God's Sacred Secrets by T Ernest Wilson

Mystery Doctrines of the New Testament

To the memory of the great spiritual giants of the Nineteenth Century, who, under the guidance and illumination of the Holy Spirit, and rightly dividing the Word of Truth by observing dispensational distinctions, opened up the treasure house of God's Word to succeeding generations, this volume is respectfully dedicated.

Introduction

Each generation of Christians, it has been stated, must discover the Word of God for itself. The truth is the same in every age, but it has to be applied to the varied circumstances and needs of each period of time. Isaac re-dug the wells which his father Abraham had excavated and called them by their old names (Gen. 26). The Philistines had filled them in. They needed to be cleaned out so that the refreshing water could spring up again. The modern Philistines are still busy choking the wells of truth. Luther, Calvin, Wesley, and John Nelson Darby were well-diggers. They rediscovered and applied the truth in the Word of God to the people of God in their day. We must do so in ours.

The object of these studies is to restate the great doctrines of the New Testament which are called "mysteries." Other men have done this in the past. But there is a need to apply them to the special circumstances of these difficult and dangerous times which the New Testament calls "the last days."

The word "mystery" is not found in the Old Testament, but the term "dark sayings" occurs three times (Ps. 49:4; 78:2; Prov. 1:6). The Greek word musterion (mystery) is used twenty-seven times in the AV of the New Testament (Matt. 13:11; Mk. 4:11; Lk. 8:10; Rom. 11:25; 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:7; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; 15:51; Eph. 1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19; Col. 1:26, 27 [twice]; 2:2; 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:7; 1 Tim. 3:9, 16; Rev. 1:20; 10:7; 17:5, 7). Note that out of these twenty-seven references, it is used by the Apostle Paul twenty-one times. Paul calls himself a steward "of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4:1).

The word "mystery" in the New Testament does not mean something mysterious, but a matter which up to this point has been hidden in God and is now revealed. The word means a truth undiscoverable by human reason, but is now divinely disclosed. William Sunday comments: "Among the heathen, it is always a secret concealed, but with Paul, a secret revealed." H. A. Ironside, writing on the subject, refers to the Eleusinian mysteries: teaching not given to the multitude, but imparted to a select company of initiates. As used in the New Testament, they are great truths which are the common property of all believers and not just a special class.

An examination of all the references in the New Testament to the mysteries would seem to indicate that there are at least fourteen, divided into four categories: doctrinal,

dispensational, devotional, and diabolical. They cover all the main doctrines and themes of the teaching of the apostles.

In these studies, we propose to look at them in the following order:

Doctrinal

Mystery of the Faith (1 Tim. 3:9)

Mystery of the Gospel (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 6:19)

Mystery of Jew and Gentile in One Body (Eph. 3)

Mystery of the Bride (Eph. 5:32; Rev. 19-20)

Mystery of the Seven Stars and Seven Churches (Rev. 1:20)

Mystery of Godliness (1 Tim. 3:16)

Dispensational

Mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 13)

Mystery of Israel's Blindness (Rom. 11:25)

Mystery of the Rapture of the Church (1 Cor. 15:51)

Mystery of His Will (Eph. 1:9)

Mystery of God (Rev. 10:7)

Devotional

Mystery of the Indwelling Christ (Col. 1:24-29)

Diabolical

Mystery of Iniquity (2 Thess. 2:7)

Mystery, Babylon the Great (Rev. 17-18)

Part One: Doctrinal

Chapter One: The Mystery of the Faith

Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience (1 Tim. 3:9).

In the pastoral epistles, Paul gives his final instructions to his young fellow-servants who will pick up the torch of testimony after he is gone. The key word of 1 Timothy is "the house of God." In 2 Timothy, it is "the man of God." In Titus, it is "the grace of God." In all three Epistles he is very much concerned about the great basic doctrines of Christianity which he calls "the good deposit" (2 Tim. 1:14). It was a trust which had been committed to him by the Lord Himself, and now he was passing it on to his dear son in the faith.

In outlining the respective responsibilities and qualifications of the elder and the deacon (or servant) of the church, among other things he says that the deacon must hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.

In these final letters of Paul, the term “the faith” means, not only the confidence with which we receive the gospel message, and our trust in the Saviour which it reveals, but is a synonym for the message itself. It is not just the act of believing, but the doctrine believed. In Acts 6:7, we read that a great company of the priests were obedient unto the faith. In Acts 16:5, the churches were established in the faith. In Judo 3, we are exhorted to contend earnestly for the faith once for ail delivered unto the saints.

As well as the actual term, “the faith” Paul speaks of the truth, and the doctrine. Twelve times in these letters he mentions the truth. While we naturally speak of holding or keeping the faith, we usually speak of knowing the truth. The gospel is received into the heart; the truth is grasped by the mind. Of the eleven passages in the Pastorals which mention the truth, five are concerned with knowing it. In each case, it is the strong word epignosis (thorough knowledge) which is used. While the faith indicates that which is believed among God’s people, and the doctrine points to that which is taught, the truth is that which it is in itself, and in relation to God. In Paul’s later epistles, and especially in the Pastorals, a certain body of teaching had come to he the common belief (called the common faith in Titus 1:4) of the saints everywhere.

Definition of the Faith

In Paul’s great doctrinal Epistle to the Ephesians, the apostle in chapter 4:4-6 outlines the seven unities of Christianity. Among them is the “one faith.” What is it? Modern ecumenism avoids sharply defining the Christian faith through fear of introducing some disturbing element. But an undefined faith produces a dubious paradise with a weak and doubtful peace at any price, a heretics’ haven. The unity of the Spirit is based firmly on the unity of the faith. Modern efforts at organizational unity are based on compromise and a watered-down definition of the faith. There is a world of difference between organized uniformity and organic unity. One is man-made; the other is divine.

Luke defines the faith as “those things which are most surely believed among us” (Lk. 1:1). In Acts 2:42, it is called “the apostles’ doctrine.” John calls it “the doctrine of Christ” (2 John 9). The doctrine of Christ would embrace, not only the teaching given by Christ, but also the doctrines concerning His Person and work. These would certainly include the following truths: The deity of Christ, His humanity, His eternal sonship, His virgin birth, His impeccability, His vicarious death, His bodily resurrection. His ascension, His priesthood, and His second advent.

The apostles’ doctrine would include: the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, coequal and co-eternal; the plenary inspiration of the original autographs of Holy Scripture; the divine Person and work of the Holy Spirit; the eternal punishment of the lost; and the eternal bliss of the redeemed.

These great truths are basic and foundational, and could be defined as “the faith” of which the apostle speaks, and the good deposit which he commits to his son Timothy.

Departure from the Faith

The eleven passages in the pastorals where “the faith” is mentioned, are as follows:

i) Concerning the faith have made shipwreck (1 Tim. 1:19)

ii) Hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience (1 Tim. 3:9)

iii) Some shall depart from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1)

iv) Nourished up in the words of the faith (1 Tim. 4:6)

v) He hath denied the faith (1 Tim. 5:8)

vi) Erred from the faith (1 Tim. 6:10)

vii) Fight the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12)

viii) Erred concerning the faith (1 Tim. 6:21)

ix) Reprobate concerning the faith (2 Tim. 3:8)

x) I have kept the faith (2 Tim. 4:7)

xi) Sound in the faith (Titus 1:13)

It will be noticed that in more than half of these passages there is a solemn warning about departing from the faith. In each of them, a different word is used for this departure.

These are: made shipwreck, depart from (apostatize), deny, cast off, led astray, miss the mark. Some of these are pictorial words, especially the first and the last. They graphically portray a ship battered on the rocks, and an archer who misses the target. This idea of the archer is used three times (1 Tim. 1:6; 6:21; 2 Tim. 2:18).

In 1 Timothy 1:5, the apostle tells us that the end or aim of the charge is love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned. This is the real mark or target at which to aim. However, some had not only missed the mark but were aiming at the wrong target. These were aiming at being teachers of the law, while those in chapter 6 wished to impress others with their possession of science or knowledge. Their aim was wrong. Then others had made complete shipwreck of the faith, having thrust from them a pure conscience, like a sailor throwing overboard his compass and navigational charts.

Paul uses the word apostasy in 1 Timothy 4:1. Describing the characteristics of the latter times, he says: “Some shall depart (apostatize) from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons.” Apostasy is reaching the point of no return. One may be recovered from backsliding like Peter, but for apostasy, there is nothing left but judgment. Peter was a backslider, but Judas Iscariot was an apostate. The apostate never had life. Enlightened—yes, but never regenerated. The apostasy is not only doctrinal and moral; it is satanic. We can expect an increasing upsurge of demon activity as the time draws near for the appearing of our great Cod and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Defense of the Faith

Paul's great object in these final exhortations is that we should not only know the truth and teach the doctrine, but that we should guard and defend the faith. Jude adds his tes- timony in verse 3 of his epistle in these words: "It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith once for all delivered unto the saints." During his lifetime of service, Paul had to contend against legalism at Galatia, against antinomianism at Corinth, and against the beginning of Gnostic error at Colosse. These old heresies have had a resurrection in our day under new names, but basically they are the same. There is the promoting of salvation by the works of the law on the one hand. Then the opposite extreme is being purveyed: if we are saved by grace, then our conduct does not matter. It all develops into a final attack on the Person of our glorious Lord. Gnosticism gave the Saviour a place, but not the place and therefore not His place at all.

The believers' resource is, first, love out of a pure heart—love for Christ and His people. Then there must be the maintenance of a good conscience—not the seared, cauterized, insensitive conscience of the apostate. Finally, the unfeigned, unhypocritical faith of a Lois, a Eunice, a Paul, and a Timothy is required—faith in the God who works all things after the counsel of His own will (Eph. 1:11).

We may well pray to be kept sound in the faith, to hold it in a pure conscience, to fight the good fight for it, and thus to be able to say at the last, like Paul, "I have kept the faith!"

Chapter 2: The Mystery of the Gospel

Now to Him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began (Rom. 16:25).

And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel (Eph. 6:19).

The mystery of the gospel is mentioned at the conclusion of two of the most important epistles in the New Testament, those to the Romans and to the Ephesians. Many commentators say that this mystery is the same as the mystery of Jew and Gentile in one body in the Church, expounded in Ephesians 3. Haldane takes the position that it refers to the gospel itself, as expounded in the Epistle to the Romans. A careful examination of the context in Romans 16:25-27 confirms this.

The word for gospel, euangellion, is used seventy-seven times in the New Testament: twelve times in the Gospels, twice in Acts, sixty-one times in Paul's Epistles, once in 1 Peter, and once in the Revelation. The verb, to preach the gospel, or to evangelize, is used fifty-six times. Taking the noun and verb together, Paul speaks of the gospel eighty-six out of the one hundred and thirty-three times these words are used.

The word "gospel" means "good news" or "glad tidings." While in every age God has good news for man, yet in each era of human history the terms and conditions may be different. It is the death of Christ on the cross and His resurrection that makes the difference. In other words, to get a clear picture of the gospel, we must recognize how God deals with men in each dispensation. Essentially, the gospel itself is the same in every age. The only way of

salvation and approach to God is through the death of Christ and His precious blood shed on the cross. The Old Testament saints looked forward to it by faith; in the New Testament age we look back to it by faith. It is the foundation of salvation and the focal point of the ages.

Three Terms in the New Testament

The Gospel of the Kingdom

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come (Matt. 24:14).

This was the message preached by John the Baptist, the forerunner of the King (Isa. 40:3-5; Matt. 3:2). He emphasized three great truths: repentance—a change of mind and heart; redemption—he pointed to the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world; and retribution—he warned of the ax laid to the root of the tree, of the sifting fan, and of the unquenchable fire that would burn up the chaff.

This was all in view of the corning King and the kingdom. But the King was rejected and crucified. The gospel of the kingdom will be preached again, with renewed emphasis, by a Jewish remnant among all nations during the great tribula- tion. This again will be in view of the second coming of the King to set up His kingdom. The same message of repentance, redemption, and retribution will be preached with remarkable results (Matt. 24:14; Rev. 7:9-14).

The Gospel of the Grace of God

But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24).

This is the gospel for the present age of grace. Paul describes it in Acts 20:21, “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” In verse 25, he includes, “preaching the kingdom of God.” This is the gospel which he expounds in his Epistle to the Romans and which he defends in his Epistle to the Galatians. In 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 (RV), he calls it “the gospel of the glory of Christ,” and in 1 Timothy 1:11 (RV), it is “the gospel of the glory of the blessed God.”

The Everlasting Gospel

And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people (Rev. 14:6).

The everlasting gospel is addressed to the earth dwellers immediately prior to the pouring out of the bowls of the wrath of God, in the latter part of the great tribulation. It calls on the nations to “Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come: and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.” The emphasis here is on judgment. The fact that the word “everlasting” is used shows that the principles which it proclaims are above and beyond all dispensational considera- tions. In every era, the gospel received brings life; refused, it ends in judgment.

The Mystery of the Gospel

Now to Him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began (Rom. 16:25).

In his great doxology at the end of the Epistle to the Romans, Paul speaks of "the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith." He introduces the doxology with the words: "Now to Him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ…" ft is obvious that the mystery is the gospel which he expounds in this great epistle. It is also quite clear that there is a vital link with the mystery of Ephesians 3, where the middle wall of partition is broken down, and where both Jew and Gentile tire made fellow-heirs and of the same body, and made partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel. But it is equally clear that in Romans the emphasis is on the gospel, while in Ephesians it is on the Church. Both are mysteries which God has now revealed.

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, written in A.D. 59, Paul summarizes the gospel which he preached: "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which 1 preached unto you…For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures." In his Epistle to the Romans, written in A.D. 60, he expounds it in detail. Three times he calls it "my gospel" (Rom. 2:16; 16:25; 2 Tim. 2:8). In Galatians 1:11-12, he tells us "that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." In Romans, he uses four terms to describe it: the gospel of God (1:1); the gospel of His Son (1:9); the gospel of Christ (1:16); and the gospel of peace (10:15). The first reveals its Author, the second its subject, the third its power, the fourth its effect.

Now what is this gospel which Paul calls a mystery? The answer is to be found in the detailed exposition of this great doctrinal Epistle to the Romans. The Epistle is in three parts. Chapters 1-8 are doctrinal; chapters 9-11 are dispensational; and chapters 12-16 are devotional and practical.

The first part is in four sections as follows:

Condemnation (chs. 1-3:23): Gentile and Jew guilty before God.

Justification (chs. 3:24-5:21): by grace, through faith, without works.

Sanctification (chs. 6-7): the question of indwelling sin.

Glorification (ch. 8): Commences with no condemnation and ends with no separation.

The second section, chapters 9-11, deals with the question of the gospel in relation to the Jew, God's ancient chosen people. If there is no difference between Jew and Gentile today, then has God cast them off nationally, and repudiated the Old Testament covenant promises given to Abraham and to David? The apostle shows that this is not so. The present era is a

parenthesis in God's purposes. When the fullness of the Gentiles has been brought in, then He will restore Israel again and fulfill His promises of blessing to them (11:13-36).

The third section, chapters 12-16, applies these great doctrines in a devotional and practical way. There are seven areas in which these are applied: the believer's own life (12:1-2); the assembly (12:3-8); fellow believers (12:9-12); the unsaved (12:17-21); the political sphere (ch. 13); the weak brother (ch. 14); and ultimately the whole world (ch. 15). All this is in view of the judgment seat of Christ (14:10).

Ultradispensationalists and the followers of E.W. Bultinger have emphasized an imagined cleavage between the preaching of the gospel by the Apostle Peter and that preached by the Apostle Paul. To Peter was committed the gospel of the circumcision and to Paul that of the uncircumcision (Gal. 2:7-9). Actually, when one compares the sermon preached by Peter to a Jewish audience at Pentecost in Acts 2 with that preached to a Gentile audience in the house of Cornelius in Acts 10, one can sec immediately that in both cases the basic facts of the gospel—the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, the remission of sins through faith in His Name, and eternal judgment—were preached. The gospel is the same, but the approach to the Jew is different from that to the Gentile.

So it is with the preaching of Paul. His address in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, recorded in Acts 13, is remarkably similar to Peter's address at Pentecost. There is the same general outline, based on the Old Testament Scriptures. Then the declaration of the cross and the resurrection is followed by the offer of forgiveness and justification to those who believe. He concludes with the warning of despising and perishing. This is his message for the Jew in Acts 13. But in preaching to the Gentiles at Athens in Acts 17, he deals with pagan idolatry and the works of God in creation, concluding with a call to repentance, in view of the fact that God will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He has raised from the dead.

So it is incorrect to say that Peter preached a different gospel from that preached by Paul. It was the same gospel, but the stress is different when one is addressing a Jew or a Gentile. The same would be true today with a missionary preaching the gospel to a pagan African, or to a stone-age man in New Guinea, or to a self-righteous religionist who has been familiar with the Word of God all his life. The basic message would be the same, however it should be applied wisely according to the background of the individual.

But after all, the gospel is a mystery, and be it preached ever so simply to either Jew or Gentile, only the Spirit of God can reveal it to the mind and heart and will of the individual, and produce the great miracle of the new birth, bringing everlasting life through Christ the Lord.

Chapter 3 Jew & Gentile in One Body

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given to youward: 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 by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise

in Christ by the gospel: whereof 1 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, 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 of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him.

Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man: that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that toe ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen (Eph. 3:1-21),

It has been said that the central teaching in the ministry of the Apostle Paul is the mystery of the Church, which he unfolds in his Epistle to the Ephesians. Actually this statement needs to be narrowed down. In the New Testament, the word “Church” was first used by our Lord in Matthew 16:18, and again in Matthew 18:17, as something that lay in the future, and that He would be the builder of it. The birthday of the Church is described in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost. We are told in verse 47 that the Lord added to the Church daily those that were being saved. Then in Acts 8:1, there was a great persecution of the Church and Saul (later Paul) made havoc of the Church. So the Church was in existence long before the conversion of Paul. But the great mystery which was revealed to him was the fact that the distinction between Jew and Gentile has been removed; both are brought into the Church on equal ground, and are made fellow members and fellow heirs and fellow partakers of God’s promise in Christ by the gospel. This is the doctrine which he reveals and expounds in Ephesians 3.

Before looking at the mystery in Ephesians 3, there are three misconceptions about the Church which should be understood for what they are.

First, the Church which is His body, which Paul expounds, is not found in the Old Testament. It is something entirely new, and revealed for the first time in this great mystery. It is true that there are types and illustrations of the Church. Paul speaks of Adam and Eve in Ephesians 5 as a type of Christ and His Church. The feast of Pentecost in Leviticus 23:15-22, with the offering of the two wave loaves baked with leaven, is definitely a picture of the Church of the present day. But the doctrine itself was hidden in God until revealed in the New Testament.

Secondly, there is a clear distinction between the hope of Israel and that of the Church. The promises and covenants made by Jehovah to Israel concerning the land and the kingdom were mainly of an earthly character, and will be literally fulfilled. But the hope of the Church is

heavenly, and is entirely distinct from that of Israel. Christianity is not a sect, an offshoot, or a continuation of Israel or Judaism, but is a new body, with a new position and hope.

Thirdly, there is a definite distinction between the kingdom and the Church. The kingdom is wider than the Church. The difference between the kingdom of heaven and the Church is made clear in Matthew's Gospel. He outlines the kingdom of heaven in the seven parables of chapter 13, and the Church in chapters 16 and 18. The kingdom existed before the Church commenced and will continue after it is completed. While the Church is in the kingdom, it is distinct from it.

The workman that need not be ashamed because he rightly divides the word of truth will keep these distinctions in mind, especially while we consider the mystery of Ephesians 3.

Paul uses three metaphors concerning the Church in his letter to the Ephesians. First, there is the building (2:2-22). This is the figure used by our Lord in Matthew 16:18, "I will build My church"; and by Peter in 1 Peter 2:4-8.

The second picture is that of the body and its head. Paul alone, among the writers of the New Testament, uses this figure of the Church. He refers to it nine times in his letter to the Ephesians.

The third metaphor is that of the bride, illustrated by the first bridegroom and bride, Adam and Eve, and applied by Paul to Christ and the Church in Ephesians 5:25-32. He calls this also a great mystery. But it is particularly to the great truth of the Head and the Body that the mystery of Ephesians 3 refers. The first mention in Ephesians 1:22-23 introduces the subject of the Body in relation to its glorified Head. Paul's prayer at the end of the chapter cites seven glorious results of the resurrection and exaltation of Christ The last two state that all things have been put under His feet, and that He is given to be Head over all things to the Church, which is His Body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all.

When one considers the development in ecclesiastical circles of a clerical hierarchy with high-sounding titles, the great truth of the Headship of Christ to His Church cannot be overemphasized. In apostolic days, it was being undermined at Colosse by philosophy and vain deceit. Paul had to remind them that the remedy is in "holding the Head" and keeping Him in the preeminent place. In the human body, all thought and movement and growth is controlled by the head, and if through accident or disease this is interrupted or impaired, the body is a pathetic sight. How much more so in the spiritual realm!

In Ephesians 2:16, we first find the term "one body." The chapter gives a wonderful description of the grace of God in the gospel, covering the three tenses of salvation—past, present, and future. Then it declares how Jew and Gentile are brought together at the foot of the cross, the middle wall of partition is broken down and removed, the enmity is taken away, and both are reconciled to God and to each other in the one Body, and through the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But it is in chapter 3 that we get the full blaze of light concerning this great mystery, God's masterpiece of the present era. It is unveiled in a threefold way:

i) the revelation of the mystery (vv. 1-5)

ii) the exposition of the mystery (v. 6)

iii) the fellowship of the mystery (vv. 7-11)

The Revelation of the Mystery

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to youward: 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 by the Spirit (Eph. 3:1-5).

In relation to the mystery, Paul is seen in a fivefold relationship:

i) He is a prisoner, not of Rome or of Nero, but of Jesus Christ. Think of the precious treasure of written ministry which came out of prisons since then.

ii) He is a steward of the mysteries of God (vv. 2-6).

iii) He is a minister of the gospel (vv. 7-13). He preaches the unsearchable riches of Christ.

iv) He is an intercessor (vv. 14-19). He bows his knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

v) He is a worshipper (vv. 20-21). Note his doxology.

In verse 5, he declares that this mystery in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, but it is now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; and again in verse 9 he tells us that from the beginning it was hidden in God. It is important to notice that Paul does not claim that it was given to him exclusively, but also to the holy apostles and prophets. This rules out completely the very prevalent notion that the Church is found in the Old Testament and that the body of Christ is a continuation of the church in the wilderness (Acts 7:38). The mystery now revealed teaches that it is an entirely new concept, up to this point hidden in the counsels of God,

The Exposition of the Mystery

That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel (Eph. 3:6).

The Revised Version explains what the mystery is: “that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” All this was very difficult for the Jew to accept or understand. For centuries he had been a super-segregationalist, proud of his racial and spiritual superiority. The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, and as for the goyim or Gentile dogs, to place themselves on the same level would be unthinkable. Yet this is what the new revelation declared.

The early missionaries in Matthew 10, commissioned and sent by the Lord, were told to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, not to go into the way of the Gentiles. Nor were they to enter into any city of the Samaritans (vv. 5-6). But today all that has been altered. In His last commission, our Lord gave the command to make disciples of all nations, and to go into all

the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Matt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15). The expansion of the gospel message is outlined in Acts 1:8, “Ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” It must have been very hard for the apostles, steeped in Jewish tradition, to carry out these instructions.

Simon Peter, for instance, had to be given a vision, repeated three times, of the clean and unclean animals let down from heaven in a sheet. He was hungry, and he was commanded to rise, kill, and eat. But he remembered the taboos of Leviticus 20 concerning prohibited food, and replied: “I have never eaten anything common or unclean.” He was told that what God had cleansed he was not to call common or unclean. After the threefold repetition of the vision with its command and reply, the messengers from the Gentile Roman soldier, Cornelius, appeared at the door with the request to come and tell them words whereby they might be saved. Peter got the point!

Some time later, when Peter vacillated for fear of what the legalistic brethren in Jerusalem might say, he withdrew from the Gentiles. Paul had to take him to task for his inconsistency, and he had to learn the lesson over again (Gal. 2:11-14). Even a good man like Barnabas was influenced by Peter’s action. It is all so human and up-to-date. Human nature loves to put itself on a pedestal, a tendency which often manifests itself in social caste, or intellectual cliques, or racial pride. The Pharisaical spirit is still very much alive, but that should not be true in the body of Christ, “Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all” (Col. 3:11).

The Fellowship or Dispensation of the Mystery

And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:9-11).

Paul outlines three circles or companies to which this great mystery has been revealed. First, it was shown to the Lord’s holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit (v. 5). Paul himself was a member of this company (v. 3). He was the channel through which it was revealed, and was communicated by him to the leaders of the early Church.

Secondly, it was his responsibility to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery. That would reach out to the rank and file of the believers in the local churches.

Then thirdly, the wider sphere of angelic beings--the principalities and powers in the heavenlies—might know through the Church the manifold wisdom of God. Other passages tell us that the angels are vitally interested in Cod’s purposes in grace in the Church (1 Pet. 1:12; 1 Cor. 11:10). God is using the Church as an object lesson in demonstrating to these heavenly intelligences His manifold (variegated) wisdom and love.

It is instructive and highly important to notice how Paul develops the doctrine of the mystical body of Christ in his letter to the Ephesians. In the nine occurrences of the word, “body,” four main ideas in his teaching can be discerned.

First, there is sovereignty. In Ephesians 1:22-23, we are introduced to the Head of the Body. The final item of His exaltation in resurrection is that He "gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him (which] filleth all in all." lust as in the physical body, the head controls the movement and growth of the body, so in the mystical Body, Christ must be sovereign Lord. The Church is the fullness or complement of the Head. As Eve was the helpmeet or counterpart of Adam, so is the relation of the Church to Christ. In the great mystery of the Body, He without her would not be complete.

In chapter 4, the unity of the body is emphasized. In verse 3, Paul mentions the unity of the Spirit and in verse 13, the unity of the faith. In verses 4-6, he outlines seven unities which are ideal examples of what unity really is: "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one Cod and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." The heart and center of this unity is the unity of the Tri- une God, and the other four—one body, one hope, one faith, and one baptism are based on it. The risen and glorified Christ has given gifts to promote this unity: the apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (v. 11).

All of this leads to the maturity of the body: "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (4:13). This process, while taking place now in time, will have its full consummation only in eternity. Meanwhile, the gifts from the ascended Head are given for the perfecting of the saints, with a view to the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (v. 12).

Finally, there is the glorious destiny of the body (5:23-33). Based on the great typical teaching, linked with the first marriage in Scripture—of Adam and Eve—we are told: "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Saviour of the body" (v. 23). "For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones" (v. 30). Just as Eve, being taken from Adam's body was a part of his body, and at the same time was his bride, so the Church is both the body and the bride of Christ. Her destiny is to be presented to Himself, a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing (v. 27).

Chapter 4: The Mystery of the Bride

This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32).

It has often been pointed out that human history, as recorded in the Bible, begins with a marriage in Genesis 2 and ends with a marriage in Revelation 19. In between, we find God's great purpose in providing a bride for His Son. But the identity of the bride, the wife of the Lamb (Rev. 21:9), has been a matter of controversy. In this important question, it is well to examine the overall teaching of Scripture regarding the calling and position of both Israel and the Church. Confusion here can be fatal to balanced interpretation.

In the Old Testament, Israel is regarded as the bride and wife of Jehovah (Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3; Ezek. 16; Hos. 2; etc.). But that lovely relationship was marred by spiritual adultery in Israel's being unfaithful to her Husband. She is now regarded as divorced and separated from her Husband (Isa. 50:1). But there will be a glorious future restoration to her Husband (Hos. 2:14-20). Psalm 45 speaks of the bridegroom and the queen by his side in millennial glory. However, by no stretch of imagination could it be said that an adulterous and di- vorced

woman, although forgiven and reconciled, is a virgin bride! Paul, in addressing the Corinthians, says: “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:2).

In Ephesians 5:25-27, he says: “Christ…loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing: but that it should he holy and without blemish.” Language like this could not be used of Israel. She will be forgiven and restored as the repentant wife of Jehovah, but not as the chaste virgin bride of the Lamb.

The Bride in the Types

We are often warned against deducing doctrine from Old Testament types. We must not allow imagination to run riot. But both our Lord and His apostles used the types of the Old Testament as illustrations in their teaching. So we are in good company when we use them, too. When a type from the Old Testament is applied and expounded in the New Testament, we are on solid ground. Our Lord used the type of Adam and Eve in His teaching concerning marriage and divorce (Matt. 19:3-6), and Paul uses the same type in his teaching concerning Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:23-33). While many similar passages are not called types, yet it would seem legitimate to use them as illustrations of New Testament doctrine.

There are three lovely illustrations of the bride in Genesis:

i) Eve in chapter 2—the product of the deep sleep of Adam, his opened side, and the presentation of the bride to the bridegroom. She is called a “helpmeet” or the counterpart of her husband. He without her would be incomplete. The Lord God called their name “Adam,” not the Adamses! They were one, both in name and in nature.

ii) Rebekah in chapter 24—Isaac is undoubtedly a type of the Lord Jesus. The unnamed servant (probably Eleazer of Damascus), who was commissioned by the father Abraham to go to Mesopotamia to find a bride for his son, is a true picture of the Holy Spirit fulfilling His mission in the present age of grace. He found the bride at a well; he opened up the treasures belonging to Isaac in the house; he guided and escorted the espoused bride across the desert; and he presented the bride to the bridegroom in the field at eventide. If this is not a type, at least it is a delightful illustration of a fourfold ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Church today.

iii) Asenath in chapter 41—Joseph, too, in his humiliation and exaltation is a perfect picture of our Lord’s sevenfold stoop to the death of the cross, and His subsequent sevenfold exaltation, outlined in doctrinal form in Philippians 2:5-11. Joseph, in his triumphal ascent from the prison house, was given a sevenfold reward: a ring and a robe; a golden chain and a chariot; a proclamation and a preeminent name. Then as the climax, he was presented with a Gentile bride to share his glory.

It does not take a vivid imagination to see in these three brides the work of the Holy Trinity: God the Father in chapter 2; God the Holy Spirit in chapter 24; and God the Son in chapter 41.

The Bride In the Teaching of the New Testament

In the parable of the husbandman and the vineyard (Matt. 21:33-44), and in the parable of the king who made a marriage for his son (Matt. 22:1-14), our Lord gives us a vivid dispensational picture of the rejection by Israel of His claims to be the Messiah. As a result of that rejection, their city was destroyed in A.D. 70, and the vineyard of testimony handed over to others to bring forth its fruit. This is obviously the Church of the present age, composed of Jew and Gentile in one body. Sub- sequent to the Lord's rejection by Israel is the parable of the marriage of the king's son. The message to come to the wedding goes out to the highways and byways of earth. John the Baptist, in referring to our Lord in John 3:29, said: "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth Him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled." Apparently, he as the forerunner of the Messiah, and the last of the law and the prophets, did not regard himself as a part of the bride.

But the great doctrinal passage in this regard is Ephesians 5:25-33. The subject of Ephesians is the universal Church. Three figures are used to illustrate it; it is a body (1:23); it is a building (2:19-22); and it is a bride (5:31-32). The teaching in chapter 5 is based on the relationship between husband and wife. In the analogy, Christ is the head of the Church and the Saviour of the body. In this tender relationship, seven ministries are outlined which He performs for His bride; two in the past, four in the present, and one in the future.

In the past. He loved the Church and gave Himself for it. This reaches from eternity past, up to the cross.

In the present, He sanctifies, cleanses, nourishes, and cherishes it (v. 29). The word for "cleanses" is the same as the once-for-all bathing of John 13:10. "Nourish" is the same word as "nurture" in the bringing up of children in Ephesians 6:4. "Cherish" is the tender word used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2:7 (RV). "As…a nurse cherisheth her own children."

In the future, Christ presents the Church to Himself. In Jude 24, the presentation is "before the presence of His glory." In Colossians 1:22, the object of His death on the cross was "to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in His sight." A comparison of the two passages in Genesis 2, concerning Adam and his bride, and Ephesians 5, concerning Christ and His Church, would show the close connection between the two.

The Bride in Triumph in the Book of Revelation

In the book of Revelation, the word "church" is used nineteen times in the first three chapters. It is not used again until the last chapter, where it only occurs once (22:16). This is very significant and gives an important clue to the interpretation of the book. The Church's history on earth closes at the end of chapter 3. From this point on, she is seen in heaven, represented by the twenty-four elders, seated and crowned with victor's crowns.

There are four women named in the book, each one with a typical significance:

i) Jezebel (2:20). She introduced idolatry and immorality into the church at Thyatira.

ii) The woman clothed with the sun, who gave birth to the Man child (ch. 12).

iii) The harlot, Babylon the Great (ch. 17).

iv) The bride (21:9).

There is a designed contrast between the last two women at the end of the book. The harlot is the immoral, over-decorated counterfeit; the bride is the chaste, pure wife of the Lamb, dressed in white. Associated with each one is a city. The home of the harlot is Babylon, that great city, which is become the habitation of demons, the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. Both the woman and the city are designated by the term, Babylon the Great. Both fall under the judgment of God. The home of the bride is the New Jerusalem, which comes down from God out of heaven. Both the woman and the city are called the bride, the Lamb's wife (21:9-10; 22:17), so closely are they linked together.

The fact that she is called the Lamb's wife shows that the marriage has already taken place. The marriage and the marriage supper of the Lamb is described in 19:7-9. Obviously it is a heavenly scene, as the coming of Christ in glory does not take place until verse 11. Both the marriage and the marriage supper take place in heaven.

The description opens with a fourfold Hallelujah Chorus as a wedding march. An eastern wedding is usually in three parts; first, the contract, corresponding to our engagement. The parties are often quite young, and if so, there could be a long waiting period. The young man pays a dowry and the couple are then regarded as legally married. The bride could be called a wife.

Secondly, when the time comes for the actual marriage, the bridegroom, accompanied by his friends, goes to the house of his bride, and escorts her to his home. This is the background to the parable of the virgins in Matthew 25.

Finally the marriage ceremony arrives, and the marriage supper to which the guests are invited, it was such a wedding feast that our Lord attended (Jn. 2:1-11) in Cana of Galilee.

