

PENTECOST

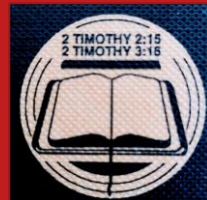
Stuart Allen

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PENTECOST

By

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The Unfolding Purpose of God

On Reading the Bible

The Interpretation of Scripture

The Early Centuries and the Truth

Resurrection and the Purpose of the Ages

etc., etc.

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PREFACE

(To the sixth edition, 1977)

The success of this booklet can be gauged by the fact that since it was first published, it has been found necessary to issue four further editions, making five in all.

We come now to the sixth edition, which has been revised and enlarged by the author. It is sent out with the prayerful hope that those who view it for the first time will not cast it aside as unworthy of further attention, but will adopt the attitude of those at Berea (Acts 17:11) who searched the Scriptures *daily*, to see ‘whether those things were so’.

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PENTECOST

Is Pentecost the birthday of the Church which is His Body?

(Eph. 1:22,23)

To ask this question is to betoken great ignorance in most evangelical quarters. Did the Church, the Body of Christ, begin at Pentecost? Of course it did! It is one of the fundamental doctrines of Christendom that is universally accepted. There is no 'of course' to any true student of the Word. The fact that multitudes believe a certain thing weighs very little with the earnest seeker for truth. Does Scripture, rightly divided, teach this thing? That is the all-important question to any one who sincerely desires to be approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed (2 Tim. 2:15). And so, to that inspired Word we turn.

The writer of the Book of the Acts, Luke, makes a reference to his former treatise or gospel in the opening verses, and seeing these overlap the last part of the gospel, we do well to turn to it.

In Luke 24:33-36 we are told of the appearance of the Lord Jesus to the eleven subsequent to His resurrection, and after eating with them He tells them that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Himself. *'Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures'* (Luke 24:45, i.e. the Old Testament Scriptures).

Before this, they would have merited the rebuke of the Lord to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus — 'O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken' (verse 25). *Now they understand.*

Luke goes on to tell us in Acts 1:3 that the Lord Jesus Christ taught the eleven apostles, during a period of forty days, things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. What

would we give to have been in their place! Favoured disciples to hear the Living Word expound the Written Word! And the result? ‘When they THEREFORE were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?’ (verse 6). They had an opened understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures and forty days instruction from the risen Christ concerning the kingdom, THEREFORE they asked Him this important question.

Doubtless there would be in their minds such a passage as Isaiah 40:1-5, where John the Baptist’s ministry is linked with Israel’s appointed time of blessing (verse 2 margin) and the setting up of the millennial kingdom (verses 4 and 5).

That the restoration of the kingdom to Israel is the dominant thought in the opening chapters of the Acts is definitely proved by the Divine command given to the nation through Peter’s lips: ‘Repent ye therefore, and be converted ... and He shall send Jesus Christ, which *before* was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of *restoration* (R.V.) of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His Holy prophets ...’ (Acts 3:19-26). The whole passage should be read very carefully; its supreme importance has been missed by practically all evangelical expositors. It was nothing less than a promise to Israel to send back their King Whom they had crucified. Should they repent, then, with their King returned, the millennial times of refreshing and restoration would immediately set in and the promise made to Abraham be fulfilled (Acts 3:25). In verse 19 the word ‘converted’ is the Greek verb *epistrepho*, which means to turn. Now, both repentance and turning to God were Divine commands to Israel for their restoration to favour from sin and back-sliding. Note the following:

‘In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, and saying, REPENT ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’ (Matt. 3:1,2).

‘From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, REPENT: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’ (Matt. 4:17).

‘When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou TURN (*epistrepho* LXX*) to the LORD thy God ... He will not ... forget the covenant of thy fathers’ (Deut. 4:30,31).

‘When the heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against Thee; yet if they ... TURN (*epistrepho* LXX) from their sin ... then ... forgive the sin of Thy servants’ (2 Chron. 6:26,27).

‘Remember, I beseech Thee, the word that Thou commandest Thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: but if ye TURN (*epistrepho* LXX) unto me ... I ... will bring them unto the place that I have chosen’ (Neh. 1:8,9).

‘Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. REPENT, AND TURN (*epistrepho* LXX) yourselves from all your transgressions’ (Ezek. 18:30. See also Jer. 3:14;18:8, and Zech. 1:3).

Thus, after the climax sin of sending the King to the Cross, God, through the lips of Peter, commanded the nation to *repent and turn*, promising restoration to follow.

We would remind the reader that to restore is not to commence something *new* — but to bring in something *old*. No wonder, after having the Lord’s instruction, the apostles asked ‘wilt Thou *at this time* restore again the kingdom to Israel?’ But it was precisely the time element the Lord could not reveal to them; ‘It is not for you to know the *times or the seasons* (Acts 1:7). He, Who knows the end from the beginning, needed no informing that Israel would not repent; but to reveal this beforehand would have countenanced their sin and taken away their responsibility in connection with the great Divine command to repent with restoration to follow.

