

# ***Prehistoric Creatures on Display***

BY RICHARD JORDAN

Because we are creatures of time it is difficult for us to grasp the concept of eternity. This is, no doubt, at least part of the reason why we find it much easier to envision things always going on and on into the future than to look back into the past and imagine when nothing was!

As truly impressive and intricate as our minds are, as vast a range of capabilities as they demonstrate, we are still finite creatures and soon come to our limits. Thus it is good that we have the Word of God to give us some insight into eternity – past and future. In this connection the epistles of Paul prove especially helpful.

## **A PREHISTORIC PLAN**

“IN HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE, which God, that cannot lie, PROMISED BEFORE THE WORLD BEGAN” (Tit. 1:2).

From this declaration by the inspired apostle we learn that far back in eternity past the triune God held, as it were, an “Eternal Life Conference.” There, in the absence of any creature, God made a promise to himself – a promise of eternal life for poor sinners!

In a similar line of thought Paul reminds Timothy that God “...hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to HIS OWN PURPOSE AND GRACE WHICH WAS GIVEN US IN CHRIST JESUS BEFORE THE WORLD BEGAN” (2 Tim. 1:9).

It’s clearly “in Christ Jesus” that this promise of life finds its reality, as Paul repeatedly emphasizes. For example:

“That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of HIS PROMISE IN CHRIST by the gospel.  
“ACCORDING TO THE ETERNAL PURPOSE WHICH HE PURPOSED IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD” (Eph. 3:6, 11).

Thus he declares:

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS; of whom I am chief” (2 Tim. 1:15).

And Paul leaves no doubt as to when this “eternal purpose” was manifested in time. Each of the above passages, when quoted in their entirety, forcefully bear out this point:

“...God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;  
“But hath IN DUE TIMES MANIFESTED HIS WORD THROUGH PREACHING, WHICH IS COMMITTED UNTO ME ACCORDING TO THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD OUR SAVIOUR” (Tit. 1:2, 3).

“...his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,

“But is NOW made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ...  
“Whereunto I AM APPOINTED A PREACHER, AND AN APOSTLE, AND A  
TEACHER OF THE GENTILES” (2 Tim. 1:9-11).

That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

“WHEREOF I WAS MADE A MINISTER, ACCORDING TO THE GIFT OF THE  
GRACE OF GOD...

“UNTO ME, WHO AM LESS THAN THE LEAST OF ALL SAINTS, IS THIS  
GRACE GIVEN, THAT SHOULD PREACH AMONG THE GENTILES THE  
UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST” (Eph. 3:6-8).

“Howbeit, FOR THIS CAUSE I OBTAINED MERCY, THAT IN ME FIRST  
JESUS CHRIST MIGHT SHEW FORTH ALL LONGSUFFERING, FOR A  
PATTERN TO THEM WHICH SHOULD HEREAFTER BELIEVE ON HIM TO  
LIFE EVERLASTING” (1 Tim. 1:16).

All this emphasizes the fact that the “promise” and “purpose” which God established before the world began is indeed the great subject of Paul’s epistles. In fact, he calls this message “...the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest...” (Rom. 16:25, 26).

## **GENUINE PREHISTORIC CREATURES**

Just as the “promise” is linked to the “purpose” established “before the world began,” so they both in turn are found in Ephesians 1:3,4:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with  
all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

“ACCORDING AS HE HATH CHOSEN US IN HIM BEFORE THE FOUND-  
ATION OF THE WORLD, that we should be holy and without blame before him in  
love.”

Thus we see that the members of the Body of Christ are, indeed, genuinely “prehistoric creatures,” having been “chosen *in him* before the foundation of the world!”

And this is all the more revealing when we carefully examine the phrase “before the world began.” First, there is a clear dispensational truth here. The Body of Christ is said to issue forth from a purpose and promise made “before”—before Abraham, before Adam, yes, even \*before the foundation of the world.” Thus it is separate and distinct from that which pertains to the earthly promises and blessings belonging to Israel, for these are said to have been prepared “*from* the foundation of the world:”

“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... Then shall the King say unto them  
on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit THE KINGDOM PRE-

PARED FOR YOU FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD” (Matt. 25:31-34).

The distinction is clear: “prepared from the foundation of the world” versus “chosen before the foundation of the world.” The difference is the difference between prophecy and the mystery—the two great subjects of the Bible. That this is not an artificial distinction is demonstrated by the fact that both Peter and Paul use this very distinction to summarize their ministries.

