

Salvation Message in the Epistles (I)

Continuing from Acts

The Kingdom Completely Taken from Israel

(This article deals with the salvation message seen throughout the epistles, a salvation message previously seen beginning with Moses, with the salvation in this message ultimately realized following time and events referenced in the Book of Revelation.

For companion articles, refer to:

“Salvation Message in the Gospels” (I, II)

“Salvation Message in Acts” (I, II)

“Salvation Message in the Epistles” (II)

“Salvation Realized in Revelation”

The events depicted in Acts 28:17-29 — Paul proclaiming the message to and being rejected by the Jewish religious leaders in Rome — *bring to a close the complete offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel* (offered in the gospels, re-offered in Acts, together covering over three decades).

Beyond this point, relative to the heavenly facet of the kingdom, attention turns *to the one new man “in Christ” ALONE.*

With Israel’s climactic rejection of the proffered kingdom, the message was *NO longer “to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.”*

And, in a respect, *the message following the Acts period was NEITHER to the Jew NOR to the Gentile.*

A statement distinguishing between saved Jews and saved Gentiles — using this type terminology, particularly in relation to the kingdom — *would have been completely out of place following this time.*

(The use of the words "Jew" and "Gentile" together, as they appear in Rom. 1:16; 2:9, 10 [referring to both saved Jews and saved Gentiles], was something reserved for the thirty-year period when the kingdom was re-offered to Israel. Saved Gentiles were referred to in this manner, during this time, to distinguish them from saved Jews.

After the Acts period, such a use of terms would have been out of place, for a distinction of this nature, used in this manner, *NO longer existed*.

After the Acts period, saved Jews and saved Gentiles, together, became part of *the one new man* "in Christ," where a distinction between Jew and Gentile *did NOT exist* [II Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:26-29].

And the use of "Jew" and "Gentile" beyond this period would refer to individuals *outside the scope of the one new man, to unsaved individuals*. And it was to those comprising *this new man ALONE that heavenly promises and blessings were NOW being extended*.

Note though that the preceding *would NOT have immediately become the status quo among ALL Jews at the time that the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel ended*. At least a segment of the saved generation of Jews to whom both the offer and the re-offer of the kingdom had previously been made still remained.

ONLY AFTER this complete generation had passed off the scene could *ALL* Jews be dealt with in the same manner in relation to *salvation and the one new man*, a manner which would be *EXACTLY the same for Gentiles* [both Jew and Gentile unsaved] and would exist in this manner for the remainder of the dispensation.)

During about the last two and one-half decades of the Acts period, Paul's missionary journeys had resulted in the establishment of numerous Churches throughout the Gentile world. And a number of the epistles, addressed to some of these Churches, were written during this time.

During the Acts period, these Churches would seemingly have been comprised entirely of saved Gentiles, for believing Jews remained a part of the nation; they did not become part of *the one new man*. *BUT*, though in many instances these two groups probably met together during this time (and possibly even for a continued time following the Acts period), with very little being understood by either about any differences between them, there is something else to take note of and understand about this period.

And this has to do with the Mystery revealed to Paul during the first few years of the Acts period.

Note the indented data which follows.

(Things in the preceding several paragraphs pertaining to the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel *have to do with Jews who had lived during the time of the original offer in the gospels, NOT with a new generation born since the events of Calvary, progressively, over time, appearing more and more on the scene.*

This new generation only adds to the overall complexity of the Acts period, though explaining *HOW Paul could write a book like Ephesians during this time — dealing with BOTH Jews and Gentiles TOGETHER forming the one new man “in Christ”* [Eph. 3:1ff].

In one sense of the word, HOW could Paul have done this on the one hand IF he COULDN'T have done it on the other hand?

Then, for clarification on Jew and Gentile in one body, as seen in Eph. 3:1ff, written by Paul *DURING* the Acts period, note that this period covers about thirty-years, with continuously changing conditions within the generation of Jews to whom the re-offer of the kingdom was extended throughout this time.

At the beginning of this time [Acts 2], the entire Jewish nation was comprised of Jews who had lived on both sides of Calvary, to whom the re-offer of the kingdom could be made.

However, with the passage of time, a new generation began to appear, one born since Calvary. And the older generation, living on both sides of Calvary, began to progressively disappear.

And, by about 62 A.D., things had evidently so changed in this respect *that there was NO longer* a sufficient number of individuals left from the older generation to whom the re-offer of the kingdom could be made that the re-offer was closed, coinciding with the rejection by the Jews in Rome in Acts 28.

Now, note something about these two classes of Jews during these thirty or so years.

Those from the older generation would have availed themselves *of the death and shed blood of paschal lambs before Calvary, reflecting back on the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world and forward to the Lamb which they slew at Calvary.*

BUT, those from the younger generation *could ONLY* avail themselves *of the death and shed blood of the Lamb slain at Calvary.*

The re-offer of the kingdom *had to do with those in the diminishing ranks of the older generation ALONE.* Those in the younger generation *were EXACTLY like unsaved Gentiles.* They could have had no part in the re-offer of the kingdom, *for the kingdom COULD NOT have been offered [in the gospels] OR re-offered [in Acts] to unsaved Jews.*

Belief in Christ for those comprising this younger generation resulted in their becoming *new creations "in Christ," EXACTLY like saved Gentiles.* And, *NOW, AFTER* having become *new creations "in Christ," the SAME kingdom being re-offered to the older generation of Jews was also being offered to them.*

Differences of this nature would have prevailed throughout much of the Acts period, increasing more and more over time with the new generation, decreasing more and more over time with the older generation.

