

United, yet Divided

A Key to Holy Scripture

Charles H. Welch



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A Key to Holy Scripture

by

Charles H. Welch

Author of

Dispensational Truth
The Apostle of the Reconciliation
The Testimony of the Lord's Prisoner
Parable, Miracle, and Sign
The Form of Sound Words
Just and the Justifier
In Heavenly Places
etc., etc., etc.

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HOW IT CAME TO BE WRITTEN

Many years ago a request was sent to us by a Pastor who had become interested in Dispensational Truth, asking if we could provide a series of outline studies to help him with his Bible Class.

Our answer was to write what now appears as *United, Yet Divided*, which was sent by post as a gift.

Later, Mr. F.P. Brininger said it was too good to give away and be lost. The result was the issue of these notes in the form now reprinted and entitled UNITED, YET DIVIDED. In conference with another brother in Christ, we sought an appropriate title. He said, 'My dear wife is reading a serial story in a woman's magazine entitled *United, yet Divided*'. This title we adopted, and found appropriate.

We append the commendation of this booklet by W.H. Griffith Thomas D.D.

'This booklet deals with the important subject of Dispensational Teaching and shows the vital necessity and spiritual importance of "rightly dividing the Word of Truth". This fundamental principle is clearly and convincingly set forth and deserves the thorough and constant attention of all Bible students. The author's application of the principle is that the dispensational boundary is not Pentecost but Acts 28:17-28. While he believes that "a" church began at Pentecost, "the" Church which is Christ's Body did not begin until the Jewish rejection of the Gospel recorded in Acts 28 took place. On this account that chapter is the boundary line. The author has a good deal to say for his position, and while it may not be possible for all Bible students to accept it, the arguments by which it is supported are more weighty than many have been accustomed to think. Thus, Mr. Welch calls special attention to the miraculous element promised in Mark 16:15,16, and pertinently asks whether these signs have followed our faith and, if they have not, whether some change of dispensation has not come in. Without necessarily accepting every position laid down the booklet is of real value and deserves the thorough consideration of all who love the Truth'.

(Signed) Dr. W.H. Griffith Thomas

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UNITED, YET DIVIDED

Chapter 1

GOD HATH SPOKEN

The Scriptures are inspired Truth

The following pages are written with a view to help those who already know the blessed fact which heads this chapter; GOD HATH SPOKEN, and all His words are pure and true. We believe that the Bible not only contains the words of God, but that it is indeed and in truth, *The Word of God itself*. We believe that ‘all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness’ (2 Tim. 3:16). We believe that this full inspiration applies equally to Genesis as to Revelation; that Moses when he wrote concerning the creation or the flood, that Matthew when he recorded the life of the Lord Jesus, and that Paul when he revealed the Mystery which God had kept secret since the foundation of the world, were all equally and fully inspired.

There can be but one result of a heart belief in inspired Scripture, namely, unconditional, and hearty obedience. To those who believe that ‘God hath spoken’, no argument can be advanced that will excuse disobedience. We therefore feel that our readers will agree with our first conclusion.

All Scripture being God’s truth, becomes the only rule of faith and practice, and demands whole-hearted obedience.

Chapter 2

SOME COMMANDS WE HAVE NEVER OBEYED!

Are we liable to these penalties?

The conclusion arrived at in the preceding chapter is nothing if not practical. Let us therefore look into the Word, to see what God has commanded.

We do not read very far into Genesis before we come up against a problem. God enjoined upon Abraham the covenant of circumcision, and used such words as these to show its importance. 'The uncircumcised ... shall be cut off from his people' (Gen. 17:14). Again, in Exodus 12, the observation of the feast of the Passover is said to be 'an ordinance for ever', and 'whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel'. Again, in Exodus 20:8, we read as a part of the commandments given by God: 'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work'. If the reader will now turn to Numbers 15:32-36, he will find that no allowance was made for not keeping the seventh day. The man that gathered sticks on the Sabbath day did not escape punishment because he intended to observe the first day instead, but the Lord said, 'The man shall be surely put to death'. In Exodus 31:14 regarding the Sabbath, we have the words quoted above, 'that soul shall be cut off from among his people'.

Leviticus 17:14 threatens the same for eating flesh with the blood.

Leviticus 23:29 threatens the same for not observing the day of atonement.

Numbers 19:13-20 threatens the same to any who are not sprinkled by the water of separation, after touching a dead body, or even a bone, or a grave.

Now it must be evident to all readers that if the conclusion of chapter 1 stands, then we are faced with a series of facts that are of the most serious character.

Chapter 3

PAUL'S TESTIMONY VERY DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF MOSES

Some opposing statements

Before attempting to explain the difficulty that is manifest as a result of chapter 2, let us continue our search, this time in the New Testament.

Galatians 5:2 says, 'Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing'. Here we find the exact opposite to Genesis 17:14. Moses says the UN-circumcised shall be cut off, while Paul says the circumcised are cut off from any benefit from Christ.

Colossians 2:16 says, 'Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbaths'. Here, again, the apostle Paul sweeps aside the commands of God given in the law regarding the feasts, fasts and sabbaths. 'Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain' (Gal. 4:10,11).

What are we to say to these things? If we believe that both Moses and Paul were equally inspired, how is it that what the one tells us God commanded, the other equally and as positively contradicts and sets aside? The answer is that God has spoken to His people at different times, with different messages, and that before we can render real obedience to the Scriptures we must learn to distinguish between these different *dispensations*, as they are called. This we will seek to do in the next chapter where the first great division of the Word will be set out.

Chapter 4

LAW AND GRACE

The first great division

Within the limits of the period covered by the outworking of redemption, the most important division is that indicated by the words LAW AND GRACE. We do not imply that the reader is ignorant of this distinction, but it is necessary for the sake of clearness to go forward together step by step. John 1:16 and 17 puts the case fairly clearly:

‘And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ’.

The meaning of these words will be better appreciated by noting the following paraphrase, which seeks to introduce the shades of meaning latent in the original:

‘Because out of His fulness have all we received, even the grace of New Testament realities, instead of the grace of types and shadows. For the law, with its types, was given through Moses as the channel, but true grace, the antitypical blessings of the gospel, came into being through Jesus Christ as the Creator’.

It will be seen that by this change of dispensation we pass from the grace set forth in types to the true grace of Christ. The epistle to the Hebrews recognises this position. There we read, ‘The law made nothing perfect’ (7:19). Its priests were sinners themselves, and were all subject to death; its sacrifices never took away sin, nor touched the conscience. God Himself found fault with the Old Covenant, and Christ’s coming and work set it entirely aside. (For this, *see* Hebrews 7:11,21-28; 8:1-5,7-13; 9:1-14; 10:1-14; also Galatians 5:4, ‘Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace’).

Chapter 5

A FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE

The key to interpretation

We now reach a conclusion, the recognition of which is of the highest importance in seeking to understand the mind and will of God for us in His Word.

