

THE ASSEMBLY IN THE BIBLE (2)

—H. L. Heijkoop

We have seen that all three things whereby the love of the Father is revealed have left us with questions. The answer to the third question, which asked how God made us sit together in the heavenlies, follows immediately after in Ephesians 2:4-6. When we ponder over the answer we begin to understand Ephesians 3:9-11, "to enlighten all with the knowledge of what is the administration of the mystery hidden throughout the ages in God Who has created all things in order that now to the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies might be made known through the Assembly the all-various wisdom of God, according to the purpose of the ages which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

These verses say that the purpose of God is connected with the establishing of the Assembly and with the place which the Assembly receives. From all the blessings given to the Assembly, even the highest angels, "the principalities and the authorities in the heavenlies" learn to know "the all-various wisdom of God, according to the purpose of the ages." These are the same angels, who were in God's presence and shouted for joy when God created the universe (Job 38:7). But in these things, those angels saw only in a very imperfect way the character of God's wisdom. They would only come to know His perfect wisdom through the Assembly and through the things which God would give to the Assembly — through the place and the privileges the Assembly would possess.

In Ephesians 1, we are told how God has brought this about. Who is not surprised when reading these things? "What the surpassing greatness of His power towards us who believe, according to the working of the might of His strength in which He wrought in the Christ in raising Him from among the dead, and He set Him down at His right hand in the heavenlies."

So, God says to us, "Do you want to know how I fulfill My counsels, how I give you the blessings I have established in My counsels? Then look at Christ! The same power that raised Him from among the dead works also in you. The power that raised Him from among the dead, by which I gave Him a place at My right hand and put all things under His feet, also raises you from among the dead." That's what chapter 2 says! We who were dead in our offences and sins have been quickened (made alive) with the Christ. God also has raised us up together and has made us sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, putting us who were lying in a condition of death into the position that *He* occupies.

In Ephesians 1:20-22, we read what Christ's position is, "He set Him down at His right hand in the heavenlies, above every principality and authority, and power and dominion and every name named, not only in this age but also in that to come; and has put all things under His feet." This is exactly the same as we saw in 1 Corinthians 15. All things are subjected to Him with the exception of the Father Himself. But then comes the marvelous thing in verses 22-23, "And gave Him to be Head over all things to the Assembly, which is His body, the fullness of Him Who fills all in all." Here is the solution to our questions: God gave Christ as *Head over all things* to the Assembly. That is how God fulfills all His counsels!

When Christ rules over the universe, all will be subjected to Him. But is His body also subjected to Him? When a king is ruling, it would be absurd to say that his head rules but his body doesn't. If we used the picture of Christ as Bridegroom and the Assembly as bride, then we could say so. England has a queen but her husband is not a king: he does not have the same position that she has. In Ephesians 5, the picture of husband and wife is used because God the Holy Spirit there wants us to see what type of love relationship exists between Christ and His Assembly. But when the subject is the privileged position which we (the Assembly) have received, then the Holy Spirit uses another picture (type) — the type of a body with a head.

This is the solution to our questions. When Christ rules over all things as Head, then His body rules with Him since the head and body of a man are united.¹ When Christ possesses all the blessings in the heavenlies, then the Assembly will possess them too because she is *one body with Him*: He the Head, she the body. If Christ is the Son of God, then the Assembly must also have the place of sons of God. Could the Head possess anything and the body not have part in it?

¹ Here it bears repeating that Ephesians 1 shows our complete unification with His position — in all that He received as Man from God; no creature can ever be brought into the Godhead, but at the same time nothing comes closer to this than the thoughts here expressed.

Thus, Christ (the Head) has been so united to the Assembly (His body) that even the smallest separation between them is an impossibility. Separate my head from my body by as little as a millimeter and I am no longer a man: I am dead. No separation is possible. By means of this type, the Word of God makes it clear to us how completely united the Assembly and Christ are, and that is how God has performed His counsels of love and goodness. Those wonderful counsels are that we, once-miserable creatures will share in all that is the portion of the Lord Jesus — His own portion, the portion of God: all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies.

Isn't that wonderful? We can see in the above what place the Assembly has in the heart of God. We spoke already of the love of the Lord Jesus for His Assembly. But here we have the love of the *Father* because the "God of the Lord Jesus" is God the Father. We may also glance into the heart of the Father. He had determined in His counsel that the Assembly should possess all that the Lord Jesus possesses, that she should have a part in all the riches He has given to His Son. He had determined to bless the Assembly with all spiritual blessings because she should be united to Him. All things are put under His feet and the Assembly will, therefore, rule with Him over the universe.