Then, beyond Acts 28:28, with the termination of the re-offer of the kingdom, *the ONLY thing seen was/is an offer of the kingdom to Jew and Gentile alike, in one body, "in Christ."*)

Offer of the Kingdom Following the Acts Period

Following the Acts period, the entity that had been the

repository of the kingdom since being brought into existence in Acts chapter two — thirty years earlier — *was NOW the LONE recipient of the message.*

The offer of the kingdom (in the gospels), then the re-offer (in Acts), had been made to Israel, with “rejection” seen time after time in the actions of the nation’s religious leaders *throughout this complete period.* And, as a consequence, in relation to the kingdom of the heavens, following the climactic rejection by the Jewish religious leaders in Rome, *Israel had been completely set aside.*

Israel, as a nation, was now *FOREVER* estranged from heavenly promises and blessings (*cf.* Matt. 12:31, 32; 21:33-43). *EVERYTHING* for Israel was *NOW* *earthly ALONE* (*the kingdom covenanted to David*).

To recap:

In the gospels, the message had been *to the Jew ALONE* (Matt. 10:1-8; 15:22-28).

In Acts, the message had been “to the Jew first,” *BUT*, unlike in the gospels, it had been “also to the Gentile” (Rom. 1:16; 2:9, 10).

THEN, the matter of the message being “to the Jew first” ended thirty years later when Paul, for the third and last time (insofar as the record relates), announced to the rejecting Jewish religious leaders in Rome that the message *would NOW* be taken to the Gentiles, who would hear the message (Acts 28:17-29).

Then, beyond Acts, the new creation “in Christ” is left as *the LONE entity to whom the kingdom was being offered*, which is the central message seen throughout the twenty-eight epistles, *though this message is almost completely unknown and NOT dealt with by Christians today.*

And the latter itself is rather amazing. The whole of Christendom has a book which, from one end to the

other, *deals with a KINGDOM*. But practically the whole of Christendom *DOESN'T* seem to know this. They *DON'T* seem to know what they have in their hands, what they are reading.

They deal with practically everything but what they should be dealing with, an existing situation foretold by Christ before the Church was even brought into existence (note the first four parables in Matt. 13, within context).

And, with that in mind, the remainder of this article will be taken up with data from different epistles (Pauline, Hebrews, General, and Rev. 2, 3), showing a uniform content relative to the proffered kingdom.

The Twenty-Eight Epistles

Moving through the epistles, Romans will be dealt with first, showing an introductory, established subject matter in the first chapter. Then, moving beyond the opening chapter, this introductory subject matter will be developed.

And Hebrews will follow Romans, for both are often thought of as companion epistles and, consequently, studied together.

BOTH epistles begin with a lengthy dissertation (the first chapter in each) relating what each epistle is about. And, as will be shown, the two epistles are about *the SAME thing*, though dealt with in different manners.

Then, as will subsequently be shown following Hebrews, this type structure is not something peculiar to these two epistles. *The SAME thing* can be seen in a number of the other epistles, with *ALL of the epistles dealing with different facets of the SAME thing*.

Thus, following comments on Romans and Hebrews, in line with the preceding, *the SAME thing* will be shown from a select number of the other epistles.

1) Romans

Romans chapter one has to do with *TWO types of saved individuals* in relation to the *gospel* (good news) mentioned in different places (in vv. 1-16), and to *faith* (vv. 16, 17), associated with this good news.

The division of the chapter into two parts, with respect to *these two types of individuals*, is seen at the end of verse seventeen, with verse eighteen beginning the second part of the chapter.

BEFORE this division there is a reiteration of the subject matter and the description of one type individual (vv. 16, 17 *cf.* vv. 1-17).

AFTER this division, with a view to the subject matter already laid out in the opening part of the chapter, there is a description of the other type individual (vv. 18-32).

a) *The Type of Saved Individuals Presented in vv. 1-17*

The individuals described in the opening part of the chapter are, as Paul described himself, “not ashamed of the gospel of Christ”; or, using an explanation of that being referenced in the words “gospel” and “Christ” in the verse, it could be said that individuals of this nature are “not ashamed of the good news of the One Who will rule and reign.”

There is really *NOTHING* about salvation by grace through faith in these first seventeen verses.

These verses, among related issues, have to do with “the seed of David” (v. 3), declared to be “the Son of God with power [‘sonship’ has to do with *rulership*]” (v. 4), with “obedience to the faith” (v. 5), with the faith of Christians in Rome being “spoken of throughout the whole world” (v. 8), and with Paul’s expressed desire to go to and proclaim this good news to the Christians in Rome, for a stated purpose — “that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles” (vv. 10, 13; *cf.* vv. 15, 16).

