

The Church's Journey

With

The Lord Jesus



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Introduction

Jesus put forth a parable regarding His future church. In agricultural terminology this parable portrays the miraculous life cycle which the church would go through over the course of time.

“And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.”
(Mk. 4:26-29)

In this parable we observe the germ of life being placed into the ground where, after undergoing a silent death amidst the deep darkness, it undergoes a miraculous conception. After a short period of germination the seed springs up above ground unto a glorious regenerated birth. It then grows up into maturity towards the great harvest, at which time it must undergo a great departure where it is gathered from the wide field and taken into the storehouse for a safe little while. Beyond what this parable reveals, we know that at the appropriate time the gathered harvested grain will return to public view to be enjoyed by the hungry masses. Each chapter will begin by examining this agricultural parable more closely.

Also with each chapter we will take a closer look at successive portions of this parable which pertain to each successive stage of the church’s literal New Testament life and development, and in accordance with the title of this study the intricacies of the church’s many exciting sequential journeys with the Lord Jesus will be examined. To further aid our understanding of the church’s epic travel with the Lord we will obviously employ some Scriptures which use the word “journey.”

Thirdly the church’s spiritual journey will also be examined in the light of Jesus’ various dispensational interactions with it. In a highly parallel ways these interactions pertain to His first *advent*, His *ascension*, His *advocacy*, His *affinity*, and His second *advent*. At all stages of the church’s amazing journey with the Lord Jesus He is present with them working on their behalf; sometimes naturally and at other times supernaturally. During all these times the church has never been alone nor void of Christ’s vital presence, interaction, love, support, and enjoyment.

When we speak of “the church” in this study, we are not referring to the various arrays of ecclesiastical Christian denominations which are found throughout the world. Rather, we are only referring to that universal blood-bought body of believers which has called on Christ’s name and placed their faith in His saving grace, apart from trusting in any works of the law, and has been baptized into Christ’s mystical body by the Holy Spirit’s supernatural working power.

Chapter 1

The Church's Conception

The Seed of Life is Planted

“And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground...” (Mk. 4:26).

God's Spiritual Kingdom

Jesus' agricultural parable introduces an exciting subject, the kingdom of God. Such a kingdom is expressive of its citizenry manifesting attributes of personal holiness and righteousness; therefore, focus should be given to the spiritual aspects of this kingdom's existence. God is a Spirit, and He moves and operates among mankind through His Spirit. Because His kingdom is spiritual, those who would seek to enter into it must also perform in a spiritual manner. Simply put, they must rely upon the divine assistance of His Spirit, not their own power. Man is a physical being, yet he is equally designed to become spiritual by giving way to God's sovereignty, by looking to Him and being completely subject to His kingdom rules. This is really the meaning of the kingdom of God. If outward reform was all that God required His citizens to possess, then they would not really need His help.

Outward reform is something typical of the kingdom of heaven, but inward renewal is symbolic of the kingdom of God. God's kingdom is indeed real and literal, but it is more noted for its spiritual characteristics. We must distinguish between these two equally important kingdoms before going any further. Two ideologies may hold great similarities yet carry notable distinctions. Such is the case here. Some would argue that these two kingdoms are the same, but they actually have some vast distinctions. “In the kingdom of heaven there are both regenerate and unregenerate persons,” but in the kingdom of God, “there are only born again ones.”¹ The kingdom of God pertains to that domain, both heavenly and earthly, where souls have subjected themselves to God's divine and sovereign rule. This is true because “the Sovereign of heaven and earth, Jesus Christ, never saved a soul which He did not govern.”² In contrast to the physical nature of the kingdom of heaven, Christ defined the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God when he declared, “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation... behold, the kingdom of God is within you” (Lk. 17:20-21).

Once Jesus was forced to speak about recent patriotic Jews who tried to bring God's kingdom into existence through physical means, that is, “by force” (Mat. 11:12). He refuted this idea

¹Melvin W. Aiken, In God We Trust, or do we? (Faith Baptist Church Publications, 2007) p. 49.

²Adam Clarke, Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible (Word Publishing, 1967) p. 769.

whether it was through the patriotic killing of Roman soldiers or through the nationalistic crowning of its miracle-working messianic King (Jn. 6:15). Both the followers of John and of Jesus, as well as the Pharisees and Sadducees themselves thought that the kingdom of God need only have its anointed Davidic King for it to commence on earth, but they were sorely mistaken. A spiritual kingdom can only be brought into reality by spiritual means, and once again, its citizenry can only be comprised of born-again souls, “those who have been regenerated” by God’s indwelling Spirit.³

For this study we use the kingdom-of-God parable because of its interesting agricultural metaphor. It is exclusive to Mark’s Gospel. This parable speaks about the mystery of God’s unfolding kingdom, and thus the mystery of the church which is part of its all-encompassing nature. But let there be no confusion; the church and the kingdom are not synonymous. As Clarence Larkin so succinctly points out, the Bible compares the church to a “house,” to a “temple,” and to a “body,” but never compares it to a “kingdom.”⁴ The church has Christ for its glorious “Head,” yet He is never referred to as its “King.”

Jesus’ agricultural parable speaks of a spiritually ordered kingdom and its godly seed that becomes, as it were, a young healthy plant which ultimately grows up into full maturity yielding ample spiritual fruit. The *Wycliffe Bible Commentary* says that, “The aspect of the kingdom in view here is the present, spiritual aspect, in its internal reality as well as its external manifestations.”⁵ This parable does allow for many good applications since the church is also present and spiritual, and has both internal and external characteristics. Although not all of Jesus’ teachings may directly point to the church, they are all appropriate for good preaching to the church. Jesus’ kingdom teachings were twofold in nature. They were either directed toward preparing the Jewish nation for the immediate coming of His literal kingdom, or for preparatory spiritual doctrines needful for the church’s future formation such as His teachings upon the Mount of Beatitudes.

God’s Spiritual Planter

The Lord Jesus was God’s initial spiritual planter. According to Jesus’ kingdom-of-God parable, the seed of life must be cast into cultivated soil by some “man” if it is to ever find safe lodging where it can continue its natural course of life unhindered and reproduce itself. As Scripture reveals, that foundational “man” was Christ Jesus. This is verified in a similar yet different parable where Jesus clearly proclaimed of Himself, “He that soweth the good **seed** is the Son of man” (Mat. 13:37). Jesus was the first Man to sow the pure seeds of New Testament life. Going out daily upon sandaled feet through the frontiers of Canaan’s dry and dusty, rough and rocky terrain, Jesus of Nazareth was the very embodiment of that gospel seed-sower the Psalmist earlier depicted. “He that goeth forth and weepeth bearing precious seed shall doubtless come again with rejoicing bringing his sheaves with him” (Ps. 126:6).

Jesus speaks of the spiritual kingdom of God not in static terms, but in stable terms. The kingdom must move forward. It was not enough for Jesus to have a dozen disciples; He wanted thousands, yea, millions! Christ wanted others to seek the kingdom of God and to find it through His abiding presence, a presence that would bring about holiness and

³Aiken, p. 52.

⁴Clarence Larkin, Rightly Dividing the Word (Self-published, 1920) p. 45.

⁵Iversen Associates. The New Testament and Wycliffe Bible Commentary (Moody Press, 1971) p. 129.

righteousness. The phrase “cast seed into the ground” denotes that “the kingdom is extended by the sowing of the seed of the word.”⁶ In reality, this agricultural parable of the sower “takes up where the parable of the soil left off, going on to describe the actual growth of the seed which bears fruit.”⁷ We will examine the seed more in a moment, but now the emphasis is upon the sower, that is, the planter. Christ set the seed-sowing example for His disciples whether He stood teaching by an empty fishing boat along the lovely Galilean seaside, or by a lonely well in Samaria’s strange land, or by a tall pillar in the busy Temple at Jerusalem.

Jesus had once found Peter casting his nets for fish, but He sought to repurpose him to go cast gospel-nets for the souls of men that they might come to fully know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Peter was more than willing to go seed-casting until things took an unexpected turn. After Jesus took up His post-incarnate ministry, Peter lost his gospel vision. His unexpected despair led him to return to his old fishing career and past time, but the risen Lord was not about to let Peter quit the gospel-seed ministry. This is why Jesus showed up along the shores of Galilee to reclaim and recommission Peter from his backslidden condition (Jn. 21:15-17). In fact, most of the disciples were also there aimlessly fishing. Jesus’ earlier intention was to redirect all the disciples’ gospel vision. Jesus began to reinstitute His visionary plan as soon as He arose from the grave. When some lady disciples met Him in the Garden, He gave them a strict command: “go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me” (Mat. 28:10). After Jesus arrived in Galilee and reconciled, reclaimed, and recommissioned all His disciples, they returned to Jerusalem with renewed excitement to await their next seed-sowing, church-planting instructions.

God’s Spiritual Seed

After giving a similar parable on casting gospel seed, Jesus explained, “The seed is the word of God” (Lk. 8:11). The inspirational words of men only bring temporary change to men’s cold and stony hearts, but the Word of God brings permanent change. Why? Because the Word of God is completely spiritual in its essence. The Word of God is found both in written form and in spoken form, the latter being the preached Word of God (Rom. 10:15). An agricultural seed turns into something greater than itself when it is properly sown into the earth; so when man by faith receives the seed of God’s Word man becomes greater than he was before, that is, greater on the inside. Whereas he was once a physical being, he suddenly becomes a spiritual being, and is born anew as a child of God as he cooperates with God.

This amazing gospel seed also shares a living and vital link to the actual Person of Christ. Jesus Christ holds the lofty title that none other does. He is called “the Word,” or more formally, “The Word of God” (Jn. 1:1; Rev. 19:13). If the seed is the Word of God as Jesus explained, then the seed in reality represents Christ’s very life-force. Let us examine one more aspect of this spiritual seed. Every germ or seed is comprised of and governed by its genetic makeup. Scientists call this genetic information DNA. It forms organized structures called chromosomes which are the unique instructions for each type of living creature. DNA is found in all plant, animal, and human life. This spiralling material of genetic data consists of two inter-linked spiralling strands and pre-determines what sort of life is destined to come from it. The genetic material will replicate itself with precision, and can do nothing else. This is the way it is designed. Hence, the offspring’s likeness of the parent will be strikingly familiar. Indeed, the kingdom of God is comprised of children of God from all over the

⁶Ibid, p. 129.

⁷Ibid, p. 129.

world. As Jesus explained in another parable, “the field is the world,” and “the good seed are the children of the kingdom” (Mat. 13:38).

During cell division, DNA remains intact. Now read what the Scriptures say of Christ’s own spiritual DNA which is perfectly replicated in His followers: “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 Jn. 3:9). The Bible calls believers Christians because they are viewed as duplicates of the incarnate Christ. Moreover, they shall fully be like Christ when they are finally given their glorified bodies. Consider the following two verses which speak of spiritual cell division. “They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the **seed**” (Rom. 9:8). “Now to Abraham and his **seed** were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy **seed**, which is Christ” (Gal. 3:16). Just as the lowly Christ became incarnate from a single seed through the overshadowing presence of the Spirit of God, in the same manner do all believers find their new life (Lk. 1:35).

