING REMARKS (Ephesians 6:21-24)**

##### **A. Tychicus the Messenger (Ephesians 6:21-22)**

He bore the epistle (and that of Colossians, 4:7-9). Also, he carried a special message from Paul “that he may comfort your hearts.”

##### **B. Closing Salutation (Ephesians 6:23-24)**

Peace, love, faith, and grace for all “*them that love our Lord Jesus Christ.*”



# Part Three

## **Eschatological Division**

Dispensational Premillennialism:

Its Doctrines and Errors  
*and*

Guidelines for a Correct  
Interpretation of Prophecy





# Introduction

Dispensational Premillennialism rests its entire theological structure on a single basic proposition: *that all prophecy is to be interpreted literally*. This method of interpreting Scripture is called, “the grammatical-historical literal interpretation” (John Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, p. 59). This theory of interpretation must not be underrated by those who are not premillennialists inasmuch as it makes dispensational premillennialism what it is. From this fundamental theory five distinct millennial doctrines take their rise:

1. A distinction is claimed between the dispensation of the church age and the dispensation of the kingdom.
2. Old Testament prophets did not foresee the church nor any event in the time period of the so-called church age.
3. The restoration of the nation of Israel to the promised land for an everlasting possession and therefore the eternal future of Israel as a nation.
4. The reinstitution of the Levitical priesthood with animal sacrifices.
5. A belief in a literal thousand-year reign on earth with Christ ruling from Jerusalem as the correct interpretation of Revelation 20.

Occasionally it is submitted that premillennialism is based on the literal interpretation of Revelation 20 and that if this can be shown to be fallacious, the entire millennial theory will collapse. But this is inadequate to explain dispensationalism. As John Walvoord states, representing his own dispensational position, “premillennialism is more than a dispute on the twentieth chapter of Revelation . . . it involves a system of interpretation of the entire Scripture from Genesis to

Revelation” (ibid., p. viii). Walvoord then proceeds in his textbook to illustrate this point of view by saying,

The doctrine of a future millennium on earth affect the interpretation of the Abrahamic covenant with its promise to Israel of inheriting the land promised to Abraham. . . . God’s covenant with David in which David is promised that his descendants would rule over the house of Israel forever . . . Premillennialism is also related to the literal fulfillment of the new covenant revealed in Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

He says that a literal interpretation will lead “inevitably to the doctrine of a future reign of Christ on earth to fulfill these promises.” (ibid.).

Precisely because of their literal interpretation of all prophecy, millennialists do not believe that any of the Old Testament kingdom prophecies have been fulfilled with the establishment of the church of Christ. Thus, dispensational premillennialism is seen to be an interpretation which affects the entire text of the Bible, not merely Revelation 20.

In this study, we will expose both the errors of the premillennial interpretation and those doctrines which stand upon that hermeneutical base. Following that refutation, we will proceed to develop an exposition of four essential guidelines for a correct interpretation of prophecy.

# Dispensational Premillennialism

## Its Doctrines and Errors

This section will consider the first four premillennial doctrines and their scriptural errors. The doctrine of the literal interpretation of all prophecy will be considered in section two.

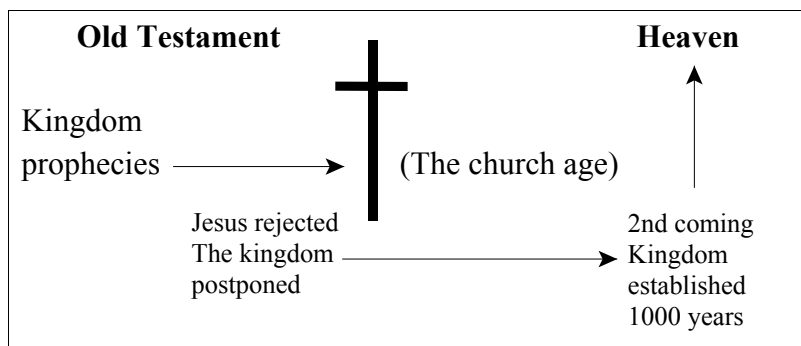
### **I. PREMILLENNIALISM TEACHES THAT A DISTINCTION EXISTS BETWEEN THE KINGDOM OF OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY AND THE CHURCH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT**

#### **A. The Premillennial Position**

Based on the literalizing method of interpreting all prophecy, the millennialist reasons that the Old Testament kingdom prophecies are to be fulfilled according to the literal and grammatical meaning of the words as used by the prophets. The term kingdom, therefore, in the prophecies, is to be understood according to the nationalistic and material aspects of an earthly kingdom. Since the church does not answer to the nature of an earthly kingdom it is deducted that the two are not viewed to be the same. As Walvoord says, “The kingdom predictions of the Old Testament do not conform to the pattern of this present age” (ibid., p. 230). That is, the kingdom prophecies, couched as they are in terms that describe the nationalistic and geographical dimensions of the kingdom, do not identify with the

spiritual aspects of Christianity. The millennialist reasons therefore that when Jesus established the church. He deducts that Jesus must have, as a consequence of the Jews rejecting his offer of the kingdom, postponed the kingdom to a future date. He deducts further that with the second coming of Christ, the present age the church age-will end, and the kingdom will at last be established. This explains Walvoord's statement, "Amillennialism identifies the present church age with the predicted millennial kingdom on earth. Premillennialism places the millennium after the second advent and therefore divorces it from the present church age" (ibid., p. 221).

This premillennial idea of the kingdom and the church can be viewed diagrammatically as follows:



## B. The Errors Of The Premillinnial Position Concerning the Kingdom and the Church

One of the critical errors of the millennialist is viewing the prophesied kingdom as nationalistic and earthly. This is due to their literalizing of all prophecy. But before considering the millennial position it is important to consider the lexical meaning and use of the

word “kingdom.”

### Defining the “Kingdom”

The term *basileia*, (*βασιλεια*), is defined in the lexicons with primary and secondary definitions: 1. royal power, kingship, dominion, rule. 2. a kingdom, i.e. the territory subject to the rule of a king (Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, J. H. Thayer, pp. 96-97). Also, kingship, royal power, royal rule, kingdom. 2. the territory ruled over by a king (A Greek-English Lexicon, Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, p.134). While both of these definitions can be found employed in Scripture the primary definition of rule, reign, dominion, kingly authority, are dominant.

An illustration from Daniel's prophecy of Christ receiving the kingdom from God is to the point:

*I was still watching in the visions of the night and I saw one like a man coming with the clouds of heaven; he approached the Ancient of Years and was presented to him. Sovereignty and glory and kingly power were given to him, so that all people and nations of every language should serve him; his sovereignty was to be an everlasting sovereignty which should not pass away, and his kingly power such as should never be impaired (Daniel 7:13-14).*

This translation from the New English Bible using the words “sovereignty” and “kingly power” instead of the word “kingdom,” as it occurs in the King James Version, makes the meaning of “kingdom” in this particular prophecy stand out.

At the same time, however, this same prophetic message was earlier foretold by Daniel (2:1-45) wherein the term “kingdom” is the translation. The choice of the translation “kingdom” seems to catch something of the territorial, or

secondary, meaning that is resident in the context of this prophecy. Notice Daniel's interpretation of the "*stone that was cut out without hands*" was later said to "*fill the whole earth*" (Daniel 2:34-35). This mountain, which is the church, has done just that since Pentecost.

This same territorial meaning of "kingdom" seems to be invested in John's statement,

*"Worthy art thou to take the book, and open the seals thereof, for thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and made them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon the earth"* (Revelation 5:9-10).

Here the kingdom is composed of those who are blood purchased. But inasmuch as the church is also blood purchased (Acts 20:28) it appears obvious that the members of the church constitute the kingdom in the Revelation passage. Hence, the territorial idea of *basileia* appears to be inherent in this particular use of the term kingdom. But the idea in many other passages in the Bible is that of sovereignty, reign, dominion.

### **Demonstrating the Kingdom Reign of Christ**

*"If I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you"* (Matthew 12:28). By casting out demons Jesus demonstrated that the kingdom had already come and was already in the midst of the people at that moment. Such a demonstration showed that Christ had the royal power, the dominion, the kingdom reign, that Old Testament prophets foresaw for the Messiah. His sovereign reign over Satan was clearly demonstrated. He further defined the nature of the kingdom when the Pharisees asked when the kingdom would come. He answered, *"The kingdom of God*

*cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo, here! Lo, there! For lo, the kingdom of God is within you"* (Lk.17:20-21). The church is here and the church is there, and we can see it. But the kingdom of God cannot be seen as we can see an earthly kingdom. The kingdom of God, that is, his sovereign authority, is manifested in the power and authority exercised by Christ. This was observed when Paul cast out demons at Ephesus and the name of Christ, his kingly authority, "*was magnified*" (Acts 19:17). Jesus said to Pilate, "*My kingdom does not belong to this world . . . My kingly authority comes from elsewhere*" (New English Translation). The church is from here, but the kingly authority of Christ is from elsewhere. Thus the translation, "*But now is my kingdom not from hence*" (KJV), appears to refer to Christ's sovereignty rather than to his church.

