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**NEW CREATION:
ITS GLORIOUS REACH**

Sequel To:

**New Creation
The End of All things
According to Flesh**

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FOREWORD

After developing the thoughts, several years ago, that led to the publication of “New Creation” by Scripture Research, Inc., I came across the terms “Replacement Theology” and “Supersessionism.” I had not seen these terms before, though I was familiar with the ideas behind them. They speak of the church *replacing* Israel of old or of *superseding* Israel as the People of God and inheritor of the promises in the OT. These terms appeared in literature accusing the US of failing to support the Israel of today adequately, thus leading, it was claimed, to all the troubles between the Palestinians and the people of Israel. The mainstream church of today was criticized for adopting “Replacement Theology” and thus rejecting Israel as the People of God and inheritors of the promises, specifically the promises concerning the land Israel occupied historically. It further claimed that this theology, adopted by “the church” early in the “Christian era” led to Anti-Semitism, Anti-Jewish feeling, persecution of the Jews, the rise of such tyrants as Hitler, the Holocaust, and the recent Mid-East troubles.

The accusations troubled me as I could see that my thoughts regarding “Israel according to flesh” presented in the booklet “New Creation” could be seen as supporting “Replacement Theology.” But I personally do not use the concept of “the church *replacing* Israel.” As I understand the life and ministry of Christ, I see *continuity* rather than *replacement*. John the Baptist and Christ came totally identified with the tradition of the OT prophets who kept warning the people to remain faithful. If the people departed from God, then God would depart from them. And he did, leaving the people in spiritual and physical exile, except for a faithful remnant. These warnings of such “cutting off” were reemphasized. Consider: “the ax is laid to the root of the trees,” “broad is the way that leads to destruction,” “these be the days of vengeance,” “save yourselves from this crooked generation.” The faithless ones were “cut off from the people.” The faithful ones, those who embraced the Messiah, were the People of God, the true Israel, God’s people who were saved from their sins. This is *continuation* of the OT tradition, not *replacement*.

-- Daniel Andersen

Invocation

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit, Romans 15:13

Prologue

In the booklet “New Creation” I sought to show how a grasp of the deepest meaning of the work of Christ caused a great change in the Apostle Paul’s personal outlook regarding all humanity, regarding the Messiah, and regarding the ancient “things of Israel.” He could no longer look upon his fellow human beings and make distinctions “according to flesh,” distinctions based primarily upon genealogy, but including all the externals of life that cause peoples to strive for status and superiority. He once viewed Messiah as one who would bring the blessings of “the times of Messiah” only to those “in Abraham” or “the seed of Abraham,” whether by natural birth or through the gateway of circumcision and keeping of the Mosaic Law. But he could no longer cling to this estimation of Messiah “according to flesh.” The “old things,” the things “according to flesh,” the “things of Israel,” have passed away. All these things have become new. Believers in Messiah partake of a “New Creation,” having a place “in Christ,” not “in Abraham.”

[Note: Scripture references will be from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) unless otherwise indicated.]

NEW CREATION – Its Glorious Reach

The “Left Behind” Fever

The thoughts summarized in The Prologue carry far-reaching implications. I believe Paul received these truths by divine revelation. They are God’s truths. Thus, God himself is not making distinctions according to genealogy, according to race, nation, ethnic background, etc., etc. This implies that God is not more concerned with the people in the land of Israel than with people in the land of Bangladesh or the Sudan or the USA! And if that is the case, there is no deep (“prophetic”) significance to what is going on in the Mid-East. As the renowned New Testament scholar N.T. Wright put it directly to me, the deepest significance of the Mid-East is that it is a region in which we should bring to bear all the proper principles of justice among peoples, but no more so than, say, among the peoples of Africa or South America.

Another implication is that the “any-moment-secret-rapture” concept and accompanying “Left Behind fever” are totally meaningless and without merit. They lead to false expectations, false planning, aroused emotional states, an “edge of the seat” feeling concerning things to come. Though born into and brought up in a group that strongly embraced 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 as an “any moment” expectation, I have long ago left that position. Today I view the Olivet Discourse as hav-

ing been fulfilled in the revolt against Rome, AD 68-70 (31/2 yr., 42 mo?), at just about the time when that generation to which Christ spoke would “pass away.”

Promises Fulfilled in Christ?

To apply the promises given the *fathers* of Israel to the situation concerning the land in the Mid-East today is to disregard what the Scriptures themselves say. I urge the reader to study the 1st and 23rd chapters of Joshua and 1 Kings 8:56 in this regard. About 3 dozen more scriptures speak in the same manner. *All* that was promised the *fathers* was fulfilled; “not one word has failed of all his good promise.” But it is an easy task to locate dozens more prophetic promises in the *prophets* that concern the land, the “Day of the Lord,” the future and “last days” of the people of Israel, etc., etc. These must be examined carefully and determination made as to how they are to be fulfilled or perhaps may already have been fulfilled.

The Key: “IN CHRIST”

I believe the key to prophecy, the key to the promises, the key to New Creation itself is Paul’s wonderful phrase, “In Christ.” This was dealt with to some extent in the booklet “New Creation” but now is the time to go into more detail.

Years ago, O.Q. Sellers, founder of the Word of Truth Ministry, made the statement:

No one will ever be anything before God unless
Christ is made that first.

I embraced that statement when I first heard it and embrace it strongly to this day. Christ is the Servant, the Seed, the Son, the Heir. Those in him become these *because he is*. Let's consider the implications of the last three more closely.

Christ, The Seed (Offspring) of Promise

Consider the following phrases from passages in the book of Genesis:

12:3 -- ...in you (Abraham) all the families of the earth shall be blessed (or, by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves, ft.).

18:18 - ...and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? (or, shall bless themselves by him, ft.).

22:18 - ...by your (Abraham's) offspring (seed) shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves...

26:4 -- ...all the nations of the earth shall gain blessing for themselves through your (Isaac's) offspring (seed)...

28:14 - ...all the families of the earth shall be blessed (or, shall bless themselves, ft.) in you (Jacob) and in your offspring (seed).

It is my conviction that these passages are entirely equivalent. "In Abraham" and "in the offspring (seed) of Abraham" (Isaac and Jacob were immediate "seed") mean the same thing. Now keep in mind that the religious leaders in Israel did not interpret these promises to indicate that the "seed of Abraham" would be the *instrumentality* or *means* by which the promised blessings would be realized. Rather, the "seed of

Abraham” was the *location* or *place* in which the blessings would be experienced, where peoples would “bless themselves.” Those *direct* descendants of Abraham (through Isaac and Jacob) who were not, for faithlessness in one form or another, “cut off from among the people,” were, by natural birth, seed of Abraham. Foreigners, by means of the gateway of circumcision and keeping the Law of Moses, could enter into and be reckoned seed of Abraham.