Journey into the Secret Place

The narrative says of Jesus, “And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem” (Lk. 13:22). The church was constantly being called out of their own villages to go journey with Jesus from village to village. Crowds regularly followed them in the wide highways, in the narrow market streets, and into small houses; but there were also those daily times when the disciples were able to spend quiet moments alone with Him. These special, secluded times afforded them the opportunity to ask Jesus to clarify His teachings. By contrast, these secret times also allowed Jesus better opportunity to bring about much needed training concerning their poor behavior.

The seeds of the church can only enter into new life first and foremost by dying to their self-willed life and then by going unnoticed by the world around them—as it were, underground, lonely, and dormant. That secret place then becomes an obscure place of conception for the Christlike seedling. Paul explained this anomaly of nature saying, “that which thou **sowest** is not quickened, except it die” (1 Cor. 15:36). Peter’s early days with Jesus were typical of the self-willed life. He did not yet know what it was to be small in his own sight. His habit was all too often the very opposite. All the other disciples had equally lived quite noisy lives over the past three years. Their human spirits were not yet Spirit-quickened. Nathanael had mocked Messiah’s hometown. James and John had sought to destroy a Samaritan village by thunderbolts. Phillip had once worried about the team’s insufficient funds to buy bread for a crowd of hungry followers. Others had rebuked little children in their attempts to come to Jesus. Peter had openly denied knowing Jesus and invoked strong oaths in the process. Judas had sought worldly riches, and Thomas had suddenly fallen out unto unbelief. These wilful ones needed to die to the will of the flesh.

Knowing that this humble change was needful for the proud disciples, the soon-to-ascend Lord Jesus gave them a simple unassuming mission. He “commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father,” and adding the illuminating words, “ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence” (Acts 1:4-5). Knowing that obedience obtains the blessing, they did exactly what Jesus instructed.

“Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day’s journey. And when they were come in, they went up

into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren” (Acts 1:12-14).

Just as Jesus in His incarnate form had daily sought to journey with God in private prayer, so the disciples would now learn to journey with the unseen Christ in the secret place of prayer. Each succeeding generation would also have to go into the inner chamber and therein “call upon the name of the Lord” asking for supernatural life beyond their own natural power (Rom. 10:13).

Jesus’ First Advent

His Infancy

As we touched upon earlier, Jesus’ own incarnate life-journey began as one holy seed given forth by the Spirit of God. The archangel made this very announcement of Christ when he said to Joseph, “fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost” (Mat. 1:20). The church’s conception consists of similar things to Jesus’ earthly conception, but not entirely. As He was mysteriously born of holy seed, so was the church. Had there been no incarnate Christ there could be no church, nor any true Spirit-enlivened Christianity. The orthodox relatives surrounding the lowly incarnate Christ were besought with constant misunderstanding. Initially Jesus’ relatives did not understand the nature of His virgin-born birth. They thought that it was an utter impossibility. Mary and Joseph, as well as Zacharias and Elizabeth, had become content with the apparent miracle, but all the other relatives remained consternated or contentious.

His Adolescence

Jesus’ first advent brought many other misunderstandings. Later, as the holy Child grew into adolescence, they could not grasp His gravitation towards the heavenly Father. On one occasion His extended family thought that He was accompanying them in pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem, but in actuality they were journeying with Him. When that festival had ended, they all departed toward Galilee thinking that Jesus had naturally tagged along close with the caravan, yet they were mistaken again. “But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day’s journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance” (Lk. 2:44). After going all the way back to the Holy City, they found Him in the Temple debating doctrine with the religious leaders and asking them questions they could not answer. As Jesus beheld His family’s amazement, He said unto them, “How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (v. 49).

Jesus’ first advent came with a twofold mission. His overriding daily goal was to do the will of His Father. The gospel narrative summarizes how the young Christ Child achieved this goal in His early years living under His parents’ watch care: “And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them... And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (Lk. 2:51-52). The other mission was to die an atoning death at His Father’s request.

His Adult Years

It is most likely that Jesus spent a sizable portion of His young adult life training for the ministry. To this we can only speculate. If so, He would have therefore spent a great deal of His time in the nearby synagogues—not just Nazareth’s—under the tutelage of Rabbis, scribes, and scholars. Tiberius, a rabbinical center of learning, was not at all far away from Jesus’ hometown, about fifteen miles. He would have poured through ancient books, memorized Scriptures, debated theology, argued both for and against traditions, and among other things, learned the use of proverbs and parables. At age thirty, the top student of the class, if he so desired, was given his own authority known as a *yoke*. This permitted such a learned one the privilege of having his very own rabbinic school. Jesus’ goal, however, was to invite the whole nation to come listen and learn from Him. Thus He would one day say, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Mat. 11:28-30).

By contrast, we read of the Jews’ negative reaction to Jesus’ striking words and strong teachings at Jerusalem. They accused Him of “having never learned” the required “letters” (Jn. 7:15). Perhaps this was because He had never attended their rabbinical schools in the religious capital of Judea. Whether or not Jesus actually undertook formal training, when the time arrived to begin schooling others, Jesus looked for twelve interested disciples to prepare and to propagate His teachings.

His Public Ministry

It did not take Rabbi Yeshua long to find twelve interested students. All twelve dropped what they were doing and gladly followed Him. As the adult Christ entered into His public ministry in the multiple roles of Israel’s Leading Rabbi, Chief Prophet, Davidic King, and Great Physician, thousands of longing souls began to journey with Him around the country. Many were looking on to see a miracle, but others listened in to hear His teachings. At times when Jesus took a boat across the sea to escape the crowds, they would navigate the circumference of it on foot to meet Him on the other side. At other times when He would retreat into a house for the evening, the crowds would journey from the suburbs bringing their sick loved ones along and cluster around the house. The miracles Jesus performed were always helpful and never just for show. His aim was to show the masses that He alone could meet their every need, but they had a need that they were not really aware of. Their cold and self-centered hearts needed remedying. His heavenly teachings on love, faith, humility, and forgiveness were the remedy, and He taught these truths by example.

For this reason Jesus sought to take His message all over Israel. For three years He journeyed throughout the land only taking time off to rest here and there. “And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent” (Lk. 4:43). Jesus’ gospel journeys were not always easy. For example, the city of Samaria sat atop a high mountain range. “Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour” (Jn. 4:6). Jesus’ uphill journey was worth the effort because He gave the gospel to a Samaritan woman who in turn told it to all the people in her city. They immediately journeyed out of the city to come hear Jesus personally preach the gospel. The result was that they became instant believers. Jesus’ preparatory work in Samaria laid the necessary ground work for Philip, Peter, and John who

later oversaw a great revival there (Acts 8:5-17). When Jesus went up that mountain that day His intention was to lay a good foundation for a future church in Samaria, and He succeeded.

Within the four Gospel accounts Jesus only referred to the children of God as “the church” on just two occasions. His first reference to the church was in His grand declaration, “upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Mat. 16:18). The other occasion marks Jesus’ command for the church to exercise good governance within its own ranks (Mat. 18:17). By this title He was speaking of “calling-out” [Gr. *ekklesia*]⁸ a New Testament assembly in the immediate future. The church’s fuller, more-revealed meaning would come into perspective after its birth.

His Death

Jesus’ second chief mission was much more difficult. He was to voluntarily die for the winning of His people’s eternal souls. Jesus, the eternal Seed of Life, could not abide in His current state and bring forth additional life. More needful, His life had to be cast into the ground lest it forever live apart from others in total holiness. As Jesus journeyed one day with His students and admirers, He used a metaphor to describe why He came to earth. Comparing Himself to a living seed He said: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a **corn** [*i.e. grain*] of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (Jn. 12:24). At the appointed time, Jesus laid down His life and went willingly to the old rugged Cross. There He suffered the penalty of the world’s endless list of sins. “And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost” (Lk. 23:46). After retrieving Christ’s body from the Cross, two believing Sanhedrin leaders took “the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury” (Lk. 19:40). Jesus’ body was then ready for burial. “Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus” (Jn. 19:41-42).

The church’s earliest journey with Jesus took them somewhere they could have never imagined—to His dark, dreary graveside. The Seed of Life was lying in a lifeless sepulchre, and His followers began to walk in utter despair. It is a fact that if temperature and moisture conditions are not favourable for a planted seed it will die and begin the process of corruption; however, one Old Testament prophecy reminds us of Jesus’ confidence that His body would not undergo decay. So endearingly His soul speaks prophetically to the Father saying, “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” (Ps. 16:10). Jesus knew that He would not stay in the grave, but His devoted ones did not have this incredible hope; rather, they remained hopeless.

This was a very sad time in the church’s history, but it was ever so needful. Paul carefully explains a mystery about this stage of the church’s journey with Jesus that we might not otherwise know. He writes, “For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him” (Rom. 6:5-8). When Jesus’ body was cast as seed into the ground, so was the church, for it is also considered to be “the body of Christ” in mystery form (Rom. 7:4). His conception from death’s dark chambers instituted the church’s conception.

⁸“Ekklesia,” Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance—King James Version, # G1577.

Chapter 2

The Church's Birth

The Seedling Springs to Life

*“So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should **spring... up**, he knoweth not how” (Mk. 4:26-27).*

The Germination Stage

Under the cover of earth's darkness a self-contained seed mysteriously turns into a seedling, that is, a young plant. This event takes place in what is called the germination stage, and it is an amazing part of a plant's life cycle. One news article on gardening enlightens us concerning the miracle of a seed's transformation into plant-hood. It says that “germination can be thought of as anything expanding into greater being from a small existence or germ.”⁹ Imagine for a moment the mightiest oak tree that you have ever seen. Now you have a miracle before your eyes, for that towering tree was once a plant, and before that it was a mere seed. Only a mighty God could make something like this possible. A seed is not designed to die in vain, but rather to die with purpose that it might become great and fulfill its destiny.

After surveying a list of more than thirty different vegetable seeds' germination period, this writer discovered that only two of them, radish and rhubarb, germinated within three days time. All the others had germination periods ranging from seven to twenty-one days. Another article confirmed this saying, “Under ideal conditions, radish seeds will germinate within three to four days.”¹⁰ This wonder of nature stands as a notable token of Christ's rapid resurrection from the dead after being planted three days in the heart of the earth. More than once Jesus reminded His followers that this three-day wonder of wonders would take place. “And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mk. 8:31). As it turned out, Jesus was killed on the very day of Passover, a feast day wherein Jewish people were ceremonially required to eat “bitter herbs” (Exo. 12:8). Today, radishes are among the Jews' favorite herbs to eat at Passover. What a striking convergence this is!

