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# Spiritual Blessings

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*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” Eph. 1:3*

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## The Epistle To The Ephesians: It Would Never Have Been Written If Paul Had Not Received A New Revelation!

By Jan Lilleby, Norway.

*(Note: When Jan uses the word ‘church’ in this article, he is referring to the ‘Church Which is His Body’, linked with the Dispensation of the Mystery. Jan’s Scripture quotations are from the Amplified Version.)*

### Part 1

Paul wrote an epistle to an assembly to which he had, four years earlier, bidden *Farewell*. In that *Farewell*, he pointed out that he had given them everything that God had told him to share. The prophet Ezekiel was threatened by God that unless he warned the ungodly Jews in Babylon, he would be charged with their blood. Paul was also aware of the similar responsibility he had to the Ephesian brethren, and was able to say to them: “...I am clean and innocent and not responsible for the blood of any of you” (Acts 20:26.)

Paul and the Ephesians together shed tears that day on the beach near Miletus. This was a final *Farewell* indeed, for they were never to see his face again. In the same moment, Paul assured them all that he had passed onto them everything to do with the Gospel of the Kingdom: “For I never shrank or kept back or fell short from declaring to you the whole purpose and plan and counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

Yet, in spite of his assurance that he had given them *absolutely everything* that the Lord had laid upon him, we find an epistle sent to them four years later in which he seems to indicate quite the opposite. All of a sudden, Paul had new doctrine to share.

We shall have a closer look at this below, and learn that the reason Paul wrote to the Ephesians was because he had received a totally new revelation from the Lord – a revelation of truth that he had not known at the time he bid them farewell on that beach. Ephesians is a re-educational document – written to an assembly *to tell them of a new calling and a new hope they had not heard of before*, viz. to be seated together in Christ in the Heavens above. All they knew from Paul’s earlier ministry had to do with the hope of the Kingdom of God on earth.

From the time perspective, we notice that this epistle separates itself from the epistles Paul had already written. It was written as long as four years after his stay in Ephesus, which had lasted for about three years. This alone gives us a sure clue that this epistle was not a “follow-up-epistle” after his long stay there. Had it been a traditional *follow-up*, like the epistles to the Galatians, Thessalonians and Corinthians, he would have written it **shortly afterwards** – and not as long after as four full years.

This fact alone shows us clearly that this letter had a whole new mission. It contains a whole *new*

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## President's Word

Greetings once again to all our readers. By the time you receive this issue of our magazine, our Bible study and fellowship day at Charlestown NSW will have come and gone. May I extend my appreciation to the other speakers, and to everyone in attendance, especially those who contributed to the day by way of providing food and setting up equipment, etc, etc. Without your support, these very enjoyable and informative days cannot go ahead. Thank you to each one.

### Rutherford Study Day

Last July, the BBFA held a Bible study day at Rutherford, near Maitland in the NSW Hunter Region. Many who attended suggested we should do it again - so that's exactly what we're going to do! The date: Saturday July 10th, the time: 10.00am - 3.00pm, and the venue: Rutherford Community Hall (Elphick Room) in Arthur St., Rutherford. Soups, sandwiches, wraps and more will be on the menu, as well as two Bible studies and great fellowship. Attendance and all refreshments, including lunch, are free. Everybody is welcome, so bring your Bible and bring a friend.

### Michael & Sylvia Penny in Australia

It is not long until British dispensational author and speaker Michael Penny arrives in Australia and New Zealand for a series of speaking engagements. For those not familiar with Michael, some biographical details, as well as a list of some of his works, may be found on our BBFA Book Agency website at [www.spiritualblessings.org/book/amp.htm](http://www.spiritualblessings.org/book/amp.htm)

Michael will lead meetings in New South Wales (Sept.14-29), Queensland (Sept. 29-Oct. 5), and Tasmania (Oct. 5-10). To find out more, please contact us at [admin@spiritualblessings.org](mailto:admin@spiritualblessings.org), or by using one of the addresses on page 12 of this issue. Michael will be speaking in New Zealand between Oct. 11-25, and you may find out more about those meetings by contacting Graeme Abbott in New Zealand - [graeme@ababooks.co.nz](mailto:graeme@ababooks.co.nz). Michael is a world class speaker, and this is a rare opportunity for those of us in this region. If you are able to get to

any of these meetings, we encourage you to set aside time to hear Michael speak, and discuss the Scriptures with him afterwards.

