

### Turning the World Upside Down (3) — A Study of the Book of Acts

—W.D. Hayhoe

*In this article we take a last look at the history of the early Church as recorded in the Acts. So far we have considered ten factors that helped the early believers to "turn the world upside down" (Acts 17:6—KJV):*

1. The proof of the resurrection
2. The position of the glorified Christ
3. The power of the Name
4. The presence of the Holy Spirit
5. The perseverance in prayer
6. The place of the Word of God
7. The priority of evangelism
8. The preaching of repentance
9. The practice of baptism
10. The pattern of the Church established

*Now we take a look at the final four factors.*

#### *11. The People-oriented Outreach*

Christians often have the impression that revival and rapid expansion of the Church take place only through mass evangelism and crusades. It is true that the great revival of Wesley and Whitfield involved daily meetings where the attendance was often in the range of 10,000 to 30,000. In our own day, many have been converted through Billy Graham Crusades where over 100,000 have been gathered together in arenas and public auditoriums. However, evangelism explosion can also take place through a one-on-one type of approach. Daws Trotman, founder of the Navigators ministry, is well-known for his simple calculation that if each believer was used once a year for the conversion and discipleship of another, the Church would double every year. In practice we know that this does not happen. Many believers are not awake to their responsibility in personal evangelism and discipleship, and some believers inevitably fall back into the world. Nevertheless, history has its examples of remarkable growth through this type of ministry.

When we turn to the Gospels, we often see our blessed Lord surrounded by multitudes of hungry souls — men, women, and children. He preached to crowds of 5,000 or more. However, the Gospels, and especially John, also demonstrate the importance of the individual to the Lord Jesus. He often took precious time out of His busy schedule to deal at length with one person. Consider the personal contact He had with Nathanael (Jn. 1), with Nicodemus (Jn. 3), with the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4), with the nobleman's son (Jn. 4), with the lame man (Jn. 5), with the adulterous woman (Jn. 8), with the blind man (Jn. 9), and with Lazarus (Jn. 11). Each individual was important to Him, as we also know from our own spiritual experience.

This "people-oriented ministry" is an essential component of Church growth, as demonstrated also in the book of Acts. Consider how much of this narrative of the early Church is devoted to describing the one-on-one encounters and discipleship sessions that took place:

1. Philip preached to the multitudes in Samaria, but he also was sent to Gaza to witness to one man, the Ethiopian eunuch (ch. 8),
2. Ananias helped and counselled the apostle Paul after his Damascus road conversion (ch. 9),
3. Barnabas took hold of Paul and introduced him to the other believers (ch. 9),
4. Peter went to the house of Cornelius (ch. 10),
5. Paul called Timothy to work with him (ch. 16),
6. Paul and Silas stayed at Lydia's house (ch. 16),
7. Paul and Silas witnessed to the jailor (ch. 16),
8. Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos and "explained to him the way of God more accurately" (18:26),
9. Paul witnessed to Felix (ch. 24) and Agrippa (ch. 26).

We may not have the gift to preach to large groups. There may not be a great revival as in the days of Wesley and Whitfield, but each of us, following the example of the Lord Jesus, can be concerned for individual souls. We can witness to unbelievers, and disciple believers in our own little way, and the Lord will take notice of it. And each "living stone" added to the Church will be for His glory.

## 12. The Proclamation of the Kingdom

September 12, 1988, was fixed by some Christians as the day when the Lord would return. They had carefully and laboriously calculated the date by many different arguments. Hundreds of thousands of copies of their "88 Reasons" were distributed throughout North America. The fact that you are presently reading these words shows that they were wrong!

There have always been believers who have wanted to know the exact day in which the Lord was returning. The first question asked in the book of Acts, addressed to the Lord by His disciples, was "Lord, is it at this time Thou art restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (1:6). To this He replied, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority" (1:7). He then told them what *was* their responsibility, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses". We have already considered this verse in previous sections.

The Lord's answer to His disciples teaches us that the dispensation of the kingdom is future, and that it is not our business to know the time that God has fixed for the kingdom to start, although present events may encourage us to think that it is near. In this future day, the kingdom will be set up in glory on the earth, and Christ will rule over the earth in power. The present time is still the Church dispensation, when God is calling out a people for His name, and when we are still under the great commission. The presence of the Holy Spirit as the power of mission work, and our position as witnesses "even to the remotest part of the earth," are still in force.

