

# **THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

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## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY ONE:

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

Is there such a thing as 'the people of God'? Are not all human beings corporately 'the people of God'? It would appear not. Time and again the Scriptures refer to God's covenant people. In Ephesians 1:3–14 the writer speaks of God's elect people, chosen before time to be holy, to be the sons of God, to be redeemed and to be to His glory. Romans 8:29 speaks of these foreknown elect as being ultimately 'conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he[the Son] might be the first-born among many [such] brethren'. Other Scriptures speak of those out of every nation, and people, and tribe and tongue who will be redeemed and will appear before God in eternity.

The Scriptures also speak of others who have 'no hope' and are 'without God in the world'. These are they who 'go away into eternal punishment', for they are 'the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted . . . murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars' and their lot is 'in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death'. In other words, there are the people of God and others who do not wish to be the people of God. The distinction is clear. How this came about, and how it obtains, we will see as we go through our studies.

### **WHY 'THE PEOPLE OF GOD'?**

The clear truth concerning God in the Old Testament is that He is Creator. I Peter 4:19 describes Him as 'a faithful Creator'. That is, He will be faithful to the purposes for which He created man and the universe. Proverbs 16:4 says, 'The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble'. Man's evil was taken into consideration prior to creation. The rich truth is that both Old and New Testaments speak of God as Redeemer, and this also 'from eternity', or, 'before the world began'. The Old Testament speaks about God being Covenant-Father of His people, and the New Testament speaks powerfully of Him being the Father of His family, i.e. the people of God.

Man rejected God in the Fall, and refused His status and rule as Creator because 'they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator'. For this reason they refuse Him as Creator and so cannot know Him as Redeemer and Father. Hence they cannot be the people of God. That God has broken through the rebellion and rejection of many in Jesus Christ, shows that He does not abandon man. Many are drawn into His great family and have come to know Him as Creator, Redeemer, and Father.

The answer, then, to our question-heading is that because God is Creator, Redeemer and Father, He will have His children—His family. His Fatherhood of the Son is expanded to embrace all who come to Him through that Son.

### **INDICATIONS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT OF 'THE PEOPLE OF GOD'**

We see a term in Genesis 6:2, 'the sons of God'. This would indicate something of participation in the family of God. It is not, however, until we come to God's covenant with Abraham that we find such statements as, 'I will be their God, and they shall be my people' (cf. Gen. 17:7–8; Lev. 26:12). Later, in Deuteronomy 7:6–8, Moses tells the people, 'For you are a people holy to the Lord your God: the Lord your God has chosen to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth . . . because the Lord loves you'.

We will see in our following studies that Israel did not always remain faithful to God, although God remained faithful to His people (cf. Exod. 34:6–7), and so they were judged by God, chastised, and brought back again to full relationship with their God. In the New Testament Israel as a nation rejects its Messiah. The holy remnant within Israel recognized Jesus as the true Messiah and believed in him. At Pentecost the new people of God was born, having continuity with the past, and at the same discontinuity, for now they were a new people altogether.

We will also see that the people of God have ever been persecuted and that Satan and his evil forces have tried to destroy this people. This should give us cause to pause and think. Why are they persecuted? Can they be destroyed as a people? Who will triumph in the end? The Scriptures indicate—as we have seen above—that the unrepentant evil ones amongst men and supernatural powers will all be destroyed, and the people of God will triumph for ever through His love, mercy, and grace.

### **INDICATIONS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT OF 'THE PEOPLE OF GOD'**

Passages such as I Peter 2:1–10, Ephesians 2:11–3:11 and Romans chapters 9 to 11—amongst many others—refer to the new people of God, the church which was born on the day of Pentecost. This new people of God—the true Israel of God—has continuity with the old as well as discontinuity. In the Book of the Revelation this vast people of God is seen before the throne of God. So then, the New Testament—as much as the Old—is taken up with the great theme of the people of God.

### **OUR OWN SITUATION AND RELATIONSHIP TO 'THE PEOPLE OF GOD'**

It would be pointless for us to do a course through this year on the theme of the people of God if we were not members of that people, or not wishing to be members. We must ask ourselves whether we are part of that community and have the prospect of eternal life, or whether we are outside of it, and have the prospect of eternity without God, and without relief from our guilt and hopelessness. We ought also to see the riches and glory of the people of God under their Creator, Redeemer and Father, and if we are part of the people, then to value this status and life most highly, and if not, then seek to obtain it for ourselves.

We ought to ask ourselves whether we can afford to live this life without a true relationship with God and His people. Rich life is a matter of full relationships.



# THE PEOPLE OF GOD

## STUDY TWO:

### ‘ALL OF ONE MAN’

#### FROM ONE STOCK

In Acts 17:26 Paul said, 'And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and boundaries of their habitation'. The term 'from one' (*ex enos*) has been variously translated, i.e. 'from one man', 'from one blood', 'one stock' and 'one nation'. In Paul's mind this must be 'the first man', i.e. 'Adam', the meaning of which is 'of the earth'. Paul—for one—sees all humanity as 'in Adam' (Rom. 5:12–21; cf. I Cor. 15:21, 48–49), but through redemption believes they can be transferred from being 'in Adam' to being 'in Christ'. Even so he sees all the nations as having stemmed from Adam and his partner Eve—the mother of all living—as is the meaning of her name.

In Acts 17:27 Paul says that God has a reason for making men of one origin and allotting to them 'the boundaries of their habitation'. It was that 'they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him'. Their oneness—as also the allotment of national boundaries—was a with a view to finding Him. Thus the unity of the race is significant for knowing Him. The text suggests that this was God's intention prior to creation. See Deuteronomy 32:7–9 for the fixing of the bounds of the nations.

**Note:** 'One blood', 'one man' and 'one origin' show that whatever colour, racial, cultural and sociological distinctions may come to man through his rejection of God and his opting for alternatives to the 'truth of God', ontologically mankind is a unity. For example blood—with its various classifications' is common across the human race. The constant drives for unity, even in diverse racial situations tell us that the creational drive is strong.

We should also note that in Athens Paul was also countering the Greek idea that it had a special origin apart from the rest of the human race. This idea is found in many races.

#### THE CREATION AND FALL OF MAN

Genesis chapters 1 and 2 give us two complementary accounts of the creation of Man. By 'Man' we mean man-woman (male-female together as a unity, i.e. 'Man' is 'man-woman'. That unity-in-complementarity is significant for the family, and for the whole human race. Man was created for a purpose, hence the command of Genesis 1:28.

The unity of the race was first to be that of man and wife, then of family, and so of all the families of the earth. The human race was to move across the face of the earth. Genesis 10 and 11 show us how man tried to evade the creational mandate (Gen. 1:28) in order to move proportionally and appropriately across the face of the earth. The confusion of tongues at Babel (Gen. 11) explains the diversification that came, but this was also rooted in man's individual desire for autonomy (cf. Gen. 3:1–6). Each person has been created to live universally with the whole human race, but the desire for individual autonomy is what brings division in the race.

Creationally man was a child of God the Father (cf. Acts 17:28; Luke 3:38), a creature of the Creator (cf. Ps. 95:6–7), and a subject of the King (Ps. 95:1–5). All of these relationships determine (i) Man's relationship to God, for in Him man lives and moves and has his being (Acts 17:28), and (ii) the internal relations of human beings within the race—since we are all of one origin. Thus to disturb the creational (ontological) order of things is to bring trouble to the whole race.

### **THE PROBLEM OF AUTONOMY**

Because Man is created in God—Who in Himself is a Social Unity—he is made for racial unity. The temptation to Man to be autonomous means a fracturing of the original order. Genesis 3:11ff. shows us that a fracture took place between the first couple, and evidenced itself in the tragic relationship of the first two brothers (Gen. 4:1ff.; cf. I John 3:10–11). What we have to see is that there will always be an ontological thrust in humanity for utter unity, but its unity can only be in God., and not otherwise. In our next study we will develop the idea of the division in the human race.

### **THE HOPE OF ULTIMATE UNITY**

Granted that there has been a break in the unity of the human race the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments speak of a unity which will come to the human race, though this will be within the true People of God. Whilst we will not discuss this now we keep it in mind so that we do not see the future as hopeless. Christ—who created all things in unity (Col. 1:15–17), will bring them altogether in unity.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY THREE: **‘THE DIVIDED PEOPLE’**

#### **THE BEAUTIFUL CREATIONAL UNITY**

In I John 1:3 the apostle says, 'that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ'. This denotes that unity or fellowship which man has with the Father and the Son by redemption, but man was originally one with God through creation. Thus the man and the woman would have had a 'one-flesh' unity of such love as is shown to us in Ephesians 5:25 and the ultimate union of the Bride and the Lamb. This is the true unity the human race knew until the Fall.

#### **THE DIVIDED PEOPLE**

We now come to see how it is that the human race became divided. In the temptation (Gen. 3:1–6) the woman was seduced into thinking she could be autonomous, even from her husband. In fact the division first came between her and God, between the man and God, and so between the two. From that point the human race became divided. We have to look at the curse which resulted (Gen. 3:8–24): (i) the seducing serpent was told of his coming doom and would live in apprehension of that (cf. Rev. 12:12); (ii) the woman would know pain in childbirth, and would be ruled by her husband, but 'desire him' (i.e. either would want him even though he ruled, or would want to rule him—cf. Gen. 4:7 where 'desire' is to rule); (iii) the earth would know a curse so that man would have to toil—in the face of weeds—to live, and at the end would return to the dust from whence he was created. This would greatly diminish the joy of the 'one-flesh' unity (Gen. 2:24). All the elements of division were present. These elements remain with us today. Nothing has changed.

The hope in the curse is that the deceitful seducer—the ancient serpent the Devil—will be crushed by the very seed of woman. This is the light of the Gospel amid the gloom of sad division.

#### **DIVISION IN THE FIRST FAMILY**

John the apostle tells us clearly that there are two families on earth. In I John 3:10–18 he gives us the distinctive differences of the two:

- (i) One family is of God, in which its members do righteousness and love their brethren. This presupposes that God is their Father. These have passed from death to eternal life, the proof of which is that they love one another.
- (ii) The other family is of the Devil. They do not do righteous deeds, but evil, and they do not love the brethren. They hate those of the true family of God because of the righteous deeds these do. Doubtless this is linked with man's never-ending endeavour to justify or prove himself.

If we go back to the account of division between Cain and Abel in Genesis 4, then we see that Cain had a wrong attitude to God before he offered his sacrifice, or his sacrifice would have been accepted. Non-acceptance angered him. It is probable that Abel being a prophet (Luke 11: 50–51) also confronted Cain by his very vocation, for the prophet speaks directly from God. In the New Testament Abel is spoken of as being a righteous man (I John 3:11–12; Matt. 23:35), and this would have been anathema to Cain (I John 3:10).

### **THE DIVISION THAT BRINGS DIVISION**

We do not know the mind of the first couple—Adam and Eve—but it is significant that Cain and Abel were of two different families even though of the same parents. It would be conjecture to say that the division of the parents was the cause of Cain's anger with God and his brother (cf. I John 4:20), but must have been a contributing factor. Each person must bear responsibility for his (or her) own decisions (cf. Ezek. ch. 18). It is certain that the unity and/or the disunity of the parents will affect the children, but this is not absolute. It is not the basic cause of disaffection, but it can be contributory. It is useful to see how many families in Scripture have division. We should also heed Paul's teaching in I Corinthians 10 that all written in the Old Testament is written as a warning. This means we need to thoroughly understand the Fall and the resultant divisions within humanity.

### **THE PERPETUATION OF THE DIVISION**

In Ephesians 2:1–3 Paul speaks of the family of the Devil. In John 8:31–47 Jesus also speaks of the Devil being the father of his children—in that particular case certain leaders of the Jews! To speak of two families is not, then, fanciful.

What we need to do is to test ourselves out as to which family we belong to. Last study we saw in Hebrews 11 that from Abel onwards there have been men and women of faith, and these belong to God's family. Likewise there are those who refuse to believe in God, and they belong to the other family. Undoubtedly the Devil does everything to keep these two streams of humanity divided.

In our next study we will see the methods by which Satan seeks to perpetuate the divisions, as he himself endeavours to draw faithful people from God and keep unfaithful man in his kingdom and under his domination.

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### STUDY FOUR:

## **THE SONS OF GOD AND DAUGHTERS OF MEN**

### **THE SONS OF GOD: DAUGHTERS OF MEN**

The term 'sons of God' found in Genesis 6:2 is thought by some to refer to angels, for elsewhere angels are called 'sons of God' (cf. Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Dan. 3:15, etc.). In this case in Genesis 6 angels would have cohabited with human women—'the daughters of men'. Some see in the text that the union brought forth giants or special folk called 'the Nephilim'. We have no basis for thinking angels who are spirits have sexuality at all, since there is no reference to angels cohabiting with humans and bringing forth children. Jesus once said that those who have gone to heaven are like the angels, neither marrying nor giving in marriage. To base this view solely on the fact that angels alone are called 'sons of God' is to fail to see that others are also called 'sons of God' (Deut. 32:5; Hosea 11:1, etc.).

The second view is that 'the sons of God' are those of Seth's line for Seth was a substitute for Abel—the godly person. In the time of Seth's son Enosh 'men began to call upon the name of the Lord', i.e. to worship him. This view assumes that sons of God are the godly line—of Adam. Seth and his descendants are called 'the generations of Adam', and Cain is left out entirely. The second view assumes Cain's progeny are called 'the daughters of men'. This may only refer to the women, who being beautiful appealed to the sight of the sons of God.

In our last study we saw there are two families of human on the earth—those whose Father is God, and those whose father is the Devil.

### **THE UNION OF SONS OF GOD AND DAUGHTERS OF MEN**

The result of this union was tragic. If the sons of God were people of faith, then light having fellowship with darkness (cf. II Cor. 6:14–18) in unequal yoking brought evil which was worse than just the darkness itself. Genesis 6:5 is one of the most damning commentaries on man's evil, 'The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually'. The judgement of this was the Flood. The Flood was a judgement (Gen. 6:11–13) but resulted in God's covenant of grace for mankind (Gen. 8:20–22).

Genesis 6:9 tells us Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation, and that he walked with God. II Peter 2:5 says he was a preacher of righteousness, and Hebrews 11:7 that he was a man of faith. He offered true worship to God after the Flood

### **THE NEW SERIES IN THE ROLL-CALL OF MANKIND**

Following the Flood the three sons of Noah had progeny and so history became that of

Japheth, Ham and Shem, and they are discussed in this order in Genesis 10. Ham had witnessed his father's nakedness when he—Noah—became drunk, and he was cursed—or rather—his son Canaan was cursed. We cannot be sure why it was Canaan and not Ham. The main point is that the Japhethites became 'the people of the coastlands', the Shemites are virtually 'Semites', and the Hamites become those who seeks to make a kingdom under Nimrod and his people.

### **THE ROLL CALL OF 'THE DAUGHTERS OF MEN'**

Cain and his followers were the first ones to make cities, and to develop industrial and artistic skills (Gen. 4:17–22). It is in the spirit of the Cainites that Nimrod and the Hamites develop a kingdom (Gen. 10:6ff.). 'Nimrod' in its verbal form means, 'Let us revolt', and 'mighty-hunter' could mean 'tyrant hunter'—one who in the sight of God hunts men to make them into his kingdom.

Genesis 11:1–9 may refer to all Shemites, Hamites and Japhethites, or may refer primarily to Hamites, for they were already in the building of cities. It does not much matter. Babel is the epitome of man's autonomy, in 'the city, the 'name' and the high 'watchtower'. This high wall was a defense against war, the tower a place to watch for one's enemies but it extended to building up to heaven, i.e. to seek to have a monopolistic hold on everything 'under the sun'. The 'name' meant man's autonomy over and against the Name of God. It was all done 'lest we be scattered across the face of the earth', i.e. have compulsorily to fulfil the creational mandate.

The principle of man's 'kingdom-building' and 'city-building' is rebellion and self-dependence. It is expressed in all the kingdoms of the world, such as Babylon and its empire, and the new Babylon seen in the N.T. It is one with Satan's kingdom (cf. Luke 11:18; Rev. 16:10–11). It can be seen that the family of the Devil (I John 3:10f; John 8:44; Ephes. 2:1–3), city and kingdom building are all of the one piece. Seeing this helps us to understand history and its conflicts—i.e. it is the battle of, and for, the kingdoms. It reaches into every part of life and experience. It is a never-ending conflict.

### **THE ROLL CALL OF 'THE SONS OF GOD'**

Whilst Genesis 11:1–9 may refer specifically to the Hamites, the chronicler seems interested in the descendants of Shem, especially from 10–32. As we will see in Study 6 this roll call is a build up to the covenant given to Abraham by God. From Joshua 24:1f. it can be seen that Shemites, too, were idolaters. God made a revelation of Himself to Abraham and altered that. Even so the true roll call of 'the sons of God' can be seen in Hebrews 11 where the people of faith are set forth. Of course once the covenant was pronounced then being sons of God or daughters of men could be seen in the light of covenant.

### **THE ESCHATOLOGICAL DIVISION AND 'TELOS'**

The purpose of our course is to trace the people of God, and it must be seen that since there are two 'peoples' then history is really the conflict of the two. We need to see that ultimately the rebel people will be defeated and the people of God will triumph. History is thus a long and painful process, also it is the triumph of God, and the vindication of creation, i.e. that 'God is a faithful Creator' (I Pet. 4:19).

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY FIVE: **THE NON-PEOPLE OF GOD**

#### **THE FACT AND ORIGIN OF THE NON-PEOPLE OF GOD**

Our past Studies in this series have shown that man was created in the image of God, and as such was one with Him. All people have been born of that one man—Adam—and his wife—Eve—was (is) the mother of all living. Man—in Adam—rebelled against God (Rom. 5:12; cf. Gen. 3:1–6; Rom. 1:19ff.). As a result all sinned in Adam (Rom. 5:12) and all the human race is 'in Adam'. Yet, at the same time, we find persons of faith throughout history who are called 'the sons of God', 'the people of God', 'men of faith', 'the sons of the covenant' and other such terms. Such people are 'in God', or 'in Christ' or 'in the Spirit' (cf. Rom. 8:9–11; II Cor. 5:15, 17).

We have seen the principle that when man lived to God then members of the human race lived to one another. To have fellowship with God is to have fellowship with one another (cf. I John 3:10, 14; I John 1:1–7).

What then of the 'non-people of God'. When we use the term 'of God' it seems to be a contradiction, yet Acts 17:28 indicates 'in him (God) we live and move and have our being'. The human race in this sense is in God, though against God, and separated by death and sin (Gen. 2:17; 3:10; Isa. 59:1–2). Having seen the fact of this people we now look at the condition of them.

#### **THE SITUATION AND CONDITION OF THE NON-PEOPLE OF GOD**

In the Old Testament there non-people are not so much described as their actions are recorded, and it is from these we can derive their condition. Certainly statements about the wicked are made such as we find in Genesis 6:5, 8:21; Isaiah 57:20–21 and Jeremiah 17:9. The Psalms are full of the iniquities and miseries of the sinner, and the fact that God's wrath is upon him. In Romans 3:9–18 Paul gives many quotes from the Old Testament to show the evil of man.

#### **THE SITUATION IN HISTORY OF THE NON-PEOPLE**

The situation of those who are not of faith in God is that they belong to the nations who go their own way. God has witnesses to Himself in every nation (Acts 10:34–35) and the law of God is not wholly absent from them (Rom. 2:14–15), but history has shown that their separation from God—by sin (Isa. 59:4)—makes them His enemies (cf. Ps. 2:1f; Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:19–21). We have seen that such people are under the grip of Satan and sin (Eph. 2:1–3; I John 3:10–11). Such people are doomed in the end time

(Rom. 18f; Matt. 25:41–46; Rev. 20:11–15; 21:8). The history of man's situation is a sad one, but Genesis 3:15 seen in the light of Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:8, 14 and Revelation 7:9–15 shows that people and nations are not doomed to be part of the non-people, but can 'come into the light of life'.