(Note the author's article *on fruit-bearing*, titled, "The Mandate Given to Adam.")

b) *The Type of Saved Individuals Presented in vv. 18-32*

Then, with verse seventeen as a closing statement for the opening part of the chapter, the other type individuals are presented. And the type individuals presented in this section, rather than exercising faith, with a view to experiencing the salvation in view in verse sixteen, *do NOT exercise faith*; and, instead of one day experiencing this salvation, they will suffer "the wrath of God."

EXACTLY the opposite of that seen in the previous section is seen in this section. And that becomes increasingly evident as one continues studying this section.

First of all, *note the subject matter at hand*. As previously stated, the gospel of grace (having to do with the unsaved and one's eternal salvation) *is NOT* the message Paul called attention to various ways in the opening seventeen verses.

Then, to further illustrate that *saved individuals ALONE* can be in view throughout chapter one, note the words "knowledge" and "knowing" in verses twenty-eight and thirty-two.

Both of these words are translations of the Greek word *epignosis* (the verb form of this word is used in v. 32 [*epignosko*], meaning the same as the noun form in v. 28).

(In the Greek text there is the regular word for knowledge [*gnosis*]; and there is an intensified form of *gnosis*, formed through the preposition *epi* [meaning, "upon"] being prefixed to the word [*epi-gnosis*, which has to do with a knowledge of something beyond a regular knowledge, *i.e.*, some facet of a mature knowledge concerning the matter at hand].

And, according to I Cor. 2:14, the natural man [which is all that the unsaved person possesses] *CAN'T* even come into possession of a *gnosis* type knowledge regarding spiritual values [the Greek word used in this verse]. The reason, of

course, is because *he is spiritually dead*. He simply *CANNOT* understand spiritual values.)

The individuals in view in the latter part of Romans chapter one came into possession of *NOT ONLY a gnosis BUT an epignosis* type knowledge of that in view (which, textually [vv. 19, 21, 28], *could ONLY have had to do with spiritual values*).

HOW did they do this if unsaved?

They DIDN'T; they COULDN'T have done so!

And, aside from the preceding, it *WOULDN'T* make any sense at all to see the first seventeen verses correctly (a message [vv. 15, 16] *having to do with faith* [vv. 8, 16, 17], *in relation to fruit-bearing* [v. 13]), and then try to see the continuing latter part of the chapter (vv. 18-32) *dealing with a completely different subject, i.e., with the unsaved*.

Scripture is simply NOT structured in such a manner!

(Note that many unfaithful Christians *would NOT* fit into the category of those committing the sins mentioned in vv. 18-32, though some would [an ever-increasing number in today's world].

The division between these two types of saved individuals is on the basis of an exercise of *faith*. One exercises faith, the other does not.

And, there is *NO middle ground in this realm*. Individuals *EITHER* find themselves among those described in the first part of the chapter *OR* those described in the latter part of the chapter, regardless of whether or not they are guilty of the sins named in the chapter.

God, in this passage, appears to simply align the sin of turning away from a mature knowledge of the subject at hand — the good news regarding Christians having a part in Christ's coming reign — with the grossest of the sins of the flesh; and this would show *NOT ONLY what God thinks about the importance of this message BUT what He also thinks about anyone who would come into a mature knowledge of this*

message and THEN turn from it, shown in passages such as Heb. 6:1-9; 10:26-39.)

“He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Matt. 12:30; cf. Luke 11:23).

Romans 2:1-5, continuing from ch. 1, deals with the latter of the two types of individuals seen in the previous chapter. Then matters change in verse six — “Who will render to every man according to his deeds” — continuing for a number of verses, dealing with both types of individuals seen in ch. 1 (e.g., compare vv. 7 and 8; vv. 9 and 10).

Then, summing matters up, Paul states in verse sixteen:

“In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.”

Paul’s gospel has to do with the mystery, that which had been revealed to him at the outset of his ministry, by the Lord Himself. And that encompassed within Paul’s reference to the message which had previously been entrusted to him *could ONLY* encompass *ALL* which has previously been stated in the book, along with that which would follow. *ALL* had to do with this gospel entrusted to him.

Note that the Law is mentioned throughout parts of chapters two through seven, which would be understandable, for the message was still “to the Jew first.” And, with respect to the message, *the Law had to do with Israel and the theocracy* (rules and regulations governing the Jewish people within the theocracy).

And though the theocracy had long since ceased to exist, the shadow of regality still remained (Matt. 21:13; 23:2). Thus, it was only a natural thing to bring the law into matters under discussion, though it is clearly stated

that the Law had to do with *Jewish believers ONLY, NOT Gentile believers* (Rom. 2:11-15).

Throughout chapters one through seven, in connection with two types of saved individuals, faith and works, Spirit and flesh are dealt with in a central respect throughout.

Everything builds into chapter eight, which forms an apex similar to that seen at the end of chapter ten and throughout chapter eleven in the Book of Hebrews.

Romans chapter eight, continuing from chapter seven, opens with that awaiting the two types of Christians introduced back in chapter one and dealt with in chapters two through seven.

An inheritance awaits one; and a disinheritance awaits the other.

For one, it is awaiting the manifestation of a new order of sons; and for the other, it is not having a part in this new order of sons (Rom. 8:18-23).

2) *Hebrews*

Continuing in Hebrews, the awaiting inheritance and new order of sons are seen dealt with the same way as in Romans.

