

-STUDIES IN EPHESIANS- #47

-THE NEW JERUSALEM-

Up to this point (Eph. 3:9) we have had the dispensation of the mystery mentioned twice. In 1:10 it is the dispensation of the fullness of the seasons. The object is that Christ should be Head of all things, all things being reunited.

This has no connection with 1 Cor. 15 where the kingdom will be delivered up to the father and God will be all in all. The latter is not a dispensation. Neither does it speak of the Headship of Christ. This is a unique expression.

The second mention is the dispensation of the grace of God to youward (Gentiles) in 3:2. There is a possibility that this may cover a bit more than the dispensation of the mystery proper, but be that as it may, here it refers to the same thing.

Now in 3:9 we find the name dispensation of the mystery (R.V.). We must hasten to add that this also has no connection with Rom. 16:25. There was a mystery hid or kept quiet in age times. But it is in accordance with Paul's gospel of that time. It has connection with the obedience of nations, which also is mentioned in chapter 1 of Rom. In the inner section of Romans we do find something that had been kept quiet. It is the teaching concerning Adam and ruined race thru his fall with the work of Christ undoing the ruin. In fact here and in Luke's gospel are the only places Adam is mentioned in the NT.

The dispensation of the mystery is set apart from all other revelations by the fact that its steward, Paul, had an apostleship that had to do with before age times, with principalities and powers of the heavenlies (not with angels who are messengers of God), and with a sphere of blessing far above all others. His ministry to us Gentiles concerns times and seasons, places, and things foreign to all other dispensations mentioned.

Among the nations of the earth, God's chosen people were Israel. They were to be a channel of blessing to the nations. Thru them all the nations of the earth are to be blest.

But there is also another chosen people. In Eph. 1:4 this is set forth. Can there be a second chosen people for the same sphere and for the same ministry? Or do they have a different purpose and ministry? Instead of being a blessing to the nations of the earth, we find them having a relationship to the principalities and powers, making known to them the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10). That is their ministry. Instead of being blest with the best of the earth (the promised land), they are blest with spiritual blessings in the heavenlies (Eph. 1:3). So they will in no wise compete with, or be in the way of, Israel and their blessings. There is no need for dispute or jealousy.

Finally, that the church may dwell in the sphere far above all and rule over the powers there, it is necessary that all things be reconciled both in heaven and in earth that this may be accomplished. No such thing was ever mentioned to Israel, but they will have a ministry to the nations of the earth.

Dispensations are times of mediation. But when all kingdom is handed over to the Father, then mediation ceases and dispensations have an end.

First of all there may be some question as to whether this city is in existence at the present time. We do not know. But we think not. It is likely that it will be constructed after the great enemy and his angels are cast out of heaven. For it is from heaven that it will come to earth (Rev. 21:2). So we feel that it is unlikely that it would be built in the presence of Satan and his messengers, but rather after they had left that domain (Rev. 12:7-10).

Who will dwell there? So fondly have peoples of the past looked for this place, calling it their heaven, that it would seem cruel to call attention to the truth. But the inhabitants of that city are a select people, according to the Word. In the first place it has 12 gates. No other entrances are mentioned. But each of these 12 gates has upon it the name of one of the 12 tribes of Israel. The person entering will have to look for the gate upon which his tribe's name is inscribed. A mere claim to being a Jew will not stand in that time. For many will claim to be Jews and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan (Rev. 2:9; 3:9). These will have had their reward before the New Jerusalem will have come down from heaven to the earth.

Also we find that the foundations, all 12 of them are inscribed with the names of the 12 apostles. Paul is not in this group, for he was an apostle of the Gentiles and never was numbered among the 12 by the Lord nor did he even claim membership in their number. So again we find that there is a relation between those who enter and the 12 who proclaimed the kingdom of heaven. There will be nations (Gentiles) outside the city in the New earth. But the city will not be their abode. At the gates will be angels who are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation (Israel).

But what of the nations outside? Who are they? The new earth is paradise. This was the hope of the dying malefactor. This was the hope of Job. It is the hope of Adam who lost the first paradise. It is the hope of all who have everlasting life according to John 3:16. All these have no part in the kingdom of heaven nor in the dispensation of the mystery.

Abraham was looking for this city, but no mention is made of it in the OT. There may be others associated with him in this hope. But it is mainly the hope of the overcomers of Israel. Paul speaks of it in Gal. and sets it over against Sinai, the place of bondage. Note the references to it in Rev. 2 & 3 in connection with overcomers. John associated himself with these (Rev. 1:9).

No, the New Jerusalem is not heaven. It is a city that comes down out of heaven at a specified time. There is no record that it will be inhabited before it comes down to the earth.

We have no description of heaven. Earthly terms would never be adequate for that. But all will be revealed to the few who have it as their hope when they get there. Such terms as streets of gold, gates of pearl, foundations of precious stones, walls of jasper; all such are earthly materials and do not describe what is to be found far above all heavens.