All of this illustrates the relation of Christ to His Church. The contract is made when the soul accepts Him as Saviour and Lord. The price of redemption was paid in precious blood at the cross. The second phase has arrived when He comes for His bride at the rapture. The marriage itself takes place in heaven when the Church is complete, and He is united to His bride. The third phase is the wedding supper, attended by the invited guests.

The fact that John the Baptist calls himself "the friend of the bridegroom" might indicate that he and the glorified Old Testament saints, called "the spirits of just men made perfect" (He. 12:23), and possibly the tribulation martyrs, would be among the guests at the wedding.

The Bridegroom

With us, a wedding is preeminently the day of the bride. But here it is His day, the day of Christ. It is the marriage of the Lamb. With us, the groom is often forgotten, but not here. It is the consummation of His joy (Heb. 12:2). He shall be satisfied (Isa. 53:11) and anointed with the oil of gladness (Ps. 45:7; Heb. 1:8-9).

As the Bridegroom, He is the Lamb, indicating His sacrificial work. He is the King, pointing forward to His glorious reign. He is the Kinsman-Redeemer, who like Boaz has redeemed the inheritance.

The Bride

Like any wife-to-be, the bride has made herself ready (Rev. 19:7). Where and how? In a life of devoted worship and service. In practical sanctification through the contemplation of Christ in His Word. Then finally at the judgment seat of Christ, where rewards are graciously conferred. Her wedding gown is of fine linen, clean and white, which we are told is the righteousnesses (plural) of saints. This is granted to her; it is all of pure grace.

There is a difference between the garment of salvation, which are exchanged for the filthy rags of self-righteousness when we become Christians, and this wedding gown. The first is called "the righteousness of God" (Rom. 3:22).

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness,

My beauty are, my glorious dress;

Midst flaming worlds in these arrayed,

With joy shall I lift up my head.

But the word in Revelation 19:8 is dikaimata, a plural word meaning righteous acts. It is not dikaiosunee—righteousness. The bride has nothing to do with the spotless robe of righteousness; but she has a lot to do with the pure and white wedding gown. The old English word for an unmarried woman was a "spinster," that is, one who weaves or spins. It points to the warp and woof and the shuttle weaving a pat- tern in the loom of life, producing the glittering threads of Mary-like devotion, which will shine in the wedding gown of the bride. The word for "white" is not the usual word, but is often translated gorgeous, glittering, or shining.

The word "bride" is used three times in Revelation 21 and 22. The first two occurrences refer to the Holy City, the New Jerusalem coming down from Cod out of heaven. In 21:2, it is prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. In 21:9, John is told: "Come hither, 1 will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." In the detailed description of the city, the fact that the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are in the twelve foundations, and the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel are written on the twelve gates, is taken as proof that the bride must consist of the redeemed of every age, from both Israel and the Church. But if our three premises are true—that there is a distinct difference between the calling of Israel and the calling of the Church; that one is an earthly people and the other a heavenly; and that Israel is the formerly estranged but restored wife of Jehovah while the Church is the virgin bride and wife of the Lamb—then that cannot be so. Why then are both mentioned in the heavenly city, which is called the bride, the Lamb's wife?

The following suggestions may be worth consideration. Every gate in the city is one pearl. The pearl is not an Old Testament figure. It is never mentioned in the Old Testament. (Job 28:18 should read "crystal.") In Matthew 13:45, the merchantman seeking goodly pearls is our Lord.

The pearl of great price, taken out of the sea of the nations, is the Church, Israel is called Cod's "peculiar treasure," but the Church is the pearl—pure, perfect, and precious.

It was through the Jew that blessing in the gospel was brought to the Gentiles, therefore the names of the twelve tribes are on the gates. Whether we take the city as describing millennial conditions or the eternal state, apparently there will be very close intercommunication between the earthly city and the heavenly. The heavens will be opened and Jacob's great vision of the ladder will be fulfilled (Gen. 28:12; Jn. 1:51).

In the modern city of Jerusalem today there is the Damascus gate and the Valley gate. This of course means that the road to Damascus or to the valley starts from these gates. It could be that the Church will be reminded by the names of those gates the means by which the blessings of heaven came to her (Rom. 9:4-5; 11:11-17).

The last mention of the bride in Scripture is in Revelation 22:17. Some years ago, a question was asked in a Christian magazine: "Can it be shown from Scripture that the Church, and not Israel, or a remnant of Israel, is the bride?" The answer was: "In Revelation 22:17, the bride, led by the Spirit, speaks in response to a testimony rendered, not in the synagogues, but in the churches. It is in the churches that the voice of the bride is heard. There are other proofs, but is not this one sufficient?"

Chapter 5: The Seven Stars & Seven Churches

The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in My right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches (Rev. 1:20).

The book of Revelation opens up the unveiling of Jesus Christ, in His Person (ch. 1), His Church (chs. 2-3); and His kingdom (chs. 4-22). It is divinely outlined for us in chapter 1:19. Write: the things which thou hast seen—in chapter 1; the things which are—in chapters 2 and 3; and the things which shall be hereafter—in chapters 4 through 22.

The great vision of the risen Christ in chapter 1 is the first of a series of seven visions of the Saviour covering every phase of His Person and work. This first vision is in three parts. First, as King, He presents His names and titles (vv. 4-8); secondly, as Priest and Judge, He walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands (vv. 9-16); thirdly, as the Mighty Conqueror, risen from the dead, He carries at His girdle the keys of hell and of death (vv. 17-18).

After seeing the vision, John is told to write: "The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in My right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks." Then the great voice, as of a trumpet, adds: "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches."

There has been considerable controversy as to the meaning and interpretation of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3, They may he regarded in three ways. First, historically and locally: the messages to them describe conditions actually existent among them in John's day. Obviously, this would be the primary application. Secondly, spiritually and practically; here we have lessons for the local churches in every age. Thirdly, prophetically

and representatively: give an outline from God's standpoint of Church history, from its beginning at Pentecost until its end at the rapture.

Most evangelicals would accept the first two applications, but many would either doubt or deny the third. What reasons have we for saying that the seven churches, commencing with Ephesus and ending with Laodicea, give us a symbolic and chronological outline of conditions in the Church, covering the whole period of the present era of grace?

First, the seven golden candles are called a mystery. That would indicate something hidden or covered and now being revealed. Here is something not lying on the surface. It needs to be studied and investigated. We are dependent on the Spirit of God to open our understanding as to the meaning of the messages. In each case we are told, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." The message was not only local, but universal.

Second, there are a number of similar chronological and prophetical outlines in Scripture. For instance, the seven feasts of Jehovah in Leviticus 23; Daniel's seventy weeks in Daniel 9; the seven parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13. It is logical to assume that we have another one in the seven churches of Revelation 2-3.

Third, there is a selection. As well as the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2-3, there were at least three others in the same area; Troas (Acts 20:6-7); Colosse and Heirapolis (Col. 1:2; 4:13). But seven were selected for a definite purpose. Asia Minor was a comparatively small province. The churches mentioned form a rough geographical circle, starting with Ephesus at the coast. They probably came into existence or were founded by Paul during his two-year residence at Ephesus (Acts 19:10). We read that all those who lived in Asia heard the Word.

Fourth, the contents of the letters show a progression of teaching, from the beginning to the end at Laodicea. There is a gradual deterioration, punctuated by two revivals, ending with the repudiation of the corporate church testimony of Laodicea.

Fifth, there are a number of remarkable references to the second coming of Christ in the last four churches. In the first three, the coming is not mentioned; but in the last four, it is prominent. The first three point back to the beginning, the last four point forward to the coming.

Sixth is the significant meaning of the names of the churches. Ephesus means, "desired" or "desirable." It is a term used by a lover to the maid of his choice. Smyrna means "myrrh"; Pergamos, "married"; Thyatira, "continual sacrifice"; Sardis, "escaping"; Philadelphia, "brotherly love"; Laodicea, "the people's rights"! What a wealth of meaning there is in each name!

Seventh, the key fits the lock! Dr. Harry Ironside uses an interesting parable of an old castle with an ancient lock. A key is found in a heap of rubbish. When it is tried in the lock, the door swings open. We would naturally conclude that it was the proper key. Ironside says: "When the key fits perfectly the wards of a very complicated lock, and opens without effort, it is difficult not to believe that they were made for one another!" If we had no Bible and only a history book, we would see that church history falls naturally into seven peri- ods; the apostolic times; the age of persecution; then Constantine and his state religion; followed by

the dark Middle Ages; then Luther and the Reformation; the evangelical revival beginning with the Wesleys: and ending in the lukewarm indifference of the present day. This is not a fanciful, arbitrary estimate of church history, forced to suit some particular school of interpretation, but is the sober natural division of the historian, which cannot be altered or denied. The seven churches present practically every difficulty of church life.

A final and, to the writer, a conclusive reason for regarding the seven churches as a panoramic outline of the whole church age, is the position of the rapture of the Church in the book of Revelation. Three positions are taken by commentators on the subject.

Premillennialists are generally agreed that it takes place at the beginning of chapter 4, where John is symbolically caught up to heaven and gets a vision of the throne and the twenty-four elders, clothed and crowned and seated on twenty-tour thrones. The elders are regarded as the completed Church, a holy priesthood, risen and glorified.

Others suggest that the rapture is indicated by the catching up of the Man child in 12:5, in the middle of the Great Tribulation. Some would equate the appearing of Christ in glory in chapter 19 and the rapture of the Church as the same event.

A careful reading of the book would show that there is no mention of the Church on earth from the end of chapter 3 till the end of the book in 22:16. If the glorified elders in heaven represent the completed Church, then the legitimate inference would be that the rapture takes place between chapter 3 and chapter 4. From that point on, Israel is in view as God's testimony on earth. The Church's testimony ends with the Laodicean period described in 3:14-22.

Archbishop Trench, in his book on the seven churches, denies the prophetic interpretation, but gives an interesting history of those who held it.

Henry Blount (1838) says: "Many commentators before the Reformation, and Brightman, Forbes, Mede, More, Gill, Sir Isaac Newton, Vitringa, Lampe, and others since that period, said that the seven churches were typical of the state of the Church during seven different periods, from apostolic days till the end." Blount himself held that view. He adds, "they not only portray as types, but predict as prophecies, the whole church period."

The Mystery of the Seven Stars

The risen and glorified Christ interprets the seven stars in His right hand as the angels or messengers of the seven churches. It should be noted that each letter was sent to the angel or messenger of the church. His responsibility was to convey the message of Christ to each individual assembly.

A number of suggestions have been made as to the meaning of "the angel of the church." Some would take the word literally, as meaning an angel who acted as guardian over each individual church. But they fail to explain how a literal and invisible angel could convey a message to a literal local church.

Others would translate the word as "messenger," and apply it to a courier who conveyed the message from John on Patmos to the local churches in Asia Minor. For instance, a note in the Scofield Bible says, "The natural explanation of the messengers is that they were men sent by

the seven churches to ascertain the state of the aged apostle, now an exile in Patmos (cf. Phil. 4:18); but they represent any who bear God's messages to a church."

Another explanation is that the "angel" was the local bishop or pastor. But the bishop or the pastor is an official unknown to the New Testament. A plurality of bishops or pastors, yes, but the bishop over a local church was a later development which concluded in a hierarchy—an arrangement pilloried in the teaching of our Lord and His apostles. It is not likely that John, who used such strong language about Diotrephes in his third epistle, would countenance or encourage such an official in these letters.

A fourth interpretation is that the angel represents the eldership or the presbytery of the church, but the fact that the word is singular would seem to rule out that idea.

It should be noted that in all seven churches, the exhortation is to him "that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." The servant of God who is in the hand of the risen Christ, and has his ear open to receive the message, is the medium that God uses to convey the message to His people. This requires time spent in the sanctuary, and intimate communion with the great Head of the Church. It is prophetic ministry in the true sense of the term. It is not sermonizing or word spinning, but a man who can diagnose conditions, get his message from the throne, and convey it in the energy of the Holy Ghost to God's people. This is the desperate need of the time.

Chapter 6: The Mystery of Godliness

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory (1 Tim. 3:16).

In the Pastoral Epistles—1 and 2 Timothy and the Epistle to Titus—Paul summarizes his final teaching concerning the great doctrines of the faith, which he has expounded at length in his former letters. In the first three chapters of 1 Timothy, he outlines a number of doctrines relating to the Church; in the last three, he emphasizes the second coming of Christ, and the corresponding conduct of the servant of God in view of its imminence. In the center, as the connecting link between the two, is this tremendous statement concerning the Person and work of Christ. It is the climax, heart, and core of the epistle.

In writing to Timothy about his responsibilities in the church at Ephesus, apparently Paul has in mind the vision given to Jacob at Bethel, described in Genesis 28, when he fled from the wrath of his brother Esau. He speaks of the house of God and the pillar of truth, reminiscent of Jacob's exclamation; "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" Then he erected his pillar and made his vow. This was a result of seeing the vision of the ladder set up on earth, the top of which reached to heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon it.

There seems to be a distinct reference to the ladder in verse 16, In the first clause of the statement, "God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16) we see Him coming down; in the last clause, "received up into glory," He is going up; and in the center we see the angels, "seen of angels."

The passage seems to be based on the typology of Genesis 28. The house of God would be the local church at Ephesus, where Timothy was ministering at the time, and "these things" of verse 14, would be the instructions of chapters 1-3 concerning the gospel, prayer, woman's place in the church, the qualifications of the elder and the deacon in the local gathering. The pillar and base of the truth would be the public testimony which each assembly is responsible to maintain. At the word "truth," Paul catches fire, and in verse 16 he gives this tremendous statement concerning it.

Some have described the verse as a beautiful early hymn in adoration of the Christ, and that Paul is merely quoting it. Men sang their creed in the form of an epitome of Christian doctrine. The six lines, and the form of the words, certainly give the impression of the rhythm of a hymn of worship con-corning our Lord Jesus Christ But Fairbairn and many others insist that it is not a quotation, but original with Paul and is comparable to the doxologies which he uses at the conclusion of other statements of doctrine, for example in Romans 8:38-39 and 11:33-36. W. E. Vine comments: "Attempts to make the six clauses parallel or antithetic in three groups of two, scarcely seems justified."

Another point worth mentioning is that some have interpreted the passage as a statement of doctrine, not concerning Christ personally, but as the Christ, that is, Christ and His people, the mystical body. The last clause, "received up into glory," in this interpretation is applied not to the ascension of Christ, but to the rapture. However, this would seem to be a strained application. Whether we take the name "God" as in the AV, or the pronoun "He who" as in the RV, as the subject of the first sentence, it is implied in each succeeding clause, and there is no doubt that it means the personal, individual Christ in each case.

Two of these mysteries in the New Testament are called "great." One is the relationship between Christ and His Church, illustrated by Adam and Eve (Eph. 5:32). The other is the mystery of godliness. We are told that it is such "without controversy," or by common consent. There should be no difference of opinion or argument here. All are agreed that this is one of the top secrets.

Godliness or piety is one of Paul's favorite words in the Pastorals. The word he uses indicates not piety as a quality or condition, but active, operative piety—a way of life. It should be noted that the secret of all godliness is occupation with a Person, with the One who is presented to us in this wonderful statement. The mystery of iniquity of 2 Thessalonians 2:7 is headed up in a person, the man of sin. But in contrast, the mystery of godliness is also headed up in a Person, the Man of Sorrows (1 Tim. 3:16).

Let us consider the six clauses in the verse. They cover all the ground from the incarnation to the ascension, and two of the intervening statements show the results.

God was Manifest in the Flesh

It has been said that the divine name does not occur in the most ancient manuscripts, and that the weight of textual evidence shows that the first word should be "who" instead of "God." But the unexpressed antecedent is undoubtedly Christ. The fact of His deity is explicit throughout. There is very much to be said for the AV rendering as the correct one. The first word indicates His deity and the last one, "flesh," His humanity. God, who is a Spirit, becomes visible in a human body. The word "manifest" covers the birth arid the whole life of

our Lord here below. This has been Paul's teaching in all of his Epistles. For example, in Colossians 1, he expounds His deity; in Philippians 2, he outlines, in seven successive steps, His mighty stoop, from Godhead glory to the death of the cross. Here these mighty truths are expressed in synoptic form. God was manifest in the flesh. The Evangelist Luke uses 2,500 words to describe the incarnation; the Apostle John expresses it in four words: "The Word became flesh." Augustine, the early church father, expressed it in this way: "God—what more glorious; flesh—what more lowly; God in flesh—what more marvelous!"

The two natures were visibly demonstrated at Sychar's well in John 4; on the little boat on the lake in Mark 4; and at the tomb of Lazarus in John 11. Paul expresses it in a sentence: God was manifest in the flesh!

Justified in the Spirit

The AV and the RSV spell Spirit with the capital S, indicating the Holy Spirit. With this most of the commentators agree. Men regarded Christ as an impostor, a blasphemer, a usurper. He was hated, persecuted, and finally judicially executed. This was in the sphere of the flesh. But in what way was He justified or vindicated in the Spirit? The believer in Him is justified or declared righteous by faith, by grace, by blood, and by works. Isaiah, speaking prophetically of the Messiah, says: "He is near that justifieth Me" (Isa. 50:8).

