

THE BEGINNING AND THE END

CONCERNING BIBLE STUDY

Note these three interesting verses of Scripture, I Peter 2:1 and Hebrews 5:13 and 14: “As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby.” “For everyone that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age.”

I think you will agree with me that most Christians are unskillful in the Word and never seem to get beyond the milk diet. It seems much more difficult for some Christians to understand the more profound truths of the Bible than for others, And sad to say, with many Christians there is an absolute indifference in the matter of diligently searching the Scriptures to feed upon the meat of the Word.

Some time ago there was a man about 50 years of age in the audience of a Bible teacher who was giving out some of the deeper truths of the Bible. At the close of each meeting this man, who had been a believer for many years, would say to the Bible teacher, “too deep for me, I don’t get it.” When he came with his usual remark at the last meeting the Bible teacher clasped his hand and said, “My dear brother, just hold on to John 3:16 and you will land in heaven.”

We do thank God that we do not have to understand the deep truths of the Bible to get into heaven for God says “by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, not of works.” Ephesians 2:8 and 9. Simple faith in the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ is all that is required for entrance into the Kingdom of God and eternal life.

But what a pity and shame that the majority of Christians are so ignorant of the structure of the Bible, especially when that ignorance is due to indifference and laziness.

The thoughtful consideration of the facts suggested in the subject of this Bible study, will prove of real value in the understanding of the structure of the Bible. By thoughtful consideration we imply that the reader should diligently search the Scriptures in the Spirit. The Christian who will thus spiritually study the Bible and learn from that study when the Old Testament (Covenant) began and when it ended, when the God-given religion began and when it ended, when the times of the Gentiles began and when they will end, when the dispensation of grace began and when it will end, will know better how to interpret, appropriate and apply the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation.

Most Christians know that they are members of the Church, called the Body of Christ, and that this present period of grace differs radically from the former period of law. They know that there is a great difference between living under the reign of law and under the dispensation, or economy, of the grace of God. They know that they are not Old Testament saints and that physical circumcision is not a Divine requirement for members of Christ’s Body during the present reign of grace. They know that politically, or governmentally, as well as spiritually, we are living in the times of the Gentiles. Luke 21:24.

But as to how much, or how little (if any), religion the members of Christ's Body should mix in with God's spiritual "grace" program, most Christians doubt and differ. And nothing troubles or baffles the average Christian more than does his inability to know how much or how little of the Divine messages and program of the Psalms, of the Four Gospels, and of the Book of Acts, is for the obedience and practice of members of the Body of Christ. When one group of Christians observes that other denominational groups include or exclude some of the commands and ceremonies that their group does not, the Christians of that group must ask or wonder why. They see that their religious leaders, in presenting their denominational creed and spiritual program, lack an intelligent Divine principle for the selection or elimination in the Body program, of instructions which God gave to His people before He brought in His present reign of grace. Thoughtful Christians must realize that there is something wrong about the hit-and-miss, snatch-grab method employed by the church preachers and leaders who, without explanation or apology, arbitrarily select for, or reject from, their church creeds and programs this or that teaching or practice, which rightly belonged to some former Divine economy, and which God will, or will not, have brought over to this present economy. We sincerely trust that this study will reveal to us something of that intelligent Divine principle.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

THE BEGINNING AND THE END OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

In order that we may obey II Timothy 2:15, and rightly divide the Word of Truth, it is altogether necessary that we know when the Old Testament, or the Old Covenant, began and when it ended.

Two common blunders generally made in Bible study are the erroneous idea that the Old Testament began with Adam in Genesis, and the equally erroneous idea that Israel had been set aside when Peter and the Eleven preached to Israel on the day of Pentecost. When the Bible student, or teacher, is guilty of these two errors, other false ideas will invariably result.

First, let us consider the statement in Galatians 3:19, "the law was added till the Seed should come." By reading Galatians 3:16 to 24 and Romans 4:1 to 12, we learn that 430 years after the gospel was preached to uncircumcised Abram, that is, 430 years after God first promised to Abram, Christ the Seed, the law was added at Sinai. Then note Colossians 2:14: "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross." Now read II Corinthians 3:7 to 18 to see how the Scriptures tell us that the law was done away: was abolished. Note II Corinthians 3:11 and 14:

"For if that which was done away was glorious much more that which remaineth is glorious." "But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament; which is done away in Christ."

In II Corinthians 3:7 and 9, we read that the law which God wrote on tables of stone is called "the ministration of death," "the ministration of condemnation," and "the Old Testament." So in Galatians 3:19 let us substitute for law, and read, "the Old Testament was added till Christ should come." We might say also, "religion was added till Christ should come." It was imposed upon Israel until the time of reformation. Hebrews 9:10.

When was the Old Testament added? Note the answer in Hebrews 8:9: “Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers IN THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; because they continued not in My Covenant.” Then note Hebrews 8:13: “In that He saith a New Covenant, HE HATH MADE THE FIRST OLD. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away:” Here we learn when the Covenant (Testament) between Jehovah and Israel was made, and when it became “OLD.” We must keep in mind that that Covenant, which God made with Israel at Sinai, was never called “Old” from the time that Moses was on Mount Sinai until after Christ died on Calvary’s cross; that is, for more than 1500 years. The Mosaic Covenant was not the Old Covenant during the 1500 years that Israel was under that Covenant. Note carefully that that Covenant, now old, was made when God took Israel by the hand and led them up out of the land of Egypt That was about 2500 years after God put Adam out of the garden of Eden. So we see that the Old Testament was in not effect with the beginning of Genesis or with the beginning of the Nation Israel. We are told in Galatians 3:6 to 24 that the Abrahamic Covenant was made more than 400 years before the Law Covenant existed, and that the Law Covenant had no nullifying effect upon the Abraham Covenant. The Abraham Covenant did not end with the Old Covenant, for many things are yet to be accomplished on this earth because of God’s promise and oath given first to Abram and then to Abraham several centuries before the Old Covenant was added, before God led Israel out of Egypt. So never let us confuse the Abraham Covenant with the Old Covenant or think that the Abrahamic Covenant has been either done away in Christ, or as yet been altogether fulfilled. The Abraham Covenant has not been abolished.