Michael Penny's visit to Australia coincides with the BBFA's Annual Conference, where he will be this year's guest speaker. We suggest that you mark Sept 18-20, 2010, as a time to keep free, so that you may join us for what always proves to be a special time in fellowship around God's Word. A registration form has been included with this issue of Spiritual Blessings for Australian readers. Both Campers and day visitors are welcome.

As usual, all of the BBFA's regular Bible study meeting details in different Australian regions are listed on page 12. We'd love to see you there!

Until next time, may the Lord be glorified by our walk, our witness, and the study of His Word.

*David Tavender.*

## Editorial

Our lead article in this issue is part 1 of a study by Jan Lilleby of Norway. Part 2 will be in the next issue. Jan told us recently of his journey with the Lord into Dispensational Truth. He writes now about the special place that Paul's epistle to the Ephesians has in God's purpose, and makes a point that, while obvious, seems to have escaped many. To assist readers who may not have studied the progress of the witness throughout Acts, we have added an overview of Acts to help in this regard.

Ron Hodge of our Newcastle Fellowship asks some searching questions about an important subject in "The Tree Of Life". I hope that readers will want to discuss the subject further. See the note at the bottom of Ron's study.

If there is a particular Scriptural question or subject that you would like us to explore for you, just let us know and we will be happy to do what we can.

My prayer, as always, is that we will all grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour as we study His Word, and will strive daily to have the balance right between doctrine and practice.

*Athol Walter.*

## ***The Epistle to the Ephesians cont. from Pg. 1***

set of doctrines, which dramatically separates it from what Paul taught the Ephesians when he stayed with them those three years described in Acts 19 and 20. Indeed, the epistle is fully opposed to the dramatic *Farewell* at Miletus – when Paul obviously not only knew they would never see his face again, but he also “knew” that he was all done with his mission to them. Finito! The end! He had done what he was originally sent to them for.

The epistle to the Ephesians was written to tell Kingdom-believers that the Kingdom had been postponed, that Israel was set aside, and that the Ephesians should, from then on, i.e. 62 AD, be aware of their new heavenly calling. This **new calling**, given to Paul by God, revealed the Mystery that God alone knew of — an assembly, a body of believers which had been chosen in Christ BEFORE God created the earth. This revelation contains a change of: #1. Hope of salvation, which is Heaven above where Christ is sitting; #2. Believers no longer were to keep any part of the Lord’s Kingdom commandments or the Law of Moses; #3. No longer is there a wall of partition between Jew and Gentile believers, for they are both, by faith made into “One New Man” in Christ. The position of “Jew First” was ended by this new revelation.

So, if we compare the *Farewell* at Miletus in Acts 20 with the epistle to the Ephesians, it may at first appear that there is a contradiction here. Paul had bid them a very decisive *Farewell*. They should not see his face again, which also implied that they would not hear from him again. But there is no contradiction. The epistle is a *new revelation* – and Paul had to write this, as he said himself: “...to enlighten ALL MEN and make plain to them what is the plan of the mystery kept hidden through the ages and concealed UNTIL NOW (62 AD) in God Who created all things by Christ Jesus” (Eph. 3:9). I shall come back to this.

At the time of the *Farewell*, Paul acted within the limits of the mission of the Kingdom of God on earth; he offered the Jews (Jews first) in the dispersion the return of Christ to establish the prophesied earthly millennium as a *response* to the repentance of all the nation of Israel. Their response should come in the order of *repentance, water baptism in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins, baptism and infilling with The Holy Spirit, keeping of the many commandments given for the Kingdom (ref. The Sermon on The Mount, Matt. 5-7), and other ordinances given to the Messianic assembly in the Acts period, including such things as Holy Communion.*

If I had to choose an appropriate “headline” for Paul’s ministry during the Acts period, I could not do better than his written words from 2 Cor. II, 3:6-11, in particular, verse 6:

**“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles — if indeed you have heard of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, of the same body, and partakers in Christ through the Gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. To me, who am the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the dispensation of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Christ Jesus; ...”**

***Ephesians 3:1-9.***

## The Epistle to the Ephesians, from previous page.

“(God) Who has qualified us as ministers and dispensers of a new covenant...”.