There were two occasions when heaven was opened, and a divine voice testified to Christ's Person: first, at His baptism in Jordan. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, with a view to the remission of sins. But Jesus was sinless and did not need to repent. Naturally He would be exempt from the rite. But He voluntarily submitted, and when He came up out of the water, the heavens were opened, and the voice of God declared: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Luke tells us that the Holy Spirit descended in bodily shape like a dove and abode upon Him. Then the voice came to Him directly, "Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased." He was vindicated by the voice of God His Father, and by the sign of the Holy Spirit. This was at the beginning of His public ministry.

The second occasion was on the Mount of Transfiguration, at the peak of the Lord's ministry. While He was praying on the mountaintop, He was transfigured, and the glory of His Godhead shone out through the veil of His flesh. Moses and Elijah appeared in glory with Him, and conversed with Him about His coming death (exodon) at Jerusalem. Many years later, Peter tells us that the glorious scene was a preview of the power and coming of the Saviour (2 Pet. 1:16). But he and James and John were fast asleep in the presence of this display of His glory. When Peter awoke and saw it, he cried out impulsively: "Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said" (Lk. 9:33). He thoughtlessly wanted to put the Son of God on the same level as the two servants of God. But he was immediately rebuked by the voice out of the cloud: "This is My beloved Son: hear Him." Again He was vindicated by heaven.

But the greatest vindication of our Lord was at His resurrection. He had been condemned and crucified by the responsible leaders of Judaism, and by the Gentile political power of Rome. Everything humanly possible was done to seal His grave and to make it inviolate. But all of this was upset by His glorious bodily resurrection. All three members of the Holy Trinity were involved in that stupendous event. The Scriptures tell us that Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12). In John 10:17-18. Jesus told His

disciples: “I lay down My life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.” His resurrection was an act of His own volition.

Two passages tell us that the resurrection was an act of the Holy Spirit “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit” (1 Pet. 3.18; cf. Rom. 8:11).

A final passage which speaks of the vindication of Christ by His resurrection is Romans 1:4, where He is “declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”

While the resurrection of Christ is not actually mentioned, yet it is obviously implied in the statement: “justified (or vindicated) in the Spirit.”

Seen of Angels

Among the glories of our Lord Jesus Christ, described in the epistles of the Apostle Paul is His headship in various spheres. He is the head of all creation (Col. 1:15-17); head of the body, the Church (Col. 1:18); head of the man (1 Cor. 11:3); and the head of all principality and power (Col. 2:10). This last headship would include all the angelic beings and celestial hosts in heaven. We read that they worship Him (Rev. 5:11-12; Heb. 1:6). They are vitally interested in the Scriptures concerning His sufferings and glory (1 Pet. 1:12). They are the silent spectators of order and decorum in the church (1 Cor. 11:10). They learn lessons of the manifold wisdom of God, as they see Jew and Gentile being united in one body in its fellowship.

In His incarnation, we are told, our Lord was made for a little while lower than angels, with a view to the suffering of death, but is now crowned with glory and honor (Heb. 2:9). There are five occasions during the earthly life of our Lord when we read of angelic ministry.

First, at His birth. They announced His birth to Joseph, to Mary, and to the shepherds watching their flocks in Bethlehem. This was climaxed by the heavenly angelic chorus, saying: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

Second, after His fasting for forty days and His temptation in the wilderness, we read that the angels came and ministered to Him.

The third occasion was in Gethsemane, where, being in an agony, His sweat was as it were great drops of blood, and Luke tells us there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him.

Angels appeared again at the resurrection, both to the Roman guards, and to the women who came with the spices to anoint His body.

Finally, at His ascension, two men in white apparel appeared to the disciples and said, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come [again] in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.”

It is noticeable that there was no angelic assistance at the cross. He was forsaken by God and man. Satanic hosts were there (Lk. 22:53; Col. 2:15), but these He gloriously overcame in His death and resurrection. Angels were the first to see Him in that hour of conquest and victory.

Some would translate the word “angels” as “messengers” and apply it to the women in the garden or to the witnesses of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8, the “preaching” of the next clause (1 Tim. 3:16) being based on this testimony. This of course is true, but it seems more reasonable to take the words “seen of angels” as referring to the celestial messengers, as in the AV.

Preached unto the Gentiles

These four words describe, in a concise form, the great missionary labors of the apostle and his fellow workers outlined in the Acts, and down through the centuries, continued by a host of devoted preachers and missionaries. William Carey, David Livingstone, and Hudson Taylor are names that naturally come to mind. But they are only examples of that great multitude of messengers that have carried the torch of gospel testimony to the ends of the earth. The record is still being written. It will be revealed on that day when the purposes of God for the redemption of fallen man are complete Today the work is being accelerated, so that all who care to listen may hear. Three great radio stations, located at strategic points, beam the glad tidings twenty-four hours a day to every part of the globe. Wherever the door is open, foot soldiers do the follow-up work in making the Saviour and His love known. What a harvest there will be!

Believed On in the World

The New Testament Church is the result of the Word heralded among the nations. It all started in an upper room with one hundred and twenty humble disciples. According to the risen Saviour’s promise, the Holy Ghost came down, baptized them into one body, energized and filled them with power to carry out the great commission. They made disciples, baptizing them into the Name, and teaching them to observe all things that were commanded. The results have been evident in every age and in every land. In spite of lire and sword and stake, though “by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed.” the gates of hell have not overcome or smashed this living organism, the Church of God. Today behind iron, bamboo, and purple curtains, little companies of believers meet in the Lord’s Name for worship and mutual edification in the Word. They are known only to God, and are members of the body of which Christ is the glorified Head. They are in the world, but not of it. One day, when their number is complete, Christ shall come and take them out of the world to the Father’s house.

Received Up into Glory

This final clause seems out of sequence with the last two, but actually it is the complement of the first clause. There He is coming down at His incarnation; here He is being received up at His ascension. There are at least fourteen passages in the New Testament that refer to the ascension of Christ and His work on the throne on behalf of His people. There are seven words in our English version that describe it: He was lifted up (Jn. 12:32); raised up (Acts 13:34); received up (Mk. 16:19); carried up (Lk. 24:51); taken up (Acts 1:9); He went up (Acts 1:10); and ascended up (Eph. 4:10). This is the glorious climax to His finished work on the cross, and the introduction to His unfinished work on the throne.

Part Two: Dispensation

Chapter 7: The Kingdom of Heaven

The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the seaside. And great multitudes were gathered together unto Him; so that He went into a ship and sat and the whole multitude stood on the shore

And He spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them up: some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had not deepness of root. And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: but other fell into good ground and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold some thirty fold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

And the disciples came, and said unto Him, Why speakest Thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables, because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophe- cy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive. For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.

For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When anyone heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received the seed by the wayside. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also heareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him. Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them. An enemy hath done this, The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheal with them.

Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

Another parable spake He unto them: The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake He not unto them: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open My mouth in parables, I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.

Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and His disciples came unto Him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field, the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.

So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto Him, Yes, Lord. Then said He unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.

And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables, He departed thence. And when He was come into His own country. He taught them in their synagogue insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? is not this the carpenter's son? is not His mother called Mary? and His brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in Him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house. And He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief (Matt. 13:1-58).

A careful consideration of the teaching of our Lord in the Gospel by Matthew would show a dramatic change at the end of chapter 12. Up to this point, the King has been presenting His credentials to the nation of Israel. But after careful examination of those claims by the leaders of the nation, He was deliberately rejected. They said His miracles were the work of Satan and not of the Son of God. He calls this the unpardonable sin and turns away from the nation as such. The unpardonable sin of Matthew 12:31, also called the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, is the national rejection of Jesus of Nazareth as the Jewish Messiah. From this point on, His ministry changes. Instead of plain statement and teaching, He uses parable and metaphor. Those who are anxious to learn and know the truth will probe and inquire and come to understand. But the indifferent will be judicially blinded. This blinding is the condition of the nation of Israel until the present day. It is the subject of one of the New Testament mysteries in Romans 11, studied in a later chapter.

Matthew 13 is a key passage in the interpretation of the New Testament. It should be studied carefully along with the seven feasts of Jehovah in Leviticus 23 and the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 2 and 3. These three passages have something in common in that they give a chronological outline of God's purposes in relation to Israel, to the kingdom, and to the Church of the present era, respectively. A clear understanding of their teaching would be an education in itself in systematic theology.

The kingdom of God is one of the important themes of Holy Scripture, but the term "kingdom of heaven" is found only in the Gospel by Matthew, where it occurs twenty-six times. The kingdom is different from the Church, although often confused with it, and regarded by many as describing the same entity. Matthew's Gospel shows the difference very plainly. The kingdom is a much wider concept than the Church, and is found in the Old Testament, long before the Church came into being. The kingdom will continue until the end of time and into eternity, when God will be all in all.

But the question arises, Is there any difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven? The fact that some of the parables in Matthew are called parables of the kingdom of heaven, and the same parables are designated parables of the kingdom of God in Mark and Luke, would seem to indicate that the terms are interchangeable. Many Bible teachers emphasize this point. Without wishing to be dogmatic, I would point out that there are very few synony- mous terms in the Word of God. When the Spirit of God uses two distinct words, there must be some good reason for it. It would appear that, in the overall picture, the kingdom of God is a wider term than the kingdom of heaven, and is universal in its scope.

The kingdom of heaven, as outlined in Matthew 13, suggests that the rejected King is absent from earth and is working out His purposes from heaven. The kingdom of God is both a

spiritual and a material kingdom, and is composed of those who gladly and willingly how to God's authority and control, while the kingdom of heaven is intershot with revolt and sinister influences that seek to undermine and destroy God's sovereignty and His universal dominion, But one day these infernal movements will be rooted out and the kingdom of heaven will merge into the kingdom of God. The seven parables of Matthew 13 describe in a systematic way how these two movements work side by side, but will result in the ultimate triumph of God's glorious purposes of grace for man and the whole universe. Perhaps this is the reason why the two terms, describing the kingdom at this period, overlap. The kingdom of God reaches back into eternity past, and stretches forward into eternity to come, when the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our God and His Christ. But at the present time the King is in exile, rejected in the world His hands made. But He reigns from His royal and priestly throne in heaven, and in the hearts of His loyal subjects on earth.

Other terms which might be studied profitably in this connection are: My Father's kingdom (Matt. 26:21); the kingdom of the Son of Man (Matt. 16:28); the kingdom of the Son of His love (Col. 1:13, RV); the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:11).

The seven parables of Matthew 13 are divided into two groups. The first four were spoken publicly to the multitude by the seaside; the last three were given privately to the disci- ples in the house. The first group describe how Satan is working to destroy the work of God. The second, given in the seclusion of the house, show how the operation of the purpose of God will ultimately triumph.

The First Four Parables Given by the Seaside to the Multitude

All four public parables have to do with the seed or its products, and how it is attacked by the enemy.

The Sower and the Seed

Here the Lord is a Husbandman sowing the good seed of the Word in the hearts of men. Note:

i) The four kinds of soil: wayside, stony, thorns, good.

ii) Four prepositions: by, upon, among, into.

iii) Four conditions for good results: good, soft, clean, deep.

Out of the four seeds, only one bears permanent fruit in a decreasing ratio: some one hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirty fold

The Lord interprets the parable in verses 18-23. The wayside hearer's heart has never been broken up by the plow and harrow of the Spirit. The seed falls by the path trodden hard by the feet of the passerby. The birds of the air that pick it up, are interpreted as the wicked one or Satan. The message never sinks in or is understood; consequently there is no fruit.

The second seed falls upon stony places where the underlying bedrock is thinly covered by a layer of earth. Consequently it never develops a root, and when the sun comes up, it is scorched and so it withers. This is interpreted as the person who makes a quick profession of faith, but when the scorching heat of persecution or trial arrives, the true root of eternal life

is not there. Note that in each of these pictures, the plant is not the person; the ground is the person. The plant that withers is the visible appearance of the influence of the Word of God in an individual's life.

The third seed falls among thorns and the thorns spring up and choke it. The thorns are interpreted as the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches that choke and destroy any prospect of fruit. The influence of the Word is neutralized in this person's life by allowing the distraction of temporal things to stifle the eternal things.

But the good seed falls into good ground and rewards the labor and toil of the husbandman. The threefold enemy in this opening parable is the devil, the flesh, and the world, respectively. Over all it is Satanic opposition to the Word.

The Wheat and the Tares

In the second parable, Satan tries another tactic to undermine the work of the husbandman. Good seed is sown in the field, but while men slept, the enemy came, sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. Tares are the bearded darnel or rye grass, which resembles wheat so closely as to be almost indistinguishable from it while it is growing. It is only when the ears are formed that it is possible to recognize it from the genuine wheat.

To the fanner in the Middle East, darnel is one of the most destructive of all weeds. Its roots twine around those of the true wheat, and if any attempt is made to uproot it, the wheal could be pulled up along with the darnel. The seeds of the darnel are black, light, and poisonous. They are generally left until the harvest, when they are separated by the fanning process that blows away the lighter and smaller seeds of the tares. After threshing, all the grains are shaken in a sieve. Any darnel seeds still remaining will pass through and leave the larger and heavier wheat behind. The inner coats of the seeds of darnel often harbor poisonous fungi that, if eaten by humans or animals, can cause dizziness, vomiting—even death.

The harvest is the ultimate test of that which is genuine wheat and that which is false and poisonous darnel. The head of the wheat, being heavy and ripe, bows its head as the harvest draws near, while the darnel, being light and empty, stands up brazenly among the golden wheat. Although there are many thousands of kinds of grasses in the world, there are only two or three known to possess poisonous properties, and darnel is one of them. It is also said to cause blindness.

One of Satan's chief weapons to undermine the work of God is imitation. Whenever God is working, the devil copies that work so cleverly that it is often difficult to distinguish the genuine from the counterfeit. One can well understand the request of the servants: "Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?" and the reply of the husbandman: "Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them." We are so liable to be deceived and make mistakes. Judas looked like wheat when he carried the bag and preached with Simon the Canaanite. Simon Peter looked like darnel when he denied the Lord with blasphemy beside the fire in Pilate's judgment hall. But Peter was genuine wheat, while Judas was the false and apostate darnel. Thus Satan's second method to frustrate the work of God is by sinister imitation.

The Mustard Tree

The third parable describes a monstrosity. A garden herb, growing from one of the smallest of all seeds, develops into a tree so large that birds rest in its branches. Naturalists tell us that the common mustard plant of Palestine, normally about three feet high, under certain conditions and in certain places, can shoot up to ten or twelve feet, and that birds, attracted by the seeds, do lodge in its branches. In Scripture, the olive, vine, and fig are trees of blessing, and are used figuratively of Israel as God's testimony on earth. But mustard! It serves only to tickle the fastidious appetite.

There are three items in the parable: a sensational growth—from the least of seeds to the greatest of all herbs; a malignant growth—from a garden plant into a tree; a haven for the fowls of the air—the birds are interpreted in verse 4 as Satan and his emissaries (cf. Dan. 4:20; Rev. 18:2).

The lesson of the parable is obvious. It teaches that another satanic method of attack on the work of God is by an unnatural sensational expansion. We see such from the upper room and the catacombs to St. Peter's in Rome. It has been said that the Vatican has eleven thousand rooms, eight grand staircases, two hundred lesser staircases, and twenty courts. In its museum are treasures of art, marble, alabaster, and rare manuscripts whose price is beyond calculation. The story is told that a visitor to the Vatican was told by the guide: "St. Peter can no longer say, 'Silver and gold have I none.'"

The visitor replied: "Neither can he say, 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!'"

In the description of Babylon the Great in Revelation 17-18, we are told that the apostate system, which represents the final form of organized religion, has become the habitation of demons, the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird (Rev. 18:2). The birds which once took away the good seed, and then found a safe haven in the branches of the tree, are now confined in a cage in the system which they helped to develop. It does not take much imagination to identify them. They are the false teachers, so often mentioned by Paul and Peter in their epistles.

The Leaven

The leaven (Matt. 13:33-35) has been called the most misinterpreted parable in the Bible. Those who advocate the post-millennial theory of the Second Corning of Christ speak of the leaven of the gospel permeating society and gradually transforming it, so that the millennium will ultimately emerge. But two world wars and the increasing demoralization of society have upset the theory. The teaching of the Bible is that the millennial reign of Christ will be ushered in, not by the preaching of the gospel, but by the cataclysmic judgments described in Revelation 6-19. These are followed by the personal appearing of Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Leaven in Scripture always represents evil teaching or influences working in the dark. It was excluded from the Passover and its subsequent feast. It was prohibited from the meal offering of Leviticus 2, where the fine flour, the oil, the salt, and the frankincense all speak of the moral glories and perfection of the Saviour. Our Lord warned His disciples of the leaven of the Pharisees, of the Sadducees, and of Herod (Mk. 8:15; Matt. 16:6). Paul speaks of the leaven of

moral evil in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8; and of doctrinal evil in Galatians 5:9. The interpretation of leaven here must fall into line with its interpretation in the rest of Holy Scripture.