### **THE CONDITION OF THE NON-PEOPLE**

There are endless materials relating to the condition of the non-people, as we have already indicated. Because the Scriptures as the word of God have the intention of bringing salvation to sinners they naturally enough reveal the condition of unbelieving man, so that he might see his state, repent, believe, and receive salvation and new life. We would need many reams of paper to fully explain the sinner's state, but we simply make some basic statements,

- (a) Unbelieving man is dead to God and doomed to ultimate death (Gen. 2:17; 3:6; Rom. 5:12; Eph. 2:1, 5; John 5:24; Rom. 6:23).
- (b) Man lives continually under the wrath of God (Rom. 1:18ff.; Ps. 7:11; I Thess. 1:10; II Thess. 2:7ff.) and must expect His wrath to end in the 'second death' (Rev. 20:15; 21:8).
- (c) Man is the slave and victim of Satan, his world system and its powers, sin, the law, death, the wrath of God, his conscience, and his idols. He fears death 'not because he has to die, but because he fears to die'. In this state he is 'like the restless sea that casts up mire and dirt'. There is no peace to him, or in him. Because of fear of death (Heb. 2:14–15) man is 'without hope in the world' (Eph. 2:12)
- (d) Man is 'alienated from the life of God' (Eph. 4:17), and as such has to be dependent upon himself (cf. Jer. 10:23). Existentially this is a state of horror as man was created to be in union with God (John 17:3; I John 5:20). Man is 'without God in the world' (Eph. 2:12) and thus is fearfully lonely. He cannot find the fulness of life in other persons or in his idols (Isa. 41:29; 44:18–20).
- (e) Man is fearfully at odds with God, creation, his fellow-humanity and himself because (i) he has exchanged the truth of God for a lie (Rom. 1:25), (ii) he suppresses the truth (Rom. 1:18), which then makes him morally callous (Eph. 4:17ff.), and (iii) he does not live in the truth (John 3:19–21; I John 1:6) but in the lie, thus going against God and himself as he was created. All of this forces man to live falsely, as such he is disoriented, dislocated as a person, so that existentially he can never be in harmony (cf. Isa. 57:22–23).

### **THE MAGNIFICENCE OF THE LOVE, MERCY AND GRACE OF GOD**

Man is all this—which we have described above—and much more (cf. Rom. 3:9–18; Eph. 2:1–3; Eph. 4:17–19; Titus 3:1–3). In the light of his evil the love, mercy and grace of God stand out as rich and glorious, for they save the non-people of God who will hear, repent and believe. We must look at man in despair of God being unable to do anything about him. In Christ He has done all for him, and this relieves the thought that man's condition is hopeless.



## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY SIX:

## **ABRAHAM AND THE TRUE PEOPLE**

### **ABRAHAM—FATHER OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

Three great peoples trace their origins to Abraham, and look upon him as their natural and spiritual father. They are the people of Israel, Islam and Christ. Abraham's first name was Abram, i.e. 'exalted father', and his later name—Abraham—means 'father of a multitude' (Gen. 17:3). Incidentally, Eve was 'mother of all living', and Sarah (Sarai) 'a princess'. Isaiah 51:1–2 points back to Israel's origins and character in Abraham. In fact Abraham was not only the father of Isaac and Ishmael, but also of six other sons by his later wife, Keturah, from whom came the tribes of Dedan and Midian (Gen. 25:1–6).

### **GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM**

Our main concern in this study is with the covenant that God made with Abraham. We can say that Genesis chapters 1–11 are really material written to give the setting to this covenant which differs greatly from the Noahic covenant (Gen. 8:20–22). That covenant was universal in regard to creation, but Abraham's covenant is universal in regard to redemption and blessing (cf. Gen. 15:6; Gal. 3:14). The nations receive blessing or cursing according to their relationship with Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3; Gal. 3:8). The descendants of Abraham will be innumerable—'as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore'. Abraham is to inherit the earth or the world (Rom. 4:13).

### **THE CHARACTER OF ABRAHAM**

We must remember that Abraham came from a situation of idolatry (Josh. 24:1–2) and became a believer in God. The principle of this transformation is seen in Acts 7:2ff., namely that God revealed Himself to him (see also John 8:56). That was all that was needed. We know he saw many theophanies. Certain elements help us to understand Abraham, namely:

- (a) He stands unique in history as a person of faith (see Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6–7; Heb. 11:7–10, 17–19). He believed God would give him children, raise Isaac back to life, and give Canaan to his children. He operated in faith by the resurrection principle (Rom. 4:16).
- (b) He was a fatherly man having had children when he was mature, his names both signifying his links with fatherhood—we can say—with God's Fatherhood (Isa. 51:1–2).
- (c) He was a prophet (Gen. 15:13–16; 20:7). See John 8:56 and compare with I Peter 1:10–12.
- (d) He was called 'the friend of God' (Isa. 41:8). Notice that God linked His name with Abraham, 'I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'.
- (e) Known on earth as a prince (Gen. 23:6) he lived well amongst the people and was friendly to all, not seeking to effect the promise of God to possess the land, but trusting this would come to pass in God's time (cf. Gen. 15:12–16). In this sense Abraham believed in the sovereignty of God.

We conclude that such a man had those qualities which would be the basis of generations to come, hence the admonition in Isaiah 51:1–2 to look back to realize our origins and to emulate Abraham and Sarah.

**Note:** We must recognize Sarah as a woman of faith (Isa. 51:1–2; Heb. 11:11), for Abraham and she together were the covenant parents of the faithful. See I Peter 3:6 and Galatians 4:21–28 in regard to being children of Sarah.

### **ABRAHAM AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

Galatians chapter 3 gives us the principle of covenant, of its blessings, and of the people who are covenant children—men and women of faith. The 'seed' (single) of Abraham is Christ, and in him people of faith become the children of God. This is what gives the Gospel—and the church—its universal character. History only has sense and meaning within the Abrahamic covenant.

**Note:** The covenant with Israel (through Moses; cf. Exod. 24) was within the Abrahamic covenant. The New Covenant through Christ (cf. Jer. 31:31–34, Matt. 26:28; Heb. 9:15), is the universal fulfilment of the Abrahamic Covenant. Every way, then, we see God's grace in covenant, and the people of faith as the children of Abraham.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY SEVEN : **THE PEOPLE ARE OF ELECTION**

#### **THE MEANING OF ELECTION**

Election is God's choice by His grace, and for the purposes He has seen fit to design, of persons or nations, to bring them to that end which He has for them. Such election fits His entire plan for His creation, to be—in the ultimate—to the praise of His glory. The fulfilment of God's elect purposes will show Him to be 'a faithful Creator', and His plan to be perfect. There is nothing that God does which is not accomplished 'according to the counsel of his will' (Eph. 1:11) for 'This was [is] according to the eternal purpose which he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Eph. 3:11).

The principle of election is found throughout Scripture. In Isaiah 46:9–10 we read, 'I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose" ...I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it'.

We will now endeavour to see that the people of God are God's elect according to the principle of Romans 8:30, 'And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified'.

#### **The Choice and Calling of the People of God**

The key to all calling is that it is God alone who does it. God's purpose of election continues 'not because of works but because of his call' (Rom. 9:11), 'So it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy' (Rom. 9:16). Whilst God's calling is prior to time (Eph. 1:3–14; cf. II Tim. 1:9), yet it is all with a view to the fullness and coming of His Kingdom, and it is all 'in Christ'. We will now look at the order of this election.

#### **(i) Christ is God's Elect One**

At Jesus' baptism the Father acknowledged Jesus as His Son 'in whom my soul delights'—a conflating of Psalm 2:6 and Isaiah 42:1. This attestation is also seen at his transfiguration (Luke 9:35)—'my Chosen'. In I Peter 2:4, 6 (cf. Isa. 28:16) Jesus is the 'cornerstone, chosen and precious'. In this Petrine context the people of God are 'built into a spiritual house....through Jesus Christ'. In Hebrews 3:1–6 Christ is the builder of the household—God's people. Moses was the servant within that house, but not the builder.

The people of God are given to the Son—'Here am I, and the children God has given me' (Heb. 2:13; cf. Ps. 22:22; Isa. 8:17–18). In John's Gospel Jesus refers to 'the men whom thou gavest me' (17:2, 6, 9, 12). Hence, Christ could say to his disciples, 'You did not choose me, but I chose you', (John 15:16).

We do not understand the people of God if we do not see them as Christ's flock, Christ's people, members of Christ's body and of his Kingdom (Eph. 5:5). Only because they

are in him are they the true people of God. That is, they are elect in him, hence God 'chose us in him before the foundation of the world' (Eph. 1:4).

## **(ii) The Elect People of God Are Those Whom He Has Chosen**

We have begun to see that the people of faith, as they are set out in Hebrews 11 had faith in God because He revealed Himself to them. If we take the principle that grace is always prior to faith, then we are driven to see that God's choice of a person is sovereign for 'it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy' (Rom. 9:16). The favour (grace: Heb. *chen*) which God exercised towards Noah was not for anything inherent in Noah.

### **(a) Israel was God's Chosen People**

If we look for the efficient cause of this choice we see it lies within God Himself—Deuteronomy 7:7; 9:6; Exodus 19:5–6; Amos 3:2; Malachi 1:2–3—i.e. God's own sovereign choice which has nothing to do with any merit in the chosen. This is underlined in such passages as Isaiah 46:8–13 and 48:3–11. In particular Israel is the chosen servant of God in Isaiah 42:1; 43:1; 44:1–2, 21; 49:1, 5; and in Isaiah 51:1–2 it is disclosed that the calling of Israel lay in God's choice of Abraham. This brings us back to the point that God has chosen His people, and these are His children (cf. Isa. 43:6–7).

### **(b) The Church is God's Chosen People—in Christ**

We have traced something of this above. Paul's interpretation of Hosea 2:23, 1:10, Isaiah 10:22–23 and Isaiah 1:9. Romans 9:25–29 makes it clear the Gentiles, too, were chosen and called in Christ—as much as the truly elect of the Jews. In I Peter 2:9–10 we see Exodus 19:5–6 and Isaiah 43:20 fulfilled in the elect people, the church. This matter of the church being the elect is worked out by Paul in Romans chapters 9–11.

Jesus had much to say about the 'called' some of whom were not 'chosen'. He emphasized the ones at the Messianic Feast without wedding garments were not the called. Works had nothing to do with choice since many would claim to do good works but would be cast out. Those who were his sheep would hear his voice and follow him. None could pluck out of his hand those whom the Father had given him.

In the Epistles, choice—calling and election—are by God's grace and His sovereign choice (see Rom. 8:28–11:36; Eph. 1:3–14; I Thess. 1:2–10; II Thess. 2:13–14; II Tim. 1:9–10). Whilst election is often in relation to salvation, it is more in regard to sanctification (I Thess. 4:7) and to the ultimate glorification of God's people (Eph. 1:3–14; Rom. 8:28–30; cf. Isa. 43:6–7).

## **CONCLUSION TO 'THE PEOPLE ARE OF ELECTION'**

When we see that God's people are to be to His glory, that He has given His elect into the hands of His Son, we might feel we have covered the marvel of election, but in fact it is what the people of God become in Christ, and what they do in Christ which is the true wonder. The dynamic, radical and total transformation of Christ's people is the real marvel of grace. Whilst some may balk at God's choice, they cannot justly cavil at this choice, since all are sinners and none deserves election. To be part of the people of God is to be part of God's true saga of history, and to know the joy of eternity in God.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY EIGHT:

## **ISRAEL IN EGYPT**

### **ISRAEL BEFORE EGYPT**

Abraham was 'the father of a multitude', of many nations. We saw that this was by election. By election Ishmael was cast out, and Isaac was the true heir of the promises given to Abraham. Likewise Esau was rejected and Jacob became the true heir, although both Ishmael and Esau were the older brothers. Becoming, or being, the people of God was not something God left to develop from natural processes or human effort.

Abraham had been promised that his descendants would possess the land of Caanan, but then, only after some hundreds of years. They would go to another place where they would be oppressed for 400 years (Gen. 17:12–16), after which they would be God's instrument to destroy the Amorites for their iniquity.

A great deal of the text of the book of Genesis is given over to the account of the lives of Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, and finally Joseph. These lives show what care God had for His people, and the degrees to which He went to train them as a holy and priestly nation.

### **ISRAEL TOWARDS EGYPT**

Prior to the story of Joseph we have the accounts of the training of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. One of the greatest moments in Abraham's life—and there were many—was the moment when he virtually slew his son because of the command of God. The context of the story, and the later comments in Hebrews 11:17–19 tell us that Abraham really participated in the nature of God as the God of grace. Abraham was prevented from killing his son, but he saw the principle that God later worked out in Christ. Jesus said that Abraham saw his day and was glad. Abraham looked for a city to come, and not the city of this world, symbolized by Babylon. He was one of the great men of faith.

Isaac also participated in the event on Mount Moriah as an obedient son. The promise, the inheritance was passed on to him. Esau his first born son was a secular ('profane') man, not valuing the blessing of covenant and the accompanying inheritance. Jacob certainly valued these, and although his name meant supplanter or cheat, yet he was aware of the sovereign promises of God given at his birth. The story of Jacob and Esau, then, is the contrast of a secular (profane) man and an elect person of God whose personal characteristics were not attractive. Malachi 1:2–3 presents God as saying,

'Yet I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau'. This, of course, speaks of elective love.

Jacob's various experiences of God brought him to be Israel—the one who strove with God, and prevailed—and he became the prince of God (Gen. 32:22–32).

## **JOSEPH AND EGYPT**

It was his second youngest son, Joseph whose life is described in Genesis with great significance. When we follow the story of his life we see the provision God was making for Israel, (i) to bring them to Egypt and save their lives in a time of famine, and (ii) to begin the training of a people—Israel—through suffering and affliction; to teach them the nature of God as the Covenant-Father and mould them into the one people of God in history who have had a revelation of Him, and so have been drawn to be His servant-nation.

## **ISRAEL BEGINS IN EGYPT**

The Book of Genesis ends with the prophetic blessing of Jacob (Israel) upon his family. Genesis 49 tells us so much regarding the sons of this old patriarch, particularly the Shiloh prophecy of verses 8 to 10. Jacob asked to be buried at Machpelah in the land of Canaan where Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah and Jacob's Leah had been buried. Pharaoh agreed with this request and sent a great Egyptian entourage as well as the sons of Jacob, and Jacob was buried with high honours (Gen. 50:1–14).

After Jacob's death Joseph showed magnanimity to his brothers who—out of jealousy—once had sold him into slavery. He told them, 'Fear not, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive'. Thus the election of God proceeded towards His people. For the time being Israel was safe in Egypt, but later, prophetically, Joseph said, 'I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob'. He then took an oath of the sons of Israel, saying, 'God will visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here'.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY NINE

## **ISRAEL OUT OF EGYPT**

### **ISRAEL AND THE NEW PHARAOH**

We have talked about God's people being of election. Romans 8:28 we read, 'We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose'. This was the case with Israel. Although things seemed to be against them, this action was for their ultimate good. Joseph's promotion aided Israel. When, however, a new king arose in Egypt who knew not Joseph—Joseph having died—Israel went through much suffering. However, God had His people always in mind. This can be seen from the following:

- (a) The Egyptians, who were afraid of the vast number of Israelites, sought to have the babies killed through the Hebrew midwives, but failed.
- (b) Through Miriam—Moses' sister—and Moses' mother, Moses was saved to become a prince in Egypt—'the son of Pharaoh's daughter' (see Heb. 11:23). As such, he was trained in all the lore of Egypt.
- (c) Through his impetuosity in killing a cruel Egyptian slave-master, Moses had to flee into the desert, where he was accepted by Jethro, a priest of Midian\* (see Heb. 11:24–25). Here Moses was trained in desert living, toughened up from being a prince in a royal court. He married Jethro's daughter Zipporah and had children—further training for leadership of Israel.
- (d) At the right time God appeared to Moses to send him back to Pharaoh, to redeem Israel from Egypt. From this point Moses, Aaron and Miriam formed a formidable trio in saving Egypt.
- (e) In the intensity of suffering as a slave-people Israel cried out for help (Exod. 2:23–25). We are not told to whom they cried out, but in any case the time was ripe for God to bring Israel out of Egypt, back to Canaan (cf. Gen. 15:12–16). It was on the basis of covenant that God moved through Moses.

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\* Midian was one of Abraham's sons (Gen. 25:2).

## **THE PROBLEM OF ISRAEL**

In Ezekiel chapter 20 we have a history of Israel in (i) Egypt, (ii) the wilderness, (iii) the promised land. In these three phases of their history Israel was idolatrous. In verses 1 to 10 God speaks of their idolatry in Egypt, and how some of their suffering arose from it—a judgement of God upon them. It is clear that God had mercy on them, not destroying them in Egypt. Even so, they had this problem: that they had been influenced by Egyptian idolatry.

## **GOD MOVED IN SIGNS AND WONDERS**

In our next study we will see the results of the liberation of Israel from Egypt by these signs and wonders. The ten plagues acted as (i) judgements upon Egypt for their cruelty to Israel, and (ii) signs to Israel as a nation that God was with them. From that time God was known to them as 'the living God', i.e. One who actually works within human history to achieve His purposes, and shows Himself by signs and wonders, i.e. events which cannot be explained as being natural.

We need to note that all of this was done on the basis of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. His nature as Covenant-God to Israel via Moses was not revealed until they were in the wilderness.

We also note that it was the last plague—the killing of the first-born—that made Pharaoh send Israel out of Egypt.

## **ISRAEL IN THE DESERT AND ISRAEL IN CANAAN**

This vast operation in the forty years of Israel being in the desert contributed powerfully to forming the character of the nation. Just as their working as a slave-labouring people, being liberated by marvellous signs, and being able to leave, having 'spoiled the Egyptians' was the basic training, so having to wander as a people for forty years further trained them in tough living, interaction with other people (mostly hostile), and in the gradual understanding of the nature of God, especially through the revelation of covenant (Exod. 34:6–7; 24:1–8). Their experience of further signs and wonders was also valuable.

Finally their entrance into the land, crossing the Jordan, toppling Jericho, and defeating the enemy, and being settled in the land under Joshua, were contributory factors in shaping the people as a nation. All things were working together for good!



## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY TEN: **THE JUDGES AND THE KINGS**

#### **ISRAEL UNDER JOSHUA**

Israel under Joshua covers the period when Israel defeated its enemies and settled on both sides of the Jordan. In the wilderness, before his death, Moses had given what has been called 'the Deuteronomic thesis', namely that Israel was warned by God from departing from true worship and covenant obedience; should this happen then Israel would be punished by God—even to exile—and Israel would become dominated by other nations and oppressed. This having happened, they would cry out to God, and God would deliver them, especially when they repented, and would restore them as a nation.

The sin of Achan at Jericho typifies the idolatry of Israel, and in Joshua 24 Joshua spoke of Abraham having been an idolater, of God's liberation of Israel from Egypt, His settling them in the promised land, and he—Joshua—called on them to make their choice of gods, either their true God, or the gods which their fathers had worshipped in Abraham's day, or the gods of Egypt and—now—the gods of Canaan. He does not seem to have much confidence that they would worship only the true and living God.

#### **AFTER JOSHUA—THE TIMES OF THE JUDGES**

The books of the Old Testament from Joshua to Nehemiah are called 'the Former Prophets'. In Joshua's time all the Canaanites had not been driven out or destroyed. Israel's problem lay to a great degree lay in the the Canaanites. Their gods and idols were supposed to be of the very location and soil of Canaan, and so the superstitious amongst Israel would think these idols had local power, especially for fertility of families, crops and stock.

Joshua had been a great leader, having received his commission and training through Moses, but following his death there was no strong leadership. In Judges 2:1–3:6 we read the 'thesis' of the Book. 2:11–12 says, 'the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals; and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers....they went after other gods'. Chapter 2 then recounts the principle which operated in the days of the Judges:

- (a) The people of God came into sorry straits because of their idolatry and rebellion.
- (b) They then became oppressed by the idolatrous people around them.
- (c) The Lord raised up a Judge (or Judges), and freed them from their bondage.
- (d) When the Judge died the people went back to their idolatry, and the cycle repeated itself.

**Note:** There was nothing fatalistic about the cycle: Israel need not have lived in this way. The writer—writers—of Judges used the idolatrous nations for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the Lord which He commanded by their father, Moses (cf. 2:20–22). Of course God knew how they would act, so that He was teaching them how they reacted or responded to His word and covenant.

### **JUDGES IN A TIME OF BONDAGE**

The remainder of the Book of Judges speaks of those men and women raised up to act as leaders, as Moses did in an overall way. Often the Judges simply acted in their own locality. There were six periods of oppression in the times of Judges. This Study is too brief to cover in our paper. In order the Judges were Othniel (Caleb's younger brother), Ehud the Benjaminite, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Abimelech, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon and Samson. Later we will see that Samuel was the last and greatest Judge.

We can say that the 'rest' which God had promised His people, came only in dribs and drabs, because of the Canaanites and their oppression. The Judges who were raised up generally worked for the most part in their own localities, but then the defeat of the enemy in their area generally meant peace for all Israel.