As we read on in Acts chapter 1 we find the concern of the eleven apostles to fill the gap left by the apostasy of Judas. The number twelve must be made up before the Divine work proceeds any further. If present day Church truth is going to follow immediately it is very difficult, nay impossible, to see any real need for this act. But if the restoration of the kingdom with Israel as the centre is the dominant theme, we can well understand the reason.

* LXX — the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, freely quoted by the Lord and the apostles.

The Lord had promised that when the kingdom was set up, the twelve apostles should sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). Twelve apostles, twelve thrones — not eleven!

There are some who tell us that a great mistake was made here. The apostles were too hasty; had they waited a little longer until Paul's conversion he would have made up the twelve instead of Matthias. The idea is entirely devoid of Scriptural foundation. The justification for filling this office is stated in Acts 1:21,22. 'Wherefore of these men which have companied with us *all* the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, *beginning from the baptism of John* unto that same day that He was taken from us, must one be ordained to be a *witness* with us of His resurrection'. This is in harmony with the words of the Lord Jesus to the apostles; 'And ye also shall *bear witness*, because ye have been with Me *from the beginning*' (John 15:27). The thought here is the capacity to bear personal testimony to the life and works of the Lord Jesus before His resurrection. This being so, the apostle Paul is definitely ruled out. He had not been with the Lord 'from the beginning'. There is not the slightest hint in the Acts or in his epistles that he was one of the twelve, or that he ought to have been so considered. In writing of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, he said, '... He was seen of Cephas, then of *the twelve* ... and last of all he was seen of *me* also ...'. It is obvious from this passage, he considered himself to be separate from the twelve, as indeed he was in work and ministry.

Another objection from the same critics is the use of the lot to determine God's choice to fill the gap. But this was of Divine sanction in the Old Testament Scriptures, and as the eleven had no New Testament, will the critics tell us how they should have discovered that God had ceased to use this method of making known His will?

Moreover, all who cavil at the appointment of Matthias charge the Holy Spirit with error, *for He endued this man on the day of Pentecost equally with the eleven!* Will they go so far as to say *He* made a mistake?

This enduement of the Holy Spirit was with miraculous gifts. It is important to realise that these were *evidential*, as were the miracles performed by the Lord Jesus Christ in His earthly life when He came to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Peter says in Acts 2:22 to his fellow countrymen ‘Jesus of Nazareth, a man *approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs*, which God did by Him in the midst of you The word ‘approved’ is translated in Acts 25:7 ‘prove’. God proved or demonstrated to Israel by these special miracles that the Lord Jesus was the *true* Messiah, performing as He did before their eyes daily, not just miracles in general — but those the Old Testament Scriptures had foretold the Messiah would work in their midst when He came to them in the flesh. They were therefore *signs* to Israel — to whom these Scriptures had been committed (Rom. 3:1,2).

Hence, when John the Baptist’s faith began to waver and he asked ‘art Thou He that should come or do we look for another?’, the Lord sent the reply, ‘Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up ...’ (Matt. 11:2-5 cf. Isa. 35:4-6).

When we realise the *purpose* of these miracles to Israel, the Lord’s terrible denunciation of Capernaum, where most of His mighty works were done, can be understood (Matt. 11:20-24). Capernaum, in rejecting Him and the signs which He wrought, put themselves lower than Sodom (verse 24), while the impertinent question of the Scribes and Pharisees demanding a sign (Matt. 12:38) becomes the more awful when seen in this light.

These special miracles then, were Messiah’s Divine credentials, and after the crucifixion and resurrection where the book of the Acts takes up the story of what Jesus *began* to do and teach and what He continued to do and teach through the twelve, these signs to Israel are continued according to the promise of the Lord in Mark

16:17-20. One finds them, too, just as prominent at the *end* of the book as at the beginning (Acts 28:3-9), and then they suddenly cease. Why? Because believers began to backslide and become unspiritual? This cannot be, for the church at Corinth had an abundance of spiritual gifts and was at the same time notorious for its unspiritual character and carnality. Moreover this charge could hardly be laid at the door of such a faithful servant of the Lord as the apostle Paul.

During the period covered by the Acts even a handkerchief sent from him was sufficient to heal miraculously (Acts 19:11,12). Afterwards, he had to leave Trophimus at Miletum sick (2 Tim. 4:20). Timothy was given advice to take a little wine for his stomach's sake and his often infirmities (1 Tim. 5:23). Epaphroditus was sick unto death and yet the apostle did not heal his beloved companion in labour (Phil. 2:26-27). The verses that follow make it clear that he certainly would have done so if it had been possible. The power he once had was his no longer.

Again we ask, why?

The Word of Truth supplies the answer. The miracles performed by the Lord and those which characterize the Acts period were *signs*, i.e., they signified some truth to *Israel*, who alone possessed the countersign, i.e. the Old Testament Scriptures. They were therefore a *confirmation* to those of Israel who believed (1 Cor. 1:6,7; Heb. 2:3,4), and a Divine witness against those who believed not (1 Cor. 14:21,22). They continue as long as Israel exists as a nation before God, and when Israel are laid aside, they cease.