The three measures of meal are equivalent to an ephah. (See Gen. 18:6; Jud. 6:19; 1 Sam. 1:24.) Taking these passages, and particularly the meal offering of Leviticus 2, into consideration, the fine flour would represent the glories and perfection of the Person of Christ, and the great doctrines concerning Him. In the natural realm, leaven makes the meal more palatable and digestible, but in spiritual things, we should look with suspicion on what would make the truth of God more palatable to the natural man. The mention too of the woman introducing the leaven into the flour has a sinister significance. It is noticeable that many of the heretical cults today, that attack the Person of Christ or undermine sound doctrine, were founded and propagated by women. Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy and her so-called Christian Science, which is neither Christian nor science, is an outstanding example.

The parable of the leaven in the meal, then, would speak of the subtle infiltration of heretical teaching concerning the Person of Christ.

To summarize: These first four parables of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 13 teach us that the message of the kingdom is being opposed by four devil-inspired movements; satanic opposition, sinister imitation, sensational expansion and subtle infiltration.

These four parables form a unit of teaching of the kingdom in mystery. In the parable of the sower, we get the origin of the work of God. Then comes its outward progress and development in the tares and the mustard tree. In the leaven, we see the climax of the efforts of Satan to subvert and destroy what God is doing. We see these two movements operating in a very manifest way at the present day.

To put it in another way: the first two parables are evangelical, the third is organizational, and the last is doctrinal.

The Last Three Parables Spoken in the House to the Disciples Privately

There is obviously a break between the teaching of the first four parables and the last three in Matthew 13. The first four show how God is working, with the devil opposing and seeking to destroy that work. The last three, given to the disciples in the house, show that the work of God will ultimately triumph. The treasure hidden in the field and the pearl of great price go together, forming a glorious pair. They teach us that God has a twofold hidden treasure that one day will be revealed. The net cast into the sea is a summary and climax of the whole chapter. It outlines the separation of the false from the genuine at the coming of the King when 1 le comes to set up His kingdom.

The Treasure Hidden in the Field

The nation of Israel assuredly will have a prominent place in the kingdom. The covenant promises made to Abraham in Genesis 15 and to David in 2 Samuel 7 will be fulfilled. The term “peculiar treasure” occurs five times in the Old Testament (Ex. 19:5; Deut. 14:2; 26:18; Ps. 135:4; Eccl. 2:8; Mal. 3:17). In this last passage, it is translated “jewels.” The word is quoted by Peter in 1 Peter 2:9. An examination of these passages would indicate that Israel is the treasure.

In Matthew 13:44, the treasure is hidden in a field, then found, then buried again. The man who finds the treasure sells all that he has and buys the field. Obviously his object is to resurrect it and enjoy it when the transaction is finished.

The teaching of the parable is simple: the field is the world. Israel was found in Egypt and redeemed by the blood of the lamb; then brought across the Red Sea and into the wilderness. There Jehovah gave them His law at Mount Sinai and made a blood covenant with them. But on account of their sin and idolatry, and especially the rejection and murder of their Messiah, God's peculiar treasure has been buried once again in the field of the world. They have been scattered among every nation under heaven. The man who sold all that he had and bought the field is the Lord Jesus, the Messiah of the Jewish nation. In His sacrificial death on the cross, He not only redeemed the treasure, but also the field in which it was buried. In Romans 8:19-23, Paul tells us about a groaning creation that waits with earnest expectation for that day when it will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Thus the three words—hid, found, hideth—give us a concise history of Israel up until the present. The man who sold all that he had and bought the field gives a graphic word picture of the incarnation, and the work of Christ on Calvary.

In our day, we see the purpose of God in relation to Israel rapidly unfolding. As predicted in the Word of God, they are returning to the land in unbelief. Surrounded by their enemies, they are soon to experience the day of "Jacob's trouble," the Great Tribulation (Jer. 30:7). But they will be miraculously delivered by the coming of their Messiah (Zech. 14:4). After their national repentance (Zech. 12:10), and their cleansing in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness (Zech. 13:1), they will be brought back into covenant relationship with Jehovah. During millennial days, when the kingdom will be in manifestation, the treasure, buried in the field of the nations, will be on display.

The Merchantman and the Pearl of Great Price

Here again is a parable (Matt. 13:45-46) that has suffered at the hands of interpreters. It has received the same treatment as the mustard tree and the leaven. The merchantman is said to be the sinner, the pearl of great price is the Saviour, and the sinner has to sell all that he has to obtain salvation! But this is upside-down exegesis and a complete misrepresentation of the teaching of the parable.

The merchantman is Christ. The pearl of great price is the Church, composed of Jew and Gentile, which in the present era is being called out of the sea of the nations. The merchantman, selling all that he has, is described doctrinally in 2 Corinthians 8:9, and in Philippians 2:5-11, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." Philippians 2 tells us of His mighty stoop, from Godhead glory down to the death of the cross. He bought the pearl with His own precious blood when He laid down His life at Calvary. Paul outlines it in another context in Ephesians 5:25-27, "Christ…loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

In Matthew 13, Christ is symbolized as a husbandman, a merchantman, and a fisherman. Here the merchantman is seeking goodly pearls. The pearl is a most beautiful figure of the Church. The Church is also called a building, a body, a bride, a flock, and a city. All of these figures give precious teaching concerning God's great masterpiece.

A pearl is the product of suffering and is the answer to a wounded side. The mollusk, lying on the ocean floor, is penetrated by a grain of sand or gravel, which lodges in the living flesh. The irritating foreign material is covered over by successive layers of mother-of-pearl, the concretions of the mollusk. Thus the pearl is formed by the living creature, as the answer to the wound in its side.

Those pearls most highly prized are characterized by irradiance and translucence. The more perfect the shape, droplike, and the deeper the pearly luster, the more valuable. The unblemished pearl was one of the ancient symbols of perfection. In classical Rome, only persons of specified rank were permitted to wear them. Pliny speaks of pearls as "the richest merchandise of all, the most sovereign commodity in the whole world."

In spite of the development of the cultured pearl industry in Japan, natural pearls of high quality still command prices of thousands of dollars. The most valuable pearls are found in the Persian Gulf. The pearl banks lie at a depth of between 48 and 120 feet. Pearl divers work in pairs. One man remains on the surface to attend the two rope lines that are used, reaching from the boat to the ocean floor. One line is attached to a stone weighing about forty pounds, which carries the diver down to the bottom. He carries a basket to contain the oysters, and a knife in his belt to defend himself against sharks. The other line serves as a signal cord. The diver remains below from sixty to eighty seconds, before signaling to be brought to the surface with his catch. Pearl diving is a dangerous occupation!

Pearls are comparatively soft and can be damaged easily by friction or heat, or even by the acids in perspiration of the body. After prolonged contact with the skin (flesh), they should be wiped off, or they may change color. They can be scratched with a pin, coin, or knife. Interestingly, like the true Church, pearls are the only precious jewels that cannot be cleaved.

Pearls of great price, noted for their size, beauty, and historical associations, are ranked among the famous jewels of the world. "La Reine des Perles," a 27.5 carat oriental pearl, was among the crown jewels of France. "Le Regent," an oval pearl weighing 34 carats, was owned at one time by the French imperial court.

How graphically these details of this beautiful jewel illustrate the work of our Lord in relation to His Church. We read that each gate of the bride-city of Revelation 21 was of one pearl. The Church is the product of His suffering and the answer to His wounded side.

The Net Cast into the Sea

Here the figure changes from the merchantman to the fisherman. The fisherman and his net is used in Scripture as an illustration of the preaching of the gospel. The message of the kingdom was preached by John the Baptist and by our Lord. Today the gospel of God's grace is being proclaimed worldwide. When the Church is completed and is removed to heaven at the rapture, the gospel of the kingdom will be preached again (Matt. 24:14). It should be noted that this parable applies particularly to the end of the age (Matt. Bi-M). To those that have

heard the gospel of God's grace in the present era, and have rejected it, will be sent the strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thess. 2:12). Let no one presume that there will be a second chance for the Christ-rejecters after the Church is gone. They will be judicially blinded, just as Israel is today. They refused the Christ, and they will follow the Antichrist blindly to their doom.

But there will be a mighty ingathering. God will take up an enlightened remnant of Israel again. Like Paul, they will be born out of due time (1 Cor. 15:8). They will be sealed by almighty God, and sent forth with the message of the coming King. They will be the greatest foreign missionary body that the world has ever seen. Aided by modern transportation and mass media of communication, the whole world will hear the message. A great multitude that no man can number will profess to accept the message. But like every other mass movement, there will be a mixture of the genuine and the false. As in the first two parables, there are those who never were truly born again. At the coming of the King, there will be a separation of those who have only a profession, without reality, from those who have life. The angels will be the agents that will separate the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth (vv. 49-50).

Conclusion (vv. 51-52)

Jesus said to the disciples, "Have ye understood all these things?" They responded, "Yea, Lord." Then He said to them, "Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a…householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old."

What a treasure of teaching we have in this wonderful chapter! Again, let us repeat, it covers a wider sphere than the Church, although it includes it. The Church, which is His body, had its birthday at Pentecost, and will be completed and removed from the earth at the rapture. This is described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and in 1 Corinthians 15:51-57. But the kingdom was predicted and illustrated in the Old Testament by the reigns of David and Solomon; it was proclaimed in the ministry of John the Baptist, and in the teaching of our Lord. Today it is in mystery form during the absence of the King, as outlined in Matthew 13. But one day it will be in manifestation, when the King comes back visibly and personally to reign. The instructed scribe will take note and act accordingly.

Chapter 8: The Mystery of Israel's Blindness

For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in (Rom. 11:25).

One of the main themes in Paul's exposition of the gospel in his Epistle to the Romans is the condition of the people of Israel in the present era of grace. Three chapters—9, 10, and 11—are occupied with it. In the first section of the epistle (chs. 1-8), Paul insists that today there is no difference between the Jew and the Gentile; all have sinned and stand on a common level of condemnation before God. Where formerly the nation of Israel had been chosen by God to be His witness to the nations, and the custodian of His law and His Word, this great blessing had been nullified by their disobedience and idolatry, and finally by their rejection

and murder of their Messiah. When Stephen tried to remonstrate with the responsible leaders of the nation, they murdered him too (Acts 7).

In Matthew 12:24, the Pharisees attributed the work of Christ, in casting out demons, to Beelzebub, the prince of the demons. This is tantamount to saying that His miracles were performed by satanic power. In the same context, the Lord calls this the sin against the Holy Ghost, which is unpardonable. Later, at His trial, when Pilate, the Roman judge, presented Him to the people as the King of Israel they cried out, "We have no king but Caesar!" (Jn. 19:14-15) And again, when Pilate washed his hands before the multitude and said, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it," their answer was, "His blood be on us, and on our children!"

There are various passages in the Old Testament that predict the setting aside or' Israel as God's testimony on earth. For instance, the solemn warnings attached to the Palestinian covenant in Deuteronomy 29-30. Also in the appendix to Isaiah's vision of the Lord of hosts cm His throne (Isa. 6:9-13). But especially in Hosea 3:4 there is a remarkable prophecy: "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim." This is the period called "Lo-ammi" (not My people) in 1:9.

After outlining this time of Israel's rejection of their Messiah in Romans 9-10, the apostle naturally asks the question in 11:1, "Hath God cast away His people?" and his answer is, "God forbid." "God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew." He brings his argument to a climax in verse 25 when he says: "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this (great! mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." The blindness is temporary, and when God's purpose in relation to the Gentile is fulfilled, then the veil that today is upon Israel's mind and heart will be removed.

Three Covenants

God's promises of blessing to Israel are contained in three covenants.

First, His covenant with Abraham recorded in Genesis 15. This is one of the great foundational chapters of Scripture. Paul's doctrine of salvation by faith, without works, is based on it (see Rom. 4:13-25). The choice and call of Abraham, the progenitor of the Hebrew race, was a landmark in history. It occurred exactly halfway between creation and the cross. Abraham has been called "the Father of the Faithful," and the "First Pilgrim Father." The name "Hebrew" means "the man from across the water [or river]" and apparently it was given him by the Canaanites.

Abrahamic

The Abrahamic covenant is first intimated in Genesis 12:1-4, when God called him out of Ur of the Chaldees. It was confirmed in Genesis 13:14-17, when he was told that his seed would be as the dust of the earth. It was ratified in Genesis 15:1-7 when God added that his seed would be as the stars of heaven. Later, in Genesis 22:17, after the offering of Isaac on Mount Moriah, God promised that his seed would be as the sand of the seashore. Notice the three terms: the dust, the stars, and the sand. These three are metaphors, referring to the earth, the heavens,

and the nations. The covenant was sealed by the rite of circumcision (Gen. 17:9-14). It was later confirmed to Isaac (Gen. 22:15-18; 26:3-5), and to Jacob (Gen. 28:13-14).

This covenant to Abraham had three features:

i) It was based on sacrifice. The multiple sacrifice of the heifer, she-goat, ram, turtle dove, and young pigeon portray various aspects of the sacrifice of Christ, later developed in the Levitical offerings. It was a true covenant sacrifice (Jer. 34; Heb. 10). As Alexander MacLaren puts it: "The strange rite derives its importance from the use made of it in Hebrews 9:16-17. The contracting parties passed between the pieces. Encompassed by awful sacrifice, and enclosed in its mysterious depths, they enter into covenant with God."

ii) It was symbolized by a deep sleep, a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp. Abraham falling into a deep sleep shows that he was set aside; God alone was the Contractor. The furnace and the lamp indicate that the seed would go through testing and suffering, but would be a testimony for God.

iii) The covenant promise had to do with the seed and the land. The three symbols the dust, the stars, and the sand—indicate that Abraham would have an earthly and a heavenly seed, and that in him all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

The frontiers of the land are delineated in Genesis 15:18; from the river of Egypt (the Nile, or thought by some to be Wadi el-Arish), unto the great river, the river Euphrates. Never in history has this whole area been occupied by the people of Israel. But God has promised that this large section of the Middle East will be the inheritance of the seed of Abraham. While it is true that the Arabs are the children of Abraham, yet they are not the promised seed.

It should be carefully noted that the Abrahamic covenant concerning the seed and the land is called an everlasting covenant (Gen. 17:7) and has never been abrogated.

Palestinian

The Second Covenant is the Palestinian. It was outlined by Moses on the plaint, of Moab, just before Israel invaded and conquered the land. The terms of the covenant, recorded in Deuteronomy 28-30, consist of a series of blessings and cursings pronounced on the people: blessings in the land if they obey the voice of God, cursings if they disobey and forsake the Lord and go into idolatry. There is a remarkable prophecy concerning the withholding of rain, and the land turning into powder and dust (Dent. 28:23-241 It also speaks of a scattering and a regathering (30:3-8). Prophecy has become history; every item has been fulfilled just as it was predicted.

The history of Israel could be summarized in three captivities and three restorations.

i) Slavery in the house of bondage in Egypt. This lasted for 430 years. It was here that Israel became a nation. They were redeemed by the blood of the paschal lamb and by the power of God. The deliverer was Moses, the prophet.

ii) The second captivity was in Babylon and lasted for 70 years. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, invaded the land, destroyed the Temple and its worship, and carried the people into

exile. Recovery was granted under Ezra the priest. Its history is recorded in five books of the Old Testament: Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

iii) The third captivity, and the most severe, took place under Rome in A.D. 70, when the Roman army burned the Temple, devastated the land, and carried the survivors of the siege into captivity. This has lasted for almost 2,000 years. The land, once flowing with milk and honey, for centuries was a wilderness, eroded and bare, with a sparse rainfall. The scattering predicted in Deuteronomy 28:49-68 has already taken place, but the regathering, foretold in 30:1-5 is unfolding before our eyes today. True, the people are going back to Eretz Israel in unbelief. Israel is still the valley of dry bones, and they are very dry (Ezek. 37). But a miraculous transformation is taking place. It will be consummated by the appearing of their long-awaited Messiah, who will be Prophet, Priest, and King. Then the Palestinian covenant will be completely fulfilled, and the land will enjoy and rejoice in its jubilee rest.

Davidic

The Third Covenant was given to David, and is recorded in 2 Samuel 7:10-16; Psalm 89:3-4; and Jeremiah 33:19-22. Its outstanding features have to do with a kingdom, a throne, a crown, and a scepter. These were promised and guaranteed to David and to his house forever. He was assured that if his sons disobeyed the Lord, as they actually did, they would be chastened and punished, but that the covenant itself was established and sure, and would never be abrogated.

We know that this covenant will be fulfilled in the Person of David's greater Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. He will sit on the throne of His father David, and will reign from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. Of His kingdom there shall be no end!

Three Symbols

Not only are there three covenants linked with the history of the people of Israel, but in the Scriptures three symbols are mentioned relating to their spiritual life: the vine, the fig tree, and the olive tree. These, too, seem to cover three periods in their historical testimony for God. Most nations have a national emblem which symbolizes some outstanding characteristic in their history or background. The United States has the eagle, Britain the lion, Russia the bear, etc. Many countries adopt a tree or flower. Canada has the maple leaf, England the rose, Scotland the thistle, Ireland the shamrock, and Wales the leek. But with Israel, the symbols have a definite spiritual meaning.

The Vine. The parable of the vine, brought out of Egypt and planted in the land, recorded in Isaiah 5:1-7, describes Israel in the past. They were elected and redeemed by God, and made His testimony among the nations. But Psalm 80:8-16 laments how it has been devastated by the boar out of the wood, and by the wild beast of the field. Instead of bearing grapes, it brought forth wild grapes. Our Lord takes up the theme in Matthew 21:33-43. The heir to the vineyard is killed by the husbandmen, and they seize the inheritance. The vineyard is taken from them and given to others. The picture is rounded out and completed in John 15, where the Lord Jesus declares: "I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman " He takes the place of failing Israel and those who are linked to Him as branches in the vine can claim to be God's testimony on earth today.

