

THE ON-HIGH CALLING

**OR, COMPANIONS OF CHRIST
AND OF A HEAVENLY CALLING**

Volume 1: The Great Transition

by

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Preface

The substance of this volume is messages given at the annual conference in Switzerland, 1963.

The messages are - with little editing - produced here in their spoken form, which accounts for the freer style than that of a meticulously literary form.

The conference was composed of friends of a number of nationalities, but one of its most precious features was the spirit of real fellowship and joy in the Lord. We would wish that something of the atmosphere of those days with the Lord might be sensed in the messages here passed on in book form.

I anticipate that there will be some big questions arising in relation to the setting aside of the first Israel and the establishing of another. Undoubtedly it will be asked whether all that is said on the matter means that we do not believe in a future for the literal earthly, historic Israel or Jews.

Let us say at once that we have said neither 'Yes' nor 'No' to this question. That is another subject and might require a book to itself. What is said here is positively what we believe to be the teaching of the New Testament as to the nature and purpose of God's work in *this dispensation*, and the calling and vocation of *the Church*, now and for ever.

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Chapter One

THE PURPOSE OF COMPANIONS

"Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling" (Hebrews 3:1).

"For we are become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end" (Hebrews 3:14).

Our first thing to do is to consider briefly the one word which is going to stand over all our meditations. It is the word which occurs in each of the verses above cited: the word 'partakers'. The Greek word so translated occurs some five times in this Letter to the Hebrews: 1:9; 3:1,14; 6:4; 12:8. In Luke 5:7 it is translated 'partners', and other translations are 'fellows', 'companions'. There are also other variations of the same original word or root.

Having looked carefully into the original meaning I have come to the conclusion that its truest and deepest meaning is 'companions'. Therefore I have taken this to define and govern all that we shall consider in these chapters. 'Companions of Christ': 'Companions of a heavenly calling'.

This idea of 'companions' runs right through the Bible as being the ultimate thought of God concerning man, and man's relationship to Him. Behind everything that is official in relationships to the Lord there is always a personal element. Think of Abraham! Abraham was a great servant of the Lord and he served Him very faithfully. But the deepest thing about Abraham was that he was God's friend. God spoke of him as *"My friend"* (Isaiah 41:8). That carries with it this idea of a 'companion of God'.

Moses was a great servant of the Lord, and the Lord often spoke of him as 'Moses my servant'. But we know that there was something deeper in it than that - *"The Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend"* (Exodus 33:11). There was a very intimate relationship between God and Moses and Moses and God. In reality Moses was a 'companion of the Lord'.

And what about David? There are many things said about him, but the greatest was that God said he was a man *"after my heart"* (Acts 13:22). That is the meaning of a companion of the Lord.

When the Lord Jesus came on to this earth He chose His disciples and apostles on the basis of companionship. Call them 'disciples', if you like - those who had to enter the school of Christ and be taught. Call them 'apostles' - those who were to be sent forth by Him. But the deepest thing in their relationship to Him was that they were His companions. Toward the end of their time He said: *"Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations"* (Luke 22:28). They were His companions in life and His companions in suffering. He said: *"Ye are my friends"* (John 15:14).

When we come to the Church, it is not some official, ecclesiastical institution. That is very cold, very formal and very distant. But when the Lord speaks about His Church it is always in terms of love: *"The church of God which he purchased with his own blood"* (Acts 20:28) - *"Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it"* (Ephesians 5:25). Perhaps we have to recover this idea about the Church: it is called to be the 'companion of Christ'. Its deepest relationship with Him is a heart relationship - just to be His companions in life, in work, in suffering and in glory.

Having said a word about the idea of companions, let us go on to think of the *purpose* of companions. The Bible is a book of one purpose, and that one purpose lies behind all its stages and phases. It lies behind creation, behind divine foreknowledge, behind election, behind the persons whom God chose, behind all the movements of God through the Bible, behind all the figures and all the types and behind the three main sections of the Old Testament - the section of priesthood, followed by the section on kingship and then followed by the section of the prophets. Those three sections comprise the Old Testament and this one purpose lies behind everything in the Old Testament. God is revealed in the Bible as a God of purpose, and every movement in His sovereignty is governed by this one purpose.

What is this one purpose in and through all? It is centred in God's Son. In all things God had His Son alone in view. The 'all things' is a very comprehensive term, but all is comprehended in God's Son. As we are going to dwell very much in this Letter to the Hebrews, take note of this very factor at the beginning of it.

The first great statement is concerning all God's past ways and methods. In times past God moved by this means and that means, in this way and that way, but at the end of those times He concentrates all in His Son. He gathers all that up together and focuses it in His Son. The Son of God comprehends the whole of the Old Testament and all God's ways in the Old Testament. To emphasize that, this Letter goes on through the first two chapters to bring the greatness of God's Son into view. You know the wonderful things said about God's Son in the first chapter. Here is the One who is above all others, who comprehends all else in the thought of God.

So God's interest in His Son is brought before us right at the beginning, and the declaration is that God's purposes are all centred in His Son. That Son is now known unto men as Jesus Christ. But the point here is this: Having introduced and presented the Son, and having magnified Him, the Holy Spirit, through the writer, goes on in this way (and there ought to be no break in chapters here) 'Wherefore - for this reason, because of this, because of God's purpose concerning His Son, because of the infinite greatness of the Son, greater than all others and all else - holy brethren, you are called into companionship with God's Son and companionship in the heavenly calling of God's Son.'

We come to our third point in this connection. There are two principles related to divine purpose throughout the Bible. The first is what we have just pointed out: God works ever and always and only in relation to His purpose. The statement of the Apostle Paul about God is: "*(He) worketh all things after the counsel of his will*" (Ephesians 1:11), and that will is centred in His Son. He therefore works ever, always and only in relation to His Son.

The Bible contains almost uncountable things. What a great mass of *things* there are in the Bible! Things which God created and things which God used. And then what a lot of persons there are that God laid His hand upon! A whole multitude of them. And then how many are the different ways that God went to realize His purpose! The ways of God are very many. The means that He employed - the Bible is just full of these things. And then we have God's blessings. God is very often found blessing people and blessing things. On the other hand, there are the judgments of God. He is a God of judgment and the Bible contains many of the judgments. But when we have said all that (and, of course, we could never really comprehend all that - this Book is always far, far too big for us!), not one of these things, persons, means used, blessings or judgments or anything else is a thing in itself. If God is the God of creation, if He chooses men, if He uses things, if He blesses or judges, He always does so with one object in view. He created all

things for His Son. That is a definite Bible statement. He took hold of these persons with His Son in view. It was so with Abraham, and through Abraham we come to God's Son, 'after the flesh'.

Well, let us be content with making the statement. If God blessed, it was because that thing stood right in line with His Son's interests. If we want the blessing of the Lord we must get alongside of the Lord Jesus and be wholly committed to Him. The Father never sees us apart from the Lord Jesus, and it is in Him that the blessing of God is to be found. If the Bible has much to say about divine judgments - and how much is said by the prophets about the judgments of God! - it is because things then were contrary to His interests in His Son. God always keeps His eye focused upon His one object and that object is His Son. God wastes nothing. He is not just interested in little things as such. The little things become very big things with God when they are related to His Son. Are you a very little person? Very unimportant? If you are vitally related to His Son God looks upon you as very important. But it is not your importance, nor mine. It is the importance of His Son.

This is true about any faithful school-teacher. I suppose all of us have been to school and have had our schoolteachers, and some of us in our school-days did want to stand well with our teachers. We tried to please them because we wanted to be happy with our teachers and we wanted to get all that the teachers could do for us. But my recollection of school-masters is this: They did not have *me* in view. The only thing they had in view where I was concerned was how their object was going to be realized. They had to have good scholars who passed examinations and came out top, and everything that they thought of related to that end. Sometimes they would be very pleasant to me, and then I thought 'What a good boy am I!' Sometimes it was the other way and I knew something about the judgments of school-teachers! Now this was not because they liked me or disliked me. What they really did like was the end when the examinations came, and everything about me was looked at in the light of the one object.

While we do not like to call God a school-master, the principle is the same. He is looking at us in the light of His Son: 'How does that man or that woman answer to My thought about My Son? How much of My Son is there in that man or in that woman?' Later we shall see how God works on that ground; but note: this is a principle in God's purpose. That leads us to the second principle.

While God is a God of purpose, ever moving in relation to that purpose, going on, no matter what happens, with His purpose, working on the ground of His own sovereign lordship, no man being able to prevent Him, He is going to reach His end. That is why He has given us the Book of the Revelation. Before we reach the end He has told us what it is going to be like. His purpose is going to be realized. Nevertheless, He keeps to this other principle - He always retains man in a place of responsibility. He never lets man off from responsibility. Why is that? Because His purpose in His Son is to be realized in man, the great, corporate man in which Christ is to have His fullness. Christ is not going to realize God's purpose alone. He will not be in glory just as one isolated unit. So we come back to our verse: "Holy brethren, *companions* of a heavenly calling... we are become *companions* of Christ, if we hold fast...."

Paul says that the Church is "*the fullness of him that filleth all in all*" (Ephesians 1:23). Hence there is a responsibility resting upon man, and no book in the Bible emphasizes that more than the Letter to the Hebrews. In that connection this Letter is one of the most terrible Letters in the Bible. On the one side it is the most glorious thing, and on the other side it is the most terrible thing. We shall be seeing that more fully as we go on.

At this point it is very important for us to recognize another matter, and this is what comes out in this Letter. Indeed, it is going to be the thing which governs all our consideration through these days. If God takes up a vessel in relation to His purpose - it may be individuals, or it may be a company of people, like Israel, or like the men whom God took up in the Bible - and that vessel does not respond to God's will, God will pass by that vessel and find another. He will call in others to take its place.

The greatest instance of this is seen in Israel. God chose Israel to be the vessel through which He would bring in His Son. Israel was called and chosen of God in relation to His Son and His purpose in His Son. And what did Israel do with God's Son? They refused Him, and therefore they refused God's purpose, so God put them aside and passed on. Jesus said: *"The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof"* (Matthew 21:43).

That is the very meaning of the Letter to the Hebrews, as we shall see. No one can say of Israel now: 'They are the companions of Christ.' Israel was once the companion of God, but the companion of God failed God.

What a lot of light this throws upon the fact that the Lord Jesus called Judas amongst the twelve! He was one of the twelve, called to be a companion, and he betrayed his Lord. Israel was called to be the companion of God and Christ, and Israel betrayed the Son of God - a companion set aside, rejected, while God goes on with His purpose and brings in others to take Israel's place.

So this explains the wonderful Letter to the Hebrews. It is the Letter of the place and of the greatness of Jesus Christ. It sets forth the wonder of being called to be a companion of Christ, and then it makes it so clear what a terrible thing it is for those who are called to be companions to fail the Lord. It says: *"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"* (Hebrews 2:3). You can never understand that phrase 'so great salvation' until you understand what it means to be a companion of Christ. Is there anything greater than being a companion of Jesus Christ? When you think of who He is, and of all that God has purposed concerning Him - and then to think that you and I are called to be companions of that Son of God! That is indeed a very great salvation! It is the 'so great salvation'.

We have spent our time just going round this one word 'companion'. The New Testament is built around that one word and around the one idea of companions of Christ. Christ is first seen choosing His companions, and then He is seen teaching them by word and by deed. Then He is seen testing and sifting them. Are they true companions? Or are they only associated with Him for what they are going to get from Him? You can have plenty of companions if you give them everything and if they can get all that they want from you. But what about the day when you can give them nothing but suffering? And persecution, and everything that is against their natural interests? You can only offer them a place in the Father's house! So He sifted them, He tested them, on more than one occasion it is said *"... many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him"* (John 6:66). Companionship is something which is tested and sifted through adversity. So if you have an extra lot of testing and of suffering in your relationship with Christ, remember that He is seeking to have us as His closest companions, in fellowship with Himself, not only in His glory, but in His sufferings.

So the relationship with Christ is on the basis of fellowship. Oneness in life, in purpose, in experience, in discipline, in death, burial and resurrection, in anointing and then, at last, oneness with Him in His heavenly glory.

We must realize that Jesus is repeating Himself in a spiritual way in this dispensation. When Luke wrote the book of the Acts, he commenced with these words: *"All that Jesus began both to do and to teach"* (Acts 1:1). His implication was: 'I am now going to write what He is going on doing and teaching. It is the same Jesus. He is doing the same work and doing the same things - but there is a difference. Before it was by illustration in a temporal way. Now it is the meaning of those things in a spiritual way. The meaning that was in the things then is now in what He is doing with us in a spiritual way. Did He open physically blind eyes? He is now opening spiritually blind eyes, and that is much more important.'

This same Jesus is going on with the same work in meaning now with you and with me. He is repeating His earthly life in a spiritual way. He is more on the line of meaning than of acts now.

Why do we say that? Well, when we were children we used to sing a hymn (and I think when we are grown up we often feel the same!):

"I think when I read that sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men,
How He called little children as lambs to His fold:
I should like to have been with them then!"

Do you feel that you would have liked to have lived with Him then, on the earth? Is that the best thing that you can think about? Let me tell you that you have something far better than that now! That same Jesus is with us, but, oh! on a much more wonderful basis than He was then. And we are called *now* to be companions of Christ and companions of the heavenly calling. His dealings with us, perhaps, are far more real because they are spiritual and eternal, while His dealings when He was on earth were only physical, and for the time being. It is a good thing to look after people's bodies and to help them in this life, but there is something very much more than that. It is that heavenly calling, that which is eternal, that which will not pass as our life work when time is no more - *"Wherefore, holy brethren, companions of a heavenly calling... we are become companions of Christ if we hold fast"*.

All that is only by way of laying a foundation. As the Lord helps we shall build on that foundation.

Chapter Two

WHO ARE THE COMPANIONS?

We come now to a more general look at the Letter in which our particular occupation is found, which particular matter we believe to be *the* concern of the Letter: the Letter to the Hebrews.

In the oldest manuscripts the title is just simply 'To the Hebrews', but we understand that to mean Hebrew Christians, or Christians who naturally were Hebrews.

We must understand the setting of the Letter in New Testament times. We know of the great battle which raged then between Jews and Christians. The Apostle Paul, who was himself a great Hebrew, had a very large heart for his own people. Do you remember what he said? "*I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake, my kinsmen according to the flesh*" (Romans 9:3). He was prepared to let everything go if only his people would accept the Lord Jesus, so great was his desire and his hope for them. But he fought a losing battle for Israel, and in the last chapter of the Book of the Acts you see Paul's surrender of that hope: "*Be it known therefore unto you, that this salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles: they will also hear*" (Acts 28:28). In effect he said: 'Seeing that Israel will not hear, we will give them up. I give up my great hope for them and I turn to those who will hear - I turn to the Gentiles.'

Then you come to this Letter to the Hebrews, and at the end of it you have the result of Israel's refusal. The writer makes this appeal to these Hebrew Christians: "*See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not, when they refused him that warned them on the earth, much more shall not we escape, who turn away from him that warneth from heaven:... And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain. Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken*" (Hebrews 12:25, 27-28).

These words contain the final judgment upon the Hebrews who rejected Christ. That 'shaking' referred, in the first instance, to the destruction which was coming upon Israel in the year A.D. 70, and when that happened Israel was left without a country, without a city, without a temple and without a government. Everything was shaken until it fell completely - the result of refusing to hear "*him that warneth from heaven*".

It is in that setting that we have this Letter to the Hebrews. On the one side it is a final appeal to the Hebrew Christians not to go back from Jesus Christ. On the other side the Letter is a great warning as to what will happen if they do. So you have to put this Letter right into that setting: it is set in a great crisis of spiritual life, and, of course, it contains an abiding message for all time.

Let us look for a minute at the three features which made up that great conflict and which led to that final division.

The first feature was Christ Himself, as the Messiah, and Jesus as the Christ. Of course, the Jews believed in a Christ, for 'Christ' is only the Greek word for the Hebrew 'Messiah'. But the trouble was that they would not have Jesus as the Messiah, and so, as was prophesied, Jesus became the stone upon which they fell and were broken to pieces. It was a matter of the place they gave to Jesus.

You can see into what a high place this letter puts Jesus, and we are going to see that again presently. Jesus was God's anointed Son, the Christ, the Rock upon which they were broken. That was the first great factor in the conflict and in the ultimate division.

We must always remember that the test of everyone and everything is the place which is given to Jesus Christ. If anyone ever comes to you wanting you to accept some system of teaching, having wonderful arguments and using a lot of the Bible, what are you going to do about it? You may not be able to meet their arguments, and you may not even be able to answer Scripture with Scripture, but there is one thing that will always go to the heart of the matter: 'What place do you give to the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you give Him the place of God's eternal Son?' Everything stands or falls on that. You can try it, and you will find that most of the false teachers will begin to wriggle on that: 'Oh, we believe in Jesus as a great man, as the greatest teacher that ever lived', and so on. 'but if you want us to believe that Jesus is God, well, we just cannot go that far.' It is the place given to the Lord Jesus that is the test of everyone and everything.

That is the first factor in this great conflict in the Letter to the Hebrews, and you will see why the writer uses the whole of the first part to magnify the Lord Jesus.

The second feature is what the writer here speaks of as 'the heavenly calling', and you have to put all the emphasis upon that word 'heavenly'. You see, the Hebrews wanted an earthly calling; and all who are like them, even if they are called Christians, just want an earthly calling; a Christianity that belongs to this earth and to this world. We are going to enlarge upon this later, but there is a tremendous significance in this little phrase 'the heavenly calling'.