It is the same mission and doctrine as that of the twelve apostles – the New Covenant to Israel by the blood of Jesus, as prophesied by Ezekiel and Jeremiah in particular – and which Paul, meeting the Jews in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, referred to as .....”So now we are bringing you the good news (Gospel) that what God promised our forefathers, this He has completely fulfilled to us their children ...” (Acts 13:32).

The good news Paul spoke to Jews at Antioch in 43 AD, was **prophesied to Israel**, and thus could not be included in the Mystery mentioned in Eph. 3:1-9. It is neither the same Gospel, nor the same ministry. At that time, Paul was a minister of the New Covenant to Israel, a “Gospel” promised to their forefathers. It concerned Israel only, including, of course, their proselytes, to whom Paul was also sent (Acts 9:15). The Gospel (Greek: *evangelion*) in Acts 13:32 is not the Gospel given to Paul in the revelation of the Mystery in Eph. 3:9. **These two different messages must not be confused.** The “Good News” at Antioch – and all the places described in Acts – was the *fulfilling* of the promised and prophesied New Covenant to Israel, while the “Good News” in such prison epistles as Ephesians and Colossians, is the “Gospel of the Unsearchable Riches of Christ” – a Gospel based upon **free grace by faith**, outside any Mosaic law, commandments or ordinances.

As opposed to this *free grace* of our time and the Church, the Body of Christ – which is seated with Christ in heaven above, the saints in the thirty years of the Acts period had only a promise to enter the Kingdom of God on earth, when Jesus would return from heaven. The New Covenant was given ONLY to *those who had lived under the previous (or Old) Covenant*, the Law of Moses given at Sinai – called the ministry (or dispensation) of death (2 Cor. 3:7). The New Covenant was to free the believing Jews from the curse of the Law, because *Christ had fulfilled the Law for them*. The New Covenant could thus never have been given to the Church, the Body of Christ, because as far as that Church is concerned, *the Law was abolished* when Paul had his new

revelation from God (Eph. 2:15; Col. 3:11). The Church has never been under the Law, and therefore it cannot come under the New Covenant (Eph. 2:12).

While the Law was *fulfilled by Christ* for Jewish believers of the Acts period, the Law itself still remained (Rom. 3:31). But for all believers, Jews and Gentiles alike, in the post-Acts *dispensation of the Grace of God given to Paul for us* (Mystery of Eph.), the Law is fully abolished and cannot be applied to the Body of Christ. There is nothing to keep. We are already seated with Christ in the heavens above, and do not have to keep any commandment or ordinance to be blessed.

We shall have a more detailed look at these issues in Part 2, and compare what Paul taught the Ephesians when he stayed with them for those three years, with what he later wrote in his epistle to them. We shall have to observe that there are *two entirely different missions, purposes and hopes of salvation* in view. And these must be kept separate. God Himself made this strict and almost militant separation, by revealing to Paul the great Secret which was hidden before He created the earth.

We must not confuse heaven with earth, the Church with Israel, or the Kingdom Gospel with the Grace Gospel. These things must be kept separated indeed. **But this separation has been almost totally absent in the whole history of the Church on earth.**

Even the so-called “Church Fathers”, in the early post-apostolic age, failed to maintain this separation. They turned away from Paul, thus turning their backs on God and His revelation to Paul. However, Paul has handed it on to us through the epistles to the Ephesians, Colossians, Titus, Philemon and Timothy. And this failure to see and preach the Mystery as it was originally given to the Church, has led to the vast confusion we see today among the denominations of Christendom.

Consequently, we find the observance of the *Kingdom-ordinances, which were never given to the Church*. We see water baptism, baptism with the Holy Spirit, the laying on of hands for healings and miracles, tongues and prophesies, Holy Communion, confession of sins, - all done in seeming ignorance of the fact that Paul revealed an *entirely new Gospel*,

which has none of those things. Ministers of most denominations keep on reading from the four Gospels, telling the Church “..we have to go and preach the Kingdom”. But Paul tells us – according to God’s **latest revelation recorded in Biblical history and doctrine** – to “...go and preach the (revealed) Mystery to all the world” (Eph. 3:9). ❖

Part 2 of this article will be in our next issue.

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## A Time Frame Of Acts

by Athol Walter.

To help readers who are unfamiliar with the passage of time throughout the Book of Acts, the following notes are presented.

