

-WAS IT JUDICIAL BLINDNESS?-

-STUDIES IN EPHESIANS- 43

We have become accustomed to the expression above in reference to Acts 28:28. But is it true? Is it what the Scriptures have to say, or is it just another tradition?

Take your Companion Bible and look up the prophecy as written in Isa. 6:9,10, MAKE THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE FAT... Now Isaiah could not do that! It is a Hebrew expression meaning that he was to declare or foretell it. The prophet was to foretell the fact that Israel would reject truth so much that they would become blind and insensate to it. This would be willful on their own part lest they should at any time turn and be healed. They did not wish to turn. They did not wish to be healed.

Now look at Matt. 13:14,15. Here is the prophecy quoted for the first time and in connection with the rejection of the person of the Messiah of Israel. There it plainly states that they were willfully blind. They did it because they did not wish to go the Lord's way, but preferred their own pleasure. BY HEARING YE SHALL HEAR, AND YE 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.

Acts 28:26,27 is virtually the same rendering. It was Israel that closed their own eyes lest they should see. It was willful on their part.

In John 12:40 we see a change in the wording. There it would seem that it was the Lord that did the blinding. However Fenton's translation makes it agree with the other texts, and it is quite likely that this is correct.

There is some sound truth in the story. It could be applied to men today. Israel would not see, therefore they could not see or understand. That is why the Lord spoke on Calvary, THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO. They had so rejected truth and hardened their hearts over the centuries that when the expected Messiah did come they could not know Him. What a sad thing it was! You can harden yourself against all truth and beauty for just so long a time till you will no longer be able to recognize it when you do see it.

God did not judicially blind Israel. But He did give them up and no longer sought to enlighten them. So their case was hopeless. There was no remedy. Only the faithful remnant were able to see and to believe.

There are men today who have hardened themselves against the truth of the dispensation of the mystery because they did not like the truth. It may have been financial reasons, prestige, or the lusts of the flesh would not allow the practice of the truth. It is only a short time till they are completely blinded and cannot see or understand at all. It is only a natural process of fallen human nature as it is.

Israel will never be healed till this blindness is removed. It is the same with people today. Most of the older generation will fall in the wilderness of unbelief. We pray that others may receive the truth readily.

As indicated last month, the mystery is a something which we cannot teach. We can tell some of its characteristics, when it began, to whom revealed, etc. It is something that is spiritually discerned. You have to know the language to understand it. You have to be one of the chosen if you can ever grasp it. Those who cannot see dispensational division of the Word are going to be plagued with questions such as predestination and election. Seeing they see not, and hearing they do not understand.

The mystery had a special minister. It was Paul, a prisoner for us Gentiles. It was not the Paul who was in chains for the hope of Israel.

The mystery consisted of a special ministry. It was for Gentiles. It was for Gentiles as such, not those grafted in, as in Rom. 11, or partakers of the promise to Abraham, as in Gal. 3. These two chapters are parallel in content.

The mystery was a special communication. It was made known to Paul by revelation. It was not something he could go to the prophecies and find there. It was not in the books of his time. It was not something a teacher in Israel should have known, such as Nicodemus.

The mystery had a special theme. It was concerning untrackable riches among us Gentiles. It was something that had been secret from ages and generations. It was something that had been hid in God, not in the Scriptures somewhere.

It covered a special period of time known as the dispensation of the grace of God to us Gentiles. The time is NOW. It is also known as the dispensation of the mystery.

The mystery has a special witness. It is not to the nations. Israel was to proclaim the name of their God among the nations. They were to be a channel of blessing, the blessing promised to Abraham and his seed. But those who belong to the dispensation of the mystery are to be witnesses to the principalities and powers in the heavenlies of the manifold wisdom of God.

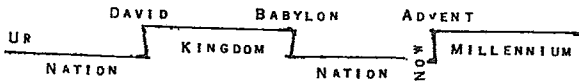
The mystery concerns a special purpose. This purpose is dated from before the overthrow of the world, before the ages began. So it is according to the purpose of the ages.

