



# Bible Student's Notebook™

## The Herald of His Grace

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume VII  
Issue 165

# Where We Fit In

Time Past – But Now

Jew – Gentile

Circumcision – Uncircumcision

by – Richard Jordan

**T**he Lord Jesus Christ is the central figure of the Christian faith. *He* is our Savior. *He* is our life, our peace, our hope – the One who fulfills our deepest spiritual needs and in Whom we find our greatest joys.

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

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

*“Now I say that **Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision** for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers”* (Romans 15:8).

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

Listening to most of the current preaching and teaching on our Lord’s earthly ministry, one would conclude that it was primarily to the Gentiles. But

how wrong this would be! For far too long passages like the following have simply been ignored by Bible teachers who claim a part in Christ’s earthly ministry:

*“These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, **Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the House of Israel**”* (Matthew 10:5-6).

*“... **I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the House of Israel**”* (Matthew 15:24).

*“Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: **for salvation is of the Jews**”* (John 4:22).

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

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# Our Mailbag

Your e-mails and web site encourage me every day. – *SC*

I very much enjoyed your latest *BSN* article about the events that led you to the place you are now spiritually. I would welcome more of this. I love all of the articles you share but the ones that are written by you where you share your heart are the sweetest. Thank you brother! – *IL*

This was a great issue [*BSN* #162 – *The Steps I Have Taken*] ... The journey I have taken with you and your family has been a great one for the 22 years I have had the blessing of taking it. I have countless memories of my time with you all, not a single one being one of regret. Being able to spend my childhood in the fellowship of Bible students like you, Andy and Rick has given me the chance to learn from your studies, and while this might make some “pastors” in the religious system unhappy; I couldn’t be happier about it. – *PA*

*Nothing Will be Lost* [*BSN* #161] rings true in my heart. – *KS*

I appreciate your stand and your family standing with you in these days of trials. You are touching many folks out in the church world. I pray for you and your family ... The Holy Spirit seems to be leading me to people’s homes instead of a building. I know it is [tough] for some to let go of their traditions, and it is like I got to convince them they seem so blind to the truth. Did you find it difficult when you first left the church building? Thanks for the daily emails they mean so much to me. – *SC*

I wanted to thank you for *BSN* #161. *Nothing will be Lost* was one of the most edifying studies I have read in a very long time. It brings real joy to my heart when I see someone stand for the truth of Christ’s total victory over sin. We do not have a weak Savior who only hopes to save a few; rather we have a Savior who can save to the uttermost! I count it an honor to know you, your family and many of those who labor with you. If I can ever be of any assistance to your ministry please let me know. – *NY*

I have been studying the subject of universal reconciliation ... I had never thought about Paul not mentioning hell! ... I am not an emotional person ... but when I read (and for the first time discerned) what Christ said to Thomas (John 20:29), tears came to my eyes. I had somehow thought that Thomas was to be condemned for wanting visible proof, but Christ did not condemn him! ... I am excited about the study that is before me. – *PA*

You are a great encouragement for me here in South Carolina. I do appreciate you and your family for standing up for the truth ... I thank God He has shown me the truth by your teaching and making it reachable to others. I think we have to take a stand for truth and it has to begin anew like our former Christians, like Brother Paul ... I know it is tough and my heart goes out to all who blaze this old new path. But I say again, thank God for you and your ministry. – *SC*

## ***Bible Student’s Notebook***<sup>™</sup>

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This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God’s abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7)
- the affirmation of God’s purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
- the “preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began” (Romans 16:25)
- true freedom and liberty apart from the law (Galatians 5:1)
- the organic nature of the church, the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12)
- the distinct ministry of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13)
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15)
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13).
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with ...
  - total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14)
  - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6)
  - adult sonship position (Galatians 4)

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any “church,” “denomination,” “movement,” “organization,” “mission,” “creed,” “meeting,” “school,” “conference” or “fellowship.”

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Remember that it is our responsibility as husbands and fathers to take the truths we learn from God’s Word, the truths that we hold dear, and impart them to our families.

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## THE GREAT DIVIDE

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

*"Wherefore remember, that **ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision in the flesh made by hands.**"*

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

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

This was nothing new or recent in Paul's day for God Himself had introduced circumcision as the sign of His covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17. He had instructed Abraham:

*"This is My covenant, which ye shall keep, between Me and you and thy seed after thee; **every man child among you shall be circumcised.** And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and **it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt Me and you** ... He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, **must needs be circumcised: and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken My***

**covenant"** (Genesis 17:10, 11, 13, 14).

That God Himself had made this division between Israel and the Gentiles is further borne out by Ephesians 2:12. In "Time Past" the Gentiles were genuinely "washed up," as it were, being

*"Without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world."*

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

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

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

Galatians 6:15 will help here:

*"For in Christ Jesus **neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.**"*

This is an amazing declaration! God says through Paul that now circumcision means nothing to Him – it now has no spiritual value at all! The special status once accorded the nation Israel has been set aside<sup>1</sup> and God has raised up the Apostle Paul to introduce a new program called "the mystery" (Ephesians 3:1-9).

Thus now in "the dispensation of grace" the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile has been broken down, and Paul declares that there is now,

1. Albeit temporarily. See Romans 11:25-29.

“... No difference between the Jew and the Greek for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him” (Romans 10:12).