But remember the plain statement of II Corinthians 3:14, that the Old Testament has been done away in Christ. That which decayeth and waxeth old was ready to vanish away. It is not binding in this present dispensation.

The Book of Genesis (from Adam to Joseph) covers a period of about 1700 years. There are several covenants in that first Book of the Bible, but not one line concerning the Covenant called “the Old Testament.” So let us not call Adam, Abel, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Levi, or Joseph, “Old Testament” men. They lived and died before the Old Testament was added. Moses himself was 80 years old when he received the Testament from Jehovah Moses died at the age of 120; so his life was divided: eighty years “not under the law” and 40 years “under the law.” For forty years only Moses was an Old Testament saint.

Now note carefully Romans 5:13 and 14:

“For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression, who is the figure of Him Who was to come.”

Here God definitely marks a period in the Scriptures, “when there was no law;” when there was no Old Testament; “from ADAM TO MOSES.” That period, when men were without the law of Sinai, or the Old Testament, was about 2500 years. “From Adam to Moses.”

Later on we shall consider the other serious blunder that so many make; namely, teaching, or believing, that Israel had been set aside as a nation when the twelve apostles, in Acts 2, preached to devout Jews from every nation under heaven. But let us first be taught that the “Law Dispensation (Old Testament)” was both a parenthetical and a temporary period and Covenant.

But now let us search the Scriptures for an answer to this question:

WHEN DID CIRCUMCISION BEGIN AND WHEN DID CIRCUMCISION END?

THE BEGINNING AND THE END OF CIRCUMCISION

Comparatively few Christians have any idea of the importance of knowing the Bible Truth concerning the place and Significance of CIRCUMCISION in God's spiritual programs for His people. The right understanding of circumcision will help students of the Scriptures in the study and understanding of Paul's statement, in Galatians 2:7 to 9:

"BUT CONTRARIWISE, WHEN THEY SAW THAT THE GOSPEL OF THE UNCIRCUMCISION WAS COMMITTED UNTO ME, AS THE GOSPEL OF THE CIRCUMCISION WAS UNTO PETER: (FOR HE THAT WROUGHT EFFECTUALLY IN PETER TO THE APOSTLESHIP OF THE CIRCUMCISION, THE SAME WAS MIGHTY IN ME TOWARD THE GENTILES) AND WHEN JAMES PETER AND JOHN, WHO SEEMED TO BE PILLARS, PERCEIVED THE GRACE THAT WAS GIVEN UNTO ME, THEY GAVE TO ME AND BARNABAS THE RIGHT HANDS OF FELLOWSHIP; THAT WE SHOULD GO UNTO THE HEATHEN, AND THEY UNTO THE CIRCUMCISION."

Concerning the facts stated in these verses, there has not only been considerable controversy, but far more misunderstanding and ignorance. What was the difference between the gospel of the circumcision and the gospel of the uncircumcision? Some answer, "There is no difference;" others reply, "I do not know." Any intelligent student of the Bible should know by the very emphatic statement of fact, in the light of the context, that there was a very decided difference. Moreover, it is imperative that we know that Peter was instructed to preach the GOSPEL OF THE CIRCUMCISION after Pentecost.

But first let us compare two other Bible statements:

"Ye stiff-necked and UNCIRCUMCISED in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye." Acts 7:51.

"For we are the CIRCUMCISION, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." Philippians 3:3.

Here we note, first, that God's covenanted people were UNCIRCUMCISED though they had been CIRCUMCISED in the flesh. And, second, that heathen, saved by the grace of God, were the CIRCUMCISION, though they had never been circumcised in the flesh.

Several years after Stephen had told the circumcised Jews that they were uncircumcised in heart Peter preached to a respectable, devout, just, God-fearing Gentile who prayed to God always, a man who gave alms to the Jews. That man's name was Cornelius. Acts 10:2 and 22. Peter said to the God-fearing Gentile, "it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to come unto one of another nation:" Acts 10:28. The idea of going to Cornelius was the Lord's idea and not Peter's. The Lord sent Peter. Cornelius and the members of his household were saved. Then what happened to Peter? The saved Jews of Judea said. "thou wentest into men UNCIRCUMCISED." Acts 11:3. What a crime! Cornelius was a splendid, upright, moral Gentile, who feared God and loved the Jews, but he was unfit even to receive a message from the twelve apostles, who heard Christ say, in the so-called "great commission," "disciple all

nations.” Why? Because he had not been circumcised in the flesh. Israel was still bound by the Covenant of Circumcision. Acts 7:8. The dispensation of the grace of God and the ministry of reconciliation had not been authorized by Christ, because Israel had not yet been set aside. Read Romans 11:15.

The majority of Christians say that the attitude of the Twelve toward Cornelius, and the Gentiles in general, was contrary to the will of the Lord. Some say that those apostles were prejudiced Jews walking in the flesh and not in the Spirit. But the intelligent, spiritual student of the Four Gospels and the first seven chapters of Acts, knows that this is not true. The Twelve were continually filled with the Holy Spirit and uncompromisingly took their stand to obey God rather than men. Acts 5:29, Acts 4:19 and 20. According to Acts 5:32, even the infallible Holy Spirit, until after Peter was commissioned to go to Cornelius, was present to witness the fact of Acts 5:31: “Him (Jesus) hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to ISRAEL, and forgiveness of sins.” Where did the Gentiles come in? They didn’t come in unless they were proselytes in fellowship with the circumcision.

Peter did walk in the flesh some time later because of the question of circumcision. Note what Paul wrote: “But when Peter was come to Antioch I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain (Peter) came from James, he did eat with Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the CIRCUMCISION.” Galatians 2:11 and 12. Many of the circumcision walked in the flesh in their attitude toward the uncircumcision: “And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren (Gentiles), and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.” “But there rose up certain of the sects of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.” Acts 15:1 to 5. This matter was settled in the Jerusalem Council, about 52 A. D.

“Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain. which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment.” Acts 15:24.

Here we note that adding the law or circumcision to the gospel of grace perverted the gospel and subverted the soul.

CIRCUMCISION BEFORE THE LAW

Let us compare John 7:22 and 23 with Genesis 17:14 and 24:

“Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (NOT BECAUSE IT IS OF MOSES, BUT OF THE FATHERS;) and ye on the Sabbath day circumcise a man. If a man on the Sabbath day received circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath day?” John 7:22 and 23.