Nevertheless, there is a present aspect to the kingdom, as the book of Acts shows us. Consider the following seven references:

1. After His resurrection, the Lord Jesus spoke with His own "of the things concerning the kingdom of God" (1:3),
2. In Samaria, Philip preached "the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (8:12),
3. Paul told the believers in Lystra that "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (14:22),
4. In the synagogue in Ephesus, Paul was "reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God" (19:8),
5. When Paul met with the Ephesian elders, he reminded them that he "went about preaching the kingdom" (20:25),
6. In Rome, Paul was "explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God" (28:23),
7. The book of Acts ends with Paul "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered" (28:30).

A consideration of these seven scriptures, together with the many times that the "kingdom" is mentioned in the four Gospels, and the few times it is mentioned in the Epistles, shows us that the term "kingdom of God" has at least two different aspects to it, one present, the other future. The future kingdom will be a *visible* kingdom set up in power where people will be forced to acknowledge God's authority. The present kingdom is an *invisible* sphere where God's authority is willingly accepted in the lives of believers. The seven references in the book of Acts refer to this latter aspect.

The teaching of the kingdom of God, and how it applies to us as believers in the present time, can be summarized in the following two general aspects:

1. *New Birth*: this is the requirement to enter into the kingdom of God. The Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:3,5). At another time, the Lord said, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all" (Lk. 18:17). The kingdom of God requires a complete change in our nature, the reception of a new nature, which is accompanied by simple childlike faith. This is undoubtedly one of the things that Philip and Paul taught the people in the book of Acts when they preached the kingdom of God.

2. *New Behaviour*: only holy living is suitable to the kingdom of God, as Paul warned the Corinthian and Galatian believers. "Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21). To the Roman believers, Paul pointed out that "the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). The kingdom of God is the moral sphere where the will of God reigns supreme. The proof that we are part of this kingdom is our holy lifestyle. This was an integral part of the teaching the new believers in the book of Acts received, as evidenced by these references.

One of the reasons that evangelical Christianity has such a bad testimony at present in North America is that these moral principles are not sufficiently emphasized and practiced. In the future day, the kingdom of God will be set up in power, and God's will be universally recognized. At present, believers have the privilege of "bringing on the kingdom" by recognizing God's will in their lives from day to day. Our holy lifestyle, not our loud words, are what give true power to our Christian witness, for "the kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power" (1 Cor. 4:20).

### 13. *The Principle of Godly Leadership*

Another principle in our study of the dynamics of Church growth, one that balances out a previous point about divine calling of God's servants (section #10), is that of proper leadership. Some over-emphasize this, making it almost everything, and others minimize or neglect it. A careful study of Acts, and of the New Testament, will show its importance in the Lord's work, but not to the exclusion of other important points.

First, we notice that God intended there to be a *plurality* of leadership. The fact that the Lord appointed 12 apostles without making one of them head over the others clearly proves this. It was never His intention that one man direct the work or preside over the Church, either locally or globally. In the Acts we see the 12 apostles praying, ministering the Word and directing the work together (6:2-4). When the Church at Antioch became established, five men ministered among them (13:1). Paul and Barnabas appointed a plurality of elders in the newly-formed churches among the Gentiles (14:23).<sup>1</sup> At the important council in Jerusalem, it appears that a large group of apostles and elders met together (15:4,22).

Second, we note that God intended there to be *unity* in the leadership. The issue at the Jerusalem council was the very important matter of whether the Gentiles had to be circumcised to be part of the Church. Paul and Barnabas had been preaching salvation by the grace of God to the Gentiles, and then some Jewish teachers appeared teaching that they had to also be circumcised. A Church split was in the making. But God prevented that by having Paul and Barnabas go up to Jerusalem:

*"Antioch and Jerusalem were tending towards a split; now, if Paul had settled it, each would have gone its own way, and we should have had two churches. God hindered that, and made Jerusalem set the Gentiles free; so keeping up the unity practically."<sup>2</sup>*

Today we may face a similar situation. Some leaders who tend towards legalism, like those in Jerusalem, may impose more than is necessary on believers, or may hinder or oppose the exercise of others to preach the gospel in full liberty. The latter may stand up against this, like Paul. They may wish to be free from the legalizing influence, and a split may be in the making.<sup>3</sup> But Paul had to learn to work with the Jerusalem church, even though he could not be bound by their legalism in his mission. At the council meeting, God gave James and the others the spiritual wisdom to not impose this legalism on the Gentile believers, and thus unity was maintained. May similar grace be given to both sides in like situations today!