It becomes manifest that it is not sufficient for us to find chapter and verse for any article of our faith, important as that is; we must also be sure that the Scripture we quote is written concerning the dispensation that applies to us. The apostle Paul, whose very ministry and apostleship was vitally connected with this fact, has expressed the principle in the following passage:

‘STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED —

RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH’

(2 Tim. 2:15).

The Lord ‘rightly divides’

Let us take one illustration from the ministry of the Lord Himself. In Luke 4:16-21, the Lord is described as reading the opening words of Isaiah 61. He closes the book at the words, ‘To preach the acceptable year of the Lord’, and then says, ‘This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears’. Had He read on in Isaiah 61:2, the next words quoted would have been, ‘and the day of vengeance of our God’, a day which is connected with the millennial blessings of Israel when they become ‘priests of the Lord’, and receive ‘double’ for their shame. This was not fulfilled in the days of Christ’s ministry. Over 1900 years separate those two sentences, which in our Authorized Version are divided merely by a comma. How important therefore this principle must be.

Before we leave this illustration of right division it will be of service to observe one other feature. The words

omitted in Luke 4 were not set aside; they were simply reserved for their own proper place, and are found in Luke 21:22:

‘For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled’.

LUKE’S GOSPEL

Chapter 4:19	Chapters 5 to 20	Chapter 21:22
The acceptable year of the Lord.		The day of vengeance of our God.
Fulfilled.		Drawing near after an interval of over 1900 years.

The right division of the Word of Truth recognises *all* Scripture. It does not cut out unpopular doctrine; it just apports all Scripture according to God’s purpose.

Chapter 6

JEW, GENTILE, AND CHURCH OF GOD

The apostle, in 1 Corinthians 10:32, gives the threefold division of mankind, as viewed from the standpoint of grace.

The Jew

Behind and beyond the question of reward for good, and punishment for evil, lies the fact that the Jew was *unconditionally* chosen for blessing when God called Abram and promised to make of him a great nation. For the time indeed:

‘As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: *but as touching the election*, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes’.

FOR THE GIFTS AND CALLING OF GOD ARE WITHOUT REPENTANCE (CHANGE OF MIND)' (Rom. 11:28,29).

We must therefore leave large room for the working out of the divine purpose concerning this elect nation, the restoration of their land, and through them the blessing of the *Gentiles*.

The Gentiles

While blessing in a full sense for the Gentiles awaits Israel's restoration (for the covenant that chose Israel includes the Gentiles, 'for *in thee* shall all the families of the earth be blessed'), there are some portions of the Word which refer to the Gentile *nations* as such, the time of their supremacy and Israel's dispersion, and the responsibilities of 'the powers that be'. But the Scriptures which speak of the Jew or of the Gentile do not necessarily contain the will of God for the *Church*.

The church

The word translated 'church' is *ekklesia*, which primarily means 'a called-out assembly'. The church of the New Testament is not composed solely of Jews or Gentiles; it is an elect company called from either, or both.

Chapter 7

RIGHT DIVISION

Right division of the dispensations

It will be evident to the thoughtful reader that the application of the principle brought forward on the preceding page will be wide indeed. To give even a *resume* of the results of rightly dividing the Word of truth would occupy more space than we have at our disposal. This booklet has an object in view, and that is that the exercised believer may be led to see the blessing and the glory which God has reserved until the present

dispensation, called in Ephesians 3:9, Revised Version, 'the dispensation of the Mystery'.

The two most important points of this booklet are:

- (1) The principle. — Rightly divide the Word.
- (2) The application. — Acts 28:17-28, the dispensational boundary.

We have been brought up to believe that Pentecost marked the commencement of the 'church' of the present dispensation, and that Acts 2 is the dispensational boundary. This we seek to show is not strictly true. A church certainly began at Pentecost, but *the* church, the church which is His Body, of which the Gentiles are 'fellow-members', did not begin then. If the reader accepts nothing further than the truth that Acts 28 is the boundary line, the object of this booklet is achieved. Granting this, the student of Scripture can be safely left to the Word itself. He will soon understand why there are no miraculous gifts today, and why he is not called upon to seek them.

The essential differences

He will soon realise the essential differences there are between the *kingdom* and the *church*, and also between the church as constituted during the Acts period, and the church of the one Body called after Acts 28:17-28.

Before we enter into the consideration of the claim of Acts 28 as the dispensational boundary, one or two important side issues will need attention. We shall notice into what divisions the Scriptures separate mankind, so that we need make no mistake in appropriating Scriptures that do not apply to ourselves. We shall need to be quite clear as to what is meant by the church.

We propose to take a rapid survey of the various dispensations in which God has dealt with man, realising thereby how futile it is to take the truth of one period and

endeavour to make it fit into another. Of course, there are some principles which are inter-dispensational. No one dispensation has the monopoly of sin and death, and no dispensation since the fall of man until his perfect salvation is accomplished can do without Christ as the Redeemer.

Other points will be touched upon as we proceed. One of the objects of this booklet is to clear the ground, to impress the fact that there is such a thing as the dispensation of the Mystery, that there is a church of the one Body entirely separate from Israel or Abraham, or miracles, that there is a sphere of redemption in the very super-heavenlies, and a set of Scriptures, written after Israel had been set aside in Acts 28, containing this distinctive dispensational teaching.

If only the reader is stirred up to go to the epistle to the Ephesians with no traditional views, but as it were for the first time, what a blessing he may receive!

We will not stay to say more in this strain, but approach the Word, trusting that the reader will have his interest sufficiently quickened to be willing to examine some aspects of truth that bear upon these important themes, even though the study may at times prove a little tedious.

Chapter 8

THE CHURCH: WHAT IS IT?

A definition needful

We must first observe the true meaning and Scriptural usage of the word *church*, or confusion will result.

First, its meaning.— The word in the New Testament is the translation of *ekklesia* (which gives us our word ecclesiastical) and literally means ‘a called-out company’.

Secondly, its usage.— The following examples will show the various ‘called-out companies’ mentioned in Scripture:

ISRAEL, as called out from other nations — ‘That thou mayest be a *multitude* (Hebrew equivalent for *ekklesia*) of people’ (Gen. 28:3).

ISRAEL, redeemed from Egypt — ‘The church in the wilderness’ (Acts 7:38).

JEWISH BELIEVERS — ‘The church of God’ (Acts 8:3; 1 Cor. 15:9). Up to this point no Gentiles had been converted, *see* Acts 10.

JEWS AND GENTILES, who believed during the ‘Acts’ (1Thess. 1:1).

BELIEVERS, mostly Gentiles, called under the dispensation of the Mystery, form ‘the church which is His Body’ (Eph. 1:22,23).