### **The Kingdom Authority of Christ Had to Precede the Establishment of the Church**

On Pentecost Peter affirmed that Christ was on his throne reigning with the power to save. After calling attention to the prophecy of Joel as fulfilled on that day he concluded the recitation of Joel's prophecy saying, "*And whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved*" (Acts 2:21). The "*name of the Lord*" refers to his kingly authority (Cf Colossians 3:17). Peter proceeded to explain that Jesus is "the Lord" of Joel's prophecy in order for those present to call on his name, that is, appeal to his authority for salvation. Peter taught that Jesus' death, burial and resurrection fulfilled Old Testament prophecy of the Messiah's ascension to the throne of David (2 Samuel 7:11-14), and to the right hand of God (Psalm 110:1), that is, the right hand of power (Acts 2:22-35), and so concluded that Jesus was both Lord and Christ (v.36). Jesus is "the Lord" of Joel's prophecy on whose name we must call for salvation. When the Jews on Pentecost heard that Jesus was the



Lord they asked what to do. Peter said, “*Repent and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins*” (Acts 2:38). Those words, “*in the name of Jesus Christ,*” are not a formula of words essential to be spoken when one is baptized. They refer to the authority of Christ. We are to be baptized for forgiveness because Christ the King has commanded it. Peter explained that Jesus was the Messiah, the reigning King of prophecy at God's right hand with all power to save from sin. He explained how to call on his name, that is, appeal to his authority for salvation: by a faith that would obey the King's royal command to repent and be baptized. Three thousand responded to Christ, were saved, and the church was established. The church came into being by the royal reign of Christ the King. Peter explained that Christ is the King of Old Testament prophecy. His reign was already in place on Pentecost. The kingdom reign of Christ is not future; it is a present reality as it has been since Pentecost two thousand years ago.

### **The Church Cannot Be Separated from the Kingdom**

The church is the people who have recognized and bowed the knee to the King. Paul teaches that the saints at Colossae were “*delivered out of the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of the son of his love*” (Colossians 1:13). Those saints constitute the church. The saved people of God are thus delivered out of the realm of the power of darkness and translated into the realm of Christ's sovereign reign. The saved are added to the church (Acts 2:47, KJV) and at the same time are translated into the kingdom of Christ. But when that translation takes place the saved are translated into more than the body of Christ; they are transferred into the sovereign dominion of Christ and God.

1. The time for the establishment of the church coincides with the time for the coming of the

kingdom.

While here, Christ announced that he would build his church (Matthew 16:18). Luke later reported that the church was established on Pentecost (Acts 2:47) and that great fear came upon it (Acts 5:11). So the church was established in the generation of Christ's first coming. Christ also spoke of the kingdom. He announced that the time for its coming was "fulfilled" (Mark 1:15) and that the kingdom was as near as that generation of people to whom he spoke, saying to them that some would not taste of death before they saw the kingdom come (Mark 9:1). Then, a few years later, Paul wrote that the saints in the church at Colossae had by that time been translated "*into the kingdom of the Son of his love*" (Colossians 1:23). It is quite obvious that the kingdom had come by the time the Colossian saints were said to have been translated into it. If the kingdom had not come at this time then it necessarily follows that Paul made a mistake when he said the Colossians were in it and forces an admission that there are yet living on earth today some of the very persons to whom Jesus spoke nearly 2,000 years ago! This, of course, will not do.

It is therefore conclusive that the kingdom existed simultaneously with the church in the first century, in the same generation of Christ's first coming. The premillennial position that Christ postponed the kingdom to a future time reflects upon the reliability of Christ who said the kingdom was at hand, as close as that generation who would see the kingdom come before they saw death. It also reflects upon the New Testament writers who speak of the kingdom as a present reality.

2. That which constitutes the church constitutes the kingdom.

The New Testament teaches that the church is constituted of those who are purchased with the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28)). It also teaches that those who are blood purchased were made to be a kingdom (Revelation 5:9-10). Since the church and the kingdom are both constituted of those who are blood purchased we must conclude that the kingdom in this passage is the church. Therefore the kingdom was already established when Christ established the church.

Paul also taught that the church is composed of saints (1 Corinthians 1:1-2). He also taught that those saints are “*translated into the kingdom of the Son of his love*” (Colossians 1:12-13). Since those saints that compose the church are translated into the kingdom it is clear that the kingdom had to be in existence for it to embrace the church.

Not only did the Lord *foretell* both the establishment of the kingdom and the church in the time period of that generation, but the New Testament writers speak of both the church and the kingdom *being in existence* during that very generation of Christ’s first coming, the first century. The premillennial position concerning the distinction between the church and the kingdom and the postponement of the kingdom to a future time reflects upon the reliability of Christ and contradicts the plain statements of the New Testament writers. Such a position cannot possibly represent the true interpretation of Old Testament prophecies of the kingdom.

3. Jesus is to eat the Lord’s supper in the kingdom.

During the Passover before the cross, Jesus, readying himself to become our Passover lamb, said,

*With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer: for I say unto you, I shall not eat it, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God* (Luke 22:15-16).

That is, what the Passover signified was fulfilled in the sacrifice of Christ and the bringing in of the kingdom of God. Notice carefully, “*I shall not eat it,*” the Passover, “*until **it** be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.*” The time lapse between eating the Passover and the fulfillment of its typical significance in the establishment of the kingdom was barely more than fifty days from the cross to Pentecost. Thus the language of the Lord, “*I shall not eat it, **until** it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.*” Christ would barely eat the Passover before its typical and prophetic quality would be fulfilled in the reality which it signified, said the Lord. Jesus further declared during that Passover feast, “*But I say unto you, I shall not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom*” (Matthew 26:29). Instead, he would drink of the fruit of the vine *when* it had the new significance memorializing his own shed blood for the remission of our sins, and he would do so “*in my Father’s kingdom.*”

Thus the Passover which signified the death of Christ and was fulfilled in the kingdom of God is made “new” in the Lord’s supper, and Jesus *pledged to drink of this new memorial in the kingdom*. Notice the time element: “*that day when I drink it new with*

*you” is clearly stated to be “in **my** Father’s kingdom.”*

Now, if the kingdom has not as yet been established, then in the light of the foregoing statements of the Lord, we must conclude the following:

- a. That Jesus was wrong when he ate the Passover at that time!* For he stated that he would no sooner eat it than it would be fulfilled in the kingdom of God (Luke 22: 16-18). If the kingdom has not yet been established, then Jesus should not have eaten the Passover. (Yet see 1 Corinthians 5:7-8.)
- b. That Jesus will never eat the Lord’s Supper with his disciples as he promised.* This is because millenarians teach that when Jesus returns to establish the kingdom, the Lord’s Supper will be replaced by the sacrifices prophesied in Ezekiel 43:1-46:24. As recorded by Walvoord:

But what is the meaning and the purpose of these animal sacrifices? The answer is quite simple. While the sacrifices Israel brought once had a prospective meaning, the sacrifices brought in the millennial temple have a retrospective meaning. When during this age God’s people worship in the appointed way at His table, with the bread and wine as the memorial of His love, it is a retrospect. We look back to the Cross. We show forth His death. It is ‘till He comes.’ Then this memorial feast ends forever. Never again

will the Lord's Supper be kept after the Saints of God have left the earth to be with the Lord in glory.<sup>3</sup>

Premillennialists teach that when Jesus returns "this memorial feast" (the Lord's supper) "ends forever." But consider the consequences of this teaching. The Lord said he cannot eat the supper again until he is in the Father's kingdom (Matthew 26:29). But the premillennial doctrine has it that the Lord's supper will "never again . . . be kept after the Saints of God have left the earth to be with the Lord in Glory." That refers to the rapture. According to millennial interpretation (ibid., p. 248-255), the kingdom will not be established immediately upon Christ's second advent, for he will stop midway down and, then, the saints will be caught up to be with Christ for a period of seven years. There they will stay until Christ brings them back down to earth to establish his millennial kingdom. But remember what millennialists teach about this very moment: *"Never again will the Lord's Supper be kept after the Saints of God have left the earth to be with the Lord."* From the very moment the saints are translated from earth to meet Christ in the air, the Lord's supper ceases to be kept. And

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<sup>3</sup> John Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, p. 312. Walvoord quotes A. C. Gaebelein's position for the solution to the problem millennialists encounter by literalizing the sin offerings of Ezekiel, while at the same time they try to accept the Bible's teaching of the sufficiency of Christ as our sin offering (Hebrews 10:14-18).

remember, that happens seven years before Christ returns to the earth to establish his kingdom. That means that Christ will not have a chance to eat the supper even after the kingdom is established because seven years before the kingdom is established the Lord's supper "ends forever," never to be kept again!

Those are the consequences of the premillennial theory of interpretation. Millennialism is wrong because it makes Christ and the New Testament writers wrong. It is wrong in its doctrine that the church does not fulfill Old Testament prophecies of the kingdom; and its doctrine concerning Christ, the rapture, and the kingdom runs counter to the Lord's own pledge to his disciples to eat the Lord's supper with them in the kingdom.

## **II. PREMILLENNIALISM TEACHES THAT THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS DID NOT FORESEE THE AGE OF THE CHURCH**

### **A. The Premillennial Position**

In essence, the millennial doctrine says that since the Old Testament prophets foresaw the kingdom of God and since the kingdom and the church are not the same, therefore, the prophets did not foresee the church. They plainly represent themselves in this regard, as seen in the following quotations:

Dispensationalists have regarded the present age as a parenthesis unexpected and without specific prediction in the Old Testament . . . .

Nothing should be plainer to one reading the Old Testament than that the foreview therein provided did not predict a period of time between the two advents . . . the present age is a parenthesis or a time period not predicted by the Old Testament and therefore not fulfilling or advancing the program of events revealed in the Old Testament foreview. . . If the church fulfills the Old Testament promises to Israel of a righteous kingdom on earth, the amillenarians are right. If the church does not fulfill these predictions . . . then the premillenarians are right. (ibid., p. 227, 228, 231)

These millennial claims can be set out as follows:

1. The church occupies a period of time called a “parenthesis.”

It is also called “the church age.” This “present age” of the church is supposed to be that period of time that separates the prophecies of the kingdom from their fulfillment in the millennial establishment.