The church had its own difficult three-day germination period. From Calvary's dark sunset to Christ's rising dawn the church continued its journey toward its sudden birth. On the very same day that Jesus sprang from death unto life so did some of the disciples, for the ones in the upper room received a fresh measure of His living Spirit. “Then the same day at evening,

⁹“Germination,” Wikipedia, www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germination, accessed February 20, 2017.

¹⁰“How long does it take for radishes to germinate?” [SFGate](http://SFGate.com), www.homeguides.sfgate.com/long-radishes-germinate-68498.html, accessed February 20, 2017.

being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost” (Jn. 20:19-22). As we will see in a moment, scholars generally assign the day of Pentecost to the church’s collective birthday. Even so, we must not discount the enlivening value of what happened to the newly germinating church on this day. The *Wycliffe Bible Commentary* touches upon the theme of the disciples’ breath-filled burst of life saying, “This recalls the creation of man” (Gen. 2:7).¹¹ Indeed, this upper room moment was only the beginning of greater life to come.

The Glowing Faith Stage

Jesus’ agricultural parable reveals the earthly sower’s spectacular amazement as the seed suddenly surfaces from the underworld. Emphasis is given to the expression, “he knoweth not how.” When a person passes from death unto life—that is, becomes born again—many people marvel at the great and sudden change that has come over such a one. New believers have such vibrancy, and it is oftentimes very inspiring to others. Just as a seedling looks and longs for the light, so a new believer will look in faith towards his illuminating Redeemer. The Priestly Blessing which was first given to Israel in the wilderness speaks of the joyful glow that God meant for His redeemed people to have.

“The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace” (Num. 6:24-26).

God’s holy glow was meant to spiritually rub off onto His covenant children. This is literally what happened to Moses after he spent forty days in God’s very presence; “the skin of his face shone” (Exo. 34:30). Today we would not see such a literal glow about a Christian’s face, but we would certainly see something of a godly radiance upon their countenance; and therefore, we speak of this in a figurative way.

Faith is the key element that God looks for in His people. He wants their faith not only to be alive, but to be active. Jesus spoke of the enormous power and potential that a person’s activated faith holds. He encouraged believers that they need only have faith the size of “a grain of mustard **seed**” (Lk. 17:6). Whenever someone around Jesus used their faith in a positive way, He always commended them. And whenever their faith began to glow, Christ began to glow. Many believers carry a similar testimony that as people around them once observed their new faith and sudden change they would be asked the question: “What has become of you?” or “Something has happened to you; what is it?” Seasoned believers readily recognize the glowing countenance of a brand new believer. It reminds them of when they themselves were first born again. The apostle Peter made reference to the glow which Christians commonly share when he said, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3).

¹¹Iversen, p. 373.

Abraham maintained a glowing Old Testament faith before God. He let his faith shine out on that mountaintop day when he willingly offered up his only son Isaac. Because he set forth such a shining example of unwavering faith, Scripture bestows upon him a posthumous title, The Father of the Faithful. The apostle Paul mentioned this in regard to both the Jews' Old Testament and New Testament saving faith; therefore, it is of faith and the world's New Testament faith, "that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the **seed**; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all" (Rom. 4:16). He says further of Abraham, "Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations; according to that which was spoken, So shall thy **seed** be" (v. 18). The Book of Hebrews reserves a whole chapter dedicated to certain Old Testament men and women who not only had glowing faith, but also maintained glowing faith throughout their walk with the Saviour.

One New Testament women in particular had a glowing faith in Jesus. Early on that notable resurrection morning a faithful woman named Mary Magdalene went with spices in hand to Christ's dark tomb. As she soon discovered, the tomb was empty, and as that new day continued to dawn upon her, she met the risen Lord Jesus face to face. The glow on her face, so far as Scripture reveals, never seemed to fade away. Her glowing-faith stage remained glowing, and it became a constantly shining example to all the mothers in Israel, especially those in the newly developing church.

The Evergreen Stage

When seedlings spring to life, they are carefully nurtured in nurseries that they might take on abundant life. God creates things to live forever, and only an infinitely powerful Creator can do something like that. God spoke to Jeremiah giving him the promise that if Israel will follow His statutes, she "shall not see when heat cometh, but her **leaf** shall be green" (Jer. 17:8). Jesus also spoke of this evergreen journey saying, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (Jn. 10:10). When a repentant sinner's soul springs to new life through the exercise of his faith in Christ, that soul is made not only to live forever, but also to live a sinless life. Upon the believer's supernatural new birth he or she suddenly holds two life-standings before God. First, the believer's *practical* life "in this world" is to strive toward the goal of a sinless nature, that is, to strive against sin. Second, the believer's *positional* life is presently sinless and wholly without fault before God because he has been supernaturally placed "in Christ" from the moment of his new birth.

John informs us of this divine wonder saying: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin for his **seed** remaineth in him and he cannot sin because he is born of God" (1 Jn. 3:9). God's seed residing within the new believer seems to be, as we can only assume, the very life of Christ, that holy germ of God's presence. This verse does leave the reader with questions, and scholars range in their interpretations of it. Matthew Henry assigns two probable meanings to express what is meant by the term, *God's seed*. Henry asserts that it is "either the word of God in its light and power," or drawing from John's proclamation, that which is born of the Spirit is spirit, he asserts that "the spiritual seminal principle of holiness remaineth in him."¹² Whatever precise meaning may be applied to this verse, this we do know: The beauty of the believer's spiritual rebirth is that his or her new life is designed to live unto eternal ages and in holy perfection.

¹²Matthew Henry, Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), p. 868.

Journey into the Open Light

From Old Testament Light to New Testament Light

The Old Testament prophetically described Jesus' incarnate life in a metaphoric way beginning as seedling coming out of obscurity and then developing before the Father's watchful eyes: "For he shall grow up before him as a **tender plant**, and as a root out of a dry ground" (Isa. 53:2). Just as Jesus once got His opportunity to live a human life for the glory of God, so did the first members of the church. A great number of the first-generation church came from the Galilee region where Jesus had scattered so much of His precious gospel seeds. Hence we read, "The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is **sprung up**" (Mat. 4:16).

Jesus was a holy Light that had not been seen in the land of Israel since the days of Solomon's Temple. Jesus had always been the Light of Israel dating all the way back to the glory cloud in the wilderness. At this time in New Testament history, He had come to lighten their way once more. In due season the Lord Jesus would lighten the whole world with His divine light. John testified concerning this saying, "In him was life; and the life was the light of men... That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (Jn. 1:4, 9). The church's inward holy light was springing up day by day.

From the Upper Room to the Temple Courtyards

Scene one with its ten-day backdrop of the upper room was officially over. Now the church's ceremonial birthday had finally arrived. As one might expect, it was a day of tremendous celebration and excitement. Details of scene two read as follows:

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:2-4).

Here we see a holy glow hovering upon each church saint, the token of God's abiding inner presence. The church's sudden and dynamic birth wherein they began to breathe in the very Spirit of God did not go unnoticed by the masses in Israel. Let's read what happened next:

"And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilæans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" (Acts 2:5-8).

This investigation by the crowd did not take place in the upper room, for God did not birth His church in secret. It was only conceived in secret. Such a marvellous spiritual birth couldn't happen in private. God did it openly in the open light. By way of argument, the myriad of spectators could not have fit into the upper room, let alone the narrow streets. You might be thinking, then where did this supernatural birth take place? Let's see.

The ten days of secret waiting was over. Scripture tells us that ten days earlier the 120 “went into an upper room,” but this does not necessarily extrapolate that they were in that same location ten days later (Acts 1:13). Because it was “the third hour of the day” on the high Sabbath of Pentecost, Israel’s fourth annual Feast, and because the disciples were orthodox believers, they would have naturally already journeyed through the narrow streets of Jerusalem to make their way up to the Temple courts (Acts 2:15). You see, that was the time of the morning oblation and the priestly prayer wherein the high priest pronounced his Aaronic benediction over the crowd. Moreover, the Mosaic Law required all males to be there. The 120 had most likely gone up to the Temple together, and as the narrative says, “they were all with one accord in one place.” Perhaps they had congregated under a portico, or upon a series of steps, but wherever they were gathered on the Temple compound, they were in plain sight, that is, in full public view of all the other happy worshippers. Matthew Henry admits to the possibility that the 120 could have been “in the temple, where they attended at public times.”¹³ The point being made is that this vibrant band of first-fruits disciples were not in a darkly lit private chamber, but rather out in the open light of day for all to see and to observe. This was the Lord’s grand plan. The disciples were in the place of blessing, “Jerusalem,” as the Lord had said; but moreover, they were at the Temple praying at the morning hour of prayer.

After the crowd enquired about the origin of the disciples’ fiery new zeal, Peter gave a good explanation and exposition from Israel’s biblical archive. This grand day had been foretold in Scripture. “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:37-41). Because the saints had journeyed out from the enclosure of the upper room and up to the open courtyards of the Temple, thousands of souls were saved that day. God always wants His church to be viable and visible.

From Satan’s Darkness to the Saviour’s Light

In later years the apostle Peter wrote about the church’s spectacular journey into the open light saying, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). The calling of God invites the lost sinner to come out of spiritual darkness and to then step into Christ’s heart-warming, spiritual light. As Peter informs, this high calling comes with a great responsibility. The believer is to live an exemplary Christian life that helps draw other people nearer to Jesus.

¹³Henry, p. 11.

Jesus' Ascension

His Ascension from the Dark Grave

“In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him” (Mat. 28:19).

This glad day was the church's inauguration for a completely new kind of journey with the Lord Jesus. They would no longer have to make daily trips to His grave, nor in the future to make annual pilgrimages to His grave. The unthinkable had happened. Jesus was up from the grave! He had predicted that His death would not be permanent, but they had put it out of their minds. On the day of Pentecost Peter would preach a much different view of Christ's death saying that it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him (Acts 2:24). Now the church could take comfort in Christ's infinite reign and run with the gospel. The “King of the Jews” would never die again from this point forward.

Jesus' ascension from the grave was a great turning point for several reasons. First, as we just discussed, this event involved His receiving of a new glorified body. Later that day when Jesus appeared to the men in the upper room, they supposed that He was merely coming in the form of a ghost, so He corrected their misunderstanding saying, “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have” (Lk. 24:39). Second, Jesus' ascension from the grave brought about an elevation in His rank. Paul brings this idea to the forefront in writing: “And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:8-11). Third, Jesus' ascension from the grave signalled the end of His incarnate mission walking among men; however, the disciples would temporarily enjoy some very privileged visits from Him. These visits were quite purpose-filled, particularly to the apostles: “To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). Fourth, Jesus' ascension from the grave presented the great needed proof that He was indeed the very Son of God (Rom. 1:4). Hence, the resurrection put away speculations that Jesus had somehow lost favour with God.

His Ascension to the Olivet Mountain

The fortieth day from Jesus' resurrection had arrived, and it was time for Him to part company with His beloved followers. "And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them" (Lk. 24:50a). Bethany is situated about one and a half miles from Jerusalem and is located on the southeast side of the Mount of Olives. This means that Jesus led them just beyond view of Jerusalem.