During the period covered by the Acts, miracles were the divine seal upon apostleship even as they were upon the earthly ministry of THE Apostle and High Priest (Heb. 3:1). This will be clearly seen if we compare Galatians 2:7,8 with 2 Corinthians 12:12. In this respect, as in all others, Paul was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles (verse 11).

Is Pentecost the birthday of the Church which is His Body?

(Eph. 1:22-23)

Before we can fully answer this, we must have a Scriptural understanding of the word 'church'. Let us endeavour to empty our minds of man-made creeds and their terminology. These talk of 'the one church', which phrase is entirely misleading and unscriptural. Most Bible students know that the word in the original is *ekklesia* and simply means a called-out company of people for any purpose, human or divine. It is used of Israel as a nation in Acts 7:38, for they were a called-out company of people and separated by God from all other peoples. Again it is used by the Holy Spirit in Acts 19:32 to describe the rabble which had gathered in Ephesus at the instigation of Demetrius the silversmith, shouting for two hours 'great is Diana of the Ephesians'.

Here are two extremes indeed, but they are definitely used in the Word by the Divine Author. To assert that God has only one called-out company of His children since the time of Adam surely needs no refuting. There is, therefore, more than one assembly revealed in the Scriptures, or, in other words, there is more than one 'church'. But this does not teach that there is more than one Body of Christ, needless to say!*

We cannot do better than to turn to the Divine description of the Church which is His Body and then we shall be in a position to decide whether or not it began at Pentecost. In Ephesians 3:3, Paul speaks of the Mystery which he had by special revelation of the ascended Lord Jesus. The word 'mystery' in the New Testament has no reference to anything mysterious, but simply to that which is a *secret*, i.e. some phase of the Divine purpose which God has kept hidden until the fitting time for its revelation. To the apostle in his Roman prison the Lord made known THE SECRET (mystery, verse 3) and he states the great aim

* See Appendix D for further notes on the word 'church' and its usage in Scripture

of his ministry in verse 9 ‘...to make all see what is the dispensation (R.V.) of the secret which from the beginning of the world hath been *hid in God*’ (author’s translation).

The reader should pause here and carefully weigh over the last phrase. Note it does not say this secret was hid even in the Old Testament Scriptures but *hid in God*. It is therefore sheer *unbelief* to say it can be found in the Old Testament, or in fact *any time or place in the Word prior to when God made it known*.

Now supposing we find that Pentecost and indeed the whole of the Acts is linked with the Old Testament Scriptures, then it is proved beyond a shadow of doubt that it can have nothing to do with this secret and the church of the Body which is so intimately connected with it. *This is precisely what we do find*; and for the following reasons:

- (1) The Divine explanation of Pentecost is given by the Holy Spirit through Peter’s lips in Acts 2:16. ‘THIS IS THAT which was spoken by the prophet Joel’. Joel 2:28-32 is quoted boldly. Note the fact of *restoration* promised in 2:25; the setting is millennial and is in line with what we have already seen in the book of the Acts. What is this Pentecost? A *secret*? No — a *revelation* given through Joel the prophet. In view of Ephesians 3:9, it will take a bold person to assert that the beginning of the church of the secret is in the prophecy of Joel!

If there were no other indication in the Word than this we should say without fear of contradiction that the idea of this assembly commencing upon the day of Pentecost is absolutely unscriptural. It makes the Bible contradict itself, which is a very serious thing indeed.

- (2) Pentecost is linked with the Old Testament in another way. It is one of Jehovah’s feasts given to Israel in Leviticus 23. These are the feasts of the Sabbath, Passover, Unleavened bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, and the day of Atonement. They marvellously portray that phase of the purpose of the ages which deals with Israel and the earthly

kingdom; but what has this to do with the church which is His Body, whose destiny is at the right hand of God? If this assembly commenced at Pentecost, then its beginnings can be found in Leviticus 23, which again definitely contradicts Ephesians 3:9.

- (3) Peter, quoting Joel, unhesitatingly links Pentecost with the Day of the Lord (Acts 2:20). This is a specific prophetic period when God begins to intervene actively with apostate Judaism and with the Gentile world powers in judgment, prior to the setting up of Messiah's kingdom upon the earth. The Old Testament is full of its description (see Isa. 2:12,17,19; 13:6-13; Zeph. 1:14,15; Amos 5:18-20; Joel 1:15; 2:1,2 and 3:14). If Pentecost is linked with the Day of the Lord, a period revealed in the Old Testament, then it cannot be connected with the Church which is His Body, otherwise Ephesians 3:9 is once more contradicted.
- (4) In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter states that the Lord had been raised in order to sit on *David's throne* (Acts 2:29,30). Thus, the rule of David's greater Son over the earth is still in view. This being, as one might say, THE great subject of Old Testament prophecy, we are again forcibly reminded that Ephesians 3:9 can have no direct connection with it.
- (5) In Acts 5:31 Peter states that Christ had been exalted in order to give repentance to *Israel*. But tradition, inserting the church of the secret into Acts 2, robs this great fact of all its point and blinds the mind to the true purpose revealed in the book of the Acts. Let the reader again carefully weigh over Acts 3:19-26 and this verse (Acts 5:31) and see whether these things are not so.
- (6) To Paul alone was given the Divine secret of Ephesians 3, connected with the church which is His Body. It was a special revelation of the ascended Lord Jesus to him (Eph. 3:3). As the apostle was not converted till Acts 9, it is difficult to see how it could have commenced at Pentecost in Acts 2.