Then there was this third feature. These Hebrews were prepared to be Christians, but it must be a Christianity after their own mind. It must be a Christianity that allows the Old Testament system to continue. It must allow Moses to continue. It must allow all the law of Moses to continue. It must allow the temple to continue. It must allow all the Old Testament priests to continue. It must allow all the sacrifices to continue - 'We are prepared to be Christians if you will let us bring over our Old Testament into Christianity, but if you say all that is finished and a *heavenly* system has taken its place, then we cannot have that.' They wanted the Jewish system brought into Christianity, that is, a Christianity of ritual and form. Do you see the force of this word 'Companions of a heavenly calling'? 'Companions of Christ'?

These companions of Christ are those who are constituted anew on a heavenly and spiritual basis. They are the ones who are responding to a *heavenly* calling.

Now we have come to the point of the transition from the natural and earthly Israel to the new spiritual and heavenly Israel. This transition ought to have been in a divine sequence, the one quietly giving way to the other. The old ought to have made full place for the new. The old Israel ought to have died, been buried and raised again in Christ and become the heavenly Israel - the companions of Jesus Christ - but they refused to have it like that. And because they refused to have it like that they were set aside. God is just moving on with His purpose concerning His Son, and, although many were called, few were chosen. There were a few of Israel who were chosen as companions, but the many who were called refused, and so they were set aside, and God moved in this transition toward His new heavenly Israel.

Note: they *positively* refused to move on to heavenly ground. They refused to move on to the ground of the heavenly Man. Hence, as a result, they went the way of Adam - and here is a very interesting and instructive thing.

Adam was made by God, chosen by God and called by God into relation to His purpose concerning His Son, but when Adam was made he was not perfect. He was innocent, but he was not perfect. You know the difference between being innocent and being perfect! A little baby child is innocent, but will you say that it is perfect? No, it is not perfect. It has to grow up, and it will only grow up and become perfect as it goes through all sorts of difficulties and troubles. We call them 'growing pains' and that is the way of becoming perfect from an innocent child to a full-grown man. Adam was innocent, like a little child. He was very beautiful, with no sin in him, but he was not perfect. He had to come to spiritual perfection. He had still to be made like God's Son. That is what he was created for. God allowed him to be tested, and, oh, what a wonderful thing would have happened if Adam had gone through his testing triumphantly! From the innocence of a little child he would have become a spiritually full-grown man like the Lord Jesus *humanly*, and we, the children of Adam, would have been very different people. But he failed in his test and did not go the way to which God had called him. What did God do? He put Adam aside. He put a curse upon him and said, in effect: 'That kind of being can never satisfy Me. He has refused to go the way of My Son.'

That is exactly what happened to Israel after the flesh. God made Israel, chose Israel and called Israel - all with His Son in view. And Israel refused to go God's way. Israel was tested as to Jesus Christ - the four Gospels are just full of Israel being tested concerning Jesus Christ, and they all close with Israel saying 'No!' to God's way. So God did with Israel as He did with Adam - He put them aside. He put a curse upon them and for these many centuries that curse has rested upon Israel.

In this Letter, you see, you have that possibility presented. God is saying to the Hebrew Christians 'Do not refuse Him that speaketh from heaven.' But here is the other side of the story. Israel positively refused God's heavenly calling... and just at that point God's *eternal* plan is revealed, that is, a heavenly people with a spiritual nature occupying a place in God's creation. That is what God eternally intended. He intended that before He called Israel, and He called Israel to be a people like that - a heavenly people with a spiritual nature.

The point is that just here, when Israel refuses, God presents His *eternal* plan, which is a heavenly people of a spiritual nature.

The whole of the New Testament is the body of truth which relates to this *eternal* will of God. Let us just look at that very hurriedly. We will take the four Gospels. (No! We are not going to study the four Gospels! We are just going to look at them.)

If you take up Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and get some idea of what they contain, and then stand back from them, you are able to see two lines of movement right through them. These two movements run alongside of each other.

On the one side there is the Jewish idea of the Messiah and the Jewish idea of the kingdom of God. The whole Jewish system is there.

Alongside of that, and over against it, there is something that is different. There is God's idea, and heaven's idea, of the Messiah. That is very different from the

Jewish idea, and it is always in conflict with the Jewish idea. Then there is God's idea, and heaven's idea, of the kingdom of God, and it is very different from the Jewish idea.

There is the Jewish idea of the king running along one side through the four Gospels - what kind of a king they want and are determined to have. Alongside of it, and over against it, is God's idea, and heaven's idea, of a king: "*Behold, thy king cometh unto thee... lowly, and riding upon an ass*" (Zechariah 9:9). That is not the Jewish idea of a king! 'How can a meek man riding on an ass overthrow the mighty Roman Empire? That is not our idea of a king... "*We will not that this man reign over us*" (Luke 14:14)'.

So, you see, the two lines run through the four Gospels: the Hebrew idea and the heavenly idea. That is the very meaning of the four Gospels. When you get to the end of them you have the Jewish idea rejected fully and finally by God, and, on the other side, God's idea introduced and established forever.

Two thousand years have proved that. The one side of an earthly system has gone and there has been nothing of it for two thousand years. On the other side there is God's idea of His kingdom. That was introduced when Israel was rejected, and God has been going on with that for two thousand years. We have God's King; we are in God's Kingdom; we are under God's government.

That is what the four Gospels say to us. Of course, that is not all, but that is the general conclusion of the four Gospels. Later on we are going to see the details in the Gospels, or, at least, in one of them, which will show how true that was. These four Gospels show the rejection by God of those who rejected His Son, and on the other side they show God bringing in that which was according to His Son and establishing it forever so that the very gates of hell have not been able to prevail against it.

You move from the Gospels to the Book of the Acts, and here you have two features. First of all, you have the feature of transition from the old to the new. With God the transition is complete, but with His people it is made slowly because they are not ready to accept it. It was slower than it ought to have been because James, the head of the church in Jerusalem, still wanted to have something of old Israel, and even Peter was very reluctant to abandon Israel and go right out to the Gentiles. And dear Barnabas was caught in that snare. Paul says, with grief in his heart, "*even Barnabas*" (Galatians 2:13). These who were of the old tradition were very slow to give up their tradition, but you see that God is going on - 'James, Peter, or whoever it may be, if you are not coming on I am going on, and if you are not going on I shall leave you behind and find others.' And while they were so slow He brought in Paul - and Paul got things going. The transition was complete with Paul, and he was God's instrument for completing the transition. The Letter to the Galatians is the instrument by which that transition was completed. Judaism in the Christian church received a fatal blow with that Letter.

You pass from the Book of the Acts to the Letters - what are called the 'Epistles' - and what have you here? Just the full body of teaching concerning the heavenly and spiritual nature of the people of God. It is applied to a whole variety of connections. There is one state of things in Corinth and another state of things in Galatia, and yet another in Ephesus, and so on. But applied to all these different conditions is this one thing: it is God's intention to have a heavenly and spiritual people. All the Letters were applied to different situations with that one object in view. Every Letter in the New Testament has something to say about this heavenly nature of the people of God.

We arrive at the Letter to the Hebrews, and this Letter takes a very, very important place in this whole question, as it is a summary of the whole New Testament. In it is gathered up the whole meaning of the New Testament, and into it there flow tributaries, making it the meeting place of all the revelation of God concerning His Son, Jesus Christ.

What is God's purpose concerning His Son? "Wherefore, holy brethren, *companions* of a heavenly calling... we are become *companions* of Christ." Who are the companions of Christ? Those who have fully left the whole earthly realm of things and are joined to the heavenly Lord: those who have become God's spiritual Israel: those who have answered to the heavenly calling. Paul cried, when he was on trial: "*Wherefore, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision*" (Acts 26:19). If Paul was a great companion of Jesus Christ, it was because he had completely finished with everything but Jesus Christ. He says: "*I count all things but loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord*" (Philippians 3:8 - A.V.). He was a man who was wholly on the ground of Jesus Christ, and wholly on the ground of God's heavenly purpose. Such are the companions of Jesus Christ.

There are many young Christians here and perhaps you do not know your Bible as well as some older Christians do, and you do not know all the Bible background of what I have been saying. I hope this will make you want to know your Bible better! But perhaps there is a lot that I have said that you do not understand. Now this is one thing that I do want you to understand - you will come to understand all the other as you go on, if you hold fast your beginning firm unto the end. If you really do commit yourself to the Lord Jesus you will come to understand. But that is not what I was going to say: what I was going to say is this:

What I want you to realize is that you have a very much greater Christ than you have ever imagined. The Christ to whom you have given yourselves is a very great Christ. The call of the Lord which you have answered in accepting the Lord Jesus is a much bigger calling than you have any knowledge of. I just want you to go away with this impression: 'My, I have come into something! This is big enough to fill my whole life.'

So don't worry about what you do not understand, but do realize how great a Lord is your Lord, and what a great thing is the heavenly calling.

Chapter Three

THE LORD'S TABLE AND THE COMPANIONS

Reading: Exodus 12: 1-16, 21-24; Luke 22: 1, 7-8, 14-21.

We have been seeing something of what the Lord is seeking in the way of companions of a heavenly calling. We have also been seeing how the Israel of old failed Him in that respect and how, in the time of their final failure, He revealed what He had ever had in His heart, even before there was an Israel - that is, a people of a heavenly life and a spiritual nature.

The Lord's Table is perhaps the most beautiful expression of this wonderful reality of companionship with Christ.

Judas had gone out. He had taken sides with the rejecting Israel and was numbered with them in judgment, so it was not only one man but a whole nation that went out that night. Judas was but the representative of the nation which rejected Christ and was rejected by God. It is impressive that such a representative of the rejecting Israel should be right there in the presence of the companions of Christ! And there, in the inner circle, he demonstrated what had become true of Israel - he was no companion of Christ.

So, with the rejecting Israel gone out, the companions were left with their Master. Of them He was able to say: *"Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations"* (Luke 22: 28).

This Lord's Table, or Lord's Supper, is one of the great features of the transition from the old Israel to the new heavenly, spiritual Israel. What the Passover was intended to mean in the old Israel has become true in the new Israel. We are, therefore, going to look at some of the features of the Passover which relate to the companions of Jesus.

We go back to the twelfth chapter of the Book of Exodus, where the Passover was first instituted and established, and look right into the heart of this matter to see exactly what it did mean. When we have looked closely enough we discover this; that it was the great contest between God and the gods of Egypt. God summed it all up when He said that that night He was going to finish and complete His judgment not only upon the Egyptians but upon all the gods of the Egyptians. The nine judgments which had preceded had been declared to be against the gods of the Egyptians, and you do not understand those plagues unless you recognize that factor. If it were necessary we could show you how each judgment had some relationship to the gods of Egypt. Just as an example: the frog was a sacred thing in Egypt. It was worshipped as representing a god, and God - Jehovah - turned their very gods upon themselves in judgment. So it was with every judgment. They worshipped the sun, so God blotted it out.

The whole thing is being gathered up and consummated on this Passover night. God is going to finish this quarrel that He had with the Egyptians because of their gods. He is a very jealous God and He had said: *"Thou shalt have none other gods before me"* (Exodus 20: 3).

That is the heart of the thing, and we must carry that over to the Lord's Table. In the first place this Table means: No compromise with anything that is against God. It is to be the Lord, and the Lord alone.

The second thing to be noted is the focal point of this whole settlement - the first-born sons of all in Egypt. In those days, and even today, the first-born is representative of all the others. He includes the whole family, and if you touch the first-born, you are touching the parents and the family. So all the Egyptians were represented in their first-born - and the Lord said "*I... will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast*". Another kind of first-born, which was not of God, had to be set aside in order to bring in what the Letter to the Hebrews calls the "*church of the first-born*" (Hebrews 12:23). One first-born must be removed to make room for the other first-born.

Those who rightly partake at the Table are of the "*church of the first-born*". They are those who have been born again by the Spirit of God, and they are the companions of Christ.

Then note the third thing: the point where this whole thing was settled. It was all settled on the threshold of every home. It is a pity that the translators have not been consistent in translating a Hebrew word which you read twice in Exodus 12:22: "*Ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the bason*". Evidently the translators could not get the idea of the Hebrew there and so they used the word 'basin', as that seemed to suit it best. Of course, in their minds the blood would be collected into a basin, and so the bunch of hyssop would be dipped into the basin. But the Hebrew word 'saph' is translated 'threshold' elsewhere in the Old Testament. What ought to have been said was: 'You shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip it into the blood that is on the threshold.' You probably know that the threshold of a house is its most sacred place. You are very particular about who crosses the threshold into your house, and that is why some superstitious people put charms over it. Sometimes it is a horseshoe - something to keep evil away, or, as they call it, 'bad luck'.

This thing has become a superstition, but behind it is this great spiritual truth - there is a threshold that God looks at as being very sacred, and behind that threshold where the blood is are His own companions. The threshold signifies a division between His companions and His enemies. Did you notice that Moses said: "*None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning*"? In effect he said 'Don't let any man cross that threshold into the realm where the enemies are. Let that blood-sprinkled threshold become a division between you, the Lord's own companions, and those He is going to judge.' Judas went out over the threshold when it was night.

I believe that even today (certainly it was so up to recent times) in the Jewish ritual of the Passover there is a point where the first-born goes out and opens the outside door, the door by the threshold. Then he comes back and places an empty chair at the table and an extra cup on the table. That is done in the hope that the Lord's messenger will cross the threshold, come in and take part with them. That is not here in the Bible, of course, but the Hebrews knew the meaning of the threshold - something sacred to the Lord, an open door to the Lord.

Judas went out across the threshold and he met the judgment of this world. The companions of Jesus stayed inside that night. They were protected by the precious blood and were saved from death.

The picture behind Exodus 12 is of the rightful Lord coming to His world to claim His rights, and He says: 'This is the sign and the token. Whether you own Me as your rightful Lord, or whether you do not, the sign is the sprinkled blood. When I see the blood I know that you are My friends and that you are loyal to Me. If I do not see the blood I know that you are enemies, and you will meet My judgment.'

My executioner is with Me and when I see the blood I say "Not in there. Leave them alone. They are My friends." When I do not see the blood I say "You go in there". You notice that the Lord speaks in this chapter as though He is one person, and the one who is going to give judgment is another. He sends someone in. That is the picture behind the Passover.

There is just one other thing that we will mention. It is not said here in this chapter of Exodus, but it is definitely said in other places. Jeremiah (in chapter 31) says that on the night of the Passover the Lord took Israel by the hand and betrothed her to Himself. In principle, then, the Passover was a marriage ceremony. To use the language of the prophets, the Lord that night took the virgin of Israel and betrothed her unto Himself, and He made a blood covenant with her. What a lot that opens up as to the marriage relationship! It is a relationship with blood - "*they shall be one flesh*" (Genesis 2:24). If ever Israel had anything to do with other gods from that time it was called whoredom, fornication, adultery. It was a breach of the marriage covenant.

That is why Israel was eventually abandoned by God. They remained very religious, and still kept up the ceremony of the Passover - but the Lord Jesus said: "*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do*" (John 8:44). It was the devil's work to bring Jesus Christ to crucifixion, and Israel was the devil's instrument in doing it. It was the last phase of a long history of rejecting the Lord and breaking the marriage covenant.

That is the dark side. Let us look on the bright side! The Lord Jesus, in constituting the new heavenly Israel on the principles of the old, took up this very thing, in all these respects, and in this one, I think, in particular. There was a marriage supper that night in the upper room. Jesus betrothed His Church unto Himself in a covenant of blood - "*This cup is the new covenant in my blood*" - and so He secured His companions of the heavenly calling. Later we shall speak more fully of the 'Bride'.

We must apply all this to ourselves. On the one side it is very searching. It says: 'No compromise with anything whatever that is against the Lord.' I wonder if, every time there is a service of Holy Communion, people recognize that that is the meaning - a real and utter division between companions of the Lord and others! In the Lord's Table we celebrate our betrothal. We were joined to the Lord in holy matrimony - by His precious blood made His Bride. The marriage of the Lamb is the *great* coming event (Revelation 19:7).

Chapter Four

THE TRUE BASIS OF LIFE FOR THE COMPANIONS

At this time I want to try and help young Christians in relation to two words which are the great words of the Christian life: 'heavenly' and 'faith'. You will have noticed, if you know the Letter to the Hebrews at all, that these are two of the most prominent words in it.

This word 'heavenly', in its different forms, occurs quite a number of times in this Letter:

"Wherefore, holy brethren, companions of a heavenly calling" (Hebrews 3:1).

"Having then a great high priest, who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God" (Hebrews 4:14).

"For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift" (Hebrews 6:4).

"Now in the things which we are saying the chief point is this: We have such a high priest, who sat down on the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Hebrews 8:1).

"Who serve that which is a copy and shadow of the heavenly things" (Hebrews 8:5).

"It was necessary therefore that the copies of the things in the heavens should be cleansed with these: but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these" (Hebrews 9:23).

"But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly" (Hebrews 11:16).

"To the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect" (Hebrews 12:23).

"Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more will I make to tremble not the earth only, but also the heaven" (Hebrews 12:26).

So, you see, the Letter has a lot to say about heavenly things, and here, in chapter three, it says that we are called in relation to these heavenly things. Our calling is a heavenly calling, unto a heavenly life: not after this life, but *now*.

I am not going to cite all the occurrences of the word 'faith'! It has a very large place in this Letter, and, as you know, one whole chapter is given up to faith - chapter eleven.