### **THE KINGS OF ISRAEL**

Again the Books of Kings and Chronicles are prophetic books, and so they deal with God's treatment of Israel under Moses' Deuteronomic thesis. I Samuel chapters 1 to 18 generally deal with the demise of the Judges and the rise of the Monarchy. Israel was a theocracy, and Samuel felt it should remain so, especially as his judging, prophetic and priestly ministry were competent to handle Israel's situation. However the people desired peace, especially from the Philistines, and demanded a king. God allowed this and Saul was crowned. He was a fine king in many ways, and not so in other ways.

The dynasty of David was promised perpetuity. David and Solomon established Israel, but Rehoboam made a foolish choice, the result of which was that the 10 tribes in the north—generally called 'Ephraim' or 'Israel', as against 'Judah' (with Benjamin)—split away from government in Jerusalem, and tended, almost immediately to be swamped by idolatry. The Books of Kings and Chronicles tell of good kings and bad kings, of the prophetic ministry, of revivals in covenant-understanding, and of terrible apostasy.

All of this concerns the people of God. Stephen's sermon in Acts 7 is a fair summary and interpretation of Israel's history as 'the people of God', and our next four studies will cover the ground of the life of the people of God—Israel and Judah—during the time of the monarchy as the prophetic, priestly and royal people of God.

Our conclusion is that God was teaching and training His true people 'the holy seed' or 'the godly remnant', for Israel was to be the matrix of Messiah, and the holy remnant to be his new true people, as we see in the New Testament.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY ELEVEN:

## **ISRAEL THE PRIESTLY PEOPLE**

### **ISRAEL A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS**

Exodus 19:5–6 are the key verses to seeing that Israel is the priest nation among the nations. The full picture of their priestly being can be seen by utilizing Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2, 21; 29:19; Leviticus 11:44; I Peter 2:4–10; Titus 2:14; and Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:4, and we will look at some of these references as we pursue our subject.

When we see that a priest (cf. 'high priest'—the one who embodies the whole priesthood) 'is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins' and 'can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness' (Heb. 5:1–2) then we see Israel was intended to have just this ministry to the other nations. I Peter 2:9–10 is a commentary on 'the priestly nation' and the function of that nation 'to declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light'. That is, Israel was to be a witness to the grace of God in redemption, and the nature of God in Covenant. Israel was to be a witness to God Himself just as the other nations were witnesses to their gods. For 'witness' see Isaiah 43:10–11 and 44:8. The difference between God and the gods is seen in Exodus 15:11.

### **THE PRIESTLY NATION IS HOLY**

Israel was to be a holy nation as we see in Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2, 21; 29:19; Leviticus 11:44—amongst many other references. Anything to do with God was to be holy, (i) because God had made this to be so since He was the only Holy One, and (ii) because all things had to be holy in His service as well as in witness to Him. For this reason all the tabernacle, the furniture of the tabernacle (temple) was to be consecrated, i.e. made holy, including the priests themselves, their garments and the offerings, since 'the altar sanctifies the gift'. This was to be done initially, and certain sacrifices were to be offered daily, and the sacrifice of the atonement annually, to keep the sanctified people of God pure.

The people of God were to live in holiness—both priests and people. To veer from God's prescriptions in worship, in the keeping of the law, and in obeying the Covenant was to be unholy, and such would meet with God's chastisement and punishment, even to exile. To live in holiness was to be a joyous worshipping and witnessing people.

## **THE PRIESTLY NATION IS THE PEOPLE OF PRESCRIBED WORSHIP**

Much of the Pentateuch relates to worship. The priesthood relates to worship. Each nation both serves and worships its gods, and service and worship are indistinguishable in principle and practice. The idolatrous nations also had prescribed worship, but since ontologically there are no gods (cf. I Cor. 8:1–6) that worship must have risen from a human source, or an occultic source. Much of the latter worship springs from the imagination—the evocation of images. In Israel the apparatus of worship, as the worship itself, sprang from God, i.e. from the nature of God. This nature was revealed to Israel, and did not spring from its own evocation. In Exodus 32:1–7 we have the evocation of Israel's idol in the wilderness. This follows the clear prescriptions of God in Exodus chapters 25–31, which were ignored in chapter 32.

Deuteronomy 5 gives the working principles of holy living—the 10 commandments. In Deuteronomy 10 principles of serving or worshipping God are set out. Serving and worshipping are really the one. Chapters which follow 10 are prescriptions against idolatry and use of the occult.

### **PRIESTHOOD, WORSHIP AND THE LAW**

Deuteronomy 4 is a significant chapter. It first speaks of the uniqueness of God's law as given to Israel (see verses 1 to 8). It then speaks of the supernatural giving of that law to Moses by God. Law is not legalism, nor does it demand such. Obedience proceeds out of love and gratitude to God for His deliverance of the nation from Egypt (cf. Exod. 20:1–2), but primarily for the revelation of Himself. We see that law and the word of God are one (cf. Psalms 1, 19 and 119), that worship and law and holiness are all of the one piece. In this sense, then, Israel could not be the priest-nation appointed by God if she disavowed the covenant, the worship, the law and the word of God. In our next study we will see that the prophets sought to preserve all these, and give a dynamic view of God, as against the formal ideas of Him and the consequent formal worship, and regard for law and the word.

### **ISRAEL AND THE BATTLE FOR TRUE PRIESTHOOD**

Almost all the books of the Old Testament, especially from Exodus onwards, are concerned with the matter of Israel as a priest-nation. Israel's chronic idolatry, her moral and ritual pollution, her failure to obey the word and the law, and her legalistic approach to law, all tell the sad story of that nation. I Corinthians 10:11 tells us the Old Testament stories and history are to warn us against similar disobedience and hard-heartedness. They are to build us up as we look at the richness of God's grace and love. To be in covenant relationship with God is the most dynamic thing we can know.

On this basis I Peter 2:4–10 become marvellously alive. We not only learn from the story of Israel. We learn from the Redeemer Himself, and come to know the riches of His mercy and grace, and the wonder of being the new priestly people—the Kingdom of priests unto our God.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY TWELVE: **THE PEOPLE AND THE PROPHETS**

#### **ISRAEL A PROPHETIC KINGDOM**

We saw in our last study that Israel was a priestly nation or kingdom. What, then, do we mean by saying that it was a prophetic kingdom? We mean two things, (i) that Israel had within it the system of prophecy—and this in a manner and degree which transcended the prophetic systems of the other nations—and (ii) that just as it was the priest nation among all the nations and for all the nations, so it had that corpus or deposit of prophecy which was for the world, and was yet to be for the world.

Prophecy and witness (cf. Rev. 19:10) are intimately connected as we will later see in a study we will do on the church as the prophetic community. For the moment we can see from Isaiah 43:10–11 and 44:8, that Israel was God's witness to the nations by showing the Lord to the nations, and living the true life of God in their own kingdom.

#### **THE NATURE OF PROPHECY**

Exodus 6:28–7:2 is an excellent passage to show the nature of prophecy, namely that the prophet is the mouth of God to the people, and tells God's word to them. This word is not the product of contemplation, the native discernment of the prophet, or what he thinks is needed to be said. 'Thus says the Lord' is the signature statement of the prophets. This means that God's word comes through directly and confronts the hearers.

The general principle of prophecy is that it is (i) hortatory, i.e. exhorts on behalf of God, and (ii) predictive, i.e. it tells the plan of God generally—for the nation and the nations—and specifically—for the immediate particular situation of Israel or another people or peoples. It is predictive with a view to being hortatory, i.e. the prophet emphasizes what God will do in order to exhort obedience and proper action, e.g. he calls for repentance, conversion, and renewed obedience—or else!

#### **THE NATURE OF THE PROPHET**

The prophet was not selected by the state or religious leaders. His (or her) category was not an officially designated work. God called the prophet and attested to him by the very word he preached. The innate call of the prophet was recognized, though often not admitted. Prophets were strongly opposed as Jesus once observed—'You have shed the blood of the prophets from Abel to Zechariah'. This was because the prophet often gave God's commands which were unacceptable to the hearers.

Generally the prophet received his message by means of dreams and visions (Num. 12:6–7; Jer. 23:23ff.; cf. Joel 2:28; Acts 2:14ff.). The prophetic was dynamic because of God's method of communication. In this sense the false prophets were also dynamic because they used the ontological mode.

In the early days of Israel the prophet was called a *seer*, i.e. one who saw, perceived, had visions and spoke from them. Because sometimes the seers went into trances it was thought their message could come from some source other than God, i.e. the occult. Deuteronomy chapters 13 and 18 give tests of a true and a false prophet, and give warnings against receiving false prophecy. The prophet of the word—the *nabi*—was respected because he was giving the message of God in a conscious manner.

### **THE VALUE OF PROPHECY**

Today we have the canon of Scripture, and tend to use that as our source book for understanding the nature and will of God, i.e. insofar as it affects us. Israel believed God would speak to it directly in the matter of its living and action. I Samuel 3:1 points to a time when the word of the Lord was rare, i.e. little direct prophecy was being given. Hebrews 1:1 shows that God spoke to the fathers by the prophets, so we can see that prophecy was needed continually. This would be in regard to the present life of the nation, and it involved many things which we shall look at later in this study, but briefly speaking it related to their internal obedience and worship and then their relationship with other nations, including leading in regard to war, and the judgements of God upon Israel for its idolatry and apostasy.

A fine description of the principle of prophecy is given in II Chronicles 20:20, 'Hear me, Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem! Believe in the Lord your God, and you will be established; believe his prophets, and you will succeed'.

We have already seen that the Books from Joshua to Nehemiah are called by the Jews 'the former prophets', i.e. these Books are prophetic, that is hortatory, and contain prediction related to the plan of God, and the right living which should issue from hearing exhortation.

Some scholars suggest that the prophets were opposed to law, but that was not the case. They enjoined obedience to the law but opposed legalism, e.g. they inveighed against the ritual of sacrifice when it was empty, hypocritical and the basis of self-righteousness before God and man.

### **THE COURSES OF PROPHECY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

Roughly speaking we can talk of the first prophetic period being from Abel to Noah, then from Abraham to Moses, followed by the period of the Judges to Samuel, and from Samuel to Malachi. In the New Testament, Acts 3:24, 13:20 and Hebrews 11:32 seem to confirm this. The last course includes both non-writing (e.g. Elijah and Elisha) and writing prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.). This series of writing prophets constitutes what is called 'the major and minor prophets', the first being from Isaiah to Daniel, and the second from Hosea to Malachi.

It is profitable to trace the reigns of the various kings, observe the happenings with their reigns, and see who were the prophets during those reigns.

### **THE PRINCIPLES THE PROPHETS OF ISRAEL SET FORTH**

- (a) Israel is God's special people called electively and not according to merit.
- (b) Mere possession of the Covenant does not exempt Israel from judgement.

(c) What God has said He will do, both in grace and judgement, He will do: nothing will change that. 'God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should repent. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfil it?' (Num. 23:19). Hence the word of the prophet is the very word of God. (cf. Amos 3:8; Isa. 55:10ff.).

(d) Israel (i.e. Judah) is of all nations the most reprehensible because of the kindness God has shown, i.e. because of the Covenant He has made (cf. Exod. 19:5–6). 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities' (Amos 3:2).

(e) Within Israel, the evils of idolatry, social evils and injustice must be castigated, and the people judged. Not so may the priest nation live! Also its mistaken and foolish dependence upon the temple and sacrifices God will judge.

(f) This being said—and done—God's Covenant will never fail. Having sent them into exile and having punished and purified them, he will return them to their land, a chastened and worshipping people, purged of idolatry.

(g) Behind all these events, and leading up from them are God's Messianic purposes. A King will reign in righteousness. A ruler will conquer the kingdoms of this world. The Kingdom will be everlasting, ruled by Messiah and given to the saints of the Most High. He who comes will be both Suffering Servant and Triumphant Conqueror. All the world will flow towards Sion.

This, then, is the substance and goal of all prophecy, hence 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy'.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY THIRTEEN:

## **ISRAEL AND THE COMING KINGDOM**

### **THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

The Kingdom of God is a vast subject. The Kingdom is, firstly, God's reign and rule over all things. Secondly, it is His reign and rule not only over loyal subjects but rebels and insurrectionists. Thirdly, it is the Kingdom of power that defeats all evil, and destroys it, and fourthly it is what we call 'the eschatological Kingdom', that is, the Kingdom in its ultimate form when all evil shall have been defeated and God reigns over all creation—that creation which has been redeemed and glorified. His Kingdom must not be thought of as an earthly kingdom, i.e. having a perimeter. God rules over all, and His Kingdom is His rule and the community of the ones ruled.

We also have to see that His Kingdom ever was, that it was coming after man's rebellion through covenant and grace, that it came—in one sense—in Christ, that it is now coming, and eventually will have come.

### **CREATION AS GOD'S KINGDOM**

It is axiomatic that if God created all things then He rules over them. In Psalm 47:2 it is said, 'For the Lord, the Most High, is terrible, a great king over all the earth'. Eschatologically Zechariah prophesied, 'And the Lord will become king over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be one and his name one'. Without a doubt the key to the Kingdom lies in the doctrine of creation, which we cannot now pursue.

### **ISRAEL AND THE KINGDOM**

The term 'the Kingdom of God' is not found explicitly in the Old Testament but there are statements approximating to it. Psalm 103:19 says, 'The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all'. In Daniel 4:37 Nebuchadnezzar said, 'I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven'. Psalm 145:11–13 states, 'They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and tell of thy power, to make known to the sons of men thy mighty deeds, and the glorious splendour of thy kingdom. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endures throughout all generations'. Psalm 22:28 says, 'For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations'.



The references are many, but the following are well worth reading to catch up the idea of God's Kingship and His Kingdom—Obadiah 21; I Chronicles 29:11; Psalms 10:16; 24:7–10; 44:4; 47:2; Isaiah 6:5; 33:2; 43:15; Jeremiah 10:7.

Israel primarily had two things in mind, (i) in general, God is king over all the earth and rules all nations and events, and (ii) God is King of Israel, in particular, and Israel, as such, is safe amongst the nations because of this. As King, God will judge all the nations. Now we can look at the understanding of Israel in more detail. It was, as follows:

- (a) God is King over all the earth: He is King of creation.
- (b) His Kingdom is from everlasting, and is everlasting.
- (c) He is the King of glory. He rules not only in the earth, but in heaven, and from heaven. All celestial creatures are subject to Him. There is none like Him amongst the (so-called) gods and lords—heavenly and earthly.
- (d) His reign is terrible. All are before Him and are afraid of Him. He is high and lifted up. He judges all the nations.
- (e) He is the living God, that is, He does great deeds. His Kingdom is known by His deeds and actions.
- (f) He is the King of Israel. He always has been the King of Israel, but this was made clear at Sinai when He gave the Law. When ultimately Israel desired a man for a king, He allowed this. In principle they rejected Him from being King, but although they selected an earthly king, he was still, nevertheless their King.

### **ISRAEL AS THEOCRACY**

Israel always thought of God as their King. How else could they have been delivered from Egypt? The nation had a leader such as Moses in the wilderness and Joshua when they were settling in Canaan. After Joshua's time they had judges who were raised up to save them from their enemies. In a way these judges had a certain rulership. Samuel was a great man and was a prophet, a priest and a judge—very close to being a king. Israel believed kings delivered their people from their enemies, and so they asked for a king, much to Samuel's disappointment. God granted this request, and Saul was appointed. This did not make Israel more a kingdom, for God had always been their King. Under David and Solomon the kingdom grew and flourished. Israel was established among the nations as a great kingdom.

### **ISRAEL AND THE COMING KINGDOM**

Israel's view of God's Kingdom is seen in I Chronicles 29:11 when David said, 'Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all'. The greatness of the Davidic and Solomonic kingdom was but a prototype of the Kingdom to come (II Sam. 7:13–14; Ps. 31:11–18; I Kings 8:25).

In order to understand the fact and nature of the coming Kingdom see as follows:

- (a) Isaiah chapters 24–27; 40–55; Obadiah 21; Micah 4:3; Zephaniah 3:15; and Zechariah 14:16–17. In Isaiah 40:9–11 God is telling Israel she will be restored and He will be her Shepherd. In Isaiah 52:7 the comforting announcement is made, 'Your God reigns!'. Isaiah chapters 24–27 are beautiful pictures of the New Israel, with God as her Guide and Comforter. Obadiah 21 announces that 'the kingdom shall be the Lord's'. In Micah 4 the Kingdom appears almost as universal, Israel being the centre and cause of blessing. In Zephaniah 3:15ff. God is in the midst of His people, delighting over them. He is called 'The King of Israel!'. In Zechariah 14:1ff., the Kingdom is so fulfilled that the statement is made (v. 9), 'And the Lord will become king over all the earth: on that day the Lord will be one and his name one'.
- (b) Hosea 14:3f.; Isaiah 2:10ff.; 9:1–6; 11:1–10; 60:1f.; 65:17; 66:22, 24 (cf. 25:7f.; 26:19; 51:4–6; 61:1f.) are prophecies which speak of the nature of the Kingdom, and the Kingly reign. They involve the person of Messiah and tell us that Israel's enemies will be destroyed, that salvation will come to Israel, and that it will be imperishable, that death will be destroyed, that there will be a new heaven and a new earth, that the wicked being judged and punished, the redeemed will experience eternal bliss. There will be blessing which will be universal since the Gentiles also will participate in it. God will reign over all, but generally through His Messiah. The picture alternates between God's own reigning and that of the Davidic king. Likewise the Kingdom sometimes seems Israel's exclusively, and sometimes that of a wider—a universal—Kingdom.

### **CONCLUSION TO 'ISRAEL THE KINGDOM'**

It is clear, then, that Israel both saw itself as a kingdom, and as the Kingdom of God. It also looked to a future time when the Kingdom would be universal, embracing both Jews and Gentiles, and being under Messiah. This must have given it great assurance and from it they took their identity. Similarly in the New Testament it is seen that we have been transferred from the dominion of darkness into the Kingdom of the Son of His love. We, too, look to the day when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY FOURTEEN: **MESSIAH AND HIS PEOPLE**

#### **THE 'BENEDICTUS', 'NUNC DIMITTUS' AND GOD'S PEOPLE**

We do not understand the New Testament unless we see its continuity with the Old Testament. This is brought out clearly in the first few chapters of Luke's Gospel, especially in the prophecy of Zechariah the father of John the Baptist. This is also known as a song, the 'Benedictus'. It needs to be read thoughtfully. In it God has 'visited and redeemed his people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for [us]'. His Covenant promise is to be fulfilled by Messiah, of whom John the Baptist is the precursor. John's own announcement of the Kingdom is linked with God's promise to His people of Messiah's coming—'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord'. The shepherds are told of 'good news of great joy which will come to all the people', i.e. men who are the objects of God's good will (grace). Simeon's beautiful 'Nunc Dimittus' says that the babe Jesus is to be 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles [the nations], and for glory to thy people Israel'.

In Matthew 1:21 the babe's name shall be called Jesus 'for he will save his people from their sins'. In John 1:11 we are told 'He came to his own home, and his own people received him not'. Jesus, then, came to his own people, calling them. It is also interesting to see how occupied Jesus was with his 'Father's house', i.e. the temple, which represented the whole congregation. This carried the idea of the household (family) of God. According to Isaiah 56:7—which Jesus quoted—it was to be the 'house of prayer for all peoples', i.e. the Gentiles as well as Israel.

#### **MESSIAH AND HIS CARE FOR HIS PEOPLE**

Jesus' reading of Isaiah 61:1 recorded in Luke 4:18–19 speaks of Messiah's care for his people. Matthew 4:23–25, and 9:35–38 (cf. John 4:35–38) also show his compassion for the sick, the demonized, and those in need of forgiveness. Luke 7:18–23 show that his healing, saving and delivering actions were all Messianic for they fit Isaiah 29:18–19, 35:5–6, and 61:1—all messianic prophetic passages. Perhaps there is nothing stronger than Matthew 12:28, 'if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you'. Messiah, of course, was the king of the Kingdom. In his ministry Jesus drove all before him, defeating the powers of darkness as he went.

We know that often his care was not well received. He fed a crowd of 5,000 and a crowd of 4,000, but there seems not to have been much gratitude. In John's Gospel the crowd is told they are working for the food that perishes and not for the food that endures unto eternal life.

## **THE SHEPHERD, AND HIS 'I AM'S'**

There are a number of figures used in the Gospels to portray Jesus' relationship to his people. Perhaps the strongest is that of the Good Shepherd for it is linked with the flock of God. This Shepherd gives his life for the flock. John 10 and the Shepherd discourse are linked with Ezekiel 34 where the true shepherd is David the Messianic King. The beautiful passage of Isaiah 40:9–11 has become a classic of the shepherd and his sheep. After the resurrection Jesus told Peter to feed the sheep and the lambs.

Jesus used the figure of the Vine and the branches—an old symbol of Israel, the people of God. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus speaks of the church for the first time, and mentions it again in 18:17. His use of the Kingdom parables often suggests his people, such as the good grain harvested, the good fish separated from the evil ones, and the sheep as against the goats.

