

THE WORD OF TRUTH

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WHAT IS A CHURCH

In a report which TIME magazine gave of the first assembly of *The World Council of Churches*, one sentence read as follows: "The greatest church meeting since the Reformation could not even agree on a definition of the word 'church'." (Time, September 13, 1948).

The reason for this inability to agree can probably be found in the fact that the word "church" has no definition. This statement can be verified by anyone if he will consult an unabridged dictionary. They will find what are supposed to be definitions, but they will find also that the English word *church* is a fickle word upon which no approximate meaning can possibly be fixed.

In the New Testament we read of "the church in the wilderness," a church that was in existence 1500 years before the Lord Jesus Christ announced "upon this rock I will build My church." Compare Matthew 16:18 with Acts 7:38. We read also of "the church of God," "the churches of the Gentiles," "the churches of Christ," "the church of the firstborn," and "the church which is His body." Each one of these phrases creates problems of interpretation and they stand as effective barriers to those who desire to know the truth. The problems they impose must be solved; they cannot be ignored by those who seek for some degree of perfection in truth. However, the first problem that must be solved, the first question that must be answered is, "What is A church?"

In spite of all their talk about it, God's people are without an honest answer to the question, "What is A church?" If we had an honest answer from the Word of God, the greater part of our problems, questions, and differences of opinion in connection with this subject would quickly disappear. Men have written many volumes discussing the various churches set forth in the New Testament, but few of them bother to discover what A church is. Those who do are somewhat vague as to just what A church is, as an examination of their definitions will show.

It is utterly impossible for a logical mind to believe that "the church in the wilderness" and "the church, which is His body" are one and the same. Yet how can we ever hope to understand the peculiar characteristics of these two churches until we first know what A church is. It is apparent also to the logical mind that such debatable questions as, "When did the church begin?" and "Will the church go through the tribulation?" can never be settled until we know what "the church" is. We can never know what **the** church is until we first know what **a** church is.

Men build a building for public worship and, presto, they have a church. They organize a number of individuals and again, they have a church. They receive others into their organization and declare that they are now in the church. Thus, among men, a church is a building set apart for worship; a church is a denomination or a single congregation. Some, not wanting to be caught with too definite a definition, say that the church is the whole company of the redeemed in the present dispensation. I know of no definition that Scripture denies as fully, flatly, and simply as it does this. Acts 7:38 demonstrates that there was a company of redeemed in another dispensation, and that company is called by the Holy Spirit "the church in the wilderness." How then can the redeemed of the present time act as if the word *church* were descriptive only of them. Furthermore, there was a church in Ephesus that was composed of idolators, as any reader of the English Bible could easily see if *ecclesia* had not been translated "assembly" as it is in Acts 19:32, 39, and 41. We could understand at once why that heathen mob was called a church if we knew what a church was. Since we do not know, we find it best to hide these embarrassing facts under mistranslations.

In the course of my own quest for truth upon this subject, desiring to know the thoughts of the average man I have asked many for their definition of a church. Several have started out with some such expression as, "That's easy," or, "That's simple," but have discovered it was highly involved when they tried to tell it, and finished up confessing that they did not really know. One answer I remember well was, "Everyone knows what a church is." Men use the word as if its meaning were well understood, agreed upon, and not even open to discussion.

The word *church* is a weasel word that will wiggle out of any trap that is set for it. It is a Humpty-Dumpty word that means just what the user intends it to mean, neither more nor less. It is a dishonest word as it never says the same thing twice. It is a chameleon, which changes its color to suit its environment. It is a harlot among words as it is related to no one idea but willingly relates itself to any purpose in which men desire to use it. Men put it in the Bible, not because it represented or translated the Greek word *ecclesia*, but because they wanted to get their religious organizations into the Scriptures. What other conclusion can we come to when we see that they refused to translate *ecclesia* by the word *church* if it militated against them?

It is my conviction that all professing Christians need to confess their sin and the sin of their fathers in regard to the use of the word *church*. Even we Who claim to have advanced to the high truth of Paul's epistles need to recognize that we have walked contrary to God in the use of this word. Some who claim to follow Paul define "the church" as being "the body of Christ," but they have no more definition of "the body of Christ" than they have for "the church." They use one obscure phrase to define another. Their definition of "the body of Christ" is "all believers in Christ in this present dispensation," which is the same definition as they give to "the church." Thus they are saying, "All believers are all believers."

We who revel in Ephesian truth speak glibly about "the church, Which is His body," **but until such time as we have a Scriptural definition of A church**, it is nothing but hypocrisy to act as if we are in possession of some great truth expressed by this term.

The word *church* is generic. It is applied in Scripture to a certain class of things, and nothing else but **A church** is ever called by this term. The term "the church which is His body" applies only to one church among all churches. As long as we are without true understanding of the generic term, all attempts to understand the specific term are useless. Man does not, man cannot reason from the particular up to the general. He must begin with the general truth and reason down to the particular. This is just as true of Scriptural things as it is of things outside the realm of God's Word.

In the course of a recent train trip, I listened while a group of men discussed at length the President of the United States. Almost everything they said revealed that they either did not know or else had not considered what A president of the United States is. They criticized THE President for not doing

what A president cannot do, and for doing what A president must do. If they had hesitated in their flow of words long enough to consider what A president of the United States is, they would not have criticized THE President for not doing that which only a ruthless dictator could do.

Even so, most statements, which men are freely making about "the church, which is His body" will cease to be made once they learn from Scripture the definition of **A church**.

About a year ago, an acquaintance said that his denomination was the church that Christ built. I told him that he could not even prove from Scripture that his denomination was **A church**, let alone proving that it was the one Christ built. This confused him so that he refused to discuss the matter further. He too had no definition of **A church**; no conception of what **A church** is. If he knew the Scriptural definition, he would never again claim such an exalted place for his denomination.

