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AUSTRALIAN

# INTER-VARSITY PAPERS

Number 18. ee

"JEW AND GREEK UNITY  
AND DIVISION IN THE  
EARLY CHURCH"

Dr. Robinson.

IVF Annual Lecture, 1960

This series of papers has been written by or presented to various branches of the IVF Graduates Fellowship of Australia. They are intended to be preliminary studies designed to encourage further study and discussion to the end that the Gospel of Christ may be proclaimed more extensively and Christians built up in their knowledge of their God.

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AUSTRALIAN

INTER-UNIVERSITY

PAPER

NUMBER EIGHTEEN

"JEW AND GREEK: UNITY AND DIVISION IN THE EARLY CHURCH"

(Dr. Robinson)

An IVFF Annual Lecture

Inter-University Fellowship,  
316 Pitt Street,  
Sydney, N.S.W.

1961



## WORDWORD

The IV<sup>th</sup> Annual Lecture was established by a recommendation of the General Committee in June, 1955. Behind this action are the recognition that in the midst of undergraduate evangelism, the preparation of papers "of the highest academic standard" of excellence in evangelical scholarship ought to be encouraged and maintained.

The lectures are directed to the Christian graduate who approaches the subject chosen by the Lecturer with any of the presuppositions of the Lecturer. The subject chosen on this occasion is both relevant to one that is currently engaging the studies of the Lecturer. Its subject matter and its presentation will stimulate the reader along important paths of thinking in relation to the nature and function of the apostolic churches.

Rev. D. Robinson read his paper to a large audience of graduates, undergraduates and friends in St. Paul's Church, Broadway, Sydney on Tuesday 11th April, 1961.

## THE OLD GREEK: UNITY AND DIVISION IN THE EARLY CHURCH.

No historical fact of the first century is better known than the difference that existed between Jew and Gentile. No claim of the New Testament is better known than the claim that this difference was done away "in Christ". The clearest statement of this claim is in the Epistle to the Colossians which speaks of "the new mankind, which is being made afresh in the image of its creator, and in which there can be no question of Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman: but Christ is all that matters" (3:10).

This new humanity, in which all national and cultural differences are non-existent, is also described as the body of the risen and glorified Christ. As the New Testament looks at reality, this body of Christ is not in the final analysis an historical body at all, much less a mere continuation, on the historical level, of a national body like old Israel. For it does not belong to the old created order, but to the "new Creation" (Gal. 6:15) which was inaugurated by Christ's resurrection from the dead. The resurrection was the entrance of the human body and flesh of Christ into the realm of eternal spirit (Rom. 1:4, 1 Tim. 3:16, 1 Peter 3:18), and it follows that the new creation, of which He is the first fruits, belongs also to this realm. It is a spiritual reality. This does not, of course, mean that it is unreal. On the contrary, it belongs to the world of ultimate reality, for God Himself is spirit. But, in terms of Paul's description of the universe, the church (which is the name he gives to the new mankind in Ephesians and Colossians) belongs to that region called "the heavenly places" (ta epourania), where also Christ is enthroned at God's right hand in eternal power and glory (Eph. 1:20-23). To say that the church's real existence is in "the heavenly places" is not to say that it has no connection with our present life or our present churches. Just as Christ Himself, who is at God's right hand, can dwell in our hearts by faith, so the new mankind, which is where Christ is, can be intimately connected with bodies of men on earth. A church on earth may not appear to have this character of the new mankind, or to be the body of Christ, but may appear uneven or even divided in the eyes of men; just as an individual believer may not appear to his neighbour to have Christ in his heart, because of his imperfections and sins which are so obvious. Nevertheless, the true character of a local church, like the true character of an individual Christian, may well be that character which Christ from His throne imparts to it, rather than what it appears to be in the eyes of men. To the divided and sinful church at Corinth Paul wrote: "ye are the body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:27).

This sort of paradox confronts us at every turn in the New Testament, and not least in the life and growth of the churches. The new mankind, the church in the heavenly places, knows no distinction of Jew or Gentile, and it entirely transcends the constitution and the history of old Israel. Yet, on the other hand, the writers of the New Testament are preoccupied with the problem of Jewish-Gentile differences within the Christian churches, and are forever drawing attention to the connections between Christian believers and old Israel.

It is the special purpose of this lecture to examine in some detail this paradox with the relation between believing Jews and Gentiles in the writings of the New Testament, particularly those of St Paul and St Luke. How do the inspired writers account for the distinctions between Jewish and Gentile Christians, which, despite their oneness in Christ, divided them, in some respects, into distinct denominations?

### "ISRAEL AND THE GENTILES."

It may be as well to set out at once an outline of the general position



adopted in this lecture in regard to Israel and the Gentiles in the saving purposes of God. Modern evangelical Christians tend to adopt one or other of two opposite positions, both of which, in my opinion, are mistaken, though not equally mistaken. On the one hand there is the position of dispensationalism, as represented by the Scofield Bible for instance, (that is, by the 'Scofield' part of the Scofield Bible) which accords little or no significance to the presence of believing Jews in the New Testament churches and relegates all the Old Testament promises about the restoration of Israel to a period which is still future in 1961. On the other hand is the more usual view which regards all Christians as constituting the new Israel in this present age, and which therefore refers the promises made concerning Israel in the Old Testament to the Christian church. In my judgement, neither of these views represents the position of St Paul and the other New Testament writers. Unlike the greater heretics of antiquity, the exponents of these two positions are wrong in what they affirm, but right in what they deny. The Scofield position rightly denies that the distinctive Jewish promises - apart that is from the spiritual promises of the Abrahamic covenant - are inherited by Christians generally. The other view, however, rightly denies that God's promises to Israel have to wait for the millennium or later to be fulfilled. What neither position allows for, but what I believe to be the teaching of the New Testament, is that God's distinctive promises to Israel are in the New Testament fulfilled, not to all believers, but to Jewish believers who constitute the restored remnant of Israel; and that Gentile believers are the inheritors of other promises altogether, that is, the promises made in the Old Testament to the nations who should come to Israel's light. These two sets of promises, though distinct, are closely related, and are both finally transfigured by a new disclosure of God's purposes, namely that both Israel and the Gentiles should lose all their distinctiveness in the one new man which will be the end-product of the salvation of God in Christ.

Let me state this position more fully. In the Old Testament, Israel was chosen by God to be the instrument of His will among the nations. Its task was to be a royal priesthood (Ex. 19:6), and to declare God's name and glory among the Gentiles (Is. 9:1-3). As such, it was the servant of the LORD, and all Israelites were commanded to be Jehovah's witnesses, to tell the nations that beside Him there was no God and no saviour. They were bearers of God's proclamation: "Look unto me and be ye saved, the ends of the earth" (Isa. 45:10, 11, 45:2).