The writer of Hebrews, after calling attention to certain things about Christ — His appointed position as “heir of all things,” His finished work on Calvary, and His present position at God’s right hand (1:2-4) — then does the same thing often seen throughout Scripture. The writer *moves FROM past sufferings and present conditions TO future glory.*

Using the Old Testament Scriptures, the writer of Hebrews, after calling attention to things past and present about Christ, then moves on to *the GOAL toward which everything moves, Christ’s coming glory.*

And to accomplish this purpose, he quotes from seven Old Testament Messianic passages (1:5-13).

(In Luke's account of Christ revealing Himself to His disciples [Luke 24:27, 44, 45], we're not told which Old Testament Scriptures He called to their attention. We're only told that He began at "Moses and all the prophets" and "expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.")

These Scriptures though, of necessity, *could ONLY have included BOTH Christ's past sufferings and His future glory* [v. 25, 26]:

"Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:

Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?"

Even though Christ, the One destined to rule and reign, had previously taught His disciples things concerning His rejection and sufferings [Matt. 16:21; 17:22, 23; 20:17-19; 26:1, 2], they still failed to grasp the overall picture and see both the sufferings and the glory in their proper perspective.

Thus, Christ's revelation of Himself to His disciples through the Old Testament Scriptures would have had to include passages concerning both.

And He could have drawn such dual teachings from Old Testament Scriptures such as those surrounding the life of Joseph in Genesis or those surrounding the life of Moses in Exodus, along with numerous other passages.)

Though the writer of Hebrews approaches the matter after a similar fashion seen in the preceding, there is a marked difference. The writer of this epistle begins by referring to Christ as *the appointed "heir of all things"* (v. 2) prior to recording anything about *His past sufferings or His present position at God's right hand* (v. 3).

And he then reflects back upon *Christ's heirship* which he had mentioned *FIRST* by focusing his readers' attention *ONLY* upon Old Testament Scriptures which have to do with

THAT day when Christ will come into possession of this inheritance (vv. 2, 5-13).

Thus, though there is a reference to Christ's past sufferings in the first chapter of Hebrews, *this is NOT what is mentioned first, and this is NOT what the chapter is about. And, accordingly, with the opening chapter introducing the book (as previously seen in Romans), this is NOT what the book is about either.*

This chapter begins with and centers upon teachings surrounding the coming glory of Christ, and this is accomplished mainly through reference to the Old Testament Scriptures.

Introducing the subject matter in Hebrews through different quotations from the Old Testament is strictly by Divine design.

There are "seven quotations" having to do with *Christ in His coming glory.*

"Seven" is a number which refers to the completion of that which is in view; and these seven quotations present a complete, composite, Messianic portrait of Christ, setting the stage for that which follows, covering the remainder of the book.

Hebrews is built around five major warnings; and to properly understand these warnings and related passages, a person *MUST understand the opening verses of the book in their correct perspective, for these verses CAN ONLY be looked upon as forming an introductory key to the remainder of the book (much like the previously discussed opening two chapters of Romans).*

The last of the seven quotations (1:13) leads directly into the introductory verse (1:14) for the first of the five major warnings (2:1-5).

The introductory verse to the first warning has to do with *an inheritance awaiting Christians, which would be realized with the Heir of all things, during the Messianic Era.* And the first warning refers to this inheritance as "so great salvation," which has to do with Christ and His co-heirs replacing the incumbent rulers — Satan and his angels (2:3-5).

Thus, one can immediately see that, contextually, it would *NOT* be sound exegesis at all for one to attempt to understand this first warning apart from the Old Testament quotations which precede the warning.

NOR, in a larger context, would it be sound exegesis for one to attempt to understand the remaining four warnings and other related subject matter in the book apart from these introductory verses and this first warning.

Thus, it becomes a simple matter to see that Hebrews, in a different manner, deals *with the SAME subject matter* seen in Romans. And, as in Romans, one might say that Hebrews deals with Paul's gospel, even though Paul didn't write Hebrews.

(Note that Paul had seen and heard Jesus, on more than one occasion; but the unknown writer of Hebrews, from his statement in connection with "so great salvation," evidently hadn't had this same experience [2:3].)

3) *Galatians*

The "gospel" seen in the opening verses of chapter one (vv. 6-9), identified in the latter part of the chapter (vv. 11, 12, 16), with additional comments in chapter two (2:1ff), sets the stage for the subject matter of the epistle.

Galatians, like Romans, was one of the epistles which Paul wrote during the Acts period. And the "gospel" alluded to at the beginning of the book — through those in this Church having been deceived by someone *proclaiming another gospel* — *is clearly revealed to be Paul's gospel in the latter part of the chapter, NOT the gospel of grace.*

(In fact, the word "gospel" [Gk., *euangelizo*] is *NEVER* used in the pauline epistles for other than Paul's gospel.

Aside from Acts 20:24, Paul NEVER used the word to reference the gospel of grace. And Paul used the verb form of this word [euaggelion] in the same manner, referencing his gospel.)

This was the message which Paul had previously received from the Lord, the message that he proclaimed to Christians throughout the Gentile world.

Paul had previously proclaimed this message to those in the Galatian Church, but someone had come in with “another gospel,” something which greatly troubled Paul, for he well knew the importance of this message.

