

## **The Prison Epistles versus Acts 28**

### **By Pastor Art Watkins**

A phobia is an irrational fear of people, places and things. There is a phobia among dispensationalists. Many of them have an irrational phobia about Israel or anything related to Israel. I guess we could call it Jewphobia. This phobia affects everything they believe. One of the main tenants of dispensationalism is the separation of the church from Israel or anything connected to Israel such as; the kingdom of God, the new covenant, the Messiah, Abraham, the promises, water baptism, the second coming of Christ etc.

In their eagerness to separate the church from Israel many dispensationalists push aside large portions of scripture that make any reference to Israel or the things related to Israel. That is why the four gospels are off limits to the majority of dispensationalists. As far as they are concerned those books have nothing to say to the church today. There is too much "Jewish stuff" in those books for them. To many of them they are no different than the Old Testament books. They have the same attitude toward the books of Hebrews through Revelation. They say those books are not quote: "truth for today". There is too much "Jewish stuff" in those books too. They say the only books written to the church today are the Pauline epistles. Scofield says in one of his notes: ***the walk, destiny, hope and doctrine for the church today is found only in Paul's epistles.*** (Bottom note in Eph.3)

But then men like E.W. Bullinger and Charles Welch began to take a close look at the Acts epistles of Paul and they could still see Israel and Abraham, the New Covenant, the kingdom of God and the promises in those books too. So in their misguided zeal they pushed aside Paul's so called Acts epistles of Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Thessalonians, Titus, and 1 Timothy. They said there was too much Jewish stuff in those books for them and they went as far as to say they are not written to members of the body of Christ today. Anything written during the Acts period or before Acts 28 is off limits to the Acts 28 people. They say Acts 28 is the quote; dispensational boundary line and they have crossed that boundary and have entered into the true promise land of the Prison epistles which they say are

free from anything pertaining to Israel and the doctrines related to Israel. They believe that there is no trace of Israel or anything pertaining to Israel in the prison epistles and that the church in the prison epistles is the true church today.

But that is a mistake and that is what this book is about. If you think that there is no trace of Israel or the promises made to them in the prison epistles you are wrong. And if you think there is no relationship between the church and Israel in any of Paul's epistles you are wrong too, for what is true about the prison epistles is true of the Acts epistles.

### ***The Prison Epistles and the beginning of the church***

One of the main tenants of men like Bullinger, Welch, Oscar Baker, Tom Ballinger and the Acts 28 people is the belief that the church found in the prison epistles began in Acts 28. They say Acts 28 is the great dispensational boundary line and once you cross that line everything is different and so is the church. They say the church of today began in Acts 28 and is found exclusively in the prison epistles. But the prison epistles they put so much emphasis on are the very books that refute their theory and the Acts 13 and Acts 9 theories also.

In Colossians 1:18 Paul wrote: ***And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.***

Dispensationalists have augured for years about the beginning of the body of Christ. Here is a verse that clearly says that Christ is the beginning of something. Beginning of what? In the context in which it appears, the body of Christ, the church. He is the beginning of the body because he is the head of the body. It only stands to reason that if he is the head of the body he has to be the beginning. The body of Christ did not start with Peter or Paul it began with the head who is Christ. But when? Paul tells us when in Ephesians 1:19-23. In his prayer for the Ephesians he prayed that God would open their understanding to see: ***What is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under***

***his 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.***

These verses tell us plainly that God made Christ the head of all things to the church. But when? It says when he raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand in heavenly places. If we can locate the time he sat down at God's right hand in heaven we can locate the time that God made him the head of the church. In Acts 1:9 Jesus ascended up into heaven and in Acts 2:33 Peter said: ***This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.***

Here is the sequence: In Acts 1:9 Jesus ascended up into heaven and in Acts 2:33 Peter said he was then seated at the right hand of God in heaven. And Paul said that God made him head over all things to the church when he raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand in heavenly places. The verses speak for themselves. The church of God became the body of Christ in Acts 1, not Acts 28 or 9 or 13 either. (More to say about the church later)

### ***The Prison Epistles and the commonwealth of Israel***

In Ephesians 2:12-13 Paul wrote: ***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; 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:***

***But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.***

These verses describe the past and present history of us gentiles. Verse 12 describes our past history. In times past we were without Christ being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. We were strangers from the covenants of promise being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. We are also without hope and without God being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.