When Israel came under judgement for her disobedience to her divine vocation, the prophets foretold a restoration of Israel when her outcasts would be gathered, Jerusalem established again with a glory surpassing the days of David and Solomon, and the Temple a centre of pure worship. It is alongside these promises to Israel that we find prophecies concerning the other nations. In some of them, Gentile nations are seen as enemies of Israel to be subjugated. But in others, Gentiles come, like the Queen of the South, as willing suppliants to do homage to the great king and to bring their gifts to the city of God. "Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." Again, there are promises which say that the Temple in Jerusalem will be open for the prayers of all nations. "Many peoples shall go and say, Come ye and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:3). Or again, "Yea, many peoples and strong nations shall come to see the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to intreat the favour of the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts: In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold, out of the languages of the nations, shall even take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech. 8:22, 23).

All these pictures show Israel as a light to the Gentiles, and as God's instrument of salvation to the ends of the earth (Isa. 49:6). Israel and the Gentiles will remain distinct, though drawn together in a common salvation, and worshipping at the same Temple. Israel even then retains her role as a kingdom of priests among her neighbours. "Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and aliens shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers. But ye shall be named the priests of the LORD: men shall call you the ministers of our God: ye shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves" (Isa. 61:4, 5).

This role of Israel as royal priesthood and servant of the LORD, and this coming of the Gentiles to find salvation in Jerusalem, form the basis of the New Testament programme of the gospel. When the day of the Lord arrived, with the resurrection of Christ, Israel found its fulfilment, not indeed in the outward form of the nation, but in the remnant of Jewish believers of whom the twelve apostles were the foundation members. The coming of the Gentiles to the light which went forth from Jerusalem was also fulfilled in the many Gentile believers who responded to the gospel brought to them by members of that Jewish remnant. In the minds of Paul and the other New Testament writers, the salvation of Israel and the salvation of the Gentiles were two distinct aspects of the gospel programme. But though distinct, they were intimately connected with one another, and indeed both were on-going processes throughout the New Testament period.

#### ACTUAL RELATIONS:

It is hard for us today to realize how completely dependent were the Gentiles on the Jews in the work of evangelization. There are no Gentile apostles, no Gentile missionaries, and no churches of Gentile foundation so far as we can see in the New Testament. The Twelve, Paul, Barnabas, James, Silas, Apollos, Andronicus, and Junias, any who have a title to be called apostles, were Jews to a man, not to mention the apostles whom Paul called false apostles in II Cor. 11:13. Nor do we know of any church which did not owe its foundation and the first ordering of its life to Jewish apostles. This is not an accident: it is a theological necessity. Salvation is of the Jews, and far from the Jews having been rejected in the gospel dispensation, it was God's will and promise that Jews should be the stewards of the gospel to the Gentiles in the pattern of things which is presented in the New Testament.

It is also safe to say that there is no conception of missionary work in the New Testament which does not have as its aim the salvation of Israel as well as the salvation of the Gentiles. Those whose task it was to preach to the Jews looked for the salvation of the Gentiles to follow as a foreordained consequence (Acts 13:46, 47). Paul, who was the special apostle to the Gentiles, always preached to the Jews in any new city first, and furthermore he looked upon his evangelizing of the Gentiles as a means of precipitating the full conversion of Israel (Rom. 11:13, 14, 25). The idea of a Gentile church which was not grown from a Jewish root, not only spiritually but visibly, is entirely foreign to the theology and practice of missions in the New Testament, however strange this may seem to us today.

In practice, the relation of the Gentiles to Israel found expression in two different ways in the New Testament. First, there was the relation between the Jerusalem church and all other churches. Both in Paul's thought and in Luke's, the Jerusalem church represented and embodied the restored remnant of Israel, while the churches abroad represented and embodied the salvation of the Gentiles. This may strike us today as in some respects an artificial symbolism, since we know there were some Jews in the membership of most if not all of the churches abroad. But it is a typically Hebrew way of thinking, and Paul certainly takes it very seriously. It was a matter of vital importance that the Gentiles should acknowledge that they were beneficiaries of



the spiritual blessings of Israel by their financial contributions to the Jerusalem church. (Rom; 15:28).

There was another way, however, in which the same relationship was expressed at the local level. Each Gentile church had its nucleus of Jews, or at least it had its Jewish apostle and his colleagues through whom the word of God had been mediated to it. Such Jews did not become absorbed into the local membership that they lost their distinctive character. They remained, especially the founding apostles, as representing the royal priesthood ministering salvation to the Gentiles. "God's grace has made me a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles", writes Paul. "My priestly service is the preaching of the Gospel of God, and it falls to me to offer the Gentiles to him as an acceptable sacrifice, consecrated by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:16). Paul is fully conscious, however, that this role and dignity of the Jews can be misused, and was in fact being misused by some Jews in the Gentile churches. The place of the Jews, though theologically significant and of great practical usefulness, must not in any wise depress the status and dignity of the Gentile believers themselves, for God had revealed to the apostles and prophets that the Gentiles were sharers on equal terms in the blessings of salvation. This mystery not previously revealed did not abolish the long-standing Old Testament picture of Israel's role in the salvation of the Gentiles, but it showed that the purpose behind it all was to create such an ultimate unity of Israel and the Gentiles in Christ that the resultant body would be nothing less than a new creation of mankind. This unity was in its full sense eschatological, but it was meant to find expression also here and now where Jew and Gentile met together with Christ in the midst. Thus it was that the local church embodied two conceptions of God's purposes: it was a place where ten Gentiles took hold of the skirt of a Jew and learnt from him the knowledge of the truth as it was in Christ; but it was at the same time a type of the great church of God's final purpose in which at last all earthly distinctions will be no more.

Thus, in the New Testament, Gentile believers are not, in fact, represented as spiritual Israelites, or as forming part of the renewed Israel of prophecy. Certainly they are represented as coming to Israel's light, eating the children's bread, coming to worship God at Jerusalem and receiving a rightful place in God's Temple. All this is foreseen in the Old Testament. Yet beyond these pictures lies another, in which Israel and the Gentiles are completely at one, and in which both groups, not merely one of them, lose their identity. This is the new body of Christ, not a new Israel, but a new mankind, the church in its spiritual and heavenly reality. Only here do we go beyond the categories of Old Testament promise, for this is a unity not previously revealed to the sons of men.

It is not my purpose here to substantiate the whole of the position I have outlined. Nor it be assumed that every New Testament writer takes exactly the same view of the question we are discussing. There is a very great variety in the manner of expressing truths in the Bible and the images and pictures used by different writers and even at different times the same writer cannot always be made to go on all fours together. Nevertheless, I believe that there is a general consistency in the New Testament in regard to the place of Israel and the Gentiles in the plan of salvation, though it is not always possible to prove this. If 1 Peter was written to Gentiles, for instance, the picture I have sketched would certainly not be Peter's view of things, for he clearly regards his readers as being a spiritual Israel. If however the epistle was written to Jewish congregations, as I personally think it was, Peter becomes a witness for the same position as that held by Paul. In the same way, the destination of the Epistle of James to the Hebrews requires consideration. So does the Revelation of St. John. It is my purpose here, however, to confine my detailed discussion to the teaching of St. Paul and of St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles.