This journey must have been filled with many mixed emotions for the church members that travelled with the Lord Jesus that day. They still did not fully understand God's divine plan, and it is probable that they were unaware of what was about to happen; however, Jesus had spoken about this soon-coming event forty days earlier. You will remember that on that glorious resurrection morning He informed Mary Magdalene with these words: "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (Jn. 20:17). If the disciples had not been ready for His third-day resurrection, then they were not likely expecting His fortieth-day ascension. Maybe they thought He was going in to Bethany, to Martha and Lazarus' house as He did so often. Whatever they were thinking, they were about to find out for sure.

Completing their short journey they arrived at Bethany. "When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:6-8). The disciples' new gospel commission would take them in journey not only across Canaan, but also across continents.

After imparting these important truths to the disciples, Luke tells us what Jesus did in a final show of love for His church: "he lifted up his hands, and blessed them" (Lk. 24:50b). Part of Jesus' rebirth involved entering into a new destiny, to become Israel's Eternal High Priest (Heb. 6:20). Jesus' raised hands and congregational blessing draw our attention to the priestly blessing which was daily spoken over the people of Israel as they gathered for the morning oblation. That high priestly prayer required the use of outstretched hands, a thing which one Mosaic narrative recalls: "Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people, and blessed them" (Lev. 9:22). Luke did not need to reveal the exact words that the Lord Jesus spoke over His disciples upon the Mount of Ascension. In summary, He blessed them. But we might conjecture that the Lord pronounced the Priestly Blessing known as the *Birkat Kohanim*.¹⁴ This prayerful benediction was always done openly. We have referred to it earlier: "The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace" (Num. 6:24-26). If this was the actual blessing that Jesus pronounced over His church then they would have immediately understood what He was signifying by it—that He was their new High Priest, and that they could be confident of His daily intercession for them in the future. This priestly prayer came with a final emphasis: "And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them" (v. 27). Here again Jesus was only carrying out the will of His heavenly Father, and He was careful not to forget anything.

¹⁴Alfred J. Kolatch, The Jewish Book of Why, (New York: Jonathan David Publishers, 1995), p. 157.

In keeping with the Mosaic pattern seen in Leviticus 9:22, this blessing was also known as *Nesiat Kapayim*, “Lifting of the Hands.” Later in Temple times so that all the people could behold him, the high priest always recited “his daily Priestly Benediction from a platform.”¹⁵ In a wonderful parallel fulfillment of that raised rostrum, we discover that the new Melchizedek High Priest, the Lord Jesus, began slowly and supernaturally ascending above the people towards heaven as He commenced this priestly blessing. No other high priest had done this before! This seems to be the picture that the Lukean narrative is giving us as we continue reading in the following paragraph.

His Ascension to the Throne of God

“And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven” (Lk. 24:51). In his sequel, the Book of Acts, Luke adds more detail on Jesus’ ascension. Luke says that “when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:9-11).

This was one journey with Jesus that the church was kept back from. They had followed their Lord faithfully for more than three years, but from this point on they would have to follow in a much different way and with much greater faith. This inspirational event seemed to have greatly bolstered their fledgling faith, yet there was more faith-bolstering to come. As the church beheld their Lord ascend out of sight that day, “they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God” (Lk. 24:52-53).

Ten days later was the feast day of Pentecost, meaning “fiftieth day.” That day the Lord Jesus sent a great outpouring of His Spirit upon the church, thus beginning an altogether new journey with them, a deeply spiritual one, yet also an outwardly dynamic one. Paul would later call this new relationship between God and man “the fellowship of the mystery” and embellish his thought by saying, “This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph. 3:9; 5:32). During Jesus’ incarnate ministry He had publically proclaimed this coming dynamic life saying, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified” (Jn. 7:38-39). Jesus’ full glorification had not only to do with His death on the Cross and His resurrection from the grave, but also His ascension into heaven. Herein do we observe the vital connection between Jesus’ ascension to the right hand of the Father’s throne and the heavenly bestowal of the church’s much-needed gift of spiritual life. What an exciting truth to ponder, the church below was born from above!

¹⁵Ibid, p. 125.

Chapter 3

The Church's Growth

The Sapling Steadily Grows

*“and the seed should spring and grow up...
For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself;
first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear”*
(Mk. 4:27-28)

Transplanted

Once a seedling moves to the sapling stage it undergoes replanting to aid its further growth and development. New Christians will soon require deeper soil in order to make room for deeper roots. The Lord Jesus recreates sinners in a renewed way, “that they might be called trees of righteousness, the **planting** of the LORD, that he might be glorified” (Isa. 61:3). Faith and righteousness are attributes that the Son of God longs to see in the church’s life. These characteristics are called spiritual fruit; hence, the Lord Jesus does everything He can to see that good fruit will eventually appear. “And he shall be like a tree **planted** by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper” (Ps. 1:3). The Lord later gave a similar promise to Jeremiah: “Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree **planted** by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and... shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit” (Jer. 17:7-8). In great contrast to these divine promises, Jesus declares, “Every **plant**, which my heavenly Father hath not **planted**, shall be rooted up” (Mat. 15:14).

Jesus’ agricultural parable focuses upon the intended outcome, the plant’s mature growth; “first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.” Temple liturgy required that ceremonial patches of barley and wheat be annually planted. According to Alfred Edersheim’s book *The Temple: Its Ministry And Services*, this location was along the slopes of the Olivet Mount, thus making it “across Kedron,”¹⁶ adjacent to the Temple. Later in the season as the crops began to ripen, selected stalks which appeared fully ripe would be ceremonially marked with ribbons, then those bundles or sheaves would be reaped at the appointed times. The ripened barley was reaped on the third Spring festival, *Yom HaBikkurim*, the Day of First Fruits, which came on the heels of Passover.¹⁷ The ripened wheat was reaped during the early Summer on the fourth festival, *Shavuot*, the Feast of Weeks; also known as Pentecost. This was observed in accordance to the command, “thou shalt observe the feast of weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest” (Exo. 34:22). After the priests ceremonially harvested the very first fruits of these grains, then, and only then, all the other citizens throughout the land of Israel were permitted to begin harvesting their own fruitful fields of grain.

¹⁶Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services, Updated Edition*, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), p. 204.

¹⁷Ibid, p. 204.

Transfused

What the Lord plants He supplies with additional nutrients of life. What is essential for every Christian's steady growth is the indwelling Spirit of Christ. Jesus gave the church another agricultural proverb: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman... Abide in me, and I in you. As the **branch** cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the **vine**; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the **vine**, ye are the **branches**: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (Jn. 15:1, 4-5). Christ desires to permeate the church with His own vibrant Spirit-life, but each born-again church member must draw close to Christ in order to receive His individual infusion of steadfast life. Paul spoke of this holy transfusion calling it "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:19). This apostle found Christ's enlivening transfusion in times of protracted prayer. This method has always remained the church's chief principle of abiding in Christ.

Trained

Jesus' agricultural proverb had one very central feature: "Every **branch** in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every **branch** that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (Jn. 15:2). What the heavenly Father transplants He trims and trains, so that the tender sapling will hold tight to the trellis and bring about the desired results. A chief part of the Lord's vineyard-training involves the plant responding to the Lord's holy Word. In Jesus proverb His said, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" (v. 3). The church's goal is to be sanctified and to remain as such, lest some foreign plant-disease quickly set into the plant. This is what happened to Israel in the wilderness. God testified against them later saying, "I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstripe in the fig tree at her first time: but they went to Baal-peor, and separated themselves unto that shame; and their abominations were according as they loved" (Hos. 9:10). Only a remnant of Israelites remained true. Training of the church is easier when each Christian sapling strives to stay tender before the Lord. We are thus commanded, "be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32).

Transcended

One definition of transcend means to exceed in excellence.¹⁸ The Lord Jesus' desire for the sapling is that it will grow into a strong and healthy plant and produce all the spiritual fruit that it was designed for. Paul gives a complete list of all the fruit which the Spirit of Christ bears out through every willing church member: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:22-23). Here we see the Spirit's ninefold work in and through the believer as it stands in contrast to the works of the law, something which cannot be accomplished through mere human effort. Let us take Paul's life as an example of a special plant that transcended Christ's expectations and produced all this spiritual fruit just described.

Originally Saul hated the church, but later, as a completely new man in Christ, Paul had a great *love* for the church and was even willing to be spent for it. At first Saul was a highly discontent man struggling to fulfil every Mosaic command lest he be condemned, but then the new man found *joy* in the Lord Jesus and spread that joy wherever he went. Saul was a

¹⁸"Transcend," www.dictionary.com, accessed March 1, 2017.

man at war against the New Testament people, but as Paul he sought to make *peace* with the church and to command every church to be at peace with one another, even to be at peace with all men if possible. Saul used to be very intolerant of the church, but as Paul he became *longsuffering* within and without the church. Saul in his roughness used to carry ropes and chains to bind Christians and bring them to prisons and tribunals, but as Paul he learned to exercise *gentleness* both to stunted Christians and even to stalwart Christians. As a fearless persecutor of the church Saul's badness and unbelief had suddenly been turned into an incredible *goodness* and *faith* that brought wonderful inspiration to local churches near and far. Lastly, Saul's earlier uncontrolled authority and unrelenting anger was suddenly turned into such delightful *meekness* and *temperance* enabling him to become a great representative of the church both at home and abroad.

Paul understood the Corinthian Church's great need for growth and maturity. They were very underdeveloped and immature; thus he said to them: "Now he that ministereth **seed** to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your **seed** sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness" (2 Cor. 9:10). The apostle that had first brought them the gospel now longed to see them grow by the infinite grace of God. Corinth had yet to transcend their carnal nature, but Paul would not rest until they showed signs of it.

Journey into the World

Across Jerusalem

Before parting from His disciples, the risen Lord Jesus gave them express instructions for their gospel journeys "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Lk. 24:47).

The church's local gospel journeys in Jerusalem probably exceeded all their own expectations. Just consider the results of their first week of preaching Jesus as Israel's Lord and Saviour. The church's initial growth began as the 120 left their prayer headquarters and made their way to preach at the Temple courtyards where 3000 Jews became gloriously born again. By the end of that first spirit-filled week, many more "of them which heard the word believed," and "the number of the men was about" 5000 (Acts 4:4). Whether this number a total including the whole first week or in addition to the 3000 which were saved on the day of Pentecost we know not for sure. The *Wycliffe Bible Commentary* suggests that "the number of believers reached five thousand."¹⁹ Either way this number is quite significant for it reminds us of a former time when Jesus successfully taught a multitude the Word of God, and "they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men" (Mk. 6:44). Out of necessity hundreds of house churches sprang up immediately, but the Temple also continued to be a favorite meeting place for believers. These two facts, along with others, are seen in the following summary that Luke's narrative paints for us on the church's progress and growth.

"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat

¹⁹Iversen, p. 396.

with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people” (Acts 2:42-47a).