Note Paul’s words to those in this Church concerning the matter:

“But 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” (v. 8).

Galatians is an easy book to understand, *UNLESS* you go wrong on the identity of the gospel in view throughout parts of the first two chapters. If this gospel is seen and understood as the gospel of grace, as so many do, Galatians simply *CANNOT* be properly understood, for the introductory foundational material upon which the remainder of the book rests *will have been destroyed*.

Galatians, as *ALL* of the epistles — *NOT* just the thirteen Pauline epistles *BUT ALL* the others as well, *ALL* twenty-eight of them — *deal centrally with different facets of that seen in Paul’s gospel, NOT that seen in the gospel of grace*.

The gospel of grace is seen different places in these epistles, *BUT, compared to Paul’s gospel, it is seen VERY sparingly*.

Galatians has to do with the inheritance awaiting the new order of sons (*cf.* Rom. 8), an inheritance separate from the Law (God gave it to Abraham, by promise, preceding the Law [3:16-18]).

The epistle has to do with Christians being “Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (3:26-29 [through their positional standing “in Christ,” who is Abraham’s Seed]).

And the book deals with the coming adoption of sons (having to do with a firstborn status in connection with the awaiting inheritance [4:1-7]), seen in Romans as well, in connection with the new order of sons (8:14-19).

Then, note the warning concerning following the works of the flesh rather than the spirit in 5:16-21, a very similar statement to that in Eph. 5:1-5. And in both Galatians and Ephesians, *an inheritance in the kingdom of God is in view, NOT eternal life.*

4) Ephesians

Ephesians begins with a reference to Christians having been blessed “with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (v. 3; cf. 2:6). Reference is then made to the adoption (v. 5) in association with an awaiting inheritance, which, as set forth at the beginning of the chapter, *is in heavenly places.*

And in relation to this awaiting heavenly inheritance, the incumbent rulers occupying the realm where this inheritance lies are dealt with three different places in the book (chs. 1, 3, 6).

The new order of sons (redeemed man), destined to take the realm which the present order of sons (angels) occupies, awaits the adoption and the manifestation of the sons of God, at which time the inheritance will be realized.

That is to say, *at THAT time, the government of the earth will change hands.*

In Eph. 1:18-23, the inheritance from verse eleven is referenced, though now seen as Christ’s “inheritance in the saints.” And, in relation to this inheritance, Christ has been raised from the dead, placed at God’s right hand, positioned “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion,” a reference to the incumbent rulers presently occupying the territory where the inheritance lies (vv. 19-21).

And God has told His Son to sit on His right hand *UNTIL* “I make thine enemies thy footstool” (Ps. 110:1), which, in relation to Eph. 1:18-23, would include these incumbent powers.

Another depiction of the same thing is seen again in Eph. 3:9-11. Opening the chapter, Paul began revealing things about the mystery which had been revealed to him, and his dealing with the mystery continues into verses nine through eleven.

In fact, once he had moved into these three verses, he was at the heart of the matter. These verses, as previously seen in chapter one, *have to do with the coming change in the government of the earth, wherein the inheritance is to be realized.*

Note these three verses:

“And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by [‘through’] the church the manifold wisdom of God,

According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

These “principalities and powers” (Satan and his angels), above whom God has placed His Son, presently occupy the heavenly places (in which Christians have already been blessed [1:3]), the places which Christ and His co-heirs are destined to occupy.

And this is being made known to these incumbent rulers through the very presence of the Church in the world — *presently in the kingdom but NOT presently occupying their proper place in the kingdom.*

The very presence of the Church in the world *is a declaration that a change in the government of the earth is in the offing.*

And the Book of Ephesians, in the closing chapter, sums the entire matter up by exhorting Christians to properly clothe themselves for the spiritual warfare at hand — a warfare against, *NOT* flesh and blood (individuals here on earth), *BUT* the “principalities and powers” presently occupying these heavenly places.

These incumbent powers are about to be replaced, they know this through the very presence of the Church in the kingdom which they rule, *and they are doing and will do everything in their power to prevent this from happening.*

Thus, the spiritual warfare rages, whether Christians know it or not (most don't). And to the victor *ALONE* belongs the spoils — whether man or angels.

Christians engaging the enemy in the proper manner *can ONLY* expect victory, for the Lord will go out ahead of them and fight the battle.

BUT, Christians *NOT* engaging the enemy in the proper fashion, will experience just the opposite. Attempting to fight the enemy themselves *can ONLY result in defeat.*

The former will overcome in the battle, subsequently realizing an awaiting inheritance in that heavenly land.

The latter though will be overcome in the battle, failing to realize an inheritance in that heavenly land.

5) *Colossians*

The entire first chapter of Colossians is a dissertation on Paul's continuing prayer for those in this Church relative to the things in the gospel which he had previously proclaimed among them, which had to do with “the hope of glory,” “fruit [fruit-bearing],” and an awaiting “inheritance” (vv. 5, 6, 12).

Colossians is a companion epistle to Ephesians. Both begin the same way, dealing with things in the gospel which Paul had proclaimed among them.

Then, after dealing with a number of these things, this gospel is mentioned (cf. Eph. 1:9; 3:1ff; Col. 1:25-29; 2:2).