Here are these two words: 'heavenly' and 'faith', and they are very difficult words for young Christians to understand. If we say to young Christians: 'Now you are called to a life of faith', they may think of that in a very limited way: that they have to believe God, that God is able to save, that God is able to keep, that God is able to provide. That is all true, but we are going to see that it means much more than that. If we say to a young Christian: 'You are called now to live a heavenly life', I do not know what he or she would think! What a difficult idea

that is! They would probably say: 'Well, how can we live a heavenly life when we have to live down here on this earth?'

Well, let us try to help such people, and everybody else. Let me say again that 'heavenly' and 'faith' are one thing.

We are going right back to the Old Testament for illustration, and I am going to use another big word. When God took up an instrument, in the form of a person or a people, He always put that instrument, that person, or that people, on a supernatural basis. He took every measure to see that the basis of their life was a supernatural one. He took them completely off a natural basis, and for them, if there was not the supernatural, there was nothing at all. They found it difficult, but it was in that way that they learned that they had come into relation with a supernatural God, a God who was altogether above the natural. So God created naturally impossible situations for these people and then, in solving the problem of the naturally impossible, He showed them what a great Lord He was.

Let us look at some illustrations. We will begin with Abraham - and he has a large place in this Letter to the Hebrews. Abraham was chosen by God for a very great purpose. We shall see more about that later, but let us be content with the simple statement of fact for the present. Abraham was called to be the father of a race which God was going to raise up and through which His Son, Jesus Christ, would come. God said to him: "*In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed*" (Genesis 22:18). Notice: 'In thy seed' - and then God went away and left him and did nothing more about it for a long time. God came back and repeated His promise, but by then Abraham was ninety years old and his wife was nearly as old - and yet God was saying: 'In thy seed'. An utterly impossible situation naturally! 'Impossible!' said Sarah, 'Altogether out of the question! We must do something about this.' And you know what they did. They tried to do God's work on natural lines. Sarah sent for her handmaid, Hagar, and they tried to fulfil God's promise in that natural way. But those of us who know our Bibles know quite well that that was not God's way, and He was having none of it. God kept to His own ground - supernatural ground. If this thing was ever to be, only God all-mighty could do it. No man nor woman could do it, and neither could both of them together. Only God could do it - and He did it! He put them on to supernatural ground. It was a big test of faith! It was not earthly ground, but heavenly ground. It was not natural ground, but the ground of faith. And that is how God did it.

That is our first illustration, and that runs right through the Bible.

We pass from Abraham and Isaac to Jacob. Jacob came into the birthright. He was intended by God to have it - that is, he was intended to be the next link in God's chain, the next step of God in the onward march of His eternal purpose, but Jacob took the thing into his own hands. In effect he said: 'I am going to do this.' So he deceived his parent and robbed his brother... but his whole little plan broke down. He had to leave home and go many miles away to his uncle, and for twenty years there was no sign of God going on with His purpose. When you come on to Jacob, at the end of that time you find a very disillusioned man and a man who is very much afraid of what is going to happen to him. He is making plans for his own safety when he meets with his brother - and then God meets him. You know the story of that night when God met Jacob, Jacob, had tried to realize God's intention on natural grounds, and God entirely destroyed those grounds. In that night Jacob came clearly to understand that if God was going to fulfil any purpose in his life, only He could do it. When God changed his name from Jacob to Israel He changed the man from the earthly to the heavenly, from the natural man to the man of faith, and then God went on with him. God could

never go on with Jacob while he was resting upon his own natural ground. When God got him off that ground on to heavenly ground, then they could go on together.

We pass from Jacob, to Joseph. The story of Joseph is one of the most fascinating stories of the Old Testament! A lot of unkind things have been said about Joseph when he was a young man. Of course, it is usually the old people who do that! Joseph had some dreams, and, well, young men are allowed to have dreams! You perhaps remember the dreams: he dreamt that sun, moon and stars were bowing down to him, and other things were doing the same. Perhaps he did make a mistake when he told his dreams to his brothers. They were shrewd enough to see the point, and they interpreted the dreams as against themselves. They said: 'Are we going to bow down to you? You are our young brother. We will never bow down to you!'

Now, you can say what you like about Joseph's indiscretion, but those dreams became literally true. The day came when his brothers were cringing before him, trembling for their very lives. 'Oh, sir,' they said, 'have mercy upon us!' Those dreams became true. There was something of God in that, and I think that Joseph always had those dreams in his heart.

Joseph was going to come, in the will of God, to a high place, and to serve God in a great piece of work. It was no less than preserving alive the whole of God's chosen nation.

However, these brothers - well, they had a conference, and the point of their discussion was how they could get rid of this young brother of theirs. One of the brothers said: 'Let us kill him, and we will soak his coat in his own blood, send it back to our father and say that a wild beast has destroyed him.' Another brother said: 'No, don't let's kill him. Let us put him into a pit.' So they put him into a deep pit. It was just another way of killing him - to let him die there. They left him and went off. Then they saw some camels coming and a caravan passing across where they were. So they decided to take Joseph out of the pit and sell him. Accordingly they sold him to these traders, who were going down to Egypt, and he was taken and sold in Egypt as a slave. Oh, wonderful sovereignty of God! Joseph had just *got* to get down to Egypt! God had ordained that he should go, for it was there that he was to do his great work of saving his nation. But Joseph never thought of that way of getting to Egypt!

However, he got there, and became the slave of a great man. We will not fill in all the details, but by the treachery of that man's wife, Joseph was put into a dungeon and was left there for years. Where were his dreams now? The whole situation was quite impossible - but God had made it so. This whole purpose could never be realized on natural grounds. It could only be realized on supernatural ground - and if ever a man was put on supernatural ground, that man was Joseph! But this transition from the earthly to the heavenly, from the natural to the life of faith, was a difficult passage. It was very hard on the flesh - and it always is! But the supernatural Lord did it. No one could ever say that Joseph did it, or put it down to a man. Only God could do it. It was on supernatural ground, on heavenly ground, not earthly. It was the way of faith and not of sight.

I suppose I ought to put in a very large section here on Israel. That nation, saved through Joseph was after many years found in slavery itself in Egypt. God had said to Abraham that they would be in Egypt as slaves for four hundred years, but that they would come out of that slavery. He would bring them out by a mighty hand. However, they were here in Egypt and things were going from bad

to worse, and from worse to awful. The whole situation was as hopeless as it could be, and to make it as impossible as could be, Pharaoh decided to kill all the little boys that were born at that time. I need not tell you the rest of the story! "*At that season*", it says, "*Moses was born*" (Acts 7:20). Moses was born at that impossible time, and will you tell me that it was not a supernatural thing that he was preserved alive when all the boys were being massacred? It was on supernatural ground, not natural, on heavenly ground, not earthly. We only need just to pass our eye over the account of the deliverance of the people of Israel from Egypt - what we call the 'Exodus' - and, my, what a difficult situation it was! Pharaoh had employed all his resources to prevent those people from going out. There was nothing he had not used to make the exodus impossible, but God stepped in when the situation was at its darkest and brought them out with a strong hand, as He had said He would all those years before. The exodus was on supernatural ground.

The story of the forty years in the wilderness is the same. If you do not believe it was supernatural, go and try living in a wilderness for forty years! Go especially to that wilderness! I have passed over it a number of times in an aeroplane and I have said: 'How on earth could a nation live in this for forty years?' The answer was: they did not 'on earth' at all. They did it from heaven. God fed them and protected them from heaven. In every way it was a heavenly life. It was not natural: it was God. He had put that nation on to a supernatural basis.

We come to the end of that time and go on to Joshua. We know what he had to face! There were all those strong and very wicked nations in the land of Canaan, and Joshua had got to lead the people in, take possession of the land and drive out all those nations. Do you think that could have been done naturally? No, God took over and the people of Israel went in. They crossed the Jordan when it was overflowing all its banks, and they went over with dry feet. The rest of the story is known to you.

We pass on many years and come to the book of Judges. We will just take one illustration from that book. Israel was now being beset by other very strong nations and the time came when the Midianites, as many "*as the sand which is upon the sea shore for multitude*" (Judges 7:12), gathered around Israel. The situation was anything but easy! The Lord called Gideon and told him that he was to go out against this combination of armies and that he would deliver Israel from them. Gideon said: 'This wants a big army', so he sent out to all Israel and got a very big army together - at least, it was what was called a big army then. He had twenty-two thousand men. But the Lord said to Gideon: 'You have too big an army. It is quite true that all these other enemies are many, many times more than your army, but your army is too big.' So Gideon put a test to them, and a great multitude went home and left him with a much smaller army. And the Lord said: 'They are still too many.' Surely He is moving Gideon on to heavenly ground! When God had finished with Gideon he had just three hundred men, and He said: "*By the three hundred men... will I save you*" (Judges 7:7) - and He did it.

Notice how He put Gideon on to heavenly, supernatural ground. It was a very testing thing for Gideon! Do you tell me that that was not faith? Faith and the heavenly go together.

Are you beginning to see the meaning of what is heavenly and what is faith? Faith is, that heaven can do what no man or men can do. Nothing is impossible to heaven in any circumstances or situation.

Well, that is not all. You remember that later Israel went into captivity in Babylon, and they were there for seventy years. At the end of that time they were in a very poor state, but when it was put to them that the time had come for them to return to their country the great majority said: 'No, it is impossible. It is no use going back there. The whole situation is hopeless. The land is in desolation and the city is destroyed. We have not got the heart for it.' But a remnant returned, and you know the details of how God came in for them in a sovereign way. He provided for them all that they needed and helped them in marvellous ways, so that they rebuilt the city and their temple and made their land productive again. But it was a supernatural thing. The majority vote was 'Impossible!' The minority believed God.

Where shall we stop? Let us leave the Old Testament and come to Him to whom all this was pointing - Jesus. It was all leading on to Him. God had promised to send His Son. The prophets were just full of the coming of the Messiah, but the ideas about the Messiah on the part of Israel were very natural ones: 'Of course, he will be a great ruler, a man with tremendous power. Everyone will gather to him. He will set up this wonderful kingdom of Israel and the Romans will be thrown out of our country.' That was their natural idea of their Messiah - but when He came there was no room for Him at His birth, and the ruling authority of that time started the old game of killing all the little boys, with the special object of getting his hands upon this one boy. The very survival of Jesus was a heavenly miracle! His birth was a heavenly thing, a supernatural thing, and the same was true of His life. How many times do we read: 'They took counsel that they might kill Him', and 'They took up stones to stone Him'? His fulfilling of His ministry was a heavenly thing. It was supernatural.

And what about His death? They took counsel to kill Him and decided they were going to do it. Then they said: 'We won't do it at the Passover. That will be the wrong time'... and God said: 'I have this matter in hand. It will be My matter and not yours. It will be on exactly the day that I choose, and that will be the day of the Passover.' Jesus said about His dying: "*No man taketh it (My life) away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I from my Father*" (John 10:18). He was saying that when it happened it would not be in man's hands, it would be in God's hands. And in spite of their decisions and their counsels, it was on the day of the Passover! It had to be. Many, many generations were involved in that. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ were supernatural - not of man, but of God.

I could go on from that to the Church. The whole history of the Church, from its beginning on the Day of Pentecost, is a miracle. It was persecuted in its early years and there were many massacres of Christians. The Roman Empire decided that Christianity must be wiped out from the earth, and at that time, and many times since, the Church has passed through very, very serious crises. But the Church of God marches on! It is still here and it is still growing. It is supernatural.

Now, why all this? This is not something which is peculiar to Abraham, Moses, Joshua and Gideon. It is not something which is limited to these men of the Old Testament. This Letter to the Hebrews is written to Christians. It is written for us, and it says that we are "*holy brethren, companions of a heavenly calling*". We are the companions of Christ, but God has put us on the same basis as that on which He always did put His people.

The older Christians know quite well from experience what I am talking about. How often in our history have situations arisen - not that we have brought about - which were quite impossible! We say: 'God allowed them.' Perhaps we ought to

say: 'God appointed them.' God has put our lives on this basis, Our salvation is a supernatural thing or it is nothing! Poor Nicodemus, the man who could not see further than nature, with all his intelligence, said: "*How can a man be born when he is old?*" (John 3:4). Our new birth is a miracle, our sustenance in the Christian life, that is, being able to keep going, is a miracle; and our survival and our triumph in many and many an impossible situation are supernatural. And at last our translation to glory will be supernatural. You may die naturally, but you will not naturally rise again. That will be God's doing. And if it is going to be true that we share His glory, we, who know ourselves, would gladly say: 'That will be a miracle! A creature such as I am sharing the glory of Jesus Christ for all eternity! My, that will be supernatural!'

This is the meaning of faith - just that you believe that heaven can do what no one else can do. Faith is a very practical thing. A whole situation is naturally hopeless. What are we going to do about it? Are we going to give it all up and say: 'It is impossible. This is the end of everything. We are finished'? Or are we going to say: 'Yes, it is like that naturally, but God... but heaven...' Heaven is greater than earth and God is greater than all.

That is the message of this Letter to the Hebrews. I hope you understand a little better what it means to live a heavenly life. It is living on the resources that heaven has for us when all other resources have gone.

Chapter Five

THE CHANGED POSITION OF THE COMPANIONS

As a subject, we have pointed out that this is a key to the whole of this Letter to the Hebrews, which is an appeal for companions of Christ, and for companions of a heavenly calling. We have also said that this Letter is a summary of the whole of the New Testament. In making that statement, of course, we provide you with a very large field of consideration. We simply have to say that all that is in the New Testament is gathered in some way into this Letter. Therefore, all that is in the New Testament is gathered up into this one thought: God is seeking companions for His Son in a heavenly calling.

We are now going to dig more deeply into this Letter, always with this one thought in mind: It is companions of Christ which are in view.

Let us say one brief word about the point of view taken by this Letter. We understand that it was written and given to these Hebrew Christians at a time of very serious crisis, when a whole system which had existed for many centuries was about to pass away. The whole system of the Old Testament, from Moses onward, was about to go. After the writer had put down all that is in this Letter he put over it a quotation from the Old Testament: *"Yet once more will I make to tremble not the earth only, but also the heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain"* (Hebrews 12:26-27 - quoted from Haggai 2:6). By quoting that Scripture and putting it at the end of this Letter, the writer indicated that this was just about to take place, and he proved to be right. It is evident that this Letter was written just before A.D. 70.

The Roman legions may already have been gathering around Jerusalem, and we know from history what happened. The city was besieged and destroyed, not one stone of the temple being left standing upon another, and the whole land was desolated. The priestly service ceased and all the functions of the temple came to an end. The whole country was put into a state of utter desolation, and from that day, even until now, that system ceased to be.

And this Letter was written because the Lord knew what was going to happen and because, in the Divine plan, the time had come for it to happen. Always read this Letter in the light of that great historic crisis.

That was the dark side of the story. But you will notice that this Letter is just full of that 'better thing' which had taken the place of the old, and we shall be dwelling upon that 'better thing' as we go along. As the people of an earthly calling were being set aside this great Letter of a heavenly calling was presented to them.

Before we go further with the Letter, let us remember that its message abides for us. It would be a very blind person who today could not see that another such event is very near. There has been built up on this earth another great system of Christianity. It is very earthly as a system, and, just as the hearts of the Jews here were very much bound up with their system, so in our time multitudes of Christians are just bound up with this historic Christianity. I do not claim to be a prophet, but there is much in the Word of God which points to the time when this whole system will be shaken. It is very impressive that in our lifetime we have seen this in a small way, when churches have been destroyed, congregations scattered, and it has not been possible to go on with the old forms. People have

had to find the Lord for themselves without any earthly helps. They have had to get their help from heaven and not from earth. We have seen this happen, in a comparatively small way, on at least two occasions. The Lord has smitten the earth on two terrible occasions, with not so many years between them, and it is not difficult to see that it could happen again on a very much bigger scale. That event may not be very far off. We Christians speak of the coming of the Lord. That is our hope and our salvation: but we must remember that the coming of the Lord is going to be accompanied by a terrible judgment upon this earth, when everything that is not heavenly is going to be shaken, so shaken that it will just collapse.

So this Letter has a real message for us. As was said to the Jewish Christians at that time: 'Your whole system, in which you are so bound up, is going to pass away', so this Letter says to us today: 'All the earthly system is going to be shaken, and shaken out of its place. But there is a better one coming' - *"God having provided some better thing"* (Hebrews 11:40).

Well, that is the standpoint of this Letter. I am sure we can see that it is very applicable to our time. We are not just studying a book of the Bible which relates to many centuries ago. God is the eternal God and He speaks to all time, but the message is intensified as we get nearer the end.

Now we are going to see further this transition from the earthly to the heavenly. In the terms of the New Testament, and of this Letter in particular, it is the transition from an earthly, historic Israel to a heavenly, spiritual Israel. So we are going to look at the beginnings of Israel in both cases.

Do you notice how the Letter begins? It begins with one word: 'God'. You can put a big ring round that word. God stands over the whole content of this Letter. Everything in it must be viewed from God's standpoint, not from man's, or from the world's, or from the earthly standpoint. It is God who is speaking, and all that is here is what God is saying. God stands over all that this Letter contains, and no one is allowed to say that this thing is of man. As we move through the Letter we have constantly to say to ourselves: 'God is saying that. This is not the interpretation of man. This is God speaking.' The great transition which is marked by this Letter is God moving forward. God is going on. God is in charge of everything. And the Letter says: 'The companions of the heavenly way are those who are moving on with God.' The appeal of the Letter is: 'Let us go on, because God is going on.'

The whole of the old Jewish system was something which had settled down, and in a very real sense it had gone to sleep. God is not the God of the spiritually asleep. The appeal to Israel was: 'Awake, thou that sleepest!' That system had gone to sleep, had settled down and had become an end in itself. It was not moving on with God. That was the trouble in the days of the prophets. And this Letter says: 'God is going on. The companions of Christ are those who are going on with God.'