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

### WHAT COULD A GENTILE DO?

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

*“I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and **in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed**”* (Genesis 12:3).

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

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

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

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

Thus for a Gentile who recognized the God of Abraham as the one true God and the nation Israel as His people, one alternative was to be circumcised and become a part of that favored

nation. In fact, it is clear from Exodus 12:48 that a proselyte held the same status as “one that is born in the land.” He thus was now on the right side of the middle wall of partition and had claim on all of Israel’s covenants and promises.

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

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

Although many Jewish widows were in dire straits due to the judgment of God upon Israel’s sin it was a Gentile widow in Zarephath who was sustained by Elijah’s ministry. Why?

Read the record:

*“So he [Elijah] arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the **Lord thy God liveth**, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. And Elijah said unto her, Fear not: go and do as thou has said: but **make me** thereof a little cake **first**, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son ... And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah ...”* (I Kings 17:10-13, 15).

Here was a humble Gentile woman who recognized that Israel was special, that they had the true God and she didn’t. She put Israel’s prophet – God’s

spokesman – “first” and obeyed “the Lord God of Israel” when He spoke. Hence even while most in Israel were refusing God’s Word through Elijah, the blessing was hers.

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

*“And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that **there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel:** now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant ... And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be **given to thy servant two mules’ burned of earth? For thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord** (II Kings 5:15, 17).*

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

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

### **HOW CHRIST DEALT WITH THE GENTILES**

Have you ever really searched the Scriptures to see exactly how many Gentiles Christ dealt with while He was here on earth? The answer will be shocking to some, surprising to most. In actual fact, Christ dealt with only two Gentiles as far as the written Word is concerned. One man, one

woman – only these two. Both encounters are very instructive.

In Luke 7:1-10 we have the record of a Roman centurion who needed help for a sick servant whom he loved very much. But this was no ordinary Gentile! By no means.

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

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

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

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

*“... He answered and said, **I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the House of Israel.** Then came she and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me. But He ►*

answered and said, **It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to the dogs**" (Matthew 15:24-26).

The woman's response is touching:

**"And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table"** (Matthew 15:27).

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

Isn't it fascinating that we don't hear much of these obvious details when people preach through the Gospels today?! Our Lord's earthly ministry was conducted under the constraints of "Time Past" when the middle wall of partition was standing and God's salvation and blessing flowed first to Israel and only then through that favored nation to the nations who were willing to take their place in subjection to her.

So we see the two Gentiles Christ dealt with during His earthly ministry.<sup>2</sup> They were the only ones He healed – the people healed in passages like Matthew 4:23; 8:16; 9:35, etc. were all Israelites. And the two Gentiles He did deal with had clearly placed themselves in alliance with Israel and thus were blessed through recognizing the program then in effect.

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

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2. "What about the Greeks who came seeking Jesus?" some will ask. See for yourself from the account in John 12:20-22 that contrary to popular opinion there is no record of Christ ever granting the interview!

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

*"And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, **beginning at Jerusalem**"* (Luke 24:47).

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

*"Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, **preaching the Word to none but the Jews only.**"*

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

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

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

Surely, however, Cornelius was no proselyte. True. But we have simply to read Acts 10:1-2 to see that he, as the centurion of Luke 7, feared Israel's God

and loved His people. He, too, was in the place of blessing, having so blessed Israel. Hence Peter is sent to him with the “Words of salvation.”

## WHERE DO WE FIT IN?

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

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

Paul describes it in Ephesians 3 this way:

*“For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery”* (Ephesians 3:1-3).

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

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

*“I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but **rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how***

*much more their fullness? **For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office**”* (Romans 11:11-13).

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

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

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

***“Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus; Who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity”*** (I Timothy 2:4-7).

Only as we thus “*rightly divide the word of truth*” can we be sure that we have a legitimate part in the program of God. Only then can we begin to fully comprehend what God has so richly given us in Christ.

*The Grace Journal*

# *You Say - God Says*

## YOU SAY

## GOD SAYS

## BIBLE VERSES

It's impossible

I'm too tired

Nobody really loves me

I can't go on

I can't figure things out

I can't do it

I'm not able

It's not worth it

I can't forgive myself

I can't manage

I'm afraid

I'm worried and  
frustrated

I'm not smart enough

I feel all alone

All things are possible

I will give you rest

I love you

My grace is sufficient

I will direct your steps

You can do all things

I am able

It will be worth it

I forgave you

I will supply your need

I have not given you a  
spirit of fear

Cast all your cares on  
Me

I give you wisdom

I will never leave you  
nor forsake you

Luke 18:27

Matthew 11:28-30

Romans 5:8

II Corinthians 12:9

Proverbs 3:5-6

Philippians 4:13

II Corinthians 9:8

Roman 8:28

Colossians 2:13

Philippians 4:19

II Timothy 1:7

I Peter 5:7

I Corinthians 1:30

Hebrews 13:5

# *The Three-Dimensional Love of God*

## **God Loves Us**

*"God, Who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us" (Ephesians 2:4).*

## **We Love God**

*"We love Him, because He first loved us" (I John 4:19).*

## **We Love Each Other**

*"Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (I John 4:11).*