2. This period of the church age was neither foreseen nor expected by the Old Testament prophets.
3. This difference between the viewpoints of the church and the kingdom constitutes the difference between those who are premillenarians and those who are not.

If one believes that the Old Testament prophets foresaw the church age, he cannot be a dispensationalist. If one believes that the church fulfills the kingdom prophecies, he is not a thoroughgoing premillennialist.



## **B. Premillennial Errors That Teach the Prophets Did Not Foresee the Church Nor the Time Period of the Church Age**

Our reasoning will be as follows: inasmuch as the church constitutes the entire body of the saved, when it is shown that the prophets foresaw the age of salvation, it will be shown that the prophets foresaw the age of the church.

1. Jesus, Peter, and Paul all taught that the Old Testament prophets prophesied of the time period of salvation, which is the age of the remission of sins, the age of the church.
  - a. *Jesus interprets the meaning of the prophets in Luke 24:44-47.*

*And he said unto them, 'These are my words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their mind, that they might understand the scriptures; and he said unto them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.'*

Jesus interpreted what was written in the law, the prophets, and the psalms, plainly declaring that these Scriptures were fulfilled in

his suffering, and in his resurrection, *and in the remission of sins*. He did not stop at the suffering and the resurrection, but continued to interpret the Scriptures, saying, “*and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name.*” The word “and” means *also, in addition to*. Thus the Scriptures foretold not only Christ’s death and resurrection, but *in addition to* that they *also* foretold that remission of sins would be preached unto all nations. Jesus said salvation through remission of sins was foretold by the Old Testament prophets. It should be easily seen, since the church is the body of the saved, that the Old Testament prophets foresaw the age of the church.

But by what name, or term, did the prophets foresee the church? They did not use the term “church.” However, we have already studied in this section that the same blood-purchased men who constitute the church are the very men whom Christ made to be a kingdom (Acts 20:28; Revelation 5:9-10). The prophets, then, spoke of the age of the church when they spoke of the kingdom.

*b. Peter interprets the meaning of the prophets in 1 Peter 1:10-12*

*Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto, when it*

*testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them. To whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto you, did they minister these things, which now have been announced unto you through them that preached the gospel unto you by the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven.*

Dispensationalists tell us that the prophets did not see the church. But Peter was clear that the prophets “prophesied of the grace that should come unto you.” Of what did the prophets prophesy? Of grace! What exegetical gymnastics could dispensationalists employ to convince thinking men that the “grace” is something other than the grace by which we are saved and by which the church came into existence? Peter was exegetically distinct in explaining that Christ’s sufferings and our salvation by grace were the very things the prophets ministered “unto you” (the church) and that “these things” (suffering and salvation) now have been announced by inspired preachers of the gospel. You can’t miss it! What gospel preachers “announced” were the things “ministered” by the prophets. That is the meaning of the prophets according to the apostle Peter. The prophets foretold the gospel of salvation, the age of grace, which is the

age of the church.

- c. *Paul interprets the meaning of the prophets in Acts 26:22-23*

*Having therefore obtained the help that is from God, I stand unto this day testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses did say should come; how that the Christ must suffer, and how that he first by the resurrection of the dead should proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles.*

Paul was a gospel preacher. At this time he had been in prison two years for preaching the gospel. Now he stands in the presence of King Agrippa proclaiming the gospel and declaring that what he is saying is “nothing but what the prophets and Moses did say should come.” Now what is Paul saying? The gospel! But what he is saying in the gospel is nothing but what the prophets and Moses did say should come. It is unmistakable that what Moses and the prophets said should come is fulfilled in Paul’s gospel. He preached the subject they foresaw. Therefore, the prophets foresaw the gospel.

Then Paul spelled out for Agrippa what the prophets and Moses foretold, explaining that Christ had to suffer and rise again and that by those very means Christ himself would “proclaim light” to

both Jew and Gentile. The “light” proclaimed is defined earlier in the sermon where Paul recounts Christ’s commission “to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:18). The “light” proclaimed by Christ in his death and resurrection he himself defines as remission of sins. That is what Paul declared fulfilled the prophecies of Moses and the prophets. And that is the age of the church.

- d. *Paul interprets the meaning of the prophets in Romans 1:1-2*

*Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, which he promised afore through his prophets in the holy scriptures.*

What comment could further clarify the transparent meaning of Paul’s declaration that the gospel was promised before by the prophets in the Old Testament Scriptures? To reject this plain statement for the millennial teaching that the gospel age was not foreseen by the prophets is to reject both apostolic Scripture and reason, as well as that disposition of heart and mind that are essential to a sound proclamation of the

truth of the gospel.

- e. *Paul interprets “the hope of Israel.”* The great promises and prophecies made to Israel of old built up within that nation a great hope for a Messiah and a new age. Israel came to expect the fulfillment of that foreview in a literal and material way, as millennialists do today. But Paul’s interpretation of Israel’s hope for the new age was couched in spiritual terms and said to be fulfilled in the spiritual blessings of the gospel of redemption.

After graciously accepting his opportunity to make his defense before Agrippa, he said,

*And now I stand here to be judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers; unto which promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. And concerning this hope I am accused by the Jews, O king! (Acts 26:6-7).*

Paul said he was being judged for the hope of the promise which God made to the Hebrew nation. He said he was being accused by the Jews for “this hope.” But we all know that Paul had been imprisoned and accused by the Jews for proclaiming the gospel. The gospel, then, is the fulfillment of the hope of the promise. The good news of redemption from sin, death,

and hell is the true hope of Israel.

Before the chief Jews of Rome, Paul said,

*For this cause therefore did entreat you to see and to speak with me: for because of the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain (Acts 28:20).*

It is common knowledge to Bible readers that Paul was in chains for preaching the gospel (Ephesians 6:19-20). Thus the gospel fulfills the great messianic hope of Israel.

**Conclusion:** It is a matter of recorded fact that Christ and his apostles interpreted the Old Testament prophetic foreview as being fulfilled in the gospel of salvation, which is the age of the church of Christ. But since the prophecies have been fulfilled in the gospel and in the church, then premillennialism is without a case or a cause.

2. Specific Old Testament prophecies which foresaw salvation and the age of the church:
  - a. *Genesis 12:3; 22:18 fulfilled in Galatians 3.8.*
  - b. *Now Jehovah said unto Abram.*

*. . . I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed (Genesis 12:1, 3).*

*And in thy seed shall all the nations*

*of the earth be blessed* (Genesis 22:18).

*And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all the nations be blessed* (Galatians 3:8).

The original statement of the Lord to Abraham, that in his seed would come the worldwide blessing, is in Genesis 12:3 and 22:18. According to Paul, these Scriptures both foresaw justification for the Gentiles and preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham (Galatians 3:8). Of course, justification, or salvation, by faith is the gospel of Christ. But this is the very thing Paul interpreted that Scripture both foresaw and preached. Millennialists believe that the present age of the gospel is “a time period not predicted by the Old Testament” (ibid., p. 231). But this contradicts Paul’s inspired interpretation of the Old Testament foreview.

Premillennial interpreters hold that the present age of the church is an *interruption* of “God’s predicted program for Jew and Gentile as revealed in the Old Testament” (ibid., p. 230). But, in fact, the church has not interrupted God’s predicted program. As Paul interpreted the matter, the present age of the gospel and the



church has *fulfilled* it. At this point it is a matter of whose interpretation of the Old Testament foreview one accepts – premillenarian’s or Paul’s. Millennialism does not agree with Paul on the meaning of Genesis 12:3. When millennialists agree with Paul that Genesis 12:3 is an example of the Old Testament predicting the present age of the gospel, millennial theories will die.

- c. *Isaiah 49:6 fulfilled in Acts 13:46-47.*

*Yea, he saith, It is too light a thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth (Isaiah 49:6).*

*And Paul and Barnabas spake out boldly, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you. Seeing ye thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee for a light of the Gentiles, That thou shouldest be for salvation unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 13:46-47).*

Paul reasoned that the Lord commanded them to preach salvation to the Gentiles and quoted Isaiah 49:6 as their commandment. The apostolic position has it that Isaiah prophesied the salvation of the Gentiles. Again, we see an Old Testament prophet foreseeing the age of the church.

d. *Amos 9:11-12 fulfilled in Acts 15:7-18.*

*In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof and I will raise up its ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the nations that are called by my name, saith Jehovah that doeth this (Amos 9:11-12).*

*And when there had been much questioning, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Brethren, ye know that a good while ago God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, who knoweth the heart, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as he did unto us; and he made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Now therefore why make ye trial of God, that ye should put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither*

*our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in like manner as they. . . . James answered, saying, Brethren, hearken unto me: Symeon hath rehearsed how first God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After these things I will return, And I will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen; And I will build again the ruins thereof And I will set it up: That the residue of men may seek after the Lord, And all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, Who maketh these things known from of old (Acts 15:7-18).*

Read these passages carefully. Peter reminded the assembly at Jerusalem of the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10). This was the first time that uncircumcised non law-keeping Gentiles had heard the gospel and were saved. James commented that this was in agreement with the Old Testament prophets which foresaw the salvation of the Gentiles and then quoted Amos 9:11-12 as an example. So James cites Amos' prophecy as an example of the prophecies of the gospel age, the age of the church.