Finally, the principles of *integrity* and *industry* among leadership are developed in Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. He reminded them that neither covetousness of money (v. 33) nor self-seeking (v. 34) had motivated him during his three year service among them. He could appeal to them with integrity of heart. He was not a "power seeker." Furthermore, rather than depending on them or expecting to be supported by them, he had worked with his own hands to be able to support himself and also give to the poor (v. 35). There is certainly nothing wrong with the Lord's servants doing some tent making on the side to support their work. On the other hand, Paul also teaches in 1 Corinthians 9 that the one who works in the gospel should live off the gospel.

### 14. *The Progress despite Great Opposition*

The final point that we notice in Acts is that true Church growth took place in spite of great opposition, or even because of it. When the persecution started in Jerusalem, "they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word"

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<sup>1</sup> In my recent booklet, "SHEPHERD MY SHEEP: THE ROLE OF ELDERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH," the question of whether or not we have the authority to officially appoint elders today as did the apostles was taken up. In either case, there is no doubt that there should be men functioning as elders today.

<sup>2</sup> J. N. Darby, MISCELLANEOUS WRITINGS, Vol. 4, p. 116.

<sup>3</sup> The opposite may also occur, where some are contending for a more liberal, less restrictive lifestyle which is not in accordance with God's Word.

(8:4 — KJV). As a result of this persecution, the gospel spread first to Judea, Samaria, and Galilee (9:31), and then to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch (11:19).

Someone has written that "the Lord's work only progresses along a pathway of suffering and sacrifice." Acts certainly demonstrates this. In ch. 4, Peter and John were arrested by the priests and Sadducees and thrown into jail. In ch. 5, the high priests threw all of the apostles into jail. In ch. 6-7, the freemen of the Synagogue stoned Stephen to death. In ch. 8, a great persecution arose against the Church. In ch. 9, the Jews tried to kill the newly converted Paul. In ch. 12, Herod killed James and put Peter into prison. In ch. 13, devout women of prominence persecuted Paul. In ch. 15, legalistic believers within the Church opposed him. In ch. 16, Roman magistrates threw him in jail. In ch. 19, business interests in Ephesus aroused the deadly hatred of the artisans against him.

If we are serious about preaching the gospel to the world, we had better be advised that we will be opposed from all sides. Nevertheless, we notice that the early believers certainly did not have a "persecution complex." Rather, they appealed to the governmental authorities wherever they could. Paul didn't hesitate to use his Roman citizenship several times (16:35-39, 22:25). This was consistent with his teaching in Romans 13 that we should be subject to authorities, for complimentary to this is appeal to the authorities for justice to be done. Nevertheless, the apostle suffered for the gospel as very few ever have (2 Cor. 11).

Elof and Isabel Anderson were missionaries in the Northwest part of Colombia for forty years. The story of how the Church there grew under terrible persecution is told in their stirring account, *Hacaritama*, named after the region where they worked. In the decade 1948-1958, a period of anarchy and civil war between Conservatives and Liberals, called "La Violencia," was unleashed throughout the country. As many as 300,000 people lost their lives. Colombia has not yet recovered.

During "La Violencia," the believers were often made the scapegoats. Many were killed, and many more dispossessed of their goods. The missionaries themselves, although American citizens, suffered beating and imprisonment. They recount how that, time and time again, the believers appealed to the authorities to have their properties returned to them, and to have the liberty to meet in peace, as the Colombian constitution had promised them. But they were seldom given justice. It was bitter for them to learn that the authorities, whom they had respected and for whom they had often prayed, usually had no interest in protecting them. They suffered terribly, but during this time the Church spread and grew. As Paul said to the new believers in Acts 14:22, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

David Livingstone, the missionary who opened up Africa to the gospel despite great opposition from European slave traders as well as from local chieftains, wrote to his home mission directors when he was 30, that he was at their disposal "to go anywhere, provided it be forward!" Likewise in Acts, the disciples moved forward. At the beginning they were given the great commission: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (1:8).

The book of Acts is the history of their fulfilling this commission: Jerusalem (Acts 1-7), Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12), and the remotest part of the Roman earth (Acts 13-28). May God give us similar grace and power today to bring the gospel to our Jerusalem, our Judea and Samaria, and the remotest parts of our earth, not only that souls might be saved, but that there might be a people for "His name" (15:14,17).

### *Conclusion*

Can these principles and practices of the early Church be applied today in our modern age? In our geographical location? In our Christian fellowship? Do we have any other option but to obey the calling the Lord has given us, to be His witnesses, recipients of the vision of the glorified Christ, faithful in prayer, preaching the Word, establishing the pattern, making progress against great opposition?