Most of the thoughts set forth in this article developed in my mind over a period of years. They took shape in the form set forth here about four years ago. The sharp accusations and criticisms in this study were first hurled by me at my own heart. I was as much at fault as anyone I now criticize. I had no honest, Scriptural definition of **A church**. My studies had long ago convinced me that there are numerous churches in the Bible, and I determined to begin my studies anew and learn from the Word of God what **A church** is. I knew that certain facts upon this subject had been ignored, and that the chief facts had been suppressed due to the paralyzing influences of preconceived fixed theories. Many of these facts were obvious, but they were never brought into their true prominence since they did not conform to beliefs that were already firmly fixed. The greatest problem was that of purging my own mind of impressions, which I had gained upon this subject through the years, impressions that had no real basis in the Word of God. These can easily be given up by the conscious mind, but the subconscious mind will retain them and give a false color to every fact that is considered. However, the very recognition of this barrier to the truth was the greatest help in overcoming it.

I began my study with the conviction that the most important facts essential to forming a Scriptural definition of **A church** were to be found in the Old Testament. I felt these facts had never been given their true prominence, and that while the Old Testament had much to tell us upon this subject, it was never permitted to speak. We begrudgingly admit that there was a church in the Old Testament, but immediately shove it into the background as being unworthy of any consideration. I was convinced that since there was a "church in the wilderness at Mount Sinai" (Acts 7:38), the Old Testament was the place where any honest study of the church should begin.

Several years were spent seeking facts, familiarizing myself with the facts, and attempting to collate the truth set forth in these facts. But it seemed to be a fruitless search. After three years, I appeared to be no nearer to a Scriptural definition of **A church** than when the study began. The apparent facts of the Old Testament would not join hands with the apparent facts of the New. I had gained hundreds of truths but they would not unite. A catalyst of truth was needed, and this catalyst was simply the definition of **A church**.

In chemistry where two things will not amalgamate, a catalyst is used to bring them together. A catalyst, one whimsical writer has said, is a chemical "parson" - it brings about chemical unions and reactions without being itself affected by any chemical change. This was what I needed, a catalyst of truth that would react upon every fact, every passage and result in a harmonious union of Old and New Testament truth. The desire to lay hold of this truth constantly dominated my thoughts, for I felt sure that if I could enter into it, I would have the key to treasures of truth that would exceed anything I had ever entered into before. Meditation, consideration, and prayer continued for many months.

About ten months ago I was teaching on a Sunday morning when a tentative definition of **A church** flashed across my mind. This was nothing new, since dozens of possible definitions had been tested and discarded. However, I determined to test it at my earliest opportunity for this might be the one truth that would cause all the facts to assemble and march as a body of well ordered truth. Sunday afternoon found me in my study with my Hebrew concordance opened at the list of passages containing the word *qahal* and my Greek concordance at the list of passages containing the word *ecclesia*. As my eye traveled down the long list of familiar passages, as I turned to the Bible again and again to check the context, as each passage began to glow with a new light, I knew I had discovered the truth that my heart so much desired-an honest Scriptural definition of **A church**. This truth was like a spark that gave new light to every passage bearing upon this subject. The facts of Scripture became warm, living truths. Four hours later I arose from my desk, pulled away by the necessity of teaching that evening. But, the message I had planned to give was forgotten, and the newly found truth was presented to those who assembled, as I wished to test it before others who were also searching for this great truth.

Since then this truth has been developed, seasoned, and clarified. It has been presented to six separate groups, and the questions and comments that resulted have been of the greatest possible value. So far as I know, this truth has not before been recognized or formulated. I am particularly indebted to Mr. Herbert Baudistel, Mr. Hershey Julien, Mr. Elroy Robinson, and Mr.. John Ribbens for their valuable help in the study, the research, and in the formulation of this teaching.

The nature of this article will lead some to accuse me of boasting. Many do not believe in Biblical research and insist that discovery and progress are impossible. My writings upon this subject will demonstrate to all truth lovers that I am not boasting, and that I have uncovered truth from the Word of God concerning the church that has been long buried under the rubbish heaps of ecclesiastical tradition. These studies will be presented under the title of *Ecclesia Truth*.

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ACTS, Chapter 3

Luke, the writer of Acts, does not record all the miracles that took place in the thirty-three years of which this book is the history. As a rule he generalizes, as seen in Acts 2:43 where he states that "many wonders and signs were done by the apostles." The specific miracle set forth at the opening of this chapter is recorded because of its far-reaching effect. It formed the background and it brought together the great audience for Peter's second message. This miracle also aroused the rulers, elders, and scribes and brought about the first opposition to the Apostles. There is nothing in the text to indicate how much time elapsed between the day of Pentecost and the performance of this miracle.

3:1. Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.

In Acts 2:42 we learned that the 3120 disciples continued: steadfastly in "the prayers." It had been their custom to observe the three set times of prayer in the temple, the third, the sixth, and the ninth hour. Here we see Peter and John doing this very thing. They are going up to the temple at the time of prayer. "This specific time is said to be "the ninth hour," which is equivalent to 3:00 P.M. The disciples faithfully adhered to the temple and its services. Their Lord had cleansed this temple at the beginning of His ministry and again near its close. See John 2:13 -17 and Matthew 21:12-13. It is commonly believed that the disciples abandoned and repudiated the temple after the death of Christ, but the whole testimony of Scripture proves that this idea is merely wishful thinking upon the part of those who desire it to be that way.