The Fig Tree. During the three years of our Lord's public ministry, there are three references to the fig tree. Luke 13:6-4 contains the parable of the fig tree in the vineyard. For three successive years, the husbandman comes seeking fruit and finds none. He orders the caretaker to cut it down; it is only occupying space. But the caretaker intercedes: "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." The application is obvious. It is a solemn warning to Israel on account of their reaction to His public ministry.

The second reference is in Matthew 21:18-22. In the last week of His ministry, returning to the city from Bethany, the Lord is hungry, and turning aside to a fig tree along the way, He looks for fruit to satisfy His hunger But He finds nothing except leaves. He curses it, and the fig tree withers. Again the lesson is plain. It is a graphic object lesson to the nation of their spiritual condition. But it was misunderstood by the disciples and by many today, who superficially look only at the malediction, and bypass the lesson.

The third mention of the fig tree is found in Matthew 24:32-33 (AV). In our Lord's prophetic discourse on Mount Olivet, as an appendix and application to His teaching concerning His second coming as the Son of Man, He said: "Now learn a parable of the fig tree; when his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors." Luke 21:29 adds, "and all the trees." The fig tree seems to symbolize Israel as a nation in their own land, exercising all the functions of a sovereign state. If this is so, how significant is the fact that, after nearly two thousand years, Israel is back in the land. On May 18, 1948, they became a nation once again, with their president, their knesset (parliament) representing the old Sanhedrin, their government, currency, and flag. Truly the fig tree has put on its green leaves. Not only Israel, but "all the trees," pointing to the remarkable upsurge of nationalism all over the world.

The Olive. If the vine represents Israel in the past, and the fig tree Israel from our Lord's time up until the present, the olive tree, and the teaching linked with it in Romans 11, would point to the future recovery and blessing of the nation. As a matter of fact, the three symbols cover the teaching of the three chapters—Romans 9-11. Romans 9 speaks of election, particularly in relation to Israel. Here we have the vine brought out of Egypt and planted in the land. In chapter 10, we have Israel and the gospel, and her reaction to it. The husbandman is digging around and fertilizing the fig tree, but with discouraging results. It is summarized in the last verse, "But to Israel He saith, All day long have I stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." In chapter 11, it is the olive tree. Here is the complete answer to the mystery of Israel's present-day blindness, and also to Paul's agonizing question: "Hath God cast away His people?" Thank God, He has not, for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance (v. 29). The original root of the olive tree remains firmly planted, and while the natural branches have been broken off on account of Israel's failure, and the wild branches from the nations grafted in, yet this is only temporary, and will last until the fulness of the Gentiles is brought in. When the Church, composed of both Jew and Gentile, is complete, and has fulfilled its mission on earth, it will be taken home to heaven. Then the original branches will be grafted in, and Israel will be once again God's testimony on earth. How this will take place is found in the prophetic Word (Zech. 12-14; Matt. 24; Rev. 6-19, and many other related Scriptures).

We must carefully distinguish between the hope of the Church of the present age and the hope of Israel. For the Church of today to call itself the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16), and to claim for itself all the promises and covenant blessings made to Israel Is an illegitimate way to treat Holy Scripture. When the term "Israel" is used, it means Israel, and must not be spiritualized.

Paul ends his argument in Romans 9-11, concerning Israel's future blessing and glory, with a magnificent doxology: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!… For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Chapter 9: The Mystery of the Rapture

Behold I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed (1 Cor. 15:51).

The second coming of Christ is one of the main themes of Holy Scripture. There are hundreds of references, both in the Old and New Testaments, concerning His visible return to the earth, when every eye shall see Him. He will then put down all opposition to God and will reign for one thousand years. These Scriptures should not be spiritualized or any attempt made to explain them away. They mean what they say, if words have any meaning at all. But a secret coming, prior to His visible appearing, to remove a select company of His people to heaven, before judgment falls on the apostate earth, is a truth never mentioned in the Old Testament. This secret snatching away of the Church is called the rapture.

It is true that, in the typical portions of the Old Testament, there are a number of illustrations of a secret rapture, but no direct teaching. For instance, Enoch, in the wicked days before the flood, walked with God for three hundred years, and he was translated that he should not see death, before the judgment of the deluge came. Paul seems to have this in mind, when he exhorts the Thessalonian believers to "walk and to please God," just as Enoch did, and then he proceeds to reveal the rapture in the same context in 1 Thessalonians 4.

Lot is another example of a believer being removed before judgment falls on Sodom and Gomorrah, Although he was a carnal believer, living in a place where he shouldn't have been, yet God calls him "that righteous man" (2 Pet. 2:8) and takes steps to remove him from the avalanche of fire and brimstone that was poured out on the cities of the plain.

We find the same principle in the case of Elijah, the prophet who was translated without dying (2 Kin. 2) Looking back from our vantage point of the revelation of the doctrine in the New Testament, we can see these pictures and types, yet in the Old Testament there is no direct teaching of the second coming of Christ in two stages: first a secret rapture of the Church, and then His visible, public appearing in glory to reign. This is the reason Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:51 calls it a mystery, that is, something that hitherto has not been revealed. It is most important to understand the truth that there is a decided difference between the secret rapture of the Church and the appearing of Christ in glory.

In the New Testament there are four main passages that speak of the rapture. First, the subject is introduced in the upper room ministry of Christ in John 14:1-3. In the Synoptic Gospels, the teaching of Christ concerning His second coming emphasizes His appearing in glory to reign in His kingdom, preceded by a time of tribulation. The parallel passages in Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 21 make this very clear. But the teaching in John 14 is

different. Here, He is coming to receive His own to the Father's house. He emphasizes the place, not on earth but in heaven.

Secondly, in 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul emphasizes the Person who is coming. It is the Lord Himself. Paul had been in Thessalonica only three weeks at the founding of the church. During that time, he had, no doubt, given the believers an outline of teaching concerning the second coming of Christ, But there was some confusion in their minds regarding the order of events. Because persecution had followed their conversion, they were wondering if the Day of the Lord had not already come with its tribulation and judgment. Some of their number had died since Paul had been there, and so had missed the glorious experience of being raptured to heaven without dying, of which he had spoken. This letter was written to set their minds at rest on these points. At the rapture, those who were alive would have no advantage over those who had died. Those in the grave would rise first in a glorified body, the living would be changed, and together they would rise to meet the Lord in the air. From that point, they all would be forever with the Lord.

A third passage dealing with the rapture is Philippians 3:20-21. There we are told that "our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself." Here the rapture and the transformation of the body of the believer, which takes place at that time, is all a part of a glorious purpose for the Christian. The chapter is autobiographical. Paul outlines his own life, commencing with his unconverted days as a self-righteous Pharisee, when the Lord arrested him and reoriented his life. He was taken into God's school and taught the vital lessons that would govern his service. He started on a long-distance race, with his eye on the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. At the end of the chapter is the blessed hope, rounding out the purpose of God in the believer's life.

In the fourth passage dealing with the rapture, 1 Corinthians 15, there is a problem. In the church at Corinth apparently there were some who had doubts, or who even went as far as to deny the resurrection of the body. Among the Jews, the Sadducees—and among the Gentiles, the Epicureans—denied this great fundamental truth. Paul encountered this at Athens, where the philosophers mocked when he mentioned the resurrection of the dead (Acts 17:32). Later, when he was being examined by the Sanhedrin in Acts 23, the issue of the resurrection caused an uproar between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. We are told that the Sadducees said that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit; but the Pharisees confessed both. Apparently this pagan and Sadducean denial of the resurrection had affected the church at Corinth.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul expounds the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. First, he points out that it is one of the fundamentals of the gospel Then he bases the doctrine on the bodily resurrection of Christ. Did He rise from the dead in the same body in which He had lived and was crucified? His bodily resurrection is the great test, pattern, and prototype of the resurrection of the body.

In verse 35, Paul asks two questions: "But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" He answers the last question first. In verses 36-41, he uses

three illustrations to describe the nature of the resurrection body of the believer. The first is taken from botany—the seed and the harvest. The second is taken from biology—four different kinds of flesh: that of men, of beasts, of fish, and of birds. Each is adapted to the environment where God has placed it. The third is taken from astronomy—the relative glories of the sun, moon, and stars. These illustrations show the difference between the earthly body and the glory of the heavenly resurrection body of the believer.

The final paragraph in this great chapter (vv. 51-58) is the answer to the question of verse 35: "How are the dead raised up?" Paul says: "Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump" (vv. 51-52).

Here again is one of God's sacred secrets, revealed for the first time in the ministry of the Apostle Paul. The apocalypse and the epiphany of Christ—His public, visible appearing as the Son of Man, described by the prophets in the Old Testament and by our Lord in Matthew 24-25—is not a mystery; but this is. Here He comes to raise the dead and change the living. Some will not die, but will be caught up. It will be instantaneous, in a moment, an atom of time, at the last trump.

Some have taken the last trump to be identical with the seventh trumpet of Revelation (11:15), and would postpone the rapture until the end of the Great Tribulation. But Paul could not have been referring to the book of Revelation, as it was not written until at least thirty-five years later, and he tells us very plainly in 1 Thessalonians 5:9 that "God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." It is much more likely that he is thinking of the silver trumpets of Numbers 10. They were used for gathering the elders and the whole congregation; at their set feasts; for warfare; they were blown over the sacrifices; and for the movements of the whole camp. When the time came to march, the last trump was the signal for the rear guard to fall into line and clear the camp.

Paul uses two terms to describe the two classes of God's people at the rapture: the corruptible and the mortal. The corruptible are those who have died and are in the grave. The mortal are the living, but liable to death. Paul quotes from a lovely passage in Isaiah 25:8, which describes the glory of the kingdom age when "death" is swallowed up "in victory." At the rapture, the mortal, that is, those who are alive and remain, will fling the challenge at death, "O death, where is thy sting?" The corruptible, as they rise from the tomb, will cry: "O grave, where is thy victory?" And both together, the dead raised and the living changed, will rise to meet the Lord in the air.

Paul closes this wondrous passage with a note of triumph: "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Then a word of exhortation and encouragement: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

Chapter 10: The Mystery of God's Will

Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself (Eph. 1:9).

Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians is the high point of teaching in the New Testament. In chapter 1, he outlines God's blueprint of the ages, His plan and purpose for mankind. It is His intention that all things shall be headed up in His beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and that through Him blessing shall be mediated to all things in heaven and on earth.

The central part of the chapter, from verse 3 to 14, is a prose-poem in praise of the blessed Trinity. The whole section is one long sentence without pause or parenthesis. It is a song of praise in three stanzas, singing the glories of each member of the Godhead, and each stanza ending with the same refrain: "to the praise of His glory!"

There are three blessings associated with each one:

i) The Father (vv. 3-6): election, predestination, adoption.

ii) The Son (w. 7-12): redemption, forgiveness, inheritance.

iii) The Spirit (vv. 13-14): seal, earnest, redemption of the purchased possession.

The purpose and plan of God the Father, formulated in eternity past, is carried out by God the Son in time, and will be brought to full fruition by God the Holy Spirit in the future.

The will of God is mentioned four times in chapter 1. Paul is an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God (v. 1), We have been foreordained unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will (v. 5), "Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth: even in Him" (vv. 9-10). "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (v. 11).

So then, the mystery of His will is that God has determined that all things will be headed up in Christ, and that the time when this will take place will be at the dispensation of the fullness of times. The two questions which we must consider are: What is meant by the expression, "the dispensation of the fulness of times"? And what is involved in "all things in heaven and in earth" being headed up in Christ?

The Dispensation of the Fulness of Times

The word "dispensation" (Greek, oikonomia) means "an organized system or method, the way that affairs are conducted." The original Greek word is anglicized in our modern word "economy." We speak of political economy, that is, the way a nation conducts its affairs. Some have a dictatorial economy, others a democratic economy. The fact that the word is translated stewardship, order, administration, as well as dispensation in the New Testament tends to obscure its meaning.

In the Scriptures, the word means that at various times in human history God has used various methods for testing man. For instance, in John 1:17, we read of two methods: "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." In Romans 2:15-16, we learn of a third method. Speaking of the pagan Gentile world, which had not the law, Paul says: "Their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else

excusing one another; in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel." Thus we have law, grace, and conscience.

The system of seven dispensations outlined in the Scofield Reference Bible has been attacked by some, and it has been said that such a method of interpreting Scripture was unknown to historic Christianity. But Augustine (354-430), surely a representative of historic Christianity, said: "Distinguish the dispensations, and the Scriptures agree."

Lewis Sperry Chafer in his Systematic Theology (Vol. 1, p. 40) outlines seven periods or dispensations in human history as follows:

The Dispensation of Innocence, which extended from creation to the fall of Adam.

The Dispensation of Conscience, from Adam's fall to the flood.

The Dispensation of Human Government, from the flood to the call of Abraham.

The Dispensation of Promise, from the call of Abraham to the giving of the law at Mount Sinai by Moses.

The Dispensation of Law, from Moses till the time of Christ.

The Dispensation of Grace, from the death of Christ until His return to receive His bride.

The Dispensation of Kingdom Rule, which lasts from the second advent of Christ for a thousand years, and which shall end with the new heavens and the new earth. This final period of kingdom rule is called the millennium. The term means one thousand years. It indicates a period when Christ will be visibly and literally on the throne, and will reign over the whole earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. It is this time period which Paul calls "the dispensation of the fulness of times" (Eph. 1:10).

Throughout human history, God has tested man in every conceivable way, both as an individual and collectively as nations. On man's part, all has been a miserable and abject failore. He has stifled his conscience, broken the law, and despised God's grace. But when man has come to the end of his rope, God will intervene, and demonstrate that He has a plan and a purpose for mankind, who has suffered so much at the hand of the dictator and the tyrant.

All Things in Heaven and Earth Headed up in Christ

The Old Testament often speaks of a golden age, a time when every man shall be able to sit under his vine or fig tree in peace, and when nothing shall hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain. In the most majestic language to be found in any literature, Isaiah describes it in chapter 11 of his prophecy: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (11:6-9).

In chapter 2, Isaiah tells us, “It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains…and all nations shall flow unto it…And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (2:2, 4).

In another magnificent passage in chapter 35, he tells us that “the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose... Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.”

All of these blessings for a restored earth were predicted in Psalm 8 and are expounded in Hebrews 2. The first Adam, the lord of creation, failed and was consequently expelled from the paradise of nature in Eden; the last Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ, will pick up the fallen scepter, and reign from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. Nature’s curse will be removed, and earth’s Edenic paradise will be restored.

The description in Isaiah of these glorious conditions has to do with the millennial earth. There is a mystery revealed in Ephesians 1:9: the heavens as well as the earth will be headed up in Christ. The millennium will have a heavenly as well as an earthly aspect. There will be a heavenly as well as an earthly Jerusalem. There will also be a heavenly as well as an earthly people. The nation of Israel, repentant and restored to covenant relationship with Jehovah, will occupy the earthly Jerusalem. The Church—composed of Jew and Gentile, redeemed and glorified, the mystery of Ephesians 3—will occupy the heavenly, and will reign with Christ over the earth. There will be very close intercommunication between the earthly and the heavenly cities. It is God’s unalterable will and purpose that all will be headed up in His beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Nature’s groan will then turn into song, and God’s people, both earthly and heavenly, will acknowledge Him as sovereign Lord. Then will be fulfilled the prayer which the Lord taught His disciples, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”

Paul rounds off this glorious mystery by saying: “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will” (Eph. 1:11). The ASV renders it: “In whom also we were made a heritage.” Either way, he assures us that we will share the blessings that God has in store for His beloved Son, and for His redeemed people.

Chapter 11: The Mystery of God

The mystery of God is the fact that for thousands of years God has waited in love and patience for men to repent of their sin and turn to Him for forgiveness. He has allowed evil men to continue in their wickedness and seemingly get away with it. Heaven seems to be silent. It is the problem of the psalmist in Psalm 73. When he saw the prosperity of the wicked and God’s people suffering—“waters of a full cup are wrung out to them”—it was devastating to his faith in God. It was only when he went into the sanctuary of God, and saw things from God’s standpoint that his faith was restored.

People have even questioned the existence of God when they see evil go unchecked. The criminal, the murderer, the dishonest businessman have it all their own way. It used to be said that crime doesn't pay. But now it does pay handsome dividends. God's moral law is ignored or laughed at, and learned theologians advance the theory that God is dead! But God has always declared through His servants that He will ultimately deal with evil and the evildoer. He will publicly judge wickedness and lawlessness. God does not execute judgment until man's iniquity has reached its limit. "The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15:16). God will wait until the sin, of man comes to a head, in open defiance of Him, by the beast and the Antichrist. Then He will judge it all, and take to Himself His great power and reign.