Genus and species

The word ‘dog’ is the name of a *genus*; the word ‘terrier’ of a *species*. All terriers are dogs, but all dogs are not terriers. Just in the same way the word church is the name of a genus, indicating a called-out company; the ‘church in the wilderness’ is one species, the ‘church of the one Body’ another. If I described the peculiar points of a terrier, and applied them generally to the genus ‘dog’, I should be inaccurate. In just the same way, if I describe the peculiar blessings, hope, and sphere of the church of the one Body, and say they are true of every company ever called a church, I shall be equally in error.

An examination of the various circumstances and degrees of advancement, of deep difference in doctrine, of complete contrast in enduement (e.g. miracles), of differing spheres of blessing — earth, new Jerusalem, and heavenly places — and of many other facts yet to be

observed, shows us that we must ‘rightly divide the Word of truth’ in its teaching concerning ‘the church’.

A church for every sphere

There is a church connected with the promises concerning ‘the kingdom of heaven’, which has its sphere in the earth in the millennial kingdom. There is a church connected with the covenant made with Abraham, chosen *since* the foundation of the world, which has its sphere in the heavens and in the new Jerusalem. There is also a church connected with a promise made *before* the foundation of the world, revealed only to Paul in ‘the mystery’, called ‘the one Body’, which has its sphere in the ‘heavenly places’ or ‘super-heavenlies’ (Eph. 1:19-23; 2:6).

Chapter 9

THE VARIOUS DISPENSATIONS

Something special

This ‘present evil age’, characterized by the presence of sin and death, extends from Adam until the millennial kingdom. While it is one in essential character, it is sub-divided into different periods called dispensations, according as God introduced different ways of dealing with mankind. The following does not pretend to be without fault, but it will indicate to the reader some of the outstanding divisions which he must observe if he would ‘rightly divide the Word of truth’.

Each has something distinctive

Tracing the great purpose of the Bible as it develops under Adam, Noah, Moses and others, we find the following:

THE DISPENSATIONS

- 1st. The six days' creation to Adam's fall.
- 2nd. From the fall of Adam to the flood.
- 3rd. From the renewed world to the call of Abraham.
- 4th. From the call of Abraham to the Exodus from Egypt.
- 5th. From the Exodus to the entrance into Canaan.
- 6th. From Canaan to setting up of the kingdom.
- 7th. From David to the Babylonian captivity.
- 8th. From the captivity to the birth of Christ.
- 9th. From the birth to the death and resurrection of Christ.
- 10th. From the day of Pentecost to Israel's rejection in Acts 28.
- 11th. The prison ministry of Paul called 'the dispensation of the mystery'.
- 12th. Commences with the recognition of Israel and is characterized by wrath. The bulk of the Book of Revelation.
- 13th. The millennial kingdom.
- 14th. The period that intervenes between the millennium and the great white throne.
- 15th. Creation again. 'The new creation'; 'God all in all'. No more sin, death, pain or curse.

It is very evident that to observe a change of dispensation is of the utmost importance in studying the Scriptures. Things that were true before the Fall, would be untrue after it. Things that were true before the Law would not be true after it, and so throughout the dispensations.

Chapter 10

ARE THERE SEVERAL GOSPELS?

The Meaning

The word ‘gospel’ simply means God’s good news, or glad tidings. Now God has ‘good news’ about many different things, and a careful examination of the Scriptural usage will show us that here, just as with the word ‘church’, we need great care.

The usage

Among the many messages of God, called ‘gospels’, may be classed the following:

The <i>gospel</i> of the kingdom.	(Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14)
The <i>gospel</i> of God.	(Rom. 1:1; 1 Thess. 2:2)
The <i>gospel</i> of the circumcision.	(Gal. 2:7)
The <i>gospel</i> of the uncircumcision.	(Gal. 2:7)
The <i>gospel</i> of the grace of God.	(Acts 20:24)
The <i>gospel</i> of the glory of Christ.	(2 Cor. 4:4)
The everlasting <i>gospel</i> .	(Rev. 14:6)

By way of drawing attention to some of the outstanding differences in these gospels, let us notice the Scriptural definition given of the gospel of the kingdom in contrast with that preached by Paul.

The three points

Mark 1:14,15 clearly defines the gospel of the kingdom of God as:

- (1) The time is fulfilled.
- (2) The kingdom of God is at hand.
- (3) Repent and believe the good news.

The three points of Paul’s gospel as defined in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 are:

- (1) Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.
- (2) He was buried.

- (3) He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

It is not merely a superficial but a real difference that accounts for the fact that the atoning work of Christ figures in one gospel and not in the other. Not one of the apostles knew that Christ was to die and rise again until told by the Lord, as recorded in Matthew 16:21: *'from that time forth began Jesus'* — a new revelation.

'Be it far from Thee, Lord', shows that Peter faces this truth for the first time (v. 22).

The 'preaching' of Matthew 10:7 clearly therefore was not that of the gospel as understood today, for who of us would accept a gospel that knew not Christ (1) Who died, (2) Who was buried, and (3) Who rose again?

Chapter 11

THE KINGDOM

God's sovereignty inclusive

When seeking to draw attention to the difference between the 'church' and the 'kingdom', we are sometimes confronted with the references to a kingdom which are found in the epistles of the one Body, namely, Ephesians, Colossians and 2 Timothy. *The kingdom or sovereignty of God includes every phase and sphere of redemption.*

Within this widest of all spheres come the subdivisions. While the church of the one Body must be kept distinct from the promises concerning either the kingdom of heaven, the millennial kingdom, or any other phase of God's redeeming love, yet the church of the one Body comes within the all-embracing kingdom of God.

When, therefore, we draw distinctions between 'kingdom truth' and 'church truth', it must be understood that we are comparing together various sections of that

great kingdom which the Son of God will bring to its perfect issue.

THE	KINGDOM	OF	GOD
The kingdom of heaven	The church of Pentecost and after	The church of the one Body	The perfect kingdom of 1 Cor. 15: 25-28.

Chapter 12

TWO DISPENSATIONS RUNNING CONCURRENTLY

Peter and Paul

Peter wrote to the ‘dispersion’; his message was for the ‘holy nation and the royal priesthood’ (1 Pet. 2:9), terms NEVER used of Gentiles throughout the Scriptures. While Peter was engaged in this ministry, Paul was engaged in his. Both during Paul’s active missionary work while Israel was still a nation, and during his prison ministry, when Israel had been set aside (Acts 28:25-28), the ministries of these two servants of God ran on together.

Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, THE ONLY MAN SENT BY THE ASCENDED LORD as His messenger to the Gentiles. To Peter was committed the gospel of the circumcision, and he never spoke to a Gentile until Paul had been saved and commissioned, and then only after seeing a vision and with great diffidence (*see* Acts 10:28).

The great foundation of Paul’s doctrine was ‘justification by faith’, whereas even the word justification is absent from the speeches and epistles of Peter.