Even the angels will occupy a place of subjection. This is a wonderful thought. If we read Revelation 4 and 5, we begin to see what a glorious results all of this has.

In Genesis and in other portions, we find certain orders in creation. Job 38:7 says that the morning stars "sang together" when the Lord created the heavens and the earth. This shows that the angels existed before the creation of the heaven and the earth. Colossians 1:16 says that the Lord also created the principalities in the heavens, the princes among the angels and the other angels, all lofty beings. In the Old Testament, we often find that God used angels to bring messages to men; angels were ambassadors-of-God to men. Stephen says in Acts 7:53 that Israel received the Law by the ministry of angels. Angels were beings who in the name of God came to men, who executed judgment over men, who kept the entrance to the garden of Eden so that no one could return there and who went out to do the will of God.

In Revelation 4, the Creator is seated upon the throne in His relationship to this earth; this is the significance of the rainbow. We see there the four living creatures in the midst and around the throne. They bear the same characteristics as the seraphim in Isaiah 6 and the cherubim in Ezekiel 1 and 10. Here we do not as yet see the angels. We see the throne with the Creator seated upon it, in the midst. We then see the four living creatures and in a second circle, the 24 thrones on which the elders are seated. The elders are a type of the glorified believers in heaven after the rapture, both the Old-Testament saints and the New Testament saints (the Assembly). But we do not find angels there.

In the *order in creation*, angels occupy the highest place. They are above men, in close relationship to God, specially to God on His throne. In Exodus 25 we see that two cherubim were over the ark, forming the throne of God. In Ezekiel 1:26, we also find the cherubim in connection with the throne, whereas in the tabernacle they themselves formed the throne. In Revelation 5, however, we see the Lord Jesus, not as the Creator but as the Saviour, as the Lamb "standing as slain" so we find there an entirely different order. The throne is still there and so are the living creatures but now they are no longer seen as an image of the angels since later we find the angels surrounding them. Here the living creatures are one with the 24 elders because both they and the 24 elders have harps and golden vials full of incense and they are standing together. From this moment on, they are united: the 24 elders are also directly connected with the throne. The angels are placed in the outer circle. As result of the salvation which our Lord has wrought, men have received a more privileged position close to the throne than have the angels. Isn't it wonderful that God has changed His creation-order in our favour so that He could give us this place?

Colossians 1 says that the Lord Jesus is the Creator of all things and that He, when He came on earth, was the Firstborn of all creation. We can understand that this had to be so. Could the Lord Jesus when He became Man and was born as a little baby, occupy a place below the angels? Could He Who created the universe be placed below the angels? Impossible! When the Creator enters His own creation, He must have the first place.

Let us assume that we are having a business meeting when the President of the United States suddenly enters the room. Would he not be given the place of honour even though he was not a member of the group? This would be done immediately: it could not be different.

So when the Creator humbled Himself to become Man, He had to receive the first place. That is why God's Word says in Colossians 1:15 that He is the Firstborn of all creation, the preeminent One. This means that He, even as Man, is above the angels.

But after He had finished the work, we also have been united to Him in this. We have become one with Him. Thus, if He is exalted above the angels, then we are too.

Could my head be placed over something without my body having part in it? Let us assume that I own a business. Could my head be the manager and my body not? Impossible! My body is inseparably connected with my head and what is due to my head is also due to my body. Thus when Christ is Head, the Firstborn-of-the-creation, then the Assembly must share in this, since she is His body.

Ephesians 1 thus shows us that Christ is Head above all and that God has given Him as Head over all things to the Assembly "which is His body, the fullness of Him Who fills all in all." Let us quietly ponder over these verses. Christ is "Head over all things." All is subjected to Him: heaven and earth, all that is created, angels and men, all things except the Father. And so, as Head over all things, God has given Him to the Assembly "which is His body", "the fullness of Him Who fills all in all." He is the One Who fills all in all, and yet the Word of God says here that He is not complete without the Assembly. The Assembly is "the fullness of Him Who fills all in all."

Can our minds grasp this? Here we see the Lord of glory, He Who accomplished the wonderful work on the cross, He Who created the heaven and the earth and Who called all things into being. He became true Man but even as Man, He carried all things by the Word of His power. All things have been put under His feet. He fills all in all.