It is vital to understand the progress of God’s purpose throughout Acts, and to know the order of events. God followed a programme or timetable. We cannot date everything in Acts precisely, but there are definite pointers to be noted, starting in the first chapter of Acts. We Gentiles miss their significance, but Jewish readers would be aware of them immediately. Let’s try to get those events of long ago into a proper timeframe.

The Book of Acts is a continuation of the Gospel account, as Luke states in the opening verses. It starts just after the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

The Lord was crucified on Nisan 14th. The next day, i.e. the 15th., special offerings took place in the Temple. From that day, seven weeks were counted off, and on the day following, i.e. on the 50th. day, the Feast of Pentecost was celebrated. Pentecost is from the Greek word meaning fiftieth.

In between His Resurrection and Ascension, the Lord spent much time with the disciples, instructing them about the Kingdom of God. He ascended from the Mount of Olives on the 40th. day, i.e. 10 days before Pentecost.

The disciples were told to wait in Jerusalem for the ‘power from on high’, which took place on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Now let’s apply these facts. The stirring events recorded in Acts 2 took place 50 days after the crucifixion of Christ, that not quite two months.

Acts 2:46 says that the disciples continued daily in the Temple etc. I think it was quite soon after the

Day of Pentecost that Peter and John healed the lame man at the Gate Beautiful as they were going in to the Temple on one of their daily visits. A large crowd gathered, and Peter did not mince his words. He told them that they had killed the Prince of life, but that, if they repented, God would send Jesus, and the times of restoration spoken of by the prophets would follow.

The excitement of the crowd brought the Temple guards, and Peter and John were hauled up before the High Priest and other rulers of the people. Peter laid the death of the Lord at their feet, and states that the lame man was healed in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Yes, I am guessing, but I think we are well within reasonable limits if we say that Peter and John were standing before the very men who had put the Lord to death, within three months of the Crucifixion. God wasn’t wasting time, was He?

The next point to notice is that in ch. 6, a dispute arose in the assembly between Hebrews and Hellenists. The Hellenists were not Greeks, but Greek speaking Jews, whereas the Hebrews were Jews who spoke Aramaic.

The dispute brings Stephen into prominence, and in Acts 6, from v. 8 on, we read of Stephen’s activities and the opposition it caused. Don’t miss the almost casual reference in v. 9, that some from a certain synagogue were unable to refute Stephen’s teaching. Several places from which these people came are mentioned, one of those places being Cilicia. Does it ring any bells? In Acts 21:39, Paul says that he was from Tarsus, **in Cilicia**. Was he involved in the plot to drag Stephen before the Sanhedrin? I suspect so, as we find that he was there in the thick of the action when Stephen was martyred.

This is where Saul, later called Paul, is first mentioned. Expositors vary greatly as to when Stephen died, but I personally think that Stephen was killed at least 7 or 8 years after the Crucifixion.

What is more important for us than the date of Stephen’s death, however, is to note what happened after it. As already noted, it was here that Saul of Tarsus entered the fray. Acts 8 tells us that, following Stephen’s death, a fierce persecution broke out upon

the Believers. Many fled from Jerusalem, which resulted in the witness spreading throughout Palestine. Ch. 9 records Saul's dramatic conversion on the Damascus Road. What a shock he got! But what I want you to notice is that Saul's conversion takes place **before** Peter is sent to Cornelius, a Gentile. It may be a coincidence, of course, but after sixty years of learning about God's Word, I don't think so! Paul was to be the apostle to the Gentiles, and I suggest that Peter was not allowed anywhere near a Gentile until Paul had come onto the scene.

Many Christians still persist in believing that Gentiles were converted in Acts 2. But ask yourself this question. If Gentiles had been in the assembly of believers from the beginning, why did the Holy Spirit have to go to such extraordinary lengths to get Peter to go to Cornelius?

Then, in ch. 11, the Jerusalem assembly hauls Peter over the coals for daring to go to a Gentile. But again, I ask, why would Peter's actions be a problem to these believers in Jerusalem if there were already many Gentile members among them?

The other thing to note is that very soon after these events, Peter fades from the record, which is not to say that he stopped his work. Of course not, but God's work moves on and the Holy Spirit's spotlight turns to Paul and his ministry to the Jewish people living outside of Palestine.

First, however, note that Stephen's death marks a climax in the witness to Israel. Those people living in Palestine had received their second offer of the Kingdom in answer to the Lord's prayer on the Cross. When they killed Stephen, they said for the second time, in the words of the parable, "We will not have this Man to reign over us."