Chapter 13

CHRIST AS KING

The King — Son of David

The Gospel of Matthew sets forth the person of Christ as one born *King of the Jews*. He is introduced as the Son of David, His gospel or good news is that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and His words and His works have the repentance of Israel as their object.

The book opens with the genealogy of Christ as Son of David, the King, and as Son of Abraham, the Hebrew. He is presented as One, 'born King of the Jews' (2:2). His forerunner calls to repentance because 'the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (3:2). The opening words of the Lord's ministry are given in 4:17, 'From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'.

His ministry was accompanied by a marvellous series of miracles. 'John did no miracle'; he knew that these were the credentials of the Lord as the Messiah (11:2-6). In chapter 10 we find the twelve apostles given power over unclean spirits, power to heal all manner of diseases, leprosy, and even to raise the dead, and the commission to preach, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand'.

The kingdom — Israel

Two very important facts are worth noticing here.

- (1) The message was EXCLUSIVE to Israel.

'These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, GO NOT into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye NOT: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matt. 10:5,6).

- (2) The preachers had no place in their gospel for CHRIST CRUCIFIED OR CHRIST RISEN!

This seems a terrible indictment, looked at from our standpoint. It can be proved by a reference to Matthew chapter 16, where we find two statements:

(1) The Lord ‘from that time forth **BEGAN** to shew unto His disciples, how that He must ... suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be **KILLED**, and be **RAISED** again the third day’ (verse 21). If the Lord at this time ‘began’, He could not have told them *before*.

(2) That the disciples had never heard of such a thing, Peter’s action abundantly shows, for ‘then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: *this shall not be unto thee*’ (verse 22). And the unbelief of all the apostles in the resurrection is manifest by the conclusion of the Gospel narrative.

Its exclusive character

A further proof of the exclusive character of the Lord’s earthly ministry is found in Matthew 15:21-28.

A woman of Canaan, i.e. not a Jewess, cried, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a demon’. What was the Saviour’s response to this mother’s cry? ‘He answered her **NOT A WORD**’! When His disciples besought Him to send her away (for she continued her supplications), the Lord said, ‘I am **NOT** sent **BUT** unto the lost sheep of the house of **ISRAEL**’. The woman then changed her mode of approach. She had called Him ‘Son of David’ (all around her were doing the same), but that was exclusive to David’s people and kingdom. She now approaches Him, worshipping and saying, ‘Lord, help me’. What response will the Saviour of the lost give now? ‘But He answered and said, It is not meet to take the **CHILDREN’S** bread, and cast it to little **DOGS**’.

What strange words! Israel are the *children*, the Gentiles are *dogs*. One loophole did the Lord leave; He said *kunaria*, ‘puppy dogs’. The term ‘dog’ was a

synonym for an outcast, and the Gentiles were so called. Little puppies were, however, sometimes allowed as pets for a time, and to this the Lord alluded. The woman accepted the dispensational position. She recognized that Israel were ‘the masters’, and she could only expect ‘the crumbs’. Then she received the blessing. While this is a faithful picture of the exclusive character of the Lord’s earthly ministry, it is an *utterly false* picture of the church of the one Body or of the gospel committed to Paul, ‘where there is neither Jew nor Greek’.

The Lord’s earthly ministry contrasted with Paul’s

It is not a question of choosing between the Lord Jesus and Paul, far from it, but of observing that the Christ who spoke on earth, has since spoken from heaven. Paul is but the new mouthpiece. The ministry of Christ on earth is defined and compared with Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles previous to the revelation of the mystery.

- (1) The earthly ministry of the Lord was not to *introduce something new*, but to *confirm something old*.
- (2) It was exclusively to Israel.
- (3) The Gentiles were only in prospect.

‘Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the CIRCUMCISION for the truth of God, to *confirm* the promises made unto the FATHERS: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy’ (Rom. 15:8,9).

(4) While the earthly ministry of Christ was divinely limited to Israel, His risen ministry was not so confined. *The only apostle appointed by the risen Christ to the Gentiles was Paul.*

‘That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the GENTILES, ministering the gospel of God’ (which *did* include the death and resurrection of Christ, *see* Romans 1:1-4 etc., and 15:16).

David

It will be observed that the Gospel of Matthew falls into two sections. The first begins with a voice from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased'. From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel' (Matt. 3 and 4, and Mark 1:15). This section ends with Peter's confession, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God' (Matt. 16:16). During this section the Lord twice declared the exclusive character of His ministry to Israel. Israel, however, 'despised and rejected' Him. His mighty works were performed with the same object in view as had His wondrous words, namely, repentance. 'Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, BECAUSE THEY REPENTED NOT' (Matt. 11:20). They are unfavourably compared with Tyre and Sidon, and even Sodom. Here stood One 'greater than the Temple', 'greater than Jonah' whose preaching caused the repentance of Nineveh, and 'greater than Solomon' the typical son of David, and Prince of Peace. And Israel rejected Him, their Prophet, Priest and King. It is here, in this setting of Israelite apostacy, that Christ refers to the wider field — the Gentiles. When the Lord knew that His miracles instead of bringing about repentance led the Pharisees to seek to destroy Him, Isaiah the prophet is quoted:

'...I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He shall shew judgment to the Gentiles ... And in His Name shall the Gentiles trust' (Matt.12:18-21; cf. Isa. 42:1).

A passage parallel to this, which throws light upon the turn of events in Matthew 12, is Isaiah 49:4-8. Messiah says:

‘...I have laboured in vain, I have spent My strength for nought ... And now, saith the LORD that formed Me ... to bring Jacob again to Him, Though Israel be not gathered ... It is a light thing that Thou shouldest be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob ... I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth ... in a day of salvation have I helped Thee’.

As in Matthew 11 and 12, the work of the Lord toward Israel seems in vain; but here, in His hour of rejection, His wider ministry to the Gentiles begins to come into view.

Abraham

This brings us to the second section of Matthew. Again we have a voice from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son’ (17:5), and this section is concluded with the confession of a Gentile, the centurion said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God’ (27:54). During this section the Lord speaks often of His death and resurrection, and of His Second Coming in glory as king (19:28 and chapters 24 and 25). In it, we have the record of the fig tree with nothing but leaves that withers away (21:19); of the son who ‘afterward repented’ representing ‘the publicans and harlots’ who go into the kingdom of God before the true sons of the kingdom (21:31). The rejection of the Messiah and the destruction of Jerusalem is foretold (21:33-46). In the parable of the marriage feast ‘they which were bidden were not worthy’ (22:8), and the subsequent furnishing of the wedding feast was with guests who were not in the first place invited (22:9,10). Here are pronounced the awful indictment of the Scribes and Pharisees (23:13-37), and the words that for a time closed up the channel of mercy, ‘Behold, your house is left unto you desolate’ (23:38). In this section the death, resurrection, and Second Coming of Christ are prominent. No commission is given to the twelve to preach as in chapter 10.