“AND THE UNCIRCUMCISED MAN CHILD WHOSE FLESH OF HIS FORESKIN IS NOT CIRCUMCISED, THAT SOUL SHALL BE CUT OFF FROM HIS PEOPLE, HE HATH BROKEN MY COVENANT.” Genesis 17:14. “AND ABRAHAM WAS NINETY YEARS OLD AND NINE, WHEN HE WAS CIRCUMCISED IN THE FLESH OF HIS FORESKIN.” Genesis 17:24. “NEITHER SHALL THY NAME ANY MORE BE CALLED ABRAM, BUT

THY NAME SHALL BE ABRAHAM; FOR A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE THEE.” Genesis 17:5.

From these verses we learn that circumcision was instituted when Abram was 99 years old and that his name was changed from “Abram” to “Abraham” at the time he was circumcised. In Galatians 3:6 to 8 and 17, we learn that Abram was justified 430 years before the law was given to Israel. Abram was then 75 years old. Genesis 12:4. Abram was justified 24 years before he was circumcised. But beginning with the circumcision of Abram, from the day his name was changed to “Abraham,” and all through the 406 years until the law was given, then through more than 1500 years, under the dispensation and reign of law, and for several years into the period covered by the first chapters of Acts, circumcision in the flesh was a Divine requirement for fellowship with God’s covenanted people: “And He gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day:” Acts 7:8. We know today that our circumcision is spiritual. Colossians 2:11. But the Twelve did not have that truth during the first years after Christ’s death any more than they had the truth of the one baptism of Colossians 2:12 and Ephesians 4:5.

God wants us to know that Isaac, the promised son, was not born until after Abram was circumcised. Then God wants us to know that that promised son was circumcised when he was eight days old. Genesis 21:4.

God also wants us to know that another promised Son was circumcised when He was eight days old: “And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.” Luke 2:21. Why was it necessary for Jesus to be circumcised? It is often said that a Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ. So many declare that they should follow Him in baptism. Jesus was baptized; but He was also circumcised. Should we follow Him in circumcision? We must have His circumcision. While Jesus was on earth, and up to the time of the salvation of Cornelius, no man was baptized unless he had first been circumcised. Now every member of the Body of Christ is circumcised and baptized the moment he receives Christ. Let us compare Romans 15:8, Ephesians 2:11 and 12 and Philippians 3:3: “NOW I SAY THAT JESUS CHRIST WAS A MINISTER OF THE CIRCUMCISION FOR THE TRUTH OF GOD, TO CONFIRM THE PROMISES MADE UNTO THE FATHERS.” Romans 15:8. “WHEREFORE REMEMBER, THAT YE BEING IN TIME PAST GENTILES IN THE FLESH, WHO ARE CALLED THE UNCIRCUMCISION BY THAT WHICH IS CALLED THE CIRCUMCISION IN THE FLESH MADE BY HANDS, THAT AT THAT TIME YE WERE WITHOUT CHRIST, BEING ALIENS FROM THE COMMONWEALTH OF ISRAEL, AND STRANGERS FROM THE COVENANTS OF PROMISE, HAVING NO HOPE, AND WITHOUT GOD IN THE WORLD.” Ephesians 2:11 and 12.

“FOR WE ARE THE CIRCUMCISION WHICH WORSHIP GOD IN THE SPIRIT, AND REJOICE IN CHRIST JESUS, AND HAVE NO CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH” Philippians 3:3.

Jesus Christ was a Minister of the CIRCUMCISION while He was on earth. Note His own positive statement: “And He said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Matthew 15:2 to 4. Then note His instructions to His Twelve: “These Twelve Jesus sent forth and commanded them saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the

Samaritans enter ye not, But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, And as ye go, preach saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” “But when they persecute you in this city flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall (may) not have gone over ‘THE CITIES OF ISRAEL’ till the Son of man be come.” Matthew 10:5 to 7 and Matthew 10:23. In Galatians 2:7 to 9 we learn that the Twelve were ministers to the circumcision with the gospel of the circumcision. They were to go to the cities of Israel. In the study of the 28 chapters of Acts we do not find any of the Twelve preaching outside the cities of Israel. When the disciples left Jerusalem the Twelve remained there. Acts 8:1. Peter, James and John were pillars at Jerusalem.

In Galatians 4:4 we learn that Jesus Christ was made under the law. Note Christ’s statement in Matthew 23:1 to 3 and in Matthew 5:17:

“Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to His disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do: but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.” “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.”

Note in Luke 4:16 that Jesus of Nazareth attended the Jewish synagogue on the Jewish Sabbath. In Matthew 8:4 this order from Jesus of Nazareth: “And Jesus with unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.”

Jesus Christ was the circumcised Minister to people who had been circumcised in the flesh. They were altogether under the covenant of circumcision. Later on the Lord Jesus was in heaven and directed Paul to write several statements concerning circumcision:

“BEHOLD, I PAUL SAY UNTO YOU, THAT IF YE BE CIRCUMCISED, CHRIST SHALL PROFIT YOU NOTHING.” Galatians 5:2. “AND I BRETHERN, IF I YET PREACH CIRCUMCISION, WHY DO I YET SUFFER PERSECUTION? THEN IS THE OFFENCE OF THE CROSS CEASED. I WOULD THAT THEY WERE EVEN CUT OFF WHICH TROUBLE YOU.” Galatians 5:11 and 12. “FOR NEITHER THEY THEMSELVES WHO ARE CIRCUMCISED KEEP THE LAW; BUT DESIRE TO HAVE YOU CIRCUMCISED, THAT THEY MAY GLORIFY IN YOUR FLESH.” “FOR IN CHRIST JESUS NEITHER CIRCUMCISION AVAILETH ANYTHING, NOR UNCIRCUMCISION, BUT A NEW CREATURE.” Galatians 6:13 and 15.

What a change! In Genesis 17 God specifically made circumcision in the flesh a requirement for fellowship with Him and His people. Uncircumcised people were to be cut off. In Galatians 5:11 and 12 circumcised people were to be cut off. This should convince any Christian of the absolute necessity of studying the Bible dispensationally.

Now let us study together Romans 4:9 to 12:

“ . . . faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.” Romans 4:9 to 12.