Let us start now, earnestly praying for spiritual revival for our generation, seeking to be filled and directed by the Holy Spirit, memorizing and meditating on the Scriptures until our minds and hearts are saturated, devising methods for reaching the lost of our day. Let us start new evangelistic outreaches and home Bible studies; establish (in much weakness, it may be) the Biblical pattern for the local church; pray that the Lord raise up godly, plural leadership. "Therefore since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy," let us not lose heart (2 Cor. 4:1). Let us not give up, but look up, get up, and get going!

The dauntless founder of the Sudan Interior Mission, Rowland Bingham, once wrote:

"The normal life of the Christian is a triumphant life. The provision made for triumph is such that it is disloyal to consider defeat. We are always to triumph' (2 Cor. 2:14)."

Margaret Clarkson originally hoped to go overseas, but ended up as a school teacher in the isolated Canadian north. Out of this lonely experience came the well-known missionary hymn, "So send I you." Her later, more Biblical, version follows:

*So send I you — grace made strong to triumph  
O'er hosts of hell, o'er darkness, death and sin;  
My name to bear, and in that name to conquer,  
So send I you, My victory to win.*

*So send I you — to take to souls in bondage  
The word of truth that sets the captive free;  
To break the bonds of sin, to loose death's fetters,  
So send I you, to bring the lost to Me.*

These words give the essence of the book of Acts.

*(Scripture quotations from the NASB)  
The End*

## Outline for Bible Study (43)

### 89. The reign of Uzziah, Jotham, and Ahaz —2 Kings 15-16; 2 Chronicles 26-28

#### Outline

1. Uzziah (or Azariah)
  - a. Prosperity 2 Ki. 15:1-7; 2 Chr. 26:1-15
  - b. Sacrifices, Leprosy 2 Chr. 26:16-23
2. Jotham 2 Ki. 15:32-38; 2 Chr. 27
3. Ahaz
  - a. Idolatry 2 Ki. 16:1-4; 2 Chr. 28:1-4
  - b. Syria 2 Ki. 16:5-6; 2 Chr. 28:5-15; Is. 7
  - c. Assyria 2 Ki. 16:7-9; 2 Chr. 28:16-27
  - d. Altar from Damascus, Temple closed 2 Ki. 16:10-20

#### Explanation

1a. Uzziah prospered as long as he sought the Lord. He successfully fought against the Philistines and the Arabians, fortified Jerusalem, and strengthened the army. God was with him in all that he did (2 Chr. 26:5-15).

1b. But then pride entered his heart. Not satisfied with being king, he also wanted to be priest. The faithfulness of the high priest, Azariah, and the other priests aroused his anger (2 Chr. 26:18-19). But the Lord intervened — leprosy sprung up in his forehead! He ended his life cut off from God's house and removed from the throne, living in a separate house.

2. His son Jotham did that which was right in the sight of the Lord (2 Ki. 15:34; 2 Chr. 27:2). He built cities, castles and towers, and subdued the Ammonites.

3a. Ahaz, the son of Jotham, did not follow in his father's footsteps. He burned his sons in idolatrous ceremonies.

3b. A battle with Israel cost him the lives of 120,000 soldiers, while 200,000 more were taken captive. Through the prophet Oded, God told Israel to set these captives free, and they obeyed. But then God allowed Syria to take Elath in the South of Judah.

3c. Ahaz called for help from Assyria, and although he paid them with the precious things taken from the temple and his own palace, the Assyrians were of no help.

3d. While in Damascus, paying respects to the King of Assyria, Ahaz saw the idol altar there and told the priest in Jerusalem to copy it. The altar of burnt-offering was set aside for divination. His whole attitude demonstrated that he didn't want to have anything to do with God. This is shown clearly in Isaiah 7. Patience from God's side (Is. 7:39) was met by arrogant pride on the part of Ahaz (Is. 7:10-12). Some prominent men in the ten tribes obeyed the prophet of Jehovah whereas Ahaz didn't listen to God (2 Chr. 28:9-15). When death came, Ahaz was not considered worthy to be buried in the sepulchres of the kings.

### *Lesson*

Uzziah's lesson to all who walk with the Lord is that they remain vulnerable to the sin of pride, and there is no telling where this sin might take them.

From Jotham we learn that if we walk faithfully with the Lord, He will bless us.

In Ahaz we see that the more man shows his antagonism toward God, the more gloriously God shows His mercy and grace. Despite Ahaz' defiant attitude, God gave him the promise of the birth of Immanuel (Is. 7:14; Mt. 1:23).