# ST. LUKE'S THEOLOGY.

Let us look first at Luke's description of the church at Jerusalem, and ask what significance he attaches to this body. In his gospel he has told us that Jesus came to fulfill the hopes of those who looked for the comforting of Israel, and for redemption in Jerusalem. He came to visit and redeem his people and to raise up a mighty salvation for them in the house of David. Moreover, Luke's gospel is oriented towards Jerusalem as the place of fulfillment. In Acts Luke sees the restoration of Israel as taking place in the establishment of the Jerusalem church. This is illustrated in the story of Pentecost. The announcement that the last days have arrived is made by Peter to "the whole house of Israel" as represented by the inhabitants of Jerusalem together with "devout Jews from every nation under heaven" who were assembled at Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. Peter at once identifies the situation with that prophesied by Joel in chapter 2: 28-32. "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those that escape (LXX 'one being saved!') and among the remnant those whom the LORD doth call (LXX 'men who preach the gospel to those whom the Lord has called')." Thus the first Jewish believers constituted the remnant of those destined to find salvation in Zion by calling on the name of the Lord. Luke describes them later as *hoi sōzomenoi*, "those being saved" (2:47). This present participle does not mean that they were a group of men being gradually saved, but that they "were gradually being selected during the 'Interim' before the End" (Lake and Cahoon, Beginnings of Christianity - Vol. IV. ad loc.). They were thus the remnant of Israel, being saved out of the "crooked generation" of unbelieving Israelites (Acts 2:40, cf. Deut. 32:5). In this remnant Israel was restored (Acts 1:6) as Christ had promised (cf. Luke 22:29f.), and its role was to be that of the servant of the LORD, witnessing to all men, as Isaiah had prophesied of Israel (Isa. 43:10, 12, 24-28 Acts 1:8). In Acts 1:8 Jesus had indicated the scope of this witness. It was to be in Jerusalem, in the whole of Judaea-Samaria (considered as a single area), and to the end of the earth. This last phrase, "to the end of the earth", is probably from the highly important servant song of Isaiah 49 which begins: "Listen O isles to me, and hearken my people from far". Verses 5 and 6 read: "and now thus saith the LORD that formed me from the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob again to Him, and that Israel should be gathered unto Him... It is too light a thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth".

Notice that there are two distinct tasks assigned to the servant of the LORD. First, to restore Israel, and secondly to extend God's salvation to the end of the earth, that is, to the Gentiles. And they are in that order. Acts is the story of the carrying out of these two tasks. First, the restoration of the preserved of Israel, in Jerusalem and in the whole of Judaea-Samaria, and then the extension of salvation to the end of the earth, which in Luke's geography is pointed by Rome.

The evangelistic programme of Isa. 49 is again invoked, this time by Paul at Antioch in Pisidia: "It was necessary", he told the Jews there, "that the word of God should first be spoken to you. Since you thrust it from you, behold we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord commanded us, saying, 'I have set you for a light for the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the end of the earth'" (Acts 13:46 f.). The "us" here is Paul and Barnabas, Jewish apostles, and they 1 cf. Dom J. J. Dupont, *Le Salut des Gentils et le Livre des Actes*, N.T. Studies, Jan. 1960.



apparently see themselves as fulfilling the role of Israel, the servant of the Lord who should bring the Gentiles to the light.

At the Council of Jerusalem, described in Acts 15, the whole question of the significance of Jewish and Gentile Christianity, and their relation to each other, came up for discussion. James, the president of the Council, sums up the theological meaning of what has been going on over the period of twenty years since the resurrection. He sums it up in terms of another Old Testament prophecy, Amos 9:11,12. James first acknowledges that the Gospel had been received by Gentiles as well as by Jews. "God has made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith, we believe that we shall be saved in the same way as they". Not merely were the Jews who believed God's people, but "God did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name". James then states that this situation is in accordance with the prophecy of Amos. "With this situation the words of the prophet are in agreement: as scripture says: 'Thereafter I will return and rebuild the fallen house of David; Even from its ruins I will rebuild it, and set it up again, That they may seek the Lord - all the rest of mankind, and the Gentiles, whom I have claimed for my own.' Thus says the Lord, whose work it is, made known long ago!".

Once again we find two distinct phases of the divine activity as in Isa. 49:6, and in the same order. First there is the restoring of the fallen tabernacle of David, which is the restoration of the kingdom of Israel. Then secondly, and as a direct consequence and purpose, the Gentiles seeking after the Lord. Notice too, how James implies, not merely that the prophecy about Gentiles seeking after the Lord was being fulfilled in the Gentile mission at Antioch and places beyond, but also that in Jewish Christianity and especially in the Jerusalem church was fulfilled the prophecy about the rebuilding of the fallen tabernacle of David. The Scofield Bible notices that the two prophecies are distinct, and claims that James' speech is the most important passage, dispensationally, in the New Testament. But by an incredible *tour de force* of exegesis, it not only reverses the order of events which James claims has the imprimatur of prophetic fulfillment, but it refers the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David to the remote future. There is no weaker point in the whole dispensational argument than their exegesis of this verse. On the other hand, it is remarkable that so many much abler exegetes should have failed to discern that James is talking about two activities, not one. Even Dr. C.H. Dodd does not appear to differentiate between the two parts of Amos' prophecy or the two stages of its fulfillment, for he writes: "The citation of Amos 9:11,12... 'I will rebuild the fallen tent of David...' (is) said to be fulfilled in the gathering of Gentiles into the church" (According to the Scriptures, p. 196). (But see F.F. Bruce's commentaries *Col.*)

Cicero's description of the church in Jerusalem, as time goes on, only confirms its representative character as restored Israel. We sometimes forget how thoroughly Jewish it was, and how thoroughly Jewish were the apostles and elders who ruled over it, especially after the more Hellenistically minded Jews like Stephen ceased to exercise influence there. "You see, brother," said James to Paul when the latter was visiting Jerusalem in 60 A.D., "You see how many thousands of converts we have among the Jews, all of them staunch upholders of the law. Now they have been given certain information about you: it is that you teach all the Jews in the Gentile world to turn their backs on Moses, telling them to give up circumcising their children and following our way of life. What is the position then? They are sure to hear that you have arrived. You must therefore do as we tell you. We have four who are under the law, take them with you, and

go through the ritual of purification with them, paying their expenses, after which they may shave their heads. Then everyone will know that there is nothing in the stories they were told about you, but that you are a practising Jew and keep the law yourself" (Acts 21:18-26). This passage, incidentally, reveals how difficult or impossible it would have been for a Gentile believer to have joined the church at Jerusalem, unless he had been prepared to be circumcised and keep the law. There were, in fact, no Gentiles in that church. The Jerusalem church was quite happy for Gentile believers abroad to be relieved of any obligations to keep the law, for it saw in the Gentile churches God's gracious provision for the salvation of all men. But it certainly did not take this to mean that the Jerusalem church, or the closely associated churches of Judaea, should either abandon their own distinctive cultus or admit Gentiles to their membership without requiring conformity to their conditions. Of course, the Jerusalem church came to an end a few years later due to the Jewish War with Rome. But churches of exclusive Jewish membership continued in many places for many years. We should like to know more about how such Christian Jews in the New Testament period looked upon their relation to Judaism and their own observance of the law. No doubt there was much confusion in the minds of some. But we may take it that the proper attitude was that expressed in the Epistle to the Hebrews which sets out how a Jew may see the whole cultus of Israel fulfilled in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice, so that as in due time the Temple was destroyed and circumstances made it impossible to carry out other provisions of the law, the believing Jew was unperturbed since his hope was set on the true pattern of all these things eternal in the heavens. But he could never forget the road by which he had travelled.