- (7) The attitude of Peter in chapter 10:28,29 makes it quite clear that he had no conception of the Body beginning at Pentecost. Those who are fond of talking about apostolic mistakes will often refer to Peter's bigotry in Acts 10. Instead of this, an unbiased reading of this chapter will reveal Peter as a man who was faithful to all that God had revealed in His Word up to *that time*. Separation from those of other nations was strictly in accord with Old Testament requirements, and remember that Peter, as we have seen, had already received forty days instruction from the risen Lord and the enduement of the Holy Spirit. While this did not make a man infallible, it is practically certain he would not have made such a gross mistake as our traditionalist friends assert. They first of all read into Scripture what is not there and then blame the apostles when they do not conform to their imaginary standard.
- (8) Acts 10 and the attitude of the mother church at Jerusalem (Acts 11:2,3,17 and 18) make it certain that there was no Gentile addressed on the day of Pentecost, and we may be sure, too, that no Greek or Roman would deign to be present at what they regarded as a puny Jewish feast. Acts 2, then, is hardly the beginning of a ministry that is predominantly *Gentile* (Eph. 3:1; Col. 1:25-27).
- (9) In Acts 26:22-23, Paul sums up his ministry to that time. Now let us note carefully. Does he tell us about the secret concerning the church of this dispensation? We put it in his own words: 'Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying *none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come ...*'. If Paul had already publicly taught the truth of the Mystery (as he must have done if it commenced at Acts 2, and what he said in chapter 20:27 was true) then according to the statement above, it can be found in Moses and the prophets. But again, we say, this flatly contradicts Ephesians 3:9.

We trust these points have sufficiently proved from Scripture that the traditional view of the Body of Christ commencing at Pentecost is absolutely untenable. We do not hesitate, from our findings, to brand this idea as *tradition* which makes void the Word of God. It is indeed a very sandy foundation upon which to erect the huge doctrinal super-structures that the popular traditionalist view does. If the church of the secret did not begin at Acts 2 we may well ask when did it begin?

A careful study of the Acts will reveal that not only is Acts 2 linked with the Old Testament but the whole book as well. There are at least *twenty quotations* from the Old Testament scattered throughout its contents, either in fulfilment of what was then happening or prophetic of what would happen, and *this includes the last chapter as much as the first.*

Some tell us that the boundary line between the last dispensation and this is Acts 7 after the martyrdom of Stephen. But will they explain Acts 26:6-7 and chapter 28 verse 20? They cannot, and these important verses have to be ignored by such, or so twisted that they become unrecognisable. Others say it is found in chapter 13:46, where the apostle Paul says 'lo, we turn to the Gentiles'. If we read on carefully, the context will show us that this turning away from the Jew was *merely local* (see 14:1; 17:1,2; 18:4,6,19; 19:8), though it was certainly prophetic of what was yet to happen to them as a nation (13:40,41).

As late as Acts 26:6,7, Paul publicly states that *the twelve tribes were waiting for their hope*. This would be, to say the least, a stupid statement if Israel as a nation had already been set aside. Moreover, when he meets the chief of the Jews in Rome he asserts he is bound '*for the hope of Israel*' (28:20), and it does not need much scriptural knowledge to realize that the hope of Israel is not, and cannot be, the same as the hope of the church which is His Body.

Some interpret the hope of Israel to be nothing more than Christ personally, and while there is truth in this, for

the Lord Jesus is basically the hope of all His redeemed people, earthly and heavenly, this does not take into account all that Paul said concerning Israel's hope. In Acts 26:6, the apostle asserts that this hope concerned 'the promise made of God unto our fathers', that is, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; and this promise, Genesis makes clear, related to a *seed* (a posterity) and a *land*, whose geographical boundaries are given by God in Genesis 15:18:

'In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy *seed* have I given *this land*, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates'.

In Genesis 13:17 Abram is invited by God to explore it:

'Arise, walk through *the land* in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee'.

This land therefore cannot be spiritualized. See also Genesis 12:1-3 and note that this unconditional promise concerning the *seed* and this *land* is repeated by God to Isaac (Gen. 26:3,4) and to Jacob (Gen. 28:13,14). The 'Hope of Israel' mentioned by Paul in Acts 28:20 cannot be severed from his statement concerning the same hope in Acts 26:6, and all this, needless to say, has direct reference to the nation of Israel and not to God's heavenly people, the Body of Christ, wherein is neither Jew or Gentile.