*e. Hosea 1:10; 2:23 fulfilled in Romans*

9:22-26.

*Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass that, in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God . . . And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them that were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God (Hosea 1:10; 2:23).*

*What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he also called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles? As he saith in Hosea, 'I will call that my people, which was not my people; And her beloved, that was not beloved. And it shall be, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people.*

*There shall they be called sons of the*

*living God.*’ (Romans 9:22-26)

Paul explained that both Jews and Gentiles, whom God called to glory, are “the sons of the living God” and the “my people” of Hosea’s prophecy. These “people” have received mercy in the forgiveness of their sins (Titus 3:5), as Hosea prophesied. These saved people are the “vessels of mercy” which God “afore prepared unto glory” and of whom Paul said Hosea prophesied. But these saved people, whom God prepared and of whom Hosea prophesied, constitute the church, since the saved are added to the church. Therefore Hosea prophesied of the age of the church.

*f. Psalm 18:49; Deuteronomy 32:43; Psalm 117:1; Isaiah 11:10—all fulfilled in Romans 15:8-12*

*Therefore I will give thanks unto thee,  
O Jehovah among the nations, And  
will sing praises unto thy name  
(Psalms 18:49).*

*Rejoice, O ye nations, with his  
people (Deuteronomy 32:43).*

*Oh praise Jehovah, all ye nations;  
Laud him, all ye peoples (Psalms  
117 :1).*

*And it shall come to pass in that day,*

*that the root of Jesse, that standeth for an ensign of the peoples, unto him shall the nations seek (Isaiah 11:10).*

*For I say that Christ hath been made a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, that he might confirm the promises given unto the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy, as it is written, 'Therefore will I give praise unto thee among the Gentiles, And sing unto thy name.' And again he saith, 'Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people.' And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; And let all the peoples praise him. And again, Isaiah saith, There shall be the root of Jesse, And he that ariseth to rule over the Gentiles; On him shall the Gentiles hope (Romans 15:8-12).*

Paul tells us that Christ became a minister of the circumcision (the Hebrews) for the truth of God, that is, the prophetic word of God. In our Lord's ministry he would "confirm," or fulfill, those promises spoken to the Israelite fathers, and at the same time bring mercy to the Gentiles in the remission of their sins (Titus 3:5). These Gentiles would, in turn, glorify God for confirming his promises by extending his mercy to them in salvation through Christ Jesus. Then Paul writes, "*as it is*

*written.*” He explains that all of this had been written beforetime in the Scriptures. Somewhere in the Old Testament Scriptures, “*it is written*” that Christ would confirm the promises of mercy, which would result in the glorification of God. But in which of those Scriptures is it written? Paul tells us! After he explains “it is written,” he then proceeds to specify the four Scriptures in the quotations from Deuteronomy, Psalms, and Isaiah. These particular Scriptures, Paul affirms, have their confirmation and fulfillment in the salvation of our souls. Thus, the church glorifies God for his mercy, as it is written in the Old Testament Scriptures.

If the millennialist persists in denying that the present age of the church neither fulfills nor advances the program of events foretold by the prophets, but insists on projecting them onward to a yet future fulfillment, then he denies to himself the salvation from sin, which the New Testament writers tell us is the fulfillment of the promises made to Israel. This is a major consequence of the premillenarian doctrine: it places a meaning on the Old Testament prophecies which is at cross-purposes with the meaning given by the inspired New Testament interpreters.

- g. *Psalm 110:4 fulfilled in the present function of the high priesthood of Christ. Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent: Thou art a priest for ever after the order*

*of Melchizedek* (Psalms 110:4).

This prophecy of the appointment of Christ Jesus to the everlasting high priesthood of Melchizedek is abundantly attested to have been fulfilled by the writer of Hebrews. Read the clear statements in Hebrews 2:17; 4:14-15; 5:1-6, 10; 6:20; 7:11-28 (especially vs. 17 and 21); and 8:1-2. Plainer statements attesting the fulfillment of Psalm 110:4 in the priesthood of Christ could not be made.

But two things must be carefully observed. First, Jesus is not only a priest, he is a priest forever. He is a priest both now and forever. Second, the function of his priesthood, in addition to providing a sin offering for alien sinners that they may receive remission of sins (Hebrews 9:26; 10:14-17), is also to provide *continual propitiation for the sins of his people*, the church ("to make propitiation for the sins of the people," Hebrews 2:17; "that we may receive mercy," 4:16; "he ever liveth to make intercession for them," 7:24-25). But keep in mind that this priesthood was bestowed on Christ according to the foreview of Psalm 110:4.

Now of what dispensation did Psalm 110:4 foresee this priesthood? It cannot be the future age of millennialism, for then Christ is supposed to be on earth in Jerusalem. But the Scripture says that if Christ were on earth, he would not be a



priest at all (Hebrews 8:4)! Is Christ, then, going to return to earth? No, not at all, for then he would not be a priest. But he is a priest, right now . . . and forever. Of what age, then, did the psalmist foresee this priesthood? Not of a future age, but of the present dispensation of the church, for whom Christ is presently making continual intercession (Hebrews 7:25) and propitiation (Hebrews 2:17). Therefore, the Old Testament foresaw the present high priesthood of Christ to function for the present dispensation of the church.

## **Conclusion**

Scripture clearly attests to the fact that many Old Testament prophecies spoke of the present age of the gospel and the church. Therefore, the theory of literalizing all prophecy and the millennial efforts to be consistent with that theory by denying that the church fulfills the Old Testament prophecies is seen to be inconsistent with the clear statements of Christ, the apostles, and other New Testament writers. It is also, therefore, conclusive that premillennialism is a false theory of hermeneutics which produces false doctrines concerning the very theologies of which they speak: ecclesiology (doctrine of the church), soteriology (doctrine of salvation), and eschatology (doctrines of the end of things).

## **III. PREMILLENNIALISM TEACHES THERE WILL BE A RESTORATION OF THE NATION OF ISRAEL TO THE PROMISED LAND FOR AN EVERLASTING POSSESSION**

### **A. The Premillennial Position**

1. Israel was promised the land for an everlastingly permanent possession, as recorded in Genesis 15:18-21, 17:1-8.

Walvoord writes,

In connection with the promise of the land, the Abrahamic covenant itself is expressly called “everlasting” (Genesis 17:7) and the possession of the land is defined as “an everlasting possession” (Genesis 17:8). It should be clear that this promise guarantees both the everlasting continuance of the seed as a nation and its everlasting possession of the land. (ibid., p. 140)

He also says,

According to the Abrahamic covenant, the land . . . would be permanently possessed. (ibid., p. 156)

2. Israel has not yet possessed all the land (ibid., pp. 156, 178, 179).
3. The promised land is to be received in the millennium.

If it is observed that the possession of the land for a thousand years is not quite as long as an “everlasting possession,” the premillenarian has an answer,

The promise of complete and everlasting possession of the land is to be fulfilled in the future millennial kingdom and will

issue in possessions in the eternal new earth. (ibid., p. 157)

## **B. The Error of this Millennial Position**

### **1. “Everlasting,” “forever.”**

The Hebrew meaning of this word is age-long, age-lasting, eternal, perpetual. It does not always mean eternal. This is made clear by comparing the statement of the anointing of Aaron and his sons to “an everlasting priesthood” (Exodus 40:15) with the statement that that priesthood was changed and replaced with the priesthood of Christ (Hebrews 7:11-17). Obviously, the Levitical priesthood was never intended to be eternal. It was age-lasting, perpetrated throughout the Mosaic age until the cross, when that age ended. Nor will it be reinstated at a future time (in the millennium) since Christ’s priesthood is unchangeable (Hebrews 7:24), as well as everlasting (Hebrews 7:18-21). The unchangeable and therefore eternal nature of Christ’s priesthood is commensurate with his own eternal nature which is essential to our salvation by his eternal intercession (Hebrews 7:24-25).

Furthermore, every Christian is a priest in the new priesthood of Christ (1 Peter 2:5, 9). No one can now serve as a priest of Christ and at the same time serve under the Levitical priesthood (Hebrews 13:10). And since the change from the Levitical priesthood to the priesthood of Christ necessitated the change from the old law to the new law (Hebrews 7:12), these two distinct priesthoods cannot

operate concurrently. Therefore, any interpretation that the old Levitical priesthood will at a future time be reinstated is in opposition to Christ and the ongoing nature of his eternal new covenant (Hebrews 13:10,20).

2. Consider that circumcision was also to be in the flesh for “*an everlasting covenant*” (Genesis 17:9-14).

The covenant of circumcision in the flesh (not spiritual, but “in the flesh,” vs. 11, 13) was stated to last exactly as long as Abraham’s seed was to possess the land. The land was to be “an everlasting possession,” and the covenant of circumcision was to be in their “flesh for an everlasting covenant.” Will the millenarian insist that the Jews are yet to possess the land eternally, beginning in the millennium? Then they must insist that Israel keep the everlasting covenant of circumcision as a necessary condition. It is necessary for the Jews to keep from breaking the covenant with the Lord and from being cut off from Israel (Genesis 17:14). It is further necessary that all Gentiles who dwell in the promised land with the Jews be circumcised (Genesis 17:13)! But the New Testament plainly declares that God never intended circumcision to continue endlessly (Acts 15:1-29). And Paul states that the practice of circumcision as necessary to please God severs one’s relationship with Christ, makes Christ of no saving benefit to such a one, and causes him to fall from grace (Galatians 5:2, 4).