And Galatians 3:6 to 8:

“EVEN AS ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS ACCOUNTED TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS. KNOW YE THEREFORE THAT THEY WHICH ARE OF FAITH, THE SAME ARE THE CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM, AND THE SCRIPTURE FORESEEING THAT GOD WOULD JUSTIFY THE HEATHEN THROUGH FAITH, PREACHED BEFORE THE GOSPEL UNTO ABRAHAM, SAYING, IN TREE SHALL ALL NATIONS BE BLESSED.”

When God declared Abram righteous 24 years before he was circumcised and 430 years before the law was added because of transgression (Galatians 3:17 to 19), the Scriptures foresaw the justification of uncircumcised Gentiles by faith alone, and when Christ in heaven sent Paul out to proclaim the message the Lord told Paul to call: “THE GOSPEL OF THE UNCIRCUMCISION.” Galatians 2:7.

This was revolutionary truth and Paul was continually in trouble with both the saved and the unsaved Jews. Note how the Jews wanted to tear him to pieces when he told them that Jesus Christ had instructed him to go to the uncircumcised Gentiles. Acts 22:21 to 28.

Thus we see the beginning of circumcision in Genesis 17 and the end of circumcision—when? Physical circumcision did not end at Calvary. For God was dealing with the circumcision in the first years after the death and resurrection of Christ, and the Lord committed to Peter the gospel of the circumcision, Galatians 2:7.

Peter was instructed to continue to preach the gospel of the circumcision after Pentecost.

How about circumcision for members of the Body of Christ?

Circumcision has not ended. Every member of the Body of Christ has been circumcised. Colossians 2:11. Any uncircumcised person is an unsaved person. But this is a spiritual circumcision—even the circumcision of Christ. Note carefully Colossians 2:11 and 12:

“IN WHOM ALSO YE ARE CIRCUMCISED WITH THE CIRCUMCISION MADE WITHOUT HANDS, IN PUTTING OFF THE BODY OF THE SINS OF THE FLESH BY THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST: BURIED WITH HIM IN BAPTISM, WHEREIN ALSO YE ARE RISEN WITH HIM THROUGH THE FAITH OF THE OPERATION OF GOD, WHO HATH RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD.”

What kind of circumcision? Not made with hands. What kind of baptism? The same kind. “For we are the circumcision which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh.” Philippians 3:3. So neither an uncircumcised nor an unbaptized person can get into heaven. But no physical ceremony is required. For the believer is complete in Christ and all his sins are forgiven. Colossians 2:10 and 13.

THE BEGINNING AND END OF RELIGION

The word “Christianity” does not appear in the Bible. The word “Christian” appears three times. Many people define Christianity as “the religion of Jesus Christ.” If the religion, preached and practiced by Jesus of Nazareth and His disciples on earth, is Christianity, and we define the messages and ministry which Christ gave to Paul to proclaim to Gentiles, as Christianity, then surely there is more than one Christianity in the Bible, for Christ in heaven gave to the Apostle Paul a spiritual program, that not only supplemented what He had taught on earth, but much of it

superseded many instructions Christ on earth intended for Israel, but are not for the obedience and practice of members of the Body of Christ. We might truly say that Christianity is “life, love and heaven.”

This brings to mind the statement of the Jewish rabbi to one of the leading evangelical preachers of London. The rabbi said, “Preacher, it was not Jesus of Nazareth who gave the Christianity that is proclaimed by you Evangelicals; it was the Apostle Paul. Your Jesus was a religious Jew from birth to death.” There is more than an element of truth in that rabbi’s statement; but of course he was not altogether correct. In the first place the rabbi did not believe Paul’s statements, “AND I THANK CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD, WHO HATH ENABLED ME, THAT HE COUNTED ME FAITHFUL, PUTTING ME INTO THE MINISTRY.” I Timothy 1:12. “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. “BUT I CERTIFY YOU, BRETHREN, 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.” Galatians 1:11 and 12. “WHEREOF I AM MADE A MINISTER, ACCORDING TO THE DISPENSATION OF GOD WHICH IS GIVEN TO ME FOR YOU, TO FULFILL THE WORD OF GOD: EVEN THE MYSTERY WHICH HATH BEEN HID FROM AGES AND FROM GENERATIONS, BUT NOW IS MADE MANIFEST TO HIS SAINTS.” Colossians 1:25 and 26. “. . . BECAUSE OF THE GRACE THAT IS GIVEN TO ME OF GOD, THAT I SHOULD BE THE MINISTER OF JESUS CHRIST TO THE GENTILES.” Romans 15:15 and 16. “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 YOU-WARD: HOW THAT BY REVELATION HE MADE KNOWN UNTO ME THE MYSTERY; (AS I WROTE AFORE IN FEW WORDS.” Ephesians 3:1 to 3. “AND LEST I SHOULD BE EXALTED ABOVE MEASURE THROUGH THE ABUNDANCE OF THE REVELATIONS.” II Corinthians 12:7. “AND I SAID, WHO ART THOU LORD? AND HE SAID, I AM JESUS WHOM THOU PERSECUTETH.” “DELIVERING THEE FROM THE PEOPLE, AND FROM THE GENTILES, UNTO WHOM NOW I SEND THEE. TO OPEN THEIR EYES AND TO TURN THEM FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT, AND FROM THE POWER OF SATAN UNTO GOD, THAT THEY MAY RECEIVE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, AND INHERITANCE AMONG THEM WHICH ARE SANCTIFIED BY FAITH THAT IS IN ME:” Acts 26:15, 17 and 18. “NEITHER WENT I UP TO JERUSALEM TO THEM WHICH WERE APOSTLES BEFORE ME; BUT I WENT INTO ARABIA, AND RETURNED AGAIN UNTO DAMASCUS:” Galatians 1:17. “BUT OF THESE WHO SEEMED TO BE SOMEWHAT, (WHATSOEVER THEY WERE IT MAKETH NO MATTER TO ME: GOD ACCEPTED NO MAN’S PERSON:) FOR THEY WHO SEEMED TO BE SOMEWHAT IN CONFERENCE ADDED NOTHING TO ME: BUT CONTRARIWISE, WHEN THEY SAW THAT THE GOSPEL OF THE UNCIRCUMCISION WAS COMMITTED UNTO ME, AS THE GOSPEL OF THE CIRCUMCISION WAS UNTO PETER.” Galatians 2:6 and 7.