These 7 special things are mentioned in the epistle to the Ephesians. The believer, who by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, is able to grasp the truth of all this, comes into a new and closer relationship with Christ. He becomes a member of The Body of which Christ is Head.

No difference how much education a man may have, no difference if he can read the Book in the original languages, just as soon as he begins to grasp something of the mystery, the Bible becomes a new book to him and he begins to study it all over again.

So all we can do is to point out some of these outstanding truths so that you may be led to think and to ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten you so that you may be able to know what is the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and the greatness of His power to usward who believe.

-ISRAEL IN THE PLAN OF THE AGES-



In the simple diagram above you will note that Israel was called as a nation in Abram from Ur of the Chaldees. That was about 2,000 years before Christ. This was right after the nations had been given up (Rom. 1:24,26,28) and had been scattered on the face of the earth by the confusion of their language (Gen. 11). The call of Abram is in the following chapter.

It was revealed to Abram that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blest (Gen. 12:3). This was further pictured at Elim by the 12 springs and the 70 palm trees (the 12 tribes and the 70 nations, Ex. 15:27).

In Ex. 19:5,6 Israel learned that they were to be a peculiar treasure and a priestly kingdom. They had a mission. They were to be a channel of blessing to the nations. Again and again we find this repeated. It is the great commission of Matt. 28, Mark 16, and Luke 24.

Israel became a kingdom with the accession of David to the throne. You may ask, Why not with Saul? But Saul was not in the promise as given in Gen. 49:10, seeing he was of the tribe of Benjamin.

Israel ceased to be a kingdom at the captivity in Babylon. From then on until the last of Acts they were a nation, not a kingdom.

In the fulness of time the King came, but they had so closed their ears and eyes to all things from God, that when the expected One did come, they could not and did not recognize Him. They did not know what they were doing when they crucified the Prince of peace. Both the Lord and Peter testified of that fact (Luke 23:34, Acts 3:17). This blindness had been foretold in Isa. 6:9,10. Our Lord repeated it in Matt. 13:14,15 and Paul repeated it as Matthew did when he closed the doors of the kingdom and Israel were cast off for the time being at Acts 28:26-28.

The King will come back some day. This coming is the hope of His people, the Jews. He was crucified as King of the Jews. That kingship was His prerogative.

He is not my King. I do not belong to that kingdom. His coming is not my hope. He is the Head of the church which is His body, of which I am a member. So I must call and hold Him as Head (Col. 2:19). Instead of looking for His coming, I look for being at the manifestation in the heavenlies which occurs before the coming, but is closely connected with it. And if I prove faithful, I shall reign, not over the nations of the earth (Rev. 2:27), but will rule with Him over principalities and powers in the heavenlies (2 Tim. 2:12, Eph. 2:6; 3:10).

With the coming of the King, Israel will again become a kingdom. This kingdom will be a part of the great kingdom which will have no end, but is only the first 1,000 years of it.

In the diagram, the break in the line indicates the present interval. No time of duration is given to us. It was a secret from ages and generations, hid in God.

-THE MAN OF THE WORLD-

In Gen. 25 we read of the birth of the twins, Esau and Jacob. Esau was a red man and hairy, so he was called Edom (red). Jacob was so-called because he was a heel-catcher. He did not seem to outgrow his name completely till he wrestled with the angel at Jabbok ford. Then he was called Israel.

Esau became a cunning hunter. He was a skillful man. He was a man of the field (the field is the world). He liked to eat. He liked good things to eat. So did his father Isaac. Eating is a favorite pastime of the world. Eating and drinking were common before the flood. Even some Christians make their belly their god. It is the cause of much spiritual leanness.

Jacob was a plain man, upright or pure, and lived in tents. He did not care for the houses of the city as did Lot. Also Jacob was not altogether a meat eater like his brother, but he also had vegetables in his diet.

One day Esau came in from the field empty handed for a famine was in the land. Wild game was scarce. Jacob had a pot on the fire boiling with something in it that was red; probably some red beans. Esau was very tired and hungry and desired some of the food.