3:2-5. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. And Peter fastening his eyes upon him with John said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them expecting to receive something of them

The picture drawn of this scene by the Spirit through Luke is a masterpiece. The scene is reproduced for us in clear and concise words. No important fact is missing. However, we should not fail to call to mind some important facts already learned from other portions of the Word. As Peter and John move toward the temple, to all outward appearances it is just two Israelites among many who are going up at the hour of prayer. But if we look beyond the outward appearance we know from the facts of Scripture that before God these are two of the greatest and most powerful men who have ever walked upon the face of the earth. John the Baptist was the greatest man ever born of woman, but the least man in the kingdom (sovereignty, the rulers, not the ruled) of God is greater than John (Matthew 11:11 and Luke 7:28). Peter and John are in the sovereignty of God and they are far from being the least in it. These two men are among the twelve who are destined to sit upon thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. These men are in possession of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. They can bind a thing on earth and it will be bound in heaven, or they can loose a thing on earth and it will be loosed in heaven. If Peter and John agree on earth as touching anything they shall ask, it will be done for them. They are identified with the judgments of God. They can remit a man's sins or they can retain a man's sins. If all these things are not literally true of these men then we may just as well erase from our Bibles such passages as Matthew 16:19, 18:18-20, John 20:21-23.

The greatness of these men could not be manifested upon the earth during the time of their Lord's rejection by men of the earth. It would not be right for them to "reign as kings" without Him. The power that they possess cannot be fully displayed, for it must be used in harmony with the will and purpose of God at that time. Nevertheless, these two men are two of the greatest and most powerful men who have ever trod the earth. They are two of the twelve who are foremost in the ecclesia of God.

The desire of some to find the beginning of what they call "the church" in the early chapters of Acts has caused them to ignore the greatness and the power of these men. They would like to believe that these Apostles are about the same as present day ministers. Thus they pull the Apostles down and lift themselves up so that they can make the ministerial office in their churches correspond to the place of the Apostles in the ecclesia of God. If John the Baptist was "great in the sight of the Lord," these men are greater in His sight. The truth is that there is not a man on earth today that possesses one grain of the greatness or power of these men. Neither is there anything on earth today that can even remotely compare with the ecclesia of God in the Acts period. Therefore, let none say that if we had the same faith we could do what Peter and John did. The truth is that if we had the same greatness and power of these men we could do what they did, but such power is not our portion in this the dispensation of the grace of God. Nevertheless, His grace is sufficient.

The marvelous power possessed by Peter is seen at work here. A certain man lame from his birth was carried by others and placed at the temple gate called Beautiful. This was their daily practice in order that the lame man might beg from the people as they went in. Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple he asked an alms. It is evident that his appeal was somewhat general for there is no indication that he had singled Peter and John out of the great throng that moved toward the temple. It seems that he may have asked and then quickly turned to the next one who was ascending into the temple. His eyes were not upon Peter and John, but they fixed their eyes upon him and said, "Look at us." The lame man looked and waited, expecting to receive a coin or some such thing from them.

3:6. Then Peter said. Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

Without a single word of explanation, without doing anything to awaken or increase the lame man's faith, Peter speaks the Word that carries all the power behind it that the Lord's word carried while He was upon earth. He had sent them fully equipped to do the same works that He did (John 14:12). "I have no silver or gold," Peter said, "but what I have, I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk." These words demonstrate that the healing of this cripple was based upon Peter giving him of what he possessed. The Lord had given Peter the power to heal and he used it in behalf of this man.

3:7-8. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

Following his words, "Be walking," Peter took the man by the hand. This was probably the very hand he was holding out for an alms. Immediately the man's feet and ankles were strengthened and made ready to perform the purpose for which they were intended. A truly notable miracle is about to take place. Even if limbs are perfect, sound, and strong, no human being can walk, leap, and run who has never done so before. Walking is an art that must be slowly learned. But this man is not told to learn. Note that Peter's command to him is not "Be healed," but "Be walking."

Even though Peter grasped the man's hand, he did not need to pull the cripple to his feet. Of himself, on the basis of his newly - given strength, the lame man leaped up, stood upright, and began to walk. His first steps took him toward the temple, not away from it.

3:9-10. And all the people saw him walking and praising God: And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful *gate* of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.

It appears that verses 1 to 10 describe what took place before the temple service of prayer, and verse eleven after it was over. However, it may be that verses 9 and 10 refer to what was going on while the service of prayer was being conducted. The average worshipper upon arriving at the temple would ordinarily stand reverently still in one place, but this man may have kept walking around and speaking out words of praise to God. When the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him at once as the familiar figure who had habitually sat at the Beautiful gate of the temple seeking alms. This unusual action brought the man to everyone's attention, and they were filled with awe and amazement. The word *dumbfounded* best describes their state of mind.

3:11. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.

This passage makes it plain that the time of prayer is now over and the people are in the act of departing from the temple. As Peter and John departed the healed cripple clung tightly to them. This centered attention upon the three of them and the people look to them for an explanation. The lame man has no explanation for he does not yet know how it all happened. Peter, acting as the spokesman, gives the explanation, and his words will be as surprising to the lame man as they are to the people of Israel. While the questioning of the people concerns only the beggar, Peter will use this incident as an occasion to tell them something about themselves. The carnal curiosity of many about the things of God should be used to apply the Word to the hearts of those who ask the questions.

3:12. And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man walk.

Peter addresses these men as Israelites, which is the most honorable name that can be given to the Jewish people. He calls upon them to consider this miracle as Israelites should. They are not just to marvel at it, give some passing honor to Peter and John then drop the matter. Neither are they to think that Peter and John did this by their own power or holiness. Power and position belonged to Peter and John, but they would permit no one to think for a moment that it was resident within them. They were identified with the power and position of the risen Lord. By his words Peter takes the thoughts of the people and directs them elsewhere.

3:13. The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus, whom ye delivered up, and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go.