3. While millenarians deny that Israel ever received all the land, the Bible emphatically

states that Israel both possessed all the land and dwelt in it (Joshua 21:43; 23:15-16; 24:8; 2 Chronicles 20:7-8; Jeremiah 32:21-23).

4. The land promised was the land of Abraham's sojourn (Genesis 17:8), of Isaac's sojourn (Genesis 26:2-3), and of Jacob's sojourn (Genesis 28:4).

The land wherein they *sojourned* was promised for an everlasting possession. But the millennialist wants Israel to possess the land everlastingly in the new earth! (ibid., p. 157). However, the new earth was not a part of the land promised. Neither Abraham, nor Isaac, nor Jacob ever sojourned in the new earth. How much land was in the promise? Exactly as much as the holy record says they received, possessed, and dwelt in. And it did not include any possessions in the new earth.

God's promises concerning the land of promise have been literally and physically fulfilled to Israel with no further obligations to her future in that regard.

#### **IV. PREMILLENNIALISM TEACHES THERE WILL BE A REINSTATEMENT OF THE LEVITICAL SACRIFICES**

##### **A. The Premillennial Position**

The theory to literalize all prophecy has forced premillennialists to interpret the following prophecies (and a number of others) in a literal and physical manner: Isaiah 56:7, 66:20-23; Jeremiah 33:18; Ezekiel 43:18-46:24; and Zechariah 14:16-21 (ibid., p. 311). Their reasoning is that since these

prophecies are to be interpreted literally and since they have not been fulfilled in the historical past, they must be fulfilled in a yet future time and that they will be fulfilled in the millennium (ibid., p. 310). But remember, there is no statement in Scripture that these prophecies will be fulfilled in the millennium. That is their own deduction in keeping with their theory or literal interpretation.

An example of this is found in Jeremiah's prophecy: "*neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before me to offer burnt-offerings, and to burn meal-offerings, and to do sacrifice continually*" (Jeremiah 33:18). It is easy to see that a literalizing of this prophecy will demand the reinstatement of the Levitical priesthood to offer animal sacrifices ("to offer burnt offerings") for eternity ("to do sacrifice continually").

## **B. The Error of this Millennial Position**

Study this section very carefully. It will expose the totally irreconcilable nature of premillennialism and its stubborn insistence on a total literalizing of all prophecy when compared with the teaching of the New Testament.

1. There cannot be a reinstatement of the Levitical priesthood or a Levite appointed to any other priesthood than that of the Christian priesthood without changing away from the priesthood of Christ (Hebrews 7:12).

Inasmuch as Christ's priesthood is unchangeable (Hebrews 4), it renders both the reinstatement of the Levitical priesthood or the appointment of a new priesthood absolutely impossible. Therefore, God never intended

Jeremiah's prophecy to be fulfilled in a literal and physical way. Christ is himself the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of an ideal and eternal priest who offers himself to God for our sakes continually (Hebrews 5-28; 9:11-12; 24-26; 10; 14).

2. Because remission of sins is obtained by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ God will never again receive another sin offering (Hebrews 10.12-18).

Read that passage carefully. Christ's sacrifice at the cross has provided us with the remission of sins. And the Scripture states that precisely because of that fact "*there is no more offering for sin*" (Hebrews 10:18). Never again, says the Scripture, will there be another sin offering inasmuch as Christ's sin offering is eternally adequate.

This amounts to the most devastating blow against the premillennial doctrine of the yet future fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, which is based on the impossible theory of the literal interpretation of all prophecy. Premillennialism wants these Old Testament prophecies of Levites offering sin offerings to be fulfilled literally in the millennial era. But the Scripture states that God will not accept any more sin offerings, now that Christ has obtained remission of sins. At this point, premillennialism is indisputably opposed to the unmistakable pronouncement of the Scripture, "*Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.*" The Old Testament prophecies of the Levites offering sin offerings

(Ezekiel 43:19) was thus never intended to be fulfilled in a literal and physical interpretation of these prophecies is seen clearly to have been couched in terms which were the most precious and meaningful and applicable to the covenant people of that day, but which were in fact speaking of things much higher and holier and altogether other than the language employed to depict their messianic meaning. Such language, which depicts a literal future fact but employs a choice of words and phrases which are not to be interpreted literally, is figurative language. This is the language of the prophecies under consideration.

Now Walvoord and other millennialists admit the difficulty of their position at this point (ibid., pp. 309-311) since it objects to “New Testament affirmations concerning the one sacrifice of Christ.” Indeed it does! The sufficiency of Christ's work at the cross is objected to by a literal interpretation of these prophecies of animal sacrifices to be offered in the future kingdom of God. If Christ's sacrifice is adequate to save, we need no more sacrifices for sin. That is indeed what the Scripture says! But the millenarians would interpret these prophecies as having their fulfillment in a “memorial” way, not in an “expiatory” way (ibid., p. 312). The passage under special consideration is Ezekiel 43:18-46:24, which speaks plainly of the Levites offering a young bullock for a sin offering. Notice an example,

*Thou shalt give the priests the Levites that*



*are of seed of Zadok, who are near unto me, to minister unto me, saith the Lord Jehovah, a young bullock for a sin offering” (Ezekiel 43:19).*

Now while this is interpreted literally, the “*young bullock for a sin offering*” is explained to be offered as a memorial of the death of Christ replacing the memorial of the Lord’s Supper (ibid., p. 312). Thus explained, the sin offering is not “expiatory,” does not militate against the sacrifice of Christ, but is only a “memorial” to that sacrifice. *But this is incorrect on three counts:*

- a. *Ezekiel explains that the sin offering in his prophecy is an “expiatory” sacrifice.* This is clarified by his own words in the same context: “*The priests shall make your burnt-offerings upon the altar, and your peace-offerings; and I will accept you, saith the Lord Jehovah*” (Ezekiel 43:27). When will the Lord “accept you”? If interpreted millennially, when the priests of Levi make their literal sin offerings to the Lord. That is the condition for our acceptance.

If millennialism is right, we cannot be accepted until that offering is made! And if unacceptable to the Lord, then we are not saved. That is absolute. But such a sacrifice is not merely memorial. It is expiatory. It is essential to salvation and to be acceptable to the Lord. But that means that Christ's sacrifice is by itself

inadequate to make us acceptable to the Lord! According to Ezekiel, as literally interpreted by millenarians, that bullock for a sin offering is also necessary to make us acceptable. That is the conclusion necessarily resulting from the premillennial theory of interpretation. Of course, that is tantamount to blasphemy.

- b. *The Hebrew writer explains that since Christ has obtained for us remission of sins, no more offerings for sin will ever again be performed in the service of God (Hebrews 10:18). How can Ezekiel's sin-offering prophecy ever be fulfilled literally in the future without contradicting this Scripture: "Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin"? It is inescapable that the prophecy of Ezekiel 43:19-27 and all others in that category were never intended to be fulfilled literally. This prophecy and all such prophecies in this category are thus seen to be couched in figurative language and fulfilled in Christ's sin offering at Calvary. Now those in Christ are acceptable to the Lord Jehovah.*
- c. *The millennial theory of literalizing all Scripture is contradicted at this point by their own interpretation! If the sin offering of Ezekiel is not actually an offering for sin, but merely a memorial to Christ's sin offering, then the prophecy is not literal! If it does not mean what it says, if it actually means something else, then that cancels*

out the literal meaning. To say a prophesied sin offering is not expiatory is a contradiction. To say a prophesied sin offering is not actually an offering for sin, but memorial in nature, is to place a figurative interpretation on the prophecy! They have admitted that their interpretation of Ezekiel 43:18-46:24 has the appearance of making the sacrifice of Christ look inadequate. And it does-by literalizing the prophecy of the sin offering and by insisting that it is yet for the future, thus contradicting Hebrews 10:18. And by interpreting the sin offering prophecy as memorial, rather than expiatory, they have placed a figurative interpretation on the prophecy and have thus rendered their strictly literal theory of interpretation null and void.

Premillennialism is thus indefensibly routed by the application of this New Testament statement (Hebrews 10:18) to the meaning of these aforementioned prophecies of sacrifices and sin offerings.

## **Conclusion**

Premillennialism is a false theory of interpretation. It stands opposed to the New Testament inspired interpretations of Old Testament prophecies; and by its contradiction of New Testament doctrine, it is seen to stand at cross-purposes with the gospel of redemption.

# Guidelines for a Correct Interpretation of Prophecy

It will become obvious, upon thoughtful consideration of the following principles of interpreting Bible prophecy, that these guidelines have actually been determined by the very structure and teaching of the Scriptures themselves. These principles of interpretation are not the product of human ingenuity, though some ingenuity is required in both the discovery and application of them, but are in fact the simple genius of divine revelation. In contrast, it should be observed that it is not the prerogative of any interpreter to foist upon the Scripture an interpretive structure of his own creation and developed in accordance with his preconceptions as to the meaning and fulfillment of prophecy. Such procedure always results in arbitrary interpretations, which often require twisting the otherwise plain meaning of Scripture.

The guidelines elaborated here are without exception productive of the truth when honestly, consistently, and impartially applied. Since they constitute a structure of the Scripture's own making, they are not therefore merely recommended for consideration, but are strictly required of those students who would engage in the serious determination of the meaning of biblical prophecy and of its central doctrine of the kingdom of God.

## **I. SOME PROPHECIES ARE TO BE INTERPRETED FIGURATIVELY**

Those who insist on the literal interpretation of all

prophecy as the only correct mode of interpretation must wrestle with the fact that the Scripture itself declares that the prophets spoke in various modes and manners and that New Testament writers placed figurative interpretations upon a number of Old Testament prophecies.