The seven 'I Am's' of John's Gospel are to do with the people. In being the Way, the Truth, and the Life—to and of the Father—he is speaking of the family of God coming to the Father. He is the Door to the sheepfold so that many may enter and be saved; He is the Bread of life, and those eating will find eternal life. He is the Light of the world to show people the way, so that they will not walk in darkness, but find the light of life.

His final weeping as he beheld Israel and the analogy of the hen and chickens tell us how loving he was, and how deeply he felt about his people.

## **MESSIAH, ISRAEL AND THE GENTILES**

We have seen that the prophets, in their understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant, believed that God's action and grace would ultimately embrace the whole human scene. Jesus was careful to go 'only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matt. 10:6; 15:24). The Samaritans were preached to, but the Gentiles virtually not at all, though Jesus said the faith of the Roman centurion was greater than he had seen in Israel. He demanded faith of the Syrophenician woman in a manner he did not demand of those in Israel. At the same time he was as insistent as John the Baptist that blood-descent from Abraham did not make one a child of Abraham. On one occasion he said that the 'sons of the Kingdom' (i.e. Israelites by natural birth) would be cast out, and that the Gentiles would take their place—a scandalous thought to Israelites. Also he talked of the vineyard (God's Kingdom) being let to others—the Gentiles—rather than the Jews, for they had killed the prophets, slain the Son, and paid no return to the King. In this way Jesus, whilst ministering solely to Israel, as the prophets had said he would, indicated the universal nature of his ministry. We shall see, later, that his final commands to his disciples regarding the proclamation of the Gospel was that it was to be universal. This was also in accordance with prophetic prediction. Later James the Elder at Jerusalem (Acts 15:14) was to speak of 'how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name'.

We know that Jesus looked beyond even his 'own people' and his 'own home', for the Messiah was to be the universal King of the Kingdom of God.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY FIFTEEN:

## **THE BELOVED SON AND HIS BRETHREN**

### **THE ONLY SON OF GOD**

Old translations of the New Testament had 'the only begotten Son' whilst new translations have 'the only Son' (John 1:14; 3:16). This is to distinguish the term related to Christ from the general term 'son of God'. This latter title is given in some cases to men—especially in Israel, as in Deuteronomy 14:1—and sometimes to celestial beings, i.e. angels (cf. Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). Opinion is divided on Deuteronomy 32:8 as to whether the term means angels or the sons of Jacob. Theologians talked about 'eternal generation', i.e. that the Son has ever proceeded from the Father. This is an area of difficulty since we have no human parallels.

### **THE TRUE SON OF GOD**

In the New Testament there is talk of one who 'became flesh', 'was made in the likeness of sinful flesh', was 'born of woman, born under the law', who was known in his day as 'Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary'. There are many references to his pre-existence such as John 1:1–3; 8:58; 17:5, 24; Colossians 1:15–17; Hebrews 1:1–2. Since he was 'the first-born of all creation', i.e. the pre-eminent one, he was before anything was created, since all was created through him. This One was also known as 'the Word', and this Word became flesh, i.e. incarnate through the body of Mary, by the action of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). He was to be known as 'the Son of God'. This Sonship was attested by the Father Himself at Jesus' Baptism, and his Transfiguration. Jesus often spoke of himself as 'the Son of the Father' claiming a unique relationship with Him, i.e. 'I and the Father are one' (John 10:30). The Gospel of John brings this out very clearly, but it is also seen in Matthew 11:27; and is expanded in the Epistles where Jesus referred to as 'the Son of God', and God is 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'.

Since we are not studying Christology in this study we will take the things above as being so. Our study is in regard to 'the beloved Son and his brethren'.

### **'ALL OF ONE ORIGIN'**

Hebrews 2:9–18 is quite significant, for it deals with humanity as set out in Psalm 8 but not yet apparent in its fullness. It then proceeds to say that through Jesus—especially his death—God brings 'many sons into glory'. It then says that those who are sanctified (by his death), and he who sanctifies 'have all one origin', i.e. come from one stock, so Jesus

can call them 'brethren'. Even so he had to become incarnate for this to be fully so, and now it was fully so.

In John 20:17 Jesus told Mary, 'Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' Up to this point Jesus had not referred to them as his brethren, but now he designated them 'brethren'. Hebrews 2:11 said, 'That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren'.

We may note in passing that Jesus did speak of the people of God as 'brethren' in Matthew 23:8–9, and had commanded them to pray to God as 'Our Father', so that being brethren is implied, but his disciples had to await the coming of the Spirit to fully know the truth of God as their Father, and they as brethren together (Gal. 3:26; 4:4–6).

### **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF 'SONS' AND 'BRETHREN'**

We have seen the term 'sons' was a covenant-term within Israel for covenant-members. Doubtless it was the same in the New Testament but with the added factor that God had been rightly revealed as Father by the Son. There are some mentions of God in the Old Testament as 'Father', but this is greatly amplified in the New Testament because the Son came to reveal the Father. Hitherto no one had seen him as Son. He revealed the Father (i) by teaching about the Father, i.e. in the Sermon on the Mount and throughout the Gospel of John, (ii) simply by being the Son in front of the people (cf. John 5:17ff.), and (iii) by the act of the Cross in which he showed his relationship to God as Father and became 'the pioneer of their salvation' in order 'to bring man sons into glory'. We see in John 1:18; 5:17ff.; 14:1–6—and other places—that man may come to the Father by the Son and so, himself, come into sonship (cf. John 1:12–13; Gal. 3:26; 4:4–6).

Now the significance of all this is that 'the beloved Son and his brethren' constitute the true family, the authentic people of God. In the Old Testament we do have terms such as 'house' and 'household' (cf. Heb. 3:1–6; Num. 12:7), but this understanding blossoms out richly in the New Testament (cf. Eph. 2:18–22; Heb. 3:1–6; I Tim. 3:15). We have the term 'brotherly love' used liberally, and 'brethren' is the most social and intimate of terms for the people of God. 'Disciples' is mainly a term to denote believers to those outside the church, but 'brethren' was the way they saw themselves within the community of Christ. Christ then is 'the elder brother'.

### **CONCLUSION REGARDING 'THE BELOVED SON AND HIS BRETHREN'**

In this study we have scarcely touched on the idea of God as our Father, and the functional nature of the Family. Given time we will see that all relationships spring from the Father–Son relationship through the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of the Father and the Son. This can be seen in Ephesians 3:14–15 and 4:6, yet there is much more. What is valuable to our understanding is that we are Family under the Father, through the Son. This is the warm intimate reality of the true people of God. They are one in the Father.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY SIXTEEN: **THE NEW PEOPLE— THROUGH THE CROSS**

#### **'BORN CRUCIFIED'**

The Swiss theologian Frederic Godet once said that the church was 'born crucified'. This, of course, is borne out by such references as Romans 6:6, Galatians 2:20 and Colossians 3:3. Sinful humanity was taken up into the Cross with Christ. Romans 6:1–14 is an admirable exposition of what it meant for each person, and all humanity to be taken up into the Cross, although this is not intelligible without reading Romans 5:12–21. We have seen from the beginning of our studies that men and women are either 'of faith' or 'of themselves', 'of God' or 'of their father the devil'. Here we see that we are either 'in Adam' or 'in Christ'.

#### **MEN AND WOMEN GOING THROUGH THE CRUCIBLE OF THE CROSS**

Some theologians hold to what they call 'the limited atonement', whereas others see a universal atonement, and some even see a universalistic redemption. We need not here debate the matter, but if Christ bore the sins of all, then it means he has defeated all sin, everywhere. It is clear from the New Testament that only those who repent and believe receive the benefits of Christ's atonement, and are redeemed.

What we are concerned with is the personal nature of salvation, and the corporate nature of the redeemed. Each person was crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20), and in that sense all the elect were crucified together. With the coming of the Holy Spirit in a special way at Pentecost, the church was born, having its links with the old Jewish congregation, but forming a new congregation with a new form of worship, and the teaching of the New Covenant. The people of God have never been a mere aggregation, but have always been a congregation. They have their own life within their community, which is an organic body rather than an organized group of persons. Thus the terms 'body of Christ', 'the flock of God', 'the family of God' and 'the brethren' speak of personal intimacy and corporate oneness.

## **THE EFFECTS AND FRUITS OF CRUCIFIXION WITH CHRIST**

In John 12:24 Jesus said that the wheat-seed has to be buried in the soil to become fruitful, and that was how he saw his death. Isaiah 53:11 speaks of the 'the fruit of the travail of his soul', and says that when he sees that he is satisfied. The church is that fruit. Yet it is what happens to each person as a result of his death and resurrection that concerns us. The following are some of those results:

- (a) Each person within the elect people of God is forgiven and purified of all his sins.
- (b) Each person is justified by grace, receiving by faith the non-imputation to him of his sins, and the imputation to him of Christ's righteousness.
- (c) Each person is sanctified by faith (i) by the cleansing of the conscience, and (ii) by inclusion into the true people of God, thus being accounted a saint or holy person.
- (d) Each person is reconciled to God, and lives in that relationship, and as a result reconciliation with other persons is a powerful drive, particularly so because the love of God has been flooded into each heart by the Holy Spirit.
- (e) Each person has been adopted, i.e. made a son of God, and a child of the Father. This then issues in the fact and experience of the people of God being the family.
- (f) Each person—together with the whole community—desires to proclaim the love of God through the Gospel, and in this and other ways serve the community of the church, and the whole community of man.
- (g) The Atonement has assured the person of eternal life, of resurrection from the dead, and the glorification which follows.

## **THE CRUCIFIED PEOPLE OF GOD**

We have, then, in history a people which has been through the crucible of the Cross, a renewed, redeemed and re-created people. The significance of this for the world, and for its history is enormous.



## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY SEVENTEEN:

## **THE NEW PEOPLE—THROUGH THE SPIRIT**

### **PENTECOST AND THE NEW PEOPLE**

The coming of the Spirit was foretold both by John the Baptist and Jesus, but long before them the prophets had spoken of the Spirit's coming and the effects that that coming would bring to God's people. Some of the prophecies had first to do with Messiah, e.g. Isaiah 61:1f.; 35:5ff., and 44:1–5, but Isaiah 11:1f., Joel 2:28f., and Isaiah 42:1 are linked with the whole people of God. The special prophecy of Pentecost was that of Ezekiel 37:1–14, in what has been called 'the vision of the prophet of the valley of dry bones'. The phenomena of that vision and of Pentecost are similar, i.e. the sound of a rushing mighty wind, and the vivification of the dead. This is what Pentecost signifies. The militant host of the Lord which stood up in the desert is similar to the new army raised up at Pentecost. Acts 1:3–11 indicates that the coming of the Spirit was related to the advance of the Kingdom of God.

#### The Purpose of Pentecost

We do not need to think that the church, of itself, was of great importance, as, say, promoting a group of people who would support the thought and ministry of Jesus as the true Messiah. God had planned the Atonement, and the birth of His new people who would proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom, the Gospel of personal salvation, and the Gospel of the ultimate triumph of God in history. Pentecost, then, bred a new breed of people—those who were militant as proclaimers. Last week's study tells us how they were changed personally and as a people. We now wish to see the ways in which the Spirit worked to effect the fruits of the Atonement.

### **THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH**

#### **(i) The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Believer**

The Holy Spirit is instrumental in bringing conviction of 'sin and righteousness and judgement' (John 16:7–11). This conviction precedes repentance which is also a ministry of the Spirit (Acts 5:31–32; 11:18). Belief in the Gospel, the forgiveness of sins,

cleansing from sins, freedom from the penalty of the law, the new birth, justification, reception of God's love into the heart, the new sonship of the Father, and holiness of life are linked with the Spirit (Acts 5:31–32; Rom. 8:3; John 3:6; Titus 3:4–7; Rom. 5:5; Gal. 4:4–6; I Cor. 6:11; Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:16, 18, 25, 26).

Then also, the elements of prayer, worship (see below), practical love, unity and fellowship which concern each person come by the Spirit (Eph. 5:18; Phil. 3:3; Rom. 5:5; Eph. 4:1–3; Phil. 2:1–3). Thus the believer is led by the Spirit in all things and walks by the Spirit (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16, 18, 25, 26), and so must be continually filled and aglow with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18; Rom. 12:11).

## **(ii) The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Community**

All the elements mentioned immediately above relate to the whole people of God. We need only mention a few things that come to it by the Spirit, for in our next few studies we will be expanding these points. The first important one is the new worship. Jesus had predicted this in John 4:20–23. New worship came 'in Spirit and in truth' at Pentecost. This Paul verifies in Philippians 3:3. The second important point is the proclamation of the Gospel. Acts 1:8 and related verses show the new community would proclaim the Gospel of redemption to all the world, through the power of the Spirit (cf. I Cor. 2:4–5; I Thess. 1:5; I Pet. 1:12). The third important point is the unity, fellowship and love of the church. It was important for the church to be one as a testimony to the reconciling love of God, and so the unity of the spirit, the fellowship of the Spirit and the love of the the Spirit were powerful elements. The fourth important point was the gifts of the Spirit, and the weapons of the Spirit which receive prominence in the Acts and the Epistles. By means of these the church was strengthened internally so that it could proclaim externally—to the nations—the saving truth, defeating in that process the evil powers who were coming against them.

## **CONCLUSION AS TO THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT**

Whilst Christ was—and is—the Head of the church, yet he ministers through the Spirit who is 'the Spirit of Jesus', 'the Spirit of Christ', 'the Spirit of His Son' and 'the Spirit of the Lord'. This is why the people of God can never be destroyed.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY EIGHTEEN: **THE COMMUNITY OF GRACE**

#### **THE GOD OF ALL GRACE**

In I Peter 5:10 God is called 'the God of all grace'. This means that all grace found in this world flows from Him. Whilst we use the word 'graces' the word grace in Greek is always in the singular. We can speak of 'gifts of grace' (charismata) but they are not 'graces'. The two Hebrew words for 'grace' are *chen*—which mainly relates to favour—and *chesed* which is often translated 'steadfast love'. The two together approximate to our New Testament Greek word *charis*. *Charis* has come to mean in Christian thinking, that which God does for man which primarily relieves him of the guilt of sin and brings him forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, and the new life of holiness. It has been described as 'God always going towards man to do him good'. It is true that nothing man can do merits him salvation, although in the New Testament that is not—so to speak—thrown up into man's face.

The word 'grace' is also used of the aid God gives man as a believer in order for him to live worthy of the calling he has been given, to proclaim the Gospel, live in fellowship with others, and live a holy life, always anticipating the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and 'the grace that is coming to you' at that event (I Pet. 1:13).

#### **BY GRACE YOU ARE SAVED**

The New Testament makes it clear that man—without the grace of God—would remain forever lost. Passages that ought to be looked at in this regard are Romans 3:24–25; 5:20–21; Titus 2:11–14; 3:1–7; II Corinthians 8:9—among many other references. These passages make it clear that man had no power to redeem himself, that he was under the power of sin and Satan, was doomed to the curse, the wrath of God, and the judgement of the law. Ephesians 2:6–8 and II Timothy 1:9 make it clear that God planned to redeem man, and did so in Christ. Romans 3:24 (cf. 5:17–21) shows that we are justified by grace, i.e. by the action of God which initiates the saving event in each believer.

As we have said that the church is 'born crucified', so we can say it is born of grace, and grace alone.

## MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU

Being saved by grace means that henceforth we live the life in Christ as a community of believers. A good illustration of this is seen in Acts 11:23 where Barnabas saw the grace of God in the church at Antioch in Syria. Likewise in Acts 4:23–35 we see the infant church at Jerusalem facing the persecution of their apostles, and so much so that the people prayed for boldness for the apostles and for the action of Jesus by signs and wonders. The outcome of the prayer was the infilling of the Spirit to all, the utter unity of the community, and so 'great grace was upon them all'.

It is interesting to study the word 'grace' in the Book of Acts. If we look at 6:8; 13:43; 14:3 14:26; 15:11; 15:40; 18:27; 20:24 and 20:32, then we will be able to form a picture of grace and the work it accomplished. The early church certainly thought of grace as an ever-present action of God at the point where His people needed His help to fulfil their calling as persons and as the community of Christ.

In the Epistles we have a wide range of references to grace, and a study of these shows that God's grace was there for every need and every ministry exercised. Almost all the apostolic Epistles open with the salutation of grace ('Grace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'), and most of them close with a similar statement. One of the most moving passages on grace is II Corinthians 12:1–10. What we conclude from our studies is that grace is not a spiritual commodity effective in or on us, nor one given to us for us to utilize. There is 'the grace of God' and 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ', i.e. their personal action in grace, for grace is never separated from them. This is seen in the powerful verse of I Peter 1:13 where the writer tells us we have yet to have more grace experienced 'at a revelation of Jesus Christ'. There is grace beyond the experience of this life!

## LIVING IN GRACE

There is no Christian living apart from grace. We can never go beyond grace. The community is a 'grace-community'. Grace, as we have said, is not a commodity. It is never apart from 'God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ', for it is the action of the Father and the action of the Son towards the community which is theirs—the people of God. That is why grace is always personal, warm, and dynamic—the *chen* and *chesed* of the Old Testament, as well as the *charis* of the New Testament.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY NINETEEN:

## **THE NEW COMMUNITY IN ACTION**

### **THE CONTINUITY OF ACTION**

The people of God have never been inactive. From the time of Seth, through to the 'congregation in the wilderness' (Acts 7:38), and then in the promised land, there has always been the inner life of God's people and the outward witness of the same. Just as man was given the creational mandate at the beginning (Gen. 1:28) and after the Flood (Gen. 9:1; cf. Ps. 8:5–8), and as Israel was given the status and ministry of a priest nation (Exod. 19:5–6) and so was to witness to God (cf. Isa. 43:10–12), so the new community of Christ was given the mandate to proclaim the Gospel in all the world (Matt. 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–18; Luke 24:44–47; John 20:19–23; Acts 1:8; 10:43). This action was to preach repentance and remission of sins in all nations. It was to preach the Gospel to every creature, to preach it to whole nations and all nations so that they would become the disciples of Christ.

### **THE ACTION COMMENCED AT PENTECOST**

The Book of the Acts shows us that the Gospel began to be proclaimed on the day of Pentecost. All 120 present declared the wonderful works of God and Peter proclaimed the Gospel in full measure as being that of Christ's Lordship through his resurrection, and hence the demand for men and women to believe in him, to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins and to receive the Holy Spirit. This message was repeated a number of times by Peter, was given out by the apostolic band, and—following the conversion of Paul—was powerfully announced by him, as by all others of the faith.

We can trace the effects of the Gospel in Jerusalem and Judea. We can see the action of proclamation in Samaria and later in Syria—both following the persecution of Stephen—and later the missionary journeys of Paul and Barnabas, and Paul and Silas in Asia Minor and parts of Europe. In this sense there was plenty of action and it was continuous.

### **SAVED TO SERVE**

This old statement covers the principle found in the New Testament as set forth clearly in Galatians chapter 1. Ephesians 2:8–10 is much along the same lines. It could be better said, 'Saved to serve, and to serve by saving'. This was the rich task of the early church. It has also been the operation of the church down through its history. Almost all the constraint to ministry can be read in the Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians, where it is shown to be most dynamic, but also very costly because of the suffering necessarily entailed. The apostolic band did not make much of suffering. They made more of ministry being a matter of grace and privilege, and its goal was that more and more might come to know the grace of Christ. This whole range can be seen in II Corinthians 4:7–15.

### **SAVED TO FIGHT**

The preaching of the Gospel and the battle against evil powers are one together. I Corinthians 15:24–28 needs to be read thoughtfully. This is really a precis of the whole Book of the Revelation. These two Scriptures speak of the battle to overcome evil powers by means of the Cross—Christ himself leading the battle, and the Spirit giving weapons and power by which the people of God can share with their Messiah in the conflict. For the weapons of the new community see II Corinthians 10:3–5; Ephesians 6:10–19; I Thessalonians 5:8. We should note that such weapons are not worldly, but spiritual, and most effective.

### **SAVED TO SERVE ONE ANOTHER**

The studies which follow this one speak first about the service of the new community to the world and then about service inwardly—to itself as the community of Christ. This will occupy much of our time. Serving God, serving man and serving the community was certainly the action of the early church and this has continued down through the ages where its nature has been recognized.