Verse 13 describes our present history. ***What it shows us is that verse 12 is no longer true of us.*** Verse 13 changes everything. What we were afar off from in time past in verse 12, we are now made nigh to in verse 13. One of them is the commonwealth of Israel. When it comes to defining the commonwealth of Israel most dispensationalists have their head stuck in the sand. They talk about the blindness of Israel when in fact many of them are blind about Israel. Many of them are blind to the fact that there are two Israel's in the Bible and have always been two Israel's in the Bible.

In Romans 11 Paul describes the two Israels. Those who were blinded, fallen, cast away and cut off. Those who believed God that he calls the election of grace in verse 5. The election of grace was the Jews who believed on Christ. Paul himself was a part of the elect remnant of Jews. These Jews are not a state or a political body or national government. They are born again believers in Christ.

(a) They are the commonwealth of Israel we are made nigh to in Ephesians 2:12-13.

(b) They are the Jews who first believed on Christ in Ephesians 1:12.

© They are one half of the one new man, the body of Christ in Ephesians 2:15-16.

(d) They are the saints who were nigh to God in Ephesians 2:17 that we are now one body with.

(e) They are the saints in Ephesians 2:19 that we are now fellow citizens with.

(f) They are the saints we are fellow heirs with in Ephesians 3:6, and members of the same body with in Ephesians 3:6, and it's their promise we now partake of in Ephesians 3:6.

In Romans 11:17 Paul shows us that we are grafted into the good olive tree with them and partake of the blessings and promises and salvation of the tree along with them. In Galatians 6:16 Paul also calls them the true Israel of God.

You cannot get away from Israel in the prison epistles. In the prison epistles we are one body with the commonwealth of Israel who are the Jews who first trusted in Christ. So the question today is not are the believers before Paul in the body of Christ. The question is, are you in the body with them, for they were in it before you and I.

## ***The Prison Epistles and the New Covenant***

According to Ephesians 2:12-13 we are not only made nigh to the commonwealth of Israel, but to their covenants of promise. And the greatest covenant with the most blessed spiritual promises is the New Covenant. Ephesians 2:13 tells us in no uncertain terms that even though we are gentiles we partake of the New Covenant of promise that was originally promised to Israel.

(a) This agrees with Rom.15:27 where Paul said we have been made partakers of Israel's' spiritual things including their New Covenant.

(b) It also agrees with Galatians 3:29 which say that in Christ we are counted as the seed of Abraham and heirs to the promises God made to his seed and one of those promises was the promise of a New Covenant.

© This is why God made Paul a minister of the New Covenant according to 2 Cor. 3:6.

(d) This is why Paul wrote the book of Hebrews that explains and defines the New Covenant. (See 2 Peter 3:15)

(e) And this is why we are told to observe the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 for it is a memorial of the New Covenant and we are told to do so till the Lord comes again.

Paul is the apostle God chose to define the blessings of the New Covenant in this age. The promise is found in Jeremiah 31, but it is Paul who fully explains it. In the new covenant we have received a:

A new and better Spirit - 2 Cor.3:6-8, 17, Ezk.36:26  
(The indwelling Holy Spirit)

A new and better heart - Ezk.36:26, 2 Peter 1:4  
(The new nature)

A new and better birth- 1 Peter 1:23, John 3:1-8  
(A second spiritual birth)

A new and better sacrifice – Hebrews 9-10  
(Christ's all sufficient sacrifice)

A new and better hope – Heb.11:16, 12:22  
(A heavenly hope)

New and better laws - Heb.8:10  
(The law of God written in our hearts)

A new and better priesthood - 1 Peter 2:5  
(The spiritual priesthood of all believers)

A new and better High Priest - Heb.3:1  
(Christ)

A new and better city - Heb.11:16  
(The Heavenly City New Jerusalem)

A new and better mediator –Heb.8:6, 1 Tim.2:5  
(Christ)