In the latter part of Acts the churches founded by Paul represent the coming in of the Gentiles. Ephesus may be a partial exception. Of all Paul's churches, the church at Ephesus is described in terms which suggest a Jewish character (e.g. Acts 20:28). Perhaps this was the case. There was a large concentration of Jews in Ephesus, and it may be they formed a majority in the church. Nor did Paul introduce Christianity to Ephesus. There were already Christian Jews in Ephesus before Paul arrived there, and they were formed into some sort of assembly (Acts 18:26ff.). Paul's own initial synagogue ministry there lasted some three months, and when finally he broke with the synagogue, we are told he "separated the disciples". Paul's new establishment, therefore, may have been practically a separatist synagogue. If the Ephesian church was at this stage predominantly Jewish, it would account for Paul in his farewell speech in Acts 20 describing it as God's redeemed congregation, which is an expression belonging to Israel and derived from Psalm 74:2. Generally, however, Paul's churches are embodiments of Gentile Christianity.

#### ST. PAUL.

We come now to St. Paul. Paul was a Jew of the strictest kind who, even after his conversion, remained self-consciously a Jew. He affirmed in full the value and significance of the Jewish cultus as God-given and irrevocable (Rom. 2:17-20, 3:1-3, 9:15). When among his fellow-Jews, he was careful to uphold the strict standard of his own Pharisaic upbringing, and according to Acts 21:26 he deliberately repudiated the rumour that he had tried to persuade Jews abroad to abandon circumcision and observance of the Mosaic law. How did Paul reconcile this intense Jewishness with his apostleship to the Gentiles and with his vehement insistence that no form of law-keeping should be laid on Gentile churches? In his Epistle to the Romans, written nearly thirty years after the crucifixion, Paul gives us his most direct discussion of the relation of Israel and the Gentiles in the



economy of salvation.

The idea that Israel is or was a significant factor in the evangelisation of the world has so far receded in the minds of many today, that we tend to read the Epistle to the Romans without taking account of its largest theme. It was written at a turning point in Paul's life. He had, over a period of some fifteen years, been doing the work of an apostle in Asia, Macedonia and Greece. That mission is now completely finished. He no longer has any room for work in these regions", he wrote (Rom. 15:28). It was not that circumstances forced him to withdraw, or that he felt he could do with a change. It was simply that his task was fulfilled. So he wrote to the Roman Christians to inform them that he would be calling there on his way to his next sphere of service - Spain. Not Rome, for the gospel was planted there already, and Paul's task was to be an apostle, not a resident bishop. Yet as one reads Romans, it becomes evident that Paul is not thinking, in the ordinary sense, of missionary strategy. The problem on his mind is a problem of theology, and, in particular, a problem of eschatology. Nor is it so much Spain which is on Paul's heart, but Jerusalem. For the moment his concern for the Gentiles is overshadowed by his concern for Israel. Paul is distressed by the comparatively small response to the gospel on the part of Israel, and this leads him to re-examine Israel's role in God's plan of salvation. That Israel was the instrument of God's salvation to the Gentiles, he takes for granted. But why the disproportionate response? The welcome given to the gospel by the Gentiles threw into relief the hardening hostility of so many Jews. Probably also some Gentile believers were beginning to write off the Jews in their area as having no hope of salvation. This is the problem Paul wrestles with in Romans. He sees the solution as a kind of reflex evangelism. The gospel has come the first place from Israelites to the Gentiles, though a majority of Israelites has not received it. But as the Gentiles increasingly enjoy the blessings of salvation, unbelieving Israelites will be stirred to envy and will turn and be saved (Rom. 11:14). The evangelisation of the Gentiles will thus precipitate the salvation of Israelites, so that finally all the elect, both among Israel and among the Gentiles, will be saved. (cf. J. Munck, Paul and the Salvation of Mankind, Wegen Munck takes Paul to mean that Israel will only be stirred to envy and be converted after Paul's mission to the Gentiles is finished.)

In order to appreciate the urgency and relevance of Paul's problem, it is necessary to be reminded of Paul's general eschatological outlook. He knew that the last days had come, and that the reign of God had been inaugurated by the resurrection and glorious exaltation of Christ. All that remained was the full and universal manifestation of that reign, and the coming (or parousia) of Christ. What was the purpose of a time-lag between the inauguration and the consummation of the reign of God? It was simply to provide opportunity for men to be summoned to the great feast of salvation prepared by God. But whereas we now think of this time of opportunity as stretching over many ages and centuries (for so it has, in the event, proved to do), it is clear that Paul and his contemporaries did not so regard it. The deaths of even a few believers became ground for serious misgivings until Paul explained that death meant no handicap as to God's intentions, the expectation of a speedy end to all things is unmistakable. This sense of the imminence of the Lord's parousia determined also the missionary strategy of the day. Two tasks had been set the first apostles by Christ Himself: to gather together the outcasts of Israel, and to summon the Gentiles to the light. The mission to Israel (called in Galatians "The apostleship of the circumcision") was entrusted to the Twelve, especially Peter and John (Gal. 2:7-9),

and the mission to the Gentiles was entrusted pre-eminently to Paul ("the apostleship of the Gentiles"). What is particularly noteworthy is that the task of world evangelisation was not expected to take very long - perhaps 3 or 4 decades. Already Paul could claim by A.D. 60 that the gospel had been preached in the whole creation under heaven, (Col. 1:23). It seemed urgent that more Jews should be converted.

# ROMANS.

Let us now turn to see how Paul views Israel and its role, as he completes his first great apostolic task.

His clearest assertion is that there is no difference at all between Jews and Gentiles either in guilt before God or in eligibility for God's grace in salvation. It does not, however, follow from this that there is no distinction of any kind between Jew and Greek. For when Paul asks the logical question, "What advantage then has the Jew?" he replies, "Much in every way". Already in the first chapter he has said that the gospel is God's instrument for saving believers, and adds, "for Jews in the first place". This is not merely an accident of opportunity. It is an actual priority in experiencing God's saving power through believing. So then there are Jews who believe. Paul, of course, is scathing in his denunciation of the professing Jew who beneath his profession is a transgressor of God's law, and he says that this 'Jew-in-appearance' is not a Jew at all (2:28). However, the converse is also true. The true Jew is the 'Jew-in-secret', whose outward profession corresponds to his inward, unseen spiritual state before God (2:29). Thus, Paul is far from saying that all Jews according to the flesh are unbelieving. Only some are "without faith" (3:3). Others believe, and are, like Nathaniel in John's Gospel, 'Israelites indeed'.