Different things relative to this gospel are seen in each epistle. Ephesians deals quite a bit with the incumbent powers in the heavens (1:20-22; 3:1-11; 6:10-18). Colossians though only deals with these powers by way of passing (1:13, 16).

Both Ephesians and Colossians deal with Paul's desire that those in these Churches come into a mature knowledge (Gk. *epignosis* [ref. pp. 8, 9 in this article]) of the things having to do with the subject at hand, things surrounding the gospel which had been proclaimed among them (Eph. 1:17; 4:13; Col. 1:9, 10; 2:2; 3:10).

And, exactly as in Ephesians, so in Colossians (or, as previously seen in Romans, Hebrews, and Galatians). That seen in the opening chapter sets the tone for the remainder of the book.

Though reference is made in both books to salvation by grace (Eph. 2:1, 5, 8, 9); Col. 2:13, 14), *the subject matter throughout both books is Paul's gospel, NOT the gospel of grace.*

Note how Paul, in the opening chapter of Colossians, handles the present kingdom of Satan, the coming kingdom of Christ, and the relationship of Christians to both:

“Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:

In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (vv. 13, 14).

Verse thirteen, as it has been translated, would lead an individual to believe that Christians have been delivered from Satan's kingdom and placed in Christ's kingdom. That could be true in a futuristic respect, though *NOT* in a present respect, *for there is NO present kingdom of Christ into which Christians can be placed.*

The verse could be better understood in the sense of *Christians being caused to change sides with respect to two kingdoms* — the present kingdom of Satan, and the coming kingdom of Christ.

(Note: How could there be a present kingdom of Christ when the kingdom of Christ will be the one which Satan presently rules and controls?)

Then, the next verse deals with “redemption” and “the forgiveness of sins.” The verse, contextually, has to do with Christians, through a payment, being released from one kingdom, with a view to another kingdom. And the payment is clearly stated to be Christ’s “blood.”

This is *NOT* a reference back to the time those in Colossae were saved *BUT* a reference to Christ’s present ministry as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, on the basis of His blood [presently on the mercy seat].

And, comparing Ephesians and Colossians at this point will provide a better understanding of matters in both books.

The word translated “redemption” in Col. 1:14 (Gk., *apolutrosis*, “to release, effected by payment”) is the same word translated “redemption” in Eph. 1:7, 14; 4:30. In each instance, *things in Paul’s gospel are in view, NOT eternal salvation.*

Thus far, looking at different epistles, the same subject matter — Paul’s gospel — is clearly seen to be dealt with throughout, though different ways in each epistle.

In this respect, understanding more and more about Paul’s gospel can be derived *ONLY one way* — through comparing Scripture with Scripture, in this case, through comparing epistle with epistle.

6) I, II Thessalonians

I Thessalonians could be summarized as a *dissertation* to those in “the church of the Thessalonians” relative to the contents

of Paul's gospel, with the word "gospel" (Gk., *euaggelion*), as it is used throughout the epistle (used seven times), referring, as in all his other epistles where he uses the word, to this particular facet of the overall gospel message (1:5; 2:2, 3, 8, 9; 3:2, 6).

This aspect of the good news is introduced in I Thess. 1:5 as "our gospel," setting the stage for the use of the word *gospel* throughout both epistles. And, as Paul referenced this aspect of the good news different ways in Romans chapter one ("gospel of God," "gospel of his Son," "gospel of Christ" [vv. 1, 9, 15, 16; cf. Rom. 2:16; 16:25]), he does the same thing in I Thessalonians ("gospel of God," "gospel of Christ," "good tidings ['gospel'] of your faith" [2:2, 8, 9, 3:2, 6]).

Note II Thess. 2:14 pertaining to the content of Paul's gospel:

"Whereunto he called you *by our gospel*, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Then note the crux of the message, emanating from a proclamation of this good news which Paul was writing about to those in this Church, as seen in I Thess. 2:11, 12:

"As ye know *how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you*, as a father doth his children.

That ye walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto ['with respect to'] his kingdom and glory" (cf. I Peter 5:6-10).

This then merges into a section on the rapture and that which lies beyond the rapture relative to the Son's coming kingdom, seen in the latter part of chapter four and the first part of chapter five (4:13-5:10). Then, the remainder of the book has to do with Paul's closing remarks.

Then, the second epistle to the Thessalonians simply continues where the first left off, beginning with *two types of Christians at Christ's coming*, at the end of the Tribulation.

I Thessalonians left off with matters surrounding the rapture and subsequent accounting of Christians, preceding the Tribulation (4:13-5:10), wherein these two types of Christians had been seen — *the faithful, who had heeded Paul's exhortations; the unfaithful, who had failed to heed these exhortations.*

For one (the faithful), removed from Man's Day into the Lord's Day, "salvation" awaited; for the other (the unfaithful), removed from Man's Day into the Lord's Day, "wrath" awaited (5:1-9).

Then II Thessalonians chapter one begins with events occurring at a time at least seven years later, following the Tribulation, following Christ's return.

And again, *two types of Christians are seen.*

The faithful are seen realizing an inheritance, realizing the "salvation" of I Thess. 5:9, in "his kingdom and glory" (II Thess. 1:5, 10-2:1); and the unfaithful are seen being denied an inheritance in His kingdom, realizing the "wrath" of I Thess. 5:9 (II Thess. 1:6-9).