It is no wonder, then, that those “Pharisees that believed” (Acts 15:5) stood up and said, concerning those abroad to whom Paul had brought the testimony concerning Christ Jesus:

It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses.

They had the inspired Scriptures on their side and could certainly point to “chapter and verse” from among those listed above.

But, for Paul, the situation has dramatically changed. Though he once also had an “estimation of Messiah according to flesh,” whereby a place in the offspring of Abraham was vital, he no longer viewed Messiah in that provincial manner. To Paul, Messiah *Himself* was the “offspring (seed) of promise” and those who embraced Messiah became “offspring of Abraham” in Messiah!

This is the impact of “New Creation,” whereby the old things had passed and all things were now new. Paul speaks clearly concerning these matters in his letter to

the Galatians. Consider (“seed, seeds” from NRSV ft):

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring (seed); it does not say, “And to offsprings,” (seeds) as of many; but it says, “And to your offspring,” (seed) that is, to one person, who is Christ. (3:16)

It (the law) was added because of transgressions, until the offspring (seed) would come to whom the promise had been made...(3:19)

Notice how pointed Paul’s statement is in v 19: Christ (Messiah) is the one *to whom the promise had been made!* Can Paul be accused of “spiritualizing” the promises? Not by this writer!

Now Paul draws his argument full circle in v 29:

And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring (seed)...

It is my personal conviction that Paul added this remark at the end of the 3rd chapter for the benefit of dispersed Israelites who would learn from this epistle. They were the ones who were so deeply concerned about being “seed of Abraham,” something they had learned and been schooled in from infancy. Paul gives them assurance that, in Messiah, they had not lost a thing (in fact, they had gained!). They could rest assured they were truly “Abraham’s seed.” They become “seed of promise” because Christ is the “seed of promise” -- *they become what He is!* (Contrary to many commentators, I believe this epistle was written mainly to, or for the benefit of, dispersed Israelites. Notice that “Gentiles”

are always spoken of in the 3rd person, the “outsiders,” never “you Gentiles” as in Romans and Ephesians. Galatians 3 and 4 are clearly a review of the history and status, before God, of the people of Israel before and up to the time “the faith came.” The Law certainly was not “custodian” or “disciplinarian” of *Gentiles* “until Christ came.”)

Son, Sons of God

Ask an Israelite, schooled in the traditions of that people, “Who is the Son of God?” One standard answer is, “Well, we (Israelites) are!” They could point to certain unambiguous passages in the OT:

Thus says the LORD: Israel is my firstborn son...Let my son go that he may worship me, Exodus 4:22,23.

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son, Hosea 11:1.

There are probably no more than about half a dozen or so verses in the OT speaking of Israel as “son of God,” but those few speak clearly. The concept of “son of God” is not a well-developed or familiar topic in the OT Scriptures. Contrast this with the flood of passages in the NT Scriptures designating Messiah, Christ, as “Son of God.” We select one from dozens of possibilities:

...these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God...John 20:31.

Now consider Paul’s statement in Galatians 3:26:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus...(NIV)

I prefer the rephrasing as in the Revised Standard Version (RSV):

...for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

NRSV is the same except it uses the term “children” here instead of “sons” (Gk.), and carries this rendering into the 4th chapter. So the following quotation of 4:4-7 is from the RSV:

But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.

Paul brings the believer into the highest possible relationship with God. Were the Galatians concerned with being “sons of Abraham” or “seed of Abraham?” Think of it -- in Messiah believers become “sons of God!” Nothing can surpass this! The Messiah is the Son of God -- *the believer becomes, before God, what his own Son is!* Paul writes in a parallel manner in Romans 8:14-16. Again, using RSV:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children (Gk!) of God...

Though Gentiles are conspicuously absent in Galatians, not being addressed directly, Paul clearly states:

that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, 3:14.

The meaning of this “blessing of Abraham” is clearly stated in 3:8:

...the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.”

I believe this gives us every right to consider Gentiles, in Christ, just as much The People of God as believing Israelites themselves. In support of this thought is Paul’s statement in Romans 11:13:

Unto you however, am I speaking, -- you of the nations; inasmuch indeed then as *I* am an apostle to the nations *my ministry* I glorify, Rotherham (emphasis his).

I believe this gives us every right to consider the passage, Romans 8:14-16 (quoted above), concerning the placing as sons, as applicable to Gentiles (those of the nations) as much as to believing Israelites. A most positive confirmation is in Ephesians 3:6:

...the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Thus, the prospect of being The People of God is open to all humanity, as far as the reach of the gospel of

Christ. Do we not see here an indication of the riches of the grace of God? Do we not see here a major step in the realization of God's ultimate purpose in the Person of his Son? The "chosen People," "The People of God," is expanded from a single people, the descendants of Abraham, to include all humanity! And not via the gateway of circumcision and keeping the Law. Specific promises of blessing, peace, prosperity, security, etc. for Israel are expanded to include all the nations of the earth. And it is all because of what peoples become "in Christ."

Christ, Heir of The Works of God's Hands

Psalm 8, in answer to the question about the apparent insignificance of human beings, speaks of them crowned with glory and honor, given dominion over the works of God's hands and all things put under their feet. Hebrews 2:6-8 quotes from Psalm 8. The Hebrew of Psalm 8 and the Greek of Hebrews 2 use "man" and "son of man" in the singular though all humanity, human beings, are clearly in view (NRSV uses the plural, "human beings."). But there may be significance in using the singular, for in 2:8 we read:

In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him (NIV).

Then immediately we read:

But we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor...(v 9)

This seems purposefully an echo of v 7 and justifies, I believe, our seeing Christ as the “son of man” in these contexts. And we cannot help but connect these contexts with the following:

For God has put all things in subjection under his (Christ’s) feet, 1 Corinthians 15:27.

And he (God) has put all things under his (Christ’s) feet... Ephesians 1:22.

Heir by Appointment!

Surely it is safe to conclude that Christ is in view as we read of the one who has been given “dominion over the works of your hands,” though it might be claimed that Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2 are a bit ambiguous in this regard. But all ambiguity is removed by the forceful statement in Hebrews 1:2:

...He (God) has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things...