Whenever the church loses these three aspects of action it becomes ineffective to the degree that it does not properly serve. Revival of the church—i.e. obedience to Christ—always brings action, for this is the hallmark of its Lord and Leader—Jesus Christ—and so it is the hallmark of the true community.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY TWENTY: **THE PROCLAIMING COMMUNITY**

#### **THE COMMUNITY OF ACTION**

A not too careful study of the New Testament might lead us into believing that persons like apostles and evangelists were the only ones who proclaimed the Gospel, but this was not the case. The whole community was the witness to Christ, as a study of the words 'witness' and 'testimony' will show. The gifts of ministry (Eph. 4:11) helped to build and strengthen the church, and the gifts of the Spirit (I Cor. 12:4f.) likewise gave power to the inner life of the church, all of which was with a view to the church witnessing by its holiness of life, its unity of love, and its grasp of the truth. This enabled those who had direct proclaiming gifts to be wholly supported and stimulated. Those who really know the grace of God are anxious and urgent to preach it to others—man bringing redemption to man.

#### **THE MESSAGE OF PROCLAMATION**

The word 'proclamation' in Greek is kerygma (Acts 8:5; 9:20; 13:5, 38; 15:36; 17:30). It is the message given by the king's herald and must be obeyed. Note that obedience is the response to the Gospel (e.g. Acts 5:32; 6:7; Rom 10:16; I Thess. 1:8). The content of the message is as follows:

- (i) Jesus is the Messiah predicted by the O.T. prophecies. His ministry of teaching, his actions, his death, resurrection and ascension all comport with the prophecies, and affirm him to be Messiah.
- (ii) His death was God's act to deal with sin. His resurrection attested to the effective power of the Cross, and affirmed Jesus as Lord over life, death, creation and all history.
- (iii) Men and women must, therefore, believe his Lordship, believe on him, repent for their sins, and receive forgiveness from their Saviour, Jesus Christ. Thus they will be justified and given the gift of the Spirit.

This Kerugma is worked out in the Epistles into a fully detailed, formulated Gospel, and includes repentance and faith, justification, forgiveness of sins, adoption as sons, regeneration, purification from sin's pollution, the gifts of love and the Holy Spirit. Response to the Kerugma brings incorporation of the new believers into the community of Christ, and the fellowship of the New Covenant.

#### **PROCLAMATION IS WITNESS**

In Study 19 we saw the example of Paul in regard to proclamation. God revealed to Paul that he might preach the Gospel to the nations. Preaching the Gospel to the nations is the natural outcome of one's believing the Gospel. Thus the whole church prayed for

effective proclamation (Acts 4:29–30, cf. 13:1–4), and thus the proclamation is really the witness to what has happened to the proclaimers (Acts 1:8; cf. 2:33; 3:15; 4:33; 5:32; 10:39, 41; 13:31; 22:15; 23:11; 26:16). This principle of witness is expanded in the Book of the Revelation (1:2; 1:5; 1:9, 6:5; 11:11; 12:17; 19:19).

### THE WAY OF PROCLAMATION

We simply observe that gripped by the grace of the Gospel the early church proclaimed it. We could discuss what are sometimes called 'missionary methods' but Paul's statement in I Corinthians 1:17–2:5 covers the fact that it is the direct unembellished statement of the Gospel—the Kerygma. In II Corinthians 11:22–29 (cf. Acts 20:18–31) Paul tells what was the cost of proclamation. In Romans 15:17–19 he describes the way in which he went about preaching the Gospel, and this passage rewards close study. In it there are 3 elements,

- (i) by word and deeds, i.e. by the word and the works which relate to each other (cf. I Cor. 2:5; I Thess. 1:5), and which are seen in the lives of the proclaimers, and then in the lives of the converts. A good example of this is the 1st. chapter of I Thessalonians.
- (ii) by the power of signs and wonders, i.e. those works and acts wrought not by the proclaimers but through them, by the Father and the Son, through the power of the Spirit (cf. Acts 2:22; 14:3; 19:11; cf. Heb. 2:4; 6:5; Acts 8:6–7).
- (iii) by the power of the Holy Spirit, i.e. the word, the deeds, and the signs spring from the power of the Spirit, but most of all the Spirit gives understanding of the truth (John 16:12–15) so that it can be proclaimed as witness by the preacher (cf. I Cor. 1:2–5; I Thess. 1:5; I Pet. 1:12).

There is no reason to think that today things should be any different from the apostolic days. The word of God, the deeds spring from it, the signs and wonders attesting it—under God's sovereignty and not man's manipulation—are essential. The audiences to whom the Kerugma is proclaimed do not differ substantially from the those of the apostolic days.



## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY TWENTY ONE:

## **ISRAEL, SAMARIA, AND THE NATIONS**

### **THE DYNAMIC ACTION OF THE GOSPEL**

We might think that the proclamation of the Gospel was a promotional matter; that a group had started around the person and ministry of Jesus and they desired to expand it much as a commercial company wishes to be accepted, and so enlarged and become successful. This was not the case. From the 'commission' passages at the conclusions of the four Gospels, and the statement of Acts 1:8 (cf. Psa. 2:6-7) it is clear that the gospel was to be preached to all persons with a view to making each people or nation a disciple of Christ, i.e. come to sit at his feet, come to know him and then obey him. The sign of discipleship was baptism. All of this, we can see, is to make the new people of God—a theme we will study next week under the title of 'The True People of God'.

What we observe from the Book of the Acts is that the leadership of Israel—the Sanhedrin—officially rejected Jesus as their Messiah, both at the time of the Crucifixion and then following Pentecost. The power of Stephen to debate the issue was not merely a native ability, but he was a man filled with the Spirit and 'full of grace and power, [and] did signs and wonders among the people' (Acts 6:3, 8). The content of his message enraged the Sanhedrin so that the persecution with which they had threatened the apostles began with the stoning of Stephen. The difference was now made between Israel—after—the-flesh, and Israel—after—the-Spirit.

### **THE SCATTERED PROCLAIMERS**

Acts 8 describes the going of Philip—one of the 7 who had served at tables and later named as an evangelist (Acts 21:8)—to Samaria, to proclaim the Kingdom of God (8:5, 12). We know that Jesus ministered to Samaritans on some occasions (see John ch. 4), and that he had told them the crop was ripe to harvest. In Acts 1:8 Jesus had nominated 'Judea, Samaria, and the end of the earth' as—roughly speaking—3 stages of proclamation. They were to bring the gospel to Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles.

We might think that going to Samaria was a thought-out strategy. Not so: the Holy Spirit was the one who always directed them. So in Acts 8:26-40 Philip was directed in his ministry by the Holy Spirit. Likewise in chapters 10-11 we see the Holy Spirit directing Peter to Cornelius's house in Caesarea. Chapter 11 also shows the Christians from Jerusalem fleeing as far as Cyprus and Cyrene and also into Syria where a new church was founded. Whilst at first the Jewish Christians had preached only to fellow-Jews, then at Antioch in Syria they also preached to Greeks and a church of Jews and Greeks was founded.

The Gentiles had had the Kingdom of God opened to them by Peter's visit to Caesarea, but here-at Antioch-there was a dynamic church. Acts 13:1-4 shows that the church listened to the voice of the Spirit, and so the Spirit's `strategy' was put into action. It is interesting and profitable to study the church at Antioch, for it sent out Paul and Barnabas, and later Paul and Silas, commending them, to God's grace. It obviously prayed for the apostolic band on tour, and it received them and their reports on return.

## **THE GOSPEL TO ALL THE WORLD**

Whilst we are told little about the ministries of the apostles other than Paul following the persecution at Jerusalem, we have some history, some tradition, and some internal information from the N.T. to inform us that the gospel spread rapidly. Paul covered much of Asia Minor and part of Europe. In Romans 15:19 Paul; said that he had preached the gospel `from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum'. Acts tells us he went on to Rome. We have the Epistles of John, Peter and Jude which indicate they had a somewhat wide audience, and the Epistle to the Hebrews also indicates an important group of converted Jews.

The Book of the Revelation certainly speaks of literal churches in Asia Minor, but it is the scope of the book which draws us on to see the nature of the gospel as universal and everlasting. Just as Jesus had said the gospel must be preached to all nations before the end would come (Matt. 24:14) so the Revelation shows us the ultimate in the great multitude of those out of every tribe, and nation, and kindred and tongue, standing before the Lamb, and also all the nations coming into the Holy City, so we observe the gospel being proclaimed not only in the Apostolic age, but in the various ages following.

## **CONCLUSION**

We conclude then, that through Christ and his gospel the true remnant of the old people of God-Israel-moved into being the new people of God, and that the nature of the gospel was universal, and certainly the fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant. So we see what history is all about, and so, too, we can participate in it, as being part of the true people of God.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY TWENTY TWO

## **THE TRUE ISRAEL OF GOD**

### **'THE ISRAEL OF GOD'**

In Galatians 6:16 Paul wrote, 'Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God'. What did he mean by 'the Israel of God'? The choices are (i) it refers to historic Israel, and Paul is gesturing towards his national brethren, (ii) it refers to that believing part of historic Israel, but not to all Israelites, (iii) Paul is saying that historic Israel has been taken over and superseded by 'spiritual Israel', i.e. the church, or (iv) it refers to all believers whether they have originated from historic Israel or the Gentiles. In this case '(iii)' and '(iv)' are much the same. It seems the best way is to understand verse 16 is by the previous verse, 'For neither circumcision counts for anything, not uncircumcision, but a new creation'. That is, all who have been born again by the Cross and the Spirit (cf. John 3:1-14; Titus 3:5-7; II Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15-16)-whatever their ethnic origins-are 'the Israel of God'. Notice in Romans 2:29 (cf. Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11-13) that the true Jew is one whose circumcision is of the heart.

### **THE PLACE OF HISTORIC ISRAEL NOW AND IN THE FUTURE**

In thinking of the people of God many wonder what place Israel has in the sight of God, and in light of the prophecies. There are a number of views,

- (i) because Israel rejected Christ, and the Sanhedrin rejected the apostles and the gospel, therefore Israel has ceased to be the people of God, and the new Israel is the church, so that all prophecies pertain to it,
- (ii) God's promises to Israel in the O.T. are without recall. They refer to Israel, and only Israel, so that Israel will return to its land, rebuild the temple, and establish itself as God's people, and up to it (Mt. Zion) will the nations flow,
- (iii) The 'Israel of God' is composed of all who have been chosen as God's elect whether Jews or Gentiles. Even so God has a plan for Israel according to Romans chapters 9-11, which may well include a return to their land and their formation as a nation, but is primarily the plan for their salvation, as in Romans 11:15, 'For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will; their acceptance mean but life from the dead?' By this Paul means that Israel's rejection at the time of Messiah has brought the Gospel to the Gentiles, but their [coming] acceptance will mean a great surge of life in the world.

Again, in Romans 11:25-28 Paul is saying that when the full number of the Gentiles has come in, then there will be the salvation of all Israel-that event of which

we have just spoken, above. Even so Acts 4:12 stands firm-no one in Israel can be saved apart from Christ. This comports with Galatians 6:15-16.

For our present purpose then, the Israel of God is composed of those Jews and Gentiles who believe in Christ. It will-in the future-be composed of those who will believe in Christ, but for this moment no one in historic Israel is in 'the Israel of God' if he/she has not come through Christ. God's covenant still obtains for Israel but Israel must remain faithful to that covenant, i.e. believe in its Messiah. That is 'the bottom line'.

### **'THE PRESENT 'ISRAEL OF GOD'**

Two significant passages ought to be read, namely I Peter 2: 1-10, and Ephesians 3:1-11. These passages present the church as the new covenant-people. They show that the promises to Israel are also promises to those of the new covenant. In Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Gentile. The Gentiles are 'fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel'. They constitute the new nation, the new priesthood, and are the new temple. What is promised in the future for Israel is a comfort and encouragement to the present 'Israel of God', but, in fact, the church is to keep moving in its life and Gospel proclamation, glad that it is one with all the people of God from the beginning to the end. Certainly differences in prophetic and eschatological views should not divide Christians or dissipate time in debate that could otherwise be used for the true ministry of the word.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY TWENTY THREE: **THE ROYAL PEOPLE OF GOD**

#### **CHRIST THE TRUE KING**

Christ is the King of the Kingdom of God. He is this with his Father (Eph. 5:5; Rev. 11:15) and will one day deliver the Kingdom to the Father when its historical triumph is complete (I Cor. 15:24). That he is 'King of kings, and Lord of Lords' is not in doubt (Rev. 1:5; 17:14; 19:15). His baptism was virtually his coronation-as a man- to Kingship. Psalm 2:6-7-especially as it is quoted in the New Testament-shows his coronation to be spaced out at points such as his baptism, his death, resurrection and ascension. Psalm 2:6 has God saying, 'I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.' 2:7 shows him as receiving all the nations from God and ruling over them. Isaiah 9:6-7 portrays him as the Davidic king-'and the government shall be upon his shoulders'. Zechariah 9:9 shows him as coming into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday-the acknowledged Messianic King-a fact which Pilate had noted. To Pilate's question Jesus gave the answer that he was a king, but 'not of this world'. His Kingdom was beyond even Pilate's conception.

One of the most beautiful pictures of Christ as King is given in the Book of Hebrews. There Jesus is a high priest 'after the order of Melchizedek'. His name means 'king of peace'. Psalm 110:1f. shows this person (Christ) seated at the right hand of God, ruling with him. Again Psalm 89 speaks of one whom God makes 'the first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth', a statement often echoed in the Book of the Revelation.

The facts are that his defeat of all evil powers and his liberation of mankind from its enemies through his incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension showed him to be the true King. His Kingdom is the eternal Kingdom of God, and his people are the people of this community

#### **THE ROYAL COMMUNITY**

The people of God are 'the sons of the prophets and the covenant' (Acts 3:25). Such are equal to 'the sons of the kingdom' (Matt. 8:12). The redeemed have been 'transferred from the dominion of darkness to the kingdom of his beloved son' (Col. 1:13), and so are members of the Kingdom.

What we have to note is that the church of Christ and the Kingdom of God are not the one. The church does not equal the Kingdom. The Kingdom has always been, for it is God's reign and rule over all things. This reign is over rebellious as well as obedient creatures. Angels and men who are fallen have departed from loyalty to God their King, but He has not ceased to rule over them. Israel was a nation ruled by God, and closer to an earthly demonstration of a true kingdom than any other nation, but as God's Kingdom is 'not of this world' but transcends it, as also it rules it, the truth of the Kingdom of God must be seen as greater than Israel the nation.

Of great significance to us is that Christ being King, his church is 'kingly', i.e. 'royal'. That is, *the church is the royal community by which Christ works out his Kingship in history*. We would expect to see, then, that the community of Christ is sharing in his Kingly acts and showing his Kingly Lordship in all that it does. In Revelation 1:6; 5:10; and 22:5 the people of God are kings who 'reign upon the earth', and 'reign for ever'. This reigning may be thought to be eschatological, i.e. beyond the present time, and only following Christ's Parousia-his reappearing. Against that thought are (i) Romans 5:17, which tells us that 'we reign in life by one Christ Jesus, (ii) Ephesians 2:5-6, which says we are presently raised up and 'seated with him in the heavenly places,' and (iii) I Peter 2:9-10 which tells us we are 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.'

### **THE WORK AND REIGNING OF THE ROYAL KINGDOM**

When we ask, 'What does the royal community do?' the answer is found in I Corinthians 15:24-28. Christ, when he was on earth, defeated the powers of darkness out of his Messianic person and office (cf. Matt. 4:23; 12:28; cf. Luke 4:18-19; Acts 10:38), and this was the action of the King of the Kingdom. He gave his disciples power to proclaim the Kingdom (Luke 9:1-6; 10:9-11, 17-20). He then defeated the 'prince of this world' in the hour of 'the authority of darkness' (Luke 22:53) by casting him out (John 2:21; 14:30-31; 16:11; Heb. 2:14-15; Col. 2:14-15). This was, of course, through the Cross and the Resurrection.

Prior to his ascension he told the disciples that all authority was given to him, and in the light of his authority they were to go and preach the Gospel, which in the Book of Acts is proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom (Acts 1:3-8; 8:5, 12; 19:8, 28:23, 30-31). As he had preached, taught and healed, so they were to do, and so to overcome the powers of darkness. We say that he defeated these powers at the Cross and Resurrection, but the 'mopping up' operations go on in this present continuing period of time in accordance with I Corinthians 15:24-28. Christ's people are 'more than overcomers' (Rom. 8:37) and this is seen in Revelation 12:11; 15:2 and I John 2:13-14). Hence the truth of Romans 5:17; Ephesians 2:6-6 and I Peter 2:9-10. The church is Christ's fulness working itself out in history as the royal community.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY TWENTY FOUR

## **THE PROPHETIC PEOPLE OF GOD**

### **CHRIST THE PROPHET**

In Deuteronomy 18:15f. Moses prophesied that a prophet after his order would arise, and that his words would have to be listened to under pain of judgement. Acts 3:22-23 appears to confirm that this prophet was Christ. Moses was regarded as a great prophet if not the great prophet, but time and again in the Gospels and in the Letter to the Hebrews Jesus is shown as greater than Moses. Therefore his prophethood must be greater than that of Moses. John the Baptist was 'a prophet, and greater than a prophet' and so Jesus was 'greater than greater than a prophet'. Jesus was, thought of as a prophet (Matt. 21:11; Mark 6:4, 15; 8:28). Jesus referred to himself as a prophet, 'Nevertheless I must go on my way today and tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem' (Luke 13:33).

Jesus was not just a prophet but *the* prophet. In this sense he lifted prophethood above what it had been seen to be. The true prophet was the voice of God (cf. Exod. 6:30-7:2). Jesus made it clear that he had come *to bear witness to the truth* (John 8:37), and time and again said that his words were from the Father. God had spoken by the prophets to the fathers, but now He spoke by a Son (Heb. 1:1).

Revelation 19:10 states, 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.' This must mean at least that the subject of all prophecy was-and is-Jesus (cf. Luke 24:25-27; I Pet. 1:10-12). It must also mean that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of prophecy, because he witnesses to Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life. We can say, then, that Christ is the subject of the prophecies and prophecy witnesses to Jesus. That is why he is the prophet, *par excellence*.

*Note: We will be confused about the matter- of prophecy if we think it is confined to prediction. Prophecy is both forth-telling, i.e. exhortation, and fore-telling, particularly when prediction is linked with exhortation. Paul says the ministry of prophecy is edifying, i.e. builds up the church. Prediction certainly encourages the people of God, but since prophecy is God speaking directly to his people it is no wonder they are edified.*

### **THE PROPHETIC COMMUNITY**

The community is prophetic because it is the community of Jesus Christ and He is the Prophet. We might think he ceased to be prophetic when he ascended, but as he continued to be both King and Priest so he continued-and continues-to be Prophet. This is because 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy'. This statement doubtless has many elements, and one of them is that Christ continues his testimony (to the truth, to God his Father) by what he does. Acts 1:1 shows that Jesus had *begun* to do and to teach during his ministry, and implies that he was now *going on* to do and to

teach-until the consummation of the age (Matt. 28:19-20). In other words what Jesus is doing in history is his testimony, and his testimony is to God and the-truth.

If we grasp this fact then we can say that the community of Christ is identified with; and involved. in what he is doing because it-the church.-is Christ's fulness, as - he is 'filling all in all' (Eph. 1:23;' cf. 4:10). If it is involved, in: all that he is doing As his life and word witness to God and the truth (cf. John 18:37) then it is 'witnessing to the witness', i.e. it is part of 'the testimony of Jesus as also it is testifying to Jesus.

## **THE PROPHETIC SPIRIT AND THE PROPHETIC COMMUNITY**

The only way. the community can witness to Christ and so be prophetic to the world is by the Spirit. This comes from the following:

- (i) In Acts 1:8 (cf. I John 5:7) Jesus said that the apostles would witness to Christ ,when the Spirit came upon them-which he did at. Pentecost—and they certainly witnessed to him,
- (ii) Jesus told-them in John 16:12-15 (cf. John 15:26-27;. Luke 24:48-49) that the Spirit would. witness to the apostles thoroughly leading them into the truth of himself. This he did at Pentecost;
- (iii) Jesus told them the Spirit would dwell in them (John 14:16-17) which he did (cf. Rom. 5:5; 8:9-11;'11 Cor. 1:22; II Tim. 1:14),
- (iv) The Holy Spirit was to tell them 'things to come.' (John 16:13), and this would both forewarn and encourage them, as well as give. them power to exercise both hortatory and predictive elements of prophecy. -
- (v) Christ would dwell in their heart through faith, by the work of the indwelling Spirit (Eph. 3:16). With Christ as Prophet dwelling in their hearts what else could they be but the prophetic community?