Do remember this: that a true, living Christianity is a 'going on' Christianity. It will never stop going on, in this life or in eternity. It says: *"Of his government... there shall be no end"* (Isaiah 9:7). So we begin with God, and we move on with God.

This Letter is God expressing Himself. That is in the very first statement in the Letter: *"God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son"*. Here, then, we meet with a God who is expressing Himself. He is here

declared to be a speaking God; He is not a dumb or silent God. He is a God who has always been speaking and is speaking now. So, right at the beginning, this Letter declares God to be a God who speaks. And then, to analyse it further, He is spoken of as being a God who speaks with a purpose. He is a God of purpose and is speaking concerning His purpose. He spoke in times past *"in the prophets by divers portions"*. He speaks now in His Son, and here there are two very important things to note.

In times past God spoke in many parts, by many prophets. He said one thing through one prophet and another thing through a different prophet. All the prophets were parts of God's speaking. No one prophet said everything. You can look into the prophets and see that every one of them had a specific aspect of God's message. "In many parts", is the word. His final speech in Christ is the gathering up of all the parts into completeness. God's Son is the complete speech of God - all the parts are brought together in Him. That gives this Letter a very, very big place, does it not? It says that now, here, God is speaking in fullness in His Son.

And alongside of that is the appeal *"to give the more earnest heed"* (Hebrews 2:1), because this is so much fuller than anything that God had ever said before.

Then it says that in times past God spoke 'in many ways', not only in different portions, but in different manners. It would take too long for us to go back to the Old Testament to see all the manners in which God spoke. He spoke by a thousand different means: sometimes by words and sometimes by acts. The manners were indeed 'divers'. However, the statement here is that at the end He speaks in one way, one all-inclusive way, and that is in His Son. God's Son is His one inclusive way of speaking at the end. On the one side, no one is going to get anything from God apart from Jesus Christ. God will absolutely refuse to speak other than in His Son. If you want to know what God wants to say to you, you have to come to His Son. On the other side, in Jesus Christ we have all that God ever wants to say.

I want to say that especially to young Christians. I have been reading and studying my Bible all through the years, and I tell you quite honestly that today this book is altogether beyond me. I would never come back to this Letter to the Hebrews if that were not true. I have preached and lectured on this Letter for years, but today it is far beyond me. Should I say 'the Letter to the Hebrews'? I would be more correct in saying 'the Lord Jesus who is revealed in this Letter'.

Yes, we have far more of God's speaking in His Son than we have yet come to understand. We have nothing apart from Jesus Christ, and we *need* nothing apart from Him.

We said that this letter presents God as a God of purpose, and it goes on to show that His purpose is centred and summed up in His Son. That is set before us at the beginning of the Letter in three ways.

Firstly, in the person of His Son. Just look at this: *"At the end of these days (He hath) spoken unto us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds; who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance..."* You notice that the whole of the first chapter is occupied with presenting God's Son. God is speaking concerning His Son, as to who He is. What a great Son this is!

Then it presents the Son in terms of redemption. *"He made purification of sins"*. That is just one phrase, but many chapters follow to explain what that

redemption is. All these chapters on priesthood and sacrifice have to do with that one clause. God is speaking in His Son concerning redemption.

In the third place He is speaking in His Son concerning glory. The Son is *"the effulgence of his glory"*, and He is going to bring *"many sons unto glory"* (Hebrews 2:10), because *"when he had made purification of sins, (He) sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high"*. God speaks in a Son whom He has now glorified and sat at His own right hand.

But God does not speak in His Son and leave it there. You will notice that in chapter two He brings man into this, and this Letter has a wonderful message for man: that all that God has put in His Son is for man. God speaks in this Letter of the finished work of Christ, the work which is made complete for man.

Here is something that you and I must dwell upon. Personally, I am constantly brought to this: I have not yet learnt thoroughly to believe what I believe in! I believe in the finished work of Christ, yet sometimes I am just as miserable about myself as any man could be. I am often almost at the point of giving up because of what a wretched kind of thing I am. If there is anything in this world that would cause me to give up the Christian ministry, it is myself. Do you understand what I mean? Oh, how we are discouraged by what we find in ourselves! And so, we don't believe what we believe in. We believe in the finished work of Christ, and that God puts all that finished work to our account. God does not see us in ourselves - He sees us in Christ. He does not see us, He sees Christ in us. We don't believe that! If we really did we would be delivered from ourselves and would indeed be triumphant Christians.

Of course, that does not mean that we can just behave anyhow. We may speak and act wrongly, but for every Christian there is a refuge - a mercy-seat. It has not to be made; it is there with the precious Blood. That has not to be shed; it is shed. There is a High Priest making intercession for us. There is everything that we need. The work is finished, completed. Oh, we Christians must believe our beliefs! We must take hold, with both hands, of the things which are of our Christian faith.

But I know you have problems when I say that: 'What about this old man?' Perhaps you are one of those people who believe that sin has been absolutely rooted out of you and that it is quite impossible for you to sin - well, if you believe that, the Lord bless you! I think you may be tripped up one day and find that there is an old man there after all. But leaving that aside, most of us do know that there are two things in us - there is the new and there is the old, there is the spiritual man and there is the natural man, and this natural man is a very troublesome fellow! What about him over against the finished work? This Letter tells you all about that when it says: *"God dealeth with you as with sons"* (12:7), and God loves sons. Are you a child of God? Has there been in your history that deep action of new birth? Have you received the Lord Jesus? The Word of God says: *"As many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God"* (John 1:12). If you have received the Lord Jesus you are a child of God. The spirit of sonship has come in and dwells in you.

This Letter says that God loves His sons, and therefore He chastens them: He child-trains them, and 'no child-training', says the Letter, 'for the present is pleasant'. God's dealings with His own family are not always pleasant, and when they are unpleasant there is a little demon sitting on our shoulder who will whisper in our ear: 'You see, God does not love you. He would not deal with you like this if He loved you.' The devil is always out to turn the loving works of God into evil things.

Yes, God is dealing with us as with sons. It is discipline, and it goes against the flesh. The Letter says: 'It is not for the present pleasant.' Indeed, it might have said: 'It is very unpleasant!' 'What father is he', says this Letter, 'who does not chasten his son?'

What I am saying is not easy to say, because I may be exposing myself to the rod. We have enough experience to know that we have to say some things very carefully, because we are often tested on the things that we say. But here is the statement that it is a totally unkind father who never chastens his child. Have you seen children who are never chastened or corrected? Those children are going to have a bad time in this world, as people are not going to like them, and they will discover that. Their parents have spoiled them.

This Letter says that God's love is expressed in His using the rod to His children. He does not always put His good things, His best things, into a nice form. I heard the other day of a little boy who had to take some medicine, and it was not very nice. His father said: 'There are many vitamins in this medicine.' The little boy said: 'Daddy, why must all the good things be put into nasty things? Why can't they be put into ice-cream?' The Lord does not always put the good things into ice-cream. Sometimes the vitamins are in the nasty medicine.

Now that is exactly what this Letter says. God is not condemning us when He deals with us like that. He is working to deliver us. If you think that these talks here are going to save you, you are making a mistake! They are only to explain what God is doing. God never saves by theory. You can read everything that has ever been written on Christian doctrine and still be the same man or woman. God's ways are very practical, and He teaches us by experience. That experience is sometimes very difficult and is called here 'the training of sons'.

May the Lord Jesus just impress our hearts again with these things! God is still speaking in His Son, and His speaking is in order to get companions of His Son. Companions of this heavenly calling and of Christ will go into the hard school and have to learn many hard lessons, but in learning them they will come to understand how great is their inheritance in the Lord Jesus.

I may add this: My experience is that no one really has spiritual knowledge without suffering. I am not speaking about head knowledge. I am speaking about real knowledge of the Lord in the inner life. I do not know of anyone who has come into that knowledge apart from suffering. Perhaps that is a depressing thing to say, but there it is - it is a law in God's Word. "*We have this treasure in earthen vessels*" (2 Corinthians 4:7), and how poor this vessel is we learn through trial and affliction, but then we learn how wonderful the Lord is. The Letter to the Hebrews says: "*Afterward*" (that is, after the chastening) "*the peaceable fruit of righteousness*" (12:11). What a wonderful phrase! Those fruits come along the line of chastening and by way of suffering.

So let us ask for that grace which the Apostle had to rejoice in suffering.

Chapter Six

SOME TITLES AS EVIDENCE OF THE CHANGE

The point at which we have now arrived is that, in the constituting of the spiritual Israel, God is following the same line as He took with the earthly Israel, but with one great difference - with the earthly He followed temporal lines, but with the heavenly He is following spiritual lines. However, they are both one in principle. We have seen something of this and are now going to see a little more.

Surely it must be perfectly true that this is what God is doing. The Letter to the Hebrews is the great document of the transition from one Israel to another, and in it there are many evidences of this truth. If anyone has any doubt at all, there is one fragment which should settle all such questions:

"For ye are not come unto a mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, and unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that no word should be spoken unto them: for they could not endure that which was enjoined. If even a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned; and so fearful was the appearance, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake" (Hebrews 12:18-21).

That is the old Israel being constituted at the mount. However, the word to us is: 'Ye are not come to that. That is not God's way of constituting His new Israel.'

"But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better than that of Abel" (Hebrews 12:22-24).

That surely settles all argument! If we had only that paragraph in the New Testament we should know the difference between the old dispensation and the new, between Judaism and Christianity, and between what *they* were in and what we are in.

But that is not all: it is only a part of the whole argument. I would have you note some of the titles in this Letter which are evidences of this truth:

(1) God's Family

We all know that God looked upon Israel as His family. He said to Pharaoh: *"Let my son go"* (Exodus 4:22). The evidence is too much for us to follow through, but it is quite clear that Israel of old was, in a certain sense, looked upon by God as His family. They were His children, and, in that sense, He spoke of Himself as their Father.

Here, in this Letter of transition from the old Israel to the new, that idea is carried over into the spiritual realm:

"For it became him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation will I

sing thy praise. And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold, I and the children which God hath given me." (Hebrews 2:10-13).

You will notice a whole list of quotations from the Old Testament in that connection. Formerly it related to the old Israel. That Israel has now been set aside and God is taking up in a new way this principle of family life in relation to Himself. His Son is *"the firstborn among many brethren"* (Romans 8:29) and we are *"sons of God, through faith, in Jesus Christ"* (Galatians 3:26).

You have probably noticed that the very first idea of God was a family - the idea was born in His heart. This is not some official society or institution. The deepest thing in God's heart about us is to have us as His children, and you, who know the Bible, will be able to quote to yourself many passages, such as: *"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him"* (Psalm 103:13). We could build up a tremendous mountain of references to God as Father and to His people as His children. He could have made an organization of people into a kind of society. He could have called some from one place and some from another, given them the title of some denomination and said: 'Now you are members of this denomination. You are formed into this organization.' But God never had any such idea. His idea is a family, and the Lord Jesus said that He came into this world especially to reveal God as Father - *"I kept them in thy name which thou hast given me... I made known unto them thy name"* (John 17:12, 26). The name of God which was most on the lips of the Lord Jesus was 'Father', and God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts whereby we say the same thing - *"Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father"* (Galatians 4:6).

That is very elementary, but there is a very great battle for this family conception. We do not worry very much if some organization gets broken up, not even if it is the 'United Nations', but we are always filled with grief and shame when a family breaks up. We feel that there is something about a family which carries a very sacred idea. What a bad thing it is when a family becomes divided! When children are against one another or against their parents, and the husband is against the wife and the wife against the husband. That is a special mark of the devil's work at the end of the dispensation! There is nothing more terrible in our time than the break-up of family life. The lists of divorces are most distressing, and poor children are left really without father or mother because of the break-up of the family. This is a blow at the deepest thing in the heart of God, but it does not stay there.

The most distressing aspect of this whole thing is in the family of God. There is nothing more terrible in this universe than the break-up of God's family. The devil does not mind our denominations and organizations, but he does object to this family matter! It is God's most cherished idea.

I think that is one of the most precious things about a time together like this. Here we are, representing quite a number of different nationalities. Many of us have never met before on this earth and have not yet had time to shake hands with one another, but we are all rejoicing here together as a family. The family spirit is the most precious thing, and it is the very hallmark of the heavenly Israel.

I have often said, in speaking about the heavenly Jerusalem as it is presented symbolically at the end of the Bible, that it has only one street. Our hymn-writers have led us astray over this, for they talk about the *streets* of gold. The Bible says there is only one street of gold. So we have to live in one street for all eternity! What do you say about that? How are you going to get on with your

neighbours? Don't worry, it will be a very happy thing to live on one street, for, you see, it will just be a holy family. When the whole family is one it is not a bad thing to live next door to one another!

Well, that is just a symbolic way of speaking about this, but you know what it means. This is a spiritual relationship: Father, big Elder Brother, the all-uniting Holy Spirit... "holy brethren, companions in a heavenly calling". It is a glorious thing to have companionship!

Thus this very first idea of God in the old Israel is carried over spiritually to the new Israel.

(2) The House of God

"Moses indeed was faithful in all God's house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were afterward to be spoken; but Christ as a son, over God's house; whose house are we, if we hold fast our boldness and the glorying of our hope firm unto the end" (Hebrews 3:5-6).

Did you notice what that said? *"Moses indeed was faithful in all God's house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were afterward to be spoken."* When is the afterward? It is *now*. *"Whose house are we."* The house of God is something which is carried over in principle by God from the old to the new. Peter says that we are a spiritual house - but there is one thing which needs to be made quite clear here. When we use this word 'house', we usually think of a place in which people live, but that is not the meaning of the word here. I do not know whether you can understand the change that I am going to make, but do you know the difference between a 'house' and a 'household'? A household is quite a different thing from a house. A household is two things: the people who dwell there and the order that exists. It is a house with a certain kind of order.

This is God's house, composed of His people who are under His order. He is a God of order. He is not only concerned to have things done, but to have them done in His way. It matters just as much to Him *how* things are done as to whether they are done at all. God's house is a house which is ordered by God. Everyone in it has to be in subjection to the Spirit of God and has to come under the headship of Jesus Christ.

We could spend very much time on the house of God! However, if you look into God's ordering of the life of Israel in the old dispensation, you will see how particular He was as to what was done and how it was done. God's spiritual and heavenly house was brought in on the Day of Pentecost, and He had His own new order. You will see how in those first days of the life of the Church two things were happening. God was demanding that His new order should be observed. Even the apostles had not come fully to recognize that new order. They were holding on to something of the old order, and when the Lord was moving toward the Gentiles in the case of Cornelius, the Gentile, Peter said: 'Not so, Lord. This is not according to the old order. I was not brought up in this way. The old system says I must not do that. Not so, Lord.' But the Lord is Lord of His own house, and He made it perfectly clear to Peter that He had brought in a new order. This was a new Israel. The Cross had made a great change: *"What God hath cleansed, make not thou common"* (Acts 10:15). The Cross has dealt with all uncleanness and we are moving on to a new basis.

Peter came to see that. Of course, this incident was not the end of the difficulty even for him, but I think that when we come to his Letters we get to a Peter who

has fully accepted the new order. "A *spiritual house*", says he, "to offer up *spiritual sacrifices*" (1 Peter 2:5).

But we were noting that in the Book of the Acts we have two things: there is the movement of the Spirit of God concerning the new order, but there is also the movement of the evil spirit against this new order. There is that terrible episode of Ananias and Sapphira who violated the new order of God's house. They brought in their own personal interests, and Peter summed it up in this way: "*Why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?*" (Acts 5:3). On that terrible day the new order was upset. Satan struck a blow at this new Israel, but to show how jealous God was for His heavenly order, see what happened to those two! God has therefore laid down the principle very clearly, and He is very jealous for His heavenly order.

Nothing but trouble can follow if we get out of God's order. While that is suspended everything is in confusion.

That is enough about the house of God for the time being - "*Whose house are we*".

(3) The Heirs of God

This matter is introduced with the Lord Jesus Himself.

"*Whom He appointed heir of all things*" (Hebrews 1:1).

In verse fourteen of the first chapter we are spoken of as the heirs of salvation ("*...for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation*").

In chapter six, verse seventeen, we are spoken of as "*the heirs of the promise*", and in the eighth chapter of the Letter to the Romans, verse seventeen, Paul says that we are, "*heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ*".

In the earthly sense, Israel were to be God's heirs. The promise was made to Abraham that his seed would inherit the earth: God covenanted with him that his seed should be the possessors. Israel were to be God's heirs and they ought to have become joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. But they killed God's heir. They said, as in the parable spoken by the Lord Jesus, "*This is the heir: come, let us kill him*" (Matthew 21:38). They killed Him whom God had "*appointed heir of all things*", and in so doing they robbed themselves of the inheritance.

Then the Church comes in - "*heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ*". The Church is now the heir to the promise made to Abraham, and this whole Letter to the Hebrews has to do with the inheritance, the great inheritance to which we are called as companions of the heavenly calling. The appeal to us in this Letter is: 'See that you do not miss the inheritance! The old Israel lost it through unbelief. You can lose the inheritance.' So the Letter uses Israel by way of illustrating the terrible possibility of Christians losing the inheritance.

Do you notice the little word 'if' which occurs so often? "We are become companions of Christ *if* we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end" (Hebrews 3:14): "*Whose house are we, if we hold fast our boldness*" (Hebrews 3:6). That little word is a very big word! A lot hangs on it. We are not talking about the loss of eternal life, but of the *purpose* of salvation, which is a very much larger thing than just being saved. Paul says that there will be a lot of people who get into heaven having lost everything. All their life work will go up in smoke: "*He himself shall be saved; yet so as through fire*" (1 Corinthians 3:15).