We will set out this arrangement of the book graphically in order that its bearing upon our next subject may be better seen.

First Section

TIME — ‘From that time Jesus began to preach’ (Matt. 4:17).

VOICE — ‘This is My beloved Son’ (Matt. 3:17). The Son of David (Matt. 1:1).

The Lord rejected by Israel

CONFESSION BY A JEW — ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God’ (Matt. 16:16).

The first section is limited to Israel, and records the mission of Christ as Son of David, which has the kingdom and all Israel in view.

Second Section

TIME — ‘From that time forth began Jesus’ (Matt. 16:21). Death and resurrection.

VOICE — ‘This is My beloved Son’ (Matt. 17:5). The Son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1).

Israel rejected by the Lord (see the Parables)

CONFESSION BY A GENTILE — ‘Truly this was the Son of God’ (Matt. 27:54).

The second section introduces the doctrine of a Ransom for many. It is the preparatory work of the Lord as the Son of Abraham. The blessing to the Gentiles cannot begin to operate until the Lord has been raised from the dead.

Here is introduced the New Covenant (Matt. 26:28), which is closely linked by Paul with the reconciliation (2 Cor. 3 to 5), and so this latter half of Matthew lays the foundation in the death of Christ for the wider ministry which is seen in the Acts.

We will keep this in mind while we turn our attention to the book which records the second ministry of Christ and His apostles, the ministry of the risen One, namely,
THE ACTS.

Chapter 14

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Showing that Acts develops the promise of Matthew

We will for a moment leave what we have seen in Matthew, and turn our attention to the Acts. It is patent that this book chiefly concerns the ministry of two men, Peter and Paul. Peter received the apostleship and gospel of the *circumcision*, Paul the apostleship and gospel of the *uncircumcision* (Gal. 2:7,8). Peter is the prominent figure in Acts 1 to 12, while Paul is the prominent figure in Acts 13 to 28. Acts begins at Jerusalem (1:4,12). Peter speaks to ‘men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem’, ‘men of Israel’ and ‘all the house of Israel’ (2:14,22,36). He speaks of David’s throne (2:29-33), and of Abraham’s promise (3:25). God is ‘the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers’ (3:13). Christ was raised to be ‘a Prince and a Saviour’ (the kingly element), ‘for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins’ (Israel still prominent and the covenant of Abraham in operation) (5:31).

Even when the believers were scattered abroad after Stephen’s death, and travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, they preached ‘the word to NONE but unto the Jews only’ (11:19). A change was however approaching. Philip preaches in Samaria; that barrier gives way. Philip preaches to a man of Ethiopia who had come to Jerusalem to worship (8:26-40). Saul of Tarsus is converted outside the confines of the land of Israel, and receives his call to the *Gentiles* (9:15). Peter receives the vision which shows that the exclusive position of Israel is now passing. Peter regards his visit to Cornelius as a strange thing. He says:

‘.. Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of *another nation*’ (10:28).

Peter was then still ‘*a Jew*’, Peter had never entertained the idea of a church that included men of ‘*another nation*’. If this be so in Acts 10, HOW CAN WE BELIEVE THE TRADITION THAT THE CHURCH BEGAN AT PENTECOST? We can agree that A church began then, but not a church which would admit a Gentile, nor a church in conformity with the teaching of the apostle Paul.

What was Pentecost?

The feast of Pentecost was as much a Jewish feast as that of the Passover or Tabernacles. The feasts of Israel’s year symbolized the history of God’s purpose for them. Leviticus 23 sets them out in order. Beside the weekly Sabbath, which typified the seventh thousand-year-day (‘The rest that remaineth’), there were feasts at different seasons of the year.

The Passover has been fulfilled; Christ is our Passover. The sheaf of the first-fruits has been fulfilled. Christ the First-fruits. Pentecost has been partially fulfilled; Peter refers to the prophet Joel, and shows that Pentecost was a fulfilment of the promise there given. The prophecy is divided into two parts:

- (1) The outpouring of the spirit in miraculous gifts.
- (2) The signs and wonders in heaven and earth.

The first part was fulfilled, but Israel repented not; the complete fulfilment awaits the day of the Lord (*see* Joel), which is described in the book of the Revelation.

Peter’s first miracle was one of healing; Paul’s one of judgment. Peter healed a Jew; Paul blinded a Jew. Peter showed that his miracle typified the healing and restoration of Israel (chapters 3 and 4). Acts 28:26,27 shows that Paul’s miracle of judgment typified the setting aside of Israel, and the turning to the Gentiles; Sergius Paulus believed, and Acts 28 ends with the chosen nation of Israel being temporarily laid aside in unbelief. Paul’s ministry grows in ever-widening circles until at length Rome is

reached. He alone was the apostle to the Gentiles. His ministry in the Acts and his teaching in the epistles is therefore of peculiar interest to us.

Let us now turn back to Matthew. We find that both Matthew and Acts are divided into two sections, each having something peculiar to them. We find:

Matthew 1 to 16:20

A ministry exclusively to Israel. A woman of Canaan just obtained the crumbs. Christ is preached as King, and in the capacity of Son of David. He is rejected, and the Gentiles are mentioned towards the close.

Acts 1 to 12

A ministry exclusively to Israel. A Roman proselyte is preached to only after a vision has been given for the purpose. David's throne is emphasized, but since Christ has died, Abraham's blessings are continued. Israel, however, does not repent. Saul of Tarsus is converted, and the ministry to the Gentiles is foreshadowed.

Matthew 16:21 to 28

A preparatory ministry wherein the apostles do little, but are trained for service, the Lord's death and resurrection being the next events. The Lord rejects Israel and their house. Parables hint at Israel's failure and the Gentile blessing as a result. After the Lord's resurrection comes the commission to make disciples of all nations.

Acts 13 to 28

Paul links the Gentile with the Jew in Abraham. He is finally separated from Jerusalem by shipwreck, and contemplates a new phase of ministry as a prisoner. At the close of the Acts, Paul says, 'For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain' (28:20). When blindness settles upon Israel, he then announces that 'The salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles' (28:28).