The great covenant name of God which Peter uses here is found in Exodus 3:6 and 16. Following this he makes one of his many contrasts between what the Jews did to Jesus and what God did. In order these are as follows: God approved Him, but they crucified Him. Acts 2:22, 23. They slew Him, but God raised Him up. Acts 2:23-24. The same Jesus whom they crucified God made both Lord and Christ. Acts 2:36. They denied Him, but God glorified Him. Acts 3:13. They killed the Prince of life, but God raised Him from the dead. Acts 3:15. The One whom they crucified, God raised from the dead. Acts 4:10. The stone, which they set at naught, God made the head of the corner. Acts 4:11. See also Acts 5:30 and 10:39, 40.

3:14-15. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you. And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.

The word here translated "Prince" occurs also in Acts 5:31, Hebrews 2:10 and 12:2. Peter sets forth the Lord Jesus as the Author or Source of all life as is done in John 1:1-14 and Colossians 1:14-20. They asked for a murderer and killed the Author of life.

3:16. And His name through faith in His name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know, yea, the faith, which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

In this passage Peter twice repeats the words *name* and *faith*. A man's name is what he is. The name of Christ represents who and what He is in the sight of God. Peter and John were in possession of much truth from God concerning Jesus Christ (See Matthew 16:16-17). They are now taking God at His word and acting accordingly. This is their faith in His name. His name made the man whole, but it was their faith in His name that had brought the healing to this man. The power was in His name. . . the contact with that power was the faith of Peter and John.

3:17. And now brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.

This statement is in full harmony with the word spoken by the Lord Jesus on the Cross when He said, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." In the Old Testament a clear distinction was made between sins that could be forgiven and sins for which the soul was cut off. These were sins done "ignorantly" and sins done "presumptuously." Before the resurrection God had not fully vouchsafed His testimony concerning Jesus Christ. Only a few knew who and what He was, and these were not permitted to tell it to others. See Matthews 16:20. Therefore, they committed in ignorance the great sin of rejecting Him; nevertheless, they were not without guilt. Their sin could have been worse in the sight of God. It was done ignorantly, but it could have been done with full knowledge. After the resurrection of Christ, and after the manifestations that occurred on and followed Pentecost, they could no longer claim ignorance.

3:18. But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.

In this statement Peter presents another great truth for them to consider. They are told that all the prophecies concerning the sufferings of Christ have been fulfilled by their own act of rejecting and crucifying Him. See Psalm 76:10. As they acted in ignorance, God acted in full intelligence.

3:19-20. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. And He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you.

We now have before us the first part of the preeminent portion of Peter's message. In these words of Peter a divine call is issued, divine requirements are set forth, and a divine order is established which still remains God's program for the Jewish people just as much as it was when these words were first spoken. The order is as follows: (1) They must repent; (2) They must be converted, (3) Their sins must be erased, (4) Seasons of refreshing must come to them from the presence (face) of the Lord. When each one of these divine demands have been met, God will send back Jesus Christ. This is the divine order and the divine program, and it is subject to no alterations. Here God has set forth certain things that must precede the second sending of Jesus Christ to the earth. Not one of these divine demands has ever been withdrawn. The prevalent idea that since Israel did not repent and has not repented God has withdrawn His demands and will send Christ back anyway is as false as it is childish. As this divine program is almost universally ignored, it needs to be given full consideration. Let us examine each step of it.

1. **Israel must repent.** In this demand, God does not ask for an act. He is asking for a state or condition. The meaning of repentance has been dealt with in the exposition of Acts 2:38. John the Baptist was sent by God to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:17). He did this by bringing the people into a repentant state. This was a condition wherein they were relaxed, quiescent, and ready to receive the word of the Lord. Thus they were committed to it in advance of hearing it. Only under such circumstances can the seed of the Word fall upon good soil. This repentant condition must again be the attitude of the people of Israel before the Lord Jesus will ever be sent back again. Today, this is a demand that cannot be fulfilled by Israel, and it will not be fulfilled until God Himself brings Israel into a repentant state.

A state such as this will never be brought about in the dispensation of the grace of God as this would be God doing something for one people that He does not do for another. Such distinctions as this can never be made under an administration that is wholly of grace. All sinners must be treated alike and dealt with in the same manner, whether they are Israelite sinners or Gentile sinners. This self-imposed restriction will no longer be upon God after the close of this dispensation. A change will be brought about when God withdraws His Salvation from the Gentiles (the descendants of Adam) and returns His Salvation to Israel (the descendants of Abraham through Isaac). This will reverse the great truth declared by Paul in Acts 28:28, and the first result of this will be that Israel will be brought into a repentant state or condition.

2. **Israel must be converted.** This means that Israel must be turned about to God. Again the demand is for a state or condition and not for an act. A clue to the full meaning of this can be found by comparing Scripture with Scripture. In Acts 2:38 the demand was for repentance and baptism. Here it is for repentance and conversion. These two passages force us to believe that either the divine requirements were changed between the first and second message, or that the truth set forth in the word *baptism* is included in the word *conversion*. Since such arbitrary changing of divine requirements are unthinkable, the second proposition must be the true one.

We have seen already that the demand that they be *baptized* was not a demand that they permit a water ordinance or ceremony to be performed upon them, but that it was a demand that they become identified with, be merged with, or cast their lot with the name of Jesus Christ. At one point in the life of Peter he had vociferously refused to be identified with Christ. "I do not know the man," were his words. The Lord who had predicted this denial by Peter had said to him, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32). Thus we see in Peter's history a time when he was identified with Jesus Christ, a time when he refused to be identified, and a time when he was identified again. This re-identification is expressed in the word *conversion*, and shows that the two words express the same truth in view of the contexts in which they are found.

Throughout their national history the people of Israel had always been identified with the Messiah (Christ). The hope of His presence was their national hope. See Matthew 2:4-6; Luke 9:15; John 4:25. But when the Messiah appeared they "denied Him in the presence of Pilate." "We have no king but Caesar," was their vociferous denial of any connection with Him. Now they must become "turned back," "converted," "re-identified" with Him. Baptism, that is, identification is included in conversion. Not the water ritual, which is also called baptism, but identification with the one to whom they turn again.