### **A. The Declaration of Scripture**

Hebrews 1:1 declares that God of old time spoke *“unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners.”* The prophets did not communicate their prophecies in a single mode of communication, but “literally: ‘In many parts, and in many ways:’ referring to the various revelations at different times, and the various modes in which they were given.”<sup>4</sup> The Bible says that the prophets spoke in speech forms which were other than literal.

### **B. Illustrations from New Testament Interpretations of Old Testament Prophecies**

The following Old Testament prophecies and their New Testament inspired interpretations settle the matter that prophecies were spoken in figurative language as well as literal.

1. Haggai 2:6-7 interpreted in Hebrews 12:18-29  
Haggai spoke in terms of a cataclysmic shaking of the universe, *“I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations.”* Imagine the literal fulfillment of such a prophecy. But the passage is quoted in Hebrews 12:26-27, and we are told

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<sup>4</sup>J.D. Bales quoting Francis S. Sampson, *New Testament Interpretations of Old Testament Prophecies of the Kingdom*, p.17.

what it actually *signifies*. There was no literal cataclysmic earthshock of the sort described by the language of Haggai. The book of Hebrews shows that it signified a great spiritual upheaval in the termination of the old impermanent Mosaic economy and in the events of the bringing in of the Christian system and the receiving of the unshakable kingdom of God. Clearly the prophecy of Haggai was not interpreted literally by the writer of Hebrews. It was fulfilled historically, but not literally according to the terms in which the prophecy was cast.

2. Isaiah 40:3-5 interpreted and recorded as fulfilled in Matthew 3:1-3; Mark 1:1-4; Luke 3:1-6.

This prophecy is fulfilled in the preaching and baptizing ministry of John the Baptist. If fulfilled literally, Isaiah would make John a road construction engineer: *“Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of Jehovah.”* In antiquity highways were built for the use of kings. If literal John would be shouting orders to *“make level in the desert a highway for our God.”* John would be directing his crew to cut through mountains and fill in the low places to make the highway level. But this is not the interpretation our New Testament gospel writers place upon the prophecy. Matthew explains that it is fulfilled in the preaching ministry of John the Baptist. Isaiah does not speak in terms of a preaching ministry, but of one who cried out “in the wilderness” to build the King’s highway. What did John do “in the wilderness”? He did

not do what the literalizing of the language would make him do. But Mark tells us what he did in the wilderness: *“John came, who baptized in the wilderness and preached the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins.”* What did John do “in the wilderness”? He preached and he baptized. He spoke, but he did not tell anyone to build a literal highway for the king, as a literal interpretation will demand.

Luke, in attributing Isaiah’s prophecy to John, recorded as follows: *“the crooked shall become straight, and the rough ways smooth.”* He then immediately offered this prophecy as a reason for John’s uncompromising attitude toward sin.

*He said therefore to the multitudes that went out to be baptized of him, Ye offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance* (Luke 3:7-8).

How did the crooked become straight and the rough smooth? By the message John preached. The inspired interpreters place a figurative interpretation on Isaiah 40:3-5. But premillennialists project that prophecy into the future millennium! (Walvoord, op.cit., p. 306). Who is right?

3. Malachi 4:5-6 interpreted in Matthew 17:1-13; Luke 1:13-17.

A literal interpretation of Malachi’s prophecy would demand the reappearance of

the old prophet Elijah. But Jesus said it was fulfilled in the coming of John the Baptist; and Matthew, being one of the apostles to whom the Lord interpreted the prophecy, understood it that way (Matthew 17:13).

Later, when the Jews asked John if he was Elijah, he answered that he was not (John 1:21). Now, Jesus said that he was! No contradiction here. John knew that the Jews, like the millennialists, expected a literal fulfillment with the historical Elijah. But he denied their literal expectation saying he was not Elijah, while Jesus' answer was directed toward the true meaning of the prophecy. Thus, when John's birth was foretold to Zacharias, the angel said that John would go before the face of Christ "*in the spirit and power of Elijah*" (Luke 1:13-17) and Jesus, knowing that John's spirit and power were those of old Elijah, interpreted Malachi's prophecy to be fulfilled in the spiritual sense in the person of John the Baptist

4. Isaiah 28:16 and Psalm 118:22 interpreted in Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:4-8.

The New Testament Scriptures interpret these Old Testament prophecies to have their fulfillments in Jesus Christ as the foundation of the church. To literalize them would miss the real meaning intended for Christ

5. Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12.

All of these prophecies referring to "the Branch" actually refer to Christ. After God made the promise to David that he would take his seed and establish it upon David's throne (2



Samuel 7:11-16), the prophets, as in these instances, referred to the coming Messiah as “the Branch” of “the stock of Jesse” (David’s father). Hence, the idea of the Messiah to come as the offspring of David was figurized as a “shoot,” as a “branch out of his roots.” To literalize these prophecies would be ludicrous.

These New Testament interpretations of Old Testament prophecies prove conclusively that some prophecies are to be interpreted figuratively.

## **II. NO INTERPRETATION OF AN OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY CAN CONTRADICT ANOTHER OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY AND BE THE CORRECT INTERPRETATION**

### **A. Lions in the Kingdom**

Isaiah 11:1-16 is a favorite prophecy of the millennialists. It speaks of beasts of prey dwelling peacefully with domesticated animals and of children playing in their midst without harm. This prophecy is interpreted literally by millennialists who believe it will not receive a fulfillment until the future millennial kingdom. The prophecy says that,

*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together . . . and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*

But when a literal interpretation is placed on this prophecy, it contradicts Isaiah 35:9, which millennialists also believe has a future and literal

fulfillment. It states there shall be no lion there! How can lions eat straw like the ox when there are no lions there? This is a contradiction when literally interpreted. Only the spiritual interpretation can satisfy the meaning of the prophecies. When proud, sinful, bestial man comes to Christ on His terms, a change of attitude and spirit is experienced, and the spirit of submission and humility replaces the former spirit. In this manner, the lion nature is absent from both prophecies. But whatever the correct interpretation, the literalizing of these prophecies cannot be correct since they would contradict.

## **B. Who Is to Be the One True King**

David or the offspring of David?

Ezekiel prophesied of the Messianic king saying that *“one king shall be king to them all”* (Ezekiel 37:22). He then names David as that king (v. 24). The literal interpretation contradicts Jeremiah’s prophecy that Jehovah would *“raise unto David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king”* (Jeremiah 23:5). In Jeremiah’s prophecy, it is the Branch unto David that shall reign as king. Ezekiel says it will be David, Jeremiah says it will be the Branch, the offshoot of David, springing from the Davidic line. One says it is David, the other says it is the offspring of David. A literal interpretation of Ezekiel produces a contradiction. Millennial literalism will have two kings ruling the messianic kingdom whereas Ezekiel foresaw only one! The figurative interpretation sees Jesus as both the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s David, **the Israelites’ ideal king, and** at the same time recognizes Jesus as the offspring of David through Mary.

### **C. Will the Millennial City Be Surrounded by Walls or Not**

Ezekiel 38:11-12 speaks of Israel's future security, saying that she shall dwell in a land without walls, without bars, and without gates. Yet in Ezekiel 40:1-48:35, the prophet describes the great city of God surrounded by massive walls with gates (40:5-8, 20, 24; 42:20; 48:31). Millennialists believe chapters 35-48 will be literally fulfilled in the millennium. But which passage shall be literalized? The prophecy of no walls and no gates? Or the prophecy of the city where there will be walls and gates?

It should be clear from these observations that no interpretation of an Old Testament prophecy can contradict another Old Testament prophecy and be the correct interpretation.

## **III. NO INTERPRETATION OF AN OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY CAN CONTRADICT A NEW TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION OF THAT SAME PROPHECY AND BE THE CORRECT INTERPRETATION**

### **A. Isaiah 11:10 Quoted and Interpreted in Romans 15:8-12**

In the eleventh chapter of Isaiah, the prophet describes the character of the Messiah and his messianic kingdom. In verse 10 he foresees what "*shall come to pass in that day,*" that is, the same day of the verses immediately preceding, which speak of the wolf dwelling with the lamb and the lion eating straw like the ox (vs. 6-9). He said, "*in that day, that the root of Jesse, that standeth for an*

*ensign of the peoples, unto him shall the nations seek.*” Or as in the Authorized Version, “*to it shall the Gentiles seek.*” That is what Isaiah prophesied would come to pass, that the Gentiles would seek the Lord in the same day when wolves and lions dwelt with lambs and oxen. When one is fulfilled, the other is fulfilled. And it is this verse that Paul quotes in Romans 15:12 and interprets to mean that the Gentiles, at the very time Paul was writing Romans, could receive the mercy of God. (Read the whole context of Romans 15:8-12.) The question is: For what time did Isaiah foresee these Gentiles receiving the mercy of God? The millennialists say it is yet for the future. But Paul says it was being fulfilled at the very time he was writing the Roman epistle! Paul interprets both the what and the when of the prophecy. He states that Isaiah foresaw God’s mercy to Gentiles (Titus 3:5) in the present Christian age. Now nail that down, the what and the when of the prophecy, the meaning and the time of Isaiah 11:10. Isaiah said verse 10 would be fulfilled in the same day as the events foretold in verses 1-9, when lions would eat straw like the oxen. Now since Paul says verse 10 was fulfilled in Gentile salvation, and since verses 1-9 were to be fulfilled at the same time, it is conclusive that the events of verses 1-9 were also fulfilled at that time. The prophecy, then, was not speaking literally of lambs and lions. The apostle made that clear.