## **90. Revival under Hezekiah, Sennacherib. — 2 Chronicles 29:1-32:33; 2 Kings 18-19**

### *Outline*

1. The Worship of Jehovah restored    2 Kings 18:1-8
2. Sennacherib                            2 Kings 18:13-37
3. Hezekiah's Prayer answered        2 Kings 19

### *Explanation*

1. Just before the fall of the ten tribes (Israel), the kingdom of Judah experienced a revival under the God-fearing king Hezekiah, who restored the worship of Jehovah according to the commandments. He had the temple cleansed and, remembering the unity of the twelve tribes, invited all Israel to come and celebrate the passover (2 Chr. 30).

2. The threat of the Assyrians tested Hezekiah's faith.

3. Hezekiah was saved because of his steady confidence in Jehovah who answered his cry (Ps. 46:1; 145:18-19). He prayed to God about the threat and spread the menacing letter before the Lord in the temple. In response, God saved His covenant people from their enemies through His mighty intervention (Ps. 33:16-22).

### *Lesson*

Hezekiah, a man full of godly energy and true dedication to Jehovah (2 Pet. 1:5), was a picture of the King in the Kingdom of God. During Hezekiah's life God showed him that "all the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies" (Ps. 25:10).

*To be cont'd*

### **Ponder this!**

One asked Robert Chapman, the well-known evangelist:

"Do you think that a newly converted Christian should right away begin to do something for the Lord?"

"No," he answered, "I don't think so."

"How is that?" Was the surprised reaction.

"I believe," Chapman replied, "that they should do *everything* for the Lord."

## Questions and Answers

*We recently received a series of thought-provoking questions. They are interesting enough to be shared with all our readers. Perhaps others will be prompted to ask questions as well, so that we may have an exchange between the readers and the editor. Any questions will also be answered personally, to avoid a delay for the one who asks the question.*

*Q1. Hebrews 8:7 tells us that the first covenant was faulty. What were its faults that caused the need for the second?*

A1. The first covenant was announced to Israel in the wilderness (Ex. 19:5-6) and sealed with them in Exodus 24:1-8 after God had given its details in chapters 19 to 23. God made this covenant with Israel on the basis of their responsibility. He said, "If ye will hearken to My voice indeed and keep My covenant, then shall ye be..." (19:5). It expected man in his own strength to keep God's commandment. Full of confidence, the Israelites twice replied, "All that Jehovah has spoken we will do!" (19:8; 24:3). They broke that covenant within 40 days. This proved that there is no strength in a man to do God's will. If salvation depended on our keeping commandments we would all perish. And so we see that the old covenant was faulty in that it counted on strength in man, and there was none (see Rom 7).

God knew this beforehand, but He wanted to demonstrate it to man. But God also had a plan — He would make a new covenant with Israel. He promised it through Jeremiah (31:31-34). To this new covenant with Israel, Hebrews 8:7 refers. This new covenant is better, in that it does not expect strength in man, it counts on what God does. When Israel repents in days to come (and when we repent today) God does something to them (as He does to us today). He gives a new heart, a new life, to those who truly repent. That life is eternal life (Jn. 5:24), that life is Christ (Col. 3:4), that life gives us knowledge of the Father and the Son (Jn. 17:3). Therefore Hebrews 8:10 says that the law of God will be written on their hearts. They will be born-again.

*Q2. We know that during the time of ignorance God overlooked sins. Now suppose someone has accepted the Lord Jesus as Saviour and is baptized but then goes secretly back to the world of sin, how can his sins be forgiven? (Acts 17:30; Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-27; Lk. 9:62).*

A2. To start with, read Romans 5:25-26. The basis of all forgiveness of sins is the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross. There, He paid for the sins of all who believe in Him, and besides, He was made sin for us (1 Pet. 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:21 — *sin* is the root on which the fruit, *sins*, grow). When we deal with questions of this kind we need to be aware that we can see things only from man's side, God sees His side as well. When we see someone who confesses to believe in the Lord Jesus, he may be a true believer, he may also merely say so for one reason or another. Of course, *you* know whether you are true in your confession and God knows that. However, we cannot really know it of each other, but can only go by appearances.

If one is a true believer, he will never perish, he has received eternal life (Jn. 10:27-29). Not only have his past sins been borne by the Lord Jesus, but also his future ones. Thank God this is so, because since I first came to the Lord Jesus to confess my sins, I have sinned daily. I have not tried to sin on purpose, but God's yardstick is, whatever is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23), and measured by that, we all fall short daily. When Christ died, all my sins were future, yet He died for them all and paid the price. And although I cannot understand or explain it, I know that all my sins, both past and future are forgiven, I will not perish, for I have eternal life (Jn. 5:24).