The repentance and conversion of Israel was entirely possible throughout the Acts period. At Acts 28:28 a divine judgment came upon Israel and this brought about a condition which makes national conversion utterly impossible as long as that condition prevails. This judgment had fallen upon them before in the days of the Son of Man upon the earth (See John 12:37-40), but it had been lifted through His prayer for them while He was upon the Cross. At the close of Acts the judgment fell again, "lest they. . . should be converted." In addition the Salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles, and the only means that could produce national repentance and conversion was taken from Israel. God's Salvation will have to return to Israel before they will ever turn back to Messiah. Until this condition is fulfilled, God will not send Christ again.

3. Israel's sins must be blotted out. They are to repent and be converted with a view to their sins being erased. This must be accomplished before the return of the Lord, for if it is not, they would experience the judgment set forth in II Thessalonians 1:8-9.

4. Seasons of refreshing must come upon Israel from the face of the Lord. These seasons of refreshing precede the coming of Christ to the earth. The popular interpretation refers these seasons to the millennium. But this cannot be true for Peter makes these seasons to be dependent upon the repentance, conversion, and erasure of Israel's sins, and not upon the second coming of Christ. Furthermore, he places these "seasons of refreshing" ahead of Christ being sent the second time. In fact, if it were not for these seasons of refreshing, there would be nothing that the Lord could righteously do when He comes except smite the earth with a curse. See Malachi 4:5-6. In love God is going to do the work that must be done to spare the earth from being so smitten.

The comment of A. T. Pierson is of interest here. *In Acts of the Holy Spirit* concerning Acts 3:19 he says: "The whole passage has been long an enigma to commentators; and the only interpretation that seems to illumine it with true meaning is that which refers it to another and even greater outpouring of the Spirit, which is somehow conditional on the restoration of God's apostate people. He must be an indifferent and careless reader of prophecy who does not recognize a remarkable future as yet before the Hebrew nation, upon which also hangs larger blessing for the whole race."

When the four great conditions of repentance, conversion, erasure, and refreshing have been met, God will then send Jesus Christ back again. These great truths will be strenuously objected to by those who hold to the "any moment" theory of the return of Christ. Those who hold this view have little room for these great truths in their theology.

3:21. Whom the heaven must receive until the times of the restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

The statement "the heaven must receive until" can mean nothing else but that "the heaven must receive and hold until." If I receive a thing until a certain time, I cannot release it one moment before that time. The time of His return is here set as being "the times of the restoration of all things, which God hath spoken," etc. On this passage the *Scofield Reference Bible* has a note saying, "Gr. apokatastaseos = restoration, occurring here and Acts 1:6 only." This note is entirely wrong as the noun appears only here, but the verb appears in Matthew 12:13; 17:11; Mark 3:5; 8:25; 9:12; Luke 6:10; Acts 1:6; Hebrews 13:9. The common popular interpretation of this passage is merely a gloss, which does not consider the obvious facts. It is commonly held by premillennarians that "the times of the restoration of all things" is the millennium or kingdom, and that this passage declares that Christ remains in the heavens until it is time to establish the kingdom; then He returns and does this great work. This interpretation fails to consider the words of Christ in Matthew 17:11, "Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things." In view of this we are forced to believe that heaven must receive and hold the Lord Jesus until the restoration of all things is a reality, then He will come and establish His kingdom. His kingdom cannot be called a restoration since there has been no kingdom of like character before.

A. C. Gaebelain says: "The second coming of Christ will result in the times of refreshing and restoration of all things." It is evident that he allowed himself great liberty with the Word of God and teaches the very opposite of what Christ declared in Matthew 17:11, and what Peter spoke to the Jewish nation.

3:22-23. For Moses truly said unto the lathers. A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me: him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.

The truth set forth in this passage is some of the most important to be found in the book of Acts. Peter gives the words of Moses as if they were still a prophecy of the future, but no fact is more plain than that the Prophet like unto Moses has already been raised up. Christ was of Israel and He was like unto Moses. The rejection and denial of Him by the people before His resurrection did not seal their destiny, for they did it in ignorance. But after His resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit, ignorance was no longer possible. Their ignorance has been dispelled by the two messages of Peter. If any man in Israel continues His opposition to Jesus Christ, his doom is sealed. He will be utterly exterminated from among the people.

It may not be seen at once, but this passage refutes some of the most popular theological beliefs held today. It is commonly believed that Pentecost marked the beginning of something new called "the church", a company of believers quite distinct from Israel. In harmony with this idea it is held that from Pentecost onward all who put their faith in Christ were severed from Israel and became members of a new thing called "the church" or "the body of Christ." It is further taught that by "the baptism of the Spirit" men who put their faith in Christ became members of this new thing. However, Acts 3:23 alone proves these ideas to be false. Here it is emphatically stated that those who believed were not severed from Israel, for the plain declaration is that those who refused to believe were utterly destroyed from among the people. The unbelievers were severed, but the believers continued as they were "among the people."

Thus it is the simple testimony of Scripture that Jesus Christ came to a company of people related to God by covenants and these are called "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" Matthew 15:24. This company of people to whom He came rejected and crucified Him. They did this through ignorance. In His death He died for the nation of Israel (John 11:51), and His prayer for them while hanging

upon the Cross cleared them so that He can again be offered as their crucified and risen Messiah. From Pentecost onward all who receive Him will preserve their place in Israel, and will gain many blessings in addition. Those who reject Him are to be utterly destroyed from among the people of Israel. This test continues throughout the entire Acts period until a complete test of all is made. By this means the "Israel of God" will be determined and established (Galatians 6:16). In the end Peter speaking to those Israelites who have believed says, "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a procured people. . .which in times past were not a people, but now are the people of God." See I Peter 2:9-10.