The church’s inward and outward growth was continual and dynamic during this early season. The next two verses make this abundantly clear. “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved... both of men and women” (Acts 2:47b; 5:14). “And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). Indeed, Jerusalem’s city-wide church became abuzz with much healthy New Testament activity, but people problems within the church also began to creep in. Graham Scroggie makes the following note on church growth: “With growth comes need for adjustment in machinery.”²⁰ Because of disputes over the daily distribution of goods between poor Greek-speaking and Aramaic-speaking widows, a need for ordained servants arose. The apostles decreed that seven honest men who were full of the Spirit and of wisdom be appointed as deacons to look over the church’s daily affairs (Acts 6:3). In this way the apostles could continue their ministry of preaching and prayer unhindered. This deacon ministry afforded the church ample opportunity to grow spiritually.

Across Judea & Samaria

On that earlier momentous day just before the Lord Jesus ascended upward into glory, He summarized the church’s Great Commission saying, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria” (Acts 1:8).

The revival fires had been burning so brightly in Jerusalem over the past years that both the apostles and the other disciples of Jesus felt quite comfortable and successful there. They had not become complacent in ministering to souls, yet they were being careless with the Lord’s gospel commission. Samaria’s harvest-field of souls had been wonderfully prepared by Jesus Himself during His itinerate incarnate ministry; hence, these were still presently waiting for the life of Christ to more fully come their way (John 4).

What was holding the presently all-Jewish church of Jerusalem back from their God-given evangelistic duties was their animosity for the half-Jews of Samaria. No love had been gained between these two groups of Semites over the past ten centuries. In fact, matters were only getting worse with time. We do not have time to discuss the various acts of hatred that transpired between the Jews and Samaritans, but we will cite one of the most recent examples. Earlier when Jesus had sent forerunners into Samaria and been refused because He would not stay a long time with them, apostles James and John hoped to demonstrate their Jewish zeal to the King of the Jews by asking Him if they could call down fire upon that half-breed Jewish city (Lk. 9:54). The time had now come for the reigning Lord Jesus to push the reluctant Jerusalem church further out into the world’s harvest fields. Stephen’s death seemed to be the catalyst (Acts 7:60). At this time, about seven years had elapsed since the church’s Pentecostal birth.²¹

The Jerusalem Church had experienced persecution from the beginning but not to this recent level. “And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great

²⁰W. Graham Scroggie, The Unfolding Drama of Redemption, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) vol. 2, p. 229.

²¹Ibid, p. 237.

persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” Acts 8:1-4).

“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city” (Acts 8:5-8). The Jerusalem Church sent two other apostles, Peter and John, to set things in order that a proper church might be established there. Scroggie gives a helpful comment concerning this transitional period of turning to the Gentiles. “We should remember as we read the Acts, that one dispensation is ending, and another is beginning: Judaism is setting and Christianity is dawning.”²²

The coastline of Israel was also the target of Philip and Peter’s further preaching journeys. This area was populated with Gentile cities. Philip preached in Gaza, Ashdod, “and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Cæsarea” (Acts 8:26-40). It was there that it seems he settled down to establish a church, for he is found dwelling there some twenty years later (Acts 21:8). Peter preached in Lydda (Acts 9:32-35), Joppa (Acts 9:36-43), and also Caesarea (Acts 10:24-48).

Across Countries & Cultures

The Lord Jesus’ Great Commission included these additional, weighty words, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mk. 16:15). By this command the disciples understood that their future journey with the unseen Jesus would take them farther than they had ever gone with Him during His incarnate ministry.

Those who had been scattered because of the persecution “travelled as far as *Phenice*, and *Cyprus*, and *Antioch*, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only” (Acts 11:19). Here it is very obvious that the transition was still in transition, but not for much longer. As the Christians at Antioch, Syria were praying and fasting one day, the Holy Spirit spoke in their midst and said, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away” (13:2-3).

These two men and their small entourage—which initially included Mark—set out on the church’s very first missionary journey covering the years from 47 to 49 A. D. Their journey took them first by ship to Cyprus where they spent time in the chief cities of the east end and west end, *Salamis* (Acts 13:5) and *Paphos* (13:6-12), then on to the mainland of Asia Minor where they spent considerable time preaching and teaching in the cities of *Perga* (13:13a), *Antioch* of Pisidia (13b-14a), *Iconium* (13:51-14:6), *Lystra* (14:6-20), and *Derbe* (14:20-21). Some of these cities had sizable Jewish populations and others did not. They reached out with the gospel of Christ equally to both Jews and Gentiles. Although this journey was quite successful, the missionaries were met by “malaria,”²³ sorcerers, “brigands,”²⁴ angry Jews, and

²²Ibid, p. 246.

²³Ibid, p. 322.

a storm of idol-worshippers. These adversities and severe persecutions—including Paul’s apparent death at Lystra—all worked for good to bring about the church’s steady growth and development. Persecution, even the tragic blood of the saints, has always been that rich fertilizer which has fostered the church’s amazing growth.

These same two men set out on their second missionary journey a short time later to go check on all the people to whom they had earlier preached that they might strengthen their faith and establish their churches. This took place between the years 50 to 53 A.D. At the outset of the second missionary journey, Paul and Barnabus had a dispute over Mark’s former timidity. Barnabus decided to take Mark back to Cyprus with him while Paul chose Silas to go with him to Asia Minor (Acts 15:36-40). After Paul and Silas went through *Tarsus* of Cilicia (15:41), they came to *Derbe*. At *Lystra* Paul took Timothy to his side as a young missionary recruit (16:3). After going again through *Iconium* and *Antioch* of Pisidia, they went on northward to the port city of *Troas*. The Spirit had forbidden Paul from spending any more time in Asia Minor. At Troas Paul had his dream of a man in Macedonia begging him to come over into *Macedonia* and help them (16:8-9). Dr. Luke yoked up with Paul from this point forward—indicated by the insertion of “we” (16:10) into the narrative—and remained with him throughout all of Paul’s foreign journeys.

They took the gospel into Europe for the very first time landing at the port city of *Neapolis*. From there they went to *Philippi* where they made their first converts: a business woman who sold purple fabrics (Acts 16:13-15), a girl possessed with a python-spirit (16:16-17), and a Roman jailer and his household (16:27-33). Next they journeyed to *Thessalonica* where Paul preached in the synagogue and gained some converts both from Judaism and paganism (17:4). After the unbelieving Jews began to incite a riot shouting their battle cry, “These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also” (17:6), the ministry team set off to *Berea* by night (17:10). At the synagogue in Berea they found the Jews to be more interested and more noble regarding Scripture having its proper weight. Many came to faith and belief both of Jews and of the Greeks (17:12). However, the angry Jews from Thessalonica came to Berea to chase the missionaries out of town again. Silas and Timothy stayed behind in Berea, but others escorted Paul “as it were” setting off toward the sea (17:14). Ultimately they secured Paul’s safety all the way to *Athens*. After the ministry team joined Paul in Athens, a city boasting a display of more than 3000 public statues,²⁴ they preached in the synagogue (17:17a), in the market-place (17:17b-21), and in the midst of Mars Hill (17:22-33). After the Epicureans mocked and the Stoics mused, Paul decided to depart having only converted a few men and one woman named Damaris (17: 34-35). Next they came to *Corinth*, the capital of Achaia, and at that time the leading merchant city of all Europe. It was steeped in spiritual debauchery with its chief temple employing 1000 prostitutes. There Paul met Aquila and his wife Priscilla who were both Jewish believers recently exiled from Rome. These became valuable helpers in his missionary ministry (18:1-2). Paul stayed there quite some time and labored with his hands making tents and preaching to the Jews in the synagogue until such a time as they began to blaspheme the name of Jesus, wherein he turned to the Gentiles (18:3-6). Paul’s gospel preaching was not in vain for the chief ruler of the synagogue, Crispus, believed along with his whole house, as well as many other Corinthians (18:8). At the Lord’s command Paul stayed an additional eighteen months until such time as he set sail for home. His first port of call was *Ephesus* where he reasoned the gospel among the synagogue’s many Jews (18:19). They desired for him to stay longer, but he was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem

²⁴Ibid, p. 323.

²⁵Ibid, p. 382.

for the feast (18:20-21). Aquilla, Priscilla, and a mighty Jewish preacher from Alexandria named Apollos stayed behind to carry on the work (18:24-26).

Paul's third missionary journey covered most of these same cities, and this took place between the years 54 to 58 A.D. His fourth journey was of a very different sort than his former ones. As Caesar's prisoner Paul spent two years confined at Caesarea Maritime before setting sail to *Rome*. This captivity took place between the years 60 to 63 A.D. At Rome he preached to the Jews first when they came to him in a one-day grand assembly. Some of them believed (Acts 28:23-24). He also preached to regular visitors in his own hired house (28:30-31). Even Paul's jailers were greatly influenced by his many gospel appeals, and after their conversions they carried the same message straight into "Caesar's household" (Phil. 4:22).

After Paul was finally acquitted and released, he was able to freely move about the Mediterranean world with the gospel. This took place between the years 63 to 67 A.D. During this fourth missionary journey Paul visited many former cities, and perhaps a new one in *Spain* (Rom. 15:24, 28). Of great importance, he helped to oversee the establishment of a church in *Crete* (Titus 1:5).

During the church's first generation, local churches throughout the Mediterranean world grew both in number and in nourishment. They were increased and enriched. They were established and edified. Overall their growth was exceeding. The church at Thessalonica is just one example. Paul commended them saying, "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren... because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth" (2 Thess. 1:3). Like many others, their faith was growing upwards, their love was growing outwards, and their gospel-light was shining ever onwards.

Jesus' Advocacy

The Advocacy of a Father

The success of the church's growth and journey into the world had everything to do with the Lord Jesus Christ's heavenly advocacy for them. The word *advocacy* may be defined as: "the act of pleading for, supporting, or recommending; active espousal."²⁶ The Great Heavenly Advocate had earlier declared unto them, "And in that day... whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you" (Jn. 16:23). The aged apostle John wrote about Jesus' heavenly advocacy saying, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an ADVOCATE with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 Jn. 2:1-2). Here we see that the church may seek Jesus' advocacy on behalf of their own personal needs as well as on behalf of the lost world's need of salvation.

The Advocacy of a King

Not long after the Jerusalem church had begun, it found itself a lion's den of controversy. Peter and John had been arrested and flogged for preaching at the Temple. Notice how the church quickly sequestered themselves and sought the *advocacy* of the most High Christ so that it could go on preaching the gospel around town unhindered or undeterred.

²⁶"Advocacy," www.dictionary.com, accessed March 1, 2017.

“And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul” (Acts 4:23-32).

The Advocacy of a Priest

Later when Herod beheaded James and sought to do the same with Peter, the church again leaned heavily upon Jesus’ heavenly advocacy (Acts 12:1-12). When they did, they were in no way let down. Jesus’ representational advocacy on behalf of the missionary-ready evangelical church was based upon His eternal Melchisedec priesthood. This was foretold in the Old Testament.