Chapter 15

MAIN FEATURES OF EPISTLES OF THE ACTS PERIOD

Outstanding features

To attempt a real analysis of Paul's epistles is totally beyond the scope of this booklet; we must concentrate rather upon a few outstanding features, which will reveal the essential differences between the two sets of epistles. (In passing we would say that the glorious doctrine of justification by faith is practically exclusive to Paul's gospel; Peter never uses the expression, and James takes a somewhat different point of view. This only illustrates the difference in calling and ministry). The following features must be noticed:

Miraculous gifts were the rule

Galatians 3:5 links miracles and faith together in a context that is dealing with justification, and the blessing of Abraham. The first epistle to the Corinthians is the one that deals with the question of spiritual gifts and therefore contains the fullest statement. In chapter 12 are gifts of healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues and interpretation of tongues. The apostle, to show how senseless was the pride of some in gifts more striking than those possessed by their brethren, uses the figure of the human body — for the body is not one member, but many. The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee. The apostle even speaks of less honourable parts of the body, and of the more comely parts, showing that he is not here speaking of 'the church which is His Body', but is using a natural figure even as he does in a similar context in Romans 12:4,5. The church was one body in Christ; the church had inter-dependent members LIKE a body, but the church, the 'one body', was not then revealed.

The miraculous element, which continued right through to Acts 28, was promised in Mark 16:

‘These signs SHALL follow them that believe; In My name SHALL they cast out devils (demons); they SHALL speak with new tongues; they SHALL take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it SHALL not hurt them; they SHALL lay hands on the sick, and they SHALL recover’ (Mark 16:17,18).

Dear reader, if ‘the church’ began at Pentecost, what evidence have you that you are ‘saved’ (see Mark 16:15,16)? Have these signs followed your faith? If not, why not? If the Lord kept His word, we are reduced to two alternatives:

- (1) *No one is saved now, for these signs do not follow, or*
- (2) *These signs did follow, but a change of dispensation has come in.*

That the true reason is the second one suggested, will be evident from the fact that while the apostle Paul was bound for the hope of Israel, he worked miracles identical with those promised in Mark 16 (see Acts 28: 3-9, ‘a serpent’ and ‘healing by laying on of hands’). After Acts 28 the apostle in great sorrow has to leave a faithful fellow-servant behind *sick* (2 Tim. 4:20). Another had been sick unto death and recovered by the mercy of God, but not by the apostle’s miraculous intervention. Paul advises Timothy what to take for his physical weakness, whereas once, a handkerchief sent from the apostle worked a cure (Acts 19:12).

Israel holds the first place

Linked with the presence of signs and miracles is the next feature, namely, ISRAEL HOLDS THE FIRST PLACE.

The following will show how differently the Jew is treated in the two sets of epistles:

<i>Expression</i>	Before Acts 28 (Six epistles) <i>Times</i>	After Acts 28 (Six epistles) <i>Times</i>
Jew	25	1
Israel	14	2
Israelite	3	0
	Total 42	Total 3

The three occurrences after Acts 28 are, however, beside the mark. The word Jew occurs in a verse which sets aside his distinctive position (Col. 3:11) and Israel is used in a negative way (Eph. 2:12; Phil. 3:5), so that the usage is confined, in a positive sense, to those epistles written before Acts 28. Think of the way the Jew figures in Romans. ‘The Jew FIRST’ for blessing or judgment (Rom. 1:16; 2:9,10) exactly indicating Israel’s millennial position (Isa. 60 and 61).

While Israel remained as a recognized kingdom, Nebuchadnezzar could not be the head of gold, neither could the times of the Gentiles commence. So, in like manner, no revelation of absolutely unqualified equality for the Gentile believer could be made in any epistle written while the Jew still held his God-given place. Paul said that it *did* profit to be a Jew, and circumcision *did* hold an advantage dispensationally. Romans sets forth Israel’s dispensational privileges in chapter 9:3-5, namely:

- A According to the flesh (*kata sarka*) Brethren.
- B Israelites.
- C Sonship.
- D Glory.
- E Covenants.
- E Law.
- D Service.
- C Promises.
- B Fathers.
- A According to the flesh (*kata sarka*). The Messiah.

Bounded indeed by ‘the flesh’, these blessings were Israel’s, and no Gentile could find a place there. Imagine anyone today saying, ‘Is He the God of the Jews only?’ (Rom. 3:29; 9:24). Today we rather forget that the Jew has a place at all. This testifies to the fact that Romans belongs to a period that has passed *as touching its dispensational teaching*. The Gentiles are reminded that they are wild olive branches graft into the true olive, and that finally the broken branches shall be put back, and ‘so all Israel shall be saved’ (chapters 9 to 11). Israel’s attitude during the Acts is that of a ‘disobedient and gainsaying people’ (Rom. 10:21).

Blessings Abrahamic

Closely related to this Jewish element is the emphasis upon Abraham. Taking the six epistles on either side of Acts 28, as before shown, we find that Abraham is mentioned by name 19 times before Acts 28, and never again mentioned in the other six epistles. Both Romans and Galatians show that the Gentiles were included in the blessings of Abraham, that justification by faith, which so characterizes Paul’s preaching, was made known to Abraham *before circumcision*, i.e. while *Abraham was a Gentile*. The rightful inclusion of the Gentile in the promise made to Abraham is the very basis of Paul’s contention during the Acts, but when Israel passes off the scene, Abraham passes too. He who had so strenuously fought for the inclusion of the Gentile in the Abrahamic

covenant, omits reference to Abraham in his later epistles. It is evident that another promise, and another phase of God's purpose are brought to light when Israel ceases nationally. During the period of Israel's blindness, the Gentiles are either living on crumbs, saved by hope, or are enjoying the 'spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ', which are not included in the blessing of Abraham.

This link with the Jew and with Abraham must of necessity have a bearing upon the character and sphere of the believer's HOPE.

Israel's hope

Acts 3:19-26 gives the hope of the Acts period in its main issues:

'Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of REfreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of REstitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the ages. For Moses ... Samuel Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in Thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you FIRST, God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities' (Author's translation).

This synopsis of the hope includes the following points:

- (1) It hinges upon Israel's repentance, as before in Matthew 3.
- (2) It is connected with a time of REfreshing and REstitution, in other words, it includes the REstoration of the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6).
- (3) It is vitally connected with the personal return of the Lord Jesus from heaven.
- (4) The restitution is that which is the burden of all the prophets.

- (5) It is the realization of the promise to Abraham concerning the blessing of the nations.
- (6) It is for this reason that Israel were dealt with (both in the Lord's earthly ministry and in the first part of His risen ministry) FIRST.

This hope of Israel the apostle kept before his converts as the realization of their share in blessing. The expression which he employs in these six epistles is generally 'the *parousia*'. The *sign* of the *parousia* is to be revealed 'immediately after the tribulation', and then shall the Son of man be seen coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Matt. 24:30). It does not necessarily follow that because the 'sign' of the *parousia* follows the great tribulation, and the 'brightness' of the *parousia* consumes the wicked one (2 Thess. 2:8), that the *parousia* itself is limited to that period. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 seems to imply a meeting with the Lord in the air before the final blow is struck against the Beast; but Matthew 24, 1 Corinthians 15:52, and 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17 all speak of the same period, and relate to the time of the last trump, and the Archangel who stands for Israel (Dan. 12; Rev. 12). The apostle joined himself with the church in this personal expectation. 'WE which are alive and remain'. When the same apostle pronounced the words of Isaiah 6:10 which *dismissed* Israel, he knew that the hope of Israel was postponed with the nation.