Everything but their salvation will be lost. Do you want to get into heaven “yet so as through fire”? No, this Letter says there is something more than being saved. There is a great inheritance, but we can miss it. Read the Letter again in the light of that.

However, our point here is that this principle of being heirs of God is carried over into the heavenly Israel.

(4) The City of God

If you look into this Letter, you will find that the city is referred to on several occasions, such as: *“Ye are come ... unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem”* (Hebrews 12:22).

The life of Israel was, of course, centred in the earthly Jerusalem. It was the centre of their unity. They were all united because of that city. That is why their males had to go up to Jerusalem so many times every year, and as they came, from the north, the south, the east and the west, a wonderful caravan, they sang the songs of Zion. Those Psalms about Zion are wonderful Psalms, and these men were glorying in their city, finding the expression of their national life there. It was the centre of their government. Their whole national life came out from the government in Jerusalem. Yes, Jerusalem was everything to them.

The writer of this Letter to the Hebrews is speaking about the approaching day, when that will have gone forever, or for a whole dispensation. Jerusalem today is the very symbol of division. The Jews have one bit and the Arabs have another, and they cannot live in peace together. It is the symbol of disunion, and with God it does not stand. It has been passed over and God has brought in His heavenly Jerusalem - *“Ye are come... unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem”*.

We have been made *“to sit with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus”* (Ephesians 2:6). All our unity, as the new Israel, is centred in Him above. There will only be a true expression of unity amongst the Lord’s people when they have a heavenly position. Our unity is in heaven, not on earth. Our government is from heaven, not from earth. Paul says we are *“fellow-citizens with the saints”* (Ephesians 2:19), and that our *“life is hid with Christ in God”* (Colossians 3:3).

Yes, the city exists. God’s thought concerning it has been carried over to the spiritual Israel.

(5) The Flock of God

These are all wonderful conceptions of the old Israel! If that Israel was God’s family, the house of God, the heir of God, the city of God, so it was thought of as God’s flock, God’s sheep: *“Thou leddest thy people like a flock”* (Psalm 77:20). That idea, of course, lay behind the cry of the prophet Isaiah: *“All we like sheep have gone astray”* (Isaiah 53:6). Israel was God’s flock and He was their shepherd. We will dwell more fully upon that later (See Volume 2) - it is indeed a very large matter in this new relationship to the Lord.

God has carried this over and it is a very precious thought of His concerning the heavenly Israel. We are *“the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand”* (Psalm 95:7), and when we come to the end of this Letter to the Hebrews we have this beautiful word: *“Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep... even our Lord Jesus”* (Hebrews 13:20).

There is a sense in which that spreads itself back over the whole Letter. The companions of Christ are His sheep: *"I am the good shepherd; and I know mine own, and mine own know me.... My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life"* (John 10:14, 27-28). That is a grand idea for sheep!

(6) The Kingdom of God

We all know that Israel of old was God's kingdom, over which He was king. Do you remember that when they chose Saul to be the king, Samuel was very distressed and went to the Lord about it? The Lord said to him: *"They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them"* (1 Samuel 7:7). The Old Testament has a great deal to say about Israel being God's kingdom.

Then we come into this new Israel: *"Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken"* (Hebrews 12:28). In the Greek the tense is: "Being in process of receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken". We are God's kingdom, and people under His kingship and government.

We will have much more to say about this matter later, but I think I have said enough now to show that this is a very real thing. We have come in a spiritual way into all that which was foreshadowed in the Israel of old. The Lord Jesus said to that Israel: *"The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof"* (Matthew 21:43). Peter said that we are *"a holy nation"* (1 Peter 2:9). We are the inheritors of all that God ever meant for His people. In us, that is, in His true Church of this dispensation, God is in process of realizing all that which He had foreshadowed through many centuries.

We are a very privileged people. The great need of our time is for Christians to know what God has called them unto. Many do not know. You can go over this world and find Christians in the majority who have no idea of these things. They know that the Lord Jesus came into the world as the Son of God and lived His wonderful life, did His works, gave His teaching, died an atoning death and rose again, has gone to heaven and is coming again; but they do not know one bit of what it all means, that is, what it is all unto, the great eternal purpose of God in it all. They are mostly quite ignorant of the things about which we have just been speaking, and that is why Christianity is in such a poor state today. They have not been given true instruction and have not a true understanding of God's great purpose in His Church through Christ Jesus. It is a very wonderful thing that we have come into in this dispensation.

Chapter Seven

THE TWO BEGINNINGS

It would be a very wonderful thing if we could spend some time in seeing God's line right from the beginning up to Christ. There were many generations which came to an end, and in one place there is a large summary of what came and what finished. It says 'So-and-so lived, for so long, and he died.' That is said about a long list of people - they lived and then they died. However, right through there is one line that is the living line, continuing straight through history up to Christ. You can follow that line quite clearly, although, at times, it seemed to go underground.

At a certain point in that movement of God, we find ourselves in the presence of His beginning with Israel. It has moved from individuals to the point where the nation comes into view. Up to then the movement had been with individuals - Abel, Enoch, Noah. Then, when it reached Abraham the nation came on the horizon, that is, the Israel of history, of this earth.

We are going to note how God began with Israel, and how the principle of that beginning is transferred to the new, heavenly Israel in Christ. It is very impressive to find that the beginning of the first Israel is in the New Testament, in the Book of the Acts. Note that, for it is a significant thing. The Book of the Acts is the link between the old and the new: the focal point of the transition from the one to the other is there. Interestingly enough, it is in the discourse of the martyr, Stephen. The new Israel received a great impetus by his death.

The first thing that Stephen said to the old Israel was: *"The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia"* (Acts 7:2)... *"The God of glory appeared."* That was the first movement toward the old Israel, and that is exactly the first movement toward the new Israel: and we find that beginning in the New Testament.

We turn again to the Gospel by John: *"In the beginning was the Word... and the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us":* now note! *"and we beheld his glory"* (John 1:1-14 - R.V. margin). Then turn again to the Letter to the Hebrews: *"God... hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son... the effulgence of his glory"* (Hebrews 1:1-3)... *"The God of glory appeared... and hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son... the effulgence of his glory."*

First of all, then, God is breaking into human history. That is how it was with the first Israel. Away there, in Ur of the Chaldees, a pagan country with two thousand other gods, the God of glory broke in and changed the course of history. Thus He took His first step toward the securing of Israel.

The first chapter of John shows the God of glory breaking into human history in a new way.

That, of course, is in the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments, and you may have taken it in mentally, viewing it in an objective way. But you must just take hold of that and let it apply to you personally, because it relates to you and to me. You and I are called by God to be the companions of Christ in a heavenly calling and this belongs to all of us. The very beginning of our history as God's heavenly Israel is His intervention in our lives. Perhaps it was just as unexpected to some of us as it was to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees. We were living our lives in this world, were mixed up in the course of things here and were ruled by the god of this world. We were just there, one in a great crowd... and then God

broke in. When God breaks into a life there is no doubt about it. It is a turning-point in our history, and the nature of the change is that we no longer belong to this world. We have become members of a new Israel, of a heavenly people with a new spiritual nature. It may not have been with us just as it was with Abraham, but it is essential for every one of us to know that God has entered into our human history. In the first place it was not something from our side, but it was from God's side. He took the initiative, perhaps in a wonderful way, or in a very simple way. It may belong to a moment in time, or it may belong to days, weeks or months. However, the fact is that God came in where we were. How did God come in? How should we put it, if we wanted to put it into words? Well, it says here about the old Israel: *"The God of glory appeared"*. Could you put it like that in your experience?

These words in the New Testament explain that. God came in Jesus Christ, and in Him is the glory of God. And as we have seen Jesus Christ, so we have come into touch with the God of glory. In the words of the Letter to the Hebrews: *"God... hath... spoken unto us in his son"*. All those who know that Jesus Christ has come into their lives really do know that the God of glory has come in. And so John, after saying that *"the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us"*, says, *"and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father"*.

And what is the glory? John goes on to say *"full of grace and truth"*. You will notice that in the New Testament grace and glory always go together. If you want to know what is the glory of God, well, it is the grace of God, and if you want to know what is the grace of God, it is the glory of God. It is the glory of God to be gracious. He glories in being gracious, and when you know the grace of God, then you know the glory of God. The glory of God will always come to us along the line of grace, and so, because of grace, we shall be able to say: *"We beheld his glory"*.

Perhaps you know that that word 'glory' is one of the big words in John's Gospel. If you have never done so, I advise you to go through the Gospel and underline that word.

(Now, just a little word to the young Christians who have not yet done a lot of Bible study. I had not thought of saying this, but perhaps it will be helpful. I do not profess to know a great deal about the Bible, indeed, I know very little of it, but I will tell you how I started to study it. I bought a box of coloured pencils and a new Bible. I started first with John's Gospel and I gave a certain colour to the same word through the Gospel. Of course, I always put green where the word 'life' is found! You see it all around - green speaks of life. Wherever the word 'glory' appears I put blue - that is the colour for heaven. I put red whenever anything to do with the blood or the Cross appeared - and so I went on. I had a wonderful result in the Gospel of John when I had finished! That is only a suggestion, but I hope that you may find it a helpful one. There are a lot more colours than those three!)

We are saying that 'glory' is one of John's great words, and all the references in his Gospel to Christ's glory are related to His super-natural person and His super-natural power. When John wrote *"We beheld his glory"* it was many years after the Lord Jesus had come and gone. John's Gospel is one of the last books of the New Testament. All the other Apostles had probably gone to the Lord when John wrote it. So he was looking back over all that history and putting his impressions into words, and as he thought of the Lord Jesus, His life, His work, His teaching and everything else about Him, he summed it all up in this: *"We beheld his glory"*.

How did John behold the glory of the Lord Jesus? He did so on many occasions and by a whole series of humanly impossible situations.

(That is another line of study for you! Go to the Gospel by John and see how many impossible situations you can find.)

The Gospel is just full of impossible situations. There is the marriage in Cana, when the wine failed. Humanly, that is an impossible situation. Then there is Nicodemus and what is it that he is saying? *"How can a man be born when he is old?"* (John 3:4). An impossible situation! Think of the woman of Samaria. She had tried everything to find satisfaction. An impossible situation! And you can go right on like that. In all these situations Jesus came in and turned the impossible into actuality. Thus it says at the end of the account of the marriage in Cana: *"This beginning of his signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory"* (John 2:11). That was the principle which governed everything. It does not always say so in those words, but if you went back with that woman of Samaria into the city and heard her shouting to all the people: *"Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: can this be the Christ?"* (John 4:29), you would conclude that she had beheld His glory.

So you go right on to Lazarus. Jesus said: *"This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby"* (John 11:4). And in the difficulty being faced by the sisters, when they could not altogether accept the fact that their problem was going to be solved at once, and they said: *"I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day"* (John 11:24), Jesus replied: *"Said I not unto thee, that if thou believedst, thou shouldest see the glory of God?"* (John 11:40). You see, the glory of God in Jesus Christ related to what God could do that no one else could do. It was the supernatural person and power of the Son of God.

That is the glory of God: and that is why we sometimes have such a difficulty in getting through. Perhaps you have often been troubled because of the difficulty some soul has in getting through to the Lord? It almost seems as though the Lord does not want to save them. They go through difficulties, sometimes for days, weeks or months, and all the time they are arguing and bringing up their problems, but nothing seems to happen. Then, at last, it does happen and they come through. Why is that? God is emphatically saying: 'This is going to be of Me, and not of yourself,' No man or woman can save himself or herself, even with all the goodwill of other people to help. The salvation of a soul is an impossible thing but for God, and He sees to it that it is put upon the supernatural basis. He very often does not come in until we have come to the point of despair - but He does come in then.

And what is true about salvation is so often true about our spiritual history. Again and again we are brought to the point where situations are quite impossible where man is concerned. We find we cannot solve that problem ourselves, or change that situation. If we were people of this world we might be able to do it, but somehow or other, because we are the Lord's people, it just does not work. All our cleverness fails. Naturally there is no reason why we should not get on, but the fact is that we just do not. We try everything and are greatly perplexed. We are being brought more and more to despair, and finally to the point where we say: 'Well, only the Lord can do this!' - and that is exactly what the Lord has been working for. When the God of glory appears, He appears as the God of glory. Do you see the point? Well, I said that the word 'glory' in John's Gospel is connected with the supernatural power of Jesus Christ, and we can only learn who Jesus is by coming up against situations in which He is the only one who can

help us. The more we go on to learn about the Lord Jesus the more impossible will life be, and situations become, on this earth.

That is the beginning of the God of glory.

Note the next thing: God's glory in Abraham reached its climax in sonship. There were many things in the life of Abraham when the God of glory needed to come in and so we read that in different situations 'the Lord appeared unto Abraham'. However, the peak of all God's appearances to Abraham was in connection with Isaac - that is, it was bound up with this matter of sonship. The covenant of God with Abraham was going to be realized along the line of sonship, and all God's purposes in him were bound up with Isaac. Of course, at the beginning Isaac was an impossibility, but at the end he was a still greater impossibility - "*Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, ... and offer him there for a burnt offering*" (Genesis 22:2). All the promise and covenant are wrapped up in Isaac, who is to be slain with a knife. This is an impossible situation! Isaac to die? There is no possibility of another Isaac, indeed, I doubt whether Abraham would have wanted another. It was a matter of life or death to him and is a quite impossible situation if Isaac lies dead on the altar. But you know what happened! And you know what the New Testament says about that: "*Accounting that God is able to raise up, even from the dead; from whence he did also in a parable receive him back*" (Hebrews 11:19).

Has anyone but God ever raised someone from the dead? Man can do a great deal in prolonging life, and he thinks he will reach the time when he will raise the dead. Well, we have not reached that time yet, and we shall see whether God will surrender His own one prerogative - that is, to bring back a departed spirit into a dead body. That is God's act and is resurrection and not resuscitation.

I was saying that the glory of God reached its climax in Abraham's case along the line of sonship. Later on we shall have to look at this more closely in connection with Lazarus, but let us come back to *our* beginning.

We turn to John again - "*We beheld his glory*". How do we behold His glory? "*He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become sons of God*" (John 1:12 - A.V.) - He gave them the authority to be sons. That is our history. We are able to say: 'By God's intervention I am a child of God.' Then you notice how John analyzes this: "*which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*" (John 1:13). We are children of God by His intervention and by a direct act on His part. We are born from above and are made children of God. The glory of God is revealed in Jesus Christ in sonship.

Are you glorying in the fact that you are a born again child of God?

This same John, many years later, wrote these words, with a very full heart: "*Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is*" (1 John 3:2). And connected with that, John said: "*Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God*" (1 John 3:1).

It is a wonderful thing to be a child of God! John said so, and he knew what he was talking about.

The glory, then, is in sonship. And it is at that point that Israel comes into view: Abraham's seed through Isaac. It is the nation that is coming into view and, as

we have said, God said to Pharaoh: 'Let my son go.' That word 'son' was a comprehensive word, meaning the whole nation. God saw that nation as one son and would not surrender one fragment, because sonship is such a complete thing. Pharaoh said 'Well, let the men go. Leave the women and children and the flocks and herds'. but Moses said: 'Not one single hoof of one single animal shall be left behind.' God had said 'My son', and that included the nation.

Chapter Eight

THE ABIDING VOCATION

Before going further with our main point there are two things that I want to say in parenthesis.

First, I want to correct a possible misunderstanding. The heavenly and spiritual Israel, which is the Church of Jesus Christ, is not an afterthought of God. It was not brought in because Israel failed. Please be very clear about that. There are those who teach that that is so. They say that the Lord offered it to Israel, who refused it. He had to do something and so He got the idea of a Church. It was quite an afterthought, a kind of emergency movement of God. That is entirely false to the whole of the Bible, and it is one thing we are seeking to show in these days. We have said that everything in the Old Testament, including Israel, had Christ and the Church in view. It was all leading on to Christ and the Church, and they take up all the divine thoughts of the past and embody them in themselves. The Church is the *eternal* thing. It was in the heart of God before time was and was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. The Church is no afterthought of God: it is a *before*-thought. God's Son is no emergency matter. He may have come in at a time of emergency, but He was in view for this particular work from all eternity. The Church was eternally intended to be the Body of Christ.

Now I want you to keep that in mind in all that we are saying. We believe that if Adam had not been disobedient in unbelief he would have been 'conformed to God's Son'; but his sin meant that he forfeited the divine intention. In the same way Israel would have become incorporated into the corporate expression of Christ, but in unbelief and disobedience Israel forfeited that 'inheritance'. The Church universal stood eternally over Israel. This is a very important matter.

The other thing that I want to emphasize is this: that this new Israel, the Church, is essentially a spiritual thing, as truly as Christ, here, now, is a spiritual matter. And Christ is here in this world by the Spirit. As truly as Christ is here - though no longer in physical presence and on a temporal basis (we can only know Him and have fellowship with Him spiritually) - so it is as to the Church.

There has to be a revolution in the minds of many Christians about this matter. That word 'Church' is taken up and put on to almost anything. Forgive me! I mean no offence, but we are dealing with very vital matters. We hear of, speak of, this church and that church - the Lutheran church, the Methodist church, the Baptist church, the Anglican church - and how many more? We speak of all these as *the* church. From heaven's standpoint that is a lot of nonsense. From heaven's standpoint those are not the Church. They may represent one or other aspect of truth, but not one of them has the whole of the truth, and when you put them all together they have not all of the truth. All the truth is in Jesus alone.