Every Christian should know that Jesus of Nazareth was a circumcised religious Jew on earth and a Minister of the circumcision to confirm promises made to Israel. Romans 15:8. Jesus Himself declared, "salvation is of the Jews:" John 4:22. However, many of the spiritual truths which Christ proclaimed to Israel can be appropriated by members of the Body of Christ without frustrating the grace of God or perverting the gospel of grace. In selecting or rejecting instructions and ceremonies from the earthly ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, members of the Body of Christ should carefully consider several facts. First: God's Son on earth was under the law. Galatians 4:4. All of the Jewish disciples of Jesus on earth were under the law with Him, as were also the unsaved Jews. Second: Members of the Body of Christ are not under the law. Romans 6:14 and Romans 7:1 to 4. After Christ revealed the "grace" program to Paul, Christian Jews were no longer under the law. Galatians 3:25. There is a great difference between "under the law" and "not under the law." There is almost as great a difference between the gospel of the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus on earth to Israel and the gospel of salvation preached by Paul to Gentiles.

So long as God's people were under the law they had a God-given program of religion to obey, and practice. For the definition of "RELIGION," do not go to the dictionary; go to the Word of God. The word "RELIGION" is found five times in the New Testament Scriptures: not once in the Old. Three different Greek words are used:

In Acts 26:5, the Greek word is "THRESKEIA."

In Galatians 1:13, the Greek word is "KOLLOURION."

In Galatians 1:14, the Greek word is "IOUDAISMOS."

In James 1:26 and 27, the Greek word is "THRESKEIA."

In Acts 13:43 we read of "RELIGIOUS" proselytes. The Greek word is "sebomai," meaning to adore, to revere, devout, religious, worship.

The Apostle Paul, as Saul of Tarsus, was a religious Jew. Note his testimony in Philippians 3:5, 6 and 8:

"Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the Church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless," ". . . Christ Jesus my Lord for whom I have suffered the loss of all things."

Even after Saul was converted he did some religious things in his zeal and agony for the souls of self-righteous, lost, religious Jews who were as blind as he had been before he met Jesus on the way to Damascus. Note Paul's confession in I Corinthians 9:20: "And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law." But after Paul reached the Roman prison he never again became a Jew to the Jews. It was from that Roman jail that he wrote Philippians and related how he counted his religion dung and put it away. Note Philippians 1:21: "For me to live is Christ, and to die His gain." Then he had much to say about Divine Truth, called "the Mystery," peculiarly Gentilish truth. God was through with all religion. The members of the Body had something better; they had Christ and eternal life.

We read in Galatians 1:13 and 14, Paul's testimony as to how he was the chief of religious Jews. In I Timothy 1:15, he declared he was the chief of sinners. He needed to be saved

from his religion as well as from his sins. The blood of Jesus Christ accomplished both. Hebrews 9:12.

Religion, in the Bible, is called “the Jews’ religion.” God never gave religion to members of the Body of Christ. Religion was given to Israel about 1492 B. C. when God gave the law by Moses. The law was added till Christ should come. So was the Jews’ religion: “WHICH STOOD ONLY IN MEATS AND DRINKS AND DIVERS BAPTISMS, AND CARNAL ORDINANCES IMPOSED ON THEM UNTIL THE TIME OF REFORMATION:”

Here we learn that the religion, which the Lord gave to Israel, through Moses the mediator of the Old Testament, was for a limited duration, “imposed until the time of reformation.” Religion was imposed on Israel until . . . Compare this with Galatians 3:19, “the law was added till . . . “The Old Covenant, the law, and the Jews’ religion were linked together, with Israel’s sabbath as a sign between Jehovah and Israel. The children of Israel shall observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed.” Exodus 31:16 and 17. The dispensation of religion was a temporary and parenthetical dispensation, which began at Sinai and ended when Israel was set aside.

Note this program of religion; “meats and drinks,” “carnal ordinances,” “divers baptisms.” “BAPTISMS” is the correct translation of this Greek word “BAPTISMOS.” The word is from the word “BAPTIZO,” “to wash.” This word is “WASH” in Mark 7:4 and 8 and Luke 11:38, where the reference is to the religious washing of hands and vessels. But elsewhere it is “BAPTIZE.” Any kind of a water ordinance or water ceremony was a part of God’s religious program. Note the words of John the Baptist when He introduced Jesus the Messiah to Israel: “And I knew Him not but that He should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.” John 1:31. Note Paul’s own testimony concerning the Lord’s instructions to him at the time of his salvation: “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Acts 22:16. Saul was converted to Christ before the beginning of the dispensation of the grace of God, before God cast away His religious nation.

About 1900 B. C. Abram was justified in uncircumcision and the Scriptures foresaw that God would justify the uncircumcised heathen by faith. Galatians 3:8. At that time God did not give to Abram “meats and drinks,” “carnal ordinances, and “divers baptisms.” Abram, Isaac, and his twelve sons had no religion unless we speak of circumcision and the blood of sacrifices which they offered as religion. The Scriptures foresaw Paul’s “grace” ministry to uncircumcised Gentiles twenty-four years before uncircumcised Abram became circumcised Abraham. Galatians 3:8. Therefore, the Scriptures foresaw, and Paul was commissioned to proclaim, righteousness for Gentiles, by faith, without circumcision, without religion, without meats and drinks and carnal ordinances, without any kind of water ceremony. Hence the testimony of Paul in I Corinthians 1:17: “FOR CHRIST SENT ME NOT TO BAPTIZE, BUT TO PREACH THE GOSPEL: NOT WITH WISDOM OF WORDS, LEST THE CROSS OF CHRIST SHOULD BE MADE OF NONE EFFECT.” This was given to Paul by revelation from Christ in heaven. Galatians 1:11 and 12.

What the Scriptures foresaw for Gentiles in the justification of Abram, was seen years before he was circumcised. Hence the folly of teaching that water baptism has taken the place of

circumcision. Moreover, only the male Israelites were circumcised. Why baptize women? Many follow the traditions of men and denominations instead of the Word of God, rightly divided.