But many Jews were living outside Palestine and they also must be given a chance to respond. We must not forget that what God was looking for back then was not the salvation of individual Jews, as important as that was and is. No, it had to be a national repentance and recognition that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed their Messiah. That national repentance has not happened yet, but we know it will at the second coming of the Lord.

After his conversion, Paul started immediately to witness that Jesus was the Messiah, but then spent

3 years away from the public eye, apparently receiving instruction from the Ascended Lord. After his return, he is accepted into the family of believers through the help of Barnabas, and then, under the call and guidance of the Holy Spirit, he begins what are called his missionary journeys. The significant thing to note is that throughout his ministry, right up to the third last verse of Acts 28, Paul always went to the Jew first.

Some critics of the Acts 28 position point out that v. 28 should read, "...the salvation of God **has been sent** to the Gentiles ...". This is indeed correct. They say that this means God had turned to the Gentiles earlier than that day when Paul dismissed those Jewish leaders in Rome. Some believe that it happened when Paul turned to Gentiles in Acts 13:48. If we read on, however, we will find that in the very next city, Iconium, Paul and Barnabas go into the synagogue again. Still Jew first.

I believe that the sense of Acts 28: 28 is conveyed by a paraphrase such as this: "Therefore or Since you have rejected God's offer of restoration of the Kingdom, He has, as a result, sent the message of salvation to the Gentiles, and they will hear and accept it."

Paul's meaning is not that the message was sent to Gentiles at an earlier period, but that, consequent on Israel's rejection, was sent to the Gentiles. It is a sad commentary on Christian history that the majority of believers of Paul's day turned from him and did not accept the new revelation revealed in Ephesians and Colossians. The resulting confusion is with us to this day. ❖

**(Editor's note: Readers who are interested in going further into the chronology of Acts, or Bible chronology in general, are referred to "The Companion Bible", App. 50; "The Apostle Of The Reconciliation" by Charles Welch; "Biblical Chronology" by Dr. Peter John-Charles, or the articles "The Chronology of Acts" in "Spiritual Blessings, Vol. 23, Nos. 3, 4 & 5. If you don't have those issues, they can be downloaded from our website, or write in, and we will post them to you. All the books mentioned are available through our Book Agency.)**

**Progress Of The Witness in Acts**

**“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” Luke 23:34.**

Geographical	Theme	Ministry	Summary
Acts 1-2:46. JERUSALEM Jews only	Commission of the Twelve. Pentecost.	Peter and the Twelve	Acts 2:46, 47. “And the Lord added daily those that were to be saved.”
Acts 3:1 - 6:6. JERUSALEM	Dispensational miracle. (Healing of lame man) Hellenists dispute	Peter & John  The seven Deacons	Acts 6:7. “... and the number of disciples multiplied IN JERUSALEM greatly ...”
Acts 6:8 - 9:30. Samaria, Damascus	Stephen’s witness & martyrdom. Philip - Samaritans & Ethiopian. Persecution by Saul & conversion.	Stephen. Philip, Peter & John.  Saul.	Acts 9:31. “Then had the churches rest throughout all JUDEA & GALILEE & SAMARIA, and were edified ... and multiplied.”
Acts 9:32 - 11:20. Caesarea	Cornelius & Hellenists evangelized.	Peter & those scattered at persecution.	Acts 11:21. “And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed ...”

— — — — — **End of the Acts of Peter. Beginning of the Acts of Paul** — — — — —

Acts 11:22 - 12:23. ANTIOCH Jews, Hellenists, Gentiles.	Saul is called to Antioch. Herod kills James and is himself smitten.	Barnabas and Saul.	Acts 12:24. “But the Word of the Lord grew and multiplied.”
Acts 12:25 - 16:4. Asia Minor	Saul separated, called Paul. Dispensational miracle (Jew, Elymas the sorcerer, blinded). 1st. missionary journey. Defends Gospel of Uncircumcision.	Paul, Barnabas, Silas and Timothy.	Acts 16:5. “And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.”
Acts 16:6 - 19:19. Europe	Paul enters Europe; founds churches. 2nd. & 3rd. miss. journeys.	Paul, Timothy, Silas, Aquila, Priscilla & Apollos.	Acts 19:20. “So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed.”
Acts 19:21 - 28:29. ROME. Meets Jews first, Isa. 6:9, 10. Jews dismissed (divorced).	Paul a prisoner. End of ministry to Israel. start of new one. Rome. Israel set aside.	Paul.	Acts 28:31. “preaching the Kingdom of God and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.””
Acts 28:30, 31. “...Paul ... received ALL who came in to him.”	New ministry begins. The Secret revealed for the first time ever. Ephesians written at this point.	Paul, Timothy, Epaphroditus etc.	