We would then, expect the church to be indwelt by the Spirit of witness and so be active in witnessing to Jesus, and being the witness of Jesus. This is exactly how we find it in the Acts, Epistles, and the Book of the Revelation. A concordance will show us how many times the church witnesses, gives testimony and is even martyred for doing this. The English word 'martyr' comes from the Greek word 'witness' (*marturios*). Stephen witnessed to Jesus and was killed, so becoming a 'martyr'. Throughout the book of Acts the early church bore witness to Jesus by its proclamation of the Gospel, and what it did, for both were-and are-part of Christ's own prophetic ministry. John the Seer was on the Island of Patmos 'for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus'. In Revelation 6:9 the souls of those who had been slain for the witness they had borne were under the altar. In Revelation 12:11 the saints conquered the dragon 'by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony'. In the same chapter the dragon went off to make war on 'those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus'.

## **CONCLUSION REGARDING THE PROPHETIC COMMUNITY**

We see that prophetic action is as much prophecy as prophetic declaration. These two elements are seen powerfully in Revelation chapter 11. Even so, it is Christ's action through all history, seen in I Corinthians 15:24-28, and the work of Christ in the prophecy called 'Revelation', that we see Christ working prophetically. As he works, so do we, and so we are 'the prophetic community'.



## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY TWENTY FIVE

## **THE PRIESTLY PEOPLE OF GOD**

### **CHRIST THE PRIEST**

It is the Epistle to the Hebrews which gives us a picture of Christ's priesthood. In 2:10-17 we see the necessity for him to become man in order to be our High Priest. In Study 23 we Jesus as the true King, especially in relation to Psalm 2. In Hebrews 5:5-6 Psalm 2 and Psalm 110 are linked, 'Thou art forever as priest after the order of Melchizedek.' The writer of Hebrews shows that the 'order of Melchizedek' is greater than that of the Aaronic priesthood. Hebrews 7:1-28 enlarges on this wonderful priesthood. In 9:24 he has passed into the heavens to appear for us, to exercise an unchangeable priesthood, and in 7:24, 25 it is to intercede for us. In 10:10-14 he offers the perfect sacrifice, perfecting for ever those who are sanctified by his death. A combination of references such as Psalm 11:1-4; Heb. 5:5-6; 7:17; 8:1 and others show us that he is the King-Priest as well as the Son. This Study cannot even begin to show the wonder of his High-Priestly being. John 17 has been called 'Christ's HighPriestly prayer', and so it is.

### **THE PRIESTLY COMMUNITY**

During the Reformation the doctrine was emphasized of 'the priesthood of all believers'. It is not 'the priesthood of every believer', although each person of Christ's community participates in the corporate priesthood of all believers. There is no order of priests in the New Testament church.

We have seen that just as his being King makes the church the Royal community, and being the Prophet makes his people the prophetic community, so his being High-Priest makes his people to be the Priestly Community, that is his Priestly ministry is distributed through the Community, and works through it. This is borne out by I Peter 2:4-10 which we must read, now. This must be linked with Exodus 19:5-6 which shows the church to be the new true priestly community. We note the functions of the Priestly Community;

(i) *to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ* (I Pet. 2:5; Heb. 13:15-16). These are worship sacrifices to God and at the same service to others, especially the saints. See also Philippians 2:14-18; 4:18; Rom. 15:16). (Note: In Study 29 we will expand the idea of the Community at worship).

(ii) *to declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvellous light* (I Pet. 2:9). This is really the proclamation of the gospel.

(iii) *to have the ministry of intercession.* Christ has this ministry (Heb. 7:24-25; cf. Rom. 8:34).<sup>1</sup> Timothy 2:1-4 is a good example of intercessory ministry. Paul often calls for intercession (e.g. Eph. 6:18-20).

These functions we have nominated obtain now. The priest was one who represented God to the people, and the people to God. Christ was a priest of the order of Melchizedek, i.e. the King-Priest. We are of that order, in him. The Book of the Revelation speaks of our eschatological priesthood in 1:6; 5:10; 20:4 and 22:5. This surely must mean that in the new heavens and the new earth we will represent God to the creation, and the creation to him. The community, then, has a high and holy calling.

# ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

## STUDY TWENTY SIX

### **THE HOLY COMMUNITY**

#### **MAN NEEDS HOLINESS**

##### **The Nature of Holiness**

We all have some idea of holiness, i.e. moral purity, cleanness, and a way of life consistent with this. In regard to God holiness is separatedness from all that is evil and profane (worldly), but His holiness is dynamic, i.e. it sets out to destroy all evil, 'I am the Holy One of Israel-your Redeemer'. In regard to man, holiness is first creational, and when lost cannot be restored by self-effort or self-atonement. God sanctifies Israel (Exod. 19:5-6), and His church (John 17:17: cf. I Pet. 2:9-10), i.e. makes them holy. Holiness is consecration in this case, i.e. setting an object, person or people apart for His special use. Holiness comes from purification by God (e.g. through the Cross), and at the same time men and women are consecrated (called sanctification), whilst God works for their practical holiness of living. This covers holiness in general.

#### **THE DEMAND FOR HOLINESS**

(i) The demand for holiness comes primarily from God (Lev. 11:44; Exod. 19:5-6; I Pet. 1:13-16). There can be no relationship or union with God apart from holiness, by nature of the case. The second demand for holiness comes from one's self. Just as in the matter of bodily cleansing a person is refreshed and renewed, so in the cleansing of mind, heart and spirit. No one is truly free until holy. Human-beings seek to effect holiness, but by nature of the case they cannot.

(ii) Without holiness no one can see God (Matt. 5:8; Heb. 12:14; Psa. 24:3-5) for impurity affects the mind (Psa. 18:25-26; Isa. 5:20-21; Titus 1:15). Uncleaness bans man forever from God (Isa. 59:2; Rev. 21:27; 22:11).

#### **GOD IS THE PRIME MOVER IN HOLINESS**

God is the 'the Holy One of Israel'. He is above all, yet dwells in man to revive him i.e. to bring him to full life (Isa. 57:15). Christ is 'the Holy One of God', and the Spirit is 'the Holy Spirit'. God created man pure (Gen. 1:26-27). Because man wanted to become as God and not simply remain like God he became impure (Jer. 17:9; Isa. 57:20-21; Mark 7:20f.). God's grace has not only forgiven and justified him from his sins, but He has also sanctified him by (a) purification (I Cor. 6:11; Heb. 1:3; 9:14), but also consecrated him to Himself (I Cor. 6:11; I Pet. 1:2) and enables him to live in practical holiness (Phil. 1:6; 2:12-13; II Cor., 7:1; 1 John 3:3).

## **THE HOLY COMMUNITY**

Only pure people will see God (Matt. 5:8; Psa. 24:3ff.). The calling of the church is to holiness (Rom. 1:7; I Cor. 1:2; John 17:17). Whilst holiness is personal it is also communal (Lev. 11:44; I Pet. 1:15). We have seen from Exodus 19:5-6 and I Peter 2:9-10 that God's people must be holy. In the O.T. the Name of God could be profaned by the people refusing to be holy (e.g. Ezek. 36:29ff.). In the N.T. the people of God are warned against defiling the temple-the church-for such will bring judgement (cf. I Cor. 3:16-17; 5:19; I Pet. 1:13-15). Being the priestly community, worshipping God in the beauty of holiness are distinctive and wonderful marks of the holy community, predestined to sanctification from before time (I Pet. 1:2).

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY TWENTY SEVEN

## **THE COMMUNITY OF SUFFERING**

### **1. GOD'S PEOPLE ALWAYS SUFFER**

Paul said, 'All who desire to to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecutions' (II Tim. 3:12). Jesus said, 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 5:10-11). This does not mean Christians should look for suffering or even expect it. It will happen for the following reasons:-

- (i) The world system - the system of Satan - will hate God's Kingdom and His people.
- (ii) The holiness, righteousness, truth and love of God and His people will always confront evil with its distortion and falsity, provoking incredible fury.
- (iii) Evil knows its doom, and hates the judgements which are coming.

### **2. THE CHURCH, THE CHRISTIAN AND SUFFERING**

(i) *Suffering For the Kingdom of Heaven's Sake.* Evil hates the Kingdom and will try to threaten, deceive, subvert and seduce its members. See Acts 14:22; Matt. 5:10-11; Rev. chs. 12-20. Luke 11:14-23 shows that this battle is always proceeding.

(ii) *Suffering Is Always Part of True Ministry.* For the reason above the proclamation of the Gospel will always be attacked. This is the story of the Gospels; the Acts; the Epistles and the Revelation. The apostles suffered at the hands of the Sanhedrin; Stephen was martyred; James killed by Herod, and Paul had to go to trial. On the missionary journeys the apostles met with persecution. Passages to read are II Cor. 4:8-12; 6:3-10; 11:22-29; II Tim. 3:10-12. Peter's two epistles have suffering as their primary theme. In the Revelation we have 1:9; 2:10; 13, 6:9-11; 7:14; 11:7-8; 12:17; 13:9-10; 14:12-13; 17:6; 18 :24.

(iii) *Suffering Is The True Way of Fruitfulness.* Isaiah 53:11-12 is the principle of the fruitfulness of suffering. See also John 12:24-25; II Cor 4:8-12. In fact without suffering there is no fruitfulness. See I Thess. chapter 1 for a classic example of this. The suffering mentioned in the paragraph above illustrates this.

(iv) *Suffering is a Power for Holy Example and Purification.* This is the thrust of Peter's first Epistle. (i) He argues that suffering for our own misdeeds is reasonable, since we deserve it, but to be an example when unjustly punished we must be as Jesus, not fighting back. This is also seen in Rev. 13:10; 14:12-13. See 2:20-23, and 4:12-17

and compare with Rom. 12:19-21, Matt. 5:43-48. (ii) Purification by suffering is seen in I Pet. 1:6-7. In 4:1 Peter is saying that he who has suffered, has ceased from sin, i.e. he would not be suffering if he were on the side of sin!

(v) *Suffering is The Way Of, and To, Glory.* None of this will make sense if we think suffering is the cost of glory, instead of its own essence. Rom. 8:17 says, 'provided that we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him'. Suffering is the way to glory. We only know the glory of God's love and Person because of the suffering of the Cross ( I John 4:9-10, I John 3:16). Rom. 8:18-25 shows that creation (including us) is in pangs of suffering until the entire creation is liberated into the glory of the liberty of the sons of God'. II Cor 4:16ff. shows that the glory will be revealed. Meanwhile (II Cor. 3:18) we are 'being changed from one stage of glory to another'.

(vi) *We Must Accept the Principle of Suffering and Be Wholly In It.* Phil. 3:10 shows the principle of sharing Christ's suffering. Col. 1:24 shows that these sufferings - for and with the church - must be shared. This being so God's plan will be fulfilled. The rewards and outcome are great (see (3), above). We must not be angry with God or blame Him for suffering. Christ has already suffered all our suffering, good and bad (Isa. 53:4-6). Gen. 18:26 and Rom. 8:28 show us God works only for good, for those who love him. Suffering then is not a cause of bewilderment or anger, but only of sharing in the life of God and growing towards that maturity which He is presently effecting.

### 3. THE SUFFERING COMMUNITY

So then, the people of God will always face suffering, whether for others, or from others, whether in witness and because witness, whether in battle or from the enemy. Because Christ is the 'The Suffering Servant', his people-as his body-must be 'The Suffering People. This should cause no surprise, no reaction, and certainly no anger. 'They counted it all joy they were permitted to suffer for his sake,' and 'it has been granted to you to suffer,' all tell us that it is the way glory as well as the way to glory (Rom. 8:18; 11 Cor 4:16-8; cf. II Cor 3:18).

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY TWENTY EIGHT **THE PRAYING COMMUNITY**

#### **THE NATURE OF PRAYER**

Prayer is the expression of a living relationship with God, which first hears God speaking through His Word, into the heart of the worshipper, and which expresses itself in adoration, praise, thanksgiving, petition and intercession, whilst it continually seeks to know the will of God.

Thus prayer is first a relationship, then an attitude, which devotes itself to the mind and the will of God, and knows that God has ordained such prayer, and not only requires it of the worshipper, but uses it in His sovereign purposes.

#### **TO WHOM AND BY WHOM WE PRAY DETERMINES THE NATURE OF OUR PRAYER**

NOTE: Man is compulsive in prayer. He will pray to God or his gods. His prayer will be coloured by how he views the one to whom he prays, e.g. the prophets to Baal (I Kings 18:20-40) and the Pharisee and tax-gatherer to God, as each understood Him (Luke 18:9-14).

True prayer is as follows:

- (a) When the disciples heard Jesus pray to the Father, they asked to be taught to pray (Luke 11:1f.). Jesus prayed to the Father (Luke 2:49; 3:21-22; 9:28-36; Mark 14:36; cf. Luke 10:21; John 11:40f.).
- (b) Prayer is primarily made to the Father. This is because believers are sons of the Father (Luke 11:2f.; Matt.6:6). Christ has given us access to the Father (Rom. 5:2; Eph. 2:28; 3:120).
- (c) Prayer is made through the Son (John 14:13-14; 15:7; 16; 16:23-24).
- (d) As Jesus prayed through the Spirit (Luke 10:21), so do we (see Gal. 4:4-6; Eph. 6:18f; I Cor. 14:13f; and Jude 20). NOTE: The Father takes the initiative in all worship (John 4:23-24), and Romans 8:26 shows the Spirit takes the initiative in prayer, for we are weak in knowing what to pray.
- (e) Note the many prayers by the celestial creatures in the Book of the Revelation

#### **THOSE WHO HAVE PRAYED TO GOD**

- (a) We have many examples of the patriarchs praying to God.
- (b) Israel prayed to God, especially at the temple. See especially II Chronicles chs. 6 and 7 for the long prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple (II

Chron. 6: 19-21; 7:12-16; Isa. 56:7). Prophets, priests, kings and others made prayer to God.

(c) In the Gospels prayer is made at the temple, and by many. Jesus prayed there, and following Pentecost the people of the new church. Jesus addressed God in prayer in many situations.

(d) Prayer is the constant exercise of the apostolic church (Acts 1:24; 2:42; 4:31; 6:4, 6; 8:15; 9:11; 9:40; 10:4; 9,31; 11:5; 12:5,12; 13:3; 14:23; 16:25; 20:36; 21:5; 28:8).

### **THE PRAYING COMMUNITY AND THE PURPOSES GOD HAS FOR PRAYER**

(a) It is part of His plan to use the prayers of His people (Rev.5:8; 8:3-5). He uses His people's prayer to help effect His plan. So see, 'Thy Kingdom come' (cf. Rev. 6:9-11; Luke 18:6-8).

(b) Prayer is to be according to the will of God, 'Thy will be done', but the will is made known (i) through the Word, and (ii) through the exercise of prayer. See James 5:14ff. Note the power of prayer to accomplish the things prayed for (cf. Mark 11:20-26).

(c) Prayer is made according to need, e.g. Lord's Prayer (cf. Jas 1:5; 5:2; Matt.7:7-11).

(d) Intercession for others is a large part of prayer, for the Son (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25) and the Spirit (Rom. 8:26-27) intercede for us. Acts 4:23-31 is a good 'model' prayer. Paul's prayers also teach what to pray (e.g. Eph. 1:15-19; 3:14-19; Col. 1:9-12), and he asks for intercessory prayer (Eph. 6:18ff.; I Thess. 5:25. See also I Tim. 2:1).

(e) Note that in the Book of the Revelation the dynamic outcome of the community praying is seen as those prayers are offered to God at the altar (8:1-5; cf.5:8f.).

### **SOME THINGS WHICH HINDER PRAYER**

(a) Cherishing iniquity in the heart (Ps. 66:18; cf Ps. 18:41; Prov. 1:28-29).

(b) Disobedience to God's law (Prov. 28:9; cf Prov. 15:8. See I John 3:21-22).

(c) Faithless praying (James 4:2). This is empty praying (see Matt. 6:7; I Kings 18:25-29).

(d) Selfish and evil praying (James 4:3).

(e) Failure to have true marital relationships (I Pet. 3:5-7).

(f) Lack of practical love (I John 3:17-22).



## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY TWENTY NINE

## **THE COMMUNITY OF WORSHIP AND PRAISE**

### **THE MEANING OF WORSHIP**

The primary verb 'to worship' in the O.T. (e.g. Exod. 4:22) and N.T. (e.g. Rom. 12:1) is also 'to serve'. Worshipping is serving and serving is worshipping. Some translations use the word 'worship' only for God and 'honour' for fellow humanity. Man is to worship God, but to honour parents (Exod. 20:12), all men (I Pet. 2:17), wives (I Pet. 3:7), true widows (I Tim. 5:3), the king (I Pet. 2:17), and 'one another' (Rom. 12:10). Failure to honour man is an insult to God (Prov 14:31). Man worships constantly, and cannot do otherwise. His true worship is of God, and his false worship is idolatry. To love God is to worship Him (Dent 10:12; 30:6, 7; cf. Exod. 4:22), and to love idols is to worship them.

### **MAN'S LOSS OF TRUE WORSHIP**

Genesis 3:1-6 and Romans 1:18-25 give the history of man's rejection of true worship of God. In Genesis 3:1-6 man is tempted to become 'as God' or 'as gods'. A god is an independent entity, able to make its own discernment as to what is good and evil. It acts independently of the one true God. I Corinthians 8:5 sets out the truth of Deity. Romans 1:19-21 states that God can be known 'by the things that are made' (cf. Ps. 19:1-4; Rom. 10:18). We should note that worship comes from knowing God, i.e. knowing the truth of Him (Rom. 1:18, 25, 28; cf. Ps. 14:1; Rom. 3:11, 16-17). Because God has Deity, and is beyond man, He cannot be known, for there is *nothing* in all creation to which He can be likened (Isa. 44:6-8; 43:10-11; 46:9; Rom. 11:33-36). God, however, reveals Himself to His creation.

Refusing the truth of God man lost his pure knowledge of God, which he had had in creation and his pre-fall relationship with God, in innocence.

### **THE TRUE, PURE WORSHIP OF GOD**

Hebrews 9:14 (cf. Rev. 7:14) indicates that true pure worship of the living God cannot be made by man apart from a pure conscience. The only true worship of God, then, can be found in heaven, and not-at this time-on earth. No matter how fine human worship may prove to be, there will be some deficiencies in it whilst the battle of 'spirit' (Spirit) and 'flesh' is present (cf. Gal 5:16-26). Many references are made in Scripture to creation praising God, but Romans 8:19-21 indicates that creation is still subjected to futility. Only in heaven then may we see pure worship, and our own pure worship is reserved for the time of the new heavens and the new earth in which we shall dwell.

## THE NEW WORSHIP-PROPHESED AND INSTITUTED

A number of elements point to a (the) new worship: (i.) prophecies such as Jeremiah 31:31-34 (cf. Heb. 10:5-22; Ezek. 36:24-28; Isa. 56:6ff.; Micah 4:1ff.); (ii) Jesus' statements of the destruction of the temple (Matt. 24:1-2), and his implication that he would be the new temple, (iii) his prediction of a new worship of the Father by the Spirit (John 4:19-26).

The new worship came at Pentecost (cf. Acts 2, 8 and 10 with outpourings of the Spirit, and revelations of the Father and the Son, John 16:12-15). This is the worship of which Paul speaks in Philippians 3:3, where he contrasts the new worship with the old. The writer of Hebrews contrasts worship under the old (Mosaic) covenant, and under the New covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 10) with talk of a new (heavenly) sanctuary, a new true High Priest, and Christ as 'the new and living way' to come to God, in contrast to the veiled Lord of the worship of Israel. The heart of the matter lies in Hebrews 9:14 and 10:9-18 where the purified heart and conscience permit sinful man to come to God in true and pure worship.

## THE SPIRIT AND THE NEW WORSHIP

- (a) We have seen that the Spirit brought the new worship as he was poured out on God's people in accordance with Ezekiel 36:24-28, Joel 2:28f., John 1:26, 33, John chs. 14-16 and Acts 1:8. We need to see that each outpouring brought the new worship to (i) Israel, (ii) the Samaritans, and (iii) to the Gentiles (nations of the world). This was a deep departure from worship for the Jews of the old covenant, and the idolatrous worship of the nations.
- (b) The principles Christ set out in John 4:20f. are (i) that God will be known and worshipped as Father, (ii) this worship must be 'in spirit and in truth', and (iii) that the Father takes the initiative in all worship. In speaking of 'my Father's house', and 'the house of prayer', he was referring to Isaiah 56:6ff., which in turn (cf. Micah 4:1ff) referred to the worship of, and in, the new temple. This is the new worship 'in the Spirit'.
- (c) The Spirit renews (regenerates) man (John 3:3-6; Titus 3:5-7; I Cor. 6:11), which means he purifies the conscience so that man can offer pure worship in the response of love as God becomes living to him (Heb. 9:14; Rom. 12:1; cf. Rev. 7:14-15).
- (d) The Spirit is the 'spirit of truth' and brings revelation of God the Father and of the Son to the human spirit (I John 5:7; John 16:12-15). Hence Paul can say (of God), ' . . . whom I worship [serve] in my spirit' (Rom. 1:9; cf. 15:16; Phil. 3:3). Such revelation is indescribably wonderful, the true fountain of pure worship.
- (e) It is clear from I Corinthians chs. 12-14 that the forms and spirit of worship in the apostolic church were by, and through, the Holy Spirit. Such worship involved the gifts of the Spirit.