This distinction between believing and unbelieving Jews is carried on in chapters 9-11. Israel remains an indelible national entity. But only part of national Israel is believing. But this believing section, though small, is not insignificant, for it is according to prophecy the "remnant that should be saved" (9:27). Indeed, only this remnant is truly Israel, for it is only this "election of grace" which is truly the people of God, the object of His "foreknowledge". God has not cast away his people whom He foreknew. Thus we find in these chapters another contrasting pair: those who are "of Israel" and those who are "Israel" (9:6). This antithesis corresponds to the earlier pair, the "Jew-in-appearance" and the "Jew-in-secret". Or, to put the contrast in other terms, Paul's "kinsmen according to the flesh" and "the remnant according to the election of grace" (9:3, 11:15). It is only of the latter - the remnant, the true Israel - that there exists any promise of salvation. God never promised to save all Israel according to the flesh. Paul explicitly affirms this in 9:27: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that shall be saved". The promise of Isaiah 45:17 that "Israel shall be saved off the LORD with an everlasting salvation" was of course the basis of Paul's hope, and he alludes to it in 11:26 when he says "and thus all Israel shall be saved". But the promise relates only to Israel which is truly Israel, God's people whom He foreknew, Jews-in-secret, those who do or shall believe.

In all this discussion of true and false Israel, there is no suggestion that Gentiles are in any way connected with either of the groups under discussion. Paul does not say that Gentile believers become in any sense Israelites or are reckoned as part of Israel. On the contrary, Israel and the Gentiles remain over



against one another, just as in the O.T., and, in particular, "the coming in of the full complement of Gentiles" and "the salvation of all Israel" remain distinct activities right to the end of the gospel age (11:25,26). This is the clear picture of chapter 11, notwithstanding the truth that believing Gentiles share fully with believing Jews the blessings of God's salvation, as represented by 5v. "fett root of the olive tree" in 11:17, and are entitled to be called God's people.

It may be asked, however, whether Paul's argument earlier in chapter 4 does not imply that believing Gentiles, since they are said to be "faithful children of Abraham", are not to be reckoned as Israelites, or "Jews in secret". But the answer is No. Sonship of Abraham is not synonymous or coterminous with sonship of Israel. Abraham had more descendants than Israel, and, indeed, Abraham is the father of the faithful (including the Gentile faithful) precisely because he believed the promise of God "while he was uncircumcised". He was, so to say, a 'Gentile' when he believed. Not only was circumcision subsequent to his believing, but in particular the episode of the law and the Sinaitic covenant came much later and represented a phase (albeit a crucial one) within the larger purposes of salvation. To this later episode belonged Israel, Israel was to be the instrument for bringing salvation to the Gentiles, and was itself to continue until the fullness of the Gentiles should come in. Nevertheless, the destiny of Israel is not identical or co-terminous with the whole of God's plan of salvation. Israel has an inalienable priority within this plan, but the Gentiles retain their piece within that plan as much as does Israel.

Paul reverts to the relationship of Israel and the Gentiles in chapter 15, and sums up his position. As there is but one salvation, so all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, must glorify God "with one mouth". Their differences of custom and scruple (such as food taboos and observance of days) must not cause a rift in fellowship. Gentile and Jewish believers must "receive" one another to the glory of God. But the two groups do not thereby lose their distinctive characteristics. In a solemn statement (15:8) Paul describes Christ as "a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, that he might confirm the promises given unto the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy". Here is the same double-barrelled programme saw in Acts: First the salvation of Israel in process of being realised - though not yet complete - in the elect remnant of believing Jews of Paul's day. And secondly, the salvation of the Gentiles, also in process of being realised, particularly through Paul's mission. Thus it is clear that believing Israel and the believing Gentiles were at this time distinct in Paul's thought, just as distinct as were the two apostleships and missions, set off Peter and John to the Jews, and that of Paul himself to the Gentiles.

There is a further point in Romans. This exposition of Jewish-Gentile relationships is addressed to Gentiles (1:13, 11:13ff) who, then, and where, are the believing Jews whom Paul regards as the election of grace? Well, Paul himself is one, as he says (11:1), though he has left his normal environment and community for the sake of his unique mission. It is perhaps implied that there are believing Jews in Rome also, with whom the readers of the Epistle have dealings (cf. Acts 15:5,6, Acts: 28). But in a quite special way it is the Jerusalem church that represents the remnant of faithful Israel. (See Cerfaux, *The Church in the Theology of St. Paul*, p. 130ff.) This comes out remarkably in chapter 15, where the Jerusalem church, called simply "the saints", is in contrast to the churches of Macedonia and Achaia, which he calls "the Gentiles". The

§ Mils. Andersen suggests to me that this may allude to Gen. 11:1, "the whole earth was one lip".

the

term "the saints" is not everywhere restricted to the Jerusalem church in Paul's writings, but its use here in antithesis to the Gentiles certainly shows that the Jerusalem church was "the church" par excellence, and that it was in some sense the true congregation of Israel. The churches abroad, in the eyes of Paul, are representative of the Gentile nations who were to come to Israel's light. They have been partakers of the pneumatica, the spiritual blessings, of "the saints at Jerusalem" who thus figure as true Israel.

(N.B. Capacity for symbolic presentation which is not identical with actual.)

## GALATIANS.

We now turn to the earlier Epistle to the Galatians - which deals with many of the same themes as Romans.

First we notice Paul's important distinction between "the apostleship of the Jews" and "the apostleship of the Gentiles" (2:7ff.) to which we referred earlier. These two ministries not only imply two groups of people to be evangelised they also imply the establishment of two types of church, since the function of apostleship in the N.T. is not merely a function of preaching but that of founding churches.

Now Paul says in 2:9 that James, Cephas and John gave him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship "that we should go unto the Gentiles, and they unto the circumcision". Where did Paul go when he "went" to the Gentiles? He went to Syria and Asia Minor, and then to Macedonia and Greece. So we are not surprised when we find him, later, describing churches of Macedonia and Greece as "the Gentiles". But where did Peter and John go when they "went" to the Jews? We do not know for certain. They disappear from Acts, and the New Testament gives few hints as to their journeyings. Wherever they went however, we are entitled to presume that they endeavoured to preach to Jews and to found churches with Jewish converts for members. (Peter's conjectured journey to the northern provinces of Asia Minor, and John's sojourn at Ephesus, may both be relevant here). Returning to Galatians, however, we are struck by Paul's concern to relate himself and his mission to Jerusalem, that is, to the Christian church in Jerusalem.

In passing, we note that his definition of the Jewish Christian church is capable of some flexibility. Sometimes he has in mind the fact that the Jewish believers are actually organised in a number of local congregations throughout Judaea and so he speaks of the "churches of Judaea". But when he is thinking of the spiritual dignity and status of the body which in his unconverted zeal he had persecuted, he calls it "the church of God" (1:22, 1:13). But either way "Jerusalem" is a representative symbol of the Jewish-Christian body in S. Palestine, and this, as we have seen, is still Paul's mind when he wrote Romans some years later.