The first four occurrences of the word *parousia* (coming) are Matthew 24:3,27,37,39. *The word, as referring to Christ, never occurs in Paul's epistles written after Acts 28.*

We have seen the main features of the Acts epistles:

- (1) The presence of abounding supernatural gifts. Not merely faith-healing, but miracles, which in the case of the apostles extended to the raising of the dead.
- (2) The first place is held by Israel in this period.

- (3) The basis of the blessing is the covenant with and promise to Abraham.
- (4) The hope is the personal return of the Lord to the earth, to restore all things according to the prophets, and to make good the blessing of Abraham to the Gentiles, through the medium of a redeemed Israel. Romans 8:24 says, 'We are saved by HOPE'; Galatians 5:5 speaks of 'the HOPE of righteousness'; 1 Thessalonians 5:8 speaks of the 'helmet of the HOPE of salvation'. This was the character of the time.

Use of Old Testament Scriptures in the epistles

One more characteristic is noteworthy, namely, the use of the Old Testament Scriptures in the epistles. The epistle to the Romans is full of quotations. The apostle cannot get beyond the first verse without supporting his argument from Scripture. He quotes Habakkuk in proof of justification by faith. In these early epistles it is evident that the apostle did witness:

'... both to small and great, saying NONE OTHER THINGS than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles' (Acts 26:22,23).

Paul had gone to the full limit of the revelation given to him, he had 'kept back nothing', he had 'not shunned to declare *all* the counsel of God' (Acts 20:20-27).

At the same time, the epistles written after Acts 28 contain a revelation that does not find its basis in Old Testament prophecy, and goes beyond the limits of the epistles written during the Acts. Therefore, either Paul received a fresh revelation, or he kept back some of the truth committed to him. If we deny the former and accept the latter, Paul is discredited as a faithful witness, and we need waste no time in considering his words.

In the passage last referred to, namely, Acts 20, there is an allusion to a future ministry of the apostle.

Chapter 16

THE PRISON MINISTRY OF PAUL

A twofold ministry

A mark of time is introduced by the apostle in Acts 20:22 — ‘And NOW’. He uses a somewhat similar expression in Romans 3:21, and in Acts 17:30 and in Ephesians 2:13. A contrast is instituted between two periods. In Acts 20:18-21 the apostle gives a summary of his witness ‘from the first day that I came into Asia ... testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ’. ‘And NOW’ (here is the beginning of a contrasted change), ‘behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But I make of no account, nor hold I my soul valuable to myself, so that I may finish my course, even the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to bear full testimony to the gospel of the grace of God’ (Acts 20:22-24).

Notice in this passage that before the literal fetters of Roman imprisonment are fastened upon the apostle he is already ‘bound in the spirit’. His resolution to go to Rome in face of all the warnings in every city, of which Acts 21:10-14 is recorded as an example, is connected with an intense desire to finish the ministry that he had received of the Lord Jesus. We infer from this passage that he was looking forward to a future ministry. But the reader may well object to inferences. Let us, therefore, turn to another passage.

In Acts 26, Paul before Agrippa makes public what had hitherto been unproclaimed, namely, that at his conversion

the Lord had spoken of a two-fold ministry. We can quite understand the inexpediency of speaking of this second ministry until the first was finished; but in Acts 20, Paul is already bound in spirit, in Acts 26 he is bound in fact, and he is soon to embark for Rome. He can now speak. He says that when the voice came saying, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?' he said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' and the reply was, 'I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest'. (So far there is nothing new revealed). 'But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness BOTH of these things which thou hast seen, *and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee*; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee' (Acts 26:14-17). 'These things' and 'those things' indicate a difference, 'both' speaks of two; 'I will appear' speaks of a future revelation. Reference is made to this 'prison ministry' in no uncertain manner in some of the epistles written after Israel was set aside. Let us look at Ephesians.

For you Gentiles

'For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ FOR YOU GENTILES' (Eph. 3:1). The last recorded statement of Paul on the question of his imprisonment was to the effect that he was bound with a chain for the HOPE OF ISRAEL. The same prisoner, but the same chain in the same prison now binds him for the 'hope of glory among the Gentiles'. Continuing in Ephesians 3, the apostle says: 'If ("since", the "if of argument) ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to YOU-WARD'. Acts 20:24 spoke of his second ministry as 'the gospel of the GRACE of God'. It is fitting that such should be the gospel of the dispensation so named. The apostle, however, has not reached his point. He is a prisoner FOR YOU; his stewardship is TO YOU, and now he adds, 'How that by revelation He made known unto me the MYSTERY'.

We have not exhausted the unique claims of the apostle yet, but can we find any passages that speak so definitely and so clearly of the special character of any other ministry in the New Testament? In Ephesians 4:1 the apostle again calls himself ‘the prisoner of (or in) the Lord’, and in chapter 6:19,20 he asks for prayer for himself, that utterance may be given unto him, that ‘I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, FOR WHICH I am an ambassador in BONDS’. Philippians speaks more than once of the apostle’s imprisonment; ‘my bonds’ (1:7,13); ‘Caesar’s household’ (4:22). Colossians 1:23 speaks of ‘the hope of the gospel ... whereof I Paul am made a minister’. Notice the personal emphasis, not merely ‘I’, but ‘I Paul — ’ not ‘we’, including Timothy, as in verse 1. Notice also verses 24-27:

‘Who now rejoice in my sufferings FOR YOU, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His BODY’S sake, which is THE CHURCH: whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for YOU, to fulfil (complete) the word of God; even the *mystery* which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in (among) you, the hope of glory’.

‘The mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds’ (Col. 4:3).

One other epistle is written from prison, namely,
2 Timothy:

‘Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner’. ‘Onesiphorus ... oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain’ (1:8,16).

‘... my gospel: wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds’ (2:8,9).

‘At my first answer (defence) no man stood with me ... (notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me); that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the **GENTILES** might hear’ (4:16,17).

This last chapter contains the answer to the wish expressed when, bound in the spirit, Paul faced his second

ministry. There, he says, ‘that *I may finish* my course’; here he says, *I have finished* my course’ (4:7).

Chapter 17

THE GOOD DEPOSIT

Paul’s unique ministry

It appears from all the statements cited above, that the prison ministry of Paul was definitely related to some special phase of truth peculiarly connected with the Gentiles. In 2 Timothy 1:11-14 he says of the gospel:

‘Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to guard my trust unto that day. Hold fast the pattern of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good trust do thou guard through the Holy Spirit, which dwelleth in us’ (Author’s translation).