And yet, without the Assembly, He is not complete. Can we understand that? Yes, for a head by itself is not complete. A head must have a body to be a complete man. So we find the wonderful truth that the Assembly is needed to make Christ into a complete Man. She is "the fullness of Him Who fills all in all." Would anyone have dared to dream of this? What wisdom and grace must this be that gave us such promises, such blessings! Could it ever have come into the heart or mind of a man that we would receive such a place? But God's Word tells us so!

Did we read these verses carefully? It doesn't say that God gave the Assembly to Christ. If that had been said we could, I believe, have understood it. Although when John 17:6 puts it that way it certainly amazes us to think that we had such value in the eyes of God that He, the Father, gave us as a gift to His Son. When we see ourselves — what we were and what we still often are in actual practice — can we understand how the almighty God could consider us a worthy present for His beloved Son, for Him Who created and possesses heaven and earth, to Whom belong all riches in the heavens? Doesn't it elude our grasp? Yet John 17:6 tells us, "Thine they were and Thou hast given them to Me." Marvelous thought for us that the Father so loves and values us both personally and collectively!

But here in Ephesians 1, we read something different. It does not say that the Father gave the Assembly to the Lord Jesus but that the Father gave the Lord Jesus as a gift to the Assembly: "and gave Him to be Head over all things to the Assembly." Can we understand that? By this, God shows us how close to His heart the Assembly is. If we would estimate this in the light of *our* way of giving it would seem to signify that the Assembly is to God of more value than His Son since He gives His Son as a gift to the Assembly. Everyone realizes that the person to whom *we* give a gift, has greater value to us than the gift itself. *We* would not give someone a thing of greater value than he himself is to us. But *God* in His grace *does give in this way*. He is *the Giver*. And so the Word of God says here that God has given Christ (the greater value) to the Assembly (the lesser value) so that He may be her Head. God could not, reverently spoken, have been more explicit in expressing His evaluation of the Assembly which, with Christ, is dearest to His heart.

Here we see the complete revelation of the love of the Father. The Father wanted to make us holy and blameless before Him in love. He desired to give us the place of sons and to bless us with all spiritual blessings. There was only one way to make this possible: we had to be united with the Lord Jesus. To ensure our receiving all things and our practical enjoyment of all the things which He had determined in His heart to give us, He gave us Christ as Head, as Head of the Assembly.

Herein we see the love of the Father for the Assembly. Doesn't this give us some idea of the value of the Assembly to God and what an infinite privilege it is to be part of this Assembly? All the love of the Lord Jesus and of the Father go out to her. Therefore, the Father gave His own Son as her Head because only in this way would she be able to enjoy all things and to take practical possession of all things that were in His heart to give to her: all blessings which only an almighty God could give.

To be cont'd.

THE STONE

— D. B. E. Atkins

We have been much struck by the references, both in the Old and in the New Testament, to the Lord Jesus as the Stone or the Cornerstone. It is another of those wonderful thoughts running through Scripture which authenticates it again as the Word of God.

In Psalm 118: 22 and 23, we read, "The Stone which the builders rejected hath become the Head of the corner; This is of Jehovah; it is wonderful in our eyes." There seems little room for doubt that this refers to Israel's rejection of the Lord Jesus and His being owned when the kingdom is set up. Again we have a very similar word in Isaiah 28:16, "Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Behold I lay in Zion a Stone, a tried Stone, a precious Cornerstone, a sure foundation: he that trusteth shall not make haste." It seems that this has similar reference and when God takes up dealings and relationship again with His People in Zion, His holy city, it will be on the sure basis and foundation of His own Son.

Again in Zechariah 10:4, "From Him (Jehovah) shall come forth the Cornerstone," and in slightly different words in chapter 4:7, "He shall bring forth the Headstone with shoutings: Grace, grace unto it." These again are two sure references to the Lord Jesus, but it is not until we come to the New Testament that we have the full explanation of these Old Testament utterances. Beloved of the Lord, especially the younger, does this not underline once again, the importance of knowing both the Old and the New Testament? Oh, don't neglect the Old Testament because you think that you can find simple food for your soul in the New Testament and that this will suffice, because it doesn't! You will miss some lovely pictures of our blessed Lord and you will not know the original settings of those beautiful quotations in the New Testament, and there are many of them.

