

“Where We Fit In”

By Richard Jordan

The Lord Jesus Christ is the central figure of the Christian faith. He is our Saviour. *He* is our life, our peace, our hope—the One who fulfills our deepest spiritual needs and in whom we find our greatest joys.

Nowhere is this so plainly declared as in the epistles of Paul. To Paul, *Christ is all, and in all* (Colossians 3:11). Everything the believer has or needs, according to Paul, is to be found *in Christ*.

It comes as quite a surprise to many, therefore, that the apostle Paul states flatly that our Lord’s ministry while on earth *excluded* most of those who read these words:

Now I say that JESUS CHRIST WAS A MINISTER OF THE CIRCUMCISION for the truth of God, to confirm the

promises made unto the fathers (Romans 15:8).

What can this mean? How can this be? Certainly there is no mistake on Paul's part for not only was he writing by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but we have simply to consult the records of Christ's earthly ministry to see that they agree fully with Paul's assessment.

Listening to most of the current preaching and teaching on our Lord's earthly ministry, one would conclude that it was primarily to the Gentiles. But how wrong would this be! For far too long, passages like the following have been simply ignored by Bible teachers who claim a part in Christ's earthly ministry:

These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, GO NOT INTO THE WAY OF THE GENTILES, AND INTO ANY CITY OF THE SAMARITANS ENTER YE NOT:

*BUT GO RATHER TO THE LOST SHEEP
OF THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL* (Matthew
10:5, 6).

*...I AM NOT SENT BUT UNTO THE LOST
SHEEP OF THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL*
(Matthew 15:24).

*Ye worship ye know not what: we know what
we worship: FOR SALVATION IS OF THE
JEWS* (John 4:22).

But what is the explanation for all this? And just where do we Gentiles into the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ? We trust our readers will study what follows thoughtfully for it will prove a great help in your spiritual lives.

THE GREAT DIVIDE

That there is a great difference between the Jew and the Gentile in much of the Bible is clearly set forth in Ephesians 2:11. Notice Paul's words to the Gentiles at Ephesus:

Wherefore remember, that YE BEING IN TIME PAST GENTILES IN THE FLESH, WHO ARE CALLED UNCIRCUMCISION BY THAT WHICH IS CALLED THE CIRCUMCISION IN THE FLESH MADE BY HANDS ...

In *Time Past* there was a difference between Israel and the Gentiles, a difference plainly identified by the titles *Circumcision* and *Uncircumcision*. In other words, there was a difference between those who were and were not circumcised.

The Jews recognized this division for they knew God had separated them from the rest of the nations of the earth and had given them a physical sign of that separation: *circumcision*. The religious rite of circumcision literally divided the whole world into two parts and set up what Ephesians 2:14 calls “the middle wall of partition” between the Circumcision and the Uncircumcision.

This was nothing new or recent in Paul’s day for God Himself had introduced circumcision as the

sign of His covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17.
He had instructed Abraham:

*This is my covenant, which ye shall keep,
between me and you and thy seed after thee;
EVERY MAN CHILD AMONG YOU SHALL
BE CIRCUMCISED.*

*And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your
foreskin; and IT SHALL BE A TOKEN OF
THE COVENANT BETWIXT ME AND
YOU.*

*He that is born in thy house, and he that is
bought with thy money, MUST NEEDS BE
CIRCUMCISED: AND MY COVENANT
SHALL BE IN YOUR FLESH FOR AN
EVERLASTING COVENANT.*

*AND THE UNCIRCUMCISED MAN
CHILD WHOSE FLESH OF HIS
FORESKIN IS NOT CIRCUMCISED, THAT
SOUL SHALL BE CUT OFF FROM HIS
PEOPLE; HE HATH BROKEN MY
COVENANT (Genesis 10, 11, 13, 14).*

That God Himself had made this division between Israel and the Gentiles is further borne out by Ephesians 2:12.

That at that TIME YE WERE WITHOUT CHRIST, BEING ALIENS FROM THE COMMONWEALTH OF ISRAEL, AND STRANGERS FROM THE COVENANTS OF PROMISE, HAVING NO HOPE, AND WITHOUT GOD IN THE WORLD.