A new and better intercessor – Heb.7:25, Rom.8:34  
(Christ)

A new and better temple – Heb.8:2, 9:24  
(Heavenly)

A new and better mercy seat and propitiation – 1 John 2:2, Rom.3:25  
(Christ)

A new and better altar – Heb.13:10  
(Christ)

New and better promises – Heb.8:6  
(Spiritual)

A new and better understanding – Heb.8:11, 1 Cor.2:9-13  
(Spiritual understanding)

A new and better salvation – Heb.5:9  
(Eternal salvation)

A new and better redemption – Heb.9:12  
(Eternal redemption)

A new and better calling – Heb.3:1-  
(A heavenly calling)

Many dispensationalists have a problem claiming the New Covenant because it was made with Israel. They say how can we claim what belongs to Israel. But what about justification by faith, righteousness by faith, the Holy Spirit, the kingdom of God and the gospel of Christ? All these were blessings were promised originally to Israel and yet we claim them all today. If so, why is it so hard to claim the blessing of the New Covenant? It's hard because of the pre conceived ideas that many dispensationalists have about Israel and the church. More about this later.

### ***The Prison Epistles and New Jerusalem***

In Ephesians 2:19 Paul wrote; ***Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.***

Here in the prison epistle of Ephesians we are called fellowcitizens with the saints who are the Jews we were strangers and foreigners from in time past. Citizenship speaks of a city or country. When we were saved God made us citizens of a new city. What city or country are we now citizens of? It must be a heavenly city or country because our conversation is in heaven according to Philp.3:20 and we are seated in heavenly places according to Eph. 2:7. Is there a city in heaven we now have a citizenship in? Yes there is, and Paul tells us its name and location in Galatians 4:26. He wrote: ***But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.*** Paul the apostle of the gentiles tells us there is a city in the heavens that is called New Jerusalem and we are now citizens of that city. It's the Heavenly city New Jerusalem.

Hyper dispensationalists have a real problem with this fact because this again proves the church partakes of Israel's spiritual blessings in the prison epistles. You see, the Heavenly City New Jerusalem was originally promised to Abraham and his seed in the book of Genesis! In **Hebrews 11:9** Paul said this about Abraham; ***By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:***

Notice Abraham lived as a stranger and pilgrim in the land of Canaan. Today we hear that the land of Canaan belongs to the Jews and we

must fight for their rights to the land. The Jews and Arabs have fought over that land for years. But this verse says Abraham lived as if he had no rights to the land and as if he never expected to own it. He lived like a visitor in the land of Canaan. The only piece of land he owned was a small burial plot. Why did he live like a stranger and pilgrim in the land of Canaan if it belonged to him and his seed?

Because he looked for something better!

**Hebrews 11:10** says; ***For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.***

Verse 10 explains Abraham's behavior in verse 9. Abraham lived as a stranger and pilgrim on earth because he was looking for a city whose builder and maker is God. He was looking for something better than the land of Canaan. And in **Hebrews 11:16** Paul tells us what he was looking for:

***But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. (Heb.11:16)***

What we see in these verses is called the *law of subsequent revelation*. We learn something in Hebrews that was not fully revealed in Genesis. We learn that the real reason Abraham lived like a stranger and sojourner in the land of Canaan in Genesis is because he was looking for a heavenly country and a heavenly city built by God that was much better than the land of Canaan. God revealed this to Abraham in Genesis, but we don't learn about it until we read Hebrews. The city that Abraham looked for is **the heavenly city New Jerusalem** that Paul describes in Hebrews 12:22-24 and John in Revelation 21.

From Hebrews 11 we learn Abraham knew about the heavenly city New Jerusalem in the book of Genesis. This shows us the heavenly city New Jerusalem was first promised to Abraham and his seed. And because we are counted as the spiritual seed of Abraham today (Gal.3:29) we are citizens of that city. We are fellowcitizens with the Jews to whom the city was originally promised. And where is this found? In the prison epistles of Paul!