If we can only get fixed in our minds that the circumcision, added to justification by faith, as well as the Old Covenant, the law, and ordinances, the religious practices and the water ceremonies, added at Sinai, have no place in the program of grace mentioned in Ephesians 3:1 to 3, we surely will not frustrate the grace of God by adding any of these things and we will better understand Colossians 2:11 to 16: “IN WHOM ALSO YE ARE CIRCUMCISED WITH THE CIRCUMCISION MADE WITHOUT HANDS, IN PUTTING OFF THE BODY OF THE SINS OF THE FLESH BY THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST: BURIED WITH HIM IN BAPTISM, WHEREIN ALSO YE ARE RISEN WITH HIM THROUGH THE FAITH OF THE OPERATION OF GOD, WHO HATH RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD.” “BLOTTING OUT THE HANDWRITING OF ORDINANCES THAT WAS AGAINST US, WHICH WAS CONTRARY TO US. AND TOOK IT OUT OF THE WAY. NAILING IT TO HIS CROSS:” “LET NO MAN THEREFORE JUDGE YOU IN MEAT, OR IN DRINK, OR IN RESPECT OF AN HOLY DAY, OR OF THE NEW MOON, OR OF THE SABBATH DAYS.” Colossians 2:11 and 12, 14, and 16.

Just imagine what would have happened to any prophet or preacher if he had proclaimed during the reign of law, the truth of Colossians 2:16.

Many of God’s spiritual saints have followed the erroneous teachings of their leaders, that God’s religious nation, Israel, was set aside before Peter with the Eleven stood up on the day of Pentecost to preach to devout Jews of every nation under heaven, to all the house of Israel. Acts 2:5 and 36. How about the “far off” of Acts 2:39? They were Israelites. Daniel 9:7. With the setting-aside of God’s religious nation, after Saul became Paul, God’s religious program was ended.

ABRAHAM—PAUL

Abram, the uncircumcised Gentile, became circumcised Abraham, the father of the circumcision. Saul, the circumcised Jew, became Paul the apostle to the uncircumcision with the gospel which God preached to uncircumcised Abram 430 years before the law and religion were given to Moses at Sinai.

Note Romans 14:17: “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” In this day of grace Israel’s religion, carnal ordinances and water ceremonies, have no place. All the ritualism and religious practices carried on in the name of the Church of Christ, are an abomination in the sight of the Lord. If you have any religion, get rid of it, including all of your water ceremonies. Believe that because of the baptism of Ephesians 4:5 and the precious shed blood of the Son of God, you are complete in Christ and blessed with all spiritual blessings. Ephesians 1:3.

Members of the Body of Christ are baptized into the death of Christ. Romans 6:3 and 4. Christ is in them, the hope of glory. Colossians 1:27. They have eternal glory. They have eternal life. Christ is their life. Colossians 3:3 and 4. They have the only thing needful to get into heaven. They have righteousness. Christ is their righteousness. I Corinthians 1:30. They have been made accepted in Christ. Ephesians 1:6. They are complete in Christ. Colossians 2:10. They

are seated with Christ in the heavenlies. Ephesians 2:6. Note also Ephesians 2:7 and Ephesians 1:3: "That in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:7). "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who bath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ." (Ephesians 1:3).

These Body-members are to obey Ephesians 4:3 to 6: "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 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 God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all." Ephesians 4:3 to 6.

Can you name one RELIGIOUS Christian who is doing the will of God as expressed in Ephesians 3:9? "AND TO MAKE ALL MEN SEE WHAT IS THE 'DISPENSATION OF THE MYSTERY, WHICH FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD HATH BEEN HID IN GOD, WHO CREATED ALL THINGS BY JESUS CHRIST.'" It is not probable that any man will know the secret and eternal purpose of Ephesians 3:6 to 11 unless he knows and obeys the truth of the One Baptism of Ephesians 4:5. There are some who know this truth who keep silent because they fear the persecution of religious baptizers. Religious persecution is real.

THE BEGINNING AND THE END OF THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES

First, we quote Luke 21:24:

"And they shall fall by the edge of the sword and shall be led away captive into all nations; and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, UNTIL THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES BE FULFILLED."

Then Romans 11:25 and 26: "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. AND SO ALL ISRAEL SHALL BE SAVED: AS IT IS WRITTEN, THERE SHALL COME OUT OF SION THE DELIVERER, AND SHALL TURN AWAY UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB:"

Note what God did with the ten tribes; of Israel about 730 B. C.:

"Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah only." ". . . So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day." II Kings 17:18 and 23.

Then note what God did with Judah about 600 B. C.:

"At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city, and his servants did besiege it." "For through the anger of the Lord it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until He had cast them out from His presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon." II Kings 24:10, 11 and 20. "And the army of the Chaldeans, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down all the walls of Jerusalem round about." "Thus Judah was carried away captive out of his own land." Jeremiah 52:14 and 27.

Then note Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2:37 to 40 concerning the four Gentile nations:

"Thou, O King, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power and strength and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath He given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. THOU ART THIS HEAD OF GOLD. And after thee shall arise another kingdom . . . and another third kingdom . . . And the fourth kingdom." "THOU ART THIS HEAD OF GOLD."

Then note Luke 2:11: "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed." And Luke 4:5 and 6: And the devil taking Him up into an high mountain, shewed unto Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto Him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them; for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will give it."

Then note Acts 3:21 concerning Jesus Christ in heaven: "Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." And Luke 21:27 and 31: "And then shall they see the Son of man' coming in a cloud with power and great glory. "So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand."

From Sinai to the Babylonian captivity God's program was Church and State combined in the sense that political, governmental authority was given to Israel, as well as religious and spiritual authority. Under certain conditions Israel was promised to be the head and not the tail. But if they did not meet the conditions they were to be the tail and not the head: "And the Lord shall make thee the head and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken to the commandments of the Lord thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them." "He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head and thou shalt be the tail." Deuteronomy 28:13 and 44.

Beginning with the Babylonian captivity Israel became the tail governmentally and politically. For God declared that Nebuchadnezzar was the head. "Thou art this head of gold." Daniel 2:38. That was about 606 B. C. Then "the times of the Gentiles began governmentally and politically, but "the times of the Gentiles" spiritually began when the Lord had accomplished His purpose by the apostle Paul. Note again Colossians 1:24 to 26: "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 WORD OF GOD; EVEN THE MYSTERY which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints."