It must be said also that it may take hours of patient searching and thought, and above all, prayer, before a certain line of truth is laid bare to the seeker.

But we pass to the first New Testament Scripture on the subject the words of the Lord Jesus Himself in the incident of Matthew 21: 33-45, "Have ye never read in the Scriptures, The Stone which they that builded rejected, this has become the Corner-stone; this is of the Lord, and it is wonderful in our eyes? Therefore I say to you, that the kingdom of God shall be taken from you and shall be given to a nation producing the fruits of it. And he that falls on this Stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder" (4244).

Here is the explanation of the Old Testament by the Lord Himself and if we do not understand it, it is quite obvious from verses 45-46 that the chief priests and Pharisees did, and hated Him for it. Did they not grasp that He meant they would be set aside and the blessing given to others? Had they not already in their hearts rejected the Stone? This same incident is recorded in the other synoptic gospels (Mk. 12:1-12 and Lk. 10:9-19).

The meaning stands out even plainer in Peter's words during the incident of Acts 3 and 4 in verses 10-12. Here he says plainly that the Lord Jesus is the Stone and that salvation is solely by the One Whom they had crucified and by no other, and in the Name which they so bitterly hated.

In Romans 9, Paul takes up the same type of thought and the reference there is both to Isaiah 28:16 and to 8:14, which is very similar. He says (v. 33), "They have stumbled at the stumbling stone, according as it is written, Behold I place in Zion a stone of stumbling and rock of offence: and he that believes on Him shall not be ashamed." Israel had not kept the law and now they had stumbled at the Stumbling-stone, preferring in their blindness to try to keep the law rather than to humble themselves and accept the grace that God offered. Such is the heart of man!

In Ephesians 2:20, the Lord Jesus is seen as the chief Cornerstone of the whole edifice of the assembly, and this seems to bring the thought a step further, for the whole building is keyed in around Him, and He is vital to the whole structure holding together.

Lastly we have a similar thought in 1 Peter 2:4-10 and this seems to be the culmination, for the hope in chapter 1:3, is a living one, and now in chapter 2, we are the living stones in the spiritual house, to offer up sacrifices of praise to God. Here we are shown that to those who do not believe, the Stone becomes a stone of stumbling and rock of offence. But "to you therefore who believe is the preciousness." So to those of us who know the Lord Jesus, He is the Corner-stone and the Head of the corner. Is it not wonderful that we are framed together in Him and that we are too "a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a people for a possession, that ye might show forth the excellencies of Him Who has called you out of darkness to His wonderful light: who once were not a people, but now God's people, who were not enjoying mercy, but now have found mercy" (vv. 9 and 10).

The last reference which we desire to take up stands entirely on its own and, therefore, we deal with it separately. It is the reference in Daniel 2: 31-45, to the Stone which was "cut out without hands" (verse 34) in Nebuchadnezzar's dream and which shattered the image and "became a great mountain and filled the whole earth." The Stone is clearly another

reference to the Lord Jesus and He personally, will shatter the revived Roman Empire (the feet of iron and clay) — in fact, He will put down all authority and reign without a rival.

It is not our purpose to look at the image itself — the four empires of which it is symbolic are well known — but it is very much in keeping with what we have already seen, to grasp that the once rejected Lord Jesus will soon occupy the supreme place, not only in heaven but on earth. He must reign until His enemies be made the footstool of His feet, and if we link the thought with Psalm 72, we find that there are wonderful thoughts there of great David's greater Son. There His dominion is described as being from sea to sea and shore to shore.

The stone will indeed become a great mountain and fill the whole earth. Perhaps what is said in Daniel looks on the Davidic rather than on the Solomonic side of His reign. He must put down all power and authority before He can reign as supreme and absolute. Let us never look on His reign as democratic — if there is to be real blessing He must, and He will: reign as a despot with absolute and complete authority. If this were not so, why do we find Psalms like the 2nd?

We do trust that in writing these few words we shall at least have encouraged some to look more closely at the Scriptures to see the many glories of the Lord Jesus. If in any sense we have, however feebly, underlined some of these, then our labour will not have been in vain in the Lord.

*Lord, our hearts are burning
For the glorious day,
When at Thy returning
All shall own Thy sway.
Chains shall break before Thee,
Mighty King of kings;
Angels will adore Thee,
While creation sings.*

C. A. Wellesley. (Miss)