### ***The Prison Epistles and the Kingdom of God***

In Ephesians 3:4-6 Paul wrote concerning the mystery: ***Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery***

***of Christ, Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.***

Verse 6 defines the mystery of Ephesians 3. There are three parts to the mystery. The first part says that Gentiles should be fellowheirs. Fellowheirs are two or more fellows who share the same inheritance. My two brothers and myself were fellow heirs to the inheritance of our father. In Ephesians 2-3 the fellows who share in the same inheritance are Jews and Gentiles. The inheritance they share in the prison epistles is the same one found in every book in the Bible; the Kingdom of God.

Ephesians 5:5 says: ***For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.***

In Colossians 4:11 Paul writing about his fellow helpers said: ***And Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me.***

In 2 Timothy 4:1 he wrote: ***I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;***

We have all seen magicians pull rabbits out of hats and make things disappear. When the kingdom of God appears in the four gospels most dispensationalists say it is physical. In Acts 1-13 they say it is physical, but when Paul mentions it in Acts 14:22 it suddenly like magic becomes spiritual. In their writings dispensationalists remind us over and over again that the kingdom of God is a literal, physical, visible, earthly kingdom, but when the kingdom of God appears in Paul's epistles they change it into an invisible, spiritual and cosmic kingdom much the same way the A-Millinists do.

The truth is, when the apostle Paul preached the kingdom of God he preached the same one that Christ and all of the apostles preached. It is easy to determine this. For example in Acts 28 it says he preached the kingdom of God out of Moses and the prophets. (See

Acts 28:23) Everyone knows that the only kingdom Moses and the prophets wrote about was a physical, earthly kingdom and it is the one Paul preached. (Dan.2:44)

Why do many dispensationalists turn something that is obviously physical into something spiritual? This idea of an invisible, spiritual, cosmic mystery kingdom is a theory that dispensationalists hatched up to get around the fact that the church will be on the earth in the kingdom of God along with Israel and all believers from all ages. Dispensational doctrine cannot allow the church to be on the earth in the kingdom of God with Israel because they have built a middle wall of partition between the church and Israel again! But we know that wall has been abolished, and today the church partakes of Israel's spiritual blessings according to Romans 15:27 and one of them is an inheritance in the kingdom of God. Gentile members of the church are grafted into the good olive tree along with believing Jews and partake of the root and fatness of the tree which is salvation and inheritance in the kingdom of God according to Romans 11:17. Galatians 3:29 says that we are Abraham's seed and partake of the promise and promises God made to his seed and one of the greatest promises he made to them was an inheritance in the kingdom of God. Part of the mystery in Ephesians 3:6 is that gentiles like us are made fellow heirs with the Jews to their inheritance in the kingdom of God.

I have heard some Acts 28'ers quote Paul's statement in 2 Timothy 4:18 where he calls the kingdom of God a heavenly kingdom to prove Paul wrote about a different kingdom than Moses and Jesus. But the answer is simple. The kingdom of God is heavenly because it comes down from heaven. In Luke 19:12 Jesus went back to heaven to receive the kingdom of God and then to return with it. When he comes again from heaven it says he will come in his kingdom. (See Matt.16:28) This is why Jesus taught the apostles to pray: **THY KINGDOM COME, THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN**. The kingdom of God is heaven's rule on earth. That is why it is called the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. The heavenly kingdom of 2 Tim.4:18 is the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of heaven is God's heavenly rule on earth. Paul also said that the heavenly kingdom of 2 Tim.4:18 is still future. Paul said that God would preserve him UNTO his heavenly kingdom and that he would judge the quick and the dead in that kingdom in verse 1, just like Jesus and the apostles preached.

People say that the church has a heavenly hope and Israel has an earthly hope as if this proves the church will not be in the earthly kingdom of God. But what many dispensationalists fail to see and will not see is that people who will live in the kingdom of God have a heavenly hope, calling and inheritance. For example dispensationalists believe that Hebrews through Revelation are written to “tribulation saints” and their hope and inheritance is earthly when in fact the hope and inheritance and calling of these books are all HEAVENLY!

1 Peter 1:4 plainly says they have a **heavenly inheritance**.

Hebrews 3:1 says they have a **heavenly calling**.

Hebrews 12:22 and Rev. 21 they look for a **heavenly city**.