7) General Epistles

The general epistles will be dealt with mainly through two of the seven epistles — II Peter and Jude.

Then, John's epistles have to do centrally with Christians being brought forth from above or from below, overcoming or being overcome (*ref. the author's book, Brought Forth from Above*).

And this same thing can be seen in John's seven letters to seven Churches, which will subsequently be dealt with under a different heading.

Peter began his first epistle by dealing with the saving of the soul, the life (1:1-25); and he began his second epistle by dealing with the importance of Christian maturity, an abundant entrance into Christ's kingdom, and that which

had occurred when he, James, and John were on the Mount with Christ in Matt. 17:1ff, which has to do with Christ coming in His kingdom (1:1-21).

Parts of Peter's second epistle, reflecting back on his first epistle, and a verse from Jude will be dealt with in this section, beginning with the verse in Jude.

Note Jude 3:

“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”

The words “earnestly contend” in Jude 3 are a translation of the Greek word *epagonizomai*. This is an intensified form of the word *agonizomai*, from which we derive our English word “agonize.”

The word *agonizomai* is found in such passages as I Cor. 9:25 (“striveth”), I Tim. 6:12 (“fight”), and II Tim. 4:7 (“fought”). *This word refers particularly to “a struggle in a contest.”*

In I Cor. 9:24-27, Paul pictured himself as *a contestant in a race*, with a victor's crown to be won through a successful completion of the race. And he pictured himself running the race *in the most intense manner possible*, using the intensified form of the word *agonizomai* (*epagonizomai*), to describe his actions as he ran.

Paul *strained every muscle of his being* as he sought to finish the race in a satisfactory manner and be awarded the proffered crown.

And Paul sought to encourage others to run after the same fashion, keeping the same goal in view.

I Timothy 6:12 states:

“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called...”

This verse could be better translated:

“Strive [Gk., imperative of *agonizomai*; again, the word from which the English word ‘agonize’ is derived] in the good contest [*agon*] of the faith; lay hold on life for the age [the Sabbath rest of Heb. 4:4-9], whereunto thou art also called...”

Agon, translated “contest,” is the noun form of the verb *agonizomai*, translated “strive.” A contest/race is in view (same as I Cor. 9:24-27), and it is a “contest [race] of the faith.” It is “striving” *relative to the faith*.

The same thing is similarly stated in II Tim. 4:7a:

“I have fought a good fight [*i.e.*, ‘I have strived (*agonizomai*) in the good contest (*agon*)]....”

The “contest” here, as in I Tim. 6:12 and as seen in the latter part of this verse, has to do with *the faith*. And the goal set forth in both sections of Scripture is the same:

“...I have finished my course [the contest/race], I have kept the faith:

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day...” (II Tim. 4:7b, 8; *cf.* I Tim. 6:12, 15, 18).

The contest or race here is *the same race set forth in I Cor. 9:24-27*, with one or more crowns in view at the end of the race. And successful completion of the race will result in the runner being crowned, *anticipating the coming rule from the heavens over the earth as a joint-heir with Christ* (called “life for the age” in I Tim. 6:12).

With these things in mind concerning the use of the word *agonizomai* in connection with “the faith” (an expression peculiarly related to the Word of the Kingdom), note the expression “earnestly contend for the faith” in Jude 3.

In keeping with the other translations, the exact thought brought out by the word *epagonizomai* in Jude (as previously seen, an intensified form of *agonizomai*, the word used in I Tim. 6:12; II Tim. 4:7), could be better understood by using the translation “earnestly strive.”

Once again, a contest/race is in view; and *earnestly striving* “for the faith” — contextually, and in the light of the preceding related Scriptures where *agon* and *agonizomai* are used — could be better understood in the English text by translating, *earnestly striving* “with respect to the faith,” for that can ONLY be EXACTLY what is being stated.

Earnestly striving “with respect to the faith” in Jude carries the identical thought of *striving* “in the good contest of the faith” in I Timothy.

The intensified form of *agonizomai* (used only this one place in the New Testament) undoubtedly appears in Jude because of the subject of the epistle (apostasy) and the immediate danger of the recipients of this message being caught up in the apostasy at hand.

Understanding EXACTLY what is involved in *earnestly striving* “with respect to the faith” in Jude is possibly best brought out in II Peter.

II Peter is the companion epistle to Jude. Both epistles deal with the same subject matter throughout — “faith,” and “apostasy.”

“Faith” appears first in both epistles (Jude 3; II Peter ch. 1), followed by “apostasy” *from the faith* (Jude 4ff; II Peter chs. 2, 3).

II Peter also occupies the same unique relationship to I Peter that Jude occupies relative to all the preceding epistles — Pauline and General.

II Peter chapter one is Scripture’s own commentary on Jude 3. And this commentary is perfectly in line with that which is stated about “the faith” at any other point in Scripture.

I Peter deals specifically with “faith” in relation to the salvation of the soul (1:1-11), and II Peter deals with “faith” (ch. 1) and “apostasy” (chs. 2, 3) in relation to this salvation.