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# Words Of The Holy Spirit

**Studies of Scriptural words/phrases which may not be well-understood by modern readers.**

## **The Tree Of Life.**

**By Ron Hodge, Newcastle**

Often when we read Scripture, there is a tendency not only to read what is there, but also to read into it something that is not there. This tendency is usually based on an incorrect understanding of Scripture which, probably, is a result of incorrect teaching. The verses of Scripture that we are about to look at have suffered much because of this tendency.

In Gen. 3:22 & 23 we read, “And the Lord God said ‘Behold the man is become as one of Us, to know good and evil and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat and live for ever’, – therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden ...”

I have read and heard on a number of occasions that Adam and Eve were denied access to the tree of life by being banished from the Garden, because God would not allow them, as sinners, to partake of the tree of life and live for ever as immortal sinners. But is this statement true?

To discover the truth we need to look carefully at the words, and the first thing that should be noticed is that the tree in question is called the “tree of life”. In the Companion Bible, the marginal notes for Gen. 2:9 express it this way – “the tree supporting and continuing the life which had been imparted”. This implies that eating from the tree was periodically necessary for the continuation of life or the restoration of life should it have been lost through an accident.

The Septuagint – the Greek translation of the Old Testament – confirms this by its translation, “the tree of LIVES”, again implying that the tree had the power to continually sustain life and restore life in the case of accidental death.

Although it is not our subject, it is obvious that the human body was designed and constructed in such a way that it could die, and that Adam was the prototype of the One who would come as the redeemer and willingly die to fulfill God’s plan of redemption.

The fact that Adam was sinless when he was formed, yet could have died, has nothing to do with his death which came about as a result of his sin of disobedience. Because of that sin, he lost access to the tree of life. We, likewise, have been denied access to the tree of life, because Adam passed death on to all his descendants. Life for us can now only be found in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Adam’s state of sinlessness when he was created, is a parallel with our Lord Jesus Christ, who though truly human, was also sinless and as a human, could also die.

At this stage of our investigation, it is important to note that in Gen. 2:16-17, it is clearly stated that Adam was not denied access to “the tree of life” when he was first placed in the garden. It is also important to note that the tree in question was called the “tree of life”, **not** the “tree of immortality.”

The Greek word *athanasia*, translated immortality, means deathlessness or being unable to die. In 1 Corinthians 15:53, 54 it is clearly stated that immortality is put on at resurrection.

Many denominations teach that we humans have an immortal soul and that the “soul” lives on after death. The teaching of the immortality of the soul cannot be found in Scripture and its origin is in the teaching of the Greek Philosophers, Socrates and Plato. I mention that because I think that this incorrect teaching concerning the immortality of the soul is what is read into the meaning of the tree of life.

In Rev. 22:2, we again find the ‘tree of life’, and there we read: “In the midst of the street of it and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits and yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” Take note that the leaves of the tree are for healing of the nations. It is not in any way implied that the tree of life is for the purpose of imparting immortality to the nations. In v. 14, we read about those who have access to the tree of life: “Blessed are those who do His

commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.”

The word translated healing is the Greek word *therapeuo* and means to restore to health. This does not presuppose death on the new earth, but indicates the possibility of death as was the case for Adam.

The words “live for ever” in Gen. 3:22 also need our attention. The K.J.V. translates the Hebrew word ‘Olam’ as forever. However, Young’s Concordance gives the meaning of Olam as age lasting, although I have heard it argued that Olam can mean a continuous period of time. The Septuagint uses the Greek word *aiionios* as the equivalent of Olam, and *aiionios* is always translated age-lasting.

My thoughts about this subject are that Adam and Eve were denied access to the “tree of life”, not the “tree of immortality”. God immediately denied Adam and Eve access to the tree of life when they sinned, because He (God) was not prepared to wait until the

end of the age before they started to die. If Adam had partaken of the tree of life after he had sinned, but before being banished from the garden, then he would have lived for an age (what ever period of time that may have been), and only after that, would he have started to die.