Listen as Peter explains to his Pentecostal hearers just where they stood in the program of God, describing his message to them as that “which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:21). Then hear Paul entitle the message committed to his trust as “the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret *since* the world began” (Rom. 16:25). If words have meaning, these two programs are not the same!

God had a prophesied purpose – one which he had spoken about and made known since he placed man on the earth. He also, we now know, had a secret purpose—one that he did not speak about or make known until it was revealed to the Apostle Paul (See Eph. 3:1-9, Col. 1:24-26).

The prophetic program centers in his purpose for his kingdom nation, Israel. The mystery program centers in the Body of Christ and his purpose for it... two distinct programs; two distinct agencies to accomplish these programs; two distinct means of revealing these programs.

In the former, we see God’s purpose to restore the earth under his authority through the instrumentality of a kingdom vested in the nation Israel. In the latter God demonstrates his intent to do the same with “the heavenly places” through the instrumentality of the Body of Christ – a purpose *now* revealed during the interval occasioned by the setting aside of Israel and the interruption of the prophetic program.

God’s purpose for the Body of Christ was established *before* Genesis 1:1 but was *kept secret*: “the *mystery*, which from the beginning of the world hath been *hid in God*, Who created all things by Jesus Christ” (Eph. 3:9). Only now, “*in due time*,” has he manifested his “*eternal purpose*” in Christ through the revelation given to and through the Apostle Paul.

And that these two programs have a common goal is also clear. Through the revelation committed to Paul we are enabled to understand the ultimate in “insider information” – the mystery of the Father’s will! Speaking of the blessings that the Father has bestowed on members of the Body of Christ, he writes:

“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).

The Father’s ultimate intention is to have all of heaven and earth center in and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, that he alone might have the preeminence (Phil. 2:9-11, Col. 1:16-19).

That the Body centers in Christ, is touchingly illustrated by the use of the phrase, “before the foundation of the world.” It occurs only three times in our Bible – each having to do with Christ himself or with members of his Body. If the three passages are placed together, the obvious connections are easily seen:

**John 17:24**

“Father....Thou LOVEDST me before the foundation of the world.”

**Ephesians 1:4**

“...He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be HOLY AND WITHOUT BLAME before him IN LOVE.”

**1 Peter 1:19,20**

“...Christ...a lamb WITHOUT BLEMISH AND WITHOUT SPOT: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world...”

Just as Christ was loved by the Father before the foundation of the world, so the Body of Christ was “chosen in *love*”. And just as Christ was foreordained before the foundation of the world to be a “lamb *without blemish and without spot*” so his Body was likewise chosen to be “*holy and without blame*.”

Thus we see that what is true of Christ before the foundation of the world is now said to be true of members of his Body. So closely are we united to him that Scripture declares us to be “complete in him” and “blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”

As the Father views the believer today, he sees us in the spiritual accomplishments of his Son. Accordingly, we are repeatedly demonstrated to be “one with him,” crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:3-6), buried with Christ (Rom. 6:4, Col. 2:12), quickened with Christ (Eph. 2:5), resurrected with Christ (Rom. 6:5, Col. 3:1), seated with Christ (Eph. 2:6), suffering with Christ (Rom. 8:17, Phil. 3:10), even glorified with Christ (Rom. 8:17, Col. 3:4)!

So truly one with him is the believer today that we may each one join in singing the old chorus,

So near to God am I,  
Nearer I could not be;  
For in the person of his Son,  
I am as near as he!

And, blessed thought, this was so in the mind of the Father “before the foundation of the world.”

**ON DISPLAY: THE FUTURE IN VIEW**

There is at least one more aspect of this connection that we must consider:

“And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

“THAT IN THE AGES TO COME HE MIGHT SHOW THE EXCEEDING RICHES OF HIS GRACE IN HIS KINDNESS TOWARD US THROUGH CHRIST JESUS.”

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which GOD HATH BEFORE ORDAINED THAT WE SHOULD WALK IN THEM” (Eph. 2:6, 7, 10).

God’s purpose from eternity past is in fact his “eternal purpose,” for it even stretches into and across the horizon of eternity future. In “the ages to come” he will place on public display – indeed, on universal exhibition “the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.” Then we will truly be “Prehistoric Creatures on Display!”

What an incentive and encouragement all this should be for us to keep eternity in view – and thus be faithful to Christ, so that even now “the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor. 4:10,11). This is the secret of the Christian life!

And we have the solemn assurance of the Word of God to us:

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us A FAR MORE EXCEEDING AND ETERNAL WEIGHT OF GLORY:

“While we look not at the things which are seen for *the things are seen are temporal, but the things which are NOT SEEN ARE ETERNAL*” (2 Cor. 4:17,18).

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