As a matter of fact in Hebrews is found a heavenly High Priest, temple, intercessor, throne of grace, mediator, city, and sanctuary. It doesn't get more heavenly than this. So the people whose hope is earthly is also heavenly. That is why the kingdom of God is called the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of heaven is called the kingdom of God. They are used interchangeably. (See Matthew 19:23-24)

In the kingdom of God the earth will become like heaven. As we are now seated with Christ in heavenly places, we shall be seated with him in earthly places when he comes again to make this earth like heaven.

### ***The Prison Epistles and the Second Coming of Christ***

It does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that the coming of Christ in the four gospels is after the tribulation. Jesus said in Matthew 24:27-31 ***For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.***

***Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:***

***And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.***

***And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.***

The vast majority of dispensationalists do not believe the coming of Christ found in these verses is the hope of the church. They say this is the hope of Israel. The real reason they teach this theory is because it is a post tribulation coming. If this is the hope of the church that would place the church on the earth till the end of the tribulation and they can't have that. So men like Darby and Scofield came up with the theory that there are two comings of Christ in the future which means there are two second comings. They say the coming of Christ in the four gospels is for Israel at the end of the tribulation, but the coming of Christ for the church is, of course at the beginning of the tribulation, and it's found only in the Pauline epistles. They say it was a mystery that no one knew about and it will be a secret silent event.

But low and behold when we read Paul's epistles we discover that the coming of Christ in his epistles is not so secret and silent at all. In fact it is very visible and rather loud. When he comes he will come with millions of angels and saints. There will be a loud trumpet to herald his coming. A loud voice will be heard and a loud shout will be given. Millions of bodies will come up out of their graves and millions of saints who are alive will be caught up into the air and in the air there will be union of quick and dead believers from all ages.

But that is not all; when we exam Paul's epistles we also see that the coming of Christ is not pre trib at all, but it is just like Matthew 24, it's a post tribulation coming.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5 Paul wrote: ***Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?***

The rapture of the church is called the **day of Christ** in verse 2. The day of Christ in verse two is the coming of Christ and our gathering

together unto him in verse 1. The hope of the church is not only called the day of Christ, but it is also called the:

**Day of the Lord** in 1 Thessalonians 5:2

**The day of our Lord Jesus Christ** in 1 Corinthians 1:8

**The day of the Lord Jesus** in 2 Corinthians 1:14

**The day of Jesus Christ** in Philippians 1:6.

I mention this because there are some who say that the day of Christ and the day of the Lord are two different days or events. But what about the other days? Are they all different days and events also? No. They are different titles to describe one day and one event, the coming of Christ for the church. Remember; Christ is the Lord and the Lord is Christ and the day of the Lord is the day of Christ and vice versa.

The coming of Christ for the church which Paul calls the day of Christ **is not at hand**. The Thessalonians thought it was at hand or about to take place and Paul plainly tells them it was not. He even said that those who taught them that it was at hand or could happen at any moment were deceiving them in verse 3.

In the context there are three events that must first come to pass before the day of Christ in 2 Thessalonians 2.

In verse 3-4 Paul says that the day of Christ, which is the coming of Christ for the church in verse 1, **shall not come except there come a falling away first, the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition. Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.**

The three things that Paul says that must first come to pass before the day of Christ are;

(1) A falling away which is a major apostasy will precede the day of Christ which is Christ's coming. It is the same apostasy that the Spirit through Paul predicted in 1 Timothy 4:1. (The Greek word for falling away is **apostasia** and even if you can't read Greek you can see what that word means)

(2) The man of sin must be revealed the son of perdition before the day of Christ. This of course is a reference to the anti christ. Paul plainly tells them that the antichrist will come before and not after the day of Christ.

(3) The antichrist will sit down in the temple of God in Jerusalem and claim to be God before the day of Christ. The church will not only

witness the revelation of the antichrist, but will see him seated in the temple of God in Jerusalem claiming to be God.

These are the three reasons why Paul told the Thessalonians that the day of Christ was not at hand. Until these things take place no one can say that the day of Christ which is Christ's coming for the church is at hand.