Can one put a limitation on the phrase “heir of all things?” It must include all lands and all peoples. It must describe majesty and sovereignty, might and dominion. It is as inclusive a phrase as one could find in the entire Bible.

Joint Heirs With Christ

Several scripture passages indicate that Christ will not be alone when he comes into his inheritance. Consider:

When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ...Romans 8:15-17.

And if you belong to Christ, then you are...heirs according to the promise, Galatians 3:29, NRSV. (according to promise, RSV)

So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir, Galatians 4:7, RSV.

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, Ephesians. 1:11.

...this mystery...has now been revealed...that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs...Ephesians 3:5, 6.

Would we limit Christ's inheritance to the historic "land of Israel" of the OT scriptures? No, he is to have dominion over all the works of God's hands. He has been appointed heir of all things. This must certainly include all our planet Earth -- perhaps much, or all, beyond! Should particular verses in the prophets about Israel inheriting the land raise the troubling issue as to whether to take them "literally" or "spiritually?" No! The People of God are joint-heirs with Christ. They will share his dominion. Again, *God's people become, before him, what Christ is!* Can we not see that, as The People of God is expanded from Israel to include all humanity, promises about inheriting the land expand from the historic "land of Israel" to include all the planet Earth? Our God is not too small! He is the God of the whole universe, the God of all humanity, the God of all the Earth.

... The Creation Waits ...

Are the thoughts of the last paragraph too presumptuous, too far-fetched? Absolutely not! Paul speaks of this very thing, but in more transcendent terms. Consider Romans 8:19-23:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

Paul goes on to speak of this glorious expectation as something not yet seen: “hope that is seen is not hope.” But having the expectation of that which is not yet seen, he can say “we wait for it with patience.” He speaks, not of land, the promised land, the land of Israel. He speaks of “the creation itself.” These thoughts cannot be limited to a certain parcel of real estate in the Mid-East. Surely they must apply to the entire planet Earth and perhaps what is beyond!

NEW CREATION’S GLORIOUS REACH

A Progression of Thought?

Many have seen development, or progression, in the

setting forth of truths in the New Testament. I first became aware of this idea decades ago, reading a booklet by John Darby: “Romans, Colossians, Ephesians.” I believe that in Romans he stressed the “Work of Christ.” In Colossians he stressed “with Christ” (likely based on 2:20;3:1-3). In Ephesians he stressed “in Christ” (likely based on such as 1:6,7; 2:10).

I also see a progression in the thoughts of Paul himself, from his earlier to his later epistles. But first let us consider the deep implications of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ. N.T. Wright, in a lecture I attended, summarized these implications as follows:

The history of Israel -- and the world -- was brought to a dramatic climax.

Here was the true exodus, the return from exile.

Here was the return of God to his people, with their forgiveness.

Here was the true identity of the temple and of the People of God.

Here was made known the true blessings promised to the peoples of the world in the seed of Abraham -- the real exodus *for all humans* from the exile from God due to the effects of the *real* adversaries -- sin and Satan and death.

Most readers will agree that the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ have far-reaching and profound effects upon the status of the people of Israel and all

humanity. Not all will agree on the particular details of the summary just given, which appeal to me very much. I urge each one to give careful and serious thought to these statements.

The People of God

The New Covenant

In the ministry of Christ we observe the return of God, in the Person of his Son, to his people. He was given the name Jesus for he would “save his people from their sins.” This is the forgiveness promised through the prophets that accompanies the return from exile and the renewed presence of God. It is the forgiveness promised under the terms of the New Covenant. In the early chapters of the Book of Acts we see unmistakable evidence of the presence of God with his people. It is not with the social-religious hierarchy of Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, not with the scribes and elders and teachers of the Law, not with the “system” that centered in the temple and had long been associated with the presence of God, access to God, and the forgiveness of sins. The people of God now are those faithful ones who have responded by faith to the proclamation and teaching of The Messiah, The Son of God. Though few in number, *they* now constitute the People of God and the nation of Israel.

Jeremiah is the one prophet who sets forth the terms of the New Covenant -- Jeremiah 31:31-34. His words are quoted extensively in Hebrews 8:8-12 and 10:16,17. So that they are fresh in our minds, we make the full quo-

tation here:

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt -- a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

The New Covenant -- Not Yet?

I cannot agree with those who claim that the New Covenant has not yet been put into effect. This claim is based mainly upon Romans 11:26, 27:

**And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written,
"Out of Zion will come the Deliverer;
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob."
"And this is my covenant with them,
when I take away their sins."**

The claim is made that we have not yet seen "all Israel" saved. Thus the promised covenant cannot have been put into effect.

This issue was dealt with in the booklet "New Creation"

on p. 65. Let us be reminded here that “all Israel” cannot be defined as all those who came from the man Israel. It must be those who have embraced the Messiah. Consider Romans 9:6-8 again:

...For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, and not all of Abraham’s children are his true descendants... This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants.

We can say with confidence that all who, before God, constitute his people Israel will experience his full salvation. Note that 11:27, in referring to “my covenant with them,” speaks of taking away their sins. Is this not a specific reference to the life and work of Christ in “saving his people from their sins?”

It may be argued that there has been no time in history that the words “they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest” (Hebrews 8:11) have been fulfilled.

Not so! Indeed, this is an integral part of the New Covenant and for those under the New Covenant. But consider these relevant passages:

May grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, 2 Peter 1:2.

...the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true, 1 John 5:20.

I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured

understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, Colossians 2:2, 3.

I must say that anyone who, with Paul, addresses God as "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" has come to know God in accord with the very highest revelation he has ever made or will make of himself. And anyone who has ever breathed that phrase, "Abba! The Father!" has come to know God in the most intimate manner imaginable -- as one of His dear children! The terms of the New Covenant may anticipate, but cannot surpass, these lofty thoughts.

Paul – New Covenant Minister

Paul, in 2 Corinthians 3:3-6 states most plainly:

...you make it obvious that you are a letter of Christ which I have been employed to inscribe, *written* not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not *on tablets of stone* but *on tablets of the human heart*.

Such is the confidence I possess through Christ towards God. It is not that I am personally qualified to form any judgment by myself; my qualifications come from God, and he Has further qualified me to be the minister of a new covenant --a covenant not of written law but of spirit; for the written law kills but the Spirit makes alive. (Moffatt)

Moffatt italicizes words that echo OT passages. Here, "tablets of stone" direct us back to Exodus 24:12 and "tablets of the human heart" direct us back to Jeremiah "31:33. To me, all of 2 Corinthians 3 strongly affirms

the ministry of the New Covenant. And the quotations in Hebrews 8 and 10 seem to indicate the actual ministry of the New Covenant at that time. Christ spoke of the contents of the cup as “my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sin,” Matthew 26:28. And Paul writes, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me,” 1 Corinthians 11:25. Could such words be spoken if the New Covenant had not been instituted at that time?