## THE PRESENT PEOPLE OF GOD AT WORSHIP

We have seen that the royal, prophetic and priestly community through Christ and the Spirit is the true community and its worship is true (Phil. 3:3). We saw that I Peter 2:4-10 and Hebrews 13:15-16 tell us-along with Romans 12:1-2 that true worship is most practical. It is total service, doing the will of God. That is why the community of Christ is present in the world, with a view to his fulfilling the total plan of God.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY THIRTY

## **THE COMMUNITY OF UNITY AND LOVE**

### **THE COMMUNITY OF UNITY**

The images of the church in the New Testament are all of unity, e.g. the Vine and branches, the Temple-stones all bonded-the Body, the Family and the Flock. The unity that was formed on the day of Pentecost came from the Spirit and so arose the terms 'the unity of the Spirit' (Eph. 4:3) and 'the fellowship of the Spirit' (Phil. 2:1: cf. Acts 2:42). All were baptized 'in one Spirit' (I Cor 12:13). The unity then was ontological and functional. It was also the unity of Christ since all were baptized into him (Gal. 3:26-28). Again it was the unity of the body, so ably set out in I Corinthians 12:4-31. Yet again, we see it was the unity of the Father since all relationships derive from him (Eph. 3:14-15) and the church was-and is- 'in the Father' (I Thess. 1:1; II Thess. 1:1). Ephesians 4:6 shows the unifying nature and power of the Father-above all, and *through* all, and in all'. Of course it is the Fatherhood which makes the family, and this is the basic unity (Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:4-6).

### **THE COMMUNITY OF LOVE**

In the Godhead the Three Persons are One because They are love. Each is 'other-Person-centred', and none is Self-centred. We know that God's love is centred upon the world. It is shown in the Cross and the Resurrection-centred in the Atonement. Each Member is involved in salvation. We know God is love by the Cross (I John 4:7, 10, 16). Then the Spirit comes to flood that love of God into our hearts (Rom. 5:5), and hence he is called 'the Spirit of love' (Rom. 15:30; Gal. 5:22). Paul speaks of 'your love in the Spirit' (Col. 1:8).

The principle of love is as follows:

- (i) God loves us, and so we love Him (I John 4:19).
- (ii) God loves us, and so we love others (I John 4:7-12, 19).
- (iii) His love works itself out in acts of love, e.g. I John 3:11-21).
- (iv) The acts of love are seen in the Book of Acts in the daily distribution, the collection for the saints, the preaching of the Gospel by which men and women are taken out of darkness into light, and are saved.
- (v) The acts of love are seen in the use of the gifts of the Spirit (I Cor. chs. 12-14). I corinthians 13 shows us that the use of gifts is good when motivated by love. Love goes beyond even using gifts in its bearing, believing, and hoping all things.

By love the community of unity is matured into its fulness

## MATURING IN LOVE

- (i) As we have seen (above) God's love in the act of the Atonement causes us to love (I John 4:19; cf. I John 4:9-10; Rom. 5:5-10), i.e. we love God, and we love the brethren. Personal maturity comes from right relationships with God and the brethren. As we love we further mature.
- (ii) Love causes us to live in obedience (II Cor. 5:14; John 14:15; I John 2:3-5; 5:2-3). We mature as we obey, and as we mature we further obey.
- (iii) God Himself teaches us love (I Thess. 4:9), for (a) He is always in us (Phil 2:12-13); (b) He helps us to mature by chastisement where it is needed (Heb. 12:5-11); and (c) He holds us in His love (Rom. 8:35-39). Note: If Paul seeks to bring his people to maturity, how much more does the Father!
- (iv) Obedience through love causes us to do those works which are pleasing to God. Thus see 'the first works' (Rev. 2:1-7, esp. v. 5) and 'the second [latter] works' (Rev. 2:19). The 'latter works' are from 'the more mature love' (Phil. 1:9-11; I Thess 3:12-13). Mature love is discerning in what it sees, and what it does. Mature love loves all the world.
- (v) Maturity is not only a personal matter but a corporate matter, relating to building up (edifying) (see I Cor. 8:1-2; Rom. 14:15; 19, Eph. 4:11-16). As we build we mature, and as we mature we build.
- (vi) As we see His love we worship (Rom. 12:1; Heb. 9:14; Rev. 7:15), and as we worship we grow: as we grow we worship.
- (vii) Maturing in love is related to hope (Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:5-6; I John 3:1-3). Hope is looking to the wider view of love in the new age (cf. I Cor. 2:10-11; I Pet. 1:13). As we are in love we hope, and as we hope we mature, and as we mature we see more of His love. Here the key verse is I Corinthians 12:13. When we 'know as we are known', then we will worship fully.

## CONCLUSION: THE LOVE AND LOVING THAT UNITES AND MATURES US

Loving one another God abides in us, and we in Him, for both the Father and the Son dwell in us, as we in them. In this way we are 'being renewed in knowledge after the image of him who created us' (Col. 3:10). The key verse is John 15:9-10 (cf. I John 2:5-6; 4:12, 13, 16). I Corinthians 12:8-13 shows us that we mature by love, we mature in love, and love (Himself) matures us. Note that this is not without suffering (cf.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### Study Thirty-One

## **THE COMMUNITY OF THE LAST TIMES**

### **THE ESCHATOLOGICAL COMMUNITY**

`by the word `eschatological' we mean `of the last times'. The last era is `the eschaton'. For many reasons we should see the church as the community of the last times. The first is that it is the community of the kingdom-the Kingdom prophesied by the Old and New Testament prophets, demonstrated in Christ's ministry and prophesied by him, and, indeed, sealed and secured by his atonement.

Then we know that the church was the one given the `keys of the kingdom' (Matt. 16:18), and the Kingdom was to be opened to the Jews, the Samaritans and the Gentiles (Acts 1:8). The church was told that `through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God' (Acts 14:22). Jesus had predicted that his people would suffer for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake (Matt. 5:10-11). Jesus taught much about the Kingdom, and as he and John the Baptist had taught that it was near, many expected its immediate coming. The early church lived in expectancy of this coming.

### **THE BATTLE FOR THE KINGDOM**

There has always been a battle between God and the powers of darkness in regard to the Kingdom. This can be traced in the Old and New Testaments. The present people of God-the church-is in the midst of this conflict. Although the end and outcome was determined by the Cross (Col. 2:14-15; Heb. 2:124-15), yet the battle still goes on. Our Lord much regarding the conflict that lay ahead (cf. Math. ch. 214; Mark 13; Luke 21; cf. John 15:18-16:4). We see that Satan has a kingdom (Luke 11:14-23), and God has His Kingdom. The children of God are in the Kingdom (Col. 1:13-14) and that is what makes them the eschatological community.

The conflict is the subject of the Old Testament prophets, especially Daniel. In the N.T. epistles of II Thessalonians, I and II Peter and Jude the clash of the Kingdoms is depicted. Most fully of all is the description given in the Book of the Revelation chapters 12-21. Our next 4 studies will outline this conflict in detail under what we call `apocalyptic' language.

### **THE COMMUNITY LIVING IN THE LAST TIMES**

When we look back at our Studies on the community of Christ we see how well equipped Christ's people are to survive in the last times-which are desperate times-and to help to `hasten the day of his coming' (II Pet. 3:12). Some of the following points should be pondered for knowing how to live in these last times:

(i) Christ's people are ever to be alert, vigilant and sober-especially against the powers of evil. See Romans 13:11-14; Ephesians 5:14-16; I Thess. 5:1-10; I Peter 1:13; II Peter 3:11-14.

(ii) Christ's people are to be constantly looking for his coming and appearing (Phil. 3:20-21; Col. 3:4; I Thess. 1:13-18; II Thess. 2:1-12; II Tim. 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13; I Pet. 3:14).

(iii) Christ's people are to live in holiness in view of that coming (Rom. 13:11-14; I Thess. 5:23; I Pet. 1:13-17; II Pet. 3:14; I John 3:1-10. They are to ensure they do not miss inheriting the Kingdom of God (I Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5-6).

(iv) Christ's people are ever to be in the conflict (Eph. 6:18-18; II Cor. 10: 3-6; I Thess. 5: 9; cf. Rev. 15:3).

(v) Christ's people are ever to live in joyous hope, awaiting the outcome of history, looking for eternal life, glorification, seeing God's face, and receiving the ultimate inheritance (Rom. 5:2; I Cor. 15:55-58; II Cor. 4:16-18; Phil. 3:20-21; I Thess. 4: 15-18; Titus 2:13; I Pet. 1:3, 13).

We can see, then, that community which began with creation goes on working its way through to the end, when the Kingdom will come in all fulness, when 'the kingdom of this world shall become the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ, and He shall reign forever'.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY THIRTY-TWO

## **THE COMMUNITY THE DRAGON**

### **THE ESCHATOLOGICAL COMMUNITY AND THE ATTACK**

In our last study we saw that the people of God are an eschatological people—they are destined ultimately to be 'a kingdom of priests unto their God' and 'they will reign for ever'. We are about to see that the last days are days of intensified conflict. We need to understand the nature and action of the creature who is called 'the dragon' in the Book of the Revelation.

### **THE GREAT RED DRAGON**

This creature is mentioned in the 12th, 16th, 20th and 21st chapters of the book of the Revelation. The 12th chapter opens with a vision of a remarkable woman, the woman who is at once the people of God, the mother of Messiah, and the mother of the people of God. When she appears, the sign or portent of the red dragon also appears. Verse 9 tells us the red dragon is 'that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world'. This tells us that he is the one who ever headed up the opposition to God's people which we find under many forms. For example, in the Old Testament it is idolatry which destroys Israel. All idolatry is linked with demonic and Satanic action (cf. I Cor. 10:18-22). Elsewhere we read of the 'prince of this world', 'the god of this world', 'the prince of the power of the air', and they all refer to Satan, who is here the red dragon.

In these chapters of the Revelation the dragon first attacks the woman who brings forth a male child who is to rule the nations. This child is the Son-King—Messiah of Psalm 2. He is to rule the nations. The dragon wishes to rule the nations so he tries to destroy the child—the 'seed of woman' prophesied in Genesis 3:15—lest the child destroy him. Following war in heaven where Michael and his angels fight the dragon, the dragon being cast out of heaven to the earth.. The dragon tries to destroy the people of God but they overcome him 'by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony' and they are not afraid of death (cf. Heb. 2:14-15). Nevertheless the earth and sea are warned, and as we later see the earth and sea both bring forth beasts, which attack the people of God.

In order to understand the red dragon we need to go back to Daniel 7:1-7 where there are four terrible beasts which are political kingdoms, and which threaten 'the saints of the Most High'. Added up, they make what is portrayed of the red dragon, namely seven heads and ten horns. The seven heads have diadems or crowns which can speak either of victory or rulership—or both. The horns are signs of actual power.

In our next study we will look at what are called 'the beast' and 'the second beast' or 'false prophet'. These, we will; see, are clones of the red dragon. In fact they are

clever disguises for him, undoubtedly intended to deceive the people of God and the world.

For this Study we simply note two things (i) when the woman and the child are attacked then the people of God are attacked, (ii) even though the dragon seeks to attack the people of God they overcome him, and this is by the fact that 'keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus'. This function of obedience and witness is seen through Revelation, and is most significant. See 1:2, 9; 6:9-11; 11:3ff; 19:10; 20:4.



## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY THIRTY-THREE

## **THE COMMUNITY, THE BEASTS AND THE FALSE PROPHET**

### **THE ESCHATOLOGICAL COMMUNITY AND THE BEASTLY ATTACK**

The passages we need to look at in relation to the first beast are Revelation 13:1-18; 14:9-14; 16:2. 12-15; 17:7-18, and in regard to the second beast and the false prophet are 13:11-18; 14:9-11; 15:2; 16:12-16; 19" 1020:10. Patience is required to work out the nature and action of the first beast, the second beast, and the false prophet.

We need to read Daniel 7:1-28 to see the four great beasts which are terrible in appearance and action. They appear to represent great world powers, and in Revelation the four are virtually the one. In Revelation 13 the first beast emerges from the sea, and the second beast from the land (cf. Rev. 10: 2-7). If 'the sea' corresponds to 'many waters' and 'the waters' of Revelation 1T:1, 15, then the sea represents mankind (cf. Isa. 57:20), and especially rebellious mankind (cf. Psa. 2:1f.). This fits the principle that evil beasts arise from evil people. The second beast which we must also understand to be the false prophet (cf. 16:13)-arises from the land, i.e. 'out of the earth' (13:11) which is also a designation for fallen humanity.

In Revelation 12 we see the red dragon who has seven heads; ten horns and seven diadems upon his heads-all signs of power, triumph and authority. He is 'that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world'. The beast is really a clone of the dragon, and the second beast is a clone of him. In the 3 of them there is really an 'unholy trinity'. C.S. Lewis called Satan 'God's ape'. The dragon is as the Father, the first beast as Messiah, and the second beast as the Holy Spirit-note that he gives breath to the image, and so is the spirit of idolatry. The first beast has a mortal wound in one of his heads and yet lives (is resurrected). The second beast is 'as a lamb', i.e. like the Lamb of God, but its voice is that of a dragon. This evil trinity recognizes the ontological power of the Trinity, and seeks to tap in upon that power. All evil is an imitation or counterpart of all that is true, that is ontological.

### **THE ACTION OF THE BEASTLY AUTHORITY**

This unholy trinity is out to destroy the people of God, through deception as against the truth, through evil as against the good, through unrighteousness as against righteousness, unholiness as against holiness, and love as against hatred but in the process to represent itself as true, good, holy, righteous and loving. It can be seen from chapter 13 that it represents itself as having resurrection power, and the power of signs and wonders. It seems to bring all under its power by demanding all have

its mark-666. 13:5-8 shows that 'it is allowed' to do certain things which are wrong,-and ultimately it will have to account for these evil actions. In the ultimate, everything is under the sovereign hand of God. Evil can never triumph

### **THE RESPONSE OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

How are the people of God to act under such circumstances? 13:9-10 and 14:9-14 shows 3 things (i) the faithful of God are not give away to the pressure of the unholy trinity, (ii) they are not be to deceived and seduced by pretended signs, wonders and the seeming attractiveness of such elements as Babylon, and (iii) they must submit to persecution and imprisonment. The use of force will mean they will die by using the force. The rewards are that their righteous deeds will follow them, even though they may be martyred. Their conquering will be line with other NT passages, i.e. where they are kept by God, and the battle is not theirs but the Lord's. See Romans 8:31-39; Rev. chs. 2 and 3; Rev. 21:7).

### **THE COMMUNITY RECOGNIZES EVIL POWERS AND ACTIONS**

We have already seen that all that is beastly heads up into the 1st and 2nd beasts. Since the apocalyptic term 'beasts' does not mean literal beasts, but represents actual personal beastliness headed up through counterfeit father, son and spirit, we can recognize this beast-action and being in certain evil leaders of nations, and even down to families. I John 2:18-27 and 3:1-6 tell us we have an anointing which warns us against false powers and teaches us to recognize them. The principle of being 'as God', have prominence, and being worshipped such as is seen in Isaiah 14:12-14, Ezekiel 28 and II Thessalonians 2 operates at all times, finally heading up in the *seeming* triumph of evil (Rev. chs. 13-19). Such we can recognize.

### **THE DEFEAT OF ALL THAT IS EVIL**

We have already seen in passages such as II Corinthians 10:2f; Eph. 6:18-18, Rom. 13:11-14 and I Thessalonians 5:8-9 that we have weapons which defeat evil, even at their strongest points of battle. So see Rom. 8:35-39; James 4:6-7; I Peter 5:6-9; 1 John 2:12-14; cf. Revelation 12:11; 15:2; 9:15ff.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY THIRTY-FOUR

## **THE COMMUNITY AND BABYLON**

### **THE ESCHATOLOGICAL COMMUNITY AND BABYLON**

We have to remember that the dragon, the first beast (clone of the dragon), the second beast (i.e. the false prophet) and all the forces of evil (fallen angels; demonic powers; enslaved men and women) are all part of the vast system of evil headed up by Satan. One with them is Babylon the unholy city. Babylon is the counterpart to the Holy City, i.e. the New Jerusalem, the people of God, the temple of worship for all nations. The New Jerusalem is 'the mother of us all' (Gal. 4:26). Babylon is 'the mother of harlots, and of earth's abominations' (Rev. 17:3). We will look at some of the evil works she does, but we need to recognize those things which are of the Holy City, and those who are of Babylon 'the unholy city'.

### **BABYLON MILITANT AGAINST THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

There is a theme running through Scripture relating to Babylon. A Bible Dictionary will give the history and geography of ancient Babylon, but the passage of Isaiah 13:31-31-quoted in Revelation 18:21--helps us to see the innate nature of this city. Linked with the place of Babel-the erecting of a walled city with a high tower to heaven-Babylon has been the symbol of humanism and human power. The Book of Daniel gives us excellent descriptions of the city in the prophet's time, particularly of its pomp and pride, and its dominion over many nations. It subjugated Israel as a nation. In fact the city was a form of high density population not in fully in accordance with the mandate of Genesis 1:28 (cf. Gen. 11:4-9). Jaques Ellul in his book *The Meaning of the City* (Eerdmans 1970) shows us the growth and development of the theme 'the city' in the Scriptures. High density populations lend themselves to crime and other social evils.

By the time of the New Testament Babylon was the city represented as Rome because of its oppression of the people of Israel. It is not limited to this association, however, for different cities may represent Babylon in different ages, and of course Babylon is never, only, a humanly created city. Revelation 17 speaks of the 'seven heads and ten horns', and this is linked by many with the seven hills of Rome, and the various kings of that system. This is seen in that I Peter 1:1 refers to 'the Dispersion', and this is linked with Rome. Thus it is referred to many times in the Book of the Revelation. The church born at Pentecost became its strongest enemy. It would be fair to say that it represents, or is parallel with, 'the world-system' set up by Satan.

## **BABYLON IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

The first reference to Babylon is in 14:8, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of her impure passion.' In chapter 17 there is a full description of the city, the word 'fornication' being prominent and certainly meaning idolatry, false worship, and evil union with the evil system. When we contemplate the pure holy city of God and compare the two, we see the evil of Babylon. Gaudy, sensual, and seductively attractive, being linked with all kinds of commerce, luxury and the like, it is a system intensely political and worldly to the utmost degree. Babylon is seated upon the Beast, and upon 'many waters', i.e. 'peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues'. This tells us the rivalry of the unholy city in trying to control the nations which belong to God.

The brilliant picture of her was such that John 'marvelled greatly', and was forbidden by the angel to do so (17:7; note in 13:14 the astonishment of mankind at the 'glory and power' of the beast). However it is a city filled with abominations (cf. Rev. 21:27) as against the utter purity of the holy city. It is also filled with cruelty, 'I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs' (17:6; cf. 18:24), i.e. those we see in Revelation 6:9-11).

## **RECOGNIZING BABYLON, THE ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

When we look at the apocalyptic descriptions, and know them to reveal principles-'the mystery of the woman' (17:7)-we need to understand the outworking of this city in the affairs of humanity. Anything that is 'worldly' i.e. absolutizes the things of this world-such as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life'-is Babylonish, no matter where it may be. If it is 'political' i.e. human policy worked out without God, then it is Babylonish. All elements relating to idolatry, over-sensuous living, and control of God's worlds without reference to Him are of Babylon. Harlotry and fornication are primarily idolatry, and are wholly dangerous, leading to destruction.