So I challenge you to consider carefully what has been written about the “tree of life”, carefully check the relevant Scriptures and then come to your own conclusions.

Remember that God’s word is consistent and logical. ❖

*(Editor’s note: We would like to hear any comments and/or questions you may have about this subject. Please send them to The Editor, using either the postal or email address which you will find on page 12, and they will be passed on to Ron for comment.)*

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## Scriptural Discrimination

By Athol Walter.

The word discrimination is a suspect word these days because of ‘political correctness’. But, in spite of that, if we did not discriminate in many areas of our daily lives, we would be in considerable trouble. Should we not discriminate between the red and the green lights on traffic signals? Should we not discriminate between the right and left sides of the road when driving? Of course we should, and there are many other examples where discrimination is necessary. Yet many Christians seem to think that their faculty of discrimination is unnecessary when considering the Bible’s teaching. Scripture itself, however, tells us more than once that we should indeed discriminate. See, for instance, 2 Tim. 2:15.

Another word we could use instead of discrimination is discernment, and this brings us to the passage I have in mind – Philippians 1:9 & 10. It is interesting that Paul, here, does not say that, as our love grows, we should be more loving or more kind, but that our knowledge and discernment in all aspects of our Christian lives should increase.

So, what are we to be discriminating about in Scripture? Law and Grace are obvious candidates. Most of us discriminate easily between what was given to Israel through Moses, and what has since become our blessings in the Lord Jesus Christ.

What is more difficult, however, is to discern between such things as the different Gospels found in the Bible, and also the different callings or, dare I say it, churches. (I am not referring to denominations here!) Yet it is precisely in these and associated areas that the faculty of discrimination is most needed. It is not true that there is only ‘one church’ in the Bible. For instance, in Acts 7:38, Stephen refers to ‘the church (or congregation) in the wilderness’. I don’t know about you, but I have never belonged to that ‘church’, for he is referring to the people of Israel. The Greek word used in that verse is ‘*ekklesia*’ and our difficulty might not be so great if we would use the words ‘assembly’ or ‘calling’ instead of ‘church’.

It is beyond dispute that there are different callings in Scripture and I want to highlight three that we must

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discriminate between. They are: 1, Israel the nation; 2, the Bride of the Lamb; 3, the Church which is His Body. It is careless exegesis, to say the least, to refer to the Bride and Body of Christ as being one and the same company. If only we would stick to the titles Scripture gives these different companies, we would be less likely to err.

Scripture knows nothing of the Bride of Christ, the correct term being the Bride of the Lamb. The 'Church Which Is His Body' is distinct from both Israel and the Bride of the Lamb. Each calling is built on the one foundation of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus for there is no other, but the destination – the place of blessing – for each of these companies is different. Also, while some instructions for these distinct companies are the same, many are different, and it is in these areas that we must exercise discrimination, 'so that we may surely learn to ... approve and prize what is excellent and of real value ... (so) that you may approach the day of Christ, not stumbling nor causing others to stumble', as the Amplified Version has it (Phil. 2:10). Now, let us look further into the Word of God.

### 1. The Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Matt. 5:5. The word translated 'earth' is 'ge', which gives us 'ge-ography', and can mean land as well as earth. Stephen says in Acts 7:3 that God told Abraham to leave his country and go to a land that would be shown to him. Country and land are both forms of the word ge. Abraham certainly was not told by God to leave the earth! So, I think the correct translation of Matt. 5:5 is "... they shall inherit the land." We hardly need to ask which land is meant, do we? But just in case anyone is unsure, it is the same land promised to Abraham.

God promised Abraham many things, among which was a specific land. Israel has never yet occupied all of that promised land. During Solomon's reign, their borders were greatly enlarged, but the full-filling of that promise is yet to come.

Later, God made a promise to David. It is in 1 Sam. 7:11 & 12. See also Psalm 89:19–37. In plain words, the Lord promised David that he would have a descendant sitting on his throne for ever. This was true right up to the destruction of Judah by

Nebuchadnezzar. Since that time there has been no throne of David in Jerusalem. Even today the State of Israel is not a kingdom so there is still no throne in Jerusalem. But it will come, because God said so. The complete full-filling of the promise looks forward to David's greater Son, Jesus the Messiah. With all this in mind, consider these verses:

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, **the Son of David**, the Son of Abraham." Matt. 1:1.