But now there is someone who willfully sins, what about him? There we have a situation that only God can assess. For us it looks like he is one of whom Hebrews 6:4-6 speaks, and therefore there is no hope for him. But this would also mean that his past profession of faith has not been genuine; he was a fake. That is how it looks to us. But we should not forget that God, who sees his heart, knows if his confession was true. If that is the case, then God will bring him back to Himself. The Lord Jesus says that no one who has been given to Him will be plucked out of His hand or out of the hand of the Father (Jn. 10:28-29). So, we can only act towards such a person on the basis of what we see, and treat him as one who has denied the faith. But we ought to realize that God may see what we cannot, and that God will lead him back.

Those who do not know God often react when they hear this by saying, "Well then you can just go on sinning!" A true Christian will never say that. Paul answered such people in Romans 6, "Far be the thought!" When we sin, we lose the

precious fellowship we have with the Father. Only when we confess is that fellowship restored. When you were a child in your father's house and you did something wrong, you could not look your father in the eye although you remained his child. In the same way, we have no fellowship with the Father until we have cleared matters up, yet we need not fear of losing our position as sons of the Father, for we have been born of God.

In Luke 9:62 it is not a question of sinning but of being occupied with (even good) things, in this world. One ought to honour one's father, and to bury him is certainly to honour him. But if doing so keeps us from following the Lord, we are looking back and not fit for the kingdom. Who loves father or mother more than the Lord is not worthy of Him.

*To be cont'd*

## The Seven Pillars of Wisdom's House (1) — Divine Mysteries

—T. L. Mather

### *Wisdom's house*

Filled with wisdom as Solomon was, he could not plumb the depths of Proverbs 9:1 as he penned it: "Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars." The first part of this sentence, "Wisdom has built her house," is clear. We know that in Wisdom's house her children find rest, and are taught of God. The second part of this sentence is figurative and full of spiritual teaching. The pillars in Wisdom's house speak of what supports and exalts it. In Wisdom's house seven pillars have been hewn out. We believe these seven pillars are figures of seven mysteries, seven great, divine secrets now revealed to us.



These seven great secrets originate with God's desire to make Himself known in time. In a past eternity, He had His counsels, known only to Himself, to carry out this purpose. But His Son, when He appeared on this earth, opened up these secrets to His inner circle for the first time. These were the mysteries of His kingdom. He revealed them when it was clear that He was rejected as King, and so would return to His Father without His kingdom. When He was in glory, the way was opened up for Paul mostly, and John to a lesser degree, to reveal the other mysteries. This gives us a key to the mysteries — man's rejection of Christ, and God's various responses to that rejection in heaven and earth. God gave us the mysteries because we share Christ's rejection. He does not want us to forget that we will also share His glory.

### *An introduction to the Mysteries*

A mystery is a secret, but it is more than a secret, just as a sign is a miracle, but more than a miracle. There are no mysteries in the Old Testament, only secrets. God hid the mysteries until Christ was rejected. The mysteries tell us God's purposes for the glory of His Son whom man rejected. God told Daniel the secret of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, but its deeper meaning was hidden until revealed in the mysteries of the New Testament.



To understand a mystery requires divine initiation, implicit in which is the gift of the Holy Spirit as our teacher, something unknown to the Old Testament saints. J.N.Darby puts it succinctly:

*"The initiated know mysteries, the uninitiated not. That is the meaning of the word; but the true initiated are those taught of God."*<sup>4</sup>

And on the effect of being initiated into the mysteries he says:

*"It brings us into a totally new world."*<sup>5</sup>

Our spirits escape the oppression of this world, and soar into the realm of divine thoughts and purposes.

Therefore, in 1 Corinthians 2:7, Paul says, "We speak God's wisdom in a mystery, that hidden wisdom which God had predetermined before the ages for our glory." In initiating us into His richest and deepest mysteries, God repeats the warning of 1 Corinthians 8:1, "Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies." So in 1 Corinthians 13:2, Paul writes, "And if I have prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge...but have not love, I am nothing." Does Paul then disparage God's mysteries, Paul, the man God used to reveal most of them? Hardly! In 1 Corinthians 4:1 he writes, "Let a man so account of us as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." Paul is simply insisting on a balance between the knowledge of God's mysteries and love, the bond of perfectness. When this is achieved, the truth is adorned with love and the body of Christ is edified.

Because the mysteries are so rich in divine thoughts, there are several ways of looking at them. The method of presentation chosen here delineates seven mysteries, some of which combine under a common heading to which they are tributary. These mysteries are the seven pillars of Wisdom's house.