In the epistle to the Romans (which epistle was the last he wrote during the Acts) Paul likens Israel to an olive tree and states at the time of writing that *some* of the branches had been broken off. Now 'some' is not 'all'. The tree as a whole therefore was not cut down when Romans was written. Nor was it till the last chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, namely, chapter 28.

God saw to it that the Jews of the dispersion had the same opportunity of obeying Acts 3:19-26 as those living in the land under the ministry of Peter and the twelve, and when they proved obdurate and unrepentant, the awful pronouncement of Isaiah 6 was upon them and the spiritual blindness and hardness of heart there predicted has characterized Israel from that time to the present.

ACTS 28 IS THEREFORE THE GREAT DIVIDING LINE BETWEEN THE DISPENSATIONS, AND NOT ACTS 2.

It was after this that Paul had the revelation of the NEW MAN (Eph. 2) and the Secret (Eph. 3) which God had kept hid in Himself all down the Old Testament dispensation, during the earthly life of the Lord Jesus Christ, and right through the Acts while Israel was being tested for the last time before being laid aside in unbelief.

So while we can state that A church (in the Scriptural sense) began at Acts 2, THE church linked with the Secret did not begin till God revealed it to the apostle in prison at Rome after Israel's fall in Acts 28.

Let us make it quite clear this does not alter or set aside the great fundamental doctrines of justification by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ without works, or of sanctification and identification with HIM. *This is basic and permanent for all dispensations.* There is only one way back to God for sinners of *any* dispensation, and that is through the shedding of blood, the Lord's great atoning work upon Calvary. Abel knew this way and the last sinner to be saved in this age will have to come by the same way or not at all.

We state again this is *foundational* and absolutely *fundamental*. It is not the foundation which changes after Acts, but the *superstructure*. Now we have a new calling, a new Man, a new sphere of blessing.

The admission of the Gentile to blessing during the Acts of the Apostles is a major difficulty with some. They cannot see the difference between the assembly formed during this time, consisting firstly of Jew and then of Gentiles added to them later, and the assembly revealed after Acts 28, which likewise consists of Jew and Gentile believers.

If the reader will keep in mind the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 22, that through his seed all families of the earth (i.e. Gentiles) should be blessed, he will soon grasp the position. In the Acts period the Gentile believer was blessed *with* the Jew, the Jew being first

(Rom. 15:10). Read Galatians 3:8,9,13,14, where the promise of Genesis 12 is referred to. *This, then, never was a secret* but always in view in connection with God's dealings with Israel.

The Gentile believer was made a partaker of Israel's spiritual things (Rom. 15:27) or, in the language of chapter 11, was a wild olive grafted into the true, to partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree (11:17). Put in other words, this taught that the Gentile believer partook of Israel's covenant blessings. He was reminded of the priority of the Jew (verse 18), that he stood by faith (verse 20), and warned that high-mindedness on his part would cause him to be cut off (verses 21,22).

Cut off from what?

From Christ? That was impossible, as Romans chapter 8 had already stated with its glorious theme of 'no separation'. It can only mean being cut off from partaking of the root and fatness of the olive tree, i.e. from sharing in Israel's covenant blessings. This alone is in view. Romans 11 proves that Israel had not been set aside at Acts 2 but that the Gentiles were being admitted to share in the nation's covenant privileges — a tiny anticipation of the glorious day when Gentiles the world over will be blessed through Abraham's seed according to God's promise. The chapter is absolutely unintelligible if the traditional view of Israel being laid aside at the Cross and the Body's inception at Pentecost be correct. And it is a chapter studiously avoided by all who hold such a view.

There is another reason for Gentile blessing during the Acts besides the promise of Genesis 12. Romans 11:11 states that salvation had come upon the Gentile in order to provoke the Jew to jealousy. As we have seen, the Jew as a nation was sinking deeper and deeper into unbelief as the history of the Acts unfolds itself, and this was the last attempt (humanly speaking) of God to awaken the nation to realise what they were letting slip in refusing to repent and believe the great offer of chapter 3:19-26. They saw despised Gentiles sharing in their blessings and this should have stirred them up, but, alas, it failed, and at Acts 28

the olive tree was cut down. Thank God, he is able to graft the branches back again (Rom. 11:24). There is a future for the Jew as a nation, otherwise the New Covenant of grace with Israel (Jer. 31:31) will be ineffective, God's unconditional promises to Abraham will be broken, and Romans 11:29 will have been proved to be untrue. Meanwhile His secret purpose connected with the Body and the heavenly places is being worked out, since the setting aside of Israel as a nation at Acts 28.

Dispensationally, the book of the Acts is the answer to the Saviour's prayer on the Cross, 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do' (Luke 23:34). Israel is given another opportunity to repent, God's long-suffering waits during a period of thirty-five years and then the axe is laid to the root of the tree (Acts 28). All that happens during this time is in line, as we have seen, with the Old Testament Scriptures and *the earthly kingdom*. There can therefore be no reference to the Mystery (secret) and what was hid in God during that time.