"Then the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for ... you .. will bring forth a Son ... Jesus. ...And the Lord God will give Him **the throne of His father David**, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his Kingdom will never end.'" Luke 1:30, 33.

It looks as if God was serious about His promise to David! Then, 30 years later, John the Baptist appeared out of the desert with his message: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." A little later, when the Lord started His ministry to Israel, His message was exactly the same. Need I say that when we read the word 'Kingdom' in these passages, we must not substitute the word 'Church'?

Jumping over a lot of material, we have the Lord fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9. "... See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey." In Luke's account, which is in 19:28–44, the crowds understood He was claiming to be Israel's King, much to the chagrin of the Pharisees. And several days later, Pilate, knowing it would upset the Jews, put a sign on the cross saying, "The King of the Jews".

Even though I have left out much material, it is clear that the Lord came to be Israel's Messiah, a role that included kingship as well as redemption. But Israel said, in the words of the parable, "We will not have this man to reign over us."

### 2. The Bride and New Jerusalem.

Contrary to popular opinion, however, God did not finish with Israel after the Crucifixion, for the Lord prayed for their forgiveness ( Luke 23:34). The ministry throughout ALL of Acts is the answer to that prayer. Right to the last chapter of Acts, it is Jew first. And it is in two epistles that Paul wrote during the Acts years, **and only there**, that we read anything about the New Jerusalem. These two epistles are

Galatians and Hebrews. (Revelation tells of the actual coming of the New Jerusalem in the future.)

We suddenly find out that Abraham, and many others in the Old Testament, were looking for this city with foundations built by God. Strangely, there is not a hint of this city in the Old Testament, but obviously, these saints of old knew about it. The point to note is that it is mentioned in the context of overcomers. These, I believe, are the ones who are members of the Bride of the Lamb, together with those who accepted the Lord Jesus as Israel's Messiah in the time of His rejection. They will also be joined by those who are faithful during the future, terrible time of Jacob's trouble.

It should be noted here that, while the New Jerusalem is obviously not the same as the earthly Jerusalem, the two are linked. Perhaps a good way to express it briefly is to say that Israel is an elect nation, and the company called the Bride of the Lamb is an election from within that elect nation.

Several verses will show clearly that the same Kingdom as was offered in the Gospel period is once more on offer during Acts.

"Therefore, (the disciples) asked Him saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?'" Acts 1:6.

"Therefore, (David) being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn an oath to him, that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne." Acts 2:30.

"So when they had appointed (Paul) a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening ..." Acts 28:23.

It is at the conclusion of that day-long conference that Paul pronounces God's judgement on His disobedient people: "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent unto the Gentiles, and they will hear it!". Acts 28:28.

**"Thus says the Lord: 'If you can break My covenant with the day and ... the night, so that there will not be day or night ... then My covenant**

**may also be broken with David My servant so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne ..." Jer. 33:20 & 21.**

### **3. Heavenly Places Far Above All.**

Following Paul's dismissal of the Jewish leaders in Rome — which symbolised the dismissal of the nation — he was held in custody in Rome for two years, during which time he wrote the epistles to the Ephesian, Philippian and Colossian churches. These epistles detailed the new revelation, the Secret, which spoke of a part of God's plan that He had kept hidden in Himself from before the foundation of the world. This is the vital point that Jan Lilleby makes in his study. With the revelation of the Secret, a new ecclesia (company or church) is called into being called the 'Church Which Is His Body'. Unlike the other two callings already discussed, this calling has no connection with Abraham either in the earthly aspect, centred on the earthly Jerusalem, or in the heavenly aspect, centred on the New Jerusalem. The Dispensation of the Secret fills the gap between the dismissal of Israel at the end of Acts, and the restoration of Israel at the Lord's yet future return.

The sphere, or place, of blessing for the Body of Christ is at the right hand of God, far above all. Some verses of Scripture:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love ..." Eph. 1:3 & 4

"... according to the working of His mighty power ... in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places far above all ..." Eph. 1:19 & 20.

"But God, who is rich in mercy, ... made us alive together with Christ ... and raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus ..."

Now I ask you, do you think that the land (1), the New Jerusalem (2) and the right hand of God (3) are all one and the same? Your answer to this question will seriously affect your understanding of God's Word, and your place in His purposes. ❖

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