### *The Mystery of God*

The first of the seven mysteries we will investigate is known as the *mystery of God*. This is not a generalized term, but a mystery with a specific meaning, standing apart from all the other mysteries. It is the source mystery from which the others flow, although its hidden spring is "the mystery of God's will," which we will by-pass until the close of this study. Paul stresses the importance of the mystery of God in Colossians 2:2. He says, "The full knowledge of the mystery of God; in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge."<sup>6</sup> The mystery of God may be defined as the understanding of why God allows evil to flourish in the world — even to triumph over good at times — without judging it.<sup>7</sup> To understand why God is not presently a God of judgment is to understand His ways and purposes, to grasp the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

This perplexing question of the prevalence of evil in human affairs is an enigma, not only to men of the world, but also to many of God's people. Jonah was offended at God because He did not judge Nineveh after he had witnessed to it. James and John wanted fire to come down from heaven to burn up the ungodly. God's people justify God in His ways, however, even if they do not understand them. The world tends to accuse God of disinterest in human suffering because, being all powerful, He does not intervene in wars, terrorism, plagues, disease, famines, moral corruption, and so forth. Some have even had hard thoughts about God as we see in Luke 19:21, "I feared thee because thou art a harsh man." This attitude is unconsciously behind the clauses in insurance policies which classify natural disasters as "acts of God." An even better illustration is an incident which took place in a German concentration camp. A Rabbi, who was waiting his doom in the gas chambers, was exhorting a group of his fellow Jewish prisoners to maintain their belief in God. One young Jew protested, "If God exists, He must be a monster, to allow what is going on here." True enough, the god who is responsible for the chaos in the world is a monster. In Revelation 12:3 he is called "a great red dragon."

#### *a. The part played in the mystery of God by Satan's present rule of the world.*

Satan's rule over the world, the source of its misery, is beyond question. In 2 Thessalonians 2:7, Paul speaks of it as the mystery of lawlessness, something which sheds light on the mystery of God. He noted the workings of the mystery of lawlessness even in his days, even then it was permitted by God in His wisdom. He tells us that God checks its full-blown

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<sup>4</sup> J. N. Darby, "Inspiration and Interpretation," COLLECTED WRITINGS, (Reprinted —H. L. Heijkoop, 1971), Vol. 9, p. 248.

<sup>5</sup> J. N. Darby, "The Christian not of the World," *Ibid*, Vol. 31, p. 222.

<sup>6</sup> Following J. N. Darby's translation, we believe the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in the mystery of God, rather than in Christ, as many translations (KJV, NIV, NASB) give.

<sup>7</sup> There are of course providential checks, but these do not invalidate the principle.

wickedness at present, but will eventually let Satan have his way in the end time. However, that is another matter, and our concern here is primarily to establish the fact of his rule at the present time. In Ephesians 2:2 (KJV) he is called the prince of the power of the air. He governs evil spirits who support his throne, who are referred to in Ephesians 6:12 (KJV) as "the rulers of the darkness of this world." Because of this "the whole world lies in the wicked one" as 1 John 5:19 tells us, meaning that man is happy with the world as it is, the way the wicked one organised it. Only God's people see it for what it really is: governed by "the prince of this world" (Jn. 14:30). Satan boasted of his rule to the Lord in the temptation account of Luke 4:5-6, "and the devil, leading Him up into a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the habitable world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, all this power will I give Thee, and the glory of them, for that is delivered to me, and to whomsoever I will I give it." Since these Scriptures tell us that Satan's rule over the world is an uncontested fact, the mystery of God becomes a question of "How long, O Lord, holy and true?" (Rev. 6:10 — KJV).

#### b. Why God is not judging evil now but will do so later

God has postponed judgment because this is a day of salvation. Man has abused the acceptable year of the Lord. Solomon read the human heart in Ecclesiastes 8:11, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." God on the other hand is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). But there is a time limit to the mystery of God which is known only to God Himself. Paul warned man of it in Acts 17:31, "He has set a day in which He is going to judge the habitable earth in righteousness by the Man whom He has appointed, giving proof of it all in having raised Him from among the dead." When that day comes God will judge evil. Of that day 1 Samuel 2:10 warns, "The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken in pieces... the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth." Likewise, Job 38:13 tells us that the ends of the earth will be seized, that the wicked might be shaken out of it. Clearly the present world will be purified by divine judgment when the time God has allotted for evil in the world runs out. Then the Lord will assert His claim to the throne of this world, for Psalm 22:28 tells us that the kingdom is the Lord's, and He is the governor among the nations.