Even though this is not mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2 there are other outstanding events connected with the revelation of the antichrist and the temple of God that must also come to pass before the day of Christ. In Daniel 7 there is kingdom composed of 10 nations that will have ten kings prophesied to devour the whole world and become its supreme ruler. In Daniel 7:8 the antichrist is prophesied to come up **among them** which means he will come to power in one of the 10 nations that compose the fourth beast of Daniel 7. (It will be Assyria) But Daniel 7:24 says he will rise to power **after them** which means the fourth kingdom rises to power before the antichrist. When he comes to power he will overthrow it and he alone will become the supreme ruler of the kingdoms of this world. (Rev.13:7) If the antichrist is revealed before the day of Christ then the fourth kingdom of Daniel 7 must first come to power before the day of Christ also because the antichrist rises to power **after them**.

If the antichrist sits in the temple of God and claims to be God before the day of Christ this also means that the temple must first be rebuilt before the day of Christ which is Christ's coming for the church.

These are just some of the reasons why Paul told them the day of Christ which is Christ's coming for the church was not at hand. It is the same post tribulation coming of Matthew 24. When you compare them they are identical.

E.W. Bullinger and Charles Welch saw this problem about the second coming in Paul's Acts epistles. They also pointed out that in Acts 28:20 that Paul called this coming of Christ the hope of Israel which is true. So they came up with the theory that after Acts 28 God revealed a new hope to Paul which conveniently takes place before the tribulation. They call this hope **Christ's appearing**, not his coming, and that it is truly secret and silent. In fact they are the only ones who see it and if you don't you may miss it.

The answer to their theory is this:

First, the appearing and coming of Christ is one event.

1 John 2:28 says; ***And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.*** The appearing and coming of Christ in this verse is the same event.

In 1 2 Peter he said he was looking for the ***appearing*** of Christ, the ***revelation*** of Christ and the ***coming*** of Christ. Was he looking for three events or one? One. When Christ comes he will appear and when he appears he will be revealed. These are three words to describe the same event.

Second, the coming of Christ in Paul's Acts epistles is called the day of Christ and is clearly defined as a post tribulation coming. If the day of Christ can be found in the prison epistles this destroys their theory of a secret pre tribulation appearing of Christ. And sure enough the day of Christ of 2 Thessalonians 2 is found in the Prison epistles.

Philippians 1:6 says: ***Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:***

Philippians 1:10 says: ***That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ:***

Philippians 2:10 says: ***Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.***

As any one can see the hope of the church in the prison epistles is the same as the Acts epistles. It is the day of Christ which Paul tells us in no uncertain terms is post tribulation. This is the same hope of Ephesians 2:12 that we are made nigh to in Ephesians 2:13. It was originally promised to Israel and was called the hope of Israel, but it's now our hope of resurrection being in Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 15:52 Paul also says it will occur at the last trumpet. There are 7 trumpets blown before Jesus comes and the last one is at the end of the tribulation. You cannot escape the post tribulation coming of Christ in the Pauline epistles. It is found in his Acts and Prison epistles. It is the day of Christ.

## ***The Prison Epistles and the Mystery***

Ephesians 3:6 says: ***That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.***

According to the mystery of Ephesians 3:6 that the Acts 28 folks make such a big deal about, gentiles have been made members of the same body with the Jews we are fellowheirs with. Notice it says same body indicating a pre existent body of believers we were added to. The church became the body of Christ when God made Christ its head when he set him at his right hand in Acts 1. In its beginning it was made up of Jews exclusively. The mystery Paul revealed is that uncircumcised gentiles have been added to the same body with the Jews who were in it before us. (See Romans 16:7)

For years dispensationalists have argued about the beginning of the church. Friends have become enemies over this issue. I was told to stay away from a Bible Conference because the leader said it was an Acts 9 conference and I was not welcome because I was not Acts 9. (I still have the letter in my file cabinet) It is a futile argument for the following reasons:

Paul wrote his epistles to the church of God. (1 Cor.1:2, 2 Cor. 1:1)

He ordained elders in the church of God. (1 Tim.3)