## **THE DEFEAT OF THE CITY**

The city of Babylon, the powerful world rulers, the beast and the false prophet do not have the unity of love. Hatred against God and the people of God unify them, but they quickly fall out. In Revelation 17:19-17 John is told that the kings and the beast 'will hate the harlot; they will make her desolate and naked and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire'. This evil divides and destroys, and yet it is God who brings the judgement. So sudden is this judgement that the clients and customers of Babylon mourn her demise, and are astonished that it happens 'in one hour' (cf. 18:10, 17,19). The teaching of its defeat and the avengement for the martyrs is encouraging to the people of God. Whilst they do not welcome persecution and death they know that at most the unholy city can cause pain to the body, but it cannot cause eternal death. Indeed 19:1-5 shows the judgements of God on Babylon vindicate the saints and martyrs attacked by Babylon.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY THIRTY-FIVE

## **THE COMMUNITY AS THE NEW TEMPLE**

### **THE COMMUNITY ALWAYS THE TEMPLE**

Israel had its temple,, but in another way of speaking Israel was the temple. God dwelled in the holy of holies, which meant He dwelled in the temple, which in turn meant that he dwelled in Israel. In this particular sense-the covenantal sense-He did not dwell elsewhere. The tabernacle was 'the tent of meeting'-God met with His people there and they with him. In this sense the tent symbolized all of Israel. When the tabernacle became the temple God was said to dwell in Zion, i.e. where the temple was. In Jeremiah's time it was argued against Jeremiah that God would not destroy Jerusalem since God was in the temple! Thus Psalm 46%-5 speaks of 'the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved.' As the tabernacle was central in the camp-the tribes ranged round about her-so the temple was the centre of Israel. Prior to the covenant men made altars and believed God dwelt there and was present to them for their worship. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob thought of the altar as 'the house of God'. Israel was God's house, God's household, and such dwelt in the midst of His people. 'I will be your God, and you shall be my people, and I will dwell in the midst of you,' was God's covenantal promise to His people, and it always carried an eschatological. element (cf. Lev. 26:11-12; Ezek. 37:25-28 and Rev. 21: 1-4), that is that total dwelling of God with His people was put at the end-time.

### **THE ESCHATOLOGICAL TEMPLE**

Israel's history as a nation was gathered around her fortunes of tabernacle and temple. Whatever those fortunes or judgements were, they were for Israel alone, that is the temple was only connected with Israel. However when Israel was faced with exile, or was in exile, or had returned from exile, the prophets spoke of a day which would transcend the present day and the present-or destroyed-temple. Thus in Isaiah 2:1-4; cf. Mic. 4:1-3) in the latter days people who not of Israel will go up to the mountain of the Lord and to them temple, expecting to be received and come under the law and worship of God.

Such a thought seemed impossible, for it was virtually saying they would become one with Israel (see Zech. 8:20-23; Isa. 51:4-5; 45: 22-25). Israel will be the centre of all history.

### **THE QUESTION OF WORSHIP**

The worship of God is central to the Scriptures, to humanity and to all truth. It is clear from our Lord's conversation with the woman at the well in Samaria (John 4:20-24),

that salvation was only from the Jews for they alone worshipped God properly. That means Gentiles did not worship properly (cf. Rom. 1:19-25). At the same time Jesus said things were changing and that the new worship was at the door. This meant that all could worship anywhere and everywhere, provided they knew God as Father, and could worship Him 'in spirit [in the Spirit] and in truth [in the Spirit of truth].

### **THE NEW WORSHIP OF GOD BY THE SPIRIT**

The new worship of which Jesus spoke in John 4:20f, came at Pentecost when the Spirit came. Philippians 3:3 speaks of this. The worship was first through cleansing (Heb. 9:14; cf. Rev. 7:14-15) and the Spirit who brought sonship (Gal. 4:6) brought worship of the Father. Each believing *person* is a temple of the Holy Spirit—a place of worship, just as corporately all God's people are the new temple. See Ephesians 2:19-22; I Cor. 3:16; Hebrews 3:1-7. Christ risen is the new temple, and his people are living stones in it, built as a spiritual temple (I Pet. 2:4-10).

### **THE NEW TEMPLE IS ESCHATOLOGICAL**

The temple of the OT that is eschatological is the place of worship for all nations. Jesus said the temple was to be 'the house of prayer for all nations', and not just for Israel. This is seen clearly in Isaiah 56:6-8 from which Jesus quoted. Thus Isaiah 2:2-4 (cf. Mic. 4:1-3) refers to the temple at the end time.

The important conclusion we draw from all this is that the people of God are now that new, eschatological temple, and worship today is unique for that fact, carrying mighty responsibility for the people of God to be pure, a worshipping people, and a holy temple. Undoubtedly in the new age there will be a further transformation of the new temple (cf. Rev. 7:15; 11:19) but in Revelation 21:22 God Himself is the temple. The Holy City—the heavenly Mt. Zion—will have its throne, the ruling dwelling place of God and Lamb.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY THIRTY-SIX

## **THE COMMUNITY AS BRIDE AND HOLY CITY**

### **GOD A HUSBAND TO THE TRUE COMMUNITY**

In Jeremiah 31:31-34 God stated that he had been a husband to Israel. In Jeremiah 3 the figures of both father and husband are used in God's relationship to Israel. In 3:20 the Lord told Israel, 'Surely, as a faithless wife leaves her husband, so you have been faithless to me, O house of Israel. In Isaiah 54:5 Israel is told, 'For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name.' In Ezekiel 1, and in Hosea chapters 1-3 the same image is given.

### **THE COMMUNITY AS THE BRIDE OF CHRIST**

When, then, in the New Testament the church is shown to be the Bride of Christ, it is not a new thing. At the same time the relationship is somewhat different. In the Old Testament almost every reference to Israel being the spouse of God is linked with her faithlessness. The picture of Christ and his Bride is always in reference to her union with him-through redemption-and the church is submission to the Bridegroom, and shares with him in his fulness and his work. Indeed, the true marriage is the paradigm for all Christian marriages as well as the source of them as is shown in Ephesians 5:21-31.

Christ often referred to the ultimate Messianic feast the victory banquet-and spoke of it as a marriage feast to which the elect alone are invited. In Luke 22:18, 2830 it is the triumph feast of the Kingdom of God. The Conquering King is the Bridegroom of the Bride. What we have to keep in mind is that these figures of Husband and Bride are realities. Indeed they are true archetypes from which we get our understanding of human brides and bridegrooms and human marriages, for indeed such marriages are foretastes, and prophetic manifestations of the reality to come. All of this gives great colour to the people of God, to their community and to their life. The exact relationship of the church to its head is that of the wife to her husband. So, for example, we can see what the relationship of the church to Christ ought be, and what the relationship of Christ to his bride actually is.

### **THE COMMUNITY AS THE HOLY CITY**

It is simple to link the figures of Bride and Holy City. In Revelation 21:2 we read, 'And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as bride adorned for her husband.' In Revelation 19:6-9 we have description of the Bride and her adornment. She is 'clothed with fine linen, bright and pure, for *the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*'

In Revelation 21:3-4 the Holy City is described, 'Behold the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.' It seems then that until the end the Holy City is in heaven—doubtlessly being prepared. Since it is called 'the new Jerusalem' (Heb. 13:22) which is itself the new Temple, then, in accordance with our last study, the Holy City is both present in the last days, on earth, and is yet of heaven.

In a number of places we are called fellow-workers with God, and since God is the Builder of the Holy City (Heb. 11:10), we can say it is both on earth and in heaven, but will ultimately be on earth, but then as heaven. This is clear from references to 'a city to come' (Heb. 11:10, Aid).

Revelation 21:1-2:5 gives us a brilliant description of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, the New Mount Zion, and we ought now look at that passage to see its living elements, keeping mind the parallel passage of Isaiah 65:7-25. We conclude that whilst that City is yet to appear we are even now part of it, and-with God-builders of it.



## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY THIRTY-SEVEN

## **THE ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST-BORN IN HEAVEN**

### A CONTRAST OF COVENANTS

In Hebrews 12:18-29 we have a contrast of 2 covenants—the Mosaic covenant with Israel and the New covenant with the new people of God, i.e. Christ's people born at Pentecost. We need not compare the 2 covenants, but simply note that some of the Hebrew readers of the Epistle were at least tempted to withdraw from the New Covenant system, and return to the Mosaic covenant. Throughout the Epistle the author shows the superiority of the new covenant over the former one. In 12:18-21 he shows the severity of the former covenant as the people stood before Mt. Sinai. In 12:22-24 he shows the incomparable wonder of the present covenant.

### THE COMMUNITY OF THE NEW COVENANT

We now look at the elements of the New covenant people:

- (i) *You have come*: Israel had come to Mt. Sinai. Notice 'come' indicates the place of standing. As we have seen the things of the people of God are both present and yet-to-come (eschatological).
- (ii) *to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God the heavenly Jerusalem*: Mount Zion stand for (a) all Jerusalem, the holy city, and (b) for the place where the temple was situated. Galatians 4:25f. shows present Jerusalem to be as Mt. Sinai, and the true Jerusalem to be 'above', the same 'new Jerusalem' which issues out of heaven and come to earth in Revelation 21:1. There are numerous texts in the O.T. which show that there is a transcendent *new Jerusalem*, far above the earthly Jerusalem. This is where we have *come*., and *are*. Likewise, *the city of the living God* is not just a loose phrase. The living God is the One Who always acts, so that the city is. living. In Revelation 21:22 the light of the city is God and the Lamb, the temple is God and the Lamb, and in 22:1 the throne that rules the city is of God and the Lamb.
- (iii) *to innumerable angels in festal gathering*: the angels are many in number (Rev. 5:11) are present in the glorious worship of God (Rev. chaps. 4-5), attended the giving of the law (Deut. 32:2), gave the law (Heb. 2:2), hear and do the will of God (Psa. 103:20) and—among many other things—are servants to the heirs of salvation (Psalm 103:21; Heb. 1:14) *Festal gathering* indicates 'immense joy and adulation and celebration.
- (iv) *the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven*: in Acts 7:38 Stephen spoke of the 'assembly' or 'church' in the wilderness, i.e. at Mt. Sinai (cf. Deut. 4:10; 9:10; 18:16). Here the writer of Hebrews is saying we have come as the true assembly *to* the true assembly. From Exodus 4:22f.) we see that Israel was God's first-born son. In the New Testament those in God's kingdom are

members of his church (ecclesia: cf. Matt. 16:18). Christ and many other writers of the New Testament speaks about believers beings children of God by new birth (regeneration) and sons by adoption *who are enrolled in heaven* must mean their names are written in the book of life of the Lamb-another great theme throughout Scripture.

- (v) *to a judge who is God of all*: this can mean that He will bring justice in all the earth and vindicate His elect (Gen. 18:25; Luke 18:7; Rev. 6:11;15:4; 16:7; 19:2). He is Judge of all, i.e.\ all must stand before Him. Having been judged in Christ (John 5:24; Rom. 8:1) we have no need to appear in terror before Him for the Judge is *for us*.
- (vi) *to the spirits of just men made perfect*: perfect must refer to the completion of God's purposes in His saints-His people. Whilst in the present we are not perfect in our actions, yet He has perfected us, and eschatologically this will be seen (cf. Rom.8:30 where we are said to be glorified already). In Hebrews 11:9 God is said to be 'the Father of spirits'. The saints then-from the beginning to the end of times-are all present in this glorious assembly.
- (vi) *and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel*: the writer now draws his presentation to a climax. All these wonderful elements tell of the true assembly and that they are all from and under Jesus points away from Moses and all previous glories. The new covenant is better than the former one. Then angels mediated, but now Jesus himself. His blood outclasses the blood of bulls and goats (Heb. 10:3f.). It is 'the blood of the eternal covenant'. Abel's blood cried from the ground (Gen. 4:10), and it was for avengement, but the blood of Christ is *gracious*, i.e. brings grace to the sinner. The spirits of just men then glory in the salvation that is part of being in the assembly of the first-born.

### **OUR PRESENT LIFE IN THE ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST-BORN**

This vision of the people of God from the beginning of time until the end is indeed a glorious one. Given to wavering Hebrews, it is a dynamic encouragement to us to live in hope and steadfastness at the present time 'looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith', for we will all-together-be made perfect. What a glorious thought, and what a glorious community!

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY THIRTY-EIGHT

## **THE PEOPLE OF GOD GLORIFIED**

### **GOD'S GOAL OF GLORY**

What we need to see is that God had planned the glorification of His universe from before time. From Psalm 19:1-4 (cf Rom. 1:19-20) we see that creation tells out the message of the glory of God. Man was created in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27) and is said to be 'the glory and image of God (I Cor. 11:7). Time and again the Psalmist says, 'All Your works praise You.' Isaiah 6:3' says that 'the whole earth is the fulness of His glory', whilst Revelation 4:11 shows the celestial creatures praising God saying He is worthy to receive glory and honour and power because He has created all things. Isaiah 43:6-7 speaks of God's children being created for God's glory-something, which takes us back to creation. Whilst in the Old Testament there are prophecies of a new heaven and a new earth-a new creation, in fact yet Ephesians 1:3-14 speaks of God's plan before time to unite all things in Christ, and to have His elect to be to the praise and the glory of His grace, and to the praise of His glory. This passage calls for close study. In Romans 8:29-30 the ultimate glorification of the elect is in the shape of the Son.

### **WHAT IS GLORIFICATION?**

Glory is the nature of God, i.e. His essential Being. To glorify God is to hold forth a true who and what He is. Human glory is being totally in the likeness of God, i.e. the reflection of God, and reflecting God. This cannot be apart from union without God. When a man is not in union with God he is not truly man. Glory in the Old Testament-kabod-has the ideas of weight, substantiality, stability, brilliance . and authority. Often the glory of a man is his possessions, his family,, his lineage, his position. Man has sinned and come short of the glory of God, i.e. short of his own true glory (Rom. 3:23). Man apart from God has lost the fulness of glory. Through the Gospel God purposed to restore that glory.

Redeemed man is at present glorified (Rom. 8:30) but in facet is still going through the processes of glorification. This is seen in (i) II Corinthians 3:18, (ii) II Corinthians 4:16-18. Paul says the process is by looking to Christ (cf Heb. 12:2). Colossians 3:1-3 tells us our life is at present hidden with Christ in God, but one day we shall appear with him in glory. In I John 3:1-3 John speaks of a similar matter: it does not yet appear what we shall be but when we see Him we shall be like Him.

Glory and suffering are linked especially in Romans 8:17-25 and II Corinthians 4:17. Suffering is what shapes us up to glory, seeing something of the glory of God lies in suffering. In one sense Christ was glorified in and by the Cross.

The ultimate glory is that we shall be like Christ. Philippians 3:21 speaks of receiving the body of glory. II Corinthians 4:16-5:9 speaks of the putting off of one tent and the putting on of the new building or home.

### THE GLORIFIED PEOPLE OF GOD

**What concerns** us is the ultimate glorification of the entire people of God. I Corinthians 15:35-58 (cf Phil. 3:21) gives us some insight into the future glorified state. At present it can be described as 'absent in the body, present with the Lord'. II Corinthians 4:16-5:9 can be taken either of two ways, (i) on death we shall be immediately glorified, the moment of death in time being equal to that 'moment of time in eternity' which is really the moment of the general resurrection, or (ii) on death the elect go to Paradise awaiting the (in time) time of the resurrection. That is Paul may be speaking of (a) immediately putting on the new 'house' or glorified body or (b) of waiting in Paradise until the moment of general resurrection when all shall arise. It does not much matter *how* it is.. The fact is that the pictures in the Book of the Revelation regarding the saints in heaven as in 7:9-17; 14:1-5; 15:2 and 21:27-22:5 are all of glorious people who have seen the face of God, and so have been changed. The glories of the Eternal Holy City—when seen—are such as to excite the imagination. Such Paul described in I Corinthians 2:9f—beyond human sight, hearing and imagination..

### THE GLORIOUS PLAN OF GOD FOR HIS PEOPLE

We saw from Isaiah 43:6-7 that at the last God calls His family together (cf. John 11:51-52; Eph. 2:11-22; I Pet. 2:1-10; Acts 15:16-17) to glorify them. They are given the glorious inheritance laid up and kept for them in heaven (I Pet. 1:3-5; cf Eph. 1:18; Rev. 21:7) but the wonder of that inheritance is that *it is for all the people of God altogether*. This is seen in Hebrews 11:4-40 where it shown that the inheritance is 'the city to come, whose builder and maker is God'.

We see then that the wonderful Father-Creator, the Father-Redeemer, and the Father-Reconciler will draw all His family together, with their elder Brother and the Eternal Spirit, resurrecting, enlivening, and giving eternal life where there was none and glorifying man who had fallen. It is then we will see the wonderful patience, mercy and love of God, and rejoice that we are part of the new eternal People of God. It is then we will together cry to Him, 'Abba! Father!' and bless Him that He planned such wonderful things in and for history.

## ***THE PEOPLE OF GOD***

### STUDY THIRTY-NINE

## **THE PEOPLE OF GOD-YESTERDAY, TODAY AND FOREVER**

### **OUR GOD REIGNS!**

The message of the Kingdom was-and is-`Our God reigns!' (Isa. 52:7). When we perceive through the Scriptures and the Spirit of God Who this God is, then we see He is the Father, the Creator-King Who is immutable (Ma1.3:6). Zechariah prophesied, `On that day . . . the Lord will become king over all the earth. on that day the Lord will be one and his name one.' (14:8-9). John records God's word, "'I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and was, and is to come, the Almighty.' The people of God take courage from the knowledge that the Father is King (cf. I Cor. 15:24; Eph. 5:5). The Son, likewise, is `the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end' (Rev. 22:22). He is also King over the Kingdom (Psa. 2:6-7; Eph. 5:5; Rev. 11:15) with his Father. The Holy Spirit is Lord (II Cor. 3:17-18), and is the Eternal Spirit of life (Heb. 9:14; II Cor. 3:6).

The people of God, then, are those of the Kingdom of God-God's elect (Matt. 16:18; Col. 1:13; Eph. 1:4ff.; Titus 2:13-14; I Pet. 2:9-10), who are under the reign and rule of God, and who persevere to the end under the God Who works within them His good will and pleasure (Phil. 1:6; 2:12-13).

### **THE `OUR-NESS' AND THE ONE-NESS OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

The unity of the people of God is evident in both Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament we have traced the people of God from Abel (then Seth) through the patriarchs, from Abraham to the Covenant-people of Israel, along with the prophetic promises of a widening of that covenant in accordance with the universal promises made to Abraham. In the New Testament the people born at Pentecost are the people of `the unity of the Spirit, i.e.the unity of love, so that `the fellowship of the Spirit', `the unity of the Spirit' and `the love of the Spirit' are interchangeable terms. All the people of God are i.e. `the Israel of God' and Romans chapters 9-11 show how this will take place.

What we need to see is the `our-ness' and the `one-ness' of the people of God. Because we easily fall into individualism we can miss the corporate nature of the people of God. *Corporate* and *personal* are not opposed, and *personal* is richer for the *corporate* nature of the people or family of God. There is a `my-ness' which militates against the true `our-ness', and we lose much by it. It is `our Father', `your Father'and so on. See e.g. the corporate elements in Galatians 4:4-6, and in Ephesians 4:6. He is `the God and Father of us all', and this not simply an inclusive statement so much as meaning that we have no Fatherhood that is not corporative in its nature and effects. This highlights the matter of our being together in the long haul of history, the battle against evil, and the ultimate arrival of the family in-and as-the Holy City. Unity is a not merely for strength, although the strength of the people does lie in unity. An

example of the *one-ness* is seen in Philippians 1:27-30 where the church is a phalanxlike formation striking dread into the hearts of the evil opponents. On another level the unity for which our Lord prayed for his church in John 17:20-26 can be seen as incredibly dynamic. Of course the term 'brotherly love' tells the whole story. At the same this 'story' is an incredible one, for it is the victory of redeeming and transforming love in the face of man's rebellion and fallenness. It is a testimony to the defeat of evil powers, and accusation that God's creation is not good.

### **'THE ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST-BORN IN HEAVEN'**

We now come to the climax and conclusion of our year's studies. That is, what God has planned to happen comes to its conclusion at the Day of Christ. The evil powers that seek to dethrone God and enthrone themselves in history are defeated. The redemption of Christ is the means by which God reconciles all things unto Himself, and effects the unity (reunification) of 'all things' in Christ. It is this unity of all creation which testifies to the truth of God. It is the demonstration of theodicy. In this regard Hebrews 11 should be thoroughly read and studied, for it speaks of the state and faith of the saints throughout history. It shows that they always knew what God was about and knew what the outcome of His plan would be, especially in regard to His people. All the elements of receiving the inheritance, being in the Kingdom, being resurrected, glorified and made to be a 'kingdom of priest unto God' and so reigning forever—all these elements have been made known to them, and they have persevered. Now—in the ultimate—they worship Him, for they see Him face-to-face. How wonderful, for such makes all to be in the image and glory of the Son (Rom. 8:28-30; I John 3:1-3; Col. 3:3; cf. Phil. 3:21). This beatific vision is the ultimate, but it is 'the beginning' of the eternity they inhabit in given immortality.

In all of this God is Father, the Son is the Lord of his people and their Elder Brother. The Spirit of life is the Fountain of Living Waters, the River of Life, from which they will forever draw life, and by whom they will ever praise, worship, adore and serve the Everlasting God, the Father of the true People of God.