The Acts is millennial in anticipation both in blessing and judgment. God's terrible dealing with Ananias and Sapphira, and certain in the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 11:29,30) is not typical of the present time but of the direct judgment of the kingdom age — '*morning by morning* will I uproot all the lawless ones of the land' (Psa. 101:8, Rotherham's translation). If it was true now, as one writer has put it, there would be such an increase in funerals that undertakers could not take care of the work of burying the dead. And remember that Ananias and Sapphira but told a lie!

We will now sum up what we have already seen.

The Pentecostal church was formed at the time when Israel as a nation was being given another opportunity of repenting, and earthly kingdom blessings are in view (see Rom. 15:12,13 R.V. and note the reference back to Isaiah 11, the great millennial chapter).

It is likened to a *woman* (2 Cor. 11:2) and is linked with Old Testament prophecy, and therefore cannot be connected with the Secret of Ephesians 3. Its hope looked

forward to the millennial kingdom, or, if the believer went on to the better thing, the heavenly Jerusalem which descends out of heaven (Heb. 12:22; Rev. 3:12; 21:2,10). This church is called the Bride (Rev. 21:2,9).

The church which is His Body, formed AFTER the Pentecostal period, is not connected with earthly kingdom purposes. It is likened to a MAN and is termed the NEW MAN and its goal is the full-grown (perfect) MAN (Eph. 4:13, Greek *aner* — male, translated ‘husband’ in chapter 5, verse 25. It can never denote a woman or a bride. This church is part of the Bridegroom). It is connected with the secret hid from all past ages and generations and its sphere of blessing is heavenly places at the right hand of God where Christ is now seated (Eph. 1:19-21; 2:6).

There are therefore at least three spheres of blessing revealed in God’s Word:

- (a) Earth.
- (b) The Heavenly Jerusalem which descends from heaven.
- (c) The right hand of God where Christ is now seated.

Let us distinguish the things that differ (Phil. 1:10 margin) or we shall miss the best that God has to give to His redeemed children. We do not honour Him or His Word by confusing and mixing what He has kept apart, e.g. doctrinal (basic) and dispensational truth.

Concerning (c) we insist that this is a definite place and sphere of blessing as Philippians 4:19 and 1 Timothy 3:16 demand. It is where the Lord Jesus is now exalted (Eph. 1:19-21) and is also the abode of heavenly principalities and powers (Eph. 3:10). For the sake of completeness we quote from a former article. This sphere is described in at least five ways:

- (1) Heavenly places or literally ‘on-heavenlies’ *far above* all principality, power, might and dominion and every name that is named in this age and the coming one, i.e. the millennium (Eph. 1:19-23).

The phrase ‘in the heavnlies’ occurs five times in Ephesians and nowhere else in the range of Scripture. The original is in the dative case, which expresses *locality*. It is therefore *unique as a sphere of blessing* for the redeemed and is something infinitely more than just a present spiritual experience.

- (2) The right hand of God where Christ sitteth (Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1).
- (3) Far above *all* heavens (Eph. 4:10, and note the plural).
- (4) The holiest of all.
- (5) The Glory — the last two being definitely linked together.*

The earthly tabernacle with its two parts, the holy place, and the holiest of all which contained the blazing glory of God, was only a picture or a model of *the reality* that exists in the heavens (Heb. 9:23-24).

A revised translation of Ephesians 2:19 and Colossians 1:12 reads ‘ye are no more strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens *of the holiest of all*’ (there is no ‘with’ as A.V.). ‘The Father, Who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the *holiest of all in the light*’. One has only to compare 1 Timothy 6:15-16 where the Lord Jesus Christ is stated to dwell in the light which no man can approach unto, in order to realise something of the tremendous heights of blessing relating to this calling.

Here most surely is a secret that no child of God, before Acts 28, could possibly have known.

The epistle to the Hebrews indeed revealed the fact that the heavenly holiest of all had been entered by the great High Priest, but, as with the earthly type, He entered ALONE (Heb. 9:7). The thought that any of the redeemed are there with Him is entirely foreign to this epistle.

Indeed it would savour of blasphemy were it not revealed in the Word of God. No wonder then that it has

* See the booklet The Glory of God, by the same author.

become exceedingly wonderful and precious to some of God's children whose eyes have been opened by the Holy Spirit to see and accept it by simple faith. A sound test for spiritual teaching is the way it regards the Person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. This calling exalts Him as no other. It is here that Christ is ALL (Col. 3:11) and in all things has the PRE-EMINENCE (Col. 1:18).

It is here that we read of unsearchable riches (Eph. 3:8); exceeding riches of grace (Eph. 2:7); riches of glory (Eph. 1:18; 3:16) as well as riches *in* glory (Phil. 4:19). It is this transcendent secret calling resting upon the finished work of Christ that the Father *wills to make known to His saints* (Col. 1:26-27). Yet how few, comparatively speaking, of the saints are interested enough to search and see whether these things are so.