Jeremiah states the terms of the New Covenant in but two verses, 31:33,34. Our discussion shows that each phrase there is answered to in the ministry of the gospel in the time of the Book of Acts.

Status of Gentiles

We have seen that Paul speaks of Gentiles as being brought into the “blessings of Abraham,” into the Church of God, into the placing as sons of God, with a standing before God equal to that of literal descendants of Abraham. In Romans 11 Paul states, concerning believing Gentiles, that:

...you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, v 17.

Faithless Israelites were, in figure, cut off from the true Israel olive tree and believing Gentiles grafted in (Romans 11:13-24 gives elaborate details of this figure.). This can only mean that Gentiles became an integral part of The People of God, along with believing Israelites. We saw earlier that Paul’s statement in

Ephesians 3:6 speaks directly of the same matter:

...the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

But, “To Israelites Belong the Covenants!”

Paul’s statement in Romans 9:4, expressed in this subtitle, has been used as proof that, along with all covenants, the New Covenant must be limited only to “the house of Israel” and “the house of Judah,” as Jeremiah stated plainly in 31:31. No problem! Gentiles clearly become Israel, the People of God, *in Christ*. Israel is now defined *in Christ*. Distinctions of the flesh have passed away. Gentiles are included in Israel. Are there any terms of the New Covenant that could not or cannot be applied to Gentiles? If so, what are they? Can God write his “laws” upon the fleshy tables of the hearts of Gentiles? Paul’s thoughts in 2 Corinthians 3 indicate a positive answer. Can God be the God of Gentiles and they be his peoples? Certainly!

Review Romans 15:9-12 and dozens of other scriptures in this connection. After all, isn’t this a major thrust of the entire Bible -- that God will prove to be the God of all humanity, not of a select few? Can Gentiles come to “know the LORD, from the least to the greatest?” Again, certainly! Consider Colossians 1:9,10:

For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spirit-

ual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as *you grow in the knowledge of God.*

Similar passages such as Ephesians 1:8 ff.; 3:14 ff. could be cited.

How about, "...I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more?" In reply, the work of Christ cuts across all racial and national distinctions. It is for Jew and Gentile alike, for Israelites and for those of the nations. Much in the ministry of Paul proclaims this truth. Consider Ephesians 2:16-18:

...and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it (or, *in Himself*, ft). So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.

Does this all mean that we Gentiles today in the 21st Century are to view ourselves as "the Israel of God," as being under the New Covenant? When the terms of the New Covenant are scrutinized with care, as we have done above, I see no major objections to the idea that Gentiles come under its purview. All its terms can be seen to come within the scope of the Person and Work of Christ. But are we not, before God, in a new "dispensation" where all these "things of Israel," even though applicable "in Christ," have passed away?

“Progression” in Pauline Thought

It is precisely at this point that, hinted at earlier, I see a progression in the writings of Paul. In his early epistles we see much concern and elaboration on what we might call “the things of Israel.” There is much written about the Law, the promises, the covenants, the fathers, circumcision vs. uncircumcision, Abraham, seed of Abraham, the definition of God’s Israel, the identity of the true People of God. This is especially true in the epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians and also in the book of Hebrews. To list and quote all such passages would occupy too much space. Some comments regarding them will be made in the Appendix.

From the New Israel to the New Humanity

I believe that God has a goal in relation to humanity. I believe that in the Scriptures we see God working toward that goal. The steps may seem long and complicated. But God’s ways are not our ways and we must be content to allow him to attain his goal in his own way. Perhaps, when we know what his goal is, we can look back upon Biblical history, Old Testament and New Testament, and see how it all comes together and makes sense.

Paul gives one of the clearest statements of God’s goal in Romans 8:29:

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family (*among many brothers, ft*).

Paul does not say Christ will be firstborn among many fellow Israelites or sons of Abraham or in the Israel of God. What a glorious destiny -- conformed to the image of the Son of God! Incidentally, to me this indicates the meaning of that pesky term "predestination." It speaks specifically of the destiny of God's people and does not speak generally of all humanity. And what a glorious destiny it is indeed!

Paul gives us another glimpse of this goal in another of his earlier epistles but in very general terms that are not as specific as the previous passage. 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 leads us to a beautiful and magnificent climax. Here are highlights:

...He hands over the kingdom to God the Father...he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet"...it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all.

I especially like the Moffatt and RSV rendering of the last phrase. It may be the correct interpretation of Paul's grand statement:

...so that God may be everything to everyone.

I see this as completely in harmony with Romans 8:29. In Christ, The Son of God, we see God as everything he ought to be in the esteem of a human being. To humans, in the image of His Son, God will be everything

he ought to be -- in their esteem, their worship, their praise, their delight, in everything.

Paul makes another grand statement of God's goal, even going beyond, though including, the place of humanity, in Ephesians 1:9, 10:

...he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up (lit. to head up) all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Today we can say that we are:

to the praise of his glorious grace that He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved (I specially enjoy Phillips' rendering here: "that we might learn to praise that glorious generosity of his which has made us welcome in the everlasting love he bears toward the Beloved"), Ephesians 1:6.

...rescued...from the power of darkness and transferred...into the kingdom of his beloved Son (there is an active sense here, "kingdom of his dearly-loved Son," Cassirer; "of the Son of his love," Rotherham), Colossians 1:13.

And today we say that "the greatest of these is love." Then consider what it will be like when, "in Christ" are headed up all things in the heavens and on the earth. It will be a sphere of love. Love will permeate all things. Our place today before God The Father is in that Son He actively loves. When our destiny to be conformed to the image of His Son becomes actuality, there will be no barrier to our entering into and enjoying that love!

One New Humanity

This is the phrase NRSV uses in Ephesians 2:15:

He (Christ) has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself *one new humanity* in place of the two, thus making peace...

Notice well! Here is a new creation. It is a creation of Christ *in Himself*. It is a new humanity, not a new Israel, not a new seed of promise, not new sons of Abraham. It joins all humanity into a new humanity. Truly this must be “the image of His Son” which is the destiny of God’s people.