In *Time Past* the Gentiles were genuinely “washed up,” as it were, being: *Without Christ, being Aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and Strangers from the covenants of promise*, having absolutely no Hope—and thus utterly lost in a world without God.

This basic division between Circumcision and Uncircumcision is the fundamental characteristic of *time past*. Both the nation of Israel and God Himself recognized this difference and unless we honor it we will miss the basis of understanding much of the Bible.

Now, the question is: How long did this difference last? for Ephesians 2:13 is quite emphatic that *But Now* things have changed:

*BUT NOW IN CHRIST JESUS YE WHO
SOMETIMES WERE FAR OFF ARE MADE
NIGH BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST.*

Galatians 6:15 will help here.

*For in Christ Jesus NEITHER
CIRCUMCISION AVAILETH ANY THING,
NOR UNCIRCUMCISION, but a new
creature.*

This is an amazing declaration! God says through Paul that now circumcision means nothing to Him—it has no spiritual value at all! The special status once accorded the nation Israel had been set aside¹ and God has raised up the apostle Paul to introduce a new program called “the mystery” (Ephesians 3:1-9). Thus *now*, in the “dispensation of grace” the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile has been broken down and Paul

declares: *For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him* (Romans 10:12).

This division between *Time Past* and *But Now* is the great division in Scripture. Mark well that it is not until we come to the ministry our ascended Lord from heaven's glory committed to the Apostle Paul that we cross the great divide from *Time Past* to *But Now*.

WHAT COULD A GENTILE DO?

If the Gentiles in *Time Past* were without hope due to the fact they were on the wrong side of the middle wall of partition, it did not mean that God had no interest in them. Rather, the very purpose of the covenants and promises given to Abraham and his seed declared:

And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and IN THEE SHALL ALL FAMILIES OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED (Genesis 12:3).

But what were a Gentile's alternatives in *Time Past*? The answer to this is twofold, for if a Gentile came to see his true position before God, recognized his gods were false and that Israel had the one true and living God, he could do one of two things:

First, he could become a proselyte, that is, he could be circumcised and become a full-fledged member of the nation Israel.

To become a proselyte was literally for a Gentile to become a Jew, as many of the Persians did in Esther 8:17.

... And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.

Thus for a Gentile who recognized the God of Abraham as the one true God and the nation Israel as His people, one alternative was to be circumcised and become a part of that favored nation. In fact, it is clear from Exodus 12:48 that a proselyte held the same status as *one that is born in the land*. He thus was now on the right side of the wall of partition and

and had claim on all of Israel's covenants and promises.

The other avenue open to a Gentile who recognized Israel's God as the true God was to put himself in the place of blessing by blessing Israel. In other words, by taking a place of submission and service to Israel, a Gentile could be blessed *through* Israel (Genesis 12:3, Isaiah 60:1-16, 61:4-6, etc.).

Our Lord's own reference to the blessing of the Gentiles during the days of Elijah and Elisha in Luke 4:25-27 illustrates this alternative.

Although many Jewish widows were in dire straits due to the judgment of God upon Israel's sin,² it was a Gentile widow in Zarepath who was sustained by Elijah's ministry. Why? Read the record:

So he [Elijah] arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and

said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.

And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.

And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.

And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.

For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.

And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days (I Kings 17:10-15).

Here was a humble Gentile woman who recognized that Israel was special, that they had the true God and she didn't. She put Israel's prophet—God's spokesman—"first" and obeyed "the Lord God of Israel" when He spoke. Hence even while most in Israel were refusing God's word through Elijah, the blessing was hers.

Then there was Naaman, the leper. There were many lepers in Israel in those days, but only the Gentile Naaman was healed. Again, the record is clear:

And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I KNOW THAT THERE IS NO GOD IN ALL THE EARTH, BUT IN ISRAEL: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant.

And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant TWO MULES' BURDEN OF EARTH? FOR THY SERVANT WILL HENCEFORTH OFFER NEITHER BURNT OFFERING NOR

*SACRIFICE UNTO OTHER GODS, BUT
UNTO THE LORD (II Kings 5:15, 17).*

Here is faith indeed: *No God in all the earth, but in Israel!* So fully did he understand the purposes of God in and through Israel that he asked to take a load of the very dirt of the promised land home with him! He knew that Palestine was the only place that man could meet with God and when he endeavored to meet God, it would be on the very dirt of Palestine!