The Lord Jesus on earth said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." Matthew 22:21. He also said, "Salvation is of the Jews." John 1:22. The Gentile said, "Yes Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs." Mark 7:28. So Israel had spiritual headship and priority rights over the Gentiles in spiritual matters for several centuries after they became the tail governmentally or politically. Note Romans 15:27, Romans 11:11.

Some years after Peter said to the Jews at Jerusalem, "Unto you first," Paul said to some Jews outside of the land of the Jews:

“Beware therefore, lest that come upon you,, which is spoken of in the prophets: Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.”

“THEN PAUL AND BARNABAS WAXED BOLD, AND SAID, IT WAS NECESSARY THAT THE WORD OF GOD SHOULD FIRST HAVE BEEN SPOKEN TO YOU; BUT SEEING YE PUT IT FROM YOU, AND JUDGE YOURSELVES UNWORTHY OF EVERLASTING LIFE, LO, WE TURN TO THE GENTILES.” Acts 13:40, 41 and 46.

Then Paul wrote Romans 11:19, 20, 11 and 30: “Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded but fear.” “I say then, Have they (the Jews) stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles for to provoke them (the Jews) to jealousy.” “For as ye (Gentiles) in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their (Israel’s) unbelief.”

Then Paul, about 30 years after the death of Christ, said to the Jews at Rome: “AND WHEN THEY AGREED NOT AMONG THEMSELVES, THEY DEPARTED, AFTER THAT PAUL HAD SPOKEN ONE WORD, WELL SPAKE THE HOLY GHOST BY ESAIAS THE PROPHET UNTO OUR FATHERS, SAYING, GO UNTO THIS PEOPLE, AND SAY, HEARING YE SHALL HEAR, AND SHALL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND SEEING YE SHALL SEE, AND NOT PERCEIVE: FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE IS WAXED GROSS, AND THEIR EARS ARE DULL OF HEARING, AND THEIR EYES HAVE THEY CLOSED; LEST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART, AND SHOULD BE CONVERTED, AND I SHOULD HEAL THEM, BE IT KNOWN THEREFORE UNTO YOU, THAT THE SALVATION OF GOD IS SENT UNTO THE GENTILES, AND THAT THEY WILL HEAR IT.” Acts 28:25 to 28.

Paul wrote: “For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office.” Romans 11:13. “Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ and lie not:) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.” I Timothy 2:7. “Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.” II Timothy 1:11. “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).” Ephesians 3:1 to 3. “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.” Ephesians 3:8.

So since the time the Lord, by special revelation, gave to the Apostle Paul “the dispensation of the grace of God” for Gentiles, His untraceable (unprophesied) truth for Gentiles we have been living in “the times of the Gentiles” spiritually. This period has been a parenthetical period.

The Gentiles should remember these solemn words of Romans 11:21: “For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee.”

Some Christians believe that the present mis-government of nations by Gentiles is proof that “the times of the Gentiles” will soon end and the Son of man will come to be the King over all the earth, in fulfillment of Zechariah 14:9.

Surely the present spiritual chaos brought on by Satan and the Gentile religious leaders, would indicate that this too must end soon.

But only God knows when!

THE BEGINNING AND THE END OF THE DISPENSATION OF THE GRACE OF GOD

In I Corinthians 9:17, Paul writes, “a dispensation is committed unto me.” What is a dispensation? The Greek word is our word “economy.” Note the use of the word in Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians: “Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the Word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you the hope of glory.” Colossians 1:25 to 27.

Here we note a very specific dispensation and duty committed to Paul for Gentiles. He had to fulfill, or complete, the Word of God with Divine Truth called “the Mystery.” This was practically Gentilish truth. It was called “the mystery” or “the secret” because it was the Lord’s secret, never made known to Israel’s prophets or to any other of the Lord’s servants until Christ in heaven revealed it to the Apostle Paul.

The word translated “fellowship,” in Ephesians 3:9, is the same word “economy” or “dispensation.” Note 3:8 and 9, “Unto me who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the UNSEARCHABLE riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the DISPENSATION of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.” Here we read of “THE ECONOMY OF THE MYSTERY,” God’s secret and the UNSEARCHABLE riches of Christ for Gentiles. The word “UNSEARCHABLE” is “NOT-TO-BE-TRACKED,” or “UNTRACEABLE,” that is “UNPROPHESIED.” The thought is, that the Lord Jesus Christ had revealed to the Apostle Paul a distinct message for and concerning the Gentiles, a message quite different from the Gentile salvation foretold in Israel’s Scriptures and quite different from Peter’s message to Cornelius, the Gentile. Hence, “THE MYSTERY.” A part of this mystery is told in Ephesians 3:6: “That the Gentiles should be joint-heirs and of the JointBody, and joint-sharers of His promise in Christ by the gospel.”

Peter acknowledged that Paul’s message included truth that was hard for all men to understand: “And account that the long suffering of our Lord is salvation: even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you: As also in all his Epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction.”

To Peter and his associates the Lord Jesus committed a gospel message and a spiritual program.

1. "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Matthew 16:19.

2. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." Matthew 28:19 and 20.

3. "But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Acts 1:8.

4. "But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter: (For He that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in one toward the Gentiles.)" Galatians 2:7 and 8.

5. "Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them." ". . . Now therefore are we all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." Acts 10:20 and 33.

6. "And when James, Peter and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen and they unto the circumcision." Galatians 2:9.

By way of comparison, study in addition to the verses which we have quoted:

1. "AND ALL THINGS ARE OF GOD. WHO HATH RECONCILED US TO HIMSELF BY JESUS CHRIST, AND HATH GIVEN TO US THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION: II Corinthians 5:18.

2. "THAT I SHOULD BE THE MINISTER OF JESUS CHRIST TO THE GENTILES, MINISTERING THE GOSPEL OF GOD THAT THE OFFERING OF THE GENTILES MIGHT BE ACCEPTABLE, BEING SANCTIFIED BY THE HOLY GHOST." Romans 15:16.

3. "AND IT CAME TO PASS THAT WHEN I WAS COME AGAIN TO JERUSALEM, EVEN WHEN I PRAYED IN THE TEMPLE, I WAS IN A TRANCE." "AND HE SAID UNTO ME, DEPART; FOR I WILL SEND THEE FAR HENCE UNTO THE GENTILES." Acts 22:17 and 21.