There are those who teach that when Paul began his ministry, the Jews who heard him and believed in Christ through His message were cut off from Israel and became a new and distinct company. These begin what they call "the church" at Acts 13, but there is nothing in Scripture that teaches this. It is an idea read into Paul's epistles, for it cannot be found there. Furthermore, it is most unreasonable to believe that after Acts 13 the Jews who believed through Peter's ministry continued with Israel, and that those who believed through Paul became members of something higher and better called "the body of Christ." This makes the blessing dependent upon the man they heard rather than upon the Christ in whom they believed. Such an idea divides Christ, makes some to be "of Paul" and some "of Peter;" and it deprives those poor unfortunates who heard Peter of the fullness of blessings in Christ.

3:24. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.

In one grand chorus all the prophets from Samuel onward proclaimed the days of the ministry of the great prophet like unto Moses, who would bring repentance and conversion to the people and who would grant seasons of refreshing. These days were no secret. They had been foretold, and they should have been expected by the people.

3:25-26. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenants which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away everyone of you from his iniquities.

The Israelites to whom Peter was speaking were the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That covenant declared that the nations of the world were to be blessed through Israel. In full harmony with this agreement, God having raised up His Son Jesus sent Him first to bless Israel in turning everyone of them away from their wickedness. This purpose of God is yet to be fulfilled.

(Continued, Vol. XI, No. 4)

THE ORDER OF THINGS TO COME

(Continued from Volume XI, Number 1)

Many vital truths plainly declared in the Word of God will never find a place in the beliefs of some who profess to believe that the Bible is the Word of God. This is due to the fact that there is no room for these truths in the tight little theological systems with which they have aligned themselves. The readjustment process required to make room for additional light is so disturbing that the safest course for them to pursue is to believe that no advance in truth is possible. To them "all truth" is comprehended in their theology, and every passage in the Scriptures must be either explained or explained away in harmony with their ideas. Passages of Scriptures that contain eloquent truths are

stultified or effectively ignored, and much time is spent in proving that passages do not mean what they say.

Among those Scripture passages that are constantly ignored are the many portions that give positive testimony to the divine restoration and divine blessings which come upon the people of Israel, and through Israel to the nations, before the second coming of Christ. The premillennial theology, which is so popular in many circles today interprets these great passages as speaking of a small remnant of Israel and crowds the fulfillment into a very short time before the kingdom. All passages that cannot be explained after this manner are relegated to the kingdom eon after the second coming of Christ. This is done in spite of the fact that the time element in these passages shows that they must be fulfilled before the great day of the Lord comes.

The reader will notice that I speak of "the divine restoration and blessing of Israel," as I wish to emphasize that nothing that is happening to the Jewish people or to Palestine today has anything to do with the truth I am setting forth. Those who see so much prophecy being fulfilled in the present day happenings in Palestine are the successors to those who saw so much being fulfilled in Mussolini's grandiose attempts to restore the Roman Empire. That which took place in Italy was supposed to prove conclusively that we were in the time of the end; now that which is happening in Palestine is declared to be positive proof that the Lord is just about to return and erect His kingdom. Those who avidly read the newspapers and have only a smattering of knowledge of the prophetic books of the Old Testament are quick to say that we are witnessing the fulfillment of prophecy in the events now taking place in Palestine. I challenge them to point out the exact prophecy, furnishing also an honest exposition of the portion in which it appears. A typical letter from a number I have received reads in part as follows:

You say, "Not one thing that has happened in the past thirty-five years had fulfilled any predictive prophecy." None fulfilled? Dear Brother, I suppose you never do read the newspapers. What a pity, for if you did you might have seen that there has been an awakening in Israel. They have moved back into their homeland. The God of Israel is now acting on behalf of His people. Don't you know that Israel has set up a state? In unbelief, yes, but they have started a national life. See Jeremiah 23. He says they shall dwell in their own land. They are there now. It may not be the final stage, but it has begun.

This letter is characteristic of the heat rather than light that so many bring into the consideration of this matter. The one who wrote it has failed to make one of the plainest and most important distinctions in Scripture -- that between Jacobites and Israelites. It is a fact clearly established by Scripture that to be a descendant of the man Israel does not necessarily make one an Israelite.

Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect, For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel. Romans 9:6.

With all my heart and in the light of all I have come to know from thirty years of study of the Word of God, I believe that when God again brings Israel into existence, Israel will be produced from the people we today know as the Jews. And I just as firmly believe that there is no individual or company of people on earth today who can now claim that they are Israel.

It has been said that while man deals out his words at random on a hit or miss basis, God deals out His words by weight and measure on the principle of intentional selection. This is as true of the names, which God used as of the words which He used. If we "hold fast to the form of sound words" we will never make the mistake of giving divine names to things which or to people whom they do not apply. This applies to both common and proper nouns. Some proper names are terms that God has coined to fit specific people, and we should not apply them to those who fail to measure up to the truth contained in the title.

When the twin boys were born to Isaac, the second one who came forth was named Jacob. This name means "a contender," and carries in it the special idea of one who contends in order to supplant. The record shows that this name fit much of the history of the one who bore it. Jacob contended for the birthright and supplanted Esau. He contended for the blessing and got it. This led Esau to say:

Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and behold now he hath taken away my blessing. Genesis 27:36.

Later Jacob contended with Laban and succeeded, but when he contended with God he utterly failed. When he lost the wrestling match at Jabbok, his name was changed to Israel, meaning *God commands*, to teach him the greatly needed lesson of dependence upon God (See *Companion Bible* on Genesis 32:28).