The Church is a spiritual thing. You cannot look upon anything material, or on people in the flesh, and say: 'That is the church.' You are only in the Church in so far as there is something of Christ in you. It is Christ *in* us that makes the Church. You see, the Church is a unity in Christ.

The Lord Jesus never looks upon so many loaves of bread all over the world when there is a gathering to His Table. I suppose that on the Lord's Day there may be thousands of loaves of bread being broken, and I do not know how many cups - but heaven never sees more than one loaf or more than one cup. The loaf is Christ, the cup is Christ, and by partaking we are united in Christ.

It is not quite certain whether the translators were correct - though there may be something in it - when they translated the words of the Lord Jesus at the supper. In the old version it says: *"This is my body, which is broken for you"* (1 Corinthians 11:24 - A.V.) There may be very real truth in using that word 'broken'. Indeed, the Lord's body was broken, but the later translators have left that word out and have put: *"This is my body, which is for you"* (1 Corinthians 11:24 - R.V.). Perhaps that later translation dismisses a false idea, for that word 'broken' has so often been taken to mean - 'Here is one piece, there is another, and there is another'; pieces all over the world. Christ is *not* divided. Paul said: *"Is Christ divided?"* (1 Corinthians 1:13). No, Christ is not divided. There may be a thousand pieces of the earthly loaf, but the heavenly loaf is one, and that is how heaven sees the Church.

The church is a broken thing on the earth. It is broken into many pieces down here, but in heaven it is seen as one, and the sooner you and I see from heaven's standpoint the better. If this man or this woman is "in Christ", it does not matter whether he or she is in our denomination or not, whether he or she is in our sect or not. If they are "in Christ" they are part with all others in Christ.

Understand that the Church is a spiritual thing, not an earthly, temporal thing, and that is a very important thing for us to recognize; it is comprised of all who are born of the Spirit.

We have taken a lot of time before we come on to our particular point. We are doing this: Along one side we are tracing God's ways with the old Israel, and along the other side we are seeing that He takes the spiritual laws of that old Israel and perpetuates them in the new Israel. What He did in a temporal way with the first Israel, He is now doing in a spiritual way with the new Israel.

Our last word was that God's glory in Abraham reached its climax in sonship. Sonship in death and resurrection as represented by Isaac. Sonship is the climax of God's glory.

We are back in the Letter to the Hebrews now. What is the climax of that Letter and of all God's movement as contained in it? It is found in one fragment: *"Bringing many sons unto glory"* (Hebrews 2:10). That is the climax of the glory of God. As it was in a temporal way with Abraham, so it is in a spiritual way with the new Israel.

But the idea of sonship did not begin with Abraham and Isaac. It only came out in them. It went right back before them - it was God's cherished secret from before times eternal. That secret has been lost in Abraham's seed after the flesh, but is taken up in Abraham's Seed after the Spirit.

You probably know that the Letters to the Romans and the Galatians are concerned with this very thing. The Apostle is saying just this in the Letter to the Romans, chapters nine, ten and eleven (all one section really). *"They are not all Israel, which are of Israel"* (Romans 9:6) - 'All the natural children of Abraham are not Israel. Israel is only the spiritual children of Abraham.'

When you go into the Letter to the Galatians that is explained very carefully, and Paul reduces it to this one thing. He refers to the promise made to Abraham: *"In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed"* (Genesis 22:18).

This is the thing that got Paul into a lot of trouble. He said: *"(God) saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ"* (Galatians

3:16). It is not the many natural children of Abraham, but the spiritual children - and that is Christ and the companions of Christ.

Isaiah cried: *"He shall see his seed... he shall see of the travail of his soul"* (Isaiah 53:10,11), and this heavenly Jerusalem is the spiritual seed of Abraham, which is Christ and the 'born from above' ones.

The Letter to the Galatians teaches that the rest have gone. Even all the other children of Abraham are now set aside, and God recognizes only His spiritual children. This is taken up in this phrase which has governed our whole time: *"Wherefore, holy brethren, companions of a heavenly calling... we are become companions of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning... firm unto the end"* (Hebrews 3:1, 14).

This spiritual and heavenly Israel is called "companions of a heavenly calling", and we will dwell upon that heavenly calling for a few minutes.

What was God's intention in this world concerning the first Israel? It was that they should mediate light and life to the nations. That was their divine calling - that the nations should receive life through their light; that they should be the channel of divine light and life to the nations of this world. We could take quite a lot of the Old Testament to show this, but we are going to use only one illustration.

You notice that all the sons of Israel were focused in one son. (Of course, when we speak of Israel now, we mean Jacob.) That son was Joseph. If it had not been for him that whole nation would have perished, and not only the sons and families of Jacob, but all Egypt. In a sense that world would have perished. God's strange, sovereign dealings with Joseph brought him, through death and resurrection, to the throne. Then his brothers came to Egypt and he made himself known to them. They went down before him in utter shame, began to apologize and try to excuse themselves. Poor, miserable, wretched fellows they were! But what did Joseph say? *"Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life"* (Genesis 45:5). Life and light came not only to all the families of Jacob, but to Egypt, the world, through Joseph. He was the inclusive representative of all his brethren. God made him like that, and he sets forth this truth that God intended all Israel of old to be a minister of life and light to the whole world. That was Israel's calling and what they were intended for in the old dispensation. They were just down here by God's appointment, right at the centre of the nations, in a position of ascendancy, in order to mediate light and life to the nations. Abraham's seed was intended to do that, but that seed failed God, and instead of fulfilling their calling, they contradicted it.

We need not dwell upon their failure. It is a dark and terrible story. And for the last nearly two thousand years they have been where the Lord Jesus said they would be: *"The sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (Matthew 8:12). That is the story of the earthly Israel, as a nation, through all these past centuries. Thank God for all those who have escaped from the outer darkness, who are not weeping and gnashing their teeth, but are rejoicing in Christ Jesus! But that is where the nation went, and the last stroke of that was in A.D. 70.

That is the dark side. But God had not finished with an Israel. He still had in view a 'Prince with God', for that is the meaning of the name 'Israel'. This heavenly, spiritual Israel to which you and I belong is called into the vocation of Joseph. God has transferred that in a spiritual way to us. We are here in this heavenly

calling, this spiritual vocation to minister light and life to the world. That is to be our heavenly calling now, and that is why the Lord Jesus said to His new Israel: *"Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations"* (Matthew 28:19) ... 'Begin at Jerusalem... Samaria... all Judea... and unto the uttermost parts of the earth... and wherever you are your heavenly calling is to bring light and life from above.'

At the beginning the Church almost settled down in the earthly Jerusalem. They were very slow to move away from there, so the Lord took a big hammer and brought it down on the Church in that city. Then they were all scattered abroad; and the Lord said: 'I have finished with this earthly city. The new Jerusalem is above, and the new, heavenly calling is to all the nations.'

That is the heavenly calling of the spiritual Israel now, but that has to come to fullness afterward. That fullness is represented at the end of the Bible - *"the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God"* (Revelation 21:2). No, this is not a material and political world-centre. This is the Church. These are the companions of Christ represented in the symbolism of a city, and the last word about that city is this: *"And the nations shall walk amidst the light thereof... and on this side of the river and on that was the tree of life... and the leaves of the tree were for the health of the nations"* (Revelation 21:2, 4; 22:2). Did you notice that I changed a word? Our translation says "for the *healing* of the nations", but that is not correct. The nations will not need healing in eternity, thank God! But they will need their spiritual health ministered to.

Most of us here do not need saving. Remember, by the way, that the word 'salvation' in the original is the word 'health'. It is being in a state of good health. That is the meaning of the word 'salvation' - being in spiritually good health.

The nations then will be those that have had the Gospel and have responded: *"The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea"* (Habakkuk 2:14), but right at the centre of the nations will be the Church, and through the Church light and life will go out to maintain the health of the nations.

So, when everything has been said and done, and you have gone right through the long, long story, at last you come to the end in the last chapter of history in the Book of the Revelation: and the last picture is of a heavenly Israel ministering light and life to the nations.

Perhaps some of you Bible students and you people who are interested in doctrine are troubled now with a question, in view of what I have said. 'Does he mean that the Church is one thing and that there are a lot of people who are not of the Church? In other words, is the city one thing and are the nations another?'

I am not going to enter on any argument over that, but I am going to bring you back to this Letter to the Hebrews for your answer. It is one little word of two letters: 'IF!' *"We are become companions of Christ if..."*: *"Whose house are we if..."*. In one sense the whole Letter circles round that little word. It is not now a matter of salvation and getting into heaven. It is now a matter of that instrument of eternal vocation for all the rest. This is the height of the heavenly calling. I leave you to answer the question by studying this Letter again. It does seem to say that everyone will not be the city. If everyone is the city, where is the country? No, the city is the centre, the seat of administration, of government and of light. The whole country derives its values through the city. It does seem that that is the truth that is here. It is possible to get into heaven but not be of the city.

If you have trouble with that and you disagree with me - I can only say to you: 'Go back to the Word.' I cannot understand this Letter on any other ground, unless we admit that the warnings relate to salvation and not to inheritance. Why is it shot through and through with this urgency to go on? I do not believe that if you do not go on you forfeit your eternal life or sacrifice your salvation, but I do believe that if you do not go on you will forfeit your inheritance, and that is the teaching of this Letter as I see it. Why, the whole of the New Testament, after the Gospels, has this one object: to get Christians to go on, and to go on to full growth.

God put something into the very constitution of Abraham which had two effects. It made him a very discontented man. He was possessed of a *holy* discontent. He saw the land and God gave him flocks and herds in abundance, but all the time he was going up and down the land saying: 'This is not it. There is something more than this. I can never be satisfied with this.' In a right sense Abraham was a most discontented man.

On the other side, he had a vision of what ought to be. The New Testament calls it a heavenly country. (See Hebrews 11:16) He was looking for a city "*whose builder and maker is God*", and no city on this earth answered to what was in the heart of Abraham. Do you think I am exaggerating? Do you think I am making that up? What did Jesus say to the old Israel? "*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad*" (John 12:56). Abraham saw right down the ages. He had a vision and nothing *in this world* could satisfy that vision. His heart was ever hungry and so he was a man who never settled down on this earth.

"Let us go on", says this Letter to the Hebrews. 'Let us not settle down, and let us never be satisfied with anything less than God's fullness.' That is its message.

In the end it is represented as a race. We are running a race and the goal and prize lie ahead. Let us not stop in the race and turn aside! "*Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus...*" (Hebrews 12:1-2). "*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day;*" "*Looking unto Jesus*". Let us never settle down with anything less than God's fullness. "*Wherefore, holy brethren, companions of a heavenly calling.*"

Where the Holy Spirit really has His place in a heart, that heart will be a 'going on' heart. It will never settle down to anything less than God's fullness.

There are two different kinds of dissatisfaction. There are those poor, miserable people who are never satisfied with anything. They are always discontented, and in a wrong way. We are not appealing for such people! But this spiritual discontent, this that says: "*Not that I have obtained, or am already made perfect... but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind... I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 3:12-14), is the nature of a truly Holy Spirit-governed life. It will always be pressing on to something more of the Lord. Such are the true heavenly seed of Abraham, the companions of a heavenly calling.

Chapter Nine

THE SUPERIORITY OF THE NEW POSITION

We are now going to concentrate upon one aspect of the great transition: the superiority of the heavenly Israel to the earthly.

The writer of this Letter, whoever he was, was giving himself wholly to the immense superiority of what had come in with this dispensation. It was as though he said to himself. 'The time has come for someone to let these people know how superior is that which has come in with this dispensation. This final movement of God in the history of this world is greater than anything before.' So that is what he set himself to show to the people of his day. But God meant it for more than that: He meant it for His people for all time.

No one knows who wrote this Letter. Many names have been mentioned. Some have been very certain about who it was, and then someone else has come along and upset that certainty. Some have been sure that Paul wrote it, while others have very nearly proved that he did not. Some have thought that Apollos wrote it, and others have said that it was Barnabas. Apollos, it was said, was a man "*mighty in the Scriptures*" (Acts 8:24), and it certainly did require such a man to write this document! Barnabas was a Levite, and he knew all about the Levitical system of the Old Testament, so he would be a good one to write the book. As for Paul, well, of course, he was the perfect master both of Judaism and of Christianity, and it needed a man like that to write this book. If Stephen had not been martyred I would have chosen him, because I think that in his last great discourse you have all the substance of the Letter to the Hebrews.

Well, we cannot say. Perhaps the Lord has never thought it to be very important to settle a human name upon it, but rather to make everything of "God... hath spoken."

We are touching very old and well-worn ground when we remind you of the place that the word 'better' has in this Letter. It occurs more often here than in all the rest of the New Testament put together.

(Here is a study for the beginners in Bible Study. Get out your box of coloured pencils, choose a colour that you think is suitable to 'better', and underline that word through this Letter.)

This word occurs thirteen times in the Letter and always in a very instructive connection. I will just mention the references:

Chapter 1:4 - "Better than the angels". (That is a high place at which to begin!)

Chapter 6:9 - "We are persuaded better things of you"

Chapter 7:19 - "A better hope".

Chapter 7:22 - "A better covenant".

Chapter 8:6 - "A better covenant" and "better promises".

Chapter 9:23 - "Better sacrifices".

Chapter 10:34 - "A better possession".

Chapter 11:16 - "A better country".

Chapter 11:35 - "A better resurrection".

Chapter 11:40 - "Some better thing".

Then, alongside of that, you can put:

Chapter 12:24 - "The blood of sprinkling that speaketh better than that of Abel".

In chapter 1:4 and 8:6 there are the words "more excellent", and in chapter 1:4, chapter 3:3 and chapter 10:25 there is the phrase "by so much... more".

So that word is a key to the Letter. Everything here is better than it has ever been before. And we can come back with that to our own key words: "*Holy brethren, companions of a heavenly calling*" - called to something so much better than has ever been in the history of this world.

Let us remind ourselves of why this Letter was written.

In the first place, it was written to save these Christians from spiritual declension or spiritual arrest. For various reasons they were being tempted to draw back. You will remember that those words occur in a warning: "*If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him*" (Hebrews 10:38 - A.V.). It is a terrible thing to get into a place where the Lord has no pleasure in you, to lose the pleasure of the Lord! And it was to prevent these Christians from getting into such a position that this Letter was written.

Some of these Christians were inclined just to stand still and not go on any further, so that their spiritual life would be arrested and they would no longer go on and grow. They would become "stand-still" Christians - 'As it was, so it is now'. Nothing of the future was governing them. So this Letter was written to save them from going back or from standing still.

However, we have already pointed out that there was another reason: It was to carry these Christians through a time of great trouble which was coming. Evidently this Letter was written very shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem. Perhaps the writer already saw the signs of that, but, whether he did or not, the Holy Spirit saw what was coming. He knew that a time of great testing was coming to these Christians, when all that in which they had trusted on this earth was going to be shaken, so He led this writer to write this Letter. It was intended to be a strength to them and salvation in a time of trouble. And the method of so ministering help to them was to show again the greatness of the Lord Jesus, the greatness of the heavenly calling, and how great a thing it is to be companions of Christ and of the heavenly calling. So the writer sets out to bring into view the Lord Jesus in His superiority to all who had gone before. But in doing so, he does another thing, and this is a very interesting matter. He says: 'Down through the past ages there have been men who have had great difficulties, many discouragements and trials,' and he mentions Abraham.

Now Abraham had indeed a difficult life. There was the difficulty of the postponed promise - God's promises did not seem to be in the way of fulfilment. He was taking such a long time to fulfil His word. We all know something about that difficulty! We are in a hurry and God is not - He seems to have all time at His disposal. Our trouble is: 'Oh, if only the Lord would hurry up!', and I suppose our prayers are so often marked by one word: 'Lord, hasten it!'

If any man knew about having to be patient, it was Abraham! There was this difficulty of God taking so much time to fulfil His promises, and Abraham sometimes broke down under that. On one occasion he left the land of promise and went to Egypt - and there he found himself in still greater trouble. He had to tell a lie to get out of it.

This matter was a very real test to Abraham. I think there are signs that his wife was not always in sympathy with him. When they were both old and the Lord said that they would have a son, Sarah, who was in her tent, heard and *"laughed within herself"* (Genesis 18:12). The Lord was angry, and Abraham had to rebuke Sarah. Well, we must have full sympathy with Sarah. She was being hard put to it by the way the Lord was taking her husband and she was not always able to see as he saw, or feel as he felt. Perhaps, for that reason, Abraham had a certain measure of spiritual loneliness in his life.

Then what about that young man Lot? He was just a lot of trouble! He certainly did not share Abraham's vision! His vision was all on this earth, his ambitions all for the present, and you know well his story and what a thorn he was in the side of Abraham.

We could add other things to the painful story. Abraham's was not an easy life. But, do you know, the New Testament says that Abraham *rejoiced!* Why did he do so? Why did he rejoice in tribulation? Jesus Himself tells us the answer to that: *"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it and was glad"* (John 8:56). In some way Abraham had seen the Lord Jesus, had seen the day of the Lord Jesus, and that had got him through all his troubles.

You know, there is more in this Letter to the Hebrews about what Abraham saw. He had seen in the spirit a heavenly country, and was looking for it. He had seen *"the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God"* (Hebrews 11:10). Abraham had seen the day of Jesus Christ. You will remember that this writer said: *Ye are come unto... the heavenly Jerusalem"* (Hebrews 12:22). Abraham had seen that, and, having seen the Lord Jesus, he was able to go on and rejoice in a long life of trial.