Christ has not restrained the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy for a future time. Gentiles, saved by the mercy of God, have been enjoying its fulfillment for nearly two thousand years. Whatever the meaning of the prophetic figure of the animals in

verses 6-9 (likely a figure of the peace we have in the kingdom because of our salvation), it has its fulfillment in the church among Gentiles who have decided to give glory to God.

**B. Amos 9:11-12 Quoted and Interpreted in Acts 15:13-18**

Millennialism projects this prophecy of Amos to a future date. But James interprets the prophecy to be fulfilled in the salvation of the Gentiles. Just prior to this (vs. 7-11), Peter had rehearsed the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10), the first uncircumcised Gentile who was converted. Then James continued with that line of thought, commenting that the salvation of the Gentiles was *“how first God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.”* Then James explained that this agreed with what the prophets said, and he quoted Amos 9:11-12 as an example of where such a prophecy was written in the Old Testament.

It is a matter of divine revelation and inspired interpretation through James that we know the meaning of Amos 9:11-12. We know it foresaw the salvation of Gentiles by faith in Christ because James said so. But what if someone objects that he does not see the salvation of the Gentiles when he reads Amos 9:11-12, that he does not see a prophecy of salvation in the language of Amos? We must answer that our own interpretations of Old Testament prophecies are not the standard of correct interpretation. What is important is that we accept the authority of the Spirit-guided men of the New Testament, who, like James, tell us what a particular Old Testament prophecy does mean. To reject the

inspired interpretation for our own uninspired interpretation is to reject the absolute authority of the Scriptures and to enthrone human wisdom over the word of God.

So it becomes clear that no interpretation of any Old Testament prophecy can disagree with a New Testament interpretation of that same prophecy and still be a true and correct interpretation.

#### IV. WE MUST AGREE WITH THE SCRIPTURAL TIME ELEMENT FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE KINGDOM

Moses set forth the standard distinguishing marks for the identification of a false prophet (Deuteronomy 18:20-22). If every stated item in the prophecy is not fulfilled exactly as stipulated, the prophecy fails and the prophet is stripped of all credibility as a true spokesman for the Lord. And those prophets, who speak in the name of the Lord but whose prophecies fail to come to pass, are destined for death. Therefore, it is axiomatic that every true prophecy that sets a particular event to happen *at a particular time* must require the fulfillment of both the event itself *and the time element* as predicted. If the event fails to take place exactly as prophesied, or if it fails to come to pass *at the time prophesied*, the prophecy fails, and the prophet deserves to die. *He hath spoken presumptuously*, said Moses.

This warning criterion must be placed alongside those prophecies in Scripture which have preceded the kingdom, and have preset the particular time for the establishment of the kingdom. If at any point, modern expositions or interpretations would indict the Scripture prophecies of failure, either in regard to the establishment of the kingdom or as to the time for its establishment, it

will be taken for granted that this would not reflect the failure of Scripture (God forbid!), but the incorrectness of those modern interpretations precisely at the point of their departure from agreement with the Scripture. With these guidelines in mind, we will study the scriptural time element for the establishment of the kingdom of God according to prophecy.

### **A. Interpreting the Term “Latter Days”**

In Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan. 2:1-45), he preset the time for the establishment of the kingdom of God at least twice, once in verse 28, “*in the latter days,*” and again in verse 44, “*in the days of those kings,*” that is, those kings represented by the legs and feet of the image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. When we determine what the latter days are and identify the historical time period of the latter days, we can then locate the kingdom and its establishment in space and time.

#### **1. What are the latter days?**

When a prophecy is projected for fulfillment to the latter days it must refer to a specific historical framework of space and time. Otherwise, the prophecy is left suspended to an indefinite future time period and obviates any reason for mentioning the time element. Thus, we should ask, The latter days of what? Through an examination of the scriptural employment of the term “latter days” and its coordinate terms, we come to view this particular prophetic time element as the time of the end of a nation’s economy, and in particular, a reference to the end of the economy of the nation of Israel, whose

theocratic relationship to God ended at the cross, but whose national economy continued until the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

- a. *Ezekiel 38:8, 16 interchanges the terms “latter years” and “latter days” as the time when an invading nation comes into the land of Israel, against the nation of Israel. In context this would be the “latter years,” or “latter days” of Israel.*
- b. *Numbers 24:20 speaks of Amalek, of “his latter end,” that is, of the last days of Amalek’s national existence.*
- c. *Isaiah 9:1 presents a contrast of times:*

*In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; but in the latter time hath he made it glorious, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.*

Matthew tells us this “latter time” prophecy was fulfilled at the beginning of Christ’s ministry when he came into Galilee (Matthew 4:12-16). He then says,

*From that time began Jesus to preach, and to say, Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matthew 4:17).*

Notice, “From *that* time,” the time when Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled at the beginning of Christ’s ministry almost two



thousand years ago. From *that* time, which Isaiah called “the latter time,” Matthew says Jesus began to preach that the kingdom was at hand. The dispensation had not changed; it was still the Mosaic period. But the *time* had changed from “the former time” of Isaiah’s day when the land was in contempt, to “the latter time” of the Mosaic age when Jesus came, during which time period Israel’s national existence would be terminated in the destruction of Jerusalem at A.D. 70. That was the time of Israel’s latter years, her latter days.

These “latter times” were obviously not the Christian age, for Christ had not died to bring it in. Nor could they be referring to an age beyond the Christian age since Matthew said they were fulfilled in the days of Christ’s earthly ministry. These latter year, latter day, latter time prophecies do not refer to a millennial age yet in the future, since they were declared by an apostle to have been fulfilled in the latter days of Israel’s national existence when our Lord was here.

- d. *Jeremiah 29:11, 31:17 speaks of a hope for Israel in her “latter end.”* Notice, “*your* latter end,” and “*thy* latter end.” This refers to the latter days of Israel as the theocratic nation which ended at the cross. Their “hope” appears to be Christ who came at the latter end of Israel’s theocratic existence.

- e. *Daniel 8:1-14 records the vision of the ram and the he-goat. Verse 17 pinpoints its fulfillment at “the time of the end,” and verse 19 has it “appointed” for the “time of the end.” Then in verses 20-21, inspiration interprets the ram to be the MedoPersian empire and the he-goat to be Alexander the Great of the Macedonian empire. It is now common knowledge that these events were fulfilled in the latter part of the fourth century B.C. These events were for “the time of the end,” but not for the end of time.*

These same events are also stated to belong to “*the latter time of the indignation*” (Daniel 8:19). This time was designated by Isaiah to be the period of time when God’s wrath would be poured out on Israel for her sin (Isaiah 10:5, 6, 24-25; 26:20). This “indignation” referred to the afflictions to come upon Israel prior to the Messianic age, not during or after it. God’s indignation against Israel for her faithlessness was fulfilled in the Assyrian captivity of Israel in 722 BC, and in Babylonian captivity in 586 BC. This prophecy for “*the latter time of indignation*” was fulfilled 2500 years ago. It is not yet future.

These so-called “end-time” prophecies did not speak of the end of time, but of the time of the end of particular national economies, Israelite and Gentile.

2. When are the latter days?  
a. *Evil to befall Israel in the latter days:*

*For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days; because ye will do that which is evil in the sight of Jehovah, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands (Deuteronomy 31:29).*

*What would happen?* Evil would befall Israel. The evil pronounced by Moses that they would be destroyed, they would perish from off the land of their possession, that Jehovah would scatter them among the nations to be their captives (cf. Deuteronomy 4:25-28; 28:63-64; Leviticus 26: 31-33). This was fulfilled in the Assyrian (c. 722-21 B.C.) and Babylonian (606-536 B.C.) captivities (as discussed in the Historical Division).

*Why would it happen?* Israel would corrupt themselves and provoke God to anger by the work of their hands. This was through the great sin of idolatry (cf. Deuteronomy 4:25; Jeremiah 8:19, 11:17, 25:7, 32:30).

*How would Israel corrupt herself?* By turning aside from the way which Moses had commanded them, which was the covenant law given at Sinai, the law of Moses, and turn to idolatry.

*When would it happen?* “In the latter days.” The evil had to come upon them *while yet under the law of Moses*, for the “evil” was the result of turning aside from that law. This was hundreds of years prior to the time of Christ. The evil had to come upon Israel prior to 536 B.C., for the evil was the result of her idolatry, for which cause God sent her away into Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, during which time she was forever cured of the sin of idolatry.

Therefore, since the evil was to befall Israel in the latter days, and since that evil befell Israel in the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, then the latter days of this prophecy were during the captivity of Israel (722-536 B.C.).

- b. *Israel to return to Jehovah in the latter days:*

*When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, in the latter days thou shalt return to Jehovah thy God, and hearken unto his voice* (Deuteronomy 4:30).

*Where would Israel be?* In tribulation, in captivity, scattered among the nations where Jehovah had driven them, as described in the preceding verses (26-29).

*What would Israel do?* Return to Jehovah.

*How would Israel return to Jehovah?*

By hearkening to his voice, by returning to the law of Moses as a precondition to returning to the land from their captivity (Deuteronomy 30:1-2).

*When would Israel return to Jehovah?* “In the latter days.” But the return to Jehovah had to be while Israel was still under the law of Moses, for Israel would “return to Jehovah” by obeying the Lord’s voice according to all that Moses had commanded them (Deuteronomy 30:1-2).