That is not the way you learned Christ! For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self (old “anthropos” – “humanity”), corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self (new “anthropos, humanity”), created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness, Ephesians 4:20-24.

Here Paul speaks of “the old humanity” and “the new humanity” in a context of moral exhortations. It brings to mind Romans 6 about “our old humanity has been crucified with Christ” and to “reckon yourselves to be dead indeed with respect to sin but alive with respect to God in Christ Jesus.” Perhaps this is “the way you learned Christ!” and “were taught in Him.” It is again a “creation” that is in some sense “according to God.”

These words bring to mind a similar passage, Colossians 3:9-11:

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self (“anthropos” – “humanity”) with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self (“anthropos, humanity”), which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator, where there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all! (Christ is all that matters, for Christ lives in them all, Phillips.)

Here again, in a context of moral exhortations, Paul speaks of a “new humanity” to be brought eventually into the image of the one who created it. Are there not echoes here of what we saw back in Romans 8: “conformed to the image of His son?” I would certainly like to think so! Note how everything else fades away -- *Christ is all!*

There are scholars and grammarians who claim that the “prison epistles,” specifically Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians were not written by the Apostle Paul. There are many scholars and grammarians who state that this claim is false, that these are definitely “Pauline epistles.” This disputation does not bother me a great deal. I’d say that these epistles surely contain the ultimate implications and reach of the truths given to Paul to minister. They carry us to the very peak of the meaning of that wonderful phrase, “In Christ!” Everything else drops away. We are focused solely upon and occupied with The Person of The Son of God.

It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and

teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me, Colossians 1:28, 29.

...and you have come to fullness in him, who is The head of every ruler and authority, Colossians 2:10.

Notice how Christ alone fills the view. There is no mention of becoming “Seed of Abraham” or “Seed of Promise” as a result of coming to the Messiah. It is simply “in Christ.” As the KJV puts 2:10, “Ye are complete in him.” There is nothing to add!! This is not a step to something beyond!! This is the goal!! This is the attainment!! This is the place to rest!! This is where New Creation brings us!! This is its glorious reach!! May it be true in our own thinking, as it was in the Apostle Paul’s:

...that he might come to have first place in everything, Colossians 1:18.

Appendix I

The Old Things Have Passed -- Indeed, They Have Become New!

In the context of 2 Corinthians 5, these phrases were seen to speak of the old things of Israel's traditions: genealogy, the requirements of the Law for proper ancestry, the expectation that The Messiah would bring blessing to those securely within the "seed" or descendants of Abraham, the distinctions according to flesh so emphasized in Judaism for the proper ritual service of and approach to God. In "New Creation," these old things have passed away. Acceptance with and reconciliation to God are available equally to all. It is "in Messiah," "in Christ," not in Abraham or in the seed of Abraham.

I see this "passing away" exhibited in what I've called the progression of Pauline thought. The "things of Israel" that were so pronounced and so thoroughly dealt with in the earlier epistles and Hebrews are conspicuously absent in the later epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Timothy, Titus). Let's consider the use and occurrences of certain familiar names and topics.

"Abraham" is mentioned nine times in Romans, nine times in Galatians, ten times in Hebrews, but not at all in the later epistles. To me this is most significant, as Abraham occupies such a prominent place in Biblical history. As far as Abraham is concerned, in the later epistles we have a deafening silence!

The “father” or “fathers” of Israel are spoken of eleven times in Romans, three times in Hebrews, not at all in the later epistles.

The “promise” or “promises” to the fathers and to Israel are dealt with frequently in Romans, Galatians, Hebrews. In the later epistles we read more of “the promise of life in Christ Jesus.”

The “covenant” or “covenants” are mentioned twice in Romans and 2 Corinthians, three times in Galatians, and seventeen times in Hebrews (out of thirty-three times in the entire NT!). The only occurrence in the later epistles is a reminder to the Gentiles that they were once “strangers to the covenants of promise,” Ephesians 2:12.

“Israel” is spoken of twelve times in Romans, once in 1 Corinthians and Galatians, twice in 2 Corinthians, 3 times in Hebrews. In the later epistles Paul reminds the Gentiles that they were once “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel,” Ephesians 2:12. And in Philippians 3:5 he states that being “a member of the people of Israel” would be a thing to have confidence in if he were to have confidence in the things of the flesh.

“Jerusalem” occurs a total of fourteen times in Romans, 1 Cor., Galatians, Hebrews. It does not occur in the later epistles.

“Moses” is mentioned a total of twenty times in Romans, 1 and 2 Cor., and Hebrews, but not at all in the later epistles.

The Law of Moses is referred to over sixty times in the epistle to the Romans. (Not every use of the word “law” refers to the Mosaic Law.) It is referred to over twenty-five times in Galatians and about a dozen times in Hebrews, 9 times in 1 Corinthians. It is mentioned just once in Ephesians: “He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances,” 2:15; three times in Philippians where Paul, looking back, states that, in regard to the Law he was a Pharisee, was blameless according to righteousness under the Law, but that now he wanted to be

“found in him (Christ), not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ...,” 3:5, 6, 9.

Finally, Paul warns Timothy about those who desire to be “teachers of the law (literally, “law-teachers”), without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions,” 1 Timothy 1:7. He goes on to state that “the law is good, if one uses it legitimately ... that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient ... ,” vv 8, 9.

We see how “the things of Israel” disappear from our view as we progress along those truths that center in Christ our Lord. I anticipate the objection that this is what we must expect as the growing church took in Gentiles all over the Roman Empire and its center moved westward from Jerusalem, ultimately into Europe. “Of course, as Gentiles came into the majority in the church, the Jewish things would no longer be emphasized. So why make such a big deal of it?”

But is this not precisely the point! This is precisely how and why “the things of Israel” fade from the view! To some, a new, unexpected, unpredicted “dispensation” came in. Whether the grace of God given to Paul to administer (or, of which he was steward) speaks of a new “dispensation” is another study altogether (see Appendix II). But even this emphasizes Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles and thus leads us to the same conclusions regarding “the things of Israel,” that they fade away. And to me, this is a permanent situation. The things of the flesh are gone forever, the distinctions between peoples no longer count and never will again. When one comes to be in Christ, one partakes of God’s “New Creation.” And here it can be said:

He planned, in his purpose of love, that we should be adopted as his own children through Jesus Christ--that we might learn to praise that glorious generosity of his which has made us welcome in the everlasting love he bears toward the Beloved, Ephesians 1:5, 6, Phillips.

Appendix II

What About “Dispensationalism”?

We Are All Dispensationalists!