-THE SALVATION OF GOD-

-WHAT IS THAT TO THEE?-

When Simeon finally got to see the Christ, the hope of Israel, and hold Him in his arms in the temple, he said, MINE EYES HAVE SEEN THY SALVATION...A LIGHT TO LIGHTEN THE GENTILES, AND THE GLORY OF THY PEOPLE ISRAEL. We see in this passage a prophetic note, that this Christ was not only for Israel, but also for Gentiles. Of course this is in keeping with the promise made to Abraham when the Lord God said to him, IN THY SEED SHALL ALL NATIONS BE BLESSED.

In reading thru the gospels we find that the Lord, in instructing the disciples, tell them to go to Israel, not to Gentiles or even the Samaritans. However, when He gives them command for their apostolic ministry after His ascension, it is for all the world. That, we understand, is yet to be fulfilled in the Millennium, for it soon was broken off in Acts.

When Peter was speaking to the Jews at Jerusalem, he said, UNTO YOU FIRST GOD SENT HIM TO BLESS YOU. There is no record that a single Gentile heard Peter preach at Pentecost.

When there was a dispersion after the death of Stephen and the disciples left Jerusalem, they went out preaching the Word to none but unto the Jews only.

Then Paul came on the scene and in his first recorded address, he said to the Jews, IT WAS NECESSARY THAT THE WORD OF GOD SHOULD FIRST HAVE BEEN SPOKEN TO YOU...LO WE TURN TO THE GENTILES.

But Paul went to the Jews FIRST in the very next city visited, and it was not long till he had occasion to say, FROM HENCEFORTH I WILL GO UNTO THE GENTILES.

In the very last epistle Paul wrote during Acts and just before his trip to Rome, he said, THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST...THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION...TO THE JEW FIRST, AND ALSO TO THE GREEK. And again, TRIBULATION AND ANGUISH...OF THE JEW FIRST, AND ALSO OF THE GENTILE.

It was very necessary that the gospel should be preached to the Jew FIRST after the ascension. On Calvary the Lord had prayed that Israel be given another chance, that they be forgiven, for they did not know what they did when they slew the Prince of life. So the Jewish nation was given every opportunity again to repent, even as John, the Lord, and the disciples had preached. But finally the national rejection came to a head the second time. The first time they rejected and crucified Christ. The second time, they rejected and killed some of His servants. This came to a head at Acts 28:17-28.

There the Salvation that Simeon had rejoiced to see was again mentioned. This Salvation had FIRST been offered to the nation of Israel. But after quoting Isa. 6:9,10 for the last time in the Word, Paul said to these Jews, THE SALVATION OF GOD IS SENT TO GENTILES, AND THEY WILL HEAR.

It is clear that all ministry during Acts was to the Jew FIRST and the theme is the hope of restoration of the kingdom to Israel.

It is equally clear that the ministry of the apostle to the Gentiles after Acts was no longer to the Jew FIRST, or even to the Jew at all, but to us Gentiles. If this light could only break thru, present day confusion would disappear!

Peter got a little curious about what was going to be the lot of John (John 21:21). He was told to mind his own business with the words of our title quoted in the next verse.

If I belong to a group, a chosen people destined for the super-heavenlies and all its spiritual blessings, it is not my business what God is going to provide for those who have other callings, except what He already has seen fit to reveal. I have no right to say that all believers are going to share in my particular blessings. Yet there are those who do so. They say that all the redeemed of this age belong to the body of Christ whether they know and believe it or not. This is robbing others of their hope.

On the other hand there are multitudes, who have only an earthly hope and know nothing beyond that, who will argue that all will have their future home in the same place. Again this is robbery. God has various families. He has a mansion for each and all.

Then there are some who do not know very much about what their calling may be, who hope to have both earthly and spiritual blessings in the heavens. This is rather an absurdity.

Now God has chosen people for the various spheres to which He has allotted them. We dare not say that one is better than the other. It is true that one may be above another, but whether better would be open to question, for if it be a gift from God, who can say that one is better than the other? The blessings are perfect and fitting for each of the callings. There is no way that they could be improved upon, for God gives of His best to each. Those who have a heavenly calling have nothing of which to boast before those who have the earth or the New Jerusalem as their hope.

In the first place, the church of the dispensation of the mystery is made up of chosen ones. But so is the kingdom, made up of a chosen people, Israel. But there is a difference in time, place, and purpose of choice. The humblest servant in the kingdom is just as much a chosen one as the highest in the dispensation of the secret.

There is just no sense in sons and servants quarreling. It is true that they may not all understand things alike. That is to be expected. For all do not have the same orders to obey.

Not only is a member of the church of the mystery chosen before agetimes, before the overthrow of the world, but he has to be given the gift of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ (Eph. 1:17). There is nothing of which we can boast in ourselves. It is all a gift of God. There is no prize for brains, special ability, or birth. This gift of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him is available to the poorest and weakest as well as to those who may have some worldly advantages. But it is likely that the latter may prove more of a liability than an asset. Many think that it takes education to rightly divide the Scriptures and comprehend the mystery. That might be an excuse for them, but never a reason. Comprehension depends on the strengthening of the inner man (the new nature) by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 3:16-18).