In Galatians in Romans, Paul discusses Abraham's position as father of the faithful. The foundation scripture is the promise to Abraham, "in thee shall all the nations be blessed", to bring out the point more obviously, "in thee shall all the Gentiles be blessed". This promise of blessing stands over and above the entire phase of history associated with the Mosaic law, "The law was added because of transgressions". That is to say, it is a bigger thing than the national history of Israel. For although the law and all its ramifications were the pride and glory of Jewry, they represented, according to Paul, a mere



phase within the wider purposes of God's salvation as He had adumbrated those purposes in Abraham in terms of promise not law (Gal. 3:17-19). For Jews, the law was a tutor to Christ. But not for Gentiles. Of course, a Christian Jew had a radically changed attitude to the law. So far as the quest for righteousness was concerned, the law found its end and fulfillment in Christ (Rom. 10:4) and the Believer was free from the curse pronounced by the law on all who failed to observe it. But the law was still to the believing Jew the oracles of God, it still contained "the form of knowledge of the truth", continued to carry out its injunctions and provisions: not as means of securing justification, but, to say the least, as a badge of his privilege as bearer of God's oracles. For a Gentile to try to wear this badge was altogether perverse and anomalous, for he was not a Jew, and had no place in that phase of God's patriarchal dealings with mankind. Moreover, it indicated a failure to understand the Gentile's own role as a recipient of God's salvation apart from the special discipline of Israel. The tremendous denunciation of Gentiles who adopt practices from the Jewish law is the more remarkable when we reflect that believing Jews, including Paul himself, still maintained such practices themselves. Quite clearly, then, a believing Jew, was doubly distinguished. He was distinguished from the unbelieving Jew by his faith in Jesus as Messiah and his changed attitude to the relation of the law to salvation, and on the other side he was distinguished from his believing Gentile brother by his general observance of the Jewish law, which, if the Gentile were to copy him in it, (i.e. while a member of a Gentile church. If a Gentile for good reason wanted to join a Jewish church, it would be a different story) would be a symbol of that Gentile's apostasy from Christ! (Gal. 5:4).

How then does Paul relate Jewish and Gentile believers in Galatians? Both are united in a common salvation, as chapter 3 affirms. Both are sons of God. That unity is based on Christ, for He is the "seed" in whom God had promised Abraham the Gentiles would be blessed. Thus Abraham appears in a double role, as it were. He was, as everyone knew, the father of the Jews, through Judah, Jacob, Isaac. But he was also, in another sense, the father of the Gentiles, since Gentiles as well as Jews were able to receive the blessing through his greatest descendant, Jesus Christ. Thus, again, we find both unity and division. The "seed of Abraham", composed of all who are "in Christ", that is Jew and Gentile alike who believe, form "one person" (Gal. 3:28). In the later epistles of Ephesians and Colossians Paul is to develop this "one person" idea along the lines of a new mankind or a new Adam. But in germ the concept of complete unity in Christ is already present in this early epistle. On the other hand, unity "in Christ" clearly does not imply that outward distinctions between Jews and Gentile believers disappeared or were intended to disappear at the level of earthly and social relationship. The parallel distinctions between male and female, bond and free, confirm this. Man and wife, master and servant, were, if believers, completely one "in Christ" (Gal. 3:28). But they were not equal in society, and they were not equal in the society of the local church, for at neither of these levels were they equal in either function or ministry. The gospel certainly influenced profoundly the relationship which at that time existed between husband and wife, and between master and servant, but the fundamental distinction between them was actually reinforced under the gospel by a new conception of vocation. A wife is specifically forbidden in the N.T. from exercising the functions belonging to the ministry of eldership on the ground of her natural subordination to her husband who may properly fulfil the functions of eldership. Similarly, it is altogether unlikely that a slave would have been regarded in any N.T. church as eligible to fulfil the ministry of eldership. Since as a slave he lacked the authoritative status necessary. The unity of male and female in Christ, therefore, exists notwithstanding a divinely ordered distinction in their function, their vocation and their ministry.

## AB.

Thus it is wrong to assume that when believing Jews and believing Gentiles came to be seen in social relationship with each other, their unity in Christ meant an end to all former distinctions. Paul's teaching is that there remained a divinely ordered distinction in the 'vocation and ministry' of Jew and Gentile. This does not mean that the relationship of Jews and Gentiles was fixed and static. We know that as time went on it underwent many changes, not least due to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and to many modifications in the observance of the law by Jews themselves; and here again the gospel has moulded the relationship. But the argument of Galatians requires as its basis the assumption that Jew and Gentile retained even under the gospel some sort of distinctive proper to their respective roles in God's world.

Some no doubt will feel that what has been said hitherto finds a refutation in the Epistle to the Galatians itself, particularly in Paul's allegory about the two Jerusalems, and in the final assertion about "The Israel of God". Both passages have been the occasion of considerable debate, and all I wish to do here is to indicate that both are susceptible of adequate interpretation in support of the position I have adopted.

In the allegory of the two wives of Abraham, Paul equates Hagar with "the Jerusalem that now is", and Sarah with "the Jerusalem that is above". We are reminded at once of the two sets of contrasts we observed earlier in Romans: the "Jew-in-appearance" as against the "Jew-in-secret", and those who are "of Israel" as against those who are "Israel". In Romans, the distinction in each case is between professing but unbelieving Jews on the one hand, and professing but also believing Jews on the other hand. The question is now whether Paul is continuing this distinction or whether he means to include believing Gentiles in the membership of Jerusalem above. The answer depends on Paul's purpose in using the allegory. The Gentile Galatians, remarks Paul, have only a superficial understanding of Jewish religion. They have fallen for certain ritual features without appreciating that there is a world of difference in attitude to the law between believing and unbelieving Jew, and, without knowing it, it is the unbelieving Jew's attitude that the Galatians have taken up. Acquaintance with the law itself should have warned the Galatians against this. But in their misplaced zeal they have attached themselves to the wrong mother, the wrong representative of the Jewish faith. "We (i.e. Jewish Christians) are children of the 'freewoman' says Paul, 'it is Jerusalem above which is our mother', 'but you Gentiles, in trying to copy us, have failed to distinguish between the two women, the two cities. 'You have aped the purely external form of Judaism which in reality is actively persecuting the true members of the real Jerusalem'".

Thus it does not follow from the allegory that Paul regarded the Galatians as members of Jerusalem above. This is not the point. It is true that Paul has already called the Galatian believers "the seed of Abraham" (3:29), but that was by virtue of their faith in Christ who is the true "seed of Abraham". The allegory is, it is true, connected with the idea of Abraham's children, but with a quite different aspect. Its purpose is to distinguish between true and false Jews. Believing Jews are ultimately children of Abraham not by keeping the law, but precisely because they have been redeemed from the law by faith in the promise, and for this reason can be regarded as spiritual children of Sarah. Outwardly such Jews may seem to be exactly like all professing Jews, but inwardly they are quite different.