In the past few years we have witnessed the attempt of Jacob's descendants to supplant the Arabian in the land of Palestine. The success of this attempt can be seen in the constantly increasing number of Jews in the land. Recently these Jacobites have prevailed to the point where they have established their own government in the land and have taken upon themselves the most honorable name of "Israeli." Inasmuch as all this is related to Palestine and the Jewish people, many Christians feel it must be the fulfillment of some prophecy in the Bible. Assuming this to be the case, the Bible has been ransacked for texts, which can in some manner be applied to this political development. This has produced such emotional reasoning as, "God says they will return-they have returned. God says they will again dwell in the land-they now are in the land; therefore, these prophecies have been fulfilled." However, when these proof texts are examined in the light of the context wherein God has placed them, they refuse to give the testimony for which they have been called into the witness box.

Careful consideration of the Bible prophecies concerning the return of Israel to the land reveal that when this is accomplished it will be done in such manner that it will not be by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of God. In fact, the miraculous nature of this return will completely overshadow the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. There has been no return yet of this nature. The faith of some men is going to be severely shaken if disaster should overtake the present government in Palestine.

Some insist that the present return is the fulfillment of a "predicted return in unbelief," and that such passages as Jeremiah 16:14-16 predicts the return of a believing people after the second coming of Christ. If those who hold this view will attempt to separate the prophecies into two categories, (1) those that predict a return in unbelief, and (2) those that predict the return of a believing people, they will discover that no passage can be placed in the first group when it is considered in the light of the context.

In the year 1921 I heard a prominent Bible teacher declare that, "the Bible predicts a return of the Jew to Palestine in unbelief." He did not give any Scripture *for* this "return in unbelief," but as I was in full sympathy with him, I accepted without question his statement. However, I knew that when I taught this same thing, I would need positive Scripture statements *for* it, as none would accept it *from* me on the basis of my "reputation" or "prominence." I began a search *for* the passages that taught this but could not find them. I finally decided that there was no Scripture that taught this but continued to believe it because it was so essential to the system of prophetic interpretation with which I had identified myself. In the twenty-eight years that have passed since I first heard this statement, I have never yet found a line of Scripture to support it. The argument that they must return in unbelief because only an ungodly government would make a covenant with the antichrist, does not hold water. That covenant will be made because a God-fearing people have been led into a compromise by false prophets. It is the result of a "falling away." See II Thessalonians 2:3. All passages that speak of a return to the land have to do with repentant Israel, not with the natural descendants of Jacob.

The time that men wasted trying to prove the restoration of the old Roman empire could have been better spent considering the great truth of the restoration of the natural descendants of Jacob to the place of Israel, followed by the restoration of Israel to the land, then the blessing of restored Israel, and through her the blessing of other nations before the second coming of Christ.

Pre- and Post-millennial Views

It is the view of those who are commonly designated as postmillennialists that the blessings of the millennial age are to be brought in as a result of the preaching and spread *of* the gospel. It is a fundamental view of the pre-millennial school of thought that moral and spiritual conditions will constantly worsen until the time of the coming of the Lord. The post-millennialist believes the world will grow better; the pre-millennialist believes it will grow worse. In my opinion both of these views are wrong, *for* it is my earnest conviction that the Bible sets forth a different view that both pre- and post-millennialists will do well to consider.

Moral and spiritual conditions today give abundant proof that men are going to grow steadily worse. This conviction grows out of the facts before us and not *from* any passage in the Bible that declares this. The present efforts of faithful men in declaring the Word of God is about as effective in halting the flood of iniquity as would be throwing handfuls of sand to stop the flow of Niagara. Nevertheless, faithful men will continue to declare the Word, knowing that it is required of stewards to be faithful, not successful. It is commonly declared by pre-millennialists that nothing can stop this flood of iniquity except the second coming of Christ; nevertheless, when questioned they readily admit that it could be stopped by an outpouring of the Spirit of God. However, they see no hope here as they are completely hypnotized by the idea that "all signs point to the imminent coming of Christ." **It is my firm conviction that the Bible predicts that there will be an outpouring of God's Spirit upon men before the return of the Lord Jesus to establish His eonian kingdom.**

Let no one infer from this that I believe the world is going to *grow* better. I believe that if things continue as they are it is going to *grow* worse. However, if God intervenes, it will in due time take a definite turn for the better. I believe that He is going to do this, and that His intervention will be in certain great acts related to His people Israel. The first of these will be the return of His Salvation to Israel. This will be a complete reversal of Paul's great pronouncement found in Acts 28 :28. When the Salvation of God leaves the Gentiles it will be to seek and bless Israel, but Israel can nowhere be found. There will yet need to be another wrestling match between the descendants of Jacob and the Spirit of God, and in the course of it Jacob will lay hold of God and seek a blessing. Again they will be asked their name, and will confess that it is Jacob (supplanter), and again God will own them as His and give them the name of Israel. Thus will come to pass the words of the Lord spoken through Moses in Leviticus:

If they shall confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against Me, and that also they have walked contrary unto Me; And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: then will I remember My covenant with Jacob, and also My covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land. Leviticus 26:40-43.

When the Jacobites become Israelites, the effect will be such that it will be felt throughout the whole world.

For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead. Romans 11:15.

The Scriptural Basis

Every great general truth must rest upon a broad basis of Scripture. The truth of Israel's repentance, conversion, and blessing before the coming of the Lord is taught in many passages. Furthermore, many passages will never be fulfilled if Israel does not enter into a period of blessing before the second coming of Christ. If we reject this truth, we will be forced to deny or ignore the testimony of some of the plainest statements of Scripture. Let us consider some of these.

In **Malachi 4: 5-6** we read:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

I would like to ask each reader if he has any place in his beliefs for an event such as this, or if there is any room for it in the theological system with which he may have aligned himself. As this passage stands in the Old Testament it offers no major difficulty for it could be fulfilled in a moment of time. But when we consider it in the light of our Lord's interpretation and explanation it presents a major problem to those who see no period of blessing for Israel before the day of the Lord.

Why then say the scribes that Elias (Elijah) must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them Elias truly shall first come and restore all things. Matthew 17:10-11.