It has always been the high-water mark of faith in any age to believe *all* that God has revealed up to that particular time. We can instance the case of Abraham. God gave him the land of promise unconditionally and he believed and accepted this most gracious gift. But his faith did not stop there or with earthly things.

Why? God revealed to him something better and higher even than this — namely, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city that hath *the* foundations (see Rev. 21:14). The epistle to the Hebrews makes it clear that Abraham honoured God and went on with Him step by step to believe *all* that he had been shown (Heb. 11:8-10). The same epistle most seriously warns believers of an evil heart of *unbelief* and the possibility of not going on to full growth and the 'better thing' which was then revealed. That was during the Acts period.

Now, since Acts chapter 28, God has revealed His best in making known the marvellous Secret of Ephesians 3, and the exalted sphere of blessing for sinners at His right hand.

What if all this is ignored by believers of the present day? We can be perfectly certain that our Heavenly Father will never excuse unbelief in His children. The first epistle

which contains the revelation of this exalted truth opens with the words ‘... to the Saints ... and to the FAITHFUL in Christ Jesus’ (Eph. 1:1). The last one reminds us that to be ashamed of the truth given through Paul, the Lord’s prisoner, is *to be ashamed of the Lord Himself* (2 Tim. 1:8).

If Christians do not gladly accept *all* that has been revealed, then they must be the losers eternally. We remember that after being redeemed out of Egypt, *only two* out of Israel believed all that God had revealed to them and therefore only these two *enjoyed the full blessing* and entered the promised land.

So far from believing what Jehovah had revealed, the rest of the congregation were ready to take the lives of Caleb and Joshua and stone them with stones (Num. 14:10).

It has ever been the same. The truth of the Mystery has never been popular and never will be. It is ignored in most evangelical quarters and ridiculed and opposed in others. Those who believe it are, for the most part, misunderstood and misrepresented. They are cold-shouldered and deemed ‘unsound’ and ‘in error’ by other believers. While it is well to count the cost, we would say to the reader that, in spite of all, this pathway, though lonely, is *gloriously worthwhile*. The human channel through whom the Mystery was made known declared he had been completely forsaken by men, but nevertheless *the Lord stood by him* (2 Tim. 4:16,17).

Praise God this will be true of every humble believer and practical follower of this high and holy calling. We say the *practical* follower, for this tremendous calling is not one of dreams and unrelated to the realities of our daily existence. It makes sweeping claims upon the life of the believer and enters most searchingly into the relationship of husband and wife (Eph. 5:25-33), into the home life (6:1-4), and the business life (6:5-9). Let those who criticise and say this truth is not practical remember these things.

What a comfort it is to realise we are not answerable to man, whether Christian or otherwise, or to the various sects of Christendom, but to Him, Who has redeemed us by His precious blood. We have but *one Lord* (Eph. 4:5). He alone is our Master, and our endeavour is to be 'approved unto Him' (2 Tim. 2:15). Let us therefore go on to believe *all* that He has revealed for us and use the prayer of Ephesians 1:17-23 more frequently and earnestly so that we may get to know more of the hope of His calling. Hope, in Scripture, looks forward to the fulfilment of a promise or a calling. Our calling now seats us by faith at the right hand of the Father and our hope will be realised when we *are there actually*, for 'faith' is the substance of things '*hoped for*' (Heb. 11:1). Every sign of the times makes it clear that this marvellous hope cannot be long delayed. Soon the glory of the Saviour, now hidden within the veil, will be manifested and then the Head and Body united will be manifested where He is *in glory* (Col. 3:4).

Therefore let us 'live ... looking for that blessed hope and the manifestation of the *glory* of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ' (Titus 2:13), and take as our aim that of the apostle Paul when he said 'to make all men see what is the dispensation of the Mystery which from all ages hath been hid in God' (Eph. 3:9 R.V.).

APPENDIX 'A'

There is scarcely anything more helpful in Scriptural study than to realise there are at least three spheres of blessing revealed; as before stated, they are:

- (1) *The heavnlies where Christ is now seated in the holiest of all.*
- (2) *The New Jerusalem whose goal is to descend from the heavens.*
- (3) *The Earth.*

The faith of most believers does not rise above the earth and the coming millennial kingdom thereon (No. 3). The good earth becomes the enemy of the best. Abraham's faith embraced No. 2. Blessed indeed are those who believe all God has said and rise to the sphere mentioned in No. 1.

APPENDIX 'B'

The Epistles of Paul with relationship to the Dispensational boundary of Acts 28.

- (1) Galatians
- (2) Hebrews#
- (3) 1 Thessalonians
- (4) 2 Thessalonians
- (5) 1 Corinthians
- (6) 2 Corinthians
- (7) Romans

Acts 28:25-31 — The Dispensational boundary.

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| (1) Ephesians* | |
| (2) Philippians* | |
| (3) Colossians* | |
| (4) Philemon* | (Personal letter) |
| (5) 1 Timothy | } Pastoral Epistles |
| (6) Titus | |
| (7) 2 Timothy* | |

The writer believes the Pauline authorship of the epistle to the Hebrews.