He said that Christ died and shed his blood for the church of God. (Acts 20:28)

He said the church of God is the pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Tim.3)

He told us to behave ourselves in the church of God. (1 Tim.3)

He said the church of God is the body of Christ. (1 Cor.12:13)

But he also says he persecuted the church of God and wasted it. (Gal.1:13) What does this show us? That the church began before Paul was saved. As a matter of fact there is only one church of God and all believers since the beginning of time are in the church of God. ***But the church of God has not always been the body of Christ.*** So the question is not when did the church begin, but when did the church of God become the body of Christ? The answer is; it became the body of Christ when God made Christ the head of the church and he made him the head when he set him at his right hand in heavenly places according to Ephesians 1.

The church of God is called the body of Christ for a reason. It's called Christ's body because Christ lives in the believer, and the believer is in Christ, thus making them one body. Anyone and everyone who is in Christ, and in whom the Spirit of Christ lives, are in the body of Christ. It is impossible for Christ to be in a believer and for that believer to be in Christ, without him being in the body of Christ. Part of the mystery is that gentiles like us are made members of the same body with the Jews who were in it before us having trusted in Christ before us.

The mystery is also that gentiles; ***are partakers of his promise.***

In the context in which it appears the possessive pronoun ***his*** refers to the people we are fellow heirs with and members of the same body with. It's the Jews who are called the commonwealth of Israel in Ephesians 2:12. In the book of Ephesians there are three major promises we now partake of and they were all originally promised to Israel.

The Holy Spirit of promise in Ephesians 1:13. (Joel 2)

The New Covenant of promise in Ephesians 2:12 (Jer.31)

The kingdom of God of Ephesians 5:5. (Dan.2)

The mystery is not the church. The mystery is how gentiles like us got into the church and how we became fellow heirs with the Jews, how we became members of the same body with them and how we became partakers of their promises. The answer is we became fellow heirs with the Jews, members of the same body with the Jews and partake of their promises; **IN CHRIST - BY THE GOSPEL.**

Paul says ***in Christ*** because in Christ we become Abraham's seed and heirs of the promise and promises God made to his seed which include the three promises found in Ephesians; The kingdom of God, the New Covenant and the Spirit of promise.

Paul says ***by the gospel*** meaning by faith alone in the gospel without works such as circumcision and keeping the law.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says that salvation is the gift of God not of works lest any man should boast. God took the works out of salvation and made faith the only requirement to get saved when he abolished the law in Ephesians 2:14-15. Ephesians 2:8-9 is true because of Ephesians 2:14-16. When he abolished the law he also destroyed

the spiritual and dispensational advantages the Jews had above the gentiles. Now, there is no advantage in being a Jew or disadvantage in being a gentile. This means a gentile no longer has to become a Jewish proselyte to be saved or to receive the blessings found in Ephesians 2:12 and Ephesians 3:6.

### ***The Prison Epistles and the Messiah***

According to Ephesians 2:12 uncircumcised gentiles who were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel were ***without Christ*** in time past. Many dispensationalists miss the implications of statement. The word Christ is not a name, it's a title and it means Messiah. When we call Jesus by the name Christ we are actually calling him the Messiah. In John 1:40-41 it says: ***One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.***

Jesus is Christ the Messiah. He was the greatest of all the promises God made to Israel in time past. In Romans 9:5 Paul writing about Israel said: ***Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.*** This verse clearly states that Christ the Messiah was promised to the fathers of Israel and their children. He was the one who would take away the first covenant and establish the second with them. (Heb.10:9) He was the hope of Israel who would raise them dead. (John 5:25) He was the one who would be their God, everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6) He was the one who would destroy the gentile kingdoms of the world and reign over them as King of Kings in the kingdom of God. (Dan.2:44, Isa.9:7) He is the one who would bring to pass all the promises God made to the fathers throughout the Old Testament. (Rom.15:8)

In time past no one but the commonwealth of Israel had a rightful claim to Christ the Messiah. That is why he came to them first and why the apostles preached to them first. (Acts 3:25-26) Christ the Messiah even said he was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (Matt. 15:24)