So here was Jacob's chance. He wanted the birthright. He knew that it was to be his. So here was just the time to make sure of it. He suggested that Esau part with the birthright for something to eat, to give up the spiritual for the carnal. And Esau, being a man of the world, did not care for the spiritual things and the responsibilities therewith. So he sold his birthright. He despised it. He despised grace, and therefore is called a profane person.

We cannot for a minute excuse the action of Jacob, but we can admire his desire for the good things, the birthright.

It was not so very long till Jacob had another opportunity to get what he desired. The birthright was not much good to him without the blessing. So his mother schemed how to get it. It worked.

How did Esau react? He was very angry and disappointed at the first. But it was not long till he was pacified by the promise of material blessings. The promise that some day he would shake off the dominion of his brother was enough for him. He did not care for the supremacy that went with the blessing that Jacob got. He did not care for the double portion that went to the first born. He did not care for the domestic priesthood which would have been his. Worship did not seem to bother him very much. A typical man of the world!

It is to be noted that when he found that he had lost the blessing, he wept with bitter tears. But no place of repentance was found. He could not undo what had been done. He had accepted the inferior place and had to keep it. He had had a taste of better things, but drew back. There was no way he could be restored.

The man of the world, like Esau, may despise grace and then wake up to the fact some day that there may be no returning. Many a man has sold out for his mess of pottage and then wept!

-THE DEPARTURE-

-BEGINNERS' CORNER- 9

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrals the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: of dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

That which befalleth the sons of men befall-eth beasts; even one thing befall-eth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest.

If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer Thee: Thou wilt have a desire to the work of Thine hands.

As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake in Thy likeness.

And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.

And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believ-eth on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.

The time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom; preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine.

But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine. Grace be with you all. Amen. 39

In lesson 7 we mentioned Paul and how Christ stopped him on the road to Damascus and then informed Ananias that Paul was a chosen vessel unto Him to bear His name...and straightway he preached Christ in the Synagogue.

Then in Acts 13:46 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.

Now if it was necessary to turn to the Gentiles, where had they been all these years? Certainly if this was the first time, then in the past they couldn't have had much hope. And that is what Paul said in Eph. 2:12.

When Peter went to the house of Cornelius, he later reported to the council at Jerusalem and explained his actions by saying, MEN AND BRETHREN YE KNOW HOW A GOOD WHILE AGO (4 or 5 yrs.) GOD MADE A CHOICE AMONG US, THAT THE GENTILES BY MY MOUTH SHOULD HEAR THE WORD OF THE GOSPEL AND BELIEVE.

Now in this period of the Acts, we see that there is a transition, that the Gentile is being given the gospel. But why? God isn't a God of confusion, so there must be a reason. And if we will grasp the significance of this reason and admit that a dispensation is coming into view, then we can continue our study rightly divided.

Admittedly this makes a case for the Gentiles, but it doesn't alter the Word of God. For Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, quotes Moses, saying, I WILL PROVOKE YOU TO JEALOUSY BY THEM THAT ARE NO PEOPLE AND BY A FOOLISH NATION. I WILL ANGER YOU. He continues in 11:14, IF BY ANY MEANS I MAY PROVOKE TO EMULATION THEM WHICH ARE MY FLESH, AND MIGHT SAVE SOME OF THEM.

Even tho we see the Gentile coming into view, it isn't in his own right, but rather to provoke Israel to jealousy that they might be saved. Even to the very last chapter of Acts, this still holds true. In 28:28 when Paul is arguing his case at Rome with the elders, he makes this statement, FOR THIS CAUSE THEREFORE HAVE I CALLED FOR YOU, TO SEE YOU, AND TO SPEAK WITH YOU: BECAUSE THAT FOR THE HOPE OF ISRAEL I AM BOUND WITH THIS CHAIN.