The general conclusion from Chapters 3 and 4 may be stated thus: the Galatians may indeed be inheritors of the all-embracing promises given to Abraham (through



faith in Christ, "Abraham's seed") and thus reckoned as Abraham's children. But this does not make them Israelites, either literally or spiritually. Abraham has more descendants than the sons of Israel. All nations (the ethne) shall be blessed in him. A fortiori, the Galatians not members of "Jerusalem above" either, though they are one in Christ with those Jews who are, and are challenged by Paul to stand fast in that liberty from the "rudiments of the cosmos" which has come, first to the Jew (in his liberation from the bondage of the law) and now also to the Greek.

This interpretation of the argument of Galatians takes the personal pronouns "we" and "you" as indicating (as a rule) "we Jews" and "you Gentiles" respectively. Such a distinction is well prepared for, not only by the distinction of apostleship referred to in 2:7ff., but also by recounting the incident of the rebuking of Peter at Antioch which, however it is explained, turns on the consciousness of a difference between Jews and Gentiles in the fellowship of the Gospel. When we come to chapter 3, then, it is fair to note that "we" must refer to the Jews in verses 13, 23, 24, 25 and in 4:8 (cf. "you" Gentiles in 3:27, 4:8; the first plural of 4:6 includes Gentiles and Jews, and this seems also to account for the "we" of 3:14 which also refers to the communion of the Spirit.). It would not be out of place, then, to take "Jerusalem is our mother" (4:27) as meaning "the mother of us believing Jews", and "we are not children of the slave but of the free woman for freedom Christ set us free" (4:31ff.) in the same way. There is a textual variant in 4:28, where important manuscripts including P46, B, D and G read "you" instead of "we". (NEB unfortunately adopts "you" without giving any hint of a variant.) If this reading is correct, our general interpretation of the allegory would certainly need to be modified so as to include Gentiles among the children of Sarah. But the reference in the following verse to persecution of the children of promise by the children of the flesh tells strongly in favour of "we" being the correct reading, for there is no evidence of Gentile Christians being "persecuted" by Jews, whereas believing Jews were persecuted by their coset (this 284).

So we come to the last barrier. Someone will say, "But does not Paul, at the end of his epistle, describe all true believers as the Israel of God?" This interpretation has prevailed for 80 long, and is so widely taken for granted, except by dispensationalists, that it may seem presumption to question it. But even here we must ask for a fresh examination of the situation Paul is dealing with. Paul has shown the danger to the Galatians of a thoughtless following of Jewish traditions. But behind this et cetera is a great difficulty for Christians like the Gentile Galatians: how are they to distinguish "good" Jews from "bad" ones? We know that there were some Christian Jews who firmly believed Gentiles must be circumcised and keep the law if they were to share salvation in Christ (Acts 15:1, 5). It is usually held that such Jewish Christians had visited the Galatian churches and pressed their point of view there, thus "bewitching" the Christians there. Such Jews were no doubt et cetera with the prestige of being members of the mother church at Jerusalem. The Galatians needed to know which Jews they were to receive and learn from, which to greet in the name of the Lord. Paul, in his autographed post-script, supplies his friends with a simple rule which sums up the whole argument of his epistle. "As in as walk by this rule, this canon, peace be upon them and mercy, for they are the Israel of God!". Paul probably has in mind the greeting which meets us in some of the songs of ascent (esp. Psalms 122-129) with their descriptions of the true Israelites, "upon whom be peace!". Is Paul's canon one for the Galatians themselves to walk by? If so, it must be admitted that Paul is clearly designating Gentile believers (along with Jewish

believers) "the Israel of God". More likely, however, the canon is a test whereby the Galatians will be able to distinguish true Jews from false (cf. Rev. 2:9). If a Jew comes who says (as Paul himself says): "circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; what matters is the new creation in Christ", that Jew is walking truly in the fear of the LORD, and may be confidently greeted in the LORD's name. Such Jews are indeed true Israel, the Israel of God. Those who insist that the Galatians be circumcised are not Israelites at all; even their own circumcision is a mere mutilation (5:12).

Before leaving Galatians we must observe a most valuable indication of how in practice Jews and Gentiles should get along with each other when from time to time they meet in Christian fellowship. This indication is contained in the description of incident at Antioch from chapter 2. Peter was visiting Antioch. The church at Antioch had many Gentile members, perhaps now a majority, and from the beginning no Jewish rule had been enforced which would have excluded Gentiles from table fellowship. Peter, however, belonged to a wholly Jewish church, that of Jerusalem, which was zealous for the law. What should a member of such a church do when he visited a church like that at Antioch whose customs were different? Peter did the right thing. He temporarily put aside his own habits, that is the customs of his own church, acted as a Gentile (cf. Acts 10:28) in other words, he conformed to the "use" of Antioch. His own customary behaviour and keeping of the law was relaxed for the sake of those Gentile Christians with whom for the time being he was staying. The trouble started when other members of his own church arrived in Antioch, and he switched back to his home church customs, so as not to offend his fellow Christians from Jerusalem. Such was Peter's prestige that other Jews in the Antioch church, including Barnabas, followed his lead. But Paul openly rebuked Peter. On what ground? Paul himself, when visiting Jerusalem, certainly observed the strict Jerusalem standard. Why does he rebuke Peter for reverting to this standard in Antioch? Simply because in so doing Peter was imposing an improper condition of fellowship on the Antioch Gentiles. This implies that the Antiochene church, comprising both Jews and Gentiles, had the right to determine its own conditions of fellowship suitable to its own membership, and that it was the duty of visiting believers, whatever the rule of their own church, to conform to the standards of Antioch.

May we not suppose that this reflects Paul's own code? He was a Jew of the strictest sect. When among fellow Jews, as in the Jerusalem church, he kept the law meticulously. We need not think that this was mere expediency. It was a badge of his intense Jewishness, which entered deeply into his whole conception of his ministry and apostleship. But he was called to found Gentile churches where no such standard could be demanded. Paul, in such churches, acted as a Gentile, as Peter had first done at Antioch; not, indeed, because the law meant nothing to him, but for the sake of those whose church it really was, namely, Gentiles. These churches did not exist for Paul's sake, and though he was their apostle, he was serving them and not vice-versa. They were Gentiles, he a Jew to the end. Their customs in regard to the law were not his, except insofar as he adapted himself to them temporarily for their sakes.

#### OTHER EPISTLES.

If we may take Romans and Galatians as establishing Paul's main position in regard to the Jewish-Gentile question, it remains to look briefly at the other letters for either confirmation or modification of this position. Our investigation would be much assisted if we knew for certain just how the



membership of Paul's churches was made up, and, in particular, what opportunity there may have been for groups within a local church, like a Jewish group, to maintain distinctive practices of their own. Did believing Jews, for instance, always break with the local synagogue where they did, is it possible, or likely, that they retained their identity as Jews within the larger fellowship of the local church? Did they keep the Sabbath?