It is usual to look at the words of Paul (1:12) as meaning that he had entrusted his future welfare to the hands of Christ. The original leaves the passage open. It simply reads, *the trust of me*. In the next verse but one the apostle uses the same words of Timothy. In 1 Timothy 6:20 it occurs again, ‘O Timothy, guard that trust’.

The pattern

Now between the apostle’s reference to the trust which he held, and the trust given to Timothy, comes the reference to his own teaching as constituting a pattern for Timothy. Again in 2 Timothy 2:2 this very personal note is sounded: ‘The things that thou hast heard of ME among many witnesses, *the same entrust* thou to faithful men who shall be competent to teach others also’. That which is partly suggested in chapter 1 is demonstrated in chapter 2.

‘The trust’ of 1:12 and 14 is *paratheke*; in 2:2 ‘commit’ or ‘entrust’ is *parathou*. ‘That good trust’, therefore, was the body of truth entrusted to Paul when he became the prisoner of Jesus Christ for the Gentiles, and passed on to Timothy, and by him to others. Envious apostolic succession! To this doubtless the apostle referred when he said, ‘I have kept the faith’. This special trust overwhelms the apostle as he thinks of all that it means. In 1 Timothy 1:11-14 he speaks of being entrusted with the gospel, who before was a blasphemer and a persecutor. The same spirit is manifested in Ephesians 3:8,9, ‘Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship (dispensation) of the mystery’. Let us read Paul’s own statement in Ephesians 3:2-11 :

‘If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery;

(as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets),

that the Gentiles, in spirit, should be fellow-heirs (fellow-members) of the same body, and fellow-partakers of His promise in Christ, by the gospel whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power. Unto me, the less than the least of all saints, has this grace been given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the untraceable riches of Christ, and to enlighten all as to what is the dispensation of the mystery which has been hidden away from (or since) the ages by God, Who did all things create, in order that now, unto the principalities and powers in the heavenlies might be made known, by the church, the exceeding complex wisdom of God, according to the purpose of the ages which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Author’s translation).

Here are riches that are	<i>Unsearchable</i>
Here is a dispensation of the	<i>Mystery (Secret)</i>
This mystery was effectually	<i>Hidden</i>
The wisdom unfolded is	<i>Very complex</i>
The whole was discovered by	<i>Revelation</i>
Paul was commissioned to	<i>Enlighten all</i>

The secret character of this dispensation, and Paul's special trust regarding it, we have seen already in Colossians 1:25-28.

Chapter 18

THE THREE SPHERES OF BLESSING

It will not be irrelevant to call attention to the three spheres of blessing which may be seen in the Word.

The earthly

Israel's destiny is that of a great nation, a kingdom of priests, with Jerusalem the centre of earth's administration. 'The meek shall inherit the earth' awaits fulfilment. In the new creation, too, the earth is not forgotten — 'I saw a new heaven and a new earth' (Rev. 21:1). The figure used in this sphere is that of 'the Wife'.

The heavenly

Although Abraham received the land of promise and became heir of the world, he looked for a *heavenly* country (Heb. 11:16). Verses 10 and 16 speak also of a 'city', and 12:22 of the *heavenly* Jerusalem. John tells us that he saw 'the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of *heaven*, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband' (Rev. 21:2). The Hebrews were addressed as 'partakers of the *heavenly* calling' (Heb. 3:1). The figure used in this sphere is 'the Bride'.

The super-heavenly

The reader may wonder how this expression ‘super-heavenly’ is justified. It is an attempt to reverence the accuracy of Scripture. The epistle to the Ephesians tells us that when Christ ascended He went up ‘far above all heavens, that He might fill all things’ (Eph. 4:10).

This passage alone would indicate the third sphere, but it does not stand alone. The epistle to the Ephesians contains one expression that is found nowhere else, namely, ‘in heavenly places’.

The blessings peculiar to the church of the one Body are found here (Eph. 1:3); to this exalted glory the Lord ascended when He was raised from the dead and set on the right hand of the Father in the heavenly places far above all principality and power (Eph. 1:20,21). Here, too, is the sphere of the church - He has ‘made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus’ (Eph. 2:6).

Should the reader question the unique character of these blessings at the right hand of God, let him set aside the epistles of Paul the prisoner, and then seek the slightest warrant for teaching that any redeemed sinner could entertain the hope of one day ascending ‘far above all’ heavens, principalities and powers. May the search bring a glorious conviction to every reader.

Chapter 19

ACTS 28:17-28 THE DISPENSATIONAL BOUNDARY

The key to the Word

We have before said that the recognition of the principle of rightly dividing the Word of truth, and its application to the last chapter of Acts, is the most important result that we hope for from the perusal of this booklet.

Paul’s all-day conference with the elders of Israel was epoch-making. Notice particularly his line of teaching,

and compare it with the inspired summary given of his subsequent ministry in verse 31.

Paul's last witness to Israel

‘He expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets’ (verse 23). Notice his theme — the all-embracing kingdom of God. Notice the section of that kingdom, that which is connected with the Saviour under His title of ‘Jesus’ (which is rarely used by Paul, though frequent in the record of the Lord’s earthly life), and that which was to be proved from the law and the prophets.

Paul's prison ministry to the Gentiles

‘Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ’ (verse 31). Notice the difference. The sphere of the kingdom of God now opened up is no longer that which is connected with ‘Jesus’, but the Lord Jesus Christ, and this being the dispensation of the mystery kept secret since the ages, no appeal can be made to the law and the prophets, as it can only be learned by a revelation as explained in Ephesians 3. Between these two passages comes the dispensational crisis.

Isaiah 6:10 — A crisis

The quotation of Isaiah 6:10 in each of its occurrences indicates a crisis. In Matthew 13:14,15, where it first occurs, there follows the rejection of Christ by Israel as Prophet, Priest and King (Matt. 12). In John 12:39-41 is recorded the conclusion of the public ministry to ‘His own’ who received Him not, before He turned to ‘His own’ (13:1) and their private teaching.

For the last time Isaiah 6:10 is quoted in Acts 28:25-28, closing the door of Israel's recognition, and opening the new door of the mystery to the Gentiles.

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

Chapter 20

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this booklet leads us but to the beginning of our theme. The right division of the Word is not an end in itself, it is a 'Key to Holy Scripture'. Just what the dispensation of the mystery is, what its special characteristics, what its relation to ordinances, what constitutes its 'blessed hope' are the themes of other booklets. *Far above All, or the Church of the One Body* seeks to indicate these special features, while *Ephesians via Romans* shows that while the *dispensation* of the mystery is unique, the *doctrinal* basis upon which it rests is found in the doctrine of the epistle to the Romans.

The two outstanding features of this present booklet may be reduced to two heads.

- (1) To understand the dispensations — Rightly divide the Word of truth.
- (2) To appreciate the dispensation of the mystery — Pray over Acts 28.

May the name of the Lord be magnified.

'CHRIST IS ALL'