The same order is set forth in Jude and the epistles which precede. The epistles preceding Jude — Pauline, Hebrews, and General — also deal specifically with the salvation of the soul. Jude then forms a capstone for the entire subject, presenting, as II Peter, “faith” in relation to the salvation of the soul first (v. 3), and then “apostasy” in relation to the salvation of the soul (vv. 4ff).

Parallels in the sections on *apostasy from the faith* in both epistles (II Peter 2:1ff; Jude 4ff) clearly illustrate the oneness of Peter’s and Jude’s messages. Numerous identical subjects, events, and places are recorded in the same order (*cf.* II Peter 2:1-3 and Jude 4; II Peter 2:4-9 and Jude 6, 7; II Peter 2:10-14 and Jude 8-10; II Peter 2:15, 16 and Jude 11; II Peter 2:17, 18 and Jude 12, 13, 16; II Peter 3:1-13 and Jude 17-19).

“Apostasy” in both instances is *FROM the SAME* “faith” (*a departure FROM the faith*); and since Scripture is to be interpreted in the light of Scripture, a proper study on either “faith” or “apostasy” in one epistle would necessitate a study of the same subject matter in the other epistle.

The best available commentary on Jude is II Peter, along with other related Scripture; and the best available commentary on II Peter is Jude, along with other related Scripture.

Our main interest at hand is the parallel sections on “faith” in the two epistles. Where Jude devotes one verse *to earnestly striving “with respect to the faith”* (v. 3), Peter devotes the greater part of an entire chapter *to maturity in the faith* (ch. 1).

And this chapter, in the light of Jude and other related Scripture, is actually a dissertation *on earnestly striving “with respect to the faith,”* which will result in the one engaged in this “contest of the faith” (if he runs according to the rules) “receiving the end [‘goal’]” of his *faith*, even the *salvation of*

his soul (I Peter 1:9).

Then, note the way Peter ends his second epistle, *referencing Paul*:

“And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;

As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness.

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen” (II Peter 3:15-18).

8) Revelation 2, 3

The seven epistles to the seven Churches in Revelation chapters two and three are all identical in their basic structure. The opening verse of each epistle contains descriptive terminology, taken either word-for-word from the description of Christ given in chapter one or from material directly related to this description, *which has to do with JUDGMENT*.

Following this, each epistle begins with the statement, “I know thy works...” Then, certain things are stated concerning each Church relative to past works, and each epistle concludes with an overcomer’s promise.

Contextually, the “descriptive” aspects of Christ in chapters two and three *can ONLY* continue the thought of *JUDGMENT* from chapter one. The seven epistles to the seven Churches in chapters two and three provide additional information, forming commentary, with *JUDGMENT* continuing as the central issue at hand.

“Works” are then brought into the picture in each epistle, for *it is WORKS* which will be reviewed when Christians are judged.

“Overcoming” and promised “blessings” then terminate each epistle, clearly revealing that only the overcomers — those possessing works comparable to “gold, silver, precious stones” — will be allowed to enter into the promised blessings.

There are seven different overcomer’s promises in chapters two and three, and each promise *is millennial* in its scope of fulfillment.

That is, these promises will be realized during the 1,000-year reign of Christ after Christians have had their works tried “by [‘in’] fire” at the judgment seat.

Christ is seen as Judge in the midst of the seven Churches in chapter one, and chapters two and three provide information concerning why and on what basis these seven Churches — representing Christianity as a whole — are to come under judgment.

The word “overcome” is a translation of the Greek word *nikao*, which means “to conquer” or “to gain a victory over.” The thought inherent in the word *nikao* (or *nike*, the noun form of the word) always means *to be victorious in a contest or conflict*.

The “overcomers” are *the conquerors, the victors; they are the ones who will have successfully run the race of the faith; they are the ones who will have conquered the numerous encountered obstacles along the way*.

Christians have been saved with a view to their being overcomers and bringing forth fruit. And THIS matter comprises the very HEART of the message which is to be proclaimed to Christians throughout the dispensation.

Israel has been set aside during this time, and God is calling another people — a separate and distinct people — “for his name,” taken mainly from among the Gentiles (Acts 15:14).

Those presently being called comprise an entirely *new creation*, which is neither Jew nor Gentile, forming *one new man* “in Christ.” And God is extending to individual members of *this one new man* the privilege of overcoming and bringing forth fruit, with a view to their occupying positions as joint-heirs with Christ in the heavenly sphere of the coming kingdom.

The present dispensation is the time which God has set aside to accord redeemed man the privilege of overcoming and bringing forth fruit, and judgment at the end of this dispensation will reveal man’s response to this privilege.

Some Christians will be shown to have overcome, possessing works comparable to “gold, silver, precious stones”; but other Christians will be shown to have been overcome, possessing works comparable to “wood, hay, stubble.”

The overcomers will, at that time, inherit the promised blessings of Revelation chapters two and three; but those shown to have been overcome will be denied these blessings.

THIS is the central subject matter dealt with in the opening three chapters of the Book of Revelation.

And as well, as has been shown, this is the central subject matter in all twenty-one of the previous epistles, which is the central subject matter seen in Paul’s gospel.

(For additional information on the seven epistles in Rev. 2, 3, refer to the author’s book, *I Know Thy Works*.)