* These are Prison epistles.

NOTE — Readers must not infer that only the epistles written after Acts 28 apply during this present stage. He or she is referred back to what is said regarding the difference between *doctrinal* and *dispensational* truth. A broad analysis of Romans would be: chapters 1 to 8 doctrinal; 9 to 11 dispensational; and 12 to 16 practical. It is upon the doctrinal section, i.e. justification by faith and identification with Christ that the Mystery is based; this is permanent and fundamental.

APPENDIX ‘C’

The inter-relationship of the Prison Epistles.

A EPHESIANS. Seated together with Him.

Key words

- 3:2 and 9 R.V. — Dispensation (ministry)
- 3:3 — The Mystery
- 1:23 and 4:10 — The fulness
- 1:22 — Christ the Head
- 1:22,23 — The Church which is His Body
- 1:21 — Principalities and powers

B PHILIPPIANS. The Prize.

Key words

- 1:10 margin — Try the things that differ
- 1:27 — Strive
- 3:14 — Press towards the mark and Prize
- 1:23 — Depart
- 2:17 — Offered

A COLOSSIANS. Complete in Him.

Key words

- 1:25 — Dispensation (ministry)
- 1:26 — The Mystery
- 1:19 — The fulness
- 2:19 — Christ the Head
- 1:24 — The Church which is His Body
- 1:16 & 2:10 — Principalities and powers

B 2 TIMOTHY. The Crown.

Key words

- 2:15 — Rightly dividing the Word of truth
- 2:5 — Strive
- 4:7 — Course finished
- 4:8 — Crown
- 4:6 — Depart and offered

It will be observed that these epistles are in pairs, viz. Ephesians and Colossians, Philippians and 2 Timothy. The first pair make known the Mystery. The second pair reveal a prize or crown for faithful ministry and witness in connection with this transcendent Truth and the Gospel of God’s grace.

APPENDIX 'D'

It is very important to grasp the fact that *Israel* was a *church* in the Biblical sense. The Greek *ekklesia* means literally 'a called-out company' for some specific purpose. Israel was just that — separated from all other nations by God and trained to become a channel of truth and blessing to the darkened world around them.

The Bible that was in general use at the time of the Lord's earthly ministry was the Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint and it took a place very much like the Authorized Version of our day. This was the version that the Lord and the apostles frequently quoted from and this explains why New Testament quotations from the Old Testament are often worded differently from the Hebrew original.

The word *ekklesia* occurs some 75 times in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, so it is quite a frequent word, often translating the Hebrew word for *congregation*. If our A.V. had been translated from the Septuagint (usually designated LXX) we should have had the following:

'And Moses spake in the ears of *all the church of Israel* the words of this song ...' (Deut. 31:30).

'David said unto *all the church* ...' (1 Chron. 13:2).

'Wherefore David blessed the LORD before *all the church* (1 Chron. 29:10).

'And David said to *all the church*, Now bless the LORD your God' (1 Chron. 29:20).

'So Solomon, and *all the church* with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon' (2 Chron. 1:3).

'... In the *midst of the church* will I praise Thee' (Psa. 22:22; and note when this is quoted in Heb. 2:12 the word 'church' is used — not 'congregation').

'And the heavens shall praise Thy wonders, O LORD: Thy faithfulness also in the *church of the saints*' (Psa. 89:5).

These are a few occurrences of the usage of '*ekklesia*', 'church' in the Old Testament, and it is a great pity this has been hidden from us in our English translations. Stephen refers to the nation of Israel as 'the church in wilderness' (Acts 7:38). Every Jew would be familiar with the word church and it would be a good thing if we used the expression 'the church of Israel' more frequently. For one thing it would rid us of the erroneous idea that there is only *one* church in the Bible. There is only *one* 'church, which is His *Body*' (Eph. 1:22,23), but that is another matter.

Once we realise this we shall have a better appreciation of the Lord's words to Peter as recorded in Matthew 16:18 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My *church*'. What church would Peter understand by this statement? He must have been quite familiar with the word 'church' and, knowing the Old Testament, would have linked it with his own nation. He had just received a revelation from the Father and had made the great declaration 'Thou art the Messiah (Christ), the Son of the living God'. Had the Lord been referring to the church that was revealed later on in Ephesians and Colossians, Peter would have needed a further revelation from the Father, for at this time this company was unrevealed, being hidden in the mind of God. He could only have identified the church of which the Lord spoke with Israel. The Lord would have had to correct such thinking if it was the church which was to be His Body He was referring to in His statement to Peter. We believe that it was the faithful remnant of Israel we have been considering that He was speaking about, the new 'church of Israel', which, together with the faithful all through Israel's history, will finally constitute the Bride of the Lamb, whose inheritance is in the heavenly Jerusalem. (Heb. 11:9,10,14-16; 12:22,23; Rev. 21:2,9,10,12,14).

‘PENTECOST’

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