The gentiles were without Christ. We had no claim to him for we were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. But now this is no longer true. God through Paul revealed unto us a great mystery concerning Christ the Messiah. The mystery is that he is now the

Christ, the Messiah of the gentiles. In Colossians 1:25-27 Paul wrote: ***Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:***

In time past gentiles were without Christ, but now Christ is in us and our hope of glory. This is called a great mystery because God never promised the Messiah to uncircumcised gentiles who were aliens of the commonwealth of Israel. We never had any claim to Christ the Messiah. But now we do and he is as much our Messiah today as he was Israel's in time past. Christ the Messiah now lives in us and we in him and he will do for us what he promised to do only for Israel in time past! That's enough to make an Episcopalian shout!

And where do we find this great mystery revealed? Right here in the prison epistles of Paul. In Paul's prison epistles gentiles like us find out that the Messiah of Israel is now the Messiah of the gentiles!

### ***The Prison Epistles and Prophecy***

The Acts 28 people are quick to point out how many times Paul quotes the prophets in his Acts epistles, but overlook the prophecies of the prophets in the prison epistles.

The gospel of the prison epistles is prophesied. (Isa.53)

The kingdom of God we inherit is prophesied. (Dan. 2, Isa. 9)

The New Covenant we partake of is prophesied. (Jer. 31)

The foundation of the church is built upon the prophets. – (Eph. 2:20)

The gifts of the church were prophesied. – (Eph.4:8 with Psa.68:18)

The hope of the church is prophesied. ( 1 Cor. 15:54-55)

The law and promise of long life in Eph.6:1-3 is prophesied. (

The church is prophesied. (Heb.2:12 with Psa.22:12)

The secret is how uncircumcised gentiles became members of the same body with the Jews, how they became fellow heirs with them in the kingdom of God and how we became partakers of their promise and promises. It is in Christ by the gospel that is by faith alone in the gospel without becoming Jewish proselytes, without keeping the law, without works period.

The mystery is also the equality between Jew and gentiles in the body. In the body of Christ no one has an advantage over the other because of his race or genealogy or prior position. In this fellowship between Jew and Gentile believers there is total equality. When God made them one body he abolished all the national and religious advantages of the Jews and all the disadvantages of the Gentiles. In this fellowship Jew and Gentile believers are:

Planted together in the likeness of Christ's death - Rom.6:5

Quickened together - Eph.2:5

Raised up together - Eph.2:6

Seated together - Eph.2:6

Fellow citizens together - Eph.2:19

Builded together - Eph.2:20-21

Fitly joined together - Eph.4:16

Knit together - Col.2:2

Perfectly joined together - 1 Cor.1:10

Laborers together - 1 Cor.3:9

Caught up together - 1 Thess.4:17

Glorified together - Rom.8:17

The word *together* appears in all these verses because it is a word that best describes the fellowship that now exists between the two groups who were divided for so many years. Fellowship implies togetherness. You can't have one without the other. In time past this fellowship did not exist because a wall divided the two parties who form the fellowship according to Ephesians 2. This is why it is called the fellowship of the mystery. It was a mystery that these two groups of believers would ever have any fellowship or relationship with each other. But by his death Christ broke down the wall that divided these two groups and began to reconcile both unto God in one body. It's now God's will for all men to see the fellowship that now exists between these two parties that was a mystery for so many years.

But everything that is true in the Prison epistles is true in the Acts epistles of Paul. In Galatians 3:27-28 he said: ***For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus***

And in the next verse he goes on to say:

***And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.***

Verse 27-28 shows the unity and fellowship between Jew and gentile believers, but in the next verse he shows us the connection all believers have with Abraham and the promises God made to his seed. This is exactly what we find in Ephesians 2-3. In Christ we are one body, but in Christ we are Abraham's seed and heirs to the promises made to his seed such as those found in Ephesians 2:12 and Ephesians 3:6.

The prison epistles do not separate the church from Israel or their promises. In the prison epistles we are made one body with the commonwealth of Israel who are the true Israel of God, the Jews who first trusted in Christ. We have become partakers of their Messiah, their New Covenant, their hope of resurrection, their God, their kingdom, and partakers of their promises.

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