“The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 110:1-4).

With the church fully understanding the Lord Jesus’ supreme power in heaven and on earth, they went forth conquering the world in His holy name and by His holy authority. The eleven apostles could never forget that memorable day standing atop a Galilean mountain when the risen Lord appeared unto them to explain His attitude of advocacy saying, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Mat. 28:18-20). In this verse, the Greek word for “power” is meaning (in the sense of *ability*); authority, jurisdiction, liberty, power, right, strength.²⁷

What more authority could they ask for? The world was theirs for the taking, all in Jesus’ most-high and most-mighty name; hence, the disciples asked in His name, they preached in His name, they baptized in His name, they taught in His name, they prayed in His name, they fellowshiped in His name, and they evangelized in His name. Everywhere the disciples journeyed, whether it was to the Greek or to the Jew, to the Barbarian or to the Scythian, to the servant or to the freeman, to the God-fearer or to the idol-worshipper, to the hostile or to

²⁷“Exousia,” Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance—King James Version, #G1849.

the hospitable, the name of Jesus went before them first in private advocacy, then in public advancement.

Chapter 4

The Church's Departure

The Mature Plant Undergoes Harvest

*“But when the fruit is brought forth,
immediately he putteth in the sickle,
because the harvest is come”
(Mk. 4:28-29)*

Under the Sickle

The harvestman's choice tool has always been the sickle: “an implement for cutting grain or grass, consisting of a curved hooklike blade mounted in a short handle.”²⁸ Sickles may vary in size and length, but their purpose remains unified and central, to separate the grain from the ground. The right tool will always insure that a job is done more properly and promptly.

One biblical picture runs consistent throughout the Word of God—harvest time! This speaks of that great reckoning day wherein all souls, whether they were faithful and wise or wicked and unbelieving, shall be gathered up to enter into their eternal destinies for good or for bad, to heaven or to hell. The righteous long for this day of harvest, but the unrighteous know not that it is even on the horizon (Lk. 21:34).

As the text verse shows above, harvest time arrives at the point when the fruit has fully matured. It is a day that is long anticipated by the husbandman, that is, the caretaker. The spring harvest comes early producing green fields of barley. The early summer harvest comes a little later producing fields of golden wheat. The late summer harvest comes much later producing grapes, olives, and other vintage crops. On the Levitical calendar, this final harvest festival is called “the feast of ingathering” and comes “at the year's end” (Exo. 34:22). Christians are admonished to abide with a peaceful spirit until their time of maturity arrives. The apostle James wrote, “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the **precious fruit** of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain” (Jas. 5:7). Although Christians should abide patiently for the anticipated day of Christ, they should not become apathetic because of the indeterminate length of time in between. Waiting is a virtue, and so is “watching” (Lk. 12:37).

Out of the Field

Young Joseph had a dream of a great harvest day. He began to describe his dream saying, “we were binding sheaves in the field” (Gen. 37:7). Before the stalks of grain are cut they are first bound into sheaves or bundles with small cords, thus making it easier for “bringing in sheaves” (Neh. 13:15). The Old Testament presents a wonderful harvest promise. It asserts

²⁸“Sickle,” www.dictionary.com, accessed March 3, 2017.

that prayerfulness will help to insure productiveness: “He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing **precious seed**, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Ps. 126:6). Christians should work diligently and prayerfully toward an annual harvest of souls, and that after bringing in many new believers to the faith, they might also become baptized and further obedient to the faith under the local church’s watch care. It is not enough for the church to simply go out into the community to cause unbelievers to make professions of faith. The church must not only go out to make believers, but also bring them in to the safety of the fold.

Into the Barn

Not everything from the field goes into the barn. The Scripture commands, “bring home thy seed, and gather it into thy barn?” (Job 39:12). The Lord of the Harvest is not interested in filling up His barn with unbelievers. He is only after those souls possessing the embryonic seeds of faith. Hear Jesus’ command to the end-time harvesters: “Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather **the wheat** into my barn... the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels” (Mat. 13:30, 39). John the Baptizer had also spoken of this harvest-principle of Christ, “Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather **the wheat** into his garner [*granary*]; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable” (Lk. 3:17).

Church membership should only be comprised of true believers. It’s ok to bring lost souls into the church to hear the gospel, but it is not the pastor’s sole job to win the lost; it is also the parishioners’. These individuals within the church should be well prepared to go out and explain the gospel, then bring in those newly-saved souls to build them up in the faith—into the barn and sheltered from harm.

Journey into the Heavens

The Fruit is Ripe

The church’s ever-present journey with Jesus is both purpose-filled and fruit-filled. Fruit in the Christian’s individual life speaks of what he or she has to offer to the Lord Jesus. Our spiritual fruit is supposed to be mature, sincere, and Christ-honoring, and it may come in a great variety of ripened forms. Consider some of the following verses regarding the church’s spiritual fruit.

When Paul says, “this is the **fruit of my labour**,” he is reminding us that what we do for the Lord is counted completely all the way through to the end of our earthly journey (Phil. 1:22; *cf* Isa. 310). When he says that “the **fruit of the Spirit** is in all goodness... and truth” he is revealing the manner in which we are to mature in both outward character and inward conscience (Eph. 5:9). When he says, “let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the **fruit of our lips** giving thanks to his name,” he is referring to our development away from self-centeredness into Saviour-centeredness (Heb. 13:15). When Paul declares that “the **fruit of righteousness** is sown in peace of them that make peace,” he is pointing to the maturity of the believer’s peaceable gospel spirit (Jas. 3:18).

The Hebrew text of the Old Testament presents no less than nine different forms of the “various stages of child-life.”²⁹ The last stage of child-life is *bachur* meaning a “ripened one,” i.e. a “young man” (Isa. 31:8). When a young man becomes a certain age, he is ready to depart from the parent tree. Earthly fruit falls downward when it is ripe, but in contrast, heavenly fruit flies upward toward heaven. It should be the hope of every believer to arrive in God’s heavenly presence with spiritual fruit abounding to his or her account. By nature earthly fruit perishes, but heavenly fruit remains forever. Paul addressed the issue of the believer’s chief eternal fruit saying, “But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your **fruit unto holiness**, and the end everlasting life” (Rom. 6:22). Due to the church receiving new bodies at the moment of their rapturous journey upwards, each and every saint will arrive in heaven with a unified and fruitful measure of holiness.

The Day is Reserved

There are actually two wonderful end-time harvests. One soul-harvest belongs to the church and comes before the Tribulation. This is called the Rapture, or the Catching-Away of the saints. Paul encouraged the Thessalonians that Jesus would most certainly come and bring a host of holy ones with Him. Until that final day, the Father would be at work in them: “To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints” (1 Thess. 3:13). The other soul-harvest of believers comes after the Tribulation. These saved souls, sometimes referred to as Tribulation Saints, do not enter heaven, but rather into the millennium. Jesus is pictured as the Lord of the Harvest in the Book of Revelation. The setting in the following verse is the Tribulation period: “And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle” (Rev. 14:14). Let us now focus on the Rapture of the church.

This event is reserved for the unannounced future and will be the culmination of the church’s centuries-long journey with Jesus. Every generation has longed to experience this momentous event beginning with the first generation to whom Jesus declared: “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Mat. 24:36). This verse indicates that the day of the church’s upward calling is known only by the heavenly Father. In accordance with the Near-East wedding custom, the Son must patiently await the day when he is prompted by his father to go fetch his betrothed bride. In Christ’s case, it will be His blood-bought, born-again, virgin bride—the church (2 Cor. 11:2). Because that holy day is reserved by the Father, it is only intended to be revealed by the Father.

Showing that He understood the reserved nature of the church’s royal wedding day, at the Last Supper Jesus declared to the church’s founding members: “Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God” (Mk. 14:25). This glad day of the church’s calling away could come at any time. This is the reason we are to be ready for it. Paul understood the reserved nature of the church’s home going when he proclaimed that we should be “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

One of the most informative passages on the Rapture is given by Paul in his letter of comfort to the Thessalonian believers.

²⁹Edersheim, p. 100.

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be **caught up** together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:14-18).

The actuality of this event ever happening has been the hot debate of both scholars and students alike. Some assert that the concept of the Rapture is merely a modern addition to church dogma. Nevertheless, as we have just seen, the literal event of the church’s end-time upward-calling is a scriptural fact. Our modern English word *rapture* comes from the Middle English word *rapte*, which came from the Early English word *rapt*, which in turn came from the ancient Latin word *rapio*, which was a transliteration from the Greek word *harpazo* meaning; “to seize” (in various applications):—catch (away, up), pluck, pull, take (by force).³⁰ Dr. Scroggie describes Christ’s second advent as being equally “as personal and visible as was His first advent.”³¹ Why should we think otherwise? Only the timing of the Lord’s coming for His church should be the meaningful point of discussion.

Paul first taught this Catching-Away doctrine, and it was understood as taking place before the onset of the seven-year Tribulation. This doctrine was perpetuated by the succeeding generations of church fathers or historians. They fully believed in it and hoped in it. Irenaeus taught about a Pre-Tribulational Rapture of the Church. Irenaeus was the student of Polycarp who was the student of the apostle John. “In Against Heresies 5:29 he wrote: And therefore, when in the end the Church shall be suddenly caught up from this, it is said, ‘There shall be tribulation such as has not been since the beginning, neither shall be.’”³² Notice how Irenaeus used the two words *caught up* to describe this end-time event; he rendered them from the Greek word *harpazo* which Paul used in the original language of First Thessalonians 4:17. “Pre-tribulation rapture theology was popularized extensively in the 1830s by John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren, and further popularized in the United States in the early 20th century by the wide circulation of the *Scofield Reference Bible*.”³³ We do not have time to digress into a full proof of the Rapture’s exact timing, but we will reaffirm that it in no way comes at the mid-point of the Tribulation, nor afterwards. Teaching on the Rapture became forbidden under Catholicism and thus remained as lost knowledge during the Dark Ages. And just because this teaching resurfaced out of obscurity does not make it an entirely new teaching. The doctrine of the Rapture is as old as the New Testament itself.

³⁰“Harpazo,” Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance—King James Version, #G0726.

³¹W. Graham Scroggie, The Unfolding Drama of Redemption, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), Volume 3, p. 45.

³²Matt Ward, “What the Ancient Church Fathers Believed,” www.prophecyupdate.com/what-the-ancient-church-fathers-believed.html, accessed 27 February, 2017.

³³“John Nelson Darby,” Wikipedia, www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Nelson_Darby, accessed 27 February, 2017.

The Fullness is Revealed

There are several “fullnesses” which coincide with the timing of the Rapture. The first has to do with the fullness of the church’s *spiritual* development. Paul spoke of the various kinds of ministers that God gave unto the church to help them achieve an intended goal: “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the **fulness of Christ**” (Eph. 4:13). God wants the church to be revealed to the world as a proper representative of Christ’s humility, holiness, and heavenliness. Perfection is God’s goal. Anything less would be second best.