4. "FOR I SPEAK TO YOU GENTILES INASMUCH AS I AM THE APOSTLE OF THE GENTILES, I MAGNIFY MINE OFFICE:" Romans 11:13.

5. "WHO GAVE HIMSELF A RANSOM FOR ALL. TO BE TESTIFIED IN DUE TIME. WHEREUNTO I AM ORDAINED A PREACHER, AND AN APOSTLE, (I SPEAK THE TRUTH IN CHRIST AND LIE NOT;) A TEACHER OF THE GENTILES IN FAITH AND VERITY:" I Timothy 2:6 and 7.

6. ". . . THE GOSPEL WHICH YE HAVE HEARD, AND WHICH WAS (PREACHED TO EVERY CREATURE WHICH IS UNDER HEAVEN WHEREOF I PAUL AM MADE A MINISTER." Colossians 1:23.

7. "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 YOU-WARD; HOW THAT BY REVELATION HE MADE

KNOWN UNTO ME THE MYSTERY; (AS I WROTE AFORE IN FEW WORDS).” Ephesians 3:1 to 3.

The keys of the kingdom of heaven were given to Peter with whom eleven other men were associated. In Acts 2:14 we are told that eleven other men stood up with Peter. Why twelve men? Only eleven were present when the so-called “great commission” was given. Matthew 28:16. But the number had to be increased to twelve before the keys of the kingdom could be used. Therefore, Matthias took the place of Judas. Acts 1:26. Twelve apostles for Israel—twelve tribes. The twelve men were to go over the cities of Israel, Matthew 10:23. The Twelve remained at Jerusalem. Acts 8:1. They agreed to go to the circumcision. Galatians 2:9.

It is believed that Peter used a key to let Cornelius and his household into the kingdom of heaven. At that time there were still twelve apostles in the original group. After that the number was reduced to eleven, for James was killed. Acts 12:1 and 2. Then the record of the spiritual activities of the twelve in the Book of Acts ceased.

The Twelve have a future ministry with the twelve tribes: “And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That you which have followed me in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel:” Matthew 19:28.

But now again Romans 11:13: “For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch AS I AM THE APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES, I magnify mine office:”

Note the commission of Acts 13:2: “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them:” After that, the only mention of any of the twelve apostles in the Book of Acts is when they had dealings with Paul. Paul is the chief human actor in the last sixteen chapters of Acts. He wrote thirteen Epistles which have been called Gentile Epistles. In these thirteen Epistles and in the Book of Acts Paul used the first person pronoun more than one thousand times. Note what he wrote in I Corinthians 3:10: “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereupon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.” I Timothy 2:16: “Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting:” Colossians 1:24 and 25: “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 . . .” And I Corinthians 11:1: “Be ye followers of me even as I also am of Christ.”

If Christians cannot see the difference between the gospel of the circumcision committed to Peter, and the gospel of the uncircumcision committed unto Paul, certainly they cannot know the difference between “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” committed unto Peter, and “the dispensation of the grace of God,” committed unto Paul. What a great difference between “the gospel of the circumcision” and “the dispensation of the Mystery”! In order that we might recognize this great difference, we must keep in mind that “the gospel of the circumcision” was given to Peter after the resurrection of Christ. All of the message of Peter on the day of Pentecost to devout Jews from every nation under heaven, was in fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy and David’s prophecy. He preached in the third chapter of Acts concerning days prophesied by all of Israel’s prophets. Acts 3:24.

All of this is so different from THE DISPENSATION OF THE MYSTERY concerning the Gentiles, about which all I of Israel's prophets were both silent and ignorant. Why did the Lord instruct (Peter to continue with the gospel of the circumcision on and after the day of Pentecost? Because He had not yet cast away His circumcised nation Israel. After Saul's name was changed to "Paul", Christ committed unto him the ministry of reconciliation. II Corinthians 5:18 to 20. This was after Israel was set aside. Romans 11:15: "For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?" As long as the gospel of the circumcision was proclaimed, the Lord's messengers went back to the Abrahamic Covenant and the Covenant of Circumcision. Acts 7:8. When Israel was set aside and the Lord committed to Paul the dispensation of the grace of God and the ministry of reconciliation, then for the first time reference is made to Adam. Note Romans 5:11 and 12: "And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation (atonement) Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Romans 5:11 and 12.

The Lord never committed the dispensation of the grace of God to Peter for Gentiles when He gave him the kingdom keys, nor when He gave the Eleven the so-called "great commission." Nor at any other time. Note in Colossians 1:23 who had the responsibility for preaching the gospel to every creature under heaven. So far as we are concerned, in II Corinthians 5:18 to 20 and Ephesians 3:1 to 11, we find a commission far greater for us than Matthew 28:19 and 20 or Mark 16:14 to 18.

The gospel of the kingdom, which is not the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24), will be proclaimed after the present economy of the grace of God has been brought to an end. This dispensation of grace will end. After that "the times of the Gentiles" will be fulfilled.

The dispensation of the grace of God did not begin on the day of Pentecost, or with the salvation of Cornelius, or with anything that the Twelve preached or did. It began with the casting away of Israel, when that nation committed the unpardonable sin. The beginning of the end of national Israel was Stephen's message in Jerusalem and Paul's message in Acts 13:46: "Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing you put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to 'the Gentiles.'" And Acts 18:6: "And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads: I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles."

Then came the end of religion, the end of circumcision, the proclamation of the gospel of the uncircumcision, the beginning of the times of the Gentiles spiritually, the dispensation of the grace of God for Gentiles. Then followed the revelation of "the dispensation of the Mystery." Note Ephesians 3:9: "And to make all men see what is the dispensation (fellowship) of the Mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, Who created all things by Jesus Christ."

What are you doing about Ephesians 3:9?

Then note the glorious Divine Truth in Ephesians 1:23 and Ephesians 4:13:

"WHICH IS HIS BODY, THE FULNESS OF HIM THAT FILLETH ALL IN ALL."
"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 FULNESS OF CHRIST.”

We would emphasize the word “FULNESS.” The Body of Christ is the fulness of Christ. Here we have the very heart of the Mystery. His Divine Truth is different from the Truth revealed to the sons of men in other ages.