Thus it was in *Time Past* that the only way a Gentile could be blessed was being in subjection to Israel, by loving and blessing Israel and recognizing her God as the only true God. And this was just as true in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John as it was in the so-called Old Testament.

HOW CHRIST DEALT WITH THE GENTILES

Have you ever really searched the Scriptures to see exactly how many Gentiles Christ dealt with while He was here on earth? The answer will be shocking to some, surprising to most. In actual fact,

Christ dealt with only *two* Gentiles as far as the written Word is concerned. One man and one woman—only these two. Both encounters are very instructive.

In Luke 1:1-10, we have the record of a Roman centurion who needed help for a sick servant whom he loved very much. But this was no ordinary Gentile! By no means.

This man loved the nation Israel and had even built a synagogue for them to worship in. Beyond this, he obviously recognized that Jesus Christ was the God of the Jews for he knew He could heal his servant. But there is more: he also knew he, as a Gentile, was on the wrong side of the middle wall of partition—“not worthy” to personally go to Christ on his own. Thus he sent the Jewish elders to request Christ’s help—he knew his only hope of access was through Israel! He even sent word that Christ need not come the distance to his home, again because he was “not worthy that [Christ] should enter under [his] roof” (verse 6).

This is the *one* Gentile man Christ dealt with:—a Gentile in the place of blessing because he trusted Israel’s God and blessed Israel. This is, of course, a tremendous foreshadowing of what will happen to the Gentiles during the kingdom reign of Christ.

The *one* Gentile woman Christ dealt with is just as true to the divine pattern. She came to Christ seeking help for her demon-vexed daughter, obviously believing Him to be the true “Son of David,” Israel’s Messiah. When He answered her direct appeal with silence, she went to the disciples as intermediaries—recognizing the preeminent place they held as Israelites. Interestingly, these same disciples who had been given “power against unclean spirits” (Matthew 10:1) seem not to have been able to help her—they obviously had no power in cases like hers. (See Matthew 10:5, 6.)

When they approach Christ, He plainly declares that the middle wall of partition was still in effect:

*But he answered and said, I AM NOT SENT
BUT UNTO THE LOST SHEEP OF THE
HOUSE OF ISRAEL.*

*Then came she and worshipped him, saying,
Lord, help me.*

*But he answered and said, IT IS NOT
MEET TO TAKE THE CHILDREN'S
BREAD, AND TO CAST IT TO DOGS
(Matthew 15:24, 25).*

The woman's response is touching:

*And she said, Truth, Lord: YET THE DOGS
EAT OF THE CRUMBS WHICH FALL
FROM THEIR MASTERS' TABLE (Matthew
15:27).*

This Gentile woman recognized that Jesus Christ was Israel's Messiah and she owned the preeminence God had given to that favored nation. Thus she put herself in the position where she could rightfully receive the overflow of God's blessing to them.

Isn't it fascinating that we don't hear much of these obvious details when people preach through the Gospels today! At any rate, our Lord's earthly ministry was conducted under the constraints of

Time Past when the middle wall of partition was standing and God's salvation and blessings flowed first to Israel and only then through that favored nation to the nations who were willing to take their place in subjection to her.

So we see the two Gentiles Christ dealt with during His earthly ministry.³ They were the only ones He healed—the people healed in passages like Matthew 4:23, 8:16, 9:35, etc. were *all Israelites*. And the two Gentiles He did deal with had clearly placed themselves in alliance with Israel and thus were blessed *through* recognizing the program then in effect.

No other fair conclusion can be reached: Christ's earthly ministry was exclusively to and for the nation Israel. But wait, we must not stop at this point. Did not Christ command His disciples to *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature* (Mark 16: 15)? Did He not instruct them to *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, ... to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*: (Matthew 28:19, 20)? Yes, indeed.

And just on what basis was this to be done?
Luke 24:47 answers:

*And that repentance and remission of sins
should be preached in his name among all
nations, BEGINNING AT JERUSALEM
(Luke 24:47).*

*Hence even when we come to as late a date
as Acts 11:19, we read:*

*Now they which were scattered abroad upon
the persecution that arose about Stephen
travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and
Antioch, PREACHING THE WORD TO
NONE BUT UNTO THE JEWS ONLY.*

The middle wall of partition was still standing in early Acts and thus the only Gentiles dealt with by Peter, the Twelve or the “little flock” of Pentecostal believers were the same ones Christ dealt with while on earth. Remember: as long as the middle wall was standing, it was still *Time Past*. The only Gentiles dealt with in early Acts were proselytes or Gentiles that were blessing Israel.