The word “dispensation” is a perfectly good word, with good and acceptable meanings. It’s the “isms” that can

arouse emotional reactions! A dictionary may give several meanings. Among them, from *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* are:

- 1. a: a general state or ordering of things; *specif*: a system of revealed commands and promises regulating human affairs...**
- b: a particular arrangement or provision esp. of providence or nature**
- 3. a: the act of dispensing b: something dispensed or distributed**

Anyone anywhere who “believes in God” will subscribe to the thoughts in #1. If there is a God, this one will either have provided a set of “revealed commands and promises” or set up some “particular arrangement or provision” indicative of its providence, or both. And, more specifically, those who consider us as living during a particular era of God’s administrative affairs called “The Dispensation of the Grace of God,” would agree with the ideas in #3, that God today, in contrast with anger, wrath, and judgment, is “dispensing” grace to one and all.

Another approach is to claim that dispensation means “method of dealing.” Thus, anyone who believes that God’s “system of revealed commands ... ” has changed from requiring access via a temple in Jerusalem to having access in the Person of Christ, is a dispensationalist. Or, some will say that God has changed his “method of dealing” from the OT “dispensing” of the legal requirements and qualities of law-giver and judge to the NT “dispensing” of those traits accompanying the intimate qualities of “father.” These seem obviously simple extensions of the

dictionary meanings given above and should cause no great difficulties.

But our concern here should not be with the English word “dispensation.” It should be with the Greek word “oikonomia,” which is translated “dispensation” four times in the KJV (1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 1:10; 3:2; Col. 1:25). It is formed from “oikos” (a house) and “nemo” (to administer) and speaks of the administering of household affairs. Thus we read of the “oikonomos” (steward, manager) in Luke 16:1,3,8 and his “oikonomia” (stewardship, management). This concept of a person in some way having the responsibility of administering or managing household affairs (perhaps as a figure) should carry through each usage of the word. We may well wonder how the word “dispensation” came to be used in the passages noted above. Many translations, including NIV and NRSV do not use “dispensation.” They speak of carrying out an administration or commission, or discharging a trust, or carrying out an assigned task. Indeed, this is what Paul appears to be describing in each such context. He is the steward, the administrator, the manager of a trust assigned to him – making known the Gospel of Christ among the nations.

Many “dispensational scenarios” have been produced. They usually state the “methods of dealing” or “administrations” of God over the millennia. There is no basic objection to this. After all, each individual has developed his or her own particular perspective or pattern of thought (“paradigm”) in relation to every detail of their understanding of God, the purposes and works of God, and their relationship with God. When

one comes to maturity, all this should be the result of personal exercise of mind and reason, not simply the dictates of authority, no matter how well respected or highly esteemed.

Troubles arise when such a dispensational structure is adopted and incorporated into one's faith with an intense commitment as though it were something extracted directly from the Bible. Then one usually becomes associated with a denomination or group espousing this particular scheme. It becomes a *dogma to defend* rather than a tentative view of how things might be. I'm aware of folks who adopt the noble word "Berean" as part of their fellowship and faith but produce a doctrinal system so rigidly tight that there must be absolutely no deviation from a printed "statement of belief." In effect, they say, "No, don't search the scriptures daily to see if these things be so. Accept and follow our doctrinal statements." To deviate in any way is to be excommunicated, sometimes accompanied with the accusation that one has offended God, that one's relationship with God has been seriously put into jeopardy.

I've Come a Long Way!

I was born into and brought up and grew to maturity within the so-called "Darby-Scotfield" concept of dispensationalism, probably the most widespread and prevailing of all such schemes. My father, after serving in the US Army in WW I, attended the Philadelphia School of the Bible (PSOB). He became intimately acquainted with William L. Pettingill, director of PSOB,

a consulting editor of the Scofield Reference Bible, and at least met C.I. Scofield. My mother told me how, when Pettingill and others went out on fund-raising attempts, Pettingill told my father: "Carl, you stay here and pray while we go and seek funds!" Perhaps my father's prayers helped bring PSOB through some severe financial straits!

It was a simple transition for my family to become completely immersed in the Plymouth Brethren (PB) movement (the largest, "open brethren" group among the seven factions then prevailing). My father became the informal leader (no "church hierarchy" among PBs!) of the group. It met in our living room Sunday mornings for worship -- The Lord's people gathered around the "Lord's Table" to observe the "Lord's Supper" on the "Lord's Day." They were very evangelical, using a downtown storefront for literature displays and gospel meetings.

The PBs were (and still are?) the epitome of that whole "any moment" expectation. They strongly embraced the concept of a "secret rapture" of believers, leaving all others behind. This would be followed by 7 years of tribulation and wrath for the inhabitants of earth, with the revelation of the Antichrist, the "Man of Sin," and other notable "beasts," climaxing in the Battle of Armageddon, the triumphant return of Christ with the armies of heaven, conquering all foes and introducing the glorious millennium.

Left Behind?

My childhood was filled with the “any moment return of Christ” expectation. The PBs attended every lecture on prophetic schemes that came through Jamestown, NY, my hometown. I have vivid memories of the entire backdrop of a large stage draped with those fearful and threatening pictures of beasts, as seen in Clarence Larkin’s large book, “Dispensational Truth.” The pictures and diagrams followed a time line, usually beginning in Biblical times and progressing to our time and beyond. I was so impressed that every single scheme of the unfolding of the “last days” put us right at the edge, right at the hinge of fate, so to speak -- we’re at that point in history -- the secret return of Christ for his own is the next thing! Of course this aroused fears, fears of being left behind. If things became too quiet, no evidence of people around and active, I’d worry as to whether or not Christ had returned and I was left behind. The PBs gave great emphasis to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. It seems there was constant (and fond) reference to it as though it were the most important passage in all of Scripture.

As I “matured in the faith” and grew on into youth and adulthood I became a zealous propagator of the “return of Christ” teaching. In fact, I felt that, before God, it was my primary responsibility to alert one and all that Christ could come back at any moment. A friend had structured a talk he called “Living Looking” that used some of the major NT texts on the subject. I incorporated it into my “agenda” of talks on Biblical subjects, seeking to arouse the “any moment” fervor

that I was experiencing. I dropped my GI life insurance (reinstated later!), felt God didn't want me to marry (1 Corinthians 7:27 and context), and, in general, divested myself of "earthly entanglements." If Christ is coming back at any moment, don't be encumbered with extraneous, unnecessary "baggage"!