If you read the 15th chapter you will readily see that this was a Jewish hope that the Gentile was obtaining. When Peter made his statement to the council about Cornelius the decision was finally made by James. The Gentiles were allowed the privileges of Israel thru faith, but the conditions were; abstain from idols, fornication, things strangled and blood. The law itself was not necessary to salvation.

This was some 13 to 14 years after Pentecost and outside of the Jews' religion none is mentioned. How then can we say that the church began at Pentecost, or even with Cornelius?

What was happening here was no more than that which took place back in the O T when Ruth embraced the Jews' religion.

-WHO ARE WE?-

-THE EDITOR'S DESK-

Most of us, when we were saved, had texts from Romans and Galatians quoted to us. We understood that we were heathen Gentiles, coming from the darkness of the nations into the glorious light of the gospel.

We understood that we were justified by grace thru faith and that upon us the law had no hold. We heard about redemption and the atonement, that we had been bought with a price and reconciled to God.

We were taught that the Bible was full of promises and that most, if not all of them, were to and for us today.

We had our attention focussed on the turmoil about us and the sick condition of the world with the promise that some day a righteous rule would come in and that all would be well on the earth. At that time we understood that the Son of Man, even the Son of God, would rule from the throne of David in Jerusalem over the nations.

We were told that we were wild olive branches grafted into Israel and that we partook of the promises made to Abraham and Israel. We agreed that Israel were God's chosen people and that the Jew was first, and some day would be a kingdom of priests (priestly kingdom).

We were glad that we could have a share in all these blessings promised to Israel. It was better than crumbs from the children's table by far. We were willing to pray for the repentance of Israel so that we could enjoy all the blessing when the fulness of Israel came in.

We hoped that we would be meek enough that we might inherit some of the earth. We looked forward to the time when we would own a little plot in the kingdom and sit under our own fig tree.

But one day we woke up to the fact that the channel of blessing was gone. We saw the pronouncement of Acts 28:28. We realized that Jerusalem had been destroyed and the temple burnt. We saw that blindness had come upon Israel so thickly that they had been cast away for a season till they should be ready to receive their Messiah.

What then? Our question was, Who are we? How was this going to affect us now? Could the blessing come without a channel? Even tho we were saved and were children of God, what was our dispensational position? What privileges could we claim, if any? Do we still hope for the return of the Lord and His kingdom on earth? These and many other questions came to plague us. Was there no answer?

We found the answers! The key was at the very door. Right after Galatians, in Ephesians, we found what we looked for. There was revealed a secret which put all our fears to rest.

We may have lost a little but we gained much. We let go the earthly promises and laid hold of all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ. No longer is the Jew first. Now it is grace, not race. We were chosen in Christ long before Abraham, even before the foundation of the world. We now find ourselves members of the body of Christ, of which He is the glorious Head. Seated with Him in the heavenlies, we find ourselves amid the aristocracy of heaven.

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RESURRECTION AND THE PURPOSE OF THE AGES is a new booklet by Stuart Allen. We can furnish you with copies at 15¢ each postpaid.

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DO YOU KNOW? (this is the title of a little tract we printed some time ago) has been reprinted. Let us know how many copies you can use for free distribution. (4,000 printed)

THE SCRIPTURES...TESTIFY OF ME, a booklet by Andrew Morton, has just come in. It is some of the study on structure in the Word as was taken up in his former booklet, THE PRINCIPLE OF STRUCTURE IN SCRIPTURE. We have copies of the latter too yet. Single copies of each are free.

THE CHAPEL PICTURE (see notice last month as to how you can get one free).

APOLOGY; unless carefully read, our notice last month would give the impression that Mr. Welch was the author of STUDIES IN ACTS. However, the author is your editor and the studies were designed to go with Mr. Welch's book FROM PENTECOST TO PRISON. The studies are 50¢.

LOOK AGAIN at the book lists in your last TFT. We still have them. Also send for your copy of the catalog of BEREAN PUBLICATIONS.

CURIOUS? We are making original copy on the Vari-Typer now. Just learning how to use it. We finished paying for the machine last month. Many thanks to all who helped us with it.

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