Therefore: Since Israel was to return to Jehovah in the latter days, and since that return was a precondition to return to the land, and since Israel returned to the land in 536 B.C. (Ezra 1:1 ff), then the “latter days” of this prophecy preceded the year 536 B.C.

It is conclusive that those Old Testament prophecies pronounced upon Israel to be fulfilled in the latter days were not speaking of the last days of either the Christian age or of the end of time. These prophecies were fulfilled prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, which spelled the end of the nation of Israel as established and maintained by the Lord. All Old Testament latter day prophecies had to receive their fulfillment by the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Jesus foretold the destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 21:20-21). The he added, “For these

are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled” (Luke 21:22).

3. Latter day prophecies fulfilled before A.D. 70.
  - a. *Joel 2:28-32; Isaiah 2:2-4; Daniel 2:28-45.* Peter explained clearly that the events on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21) fulfilled Joel’s prophecy, for after the people asked,

*What meaneth this? (v. 12), Peter said, this is that which hath been spoken through the prophet Joel: And it shall be in the last days, saith God, I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all flesh.*

The Holy Spirit was not poured out in the Christian age, but was poured out in order to begin the Christian age. The Mosaic age had already been abolished at the cross (Ephesians 2:15), yet Israel continued on as a nation until A.D. 70. What, then, were the “last days” in which the Holy Spirit was poured out but the last days of Israel’s national existence? These “last days” overlapped the beginning of the Christian dispensation to the year A.D. 70. But since Isaiah 2:2-4 and Daniel 2:28-45 were kingdom prophecies to be fulfilled in this same time period of the last days, they too, had to receive their fulfillment during this same moment of time which ended at A.D. 70. And so they did in the

establishment of the church.

- b. *Hebrews 9:26; 1 Peter 1:20.* The Hebrew writer declares of Christ: “*now once at the end of the ages hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*” Christ was not sacrificed in the Christian age; he was sacrificed at the very end of the Mosaic age in order to begin the Christian age. Thus “the end of the ages” is neither the Christian age nor an age yet future. It was the end of the age of Israel: her theocratic relationship to the Lord ended at the cross, and her national existence ended at A.D. 70. It was during those “ages” that Jesus came and accomplished the fulfillment of those Old Testament prophecies.

Peter writes that Christ, “*was foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world, but was manifested at the end of the times for your sake.*” Christ was not “manifested” in the Christian age; he was manifested at the very end of the age of Israel for our sakes. He was manifested at the end of Israel’s times.

- c. *Hebrews 1:1-2.* The passage reads:

*God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son.*

A clear distinction is exhibited

between the way in which God spoke in former times – in hints, not clearly foreshowing the future; in portions, not fully revealing the future; in partial revelation, not a full revelation of the scheme of redemption – and the manner in which he spoke through his Son *at the end of those days*. Those days ended with the coming of Christ. When did the Son of God speak, when did he make purification of sins (v. 3), when did he sit down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (v. 3)? Not during the Christian age, but during the last days of Israel, as had been prophesied.

It is very obvious that Old Testament prophecies which are for “the latter days,” “the time of the end,” “the latter times” and “the latter years” are not to be interpreted as having their fulfillment in a yet future time period. They have received their fulfillment in Christ and in the church in the last days of Israel’s national existence, which came to its end in A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem. There are no Old Testament “latter day” prophecies yet left of fulfillment.

## **B. The Time Element Set by Christ (Mark 1:15)**

*Now after John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the*



*gospel.* (Mark 1:14-15)

The good news (the gospel) during Christ's ministry was that the prophesied kingdom was "at hand," it was the time for the fulfillment of the kingdom prophecies. This was the message of good news that resounded throughout the ministries of John and Jesus (Matthew 3:1-2; 4:17, 23) and was announced by the twelve and the seventy who were sent out to preach to the house of Israel (Matthew 10:1-7; Luke 10:1-9). The message was clear: the kingdom was "at hand."

1. The kingdom to be established in that generation (Mark 9:1).

The question may be asked, "How close was 'at hand'?" Jesus answers in the following words:

*And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There are some here of them that stand by, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God come with power* (Mark 9:1).

The kingdom was as close as that generation of persons to whom Jesus addressed himself. Some of them, said the Lord, would not so much as taste of death before they would witness the coming of the kingdom. If, then, the kingdom was *not* established in that generation of the first century, either some of those who stood by when Jesus said so are yet alive or Jesus made a mistake! Neither of these propositions is acceptable. Therefore, if the

kingdom is not established and if none of those ancient persons are yet alive, then Jesus was wrong on two counts: first, for saying some would see the kingdom when none of them did; and second, for saying that some of them would not taste of death before the kingdom came, when all of them have already died! According to Deuteronomy 18:20-22, that would make Jesus a false prophet and worthy of death. God forbid! Christ pronounced the truth.

The millennial postponement theory. Charles Ryrie, in his *Ryrie Study Bible*, represents the premillennial position in his comments on Mark 1:15:

The rule of Messiah on earth, promised in the Old Testament and earnestly longed for by the Jewish people, was near, for the Messiah had now come. However, the people rejected rather than accepted Him, and the fulfillment of the kingdom promises had to be delayed until God's purpose in saving Jews and Gentiles and forming His church was completed. Then Christ will return and set up God's kingdom on this earth.

Notice the contradictions: the kingdom was near, but it was "delayed," the kingdom was near when Jesus was here the first time, but it will be "set up" when he returns the second time! You can't have it both ways. Either the kingdom was near when Jesus was here, or it wasn't. If the kingdom was delayed, it simply

was not near. This postponement doctrine has three basic flaws: First, it contradicts the prophets who said the kingdom would be established in the latter days. Second, it contradicts the pronouncement of the Lord that the kingdom was “at hand” when he was here. Third, it makes impossible the fulfillment of those “latter days” prophecies exactly as foretold. When a time element is set for an event to be fulfilled, that time foretold is as much a part of the prophecy as is the thing which was foretold to happen. Therefore, no prophecy can be rescheduled to a time zone either antecedent to or beyond the time zone originally prophesied and still be fulfilled as originally foretold. Either it is fulfilled on time as foretold, or the prophecy fails.

2. The question to be answered by all premillennialists.

When did the Old Testament prophets foretell the establishment of the kingdom? At Christ’s first coming or at his second coming? If they say it was prophesied to be established at Christ’s first coming, then the Old Testament prophets missed it if the premillennialists are correct in saying the kingdom was “delayed,” postponed. Regardless of the reason for missing it, they still missed it! But if premillennialists claim that the prophets foretold the establishment of the kingdom to be at Christ’s second coming, then Christ missed it since he said the time was fulfilled for its establishment when he was here! One of their positions has the prophets missing it, and the

other has Christ missing it! Which, according to God's word in Deuteronomy 18:20-22, has those prophets and Christ speaking presumptuously, and thus deserving of death. Who can believe it?

## Conclusion

Rarely have we seen a position more vulnerable, more self-contradictory, more contradictory of the Scriptures, or more out of line with the great redemptive thrust of the Bible than this premillennial teaching. It makes the prophets fail. It denies the inspired interpretations of the Old Testament prophecies by New Testament writers. It is productive of more apprehension due to its literalization of Armageddon and the coming of Gog and Magog than are the wars being fought around the world. It is much more the voice of hysteria than the voice of true prophecy. It dethrones the Christ, it disclaims the place of the church in the eternal purpose of God, it relegates the church to an unintended after-thought in the mind of God, and reduces the high spiritual quality of many Scriptures to a level of materialistic anticipation. It is to be exposed as untrue and as unproductive of the one hope which God through Christ has vouchsafed to all mankind, whether Gentile or Jew.

To all men for all time to come, we say with Paul:

*Unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ  
Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever. Amen.*  
(Ephesians 3:21)



# Edward C. Wharton

Instructor at Sunset International Bible Institute



In this book Ed Wharton makes available his lecture notes from his course, "The Scheme of Redemption." Under the title, *Christ and the Church – The Fulfillment of Purpose and Prophecy*, Wharton has arranged the study for classroom use into three major divisions: Historical, Doctrinal, and Eschatological. The first division presents the historical progression of the plan of salvation from its beginnings in the Garden, through the seed-line of Abraham, to its fulfillment in Christ and the church. The second division presents the doctrine of the uniqueness of Christ (Colossians) and the distinctiveness of the church in God's eternal purpose (Ephesians) as combatants against the encroachments of paganism to fatally dilute the saving power of the Gospel. The third division exposes the basic errors of the premillennial theory of interpretation and its theology of the prophesied kingdom, and concludes with the presentation of four guidelines for correctly interpreting Old Testament prophecy.

The salvation of the human race in Christ and the church is thus presented as the fulfillment of the eternal purpose of God and the Old Testament prophecies of the coming kingdom.

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"Over the years Ed Wharton has produced a series of classic Bible studies that have been used by evangelists and church planters around the globe. *Christ and the Church - The Fulfillment of Purpose and Prophecy* is certainly no exception; it is Ed at his best. His writings on the works of Christ and the fulfilling nature of the New Testament Church are biblically deep and sound, and they are so organized and clear that one can use them to teach people at all levels of understanding. I have used this book in Bible Training Schools on both foreign and domestic mission fields and will continue to do so wherever I help stabilize and plant new churches. I heartedly recommend it to all my fellow missionaries."

Charles Cook, Director of Focus Northeast USA  
Instructor at Sunset International Bible Institute

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3728 34th Street  
Lubbock, Texas 79410  
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