

THE ONE APOSTLE

Scripture Reading: Romans 11:13

As the number of Israel is twelve, the number of the Church, the Body of Christ, is *one*. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ" (I Corinthians 12:12). "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Romans 12:5). "And [God] hath put all things under His [Christ's] feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, WHICH IS HIS BODY, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:22-23). We, believers, are the Body of Whom Christ is the head.

The apostle Paul wrote to the church at Colosse, "I Paul am made a minister; who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the church: whereof I am made minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given me for you, to fulfil [complete] the word of God" (Colossians 1:23b-25). Thus we see that the Church which is Christ's Body, of which He is the head and of which we are members, is revealed to us by the apostle Paul—the *one* apostle of this dispensation of the grace of God in which we live.

Paul writes, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable [untraceable] riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery [the secret], which from the beginning hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 3:8-9). "I am THE apostle of the Gentiles" (Romans 11:13).

REH

Notes:

THE HEAVENLY PROMISE

Scripture Reading: Philippians 3:20-21

The church the Body of Christ is promised eternity in heaven—the dwelling place of saints—with spiritual bodies, in the presence of the HEAD of the church. We (who are saved by grace according to Paul's gospel) are assured by our apostle: "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory" (Colossians 3:4). "For our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself" (Philippians 3:20-21).

How important it is that as we study God's Word, we be aware of the need to recognize *who* is speaking, *to whom*, *when*, *under what circumstances*, etc. Israel awaits the return of their coming King, as promised to the twelve apostles. "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 1:10-11).

Christ will return physically to the earth and will set up His prophesied earthly kingdom as promised to Israel. But to the church which is His Body, He does not touch down upon the earth. Rather, members of His Body are "Looking for [anticipating, expecting] that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13)... "to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (I Thessalonians 4:17).

REH

Notes:

THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH

Scripture Reading: I Timothy 2:1-4

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (II Timothy 3:16-17). When we deal with the Word of God, we are responsible to handle it properly. The above statement is perfectly true regarding "all Scripture." However, improperly studied and taught, it can confuse and frustrate. Our apostle desired "that God would open unto us a door of utterance, *to speak the mystery of Christ...that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak*" (Colossians 4:3-4). Paul refers to his own message, the gospel of the grace of God, of which he has said, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8).

Paul's gospel is the message from God for today; thus, it is *our gospel*. It is that which we should present to others as we minister God's Word. We are encouraged to "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, *that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man*" (Colossians 4:5-6). How can we thus equip ourselves properly? By heeding Paul's own instruction: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, **RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH**" (II Timothy 2:15). In other words, follow the pattern: who is speaking, to whom is he speaking, when, where, for what purpose, under what circumstances, and in what context... "Speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15).

REH

Notes:

THE REASON FOR THE SEASON

Scripture Reading: I Peter 3:18

Without question, December is the month of America's biggest celebration of the year. It might not be a white Christmas for everyone; but it is a season of gift giving for most people, so much so that many businesses depend on Christmas to keep them out of red ink.

So why do we observe Christmas at all? What is the reason for the season? Believing Christians take time to observe the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into the world. He is the eternal Word who became flesh. He "took upon Him the form of a servant, and He was made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:8). He "was found in fashion as a man." Why did He humble Himself to become like us? He did so because God the Father sent His Son into the world to shed His blood and die as the perfect sacrifice for lost sinners. When He died on the cross, He bore our entire burden of sin. He did not die a natural death. Philippians 2:7 says He "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Think of it, a perfect man who had never sinned, being condemned with others of the Roman Empire's most incorrigible trespassers, dying a death reserved for the worst criminals, the death of crucifixion on a cross. If there had been a better way to save sinners, God would have known about it.

We know from the Scriptural record that when Christ was born, He really came to die. That's the reason for the season. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit"(I Peter 3:18).

Elvin C. Myers

Notes:

BETHLEHEM

Scripture Reading: Micah 5:2

I was born and raised in Altoona, Pennsylvania, so it seems I should know every town, village and hamlet adjacent to the city. I don't. I sometimes hear of a place near the city whose name is unfamiliar to me. Not many small towns become well known, but the little town of Bethlehem is world famous.

Bethlehem means "house of bread," perhaps because it was farm country. It is mentioned often in the Scriptures. It is the place where Jacob buried his beloved Rachel outside the town limits. The romantic story of Ruth took place in Bethlehem. Being farm country, we know the people were shepherders and grain farmers. It was the home of Jesse, the father of David. It was in Bethlehem that Samuel anointed David king of Israel.

When King Solomon died, a struggle ensued for the vacant throne. The rightful heir to the throne was Rehoboam, but he was challenged by Jeroboam who had no right to the throne. The struggle resulted in Israel being divided into two kingdoms called Israel and Judah. Jeroboam attacked Judah, so Rehoboam fortified villages and towns in Judah, including Bethlehem.