Another type of fullness pertains to the church’s *numerical* development. Paul declared “that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the **fulness of the Gentiles** be come in” (Rom. 11:25). The apostle is revealing God’s new focus—the redemption of all the “nations.” The primary meaning of the Hebrew word *goyim* is “nations;” its secondary meaning is “heathen,” and its tertiary meaning is “Gentiles.”³⁴ Isaiah gave forth many Old Testament prophecies regarding the Gentiles being brought to Christ’s saving light and saving law (Isa. 11:10; 42:6; 49:6, 22; 60:3). The church is comprised of saved Jews but more prominently of saved Gentiles. God is interested in their fullness as much as He is Israel’s fullness. Matthew Henry comments on Israel’s partial blindness and the Gentiles’ utter fullness saying, “And this blindness will continue till the church of the Gentiles be fully completed—till the gospel be preached through all the nations of the earth, and multitudes of heathen everywhere embrace the faith.”³⁵ When the last Gentile comes into the church-fold, God will begin again dealing with Israel in an exclusive way, to bring her into her long-awaited national salvation (Rom. 11:26).

The last type of fullness we will look at pertains to the church’s *physical* development. Each member of the church is destined to receive a brand new body that will be fully glorified, fully perfected, and entirely sinless. This could be rightly called, the **fulness of salvation**. Paul mentioned this great change which will come over all believers when the Rapture transpires: “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor. 15:52). Many believers wonder about the precise appearance that their new bodies will take on. We ponder whether or not we will still have our former physical imperfections. We can only assume that no one will be disappointed in that revealing day!

Jesus’ Affinity

Lord of the Harvest

The word *affinity* refers to “a natural liking for or attraction to a person, thing, idea, etc.”³⁶ The Lord Jesus naturally loves souls and has therefore taken great personal responsibility to insure that a mighty harvest of souls eventually comes into His heavenly storehouse. His lordly title was announced during His incarnation when He said to His disciples, “Pray ye therefore the Lord of **the harvest**, that he will send forth labourers into **his harvest**” (Mat. 9:38). Because the Lord Jesus has claimed the harvest as “his harvest,” it is slated for absolute success. When this is finally achieved, the church will see the end of its earthly

³⁴“Goyim,” Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance—King James Version, #H1471.

³⁵Henry, p. 1071.

³⁶“Affinity,” www.dictionary.com, accessed February 22, 2017.

gospel labors, and in exchange see the beginning of its reign with Christ as they lift upwards. Fields of golden grain are beautiful, especially when illuminated by the sun, but the royal seeds which Christ died for are not meant to remain out in open fields. They are ultimately destined for a much more glorious purpose. The church's journey with the Lord will culminate when they are transported upwards to be in the physical presence of the Lord.

Love of the Harvest

Jesus' love for the church compelled Him to give His life for it, and He was determined that nothing was going to stop Him from doing so. Such supernatural love can be seen in His passionate words about His upcoming substitutionary death. He said, "But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Lk. 12:50). Jesus would not be satisfied until He had purchased the world's harvest field of souls that He might have legal claim over them (Mat. 13:44). As that final Passover week began to approach, Caiaphas, the presiding high priest, unknowingly "prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad" (Jn. 11:51-52). Gathering up the saints is what the end-time harvest is all about.

If the Lord of the Harvest proved His love of the harvest by paying for the church's redemption with such pains, then He is certainly not going to let His harvest go ungathered. On the night of His passion Jesus gave the saints a very special promise: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (Jn. 14:2-3). His affinity for this end-time church gathering can also be seen in His other betrothal promise to the saints that night: "But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Mat. 26:29). This promise was customary of Hebrew grooms. After an engagement ceremony the groom would pledge his fidelity to his betrothed bride. Refusal to drink wine from that day until their wedding day was the token proof she needed that he would refrain from drinking and revelry. Western culture today is quite the opposite as bachelors take out the groom the night before his wedding and place temptations before him.

Christ's love of the harvest is immeasurable. To understand this, we may look to just one important Scripture which so vividly paints a picture of the vast realm of Christ's harvest-love: "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Rev. 5:9).

Law of the Harvest

According to the laws of nature, every earthly harvest will come in its appointed season. Recall God's promise to Noah: "While the earth remaineth, **seedtime** and **harvest**, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Gen. 8:22). But not only are the earthly seasons governed by God's divine laws, so are the heavenly seasons. The Rapture of the Church will occur at the exact time which the heavenly Father has preordained, and not a minute before or after.

We read the apostle's decree: "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of

the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him” (Eph. 1:9-10). This law of the harvest is unalterable.

Another law of the harvest ordains that the stalks in the field—that is, the plantings of the Lord—should abide firmly rooted, patiently and steadfastly, until the day of harvest comes. The Lord Jesus declares to the church, “But that which ye have already hold fast till I come” (Rev. 2:25). If the harvest wilts, drowns, or falls victim to some blight, then the harvest will come with great disappointment. Thus, the risen Lord of the Harvest grants the church some very supportive encouragement saying, “behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Rev. 22:12). The Lord Jesus made many references to this same harvest time reward during His incarnate ministry. On that monumental day when the church saints come into His very presence and proceed before His face, He hopes to be able to say to each and every one of them, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant... enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Mat. 25:21). The law of the harvest demands that the church remain unshakeable and unmoved until the day they are taken upwards from the earth; and if they do, they will be recompensed.

In summary, the Lord Jesus has an inextinguishable affinity to be joined to His people. He longs for that glorious day to come to fruition, and we might rightly assume that He longs for that day more than we ever could. After all, He will have the scars to prove it.

Chapter 5

The Church’s Return

The Precious Grain Revealed

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.”
(Eccl. 3:1)

Out of the Storehouse

The application of Jesus’ agricultural parable that we have been using as our main text finds its end in the previous chapter where the seed was harvested and brought into the storehouse; hence, it is now needful to draw from some other pertinent verse to continue our agricultural theme. Solomon said, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (Eccl. 3:1). Harvested fruit is not meant to remain in storage forever. A season will ultimately arrive when it becomes necessary to bring the harvest out of storage and put it on display for the public’s good will and good use. Reflect back on the famine of Joseph’s day. Seven years prior to that great dearth, the “years of great plenty,” Egypt began storing up large amounts of grain, and they continued to do so year after year (Gen. 41:29). During that season of drought those stored seeds were more precious than gold, but Joseph knew the time would soon come when they would be drawn out of the silos.

On Full Display

As the seven-year season of plenty quickly turned into drought, Joseph, the viceroy of Egypt, understood that the season had arrived in which he should put the nation's subterranean grain silos on worldwide display. This welcomed news travelled far and fast. "And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn; because that the famine was so sore in all lands" (Gen. 41:57). Even the chieftain of the Hebrew clan, Jacob, "saw that there was **corn** in Egypt;" and therefore, he sent his sons to go behold and to buy (Gen. 42:1). The overflowing granary city of Saqqara with its eleven wide and deep grain pits suddenly became, as it were, the seventh wonder of the ancient world.³⁷ That walled city of golden grain with its small single entrance³⁸ and rising stepped-pyramid in the middle³⁹ must have thrilled most pilgrims' dry and dusty eyes as they approached it.

Today Christ ascribes such inestimable worth to the spiritual seed of Abraham, that is, the household of faith. Christ's New Testament church is more precious to Him than all the world's precious metals and gemstones combined. He longs for the future day when He can come out of that heavenly Zion and return to earth with His covenant bride to show her off before the whole world. This is what Paul meant when he said, "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" (1 Thess. 2:19). Not only will we be rejoicing in that day, so will Jesus. Coming out of heaven that golden day will be yet another golden highlight of the church's long and exciting journey with the Lord Jesus, "for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known" (Mat. 10:26).

Journey into the Millennium

Jerusalem as the Lord's Capital

The church's earth-bound journey with Jesus has a very specific destination—Jerusalem, the eternal capital of Israel and host-city for the world's annually-visiting pilgrims. Zechariah had a vision of this grand day: "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east" (Zech. 14:4a). Why not Mount Moriah or Mount Zion? Why Mount Olivet? This particular summit is situated a full three hundred feet above Jerusalem, and its commanding view is very near the place from where Jesus once triumphantly ascended. Jesus also once made His triumphant entry into Jerusalem by way of this towering mountain, and we are told by the ancient prophet that Jesus will use this same point of origin upon His next triumphant entry into Jerusalem, only this time with an accompanying earthquake (v. 4b). Another ancient prophet, Ezekiel, takes the last eight chapters of his book to chronicle all the many measurements of Jerusalem's millennial city including its gates, courts, temple, administrative headquarters, and surrounds.

Abraham prophesied great things for this City of God saying, "In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen" (Gen. 22:14). Calvary's Sacrifice was the foremost display ever, but only just the beginning of God's many other wondrous displays to take place in and around Jerusalem. Notice how Abraham avoids using the title Mount Moriah and instead now calls this place,

³⁷"Joseph was Imhotep of Egypt," www.arkdiscovery.com/joseph.htm, accessed 23 February, 2017.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

“the mount of the LORD.” Jerusalem was originally built upon four mountain peaks, but in the millennium Jerusalem will be reshaped through the massive earthquake and created into one huge tiered mountain. Scripture seems to indicate that that glorious mountain will have various plateaus of dwelling. The Israelite people will inhabit the lower region called, “the mountain of the height of Israel” (Eze. 20:40), and Christ will inhabit the uppermost region called, “the mountain of the House of the LORD” which will be established in “the top of the mountains” (Mic. 4:1). Jesus once made reference to “a city on a hill.” Now can you imagine for a moment the enormity of Jerusalem’s future millennial city and its sprawling environs upon the Hill of the Lord? You might be wondering where the church would be dwelling during this golden age. We can only go by Jesus’ carefully chosen words which He once spoke in the upper room. He promised those early church pillars that when He returned for the whole church, “...where I am, there ye may be also” (Jn. 14:3). This assertion is further confirmed in the next section of our study.

The Church as the Lord’s Glory

God will present the reigning Lord Jesus to the world first. This is necessary for He is the church’s faithful and fruitful Head: “Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming” (1 Cor. 15:23). This inaugural display is a token of one central theme that will run throughout the whole millennium—The Glory of the Lord.

Paul mentioned very specifically this Christ-glorifying theme: “When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe... in that day” (2 Thess. 1:10). At the Lord Jesus’ first coming He was glorified in His Cross, but at His second coming He will be glorified in His Church. The *Wycliffe Bible Commentary* confirms this interpretation saying, “Believers are the sphere in which Christ will be glorified when he comes;” and they add that “This revelation of Christ’s glory in the believers will be amazing and wonderful to all who behold it.”⁴⁰ A host of angels once accompanied Christ at His ascension, thus adding to His heavenly admiration. But at Christ’s second coming, although angels will be present, His heavenly admiration will be chiefly found in those redeemed blood-bought souls who closely accompany Him. On that epic day the beleaguered Hebrew people will behold Messiah’s blood-bought bride and instantly seek to join in that number. Yet, Christ will have His own special and joyful plans for them.