Acts 2:9, 10 lists the countries from which the Jews at Pentecost had come, adding *and proselytes*. That these proselytes were counted as Jews is clear from the assertion of verse 5 that *there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven*. Thus at Pentecost the only ones ministered to were Jews (See 2:14, 22, 36).

But what about the Ethiopian eunuch? Acts 8:26-35 tells us he *had come to Jerusalem for to worship*. In other words, he too was a proselyte. What's more, as he was journeying homeward he was reading the prophet Isaiah—when Philip overtook him, he was at Isaiah 53:7. At his invitation, Philip preached unto him Jesus and he quickly believed *that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*—that Jesus Christ is Israel's Messiah. He, too, was a proselyte into Israel's kingdom program.

Surely, however, Cornelius was no proselyte. True. But we have simply to read Acts 10:1, 2 to see that he as the centurion of Luke 7, feared Israel's God and loved His people. He, too, was in the place

of blessing, having so blessed Israel. Hence Peter is sent to him with *the words of salvation*.

WHERE DO WE FIT IN?

It is not until we come to the Apostle Paul and *the mystery* program revealed to him that the “washed up” Gentiles of Ephesians 2:12 are included in the things of God.

The special status afforded to the nation Israel and the resultant disadvantage of the Gentiles extends right through Scripture until we come to God sending a *new* message out through a *new* messenger, the Apostle Paul. To Paul was committed *the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery* (Romans 16:25), a message and program that God had kept “hidden” in Himself until revealed through Paul.

Paul describes it in Ephesians 3 this way:

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,

If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:

How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery (Ephesians 3:1-3).

In this new dispensation of the grace of God, Jews and Gentiles are now placed on an absolutely equal basis, God recognizing *no difference* between them.

Rather than Gentiles being saved through the *rise* of Israel to prominence, today salvation is being sent out *in spite of* Israel, yes, even through their *fall*:

I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but RATHER THROUGH THEIR FALL SALVATION IS COME UNTO THE GENTILES, FOR TO PROVOKE THEM TO JEALOUSY.

Now if THE FALL OF THEM BE THE RICHES OF THE WORLD, AND THE DIMINISHING OF THEM THE RICHES

OF THE GENTILES; how much more their fulness?

FOR I SPEAK TO YOU GENTILES, INASMUCH AS I AM THE APOSTLE OF THE GENTILES, I MAGNIFY MINE OFFICE (Romans 11:11-13).

The Apostle Paul was raised up by Christ Himself from His position in heaven's glory and given a message not found in the Old Testament, the Four Gospels or even early Acts—a message found only in “the words of Christ” given through Paul, Romans through Philemon.

Today there are no rites and ceremonies to perform, no signs to maintain, no special nation or religion to embrace. Now all we need to come to God is faith in the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ which was poured out at Calvary as the full payment for our sins. And when we by our own personal faith rely exclusively on Him, God the Holy Spirit places us *in Him*—and there making us *complete*, blessing us with *all spiritual blessings in heavenly places* (Colossians 2:10, Ephesians 1:3).

To Paul was given an *unrestricted* apostleship (Romans 1:5) and an *unrestricted* message. In the dispensation of grace we have an “every-man ministry” in the truest sense of the term. No one is excluded now, but God’s grace is abundantly available to all. Speaking of God our Saviour, Paul declares:

WHO WILL HAVE ALL MEN TO BE SAVED, AND TO COME UNTO THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH.

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

WHO GAVE HIMSELF A RANSOM FOR ALL, TO BE TESTIFIED IN DUE TIME.

WHEREUNTO I AM ORDAINED A PREACHER, AND AN APOSTLE, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) A TEACHER OF THE GENTILES IN FAITH AND VERITY (1 Timothy 2:4-7).

Only as we thus *rightly divide the word of truth* can we be sure that we have a legitimate part in the

program of God—and only then can we begin to fully comprehend what God has so richly given us *in Christ*.