#### *The two mysteries of the Kingdom*

The next two mysteries, the mysteries of the Kingdom, precede and prepare the way for the mystery of the Christ. When Christ came to this earth, the Jews were familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures just quoted and many others also, which clearly state that Messiah would judge evil and establish His earthly kingdom. The godly in Israel, in particular, saw in Jesus Israel's Redeemer, as we learn from the opening and closing incidents in Luke's Gospel. His genealogy proved that He was David's Son, His works that He was God's Son. But man preferred the status quo, the rule of Satan rather than the rule of God.

The human heart is opened up for us in Luke 20:14, so that we may see how it works: "This is the Heir, come let us kill Him that the inheritance [i.e. His kingdom] maybe ours." And so they bring the Lord to Caesar's judgement seat to achieve their purpose. Pilate questioned the Lord as to whether or not He was a king. In John 18:36 He replied, "My kingdom is not of this world, if My kingdom were of this world, My servants had fought... but now My kingdom is not from hence." This tells us that for the present the Lord was forfeiting His kingdom in the world, allowing Satan to continue his evil rule here. But the same statement also makes it clear that He was not abandoning His claim to the kingdom. Instead, His kingdom would take a different form until the time came to claim it publicly. What form could this be? The answer is revealed in the mysteries of the kingdom. There are two parts, *the mysteries of the kingdom of God* and *the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens*. These terms are different ways of looking at the same kingdom.

#### *a. The mysteries of the Kingdom of God*

The eighth chapter of Luke opens with an account of the Lord going through the country, city by city and village by village, preaching and announcing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. The twelve apostles were with Him. When a great crowd assembled out of every city, He told them the parable of the sower. This raised His disciples' curiosity. They asked Him, "What may this parable be?" He replied, "To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God but to the rest in parables." The reason the mysteries of the kingdom of God were hidden from the people generally is that they had previously rejected Him. This is clear from Luke 4:28-29, "And they were all filled with rage in the synagogue, hearing these things; and rising up they cast Him forth out of the city, and led Him up to the brow of the mountain upon which their city was built, so that they might throw Him down the precipice." That is why the Lord said to His disciples, "To you it is given to know," meaning that He was initiating them into the knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of God, as distinct from those not so initiated. The same principle, in the same setting, the parable of the sower, can be seen in Mark 4:10-11 and in Matthew 13:10-11. It is important then that we understand the meaning of the term "the kingdom of God," otherwise we cannot understand the mysteries connected with it.

The Lord's words to Nicodemus in the third chapter of John's Gospel shed a great deal of light on the meaning of the term the kingdom of God. From John 3:3-5 it is clear that the kingdom of God is the moral aspect of the kingdom. We might almost say it is what God expects from us in practical upright Christian life, because we have entered His kingdom and are subject to Him, and He is holy. This agrees with Luke 17:21 (KJV), "Behold, the kingdom of God is within you." The lives of those entering the kingdom of God by the new birth are ruled by God's principles, not man's. In Romans 14:17 these opposite principles are exposed, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking [man's principles of enjoyment]; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit [God's principles]." The kingdom of God is a hidden mystery to the lost, because they cannot understand a life governed by an unseen power, and by principles opposite to those which motivate the world. A Christian's life is ruled by the spiritual principles of the kingdom of God found in the written Word.

#### *b. The mysteries of the Kingdom of the Heavens*

The kingdom of the heavens is a term only Matthew employs. That is because the theme of his Gospel is the King of Israel in a literal sense. That King was rejected by His people and has gone to the heavens until the time comes for Him to receive His kingdom. No such emphasis is put on Christ as King in the other Gospels. Therefore in Matthew 13:10-11 we read, "And the disciples came, and said to Him, Why speakest Thou to them in parables? And He answering said to them, Because to you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, but to them it is not given."

In brief, the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens are the consequences to Israel and the world of rejecting Christ as King. As to Israel, the mystery of the kingdom of the heavens is supplemented by a tributary mystery, which Paul singles out as this mystery. In Romans 11:25 he tells us that we should not be ignorant of this mystery, "that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the nations be come in." Because of this the kingdom has become a kingdom in mystery. Where is the King? Certainly not on earth, where man rejected Him. He has gone to the heavens to sit on His Father's throne, until He shall come out on a white horse to overcome His enemies and sit down on His own throne. That is the theme of the book of Revelation. That book opens with the kingdom in mystery, "I John, your brother and fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and patience in Jesus." It ends with the actual kingdom established in power in the world.

*(Scripture quotations from the JND Translation)  
To be cont'd*

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