The execution of judgment on the wickedness of man is one of the great themes of the book of Revelation. In this, the final book in the Bible, all the great doctrines and revelations of God to man are brought to a conclusion. The first three chapters are historical and concern the Church. From this point on, all is prophetical. Chapters 6-19 outline events in heaven and on earth after the Church is complete and caught up to its celestial home. These events take place in a comparatively short space of time, approximately seven years. This is Daniel's seventieth week, divided into two parts of three-and-a-half years each. Our Lord calls the first part "the beginning of sorrows"; and the second part, "the great tribulation" (Matt. 24:8, 21). During this period, three series of terrible judgments are poured out by God on the world which has rejected His Son and His mercy offered in the gospel. The first series is called the seals; the second, the trumpets; and the third, the vials or bowls. These increase in intensity until a large proportion of the world's population and the material resources of the earth have been destroyed.

The seals are judgments that men bring upon themselves by their own folly. Nuclear weapons and the sophisticated means for mass destruction will then be used, and much of the earth's surface will be left a smoking ruin.

In the trumpets, satanic forces will be unleashed with all their deceitful and destructive power, and men will reap what they have sown. The sevenfold blast of the ram's horn trumpet at the siege of Jericho is an illustration (Josh. 6).

The vials or bowls are called "the wrath of Almighty God." Here is God's concentrated anger and retribution. It is His answer to the rebellion and revolt of the atheist and anarchist.

It is worth noting that the trumpets are contained in, and issue from, the seventh seal; and the bowls are contained in. and issue from, the seventh trumpet.

The seventh trumpet in which the seven bowls are contained introduces the coming of the King and the inauguration of the kingdom. "The seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 1:15).

In the events associated with the blowing of the seventh trumpet, a mighty angel comes down from heaven, clothed with a cloud, and a rainbow upon his head. His face is like the sun, and his feet are as pillars of fire. The mighty angel can be none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, He is often called "the angel of Jehovah." In this form He appeared to Abraham (Gen. 18:33); to Jacob (Gen. 32:24-30); to Joshua, as the captain of the Lord's host

(Josh. 5:14-15); to Gideon (Jud. 6:12); and to Joshua, the high priest, as the angel advocate (Zech. 3:1). These appearances are called theophanies or Christophanies. In Malachi 3:1, He is called “My messenger” or “the angel of the covenant,” in a great prophecy concerning His second coming.

The four descriptive items of the majesty and glory of this “mighty angel” leave no doubt about His identity.

He is clothed with a cloud. This would be the Shekinah cloud of glory, a symbol of the presence of God with His people. It sheltered the people of Israel as they came out of Egypt. It rested over the Tabernacle and Temple when they were in covenant relationship with Jehovah. It overshadowed the transfiguration scene (Matt. 17:5). It received the risen and glorified Christ at His ascension (Acts 1:9). And it will appear again at His coming (Rev. 1:7).

A rainbow was upon His head. This is the symbol of God’s covenanted mercy (Gen. 9:12-17). It surrounds the throne (Ezek. 1:28; Rev. 4:3).

His face was as it were the sun. He is called the Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings (Mai. 4:2). At the trans- figuration,. His face shone as the sun (Matt. 17:2), and as the Priest-Judge walking in the midst of the golden lampstands, “His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.”

His feet as pillars of fire. “His feet like unto tine brass, as if they bunted in a furnace.” This is the character in which I le appears to the apostate church at Thyatira (Rev. 2:18).

So in view of these references, it is reasonable to assume that “the mighty angel” is Christ Himself.

In his hand he holds a little book, and he plants one blazing foot on the sea, the other on the land, and claims both for God. This act would remind us of the eternal decree and the promise of Psalm 2:7-9: “I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shall dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

It also reminds us of Satan’s boast and claim at the third temptation of our Lord in the wilderness: “The devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto Him, All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me!” (Matt. 4:8-9) Luke adds: “All this power will I give Thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give if.”

In Revelation 13, a wild beast comes out of the sea and another out of the land. These are two individuals, the first a Gentile politician with his seat in Rome; and the second a Jew, the leader of apostate Judaism with his seat in Jerusalem. The first, the man of sin, is anti-God; the second is Antichrist. Behind these is the great dragon, Satan, energizing them and giving them their authority. This is the unholy trinity, an imitation and travesty of the Holy Trinity. Their joint ambition is to control the minds and worship of men. Their rule will extend over the territory of the old Roman empire.

But before they appear, John is taken aside to see things from God's standpoint. The "mighty angel" comes down from heaven and plants his feet on sea and land. His voice is like the lion's roar. When that voice is heard, all the forest is silent, so that one could hear the drop of a leaf. The little book in his hand is his claim to world dominion, and the prophecies which show how that will be accomplished. These are sweet to the prophet's taste, but the road to their fulfillment will be hard and bitter. It will be one heavy blow after another of apocalyptic judgment. It will end in divine triumph.

The mighty angel lifts his hands to heaven and swears by God, who created all things, that there will be "delay no longer" (RV, margin). God's longsuffering and patience are at an end. From this point, at the blowing of the seventh trumpet, there will be an increased tempo of judgment, involving both earth and sea in its scope. "When he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as He hath declared to His servants the prophets" (Rev. 10:7).

In many ways, the mystery of God in Revelation 10 is the climax and heading up of all the great mysteries of the New Testament. All of God's great secrets, and purposes of grace for Israel, for the Church, and for the nations will then be open and revealed. It is for that day that we wait and pray: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven… Amen."

Careless seems the great Avenger:

History's pages doth record,

One death-grapple in the darkness,

'Twixt old systems and the Word;

Truth forever on the scaffold

Wrong forever on the throne,

Yet that scaffold sways the future,

And behind the dim unknown

Standeth God within the shadows,

Keeping watch above His own.

Part Three: Devotional

Chapter 12: The Mystery of the Indwelling Christ

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 fulfill the work 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 you, the hope of glory: whom we preach,

warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: whereunto I also labor, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily (Col. 1:24-29).

The doctrine of the divine indwelling is one of the most important in the New Testament. It is the secret of holy living, of power and joy in service. If it is neglected or ignored or misunderstood, it results in serious loss for the individual believer.

It has always been God's great desire to dwell with and among His people. We see this in Eden before sin entered. The Lord God walked in the garden in the cool of the day, seeking for fellowship with the head of that beautiful creation, the man to whom He had delegated dominion. But tragically, sin intervened and marred that fellowship. When He called, "Adam, where art thou?" there was no answer. Fear had caused Adam and his helpmeet to hide from their Creator and God.

When God called His people out of Egypt, and redeemed them by the blood of the lamb. He commanded Moses to build a Tabernacle, "a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (Ex. 25:8).

Later, when Solomon was preparing to build the Temple, the word of the Lord came to him, "If thou wilt walk in My statutes, and execute My judgments, and keep all My commandments to walk in them; then will I perform My word with thee, which I spake unto David thy father: and I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake My people Israel" (1 Ki. 6:12-13).

These promises will be fully realized in a coming day in the new heavens and the new paradise. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. 21:3).

But in the present age of grace, God has a more intimate and blessed privilege for His people. Not only has He promised to dwell with and among them, but He has graciously condescended to dwell in them. A number of passages in the New Testament open up this great truth.

The Upper Room Ministry of Christ

John 13-17

The ministry of Christ in the upper room, as recorded by John, is the seed plot of New Testament doctrine. In the course of one evening, just before He went to Gethsemane and the cross, He left with His disciples the great basic, fun- damental teachings of Christianity. They are found here in germ, and later expounded in the epistles of the apostles. The fullest teaching concerning the Person and work of the Holy Spirit is to be found here. In John 14:16-17, we read: "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter that He may abide with [meta] you forever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him; but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with [para] you, and shall be in [en] you." Note the three prepositions: meta—among; para—alongside of; en— in. In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit came upon certain individuals. In the book of Judges, the idiomatic expression is: "He clothed Himself with" Gideon (6:34); and with Samson (14:6, 19). But in the upper room, the promise of our Lord is that the Holy Spirit would come in to dwell. This was fulfilled at Pentecost when He baptized the saints into one

body (1 Cor. 12:13). “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:4). The Apostle Paul elaborates on this in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. “What? know ye not that your body is the temple [naos—inner shrine] of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.” So then, the Holy Spirit is permanently resident in the believer.

But our Lord went further and deeper in His teaching. In answer to Philip’s question: “Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us,” our Lord replied, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father…Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?” (Jn. 14:8-11). Here we have the marvelous truth of the intimate relation of the Father and the Son, repeated in the great intercessory prayer of John 17: “That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee” (v. 21). “That they may be one, even as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one” (verses 22-23).

Based on this great teaching is the promise of John 14:23: “If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him.” Literally, it means make Our home with him. What a marvelous concept is this! A promise of the divine indwelling in the heart of the believer. Here it is linked with the great truth of union and communion with the triune God.

The Secret of Bearing Fruit

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye am do nothing (Jn. 15:4).

The vine in Scripture is the symbol of public testimony for God. Israel was the vine brought out of Egypt and planted in the land (Isa. 5:1-7). But on account of failure and sin, the hedge was broken down and the boar out of the wood devoured it (Ps. 80:13). But where Israel failed as a testimony on earth, our Lord takes this position. He says: “I am the true vine, and ye are the branches.” He describes three branches in the vine, and something characteristic of each one.

The Fruitless Branch. The branch that bears no fruit, He takes away. This could be by the discipline of death. But the word translated “taketh away” could also be rendered “lifteth it up.” The branch has to be elevated and supported by a trellis, lifted up out of the dirt, so that light and air and heat can surround it, that it might produce fruit.

The Fruitful Branch. This needs to be purged, or washed, and pruned, so that it may bear more fruit. The pruning is often a painful and drastic process, but it is the husbandman, whom our Lord says is “My Father,” who holds the priming knife. He has committed to us the basin and the towel and the cleansing water (Jn. 13:14-15), but He holds the knife in His own hand.

The Withered Branch. “If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” This does not mean a true believer losing his salvation or his soul. It refers to bearing fruit. It is possible for a true believer to fall into some grievous sin or behavior so that his public testimony for God is

completely ruined. Like Lot in Sodom, anything he says to the ungodly falls on deaf ears, he appears as one that mocks (Gen. 19:14).

The secret of all successful service and fruit-bearing is abiding in the Vine, and Christ abiding in us.

The Secret of Sanctification

"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8:9-11).

This is the climax of the teaching concerning sanctification in Romans 6-8. In Scripture the doctrine of sanctification is threefold. First it is positional (1 Pet. 1:2). The believer is set apart for God when he is born again and receives life from God.

Next it is progressive. The indwelling Spirit and the cleansing water of the Word, working together, reveal imperfections in the life. Provision is made through the work of the Advocate, our Lord Jesus Christ, to remove these when we confess them (1 Jn. 2:1). The object of this progressive sanctifi- cation is to make us more like Christ. Then it is perfected when we see Him face to face in the glory.

The power for this great work of promoting holiness in the life of the believer is provided by the indwelling Spirit of God, and the consciousness of the presence of Christ in the heart. As long as the saint lives in this world, prior to the redemption of his body at the rapture, he will have to contend with the flesh, the old man, and the body of sin. The flesh is the old nature, as depraved and wicked as ever; the old man is the sinful habits and lusts which dominated the individual previous to the new birth; the body of sin is the instrument that carried out the dictates of the flesh. These will never be eradicated or improved while we are in the body. But God's method of countering and dominating these evil tendencies is the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus and the indwelling Christ.

The Foretaste of Glory

To whom God would make known "what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col 1:27).

That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man (Eph. 3:16).

In Colossians 1:15-22, we have one of the highest peaks of teaching in the New Testament concerning the Person of Christ. False teachers, propagating oriental mysticism, were attempting to reduce Christ to one of many gods, or put Him on a level with the higher angels, but nothing more. The inspired apostle assures us that He is Head of all creation, visible and invisible; and of thrones, principalities, and powers, He is also Head of the body, the Church.

The apostle summarizes his statement of the greatness of the Person of Christ in three powerful statements: "That in all things He might have the preeminence" (v. 18). "It pleased

the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell" (v. 19). "In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (2:9). Human language could not express the majesty, dignity, and deity of the Saviour in higher terms.

Paul tells us that this great ministry concerning the Person of Christ was one of the mysteries committed to him to convey to the saints at Colosse, "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

He had prayed for a similar blessing for the saints at Ephesus: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; [and] that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:17-19).

O the marvel of this great truth! Not only that Christ died for me on the cross, that He is risen and glorified and seated on the throne, but that He condescends to make His home in my heart! Here He deserves to reign supreme.

The Results of Christ Dwelling in the Heart

First, He would be Lord of my heart and life; not have me just using the term "Lord" with my lips and at the same time disobeying His Word. He would govern every thought and act and word.

Secondly, self-will would be shown the door; His will would be dominant. He would be given, not the attic or the basement, but the best room in the house.

Thirdly, I would have constant, intimate communion with Him. He would be my Counselor, Guide, and the "Friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

Part Four: Diabolical

Chapter 13: The Mystery of Iniquity

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion,

that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth; whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle.

Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given its everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work (2 Thess. 2-1-17).

Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, chapter 2, is one of the key prophetic passages of the Bible. It was written by the apostle to clear up certain difficulties in the minds of the Thessalonian believers in relation to the chronology of the second coming of Christ, and the order of events immediately subsequent to the rapture of the Church. The secret "catching up" of the saints is clearly outlined in 4:13-18 of his first letter, but apparently that which takes place afterwards was confused in their minds. This confusion was complicated by supposed prophetic utterances by fake teachers, and by a forged letter allegedly written by the apostle. This spurious message was to the effect that the day of the Lord was already present (v. 2, RV). It is most important to recognize the true reading of this verse. The AV renders it: "that the day of Christ is at hand."

The term "the day of Christ" occurs six times in the New Testament (1 Cor. 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16). In each case, it refers to the day of rewards for service at the judgment seat of Christ. It takes place in heaven after the rapture. But the day of the Lord, predicted in many passages of the Old Testament, is a time of unparalleled judgment which takes place on the earth. On account of trials and persecution which had overtaken the Thessalonian believers, they had the fear that perhaps the day of the Lord had already come.

The apostle, to set the record straight, outlines in sequence the events which will take place during the day of the Lord. He tells us (2 Thess. 2) that that day cannot come until:

i) There comes a falling away first—the apostasy (v. 3).

ii) The man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition (v. 3).

iii) He sits in a re-erected Temple, showing himself that he is God (v. 4).

iv) The restrainer is removed; then takes place the full unveiling of the lawless one (v. 8). The mystery of iniquity is already working, but is restrained by the restrainer (v. 7).

v) His dupes are deceived by a strong delusion and by "the lie" (v. 11).

vi) The Lord consumes him by the spirit of His mouth and by the brightness of His coming (v. 8).

But note carefully that these are events that take place on earth while the raptured Church is in heaven, undergoing the examination of the bema, the day of Christ. The Thessalonian saints are chosen to salvation from what is described above (v. 13). Here Paul explains that the central item, the mystery of iniquity, is already working, but is being restrained, so that it cannot fully develop until the restraint is removed. Now it would be relevant to ask, What is this mystery which is operating today, but which is held back by an unseen power?

It is reasonable to assume that the answer is in the context of the passage. There are three main items: an apostasy in doctrine; the development of a God-defying religion—the deification of a man; and the deception of those who had deliberately rejected the truth of the gospel.

There are some evangelicals today who would define the "falling away" of verse 3 as the rapture, the catching away of the Church. But this seems a strange and strained interpretation of the passage. The general tenor of Scripture is that, at the end, there will be a denial and repudiation of the great fundamentals of the faith. Our Lord indicated it when He said: "When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" (Lk. 18:8). Paul refers to it in 1 Timothy 4:1. John warns us of it in 1 John 2:18-23. Peter is no loss explicit in 2 Peter 3:3-4.

This is a part of the mystery of iniquity that is working today. The major denominations of Christendom are not only repudiating the principles that brought them into existence, but one after another are denying the faith for which their fathers died. Apostate Rome, which for centuries has corrupted the pure doctrine of our Lord and His apostles, today has her theologians who are following the same path as apostate Protestantism in denying the authority of Holy Scripture. We can expect the apostasy to deepen and darken as the time draws near for the coming.

The Bible teaches that the final form of world religion will be the deification of man. In the capitalistic West, which boasts of its freedom and democratic society, the vast majority of the people, from the child in the kindergarten to the Ph.D. in the seats of higher learning, have been bludgeoned and brainwashed into accepting Darwin's theory of the origin of man and the universe. The Creator has been politely, or not so politely, excluded from His own creation. The natural result will be the emergence of a superman who will take over the direction of affairs, This is what a godless society is looking for. M will finally get it. Man has set foot on the moon and is reaching out for the stars. The thinking of the tower of Babel is being repeated, but on a supremely vaster scale. As God intervened then, He will do so again in a coming day.

This mystery of iniquity will be the unholy trinity mentioned in the previous chapter. It is described in Revelation 13 as two wild beasts, one coming up out of the sea, the other out of the land, and behind the two, giving them their power and authority, is the devil himself.

The first wild beast is the man of sin, described in 2 Thessalonians 2. He will be a Gentile, a super politician, with his headquarters in Rome. The second will be a Jew, a religious leader with his headquarters in Jerusalem. There will be a working pact or treaty between the two. The first, the head of western democracy, will guarantee the sovereignty and the security of

Israel in the land. The Temple will be rebuilt, likely on the old site, and the ancient ritual reestablished.