It may have been that the scribes used the Malachi passage as an argument against the possibility that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. "Elijah must come first," they said, and since Elijah had not appeared they reasoned that Jesus was not the Christ. The disciples put this matter before the Lord, and He confirmed the truth of their statement. "Elijah truly shall come first and restore all things," was His approval of their position. However, he added a word that showed the failure of Elijah to appear could not be used as an argument against Him. An Elijah had already appeared and they knew him not.

To arrange for an appearance of Elijah in fulfillment of the bold prediction of Malachi and of the Lord Jesus, many teach he is one of the two witnesses mentioned in Revelation 11:3. If Revelation 11 is read carefully it will be seen that neither of these witnesses do anything that can even remotely be described as "restoring all things." Their ministry could better be described in the words of Jeremiah 1:10, "to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down." And while Elijah may end his career by being one of the two witnesses, his great work of restoration is nowhere indicated in Revelation 11.

The statement of our Lord, "Elijah truly shall first come and restore all things," must be fulfilled to the very letter. To silence the voice of this prophecy by saying, it was fulfilled in John the Baptist is contrary to the truth. John did not restore all things. Neither can this passage be fulfilled by some brief, dramatic appearing of Elijah. He must come and do a work, which our Lord described as "restoring all things".

If we meditate upon these words our thoughts will almost automatically turn to the question the disciples asked the Lord just before His ascension.

Lord. Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? Acts 1:6

From the words the Lord spoke on a previous occasion they knew that Elijah would come and restore all things. Here they ask about the time of one feature of that restoration which was dear to their hearts. If Elijah does not restore the sovereignty to Israel, then he will not "restore all things." Thus in this question asked by the disciples we find proof of Israel's restoration and blessing before the coming of the Lord.

Joel's Great Prophecy

The next passage we will consider is Joel's great prophecy as quoted by Peter in Acts 2:16-21. The witness of this passage has been nullified by the insistence of some that Joel's prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost. Peter used Joel's words as an explanation of the events that occurred and said guardedly, "This is that which was spoken," but he did not say that Joel's words had been fulfilled. And, while it cannot be questioned that there was a precursory fulfillment of Joel's prophecy at Pentecost, nevertheless, the actual fulfillment is yet future. Joel's prophecy must be fulfilled before the second coming of Christ.

The reader should note carefully the words of Peter in Acts 2:17, "it shall come to pass in the last days," and his words in 2:20, "before the great and notable day of the Lord come." No other deduction is possible from these two statements than that "the last days" spoken of here precede "the great and notable day of the Lord." With this before us we can turn to Joel's prophecy and get fuller light upon this great event.

In Joel 2:12-17 we read of the national repentance of the people of Israel. This has never yet come to pass, but it will. This portion should be read carefully as lack of space makes its full quotation impractical here. When this repentance takes place, God will respond to it as indicated by the words,

"Then will the Lord be jealous for His land, and pity His people." Joel 2:18.

In Joel 2:19-27 we read of the great spiritual blessings that shall come upon the people and the material blessings that will also be their portion. The record is almost unbelievable.

That all of this precedes the second coming of Christ and the full establishment of Israel in the millennial kingdom is made plain by the passages, which immediately follow. In Joel 2:28 we read, "And it shall come to pass afterward," and in 2:31, "before the great and terrible day of the Lord come." Inasmuch as a definite sequence and time element is established by the words "then" (2:18), "afterward" (2:28), and "before" (2:31) we can state with full assurance that this prophecy has never been fulfilled in harmony with this sequence. Unless God is to default upon His promises, Joel 2:12-32 must be fulfilled before the second coming of Christ.

The Witness of Hosea

Another passage that declares this great truth is Hosea 2:14-23. As this portion has been expounded in Volume X, Number 4 of this witness (See *God's Declared Purposes*) we will not examine it here. From this we learn that the Jews will not continue forever in unbelief. Hosea 2 predicts a time to come when they as a people will be restored to faith in Him. The whole world will profit when this takes place. There is no nation upon earth today that could not obtain wisdom to solve their problems if Israel were restored to God. Restoration of the Jews to the land means nothing but more problems for the other nations. Restoration of Israel to God would mean blessing for every nation.

(To Be Continued, Vol. XI, No. 4)

THE EDITOR TO HIS FRIENDS

****My trip to the Middle-west and East was satisfactory from every standpoint. I left Los Angeles on April 18 and returned on May 13. I taught the Word twenty-seven times in eleven different places. The response to the witness exceeded my expectations. Meetings were held in Chicago, Rockford, Kankakee, and Aurora, Illinois; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Bremen, Indiana; Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids, Michigan; Toronto, Ontario; Buffalo, New York; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Tentative plans for ministry next October were discussed with various groups and individuals. Final decision in regard to this will be made and announced later.

****The Editor and Mrs. Sellers take pardonable pride in stating that our daughter Jane was granted her Master's degree in Education by the University of Southern California on June 11. It is now Jane Lou Sellers, A.B., M.S. in Ed. This completes her schooling and she plans to enter the teaching profession this fall.

****While in Milwaukee in April it was my privilege to introduce Mr. Hershey Julien to the friends who had assembled for the meeting. As they were anxious to have a regular class, Mr. Julien was invited to teach there every other week. Meetings are now held on the second and fourth Thursdays of each month in the *Modern Woodmen Hall*, 734 N. 26th Street (between Wisconsin Avenue and Wells Street). All friends of this ministry in the Milwaukee area are urged to participate in this class.

****The problem of financing a work such as this is not an easy one. We have no guarantee of support from anyone, and the gifts from the friends fluctuate with the times and the weather. At present the summer is upon us, and in addition, the times are not too good from the business standpoint. What has happened to all our friends? Will they take this reminder to their hearts? We need your constant help in this ministry of the truth.

End, Vol. XI, No. 3