It is well known that the glory of any king is his queen or bride. The returning church will add such glory and attraction to Christ the King during His earthly reign. Perhaps Paul had this same thought in mind when he said, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18; cf 1 Pet. 5:1). Whatever glory comes our way, it is only designed to serve as a reflection of our great Glory-Giver, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Church as the Lord’s Ambassadors

We are given a definition of what an ambassador is: “a diplomatic official of the highest rank, sent by one sovereign or state to another as its resident representative.”⁴¹ In this current dispensation of Grace, the Church Age, it is certain that “we are ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor. 5:20). We are thus called because we are Christ’s gospel representatives wherever we go

⁴⁰Iversen, p. 831.

⁴¹“Ambassador,” www.dictionary.com, accessed March 1, 2017.

in this fallen world. However, such a noble title might also be very fitting of the church during the millennium. Indeed, the Lord will have some tasks for His covenant New Testament bride to carry out.

Church saints who had been good stewards during the Church Age will be given subsequent rewarding roles in the Millennial Age. You will remember what Jesus said to the good servant in His parable of the Lord's Return: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things" (Mat. 25:21). Again, you will remember what Jesus said about the steadfast servant in His parable of the Postponed Kingdom: "Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities" (Lk. 19:17). Why ten cities? Wouldn't one sizeable city be enough to take care of? Well, because the millennium will be mostly an agricultural-based society, as opposed to our current industrial-based and commercial-based cities, there will be no shortage of small farm-based towns and villages during Christ's millennial reign. Observe the Old Testament prophecy concerning the farming environment of Jesus' thousand-year kingdom: "And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. 2:4).

Christ's worldwide ambassadors will personally ensure that no nation or region is able to rise up in arms during the Age of Peace and Prosperity. The church's many journeys and administrative tenures across the globe will remain Christ-honoring, gospel-loving, and peace-keeping.

Jesus' Second Advent

Returning to Rule Over the Nations

When Jesus came to earth the first time, He was born with the solemn title King of the Jews; however, when He returns the second time, He will be coming as the sovereign King of Kings. The nations will not readily accept this new rule but will instead resist it. John saw this global rebellion in his heavenly vision and wrote about it.

"And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:11-16).

Not only will Christ hold the title King of Kings, but He will also be called the King of Nations. Jeremiah once said to the Lord Jesus: "Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O LORD; thou art great, and thy name is great in might. Who would not fear thee, O King of nations? for to thee doth it appertain: forasmuch as among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, there is none like unto thee" (Jer. 10:6-7). It will not take long after

Jesus defeats the antichrist and his armies for all nations to quickly surrender to His Lordship. One token has been revealed to us concerning Jesus' divine governorship over all the nations. It is seen in the above text from John's vision. Upon His return to earth, Christ's head will be crowned with "many crowns." In his book, *The New Manners & Customs of the Bible*, James Freeman sheds light on what these multiple crowns signify. He writes: "Monarchs who claimed authority over more than one country wore more than one crown. The kings of Egypt were crowned with the *Pshent*, or united crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt. When Ptolemy Philometer entered Antioch as a conqueror, he wore a triple crown, two for Egypt, and a third for Asia."⁴²

Re-establishing the Land of Israel

Jesus foretold this time saying, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mat. 25:31-34). In order that all of mankind might dwell contently among each other, the Lord Jesus will also very likely establish the borders of all nation-states, not just Israel's; however, national pride will fade into the background. The ancient prophecy of Christ's millennial kingdom declares that "he shall set up an ensign for the nations" thus revealing the nations' new love for Christ's global banner (Isa. 11:12).

Other aspects of this Old Testament prophecy on the millennium by Isaiah will be referred to in the succeeding paragraphs, yet we pause here to concur with one modern scholar on the precise identity of this Ruler during the golden age. Dr. Henry Ironside writes, "It is when Jesus returns in glory and as the Root of Jesse fulfils the promises made to David that all these things shall come to pass."⁴³

Regathering the People of Israel

"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Mat. 24:30-31). Isaiah also foretold this dramatic event saying, "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea" (Isa. 11:11). Amidst this worldwide regathering of the scattered remnant, "there shall not an hoof be left behind" (Exo. 10:26). This rapid angelic end-time event will be immediately followed by a firm governmental action on Jesus' part confirming His Lordship over the tiny Hebrew nation.

⁴²James M. Freeman, *The New Manners & Customs of the Bible*, (North Brunswick, Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1998), p. 552.

⁴³Henry A. Ironside, *Isaiah*, (Neptune, Loizeaux Brothers Publishers, 1952), p. 78.

Restoring Peace & Righteousness to the Earth

The Lord Jesus' Second Advent will come at a time when the earth will be suffering their greatest time of crisis ever. Every problem that man has ever encountered in history will all be currently taking place at the same time—crimes, violence, wars, plagues, famines, floods, earthquakes, death, etc. Adding to the calamity of the hour, the antichrist will be undertaking his global reign of tyranny. The Lord's end-time physical appearance on the scene, along with His reigning church, will bring about untold relief from the earth's dreadful woes. Earth's long-awaited Prince will bring about vast and welcomed changes.

The apostle Paul describes the harsh but holy manner in which the Lord Jesus' new divine order will initially take place. "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come" (2 Thess. 1:7-10). Because future generations born throughout the millennium will be also be mortal and equally subject to commit sin, the reigning Lord Jesus will have to continue exercising a heavy hand. Thus we read of His lordly thousand-year rule: "But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins" (Isa. 11:4-5). Those who submit to the Lord Jesus' righteousness will live a thousand years, "but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed" (Isa. 65:20). These scriptural facts reveal that humanity's fear of the Lord will be an active force throughout the millennium.

Reaching the Gentile Nations of the Earth

The ancient prophecy speaks of the Lord Jesus' global gospel outreach saying, "And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious" (Isa. 11:10). As Israel positively responds to the Lord's gospel reign, so will the Gentile nations. In that day the Gentiles will no longer speak of their many gods such as Asherah, Bacchus, Cybele, Dionysus, Eostre, Freyja, Gaia, Hermes, Isis, Janus, Khepry, Loki, Mithrus, Neptune, Odin, Pan, Quetzalcoatl, Ra, Set, Tammuz, Utu, Venus, or Zeus.⁴⁴ Instead, they will only speak of Yeshua, the reigning Deity over all the earth who in actuality is Yehovah. The nations' ignorance of the One True God will no longer be a valid excuse, "for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9).

Reinstituting the Church's Role on Earth

The church's journey into the earthly millennium will be quite needful, and we spoke of their spiritual roles earlier. Alongside Jesus they will take their vital administrative roles in reinstituting godliness upon the earth. Before coming to earth to rule with the Lord Jesus, they will proclaim with great joy, "Thou... hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:9-10). It appears from this verse that the church will be

⁴⁴"Deities," Wikipedia, www.pagan.wikia.com/wiki/List_of_Deities, accessed February 27, 2017.

installed into earthly administrative roles both in civil realms and religious realms. This millennium-long journey with the earthly-reigning Lord Jesus, like all the other journeys the church has enjoyed with Him, will be most exhilarating, rewarding, and fulfilling.

Conclusion

In each chapter we have just observed the superlative aspects of the church's supernatural life along three distinct perspectives. These three perspectives are all linked in a wonderfully demonstrative way to reveal the Church's mysterious conception, birth, growth, departure, and return.

The first perspective was an examination of Jesus' **agricultural parable** on the seeds of the kingdom of God. Jesus' parable began with the seed of life being planted in the ground, thus representing how the church experienced its supernatural *conception* by the seeds of the Word of God which Jesus personally sowed into the disciples' lives during His private ministry among them. The parable advanced with the seedling springing into a vibrant life, thus representing how the church experienced its supernatural *birth* into the world by the abiding force of the Holy Spirit. The parable then moved along showing the sapling's steady progress, thus representing how the church experienced its supernatural *growth* by walking in the warmth of Christ's holy light. The parable continued with the plant reaching its final stage of maturity, "the full ear of corn." It was at this point that we attempted to fill in the last two progressive stages of the plant's fruit-giving life. We then showed how the fully-developed plant underwent a harvest, thus representing how the church will one day experience its supernatural *departure* from this earth and enter into Heaven's safe storehouse by way of Christ's glorious appearing. We ended the agricultural lesson with the precious grain being revealed to the public, thus representing how the church will one day experience its supernatural *return* to a hungry earth via their accompaniment with Christ and His mighty angels.

The second perspective was an examination of the church's actual **journeys with the Lord Jesus**. We began with the church's primal journey with Jesus *into the secret place* of private teaching as He explained many principles of His spiritual kingdom, and of private prayer as they waited many days in a quiet upper room of Jerusalem. Next we observed the church's miraculous breath-filled journey with Jesus *into the open light* of day and their first steps as new-born babes professing the name of Christ. Then we saw the church's journey *into the world* as they steadily grew in faith and began going abroad with the gospel of Christ where they were found as curious Christians under the pagan's watching and sometimes woefully judgmental eyes. Further discussed was the church's journey with Jesus *into the heavens* at that set harvest time when the church will have fully reached their intended maturity and fruitfulness and the dispensation of the Age of Grace will have fully concluded. Finally, we examined the scriptural evidence of the church's future journey with Jesus *into the millennium* where they return to the earth to rule and reign with Christ.

The third perspective was an examination of the various **inter-relational aspects** between Jesus and His church as they move forward through time, each one being differentiated by the specific time period that was transpiring. Jesus' *first advent* to earth made it possible for mankind to lay their eyes upon Him, and for Him to in turn teach His church how to live the Christ-life; this was done mainly through the examples of His earthly parables and of His earthly humility. Jesus' *ascension* to heaven made it possible for Him to send back down His

Holy Spirit and thereby give them dynamic and constantly-abiding life. This joyful event came at the sad and sorrowful time when His church was barely-breathing. Jesus' needful *advocacy* on the church's behalf is currently being made possible as He, in the office and order of Great High Priest, daily resides upon His priestly throne at the Father's own right hand. Jesus' *affinity* to be personally reunited with His church will one day be marvellously realized. This exciting event is for the express purpose of their heavenly wedding, and it will come at the culmination of the Church Age, a day known only to the heavenly Father. Jesus' *second advent* to the earth is promised to come seven years later. This will be a time when the church will co-exist with Him in an administrative way as He carries out His millennial reign of righteousness and peace.

During the transpiring of all these miniature dispensations, Jesus is Lord over His church. Not only so, but Jesus is undertaking and overseeing. Jesus is inspiring and equipping. Jesus is intervening and strengthening. Jesus is coming and catching away. Jesus is returning and ruling. The church can therefore be more than confident that their lives are in capable hands, even the Lord's nail-pierced hands.

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