What about Moses? Did he have any troubles? Well, we can make a long story about the troubles of Moses! He had to carry a very heavy burden, and there was a time when he nearly lost heart. He said to the Lord: *"I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me"* (Numbers 11:14). Moses often had to go back to the Lord like that and say: 'You have asked me to do something which is more than I can do.' He had very many trials through forty long, weary years. But we have this word here: *"He endured, as seeing him who is invisible"* (Hebrews 11:27). Who was the "him" that Moses was seeing? Notice what this Letter to the Hebrews says! When Moses was in Pharaoh's palace and saw his own brethren being persecuted, he decided that he was going to take sides with them, and this Letter says: *"Choosing rather to be evil entreated with the people of God"* - and now comes a wonderful thing - *"accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt"* (Hebrews 11:25-26). The *reproach of Christ!* What did Moses know about Christ? Somehow he had seen Him and seen that these Hebrew people were called in relation to Him, so *"He endured, as seeing him who is invisible"*.

This is a point at which our minds have to get adjusted. Perhaps we have the idea that when Jesus came into this world, that was the beginning of Him, but the Word of God makes it perfectly clear that Jesus Christ was present in the days of Abraham and Moses. Indeed, the Word says that He was present in the creation of the world: *"All things were made by him"* (John 1:3). He was there all the

time. He was the One who appeared again and again and they did not recognize Him. He appeared to Abraham, to Moses, to Joshua, to Gideon... yes, this same Christ was there, active all the time. He did not just begin when He was born in Bethlehem. It was then that He came into this world in human form.

Do you think that is exaggerating? Well, let us come to our Letter to the Hebrews: *"Jesus Christ... the same yesterday, and today, yea and for ever"* (13:8). I have left out one little word - *"Jesus Christ IS the same..."*: He IS yesterday, He IS today and He IS tomorrow. There is no yesterday, today or tomorrow with Jesus. Yesterday was the day of the old dispensation. When this writer wrote this Letter it was 'today' in which he lived, the new dispensation that had just begun. 'Today' is the period between Christ going back to heaven and His coming again. We have seen already how one phrase is quoted three times in this Letter, and it is brought over from yesterday to today: *"Today if ye shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts"* (Hebrews 3:7-8). That is a message for this dispensation. 'Tomorrow' is forever, and it is going to be the same Jesus Christ.

So the writer of this Letter is saying: 'Jesus Christ was back there in yesterday. He was in the past dispensation. And it is the same Jesus Christ that we know today. And He will be the same Jesus Christ forever.'

Do you notice how many quotations from the Old Testament there are in the first chapter of this Letter? We cannot stay to look at them, but the Old Testament is used here a very great deal, and the quotations are concerning Christ, so that, in the first place, it is quite clear that He was in the Old Testament. He was being spoken about then and was present in the minds of Old Testament writers. There are quotations from David. Jesus Christ was very much in the mind of David. The words *"Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee"* were first written by him (Psalm 2:7), and there is much more like that.

There are very many quotations from the Old Testament at the beginning of this Letter, which simply shows that Jesus Christ was present then. And that Jesus Christ is brought over from yesterday to today. This writer is just saying: 'That Jesus Christ of the prophets and the men of old is this One of whom I am writing today.' The first chapter of the Letter just takes up all that about Christ and brings it here into the present - and it is the same Jesus Christ.

We have hardly begun to see the superiority of this today over yesterday. We have only sought to do one thing, and that is what this writer set out to do: to show that to get through trouble and testing you need to have a large conception of the Lord Jesus. To get through to the end in victory will depend upon what kind of Christ our Christ is to us.

The writer realized that these Christians were finding the 'race' rather long and difficult, and their need was the most testing thing in spiritual life - patience. *"Ye have need of patience"*, says the writer, *"that, having done the will of God, ye may receive the promise"* (Hebrews 10:36). Later he says: *"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us"* (Hebrews 12:1). What is the real strength of patience? Oh, it is so easy to say to people: 'Now, be patient. Don't be in a hurry. Things will turn out all right.' But this writer did not just say to these Christians: 'Now be patient!' He said: *"Let us run with patience the race..."* It will test our patience, will call for a lot of patience, but the thing that will keep our patience strong is this - *"Looking off unto Jesus"* (Hebrews 12:2). If we look at ourselves we will give up the race, and we shall do so if we look at other people. There are a lot of people who will make us give up the race. If we look around us on the world we shall lose patience. And so we like the true translation of this phrase. Some versions just have *"Looking unto Jesus"*. Well, that is all right, but

the real version is: "Looking off unto Jesus". You must take your eyes off yourself. You must positively refuse to look at yourself. You must train yourself in the habit of refusing to look at yourself. Every time you are tempted to do so you have to say: 'No! I shut my eyes to that.' You must not have your eyes on those Christians who are disappointing. You must remember that the very best Christians are only human, after all. It is a very dangerous thing to think of any man or woman as being infallible.

Perhaps Paul was very near to doing that once. You know, he owed a very great deal to Barnabas. It was Barnabas who went off to find Paul and brought him back. I think that when even some of the Apostles saw Saul of Tarsus come in through the door they drew back. They were all suspicious of this man and they drew back from him. But Barnabas took him by the hand and brought him in, saying: 'Don't be afraid, brothers. He has met our Lord Jesus. He is now a companion of Jesus Christ. He is one with us.' And so they received him.

It was Barnabas who brought Paul to Antioch, a church that was in great need at that time. They needed a very strong minister, and off went Barnabas, saying: 'I know the man.' He brought Saul to Antioch and introduced him to his life ministry.

Paul owed a lot to Barnabas. of whom it was said: *"He was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 11:24). Perhaps Paul put Barnabas on a high pedestal! And then came that terrible day when Barnabas fell off that pedestal. You know of the division between the Jewish and Gentile Christians and that the new order of Christ demanded that they should be all one, eating and drinking together. Peter had learnt that lesson at the house of Cornelius, but then that day came when this whole question of Jews and Gentiles eating and drinking at the same table arose. It was a very strong dispute and a very critical day. James and some of the others from Jerusalem went down - and Peter withdrew from the table. He was afraid of James and of those others from Jerusalem! He said: 'I must not let these senior brothers see me eating with Gentiles.' And Paul says: *"And the rest of the Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that even Barnabas was carried away with their dissimulation"* (Galatians 2:13). 'Just think of it - Barnabas! I never thought Barnabas would do a thing like that! I thought he was far above anything of that sort.' I am sure it was a very great blow to Paul's confidence in men, but if he had continued to keep his eyes on Barnabas no one knows what would have happened. He had to look off from Barnabas to Jesus.

Paul was always having to do that. In many ways and situations he had to take his eyes off and look unto Jesus. There is a real touch of Paul in this Letter to the Hebrews - "Looking off unto Jesus". Whoever actually wrote this Letter, the shadow of Paul is over it. His influence is everywhere. And certainly he was called upon to look off unto Jesus.

Now that is a very vital lesson for us to learn. We have to do that again and again in our Christian life. If we get our eyes upon anything but the Lord Jesus we just go to pieces. Have all respect for God's saints. I am not saying that you have to eye every servant of God with suspicion and be saying all the time: 'Well, of course, he is not perfect, you know.' Give honour to whom honour is due, but never build your faith upon any man, however good he may be.

And as for ourselves - well, I think perhaps we are more tempted to look at ourselves than anything else! This is one of our real Christian exercises. We have continually to remove our eyes from ourselves and everything to do with ourselves. There is nothing more discouraging than this self of ours, and nothing

more misleading. Our own judgments are all wrong, and so are our thoughts and ideas. They are not God's thoughts.

We must take our eyes off ourselves, but not look out into space and be vacant. *"Look off unto Jesus"*, and you know how that sentence is finished - *"Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith"*. Did you start this thing? Are you a Christian because you decided to be a Christian? Well, the Lord help you if that is so! No, He started this thing. Are you not glad that you can say: 'It was the Lord who found me. It was the Lord who put His hand on me.'? What He said is very true: *"Ye did not choose me, but I chose you"* (John 15:16). He was the author of our faith, and it says that He is the finisher - He will finish it.

When we get to heaven we will be full of wonder that we ever did get there! We will just look at one another and say: 'Well, we are here! It is a wonderful story! How we got here we do not know. We have thought a thousand times that we never would get here. We had given up all hope - but we are here!' And it will be because Jesus is the finisher. Believe that, dear friend! In the day of your despair and difficulty, look off unto Jesus. He has said: *"Where I am, there shall also my servant be"* (John 12:26). Though it takes a thousand miracles, He will work them to get us there. Do believe it! Take hold of it with both hands and trust Him to see you right through to glory, for that is one of the great things in this Letter: *"Bringing many sons unto glory"* (Hebrews 2:10). That means you and it means me.

Chapter Ten

THE SUPERIORITY OF THE NEW POSITION (CONTINUED)

In our last message we only made a beginning with this matter - and when we say 'we made a beginning' as we come almost to the end of the Conference, it is quite evident that we are going to have twelve basketfuls over when we have finished! We really have not sounded the full depth of this Letter to the Hebrews, and there is so much more that could extend us for a long time. Perhaps that is how it ought to be. We do not want to come to an end. We want to feel that the land is a land of far distances, and that the Lord can lead us into it, even without a Conference.

Well, we are now going on a little way further into that land - the land of the superiority of this dispensation over all past dispensations.

We are now at the supreme matter in the Letter, and, therefore, the supreme matter in the dispensation: that is, how much higher and fuller is that which has come in with the Lord Jesus than ever came in, in old time.

You will see, right at the beginning of the Letter, that this is the dispensation of God's Son, and the dispensation of Him in a new personal manifestation. We believe that He was present in the old dispensation and appeared to men in other forms, but this Letter says that He has come in a new form. So it begins with the manifested presence of God's Son. The first verse says that in the old dispensation men met God in "*divers portions and in divers manners*", and God met men and men met God in the prophets. Now the prophets were the servants of God, and men met God through His servants. In this dispensation they meet Him in His Son personally. There is a statement that "*God was in Christ*" (2 Corinthians 5:19), so the 'Son' implies the 'Father', and the 'Son of God' implies God. So we meet God in the Son and not now in servants.

This reaches absolute fullness in the matter of divine revelation. "*For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in him (the Son) should all fullness dwell*" (Colossians 1:19). There is nothing more to be added.

Do not take these as just words. Do understand that in every fragment there is this truth: In the dispensation in which you and I are now living God has come to us in all His fullness. There is no more to be added. In His Son we have the absolute fullness of God, and it is out of that fullness that He speaks to us in His Son. God has only one Son in that sense - His *only*-begotten Son, which means that there is no one to come after Him. Therefore, God's last word is in His Son. The Son brings both the fullness and the finality of God. It is that which gives the solemnity to this whole Letter. It says: 'If you fail to hear the voice of the Son there will never be another voice for you. God is never going to speak by another voice. God hath spoken in His Son, and He is never going to speak by any other means.' Hence this Letter contains this word of warning and of exhortation: 'Because this is the fullness and this is the end, be sure that you give heed.'

But it is not only God speaking in His Son. That is a way of speaking, but God's speaking is always His acting. In this dispensation God is active in and through His Son. To come into touch with the Lord Jesus is more than coming into touch with a teaching: it is coming into touch with a living, active Person. 'It is God with whom we have to do.' It is a glorious thing to come into touch with God in Christ - but it says here that "*it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (Hebrews 10:31). No, it is not a book, a teaching, a philosophy: it is a living, positive, powerful Person. It is no other than God in action.

If you have any doubt about that, just remember the Book of the Acts. It is called the Acts of the Apostles, but everyone knows that name is wrong, for only three or four Apostles are in view after the first chapter. The others are spoken of at the beginning and then you hear no more about them. It is not the book of the Acts of the Apostles, but the book of the Acts of God in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit - and it is indeed a book of *acts!* Whatever teaching there is comes out of the acts.

So, in Hebrews, the Son is introduced, presented, and then described. And it is a wonderful description! But we ask: 'Who is this Son?', for His name is not mentioned until we come to chapter two, verse nine. Until then it is the God without a name. Who is this Son? Well, it tells us for the first time in that verse: "*We behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus*". Perhaps it seems a very simple thing to say that Jesus is this Son, and this Son is Jesus, but possibly you do not recognize a certain thing about this: it is very rarely, after His resurrection and ascension, that He is called Jesus. After He has gone back to heaven He is usually 'the Lord Jesus', 'Jesus Christ our Lord', or 'our Lord Jesus Christ'. He is given His full title when He is enthroned in heaven, so if someone comes right back from that and just uses the title 'Jesus', you know that His humiliation and the purpose of that humiliation are being referred to. It has to do with His work on earth for our redemption.

So look at this verse again: "*We behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death*". Jesus was the name of the one who suffered death, tasted death for every man - and it was the Son of God who did that. He it was who as Jesus tasted death for every man, and that is the Son who is introduced here. He is identified by His name - Jesus... "*Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for it is he that shall save his people from their sins*" (Matthew 1:21).

Then the next thing is the position and function of the Son. In the second verse of the first chapter of this Letter you have this: "*(God) hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds*". This Son, known to us as Jesus, is by God's appointment the *heir of all things*. All things are to come to Him by right of God's appointment.

Please do not be weary with me. This is one of the first things said about the dispensation in which you and I live. It does not look very much like it now, for "*we see not yet all things subjected to him*" (Hebrews 2:8), but it says here emphatically that He is the "heir of all things", so everything *has* to come to Him in the end. God is going "*to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth*" (Ephesians 1:10).

If we were speaking in human language we would put it like this: there was somewhere in the past eternity an occasion when the Godhead had a conference, to discuss the future of everything that was going to be made. There the Father said: 'I make My Son the heir of all things. I appoint Him My heir, and I decree that all things shall in the end come into His possession.'

Now we are dealing with the all-mighty and eternal God, and when He decides a thing like that *nothing* can prevent it. "*Whom he appointed heir of all things*" - but He did not leave it there. He turned to the Son (of course, this is only our way of speaking) and said: 'Now I am going to use You as the agent in making all things' - "*through whom also he made the worlds*". This Son, whom we know as our Saviour and Lord, was God's agent in the creation of the worlds.

Then it says a third thing, and this is something so difficult to understand: This Son upholds *"all things by the word of his power"* (Hebrews 1:3). Things do not collapse because He is "upholding all things by the word of his power". And things will not collapse until He says they should do so.

If that is true then it is something very wonderful for us. We are hearing so much about the disintegration of the universe and the blowing to pieces of this world. A lot of people are getting very frightened about this. If what is here is true, the universe and the world can never go to pieces until Jesus says so! Men may get very near to doing it, and then it recedes. It just does not happen. It has been like that several times, but the word of His power has stopped it, and until He says 'Now - go!' it will not go. He upholds *"all things by the word of his power"*.

May we go as far as to say that this should be of personal comfort to us? Sometimes it seems that our own little world is going to pieces, and that we have come to the end. Well, it applies there. He will hold things together until He wants them to go to pieces.

This is the Son identified and described.

And then we move on into the larger body of the Letter: the Son's greatness by comparison with other great things and people. In verse four of the first chapter it says: *"Having become by so much better than the angels"*. The angels are the next highest to God and the Son. Oh, there is so much said about angels in the Bible! Peter says that they are great in might and power (2 Peter 2:11). In the book of the Judges an angel is said to have had a very striking appearance, and the person who saw him was afraid she was going to die. She said: *"A man of God came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance of the angel of God, very terrible"* (Judges 13:6).

The angels have a very vast knowledge. Jesus said: *"Of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven"* (Matthew 24:36). If anyone ought to know, the angels should, for their knowledge is so full and so great, but even the angels do not know this. The angels have a vast knowledge.

There is an overwhelming number of angels: *"The number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands"* (Revelation 5:11). They are a vast number.

The angels are very near to the throne of God, and have access to His Presence. That comes out in one of the most beautiful things that Jesus said about little children - *"See that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven"* (Matthew 18:10). Of course, we do not understand that, for it is something very mysterious. But Jesus says that the angels have access to the throne of God, and are very near to God Himself. There is only One who is nearer.

The work of the angels is very varied. Look again at this Letter to the Hebrews, because we are keeping very close to it: *"But of which of the angels hath he said at any time, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to do service for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation?"* (Hebrews 1:13-14). And what a lot of work they have to do! Think of all the heirs of salvation, all over the world, in every generation - and this says that the angels have to look after them and their interests! *"To do service for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation."* Of course, we do not see them, but if the Bible is true the angels are there and are

very busy people. They have very much and very valued service. All the various needs of these heirs of salvation are their concern.

So the angels are a very high order - but in this Letter the Lord is saying: 'The Son is far greater than the angels.' It says here, in verse four of the first chapter: *"Having become by so much better than the angels, as he hath inherited a more excellent name than they."*

If you read all there is about angels in the Bible you will have a very wonderful revelation - and then you come to this fragment about the Son, who is Jesus, "having become by so much better than the angels". That is where the superiority begins.

We have come into the dispensation of that: the superiority of Jesus to all the angels. Perhaps we have not made enough of the ministry of the angels, but they are evidently very busy for us. Possibly we have been saved from many things because they were very watchful.

We begin with the angels - and then we go on with Moses. You will notice what it says in chapter three: *"Wherefore, holy brethren, companions of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, even Jesus: who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also was Moses in all his house. For he hath been counted worthy of more glory than Moses" - (Get hold of that phrase - more honour than Moses!) - "For every house is builded by some one; but he that built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all God's house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were afterward to be spoken; but Christ as a son over God's house"* (Hebrews 3:1-6 - R.V. margin). The writer is saying: 'We are not going to take anything away from Moses. We give him honour as a great servant of God, but Christ is greater. The Son is greater than Moses.'