But after three and a half years, the treaty will be broken. The first wild beast, the man of sin, inflated by a sense of his own importance, will destroy every form of religion. That which happened at the French Revolution in 1798 and at the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, will take place again on a vast scale. He will demand universal worship of himself. He will set up an image of himself in the Temple at Jerusalem. Those who refuse to worship him will be persecuted and slain. No one will be able to buy or sell unless they have his mark on their hand or forehead.

Thus will break out the Great Tribulation. Its focus will be the Jew in the land of Israel, but it will have worldwide repercussions. It will be totalitarianism with a vengeance in the political, religious, and commercial spheres.

The man of sin will have a following, just as every dictator with a vigorous program has today. It will be composed of those who once knew the truth, but rejected it. They will be judicially blinded, and led on like sheep to their doom. Many of those in false cults today were once exposed to the gospel, but refused it.

Another problem of the chapter is: who or what is the re-strainer which holds back the development of this mystery of iniquity? It is noticeable that both the personal pronoun “he” and the neuter pronoun “what” is used in describing this hindering power. Very many distinguished expositors suggest that it is organized government. While it is, of course, true that stable government holds down the forces of anarchy and lawlessness, yet this explanation does not seem to fit into the context of the passage.

Under the rule of the man of sin, there will be the ruthless suppression of everything that raises its head against him. The two forces that hold back the development of the conditions described in the chapter, are, first of all, the presence of the true Church, which acts as salt in the decaying carcass of Christendom; and secondly, the presence of the Holy Spirit, who dwells corporately in the Church and individually in the hearts of the believers.

When the Church is removed at the rapture, then the restraint will be gone, and the anti-God revolt will come to a head in the revelation of the man of sin and his accomplices. The Holy Spirit is the “He” and the Church is the “what” of the passage. The Holy Spirit will be in the world, but acting as the executive of the Godhead in the same way as He did before the Church period.

At the end of the chapter, the apostle assures the Thessalonian believers that “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The natural implication of these words is that the Thessalonian believers would be saved from the devastating events described in the chapter. It also implies that the Church of the present dispensation will be removed to heaven at the rapture before these events take place.

Chapter 14: Mystery, Babylon the Great

Revelation 17-18

The name Babylon is mentioned 260 times in Scripture, and is found from the earliest times of human history in Genesis right through till the end in the book of Revelation. It is not only the name of a city in the Middle East, but it indicates a sinister system in direct contrast to the New Jerusalem, the city of the blessed.

The references to Babylon in the Bible could be divided into three periods. First, historical Babylon, recorded in Genesis 6-12, and characterized by idolatry. Secondly, prophetical Babylon, the place of captivity of the Jewish people in the time of Daniel and Jeremiah, a captivity which lasted for seventy years. Then finally, there is mystical Babylon, outlined in Revelation 17-18.

Historical Babylon

Genesis 6-12

Historically, Babylon had its origin in the days immediately after the flood. Its first mention is in Genesis 10:10. We read that Cush, a son of Ham, begat Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel. The word means “the gate of God.” It was there that men built a city and a tower out of burned brick and slime whose top was to reach to heaven. But God put a stop to the work by confusing their language. Instead of the gate of God, the name came to mean “confusion.” Babylon is the Greek form of the name; Babel is the Hebrew.

Nimrod, a Hamite, was the first leader of a confederate departure from God, and was the brain of the movement. He was a mighty hunter, instead of a farmer or shepherd, lie was an ancient warlord and a picture of the coming Antichrist. God’s command after the flood was to decentralize and expand in life on the land. Nimrod’s counter idea was to amalgamate and build up the city. His slogan was: “Unity is strength.” He invaded Nineveh, caught the Semite off guard, and unfurled the Cushite ensign on the banned tower of Babel. The early Babylonian Empire was the result. The remains of the tower still exist, and are called by the Arabs, “Birs Nimroud.” It is estimated that it was originally 660 feet loftier than the Great Pyramid, and had eight towers decreasing in width, surmounted by a golden statue forty feet high.

Some of the tribes in Central Africa today have a tradition of the tower of Babel.

Alexander Hislop in his book, The Two Babylons, traces the development of an idolatrous religious system originating in this center. Nimrod, its founder, became the sun god. His wife, Semiramis, the queen of heaven, later became known as Ashtaroth, and her consort, Astarte. Her son, Adonis, became Horos. These were the Chaldean mysteries. They later took different forms in Egypt and Greece and Rome, but all had essentially the same source.

When Cyrus the Persian captured Babylon in 539 B.C., the idolatrous priesthood fled to Asia Minor and settled in Perg- amos, bringing their pagan religion with them. This is Satan’s seat, mentioned by John in Revelation 2:13.

Julius Caesar, shortly before the birth of Christ, moved this heathen hierarchy, with its whole paraphernalia, to Rome. For political reasons, he took the Babylonian title of Pontifex Maximus, combining in himself political and religious authority over the republic. Constantine, the Roman emperor, assumed the title in 313 A.D., and later it was appropriated by the pope. It was subtle satanic strategy to move the seat of idolatry to the west. Priestcraft, the worship of mother and child, holy water, the sign of the cross, the mass, all had their beginning in Babel. The priestly miter shaped like a fish head is taken from Dagon, the fish god. The rosary, used by the Moslem, the Buddhist, and the Roman Catholic, has the same origin. Thus popery is the lineal descendant of Nimrod and Babylon. Abraham, the Hebrew, was called by God out of it. The people in Ur of the Chaldees, his home town, were worshippers of the moon god. The call of Abraham to leave it, recorded in Genesis 12, was a great historical landmark. It was the revelation to him of the God of glory (Acts 7:2).

Prophetical Babylon

After Israel had been emancipated from slavery in Egypt under Moses, they conquered Canaan under Joshua, and became a nation with a monarchical form of government under David and Solomon. Based on the covenants given to Abraham (Gen. 15) and to David (2 Sam. 7), they had been promised a homeland and a royal house in perpetuity by God. While these covenant promises were unconditional, they were warned that if they disobeyed God's laws and went into idolatry, they would be carried into captivity by their enemies (Deut. 32). This actually took place. Israel went after Ashteroth, the pagan worship of the Canaanites, whom they had disinherited. Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab, intro- duced the licentious worship of Baal. Egyptian forms of religion were common in the time of Solomon. As a result, the threat of subjection to their enemies was carried out.

First, the ten tribes in the northern kingdom were carried into captivity in Assyria by Sargon II in 722 B.C. (2 Ki. 17:6). Then Judah suffered a similar fate under Nebuchadnezzar. He was responsible for three deportations of Jews to Babylon.

i) The first was in 605 B.C., when Daniel and others of the seed royal were taken captive to the court of Babylon.

ii) The second was in 598 B.C., when King Jehoichin and all the treasures of the Temple, and a young priest called Ezekiel, were carried away.

iii) The third and final one was in 587 B.C., when the city of Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed, and Judah ceased to be a sovereign state (2 Ki. 25:1-21).

The Old Testament books of Daniel, Ezekiel, Ezra, and Nehemiah describe this period of captivity to Babylon, and the recovery of a remnant from it. It is called "the iron age of Judaism." Their feet were taken to the original seat of idolatry, where their hearts had already been. As is so often the case, they got their fill of it by contact with it, and on their return to their homeland, they never went back to pagan idolatry.

This Babylon experience had a profound effect on the people of Israel, and also on history generally. Isaiah, Darnel, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah all write about it Daniel especially gives the overall picture of Babylon in relation to three other great world empires, of which Babylon was the first. It is amazing how his prophetic outline of Gentile world dominion has been literally fulfilled. Isaiah predicts the overthrow of Babylon (lsa. 13:20), and tells us that it will

never again be inhabited. Jeremiah 50-51 and Isaiah 21 outline its fall. This happened historically and is described in Daniel 5.

Not only was Babylon the place of captivity and suffering for the Jewish people, but it has moral features which portray a vivid picture of conditions in mystical Babylon as it is described in Revelation 17-18. The introduction of a universal religion, to which all must bow, is graphically prefigured in the great image of Daniel 2; and the stone cut out of the mountain, which destroyed it, and which fills the whole earth, is a figure of the coming again of Christ in glory and its subsequent effects.

Mystical Babylon

One-eighth of the contents of the book of Revelation, forty-two verses in chapters 17-18, is occupied with the final history of Babylon the Great. Here it is called a mystery. Some think that the actual city will be rebuilt on the old site and that the description in Revelation is a literal city, but Isaiah 13:20 tells us that it will never be inhabited, and the account in Revelation 17-18 seems to indicate a satanic system which God finally judges and destroys. There is a designed contrast between the harlot, the woman, and the city of chapters 17-18; and the bride, the wife, and the city of chapters 19-21. One is the counterfeit and false; the other is the genuine and true.

Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots, is a monstrous system with three branches; first, the religious (Rev. 17:1-7); secondly, the political (17:8-18); thirdly, the commercial (18). The two chapters describe its final form and ultimate destruction.

The Religious Form of Babylon

And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication; and upon her forehead urns a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration. And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns (Rev. 17:1-7).

John is carried away in the Spirit to the wilderness to see a woman sitting on a scarlet-colored beast, full of names of blasphemy. On her forehead was this name written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

Since the Reformation, many theologians have identified the woman as papal Rome. Luther, Tyndale, Calvin, Knox, Alford, and many others have interpreted the passage in this way. The church of Rome, of course, says it is pagan Rome, which persecuted and martyred the early Christians. The interpretation, that the harlot is the church of Rome exclusively, hardly meets

the facts. Stripped of externals. Buddhism. Confucianism, Shintoism, Islam, along with ritualistic and rationalistic Christendom, are identical. They are all winds of the same doctrine. They are all parts of an unseen satanic system secretly working in different forms since its origin and fountainhead in Genesis 11. Revelation 18:2 indicates that it is satanically inspired and energized. It is the habitation of demons and foul spirits. This would show that it includes spiritism and the occult. It is the unclean residue of false apostate religion left on the earth after the true Church is raptured to heaven. Revelation 17:15 shows that it is a vast inter- national world system. It is a combination of apostate Romanism, Protestantism, oriental religion, and atheism. It is a religious monstrosity, the huge, ecumenical world church of the last days. Under God's permissive governmental hand, it will be destroyed by the political power, to make way for the final form of false worship, the great delusion, the worship of a man, the man of sin.

The Political Form of Babylon

The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition. And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for He is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with Him are called, and chosen, and faithful. And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfill His will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth (Rev. 17: 8-18).

The political arm of Babylon is described in verses 8-18, It is headed up by a beast, with seven heads and ten horns, on whom the woman sits. Obviously the beast is the same as the first beast of Revelation 13:1, which conies up out of the sea. Both have seven heads and ten horns, and both have the names of blasphemy. The seven heads are interpreted in verse 9 as the seven mountains on which the woman sits, which without question is Rome. In verse 8, we are told that the beast which John saw, was, and is not, and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition.

This is a vivid synoptic description of the Roman Empire in four stages. It indicates a revival in the end time of the fourth world monarchy outlined in the image of Daniel 2, and the four wild beasts of Daniel 7. In Revelation 17:10, 12, the seven heads and ten horns are interpreted as kings. The heads are successive, the horns contemporaneous. Seven heads will have reigned during the first phase of the Roman Empire; the horns will be in existence after its revival during the final phase.

The seven heads are sometimes interpreted as seven forms of government, which have been in the Roman state from its beginning to its fall. Others regard them as heads of state. Perhaps both are included, the state and its titular head. The beast of Revelation 17 is the eighth, arising in the territory of the old empire. The ten horns are ten kings or heads of state, who for a short time reign independently, but who hand over their individual sovereignty to the beast, who takes over power as the supreme dictator (vv. 12-13).

At first the religious power, represented by the woman, dominates and dictates policy to the political power, represented by the beast. But, as it has happened so often in human history, she becomes intolerable, and the political dictator turns on her and destroys her. The French revolution of 1798 and the Bolshevik revolution are examples of what will happen to the harlot, the false world church (vv. 16-18).

The Commercial Form of Babylon

And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double. How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.

And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come. And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: the merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble. And cinnamon, and odors, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men. And the fruits that thy soul lusteth after are departed from thee, and all things which are dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all. The merchants of these things, which were nude rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, Alas, alas, that great city, that urns clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls! For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off, And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying,

Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness for in one hour is she made desolate.

Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her. And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and east if into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shalt that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all. And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall he found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee; and the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth (Rev. 18:1-24).

Revelation 17 outlines the woman and the beast, the religious and the political sides of this sinister worldwide system of the end time. Chapter 18 sketches the city, its commercial side, and its ultimate destruction by the hand of God. The religious side, the final great apostate world council of churches, will be wiped out by the political power, to make way for the final world religion, the worship of a man and his image. But this, as well as its commercial tool—world business, industry, and finance—is doomed to be destroyed by the judgment of Almighty God.

Some regard the city of Revelation 18 as the old city on the Euphrates, rebuilt as a center of commercial activity in the last days. But the prediction of Isaiah 13:20, that it shall never be inhabited, seems to rule this out. If the woman and the beast of chapter 17 indicate a worldwide system described metaphorically, so must the city of chapter 18. It is something far more widespread and imposing than any material city. It is the third branch of this monstrous global system.

The church of Rome, and for that matter, apostate Protestantism, have always been interested in both politics and commerce. The Vatican is a vast treasure house of every kind of priceless valuables. The church, too often, has been more interested in economics than in evangelism.

The world of today is divided into the “have’s” and the “have not’s.” About two-thirds of its population live below the subsistence level. It is estimated that about one-half of the people on the earth go to bed, if they have a bed, hungry every night. On the other hand, capitalism, with its monopolies, cartels, and combines to crush out the small man, is based on greed and selfishness.

Revelation 18 lists eight classes of merchandise: precious metals and jewels; costly clothing; furniture materials— thyine wood and ivory; containers—vessels of wood, brass, iron, marble; perfumes, cosmetics; food; transportation—horses, chariots; slaves—the bodies and souls of men.

When this vast system is destroyed, four classes mourn: shipping, government, business, and entertainment (vv. 11, 17, 9, 22). Meanwhile, three classes rejoice: saints, apostles, and prophets (vv. 20, 24).

The chapter outlines a grim picture of the breakdown of world finance. Today, the delicate balance between the dollar, the pound, the mark, the franc, and the yen—and the anxiety of politicians and economists—show how it could happen very suddenly.

Another significant happening on the world scene shows how events are rapidly shaping up for the end. On March 25, 1957, on the famous Capitoline Hill in Rome, the representatives of Belgium, France, Italy, Luxemburg, West Germany and the Netherlands signed a document called the Treaty of Rome, establishing a Common Market between their six countries. The great concept of a United States of Europe has come significantly farther since then.

When we see a ten-nations combine on the territory of the old Roman Empire in Europe forming under our eyes today, it looks as if Revelation 17-18 could be the next stage in the process of fulfillment. In October 1957, Paul Henri Spaak, who was then the secretary general of NATO, said in Paris. “We do not want another committee; we have too many already. What we want is a man of sufficient stature to hold the allegiance of all people, and to lift us out of the economic morass into which we are sinking. Send us such a man, and be he god or devil, we will receive him.”

The devil will see to it that the man will be forthcoming in his time, under the permissive hand of Cod. Considering the fact that the political and economic power will be dominated at the beginning of this satanic alliance by the religious, it is significant that a majority of the population at present in the European economic community is Roman Catholic, and that that church still has a tremendous influence in the political and financial spheres.

Looking at the overall picture, every true believer should pay attention to the exhortation in Revelation 18:4: “Come out of her. My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.”

Appendix

Three writers have given us an exposition of the mysteries of Scripture.

H. A. Ironside in The Mysteries of God, lists seven:

Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven—Matthew 13

Mystery of the Olive Tree—Romans 11

Great Mystery of Christ and the Church—Ephesians 3

Mystery of Piety—1 Timothy 3:16

Mystery of the Rapture of the Saints—1 Corinthians 15:51

Mystery of Lawlessness—2 Thessalonians 2:7

Mystery of God Finished—Revelation 10:7

W. E. Vine in The Twelve Mysteries of Scripture, gives twelve:

The Faith—1 Timothy 3:9

The Godhead of Christ—-Colossians 2:2, 9

Godliness—1 Timothy 3:16

The Gospel—Ephesians 6:19

The Kingdom of God—Matthew 13:11; Luke 8:10

The Seven Stars and Lampstands—Revelation 1:20

The Transformation of the Saints' Bodies—1 Cor. 15:51

Israel's Hardening—Romans 11:25

Babylon—Revelation 17:5

Lawlessness—2 Thessalonians 2:7

God's Purpose in Judgment—Revelation 10:7

God's Will—Ephesians 1:9

William Hoste in Mysteries of the New Testament, lists nine in two categories, as follows:

Divine Mysteries

Mystery of the Kingdom—Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 8

Mystery of Israel's Fall—Romans 11-25

Mystery of the Rapture—1 Corinthians 15:51

Mystery of Christ, called "Great"—Rom. 16:2^; Eph. 3-5

Mystery of Godliness—1 Timothy 3:1b

The Mystery of God—Revelation 10:7

Mystery of Universal Headship—Ephesians 1:^-10

Satanic Mysteries

Mystery of Iniquity—2 Thessalonians 2:7

Mystery of Babylon—Revelation 17:5