- GOD NOT A MENDER -

- BEGINNERS' CORNER - #13

The Word of God begins with the great fact of creation and Himself as the Creator. He is not in the reform business nor is He in the habit of patching things up that are ruined. Some examples will suffice to show that this is true.

1. CREATION IS RUINED. God is not going to mend it. He will create a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

2. MAN IS RUINED. God is not mending or reforming him. He has made (prepared a body) the New Man, the Second Man, the Last Adam, none other than the Lord from heaven.

3. THESE EARTHLY BODIES OF OURS ARE RUINED. They bear the stamp and imprint of Adam. In Adam all die. There is no resurrection of the body promised. There is no mending of this old body. But this body that has seen suffering and will experience death, will be replaced with a new one from heaven, a new creation (2 Cor. 5:1-4).

4. THE FIRST COVENANT WAS BROKEN. It was ruined. God has not tried to mend it. But He has promised a new covenant. HE TAKETH AWAY THE FIRST, THAT HE MAY ESTABLISH THE SECOND. Note the force of the word ESTABLISH. It is not something temporary. It will abide.

5. THE PRIESTHOOD OF AARON HAS FALLEN DOWN AND FAILED. God will not mend it. He has established a new priesthood after the order of Melchizedek in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. There will be no more failure there.

6. THE KINGS OF ISRAEL HAVE FAILED. God will not re-establish them or in any way try to mend what is ruined. He has already established a new line, one that will never cease. YET HAVE I SET MY KING UPON MY HOLY HILL OF ZION. That King will come some day and take over His kingdom.

7. ISRAEL FAILED. They did not turn out to be the priestly nation and peculiar treasure that they were chosen for to be. God is not going to reform Israel. No mending there. A new nation will be born in a day which will bring forth the fruits of the kingdom (Matt. 21:43).

8. THE CHURCH HAS FAILED. Corporate witness had failed even as early as the lifetime of the apostle Paul. God does not mend it. Man tries, in vain, to mend it with bodies of his own, each claiming to be the ONE BODY, but all a failure. Each new body that man makes only adds to the ruin and confusion. But God has done a new thing. He is creating a NEW MAN, the church which is the BODY of Christ, the great mystery.

Go down to the potter's house with the prophet Jeremiah and see what is to be seen there. A vessel is made. It is marred. Does the potter try to mend it? Does he try to shape it with his hands and try to smooth out the rough places? The lesson is there. All such attempts will end in worse ruin. So he tears down the vessel and starts all over again. It is a new vessel when it is finished.

Let us beware of all of man's organizations and efforts to mend the ruin that is about us. There is only One who can do the work so that it will last. The Creator will make a new thing, a new creation to take the place of the old. Do you have the new creation within, which is to take the place of that ruin received from Adam?

Now with this shot of the grafting in of the Gentiles uppermost in our minds; also that their hopes, rewards, and rights were inseparably bound up with their Jewish affiliations; let us consider a few modern parables:

Suppose you were a laborer, and in order to secure work you had to join a labor union. Upon joining you would in return for your dues receive certain benefits, higher wages, shorter hours, old age security, etc. Now suppose that thru an act of legislature this union was dissolved and set aside. Would your rights and hopes still go on as before?

Suppose you were a citizen of another country and enjoyed certain freedoms and privileges under the constitution of that country. Then a greater state invades and subjugates your country. Do you suppose your rights and freedoms would continue as before?

Suppose you joined a church that believed in certain doctrinal beliefs and practices under which you had certain liberties and duties. Do you suppose you could continue in these practices if the church was dissolved or dominated by a greater?

Or suppose you joined a lodge in which you held certain offices, received certain honors and hoped for certain benefits after death. If for some reason this fraternity should fail or be dissolved, do you suppose your offices and degrees would be of any value?

Or suppose that you put your life savings in a certain bank, thereby insuring and giving you hope for future security. The bank suddenly fails (as they once did). Do you suppose your future would be the same as before?

Absolutely not! You would call the man a fool who would subscribe to such nonsense.

Now suppose these Gentiles who had been grafted into the Jewish faith and thru their allegiance were promised certain benefits, just as the laboring man, the citizen, and the member, suddenly found the mother organization had been dissolved. Would these benefits continue? Absolutely not, no more than the examples cited above.

If the Gentile, being a wild olive branch, was grafted into the olive tree, and then the olive tree is cut down, from whence will they draw their strength?

Do we presume that in the face of Scripture and reason that in this ONE case things can continue as before? There is no escape, either from logic or Scripture. The Gentile was grafted in, and the Jew was blinded and set aside for a time.

We have one of two alternatives. Either the wild branches were set aside with the natural branches and we of all people are the most miserable, or thru the grace of God a new way is opened that had not been known before.

Either the Gentile falls in his old citizenship along with the Jew, his country being dissolved, or he is promised a new citizenship in a new country. He can't continue on in a social or religious order that no longer exists any more than you can pay your bills with Confederate money. TIMES HAVE CHANGED! .. DENTON C. ABBEY

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