I do not know of a "dispensational scheme" that does not require God to be dealing with peoples and nations "according to flesh." We hear so much about God undertaking "on behalf of his ancient people." Being an Israelite gives one some kind of special status in relation to God -- the natural "seed of Abraham" has a distinct place before God in the accomplishment of his purposes in relation to humanity. The strong implication of the "New Creation" booklet is that God has discarded all such distinctions, that nothing in the way of race, nationality, ethnic group, genealogical roots, etc., etc., have any place or status in the outworking of his purposes. He has discarded all these. They are the (specific) old things that have passed away, 2 Corinthians 5:17. Everything God will do in relationship to humanity is to be in and through His Son. And this is open to all, with absolutely none of the racial, national, ethnic distinctions so characteristic of human affairs. It follows that the turmoil and troubles in the Middle East involving Israeli peoples and Arabian peoples are not part of a divine, elaborate "end times" scenario. This realization alone would justify a change in outlook and perspective.

The Popular Paradigm

The Darby-Scofield dispensational scenario calls for a “postponement” concept concerning “last things.” The time for the occurrence of such events as the return of Christ, the “great tribulation,” the “70th week” of Daniel 9, the coming of the Antichrist and the “Man of Sin,” the frightful events described in 2 Thessalonians 1, 2 and the book of Revelation, etc., etc., is simply postponed from the expected time after the resurrection of Christ until some time yet in the future. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans is considered a *partial* fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse, Matthew 24. At some time in the future a new temple will be constructed. It, in turn, will be destroyed in total fulfillment of Matthew 24. In fact, the awful destruction and slaughter of people that took place in AD 68-70 was but a sample of even greater destruction and slaughter yet to come. C. I. Scofield’s note at Luke 21:20 states:

...that siege and its horrors but adumbrate the final siege at the end of this age, in which the “great tribulation” culminates.

“Dispensationalists” would say that the “prophetic clock” was stopped. The time for all the “end time” events to take place, shortly after the resurrection of Christ, was postponed to the future when that “clock” will again be running. In the meantime, God has introduced a method of dealing, “The Dispensation of the Grace of God” (Ephesians 3:2), in which prophecy is not being fulfilled but the testimony of Christ, the gospel, is being proclaimed, sinners are being justified through faith by the grace of God. At some time in the future, a time which many believe is very near at hand,

the prophetic clock will tick, the parenthetical “grace period” will end, and the apocalyptic end-time events will take place.

Another scheme considers the entire “70 weeks” of Daniel 9 to be future. As the “end-time” events are not until the “70th week,” a period of almost 500 years (7 years per week) must intervene before the return of Christ after the prophetic clock is in motion.

It took quite a long time but I eventually realized that the popular scheme took some things out of contexts and distorted some meanings. For example, “generation” in Matthew 24:34 should not be distorted to “race.” And Christ’s words: “...this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place” must be allowed to have their full force. (These matters, and the Olivet Discourse itself, are dealt with in detail in *This I Believe* #35 which will be sent to anyone upon request.)

The Dispensation of the Grace of God

...If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward...Ephesians 3:2, KJV

This is surely a key text for the entire Darby-Scofield dispensational scheme and a variety of other such schemes. It purports to describe God’s “method of dealing” for the age in which we live. He is dealing graciously, he is “dispensing grace.” His grace

reaches out to accept any and all. He is withholding judgment and retribution. Most would say this dispensation began at Acts 2 with the founding of the church. Some say it began at Acts 13 when Paul declared "...we are now turning to the Gentiles." Still others would insist it began at Acts 28:28 with what has been considered a pronouncement by Paul:

Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it, KJV

God's administration of grace will run its course and terminate in the "secret rapture" of the church and/or the Great Tribulation, the great time of trial that is to test and try all the inhabitants of the earth. The culmination will be the glorious and triumphant return of Christ where "every eye shall behold him." He will rescue his people, Israelites, who have been engaged in battle with all surrounding nations. He will put down all enemies and introduce his wonderful 1,000 year reign, a time of peace and prosperity such as earth has never experienced.

How can one be critical of such a magnificent scenario? Why not eagerly embrace it, live in the glow of it, and await its glorious consummation?

My main criticism is that this scenario, in my estimation, is not built upon the foundation of the Person and Work of Christ. It has God accomplishing his purposes by executive fiat, by administrative activity, and not by his accomplishments in the death and resurrection of His Son. It requires a reestablishment of persons and

offices based upon proper genealogy. It is a reestablishment of distinctions “according to flesh.”

I urge the reader to consider the possibility that Paul, in Acts 28:28, is not making a *pronouncement* but is rather *reflecting* upon the course of his ministry.

So What Does Ephesians 3:2 tell us?

Anyone who begins to expound on Ephesians 3:2 should carefully review such texts as the following:

Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the *gift of God's grace that was given me* by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, *this grace was given to me* to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ...Ephesians 3:7,8.

Nevertheless on some points I have written to you rather boldly by way of reminder, because of *the grace given me by God* to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God...Romans 15:15,16

...when James and Cephas and John...recognized *the grace that had been given to me*...that we should go to the Gentiles...Galatians 2:9

According to *the grace of God given to me*, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation...1 Corinthians 3:10.

I became its servant according to God's commission that was *given to me* for you, to make the word of God fully known...Colossians 1:25

Other passages that speak similarly of *grace given* and which should be read in this connection are Romans 12:3, 6; 1 Corinthians 15:10; Ephesians 4:7; 1 Peter 4:10.

We are led to one distinct conclusion. In Ephesians 3:2 it is *God's grace that is given to Paul*. It is not describing God as "dispensing" grace, beautiful as that thought may be. I remember the rhetorical question often asked at Bible conferences when Ephesians 3:2 was being used in typical fashion as a proof text for the present dispensation: "What was given to Paul?" My answer was: "The truth concerning 'the present dispensation of the grace of God.'" Paul was given the truth concerning the present "method of dealing" by God, that he is dealing graciously, not punishing, not reckoning sin, not holding trespass and offense against anyone for the exacting of just recompense. This is a "parenthetical dispensation," sandwiched in between stages of the Kingdom of God or perhaps preceding the initiation of the Kingdom. To many, this present unprophesied dispensation in which the "prophetic clock" is not ticking will end at the secret rapture of the church. Then the "end times scenario" described above will run its course.