Abraham was the father of the nation, but Moses was its builder and constitutor. What a large place Moses had in history! He not only had a very large place in Israel, but he has had a large place in the world. Many of the best legal systems are based upon his economy. Because through Moses it was said "Thou shalt not steal" we have all the police forces in the world, and also because he said "Thou shalt not kill". It would be good if we had a few more forces in relation to some other things that Moses said! But the point is: Moses has come to have a very large place in history. The Jews in Christ's day always appealed to Moses as the final authority in anything. Their charge against Jesus was that He made Himself greater than Moses. They believed, therefore, that there was no one greater than Moses: and the writer of this Letter to the Hebrews says, with great boldness, 'There *is* One greater than Moses. Give Moses all the honour due to him, but the Son is greater than he.'

Then the writer goes on to speak of Aaron, who was the first high priest and thus the representative of the whole priestly system. He was over all the other priests and Levites, over all the sacrifices and over the whole sanctuary. On the Day of Atonement he went alone into the place of the Most Holy. No one but Aaron was allowed then to go into the Holy of holies - and the writer here is saying that the Son is greater than Aaron, far greater. And he tells us why: Aaron died. And anyone who dies can never make anything perfect. When he dies he has to leave something unfinished. So the writer is saying: 'Aaron died. Therefore his work was not perfect. Death cut across it. It was never finished. There had to be a succession of high priests to carry on the work.' There were many more priests and many more sacrifices - all being added to try and make this thing perfect, and chapter nine of this Letter says that they never did make anything perfect.

There were many high priests, millions of sacrifices and *rivers* of blood, yet never bringing anything to perfection.

And then the Son came - one High Priest for ever, who *"ever liveth"* (Hebrews 7:2, 5). Therefore His work will never be cut short. *"Thou art a priest forever"* (Hebrews 7:17) - and there, in that wonderful paragraph, Melchizedek comes in, and everyone is wondering who he was. Who was Melchizedek? You can go to the Bible and you will never find the answer, and you certainly will not find it outside the Bible. This mysterious man came in, as it were, from nowhere, and where he went to no one knows. He has not beginning nor end, so far as the record is concerned, and that is taken up as illustrating the Lord Jesus as the High Priest - neither beginning of life nor end of days. He is the eternal High Priest. This High Priest, this greater than Aaron, *"ever liveth (lives forever) to make intercession"*.

Then He offered one sacrifice forever. The high priests had used millions of sacrifices but had never made anything perfect. He, with only one sacrifice, did it. It is done forever, and He was the sacrifice as well as the priest. As priest He offered Himself without blemish unto God.

If we go on like this you will really begin to believe that there is something better here - better than Moses and better than Aaron. Do you know why God put these two men together? They were brothers, but they were very different. Yet they had to live together and work together? Why was that, and what was the difference? Moses was the governor, representing government and authority. What came through him was 'Thou shalt and thou shalt not'. Moses governed and exercised authority in Israel. But God is not only like that. Aaron was the man of love and of sympathy. Priesthood means just that - love and sympathy: love for the poor sinner, for the poor sinning world, and sympathy with men. God puts these two things together. It would not do to have all of one. It would never do to have only an autocrat. You must unite with the governor, the authority, a heart of compassion. If you have those two things put together you have a very good Israel.

Here in this letter it is saying that Jesus, the Son, is better than Moses and Aaron. On the one side He can say: *"All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth"* (Matthew 28:18). The Father said: *"Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet"* (Hebrews 1:13).

There are two wonderful pictures in this Letter. The one is of Jesus *"crowned with glory and honour"*, having *"sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high"* waiting, until His enemies are made 'the footstool of His feet', with all authority in His Power. He is in the place of government. And alongside of that is this other beautiful picture: *"For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities"* (Hebrews 4:15).... *"He ever liveth to make intercession for us."* Not only authority and government, but love and sympathy - and so much greater than Moses and Aaron. His authority is a greater authority than that of Moses, and His government is a greater one than ever Moses exercised, but His love and sympathy are far greater than that of Aaron.

I am afraid that this is where we have to stop, though I have not finished with the superiority of the Son. We have not touched upon His work - the work of making purification for sin, but you can read it. Perhaps this is just like a window opened into heaven. If you get the right window you can see quite a lot. You can see great things and you can see far things. But the best that I can hope is that this has just opened a window, and that as you look through it you are seeing one thing - how superior is Jesus Christ to all else, and how superior is the

dispensation into which we have come, and how superior are all the resources at our disposal to all that ever was before!

Chapter Eleven

THE COMPANIONS AS THE BRIDE OF THE LORD

(Earlier we said that we should be dealing with the Bride more fully later. We come now to a consideration of this matter.)

"For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name: and the Holy One of Israel is thy redeemer" (Isaiah 54:5).

"For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee" (Isaiah 62:5).

"Return, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am a husband unto you" (Jeremiah 3:14).

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 31:31-32).

"Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the Lord which he loveth, and hath married the daughter of a strange god" (Malachi 2:11).

That is how the Old Testament finishes. Now we will see how the New Testament finishes.

"Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory unto him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready" (Revelation 19:7).

"And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2).

Revelation 21:9-22:21

[We have been seeing what God is doing particularly in the dispensation in which we live. He is constituting a new, heavenly, spiritual Israel. We have seen the failure of the old Israel and the necessity for God to set it aside, but, at the same time, the bringing in of His new heavenly Israel. This is what is called the 'heavenly calling', and we are told that we are called to be 'companions of the heavenly calling', and 'companions of Christ in the heavenly calling'.

We have seen how the New Testament takes over the ideas of the Old Testament and translates them into spiritual meaning. The tides of the old Israel are redeemed and brought over to the new, because, although God may have to give up an instrument that He raises up, He never gives up His thought. He will never give up His intention, and if He cannot realize His purpose in one instrument, He will do so in another.

We have seen that the old Israel was called 'God's family', the 'Lord's house', 'God's heir for His inheritance', 'God's flock' - they were God's sheep - and all these titles are taken up and brought into the New Testament Church. The new heavenly Israel is God's family, God's children, God's house - *"Whose house are*

we" (Hebrews 3:6) - "*Heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ*" (Romans 8:17), God's flock - "*I am the good shepherd*" (John 10:11).]

Well, now we come to a little fuller consideration of the Bride.

Israel, as we have seen from those various Scriptures, was called God's bride. It says that He was a husband to Israel. You will notice that although Israel was a man literally, it is very often spoken of in the feminine. It is not 'he' but 'she', and it was 'she' who failed God as a wife. He purchased Israel with precious blood to be His bride. We have seen that the Passover was a marriage covenant, and Jeremiah, in chapter 31, says that when God brought Israel out of Egypt, He took her by the hand and became a husband to her. The blood of the Passover lamb was the blood of a covenant of marriage between the Lord and Israel. He betrothed Israel unto Himself that night, and thus she was purchased with His blood.

Very little need be said to those who know the Old Testament about God's love for Israel. It is the most amazing thing in history. When you think of what Israel was, and read the history of those people from their own side, it is the most wonderful thing to hear the Lord saying: "*I have loved thee with an everlasting love*" (Jeremiah 31:3). God has never given up that love - it is still an everlasting love, but there is a sob in the heart of God. It is a disappointed love.

However, the Old Testament is a wonderful revelation of God's love for Israel: the love of the whole heart of God for a bride. How that love was expressed! See the wonderful protection that the Lord provided for Israel! He protected her all the way along. He provided food and raiment and it says that He led her safely. The tender, providing, protecting love of God is everywhere in the Old Testament.

What was God's thought and intention in betrothing Israel unto Himself? It was that she might be to His pleasure. The Lord took pleasure in Israel, had brought her into being for His own pleasure, to bring satisfaction to His own heart.

Of course, it is a deep mystery why the all-sufficient God should want something for His pleasure. He who possessed all things and really had need of nothing is nevertheless revealed as One who created a people for His pleasure. You see, He created all things for His pleasure. He created the world for His pleasure. He created all that is good in the world for His pleasure. He created man for His pleasure. And all that went away from Him. He was disappointed in it all, so He said: 'I will begin again', and He raised up Israel. His idea was that Israel would satisfy Him where everything else had disappointed Him. The bride was for the Bridegroom's pleasure.

Then, again, Israel was raised up to be the self-revelation of the Lord. God intended to reveal Himself to the whole universe through Israel, to show what kind of a husband He is. Of course, we cannot bring this down to everyday life now, but sometimes you are able to see by the wife herself what kind of husband she has. As you look at her, see how she is provided for and cared for, you are able to say: 'She must have a wonderful husband!' Well, that is what a wife is for!

The divine thought is just that. God wanted to reveal to this whole universe what a wonderful God He is in terms of a husband to Israel. Israel has been raised up, in New Testament language, to "*show forth the excellencies of him who called (her) out of darkness into his marvellous light*" (1 Peter 2:9).

Then Israel was brought into this relationship of the wife of the Lord for the purpose of His increase, His expansion. So to speak, many others outside Israel

were to be born unto the Lord through Israel. His family was to expand by means of Israel: *"Nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising"* (Isaiah 60:3). Nations were to be born unto the Lord, and the bride was to be for the Lord's own expansion. These were the things that the prophets said.

Then, last of all - mystery of mysteries! - it was a matter of companionship. None of us can understand why the Lord wanted a companion. It is possible to be a wife and not be a companion. Many a wife is not a real companion to her husband. He does not find her a companion. She is a lot of things, but just that one thing is lacking - real companionship. Perhaps that is the reason for the tragedy of so many broken marriages today. (Of course, it works the other way as well, but companionship is the highest thought in this relationship.) The Lord raised up Israel to be His companion.

It is easy to see how Israel faded in all these matters. The time came when the Lord could no longer take pleasure in her, when she no longer revealed to the world what kind of God He is but turned to other gods, and refused to fulfil the world mission for which she had been brought into union with God. All this resulted in God losing His companion, and the Old Testament closes on that painful note. A horrible thing has happened in Israel. She has left the Lord, her Husband, and gone after 'other lovers'.

So, to the Lord, Israel died. As a nation she is dead to the Lord, "dead while she liveth". The Lord could never marry another while she was alive; that was contrary to His own law. She died, so He could take another wife. You will remember Paul's own words about this: that we are married to the Lord. When this former bride died, God brought in another, a new bride.

The New Testament has a lot to say, as you know, about this new bride. The Lord Jesus in the Gospels calls Himself the Bridegroom. You will remember the parable of the virgins, when the cry went forth: *"Behold, the bridegroom!"* (Matthew 25:6). Then we have read these passages in the Book of Revelation about the bride, the Lamb's wife. Some of you are recalling Paul's words in his Letter to the Ephesians: "Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for *her*, that he might sanctify her... that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Ephesians 5:25, 27), and that follows this: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church...".

Well, I think the fact is established, but we have to bring back all those features of this relationship. Why are we joined to the Lord? Why are we what are called Christians? For if we are New Testament Christians we are joined to the Lord in a covenant of marriage. It is *"the Church of God, which he purchased with his own Blood"* (Acts 20:28).

How many of you go to the Lord's Table at any time? It goes by different names - the Lord's Table, the Lord's Supper, the Holy Communion, and so on. It does not matter so much what you call it, but what you mean by it. Do you know that every time you go to the Lord's Table, His meaning in that is that you are putting your hand to the covenant again and are saying: 'I stand by my marriage relationship to the Lord. This loaf means that I am one flesh with Christ.' We are one body in Him, and His very Body is represented by that loaf. The marriage ordinance of God at the beginning was: *"They shall be one flesh"* (Genesis 2:24). Jesus said: *"This (loaf) is my body"* (Matthew 26:2, 6). When we take the loaf we are *meant* to be saying: 'I am one body with Christ.' It is the marriage relationship.

When we take the cup, symbolic of His Blood, we say two things: 'I share one life with Him. His life is my life, and that was made by a covenant in His Blood.' That is the deep meaning of the Table of the Lord. Is that what we mean every time we go to it? It is the bride saying: 'I stand by the covenant, I am one with my Lord.'

We often sing: "Jesus, my Shepherd, *Husband*, Friend", and that is the nature of our union with Him. That is really what it means to be a Christian. May our Christianity be redeemed from anything less than that!

But when the relationship has been established in His Blood, then its purpose begins. We are His for His Pleasure and not our own. He has made us for His pleasure: "*Working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight*" (Hebrews 13:21) ... "*To the end that we should be unto the praise of his glory*" (Ephesians 1:12) ... "*that ye may show forth the excellencies of him*" (1 Peter 2:9).

This compasses the Christian life. This is why He has drawn us with the bands of love and the reason for our union with Christ: that we should be unto His pleasure, that He may take pleasure in us. The time is coming when He will look at His bride and then He will say 'She is a glorious bride'. He has brought us to Himself for that very purpose: to reveal Himself by means of us.

Perhaps our heads and our hearts are going down now. What a poor revelation we are of our Lord! We are making a terrible mess of this business of revealing Christ, but He is taking great pains with us. Truly it is not easy, and He does not make it so. It seems that so often He puts us into difficult positions in order that we may show forth His glory.

Paul was given "*a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me*" (2 Corinthians 12:7). Do you know what it is to have a thorn in the flesh and a messenger of Satan always buffeting you? Paul says that he went to the Lord three times about this. I do not know whether he meant literally three times, but I think he meant: 'I went to the Lord again, and again, and *again!* I asked the Lord to remove this thorn and to destroy this messenger of Satan, but He said unto me: "*My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weakness*" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

That is strange sovereignty and providence of God! It seems that He sometimes puts difficulties into our lives, and makes it hard for us, and then, in the grace that He shows, we magnify Him. No one knows what Paul's 'thorn' was. A lot of people have had a guess at it, and some think they know what it was, but I do not think anyone really does know. It was evidently something that people could see, and they would say: 'My word, Paul has a hard time with that. I am very glad the Lord has not called me to go that way! That poor man does not know what suffering means, but how marvellous is the grace of God in him! Look at his victorious spirit! My, the grace of God in that man is a wonderful thing!' And Paul says: "*And they glorified God in me*" (Galatians 1:24). Yes, for the self-revelation of the Lord the Church is a suffering Church. This wife of the Lord is a suffering wife, but the revelation of His grace is a wonderful thing.

Then what about His increase through the Church? We have already said much about this. The Lord, through His Church, wants to bring many, many into the Kingdom. Paul said: "*The gospel... which was preached in all creation under heaven*" (Colossians 1:23), and Peter said: "*The Lord... not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9). The Lord would have *all* men saved, and He has never told His Church to go and pick out one here and one there and say: 'You are the elect. Come out and leave the

others.' No, He said: 'Preach the Gospel in all the nations'. Leave the rest with Him!

That is the world mission of the new Israel. But do not just view it in a general way. Get down to it tomorrow morning and make this your personal business: to see if by any means you may be able to bring souls into the Kingdom.

When we have said all that, we come to this supreme thing: He has joined us to Himself to be His companions. That has been our note right through. *"We are become companions of Christ" ... "Wherefore, holy brethren, companions of a heavenly calling."*

I confess that I do not understand this: that the Lord should want us as His friends, not just officially related to Him, but related to Him as friends. To be a friend of the Lord! I can only say to you: Let us take that word and continually ask ourselves 'How would a friend act in this matter? How would a friend decide? I am called to be the Lord's friend. I must not fail Him in friendship. I must not let Him down. He counts upon me to be His friend.' That is the highest and most sacred part of the whole relationship.

I despair of ever getting over to you what I see in this matter! After all this time, I have not yet touched upon the new Jerusalem! It is a very significant thing that the new Jerusalem is called 'a bride'. The angel said to John: *"Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb"*, and John might have said: 'Now, let us go and see this wonderful woman.' ... *"And (he) showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God."* The bride is the city, and the city is the bride. And then you have to read the whole description of the city in Revelation 21 and 22 in order to know what the bride is going to be like. See all the precious stones! This is the preciousness of the Lord Jesus in manifold expression. Peter said: *"For you therefore which believe is the preciousness"* (1 Peter 2:7). There are *"all manner of precious stones."* It is what Jesus is in His real character revealed in the bride, the city.

Stop thinking about a literal city. This is all a symbolic representation of Christ's bride. All these glories of the city are only the glories of Christ expressed at last in His bride. *"He showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: her light was like unto a stone most precious."* It was shining through all these gems.

All this is what was meant by the Apostle when he said: *"That he might present the church to himself a glorious church" ... "a glorious church"*. The city is the revelation of His manifold glories, and the city is the bride.

Now I have only to close with this final word. These are all very beautiful and wonderful ideas. They are glorious thoughts, but it is just unto this that the Lord has called us. This is the heavenly calling. It is unto this that He wants us to be companions: 'Companions of a heavenly calling' because 'Companions of Christ'.

One hesitates to strike a note that might sound a bit depressing, but be reminded that this great Letter to the Hebrews has many 'ifs' in it. *"Whose house are we, if we hold fast our boldness"* (Hebrews 3:6) ... *"We are become companions of Christ if we hold fast"*. This Letter is just full of warnings and strong exhortations, and I do not believe that it was written to non-Christians. All the evidences in it are that it was written to *true* Christians. Therefore, it was saying to them: 'Don't miss your inheritance. Don't fail of your heavenly calling. Do not fail to be true companions of Christ. Do not accept anything less than God's best and His highest.' You can be Christians having much less than God intended. You notice

that when the description of the city has been given, it says: *"Blessed are they... that may have the right to come in"* (Revelation 22:14). There are nations that will not get in. They will walk in the light thereof, but will not be inside. Make sure that you are of this bride. Do not fail the Lord as Israel failed Him.

"Let us... press on to full growth" (Hebrews 6:1 - R.V. margin).