Ezra, Nehemiah and Jeremiah speak of Bethlehem. Micah 5:2 says, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

The Scriptures often use double names for Bethlehem. This is because there was more than one Bethlehem. One was near Nazareth and the other near Jerusalem. Micah 5:2 speaks of Bethlehem Ephrata, and Matthew 2:1 says Bethlehem of Judea. They are the same place. The Holy Spirit wants to make sure the reader would not get confused about where Jesus was born. Christ had to be born in the right town, namely Bethlehem of Judea near Jerusalem, the former residence of the family of David.

EM

THE SONG OF ZACHARIAS

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:5-25; 57-80

In the first chapter of Luke we have three songs. By that time in history, the family of priests in Israel had grown quite large. All of them were eligible to perform temple services if they were not defiled in some way. Priests were the custodians of the temple sanctuary. They were divided into eight ranks, I Chronicles 24:1-19. Zacharias belonged to a division called the course of Abia. It was his duty to burn incense in the sanctuary. His service would last seven days, and then be repeated in a year. He lived in the hill country of Judea; and when it was his turn to serve his week, he came to officiate at the temple in Jerusalem. As Zacharias poured incense on the hot coals and smoke filled the sanctuary, a trumpet sounded at which time the people outside began praying. What did Zacharias pray about? He asked God for a son, even though he and his wife were elderly.

Suddenly God's angel Gabriel appeared, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. He told Zacharias that God had heard his prayers and would grant his request. The angel gave specific information about the son, including that he would be forerunner of the Messiah.

When the son was born, it was a matter of public interest. In verses 67-79, Zacharias gave a song of praise to God for answering his prayer. Because he did not at first believe the angel, the Lord struck Zacharias dumb. He did not speak for nine months. His faith was restored when the son was conceived, and his speech was restored when the son was born. When he could speak, his first words were a song of praise to the Lord.

EM

Notes:

IT CAME TO PASS IN THOSE DAYS*Scripture Reading: Luke 2:1*

God reveals to us through the written, inspired Word the things He wants us to know. We have natural curiosity and seek information we don't really need. God does not try to satisfy our curiosity. For this reason, there are many things the Scriptures do not mention. As an example, what do we know about Joseph and Mary before they were married? What do we know about the early years of Jesus before He reached thirty years of age? What do we know about Joseph after Jesus was twelve years old?

Matthew does not record details about the birth of Jesus. For that, we must turn to Luke. Mark and John do not mention it at all. Luke chapter 2 covers the nine months of Mary's pregnancy; and Matthew picks up the narrative when Jesus is nearly two years old, barely mentioning that Jesus was born.

"In those days" the Roman empire was ruled by Caesar Augustus. It was mostly a time of enforced peace, but there was no peace in men's hearts. The Emperor issued a decree that the inhabitants of the empire had to be registered for a census and taxation. It was "in those days" that a newly married couple who lived in Nazareth of Galilee complied with the decree and went to the city of their ancestry to be registered. Their own city was Bethlehem, a journey of about seventy miles. The man Joseph was a carpenter, but he had the blood of the royal family of Israel in his veins. Had Israel had a kingdom and a King to govern them at that time, Joseph would have been the King. It is of great interest that his wife Mary was expecting her first child when they moved from Nazareth to Bethlehem. The child would be born at exactly the right time, in exactly the right family in Israel, in exactly the place foretold by the prophets. That child would be the rightful Ruler to David's throne.

*EM**Notes:***THE BODY OF CHRIST***Scripture Reading: Luke 1:30-35*

When the truth is told it is often challenged: The truth has never been popular. We read in Romans chapter 1 that people who knew God, verse 21, changed the truth of God into a lie. People believe lies so easily, and this makes the devil's work so easy. Man's sinful nature leads him to do "that which is right in his own eyes."

In our age of advanced knowledge and technology, lies are all about us. Scientists lie. Politicians lie. The news media lies; and worst of all, religion lies. At this time of the year, lies abound. The plain facts of the Bible are challenged. They ask, how can God be triune and one God? How can God be eternal and have lived in time on earth? How could one part of God come to earth and be born as a helpless baby, and then grow to manhood? How could Mary conceive a child without a human father and do so by God's Spirit?

The body of the Lord Jesus Christ was made by God the Father. Neither Mary nor Joseph made any biological contribution; they did not pass on to Jesus one single atom or molecule. Adam was earthly, made from the dust of the ground. The body of the Lord Jesus Christ did not come from the dust of the ground. Hebrews 10:5 says His body was prepared for Him. "Body" is in the neuter gender not masculine. This agrees with verse 35 in our text which refers to His body as "that holy thing." Holy thing is one word in Greek. Matthew 1:20 says "that which is conceived," rather than He which is conceived. "That" is neuter gender. His dead body never corrupted in the grave (Acts 2:31-37). He was holy and separate from sinners.

*EM**Notes:*