As appealing as this whole sequence of events is to some, this is not what Paul says in Ephesians 3:2. He is stating that he is a steward, that he has the stewardship, the administration, of the *grace of God that was given to him*. This grace given him was the authority, the ability, the enablement, the competency to be *God's apostle to the Gentiles, to the peoples of the earth*. He goes on immediately in this context to speak

of the status, the place of Gentiles before God. They are, as in the literal Greek, “joint-heirs,” members of a “joint-body,” and “joint-partakers of his promise in Christ through the glad tidings of which I became servant” (Ephesians 3:6,7). Words could not make it clearer that Gentiles and Israelites are totally merged as total equals into that one new humanity in Christ and that it was Paul’s task, or commission, to, by the grace of God, make these things known.

As mentioned earlier, many translations do not use the word “dispensation” in Ephesians 3:2. They rather speak of a stewardship, an administration, or a trust given graciously to Paul enabling him to be apostle of the Gentiles. A sampling of translations follows:

-- for surely you have heard how God has assigned the gift of his grace to me for your benefit, NEB.

-- for surely you have heard how the grace of God which was vouchsafed me in your interests has ordered it, Moffatt.

... for I suppose that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace, which was given me for you, Conybeare.

For you must have heard how God gave me grace to become your minister, Phillips.

Are There Alternative “End Time” Scenarios?

I have no neat, tidy scheme according to which I see God’s future program unfolding. He may be full of delightful surprises that we simply cannot imagine. But perhaps all the cataclysmic and frightful events depicted in Matthew 24, 2 Thessalonians 1, 2 and the Book of Revelation have taken place, all in those frightful and tortuous times of the revolt against Rome and the cruel suppression by Rome. There is an extensive literature claiming this is the case. Any interested may write for suggestions.

The *Parousia(s)*, The Clouds of Heaven

The “comings” (*parousias*) of Matthew 24 may have nothing to do with Christ “coming to earth.” The vision there is based upon Daniel 7 where one like “the son of man” comes to “the Ancient of Days.” It is possible that other occurrences of “*parousia*” in the NT speak in a similar manner. Coming on the “clouds of heaven” is a vivid OT figure for God entering into judgment with his people or their enemies, perhaps using the instrumentality of the armies of hostile empires. Consider such passages as the following:

Ascribe power to God,
whose majesty is over Israel;
and whose power is in the skies.
Awesome is God in his sanctuary,
the God of Israel;
he gives power and strength to
his people, Psalm 68:34,35.

**You set the beams of your chambers on the waters,
You make the clouds your chariot,
You ride on the wings of the wind, Psalm 104:3.**

**There is none like God, O Jeshurun,
who rides through the heavens to your help,
majestic through the skies, Deuteronomy 33:26.
(Please read vv 26-29 in this context.)**

**He bowed the heavens, and came down;
thick darkness was under his feet, 2 Samuel 22:10.
(Read vv 2-20, Psalm 18 in this context in which David
describes The LORD delivering him from his enemies.)**

**See, the LORD is riding on a swift cloud
and comes to Egypt;
the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence,
and the heart of the Egyptians
will melt within them, Isaiah 19:1.**

**I saw one like a human being
coming with the clouds of heaven, Daniel 7:13**

**His way is in whirlwind and storm,
and the clouds are the dust of his feet, Nahum 1:3**

See also Matthew 26:64:

**From now on you will see the Son of Man
seated at the right hand of Power
and coming on the clouds of heaven.
(See also 24:30)**

**Notice in the following verses how the high priest
immediately became incensed, “tore his clothes,”
accused Christ of blasphemy, and declared him worthy
of the death penalty. Apparently what inflamed the
passion of anger against him was not a claim of literally**

moving across the sky. They did not take his figurative words in such a literal manner. It was the claim of intimate association with the very throne of God. Such a thought of “coming on the clouds of heaven” would be reserved for the God of Israel alone! Who did this usurper claim to be who described his own actions in terms reserved for God alone? “He has blasphemed! He is worthy of death! Crucify him!”

It has been suggested by many that this “coming of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven,” true to the figurative meaning of that phrase, took place when the Roman armies came in AD 68-70 to put down the Jewish rebellion. The cry of old for God’s people to “Flee Babylon” had been given by Christ. The New Babylon was that religio-political structure centering in the city of Jerusalem and the temple. It was totally destroyed! God had abandoned it and left it to its enemies. In putting down that awful rebellion, the Roman armies became, inadvertently, his instrument of destruction in a manner consistent with certain events of OT history.

Perhaps, if we had the wisdom and understanding to grasp all the imagery and figures, much of the vivid description of “apocalyptic events” in such books as 2 Thessalonians, 2 Peter, and the Book of Revelation would be understood in a similar manner. Perhaps the cataclysmic “end-times” events described in Biblical accounts have already taken place. Perhaps the turmoil and conflicts in the Mid-East of our present day are totally of human design, intrigue, and ambition and not part of a divine scheme described by some as “the end of the world.” My personal advice to God’s people is to

be patient, to seek to live out our lives in peace and harmony one with another and to seek to promote peace among the peoples of the world to the best of our ability. God has his plan and purpose for humanity. In his good time he will realize his goal. And we will rejoice!

Benediction

The “Things of Israel” Pass Away -- Christ Fills the View

Abraham Passes Away--

Christ Fills the View.

The “Seed of Abraham” Passes Away--

Christ Fills the View.

Isaac, Jacob, the Fathers Pass Away--

Christ Fills the View.

Moses Passes Away--

Christ Fills the View.

The Law, the Ordinances Pass Away--

Christ Fills the View.

Israel Passes Away--

Christ Fills the View.

Jerusalem Passes away—

Christ Fills the View

The Temple, the Rituals, the Ceremonies Pass Away--

Christ Fills the View.

Israel’s Offerings and sacrifices pass away--

Christ Fills the View.

The Covenants Pass Away--

Christ Fills the View.

All Things “According to Flesh” Pass Away-- Christ Fills the View.

...until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13)

...give thanks to the Father who has made us fit to receive our share of the inheritance of God’s people in Light.

It is God who has delivered us out of the dominion of darkness, and has transferred us into the Kingdom of his dearly-loved Son...(Colossians 1:12,13, Weymouth), into the kingdom of the Son he loves (NIV), transferring us to the realm of his beloved Son! (Moffatt)

Him we preach, admonishing every one and instructing every one, with all possible wisdom, so that we may bring every one into God’s presence, made perfect through Christ. To this end, like an earnest wrestler, I exert all my strength in reliance upon the power of Him who is mightily at work within me. (Colossians 1:28, 29, Weymouth)

...CHRIST IS ALL AND IN ALL! (Colossians 3:11)