# THESSALONIANS.

It has been held that "the church of the Thessalonians may have been divided into Jewish and Gentile sections, and even that 1 Thessalonians was written to the Gentile section and 11 Thessalonians to the Jewish section. The evidence is not overpowering, but even if it were, such a division would not necessarily mean that the church was "hopelessly rent" (see Leon Morris, p. 24), or that the two sections did not regard themselves as in unity with each other. It is certainly not easy to think that the two letters were mutually exclusive as to their addressees; nevertheless, there is some evidence that Paul's mind does move between the Jews and Gentiles in his unseen audience. Gentiles are clearly addressed in 1 Thess. 1:9 ("turned from idols"). At the end of the epistle we find a surprising adjuration: "I adjure you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the brethren" ("to the whole brotherhood", NEB). This has been taken by some to imply that some section of the church (indeed the Jewish section) was in danger of being left out of the readings. This interpretation would be strengthened if we adopted the additional word "holy" (hagios) which appears in Codex Alexandrinus and the earliest Versions, for this might easily be a reference to the Jews, whom Paul sometimes designates as holy Dee.

Apart from the rather markedly Jewish flavour of much of the imagery of 11 Thessalonians, there are two passages which might suggest that the Jews are especially in mind here. First is the reference to the Lord coming to be glorified in his saints, which is very much a picture of God being glorified in his people Israel (Psalm 88:1XX, Isa. 49:3). The addition here, "because our testimony unto you was believed", identifies at least some at Thessalonica with these "saints". Then in 2:13 there is the possibility that the true text reads: "God chose you as firstfruits", which, if correct, would certainly mean that the Jewish believers in Thessalonica are addressed and their priority in the work of salvation emphasised.

# CORINTHIANS, ©

The Corinthian correspondence contains many puzzles, but in some respects the picture becomes clearer. Though the general membership of the church was Gentile (12:3), there were Jews as well as Greeks within it (12:13), and the two were equal in calling (1:24) and formed "one body", of which the one loaf at the Lord's Supper was a proper symbol (10:17). This unity of the local church, and its dignity as "the body of Christ" in which each member, whatever his history, had been baptized in one Spirit, is one of the striking features of Paul's teaching here, and Jewish privilege fades to nothing in this conception of the "new creation" (2 Cor. 5). We do not know, however, what the actual relations of Jews and Gentiles were like in Corinth, unless the disunity at the Lord's Supper gives a clue. What is noticeable is that the Jerusalem church in both epistles has a unique place in Paul's thinking, and that the Corinthian church is expected to acknowledge that pre-eminence by means of the collection for

Jerusalem. Furthermore, the Corinthians on all sides must have been conscious that their faith stemmed from Israel, i.e. Christian Jews. The factions mentioned in 1 Cor. 3 are all under the names of Jews: Paul, Apollos, Cephas, Christ; and the "false apostles" whom Paul denounces in 2 Cor. are Jews from Jerusalem. The Corinthian Gentiles could not have doubted that salvation was of the Jews or that they should have a right understanding of their relationship to the "saints" on whose stem they were fastened. For though dependent on the Jews for the gospel, they are completely one with them in the new body brought into being through the death of Christ.

Paul's churches seem never to have been free from the attentions of Jews, some at least from Jerusalem and some even calling themselves apostles, who sought to impose on Gentile Christians some measure of observance of the Jewish law. (If the pro-circumcision groups were not always Jews, they were Gentiles who had conceived the idea that to be circumcised and keep the law was a more excellent mode of Christian faith and life.) Many such Jews could put a strong case for their form of Christianity, as they could represent themselves as expressing the Christianity of the very centre of the faith whence the gospel itself had come abroad to the Gentiles. Paul's difficulty in combating such teaching was increased by the fact that he himself was, in certain circumstances, a law-keeping Jew. How could he distinguish himself from the other claimants to apostleship and distinguish his reason for law-keeping from theirs?

# PHILIPPIANS AND COLOSSIANS.

Both in Philippians and Colossians, as earlier in Galatians, he tells his churches bluntly to imitate him and only such other Jews as accord with his outlook (Phil. 3:17). In Colossians he names the Jewish colleagues whom he regards as his fellow-workers (4:10, 11). Was this to assist his converts in distinguishing reliable Jews from unreliable? He lays down again the simple canon for testing the correct attitude: to be looked for in a genuine Jew, as in Gal. 6:15. In Phil. 3 it is those whose worship is by the Spirit of God and who do not place confidence in the flesh, who can be trusted. This is the true circumcision. Some of Paul's bitterest sarcasm is reserved in Phil. for those who make circumcision a significant ritual feature. There is no circumcision. It is a mere mutilation (3:22 - "the conclusion" of Gal. 5:12). They make a god of their belly and glory in their pudenda, "an allusion to their circumcision", says Karl Barth, "which in concretization of presentation leaves nothing to be desired".<sup>1</sup> When Paul says emphatically that "we are the circumcision", and "our citizenship is in heaven", in direct contrast to these false Jews (3:3, 3:20), he is speaking of himself and his true Jewish colleagues. He is not I think including the Gentile Philippians in the designation. These passages are, in fact, the only cases of the first person plural in the letter, which throughout is characterised by "I" and "you". = Paul has the same external ground of confidence as the false Jews, indeed a better ground, but although his pedigree led him in God's providence to become one of the "true" circumcision, the externals themselves are less than nothing to him as a ground of righteousness. Only Christ and His death provide a sufficient resting place for faith, and here Paul and his converts share in full all the blessings of salvation in Christ.

The distinction between Paul and the Gentile members of his churches is

<sup>1</sup> Muller, Philippians, New London Commentary, p. 151.



more clearly drawn in Colossians. In the first ~~chapter~~ he tells how God's long hidden secret concerning the place of the Gentiles in salvation has now, in the gospel dispensation, been revealed to the Jewish believers, "the saints" (1:26,27). By this arrangement, the Gentiles - whom Paul is addressing - have been counted worthy to have a share (meris) in the heritage (kleros) of God's people (hoi hagioi) in the realm of light. (1:12). This heritage is then defined as "redemption". It is Christ as the eternal Word, not merely as Jewish messiah, who by his death reconciled all alien elements, and became head of the church. The church is thus no mere restored or renewed Israel (though restored Israel shares in it) but a new creation.

Even in Colossae, however, there are some believing Jews who would continue to keep their sabbaths and feasts and other customs (2:16). Paul does not say they are wrong. But these customs are mere shadows of the substance which is in Christ, and they must on no account be laid on the consciences of Gentile believers. Had Paul been addressing only Jews, he might have argued, as he does in Romans 2:29, that they should seek the true inner spiritual counterpart of outward circumcision. But he is addressing mainly Gentiles, and to them he says, as against the suggestion that they would be better off with circumcision, that they have no concern with such a rite, that they have something far more significant - a complete putting off of the flesh through their identification with Christ's death. A circumcision indeed! Paul is not here explaining or rationalising the true meaning of Jewish circumcision so much as claiming that, particularly for Gentiles, Christ's death surpasses all Jewish rites, and renders the adopting of them a fall from grace.

### EPHESIANS

The Epistle to the Ephesians is the coping stone of Paul's theological position. In it is set forth the most striking statement of the unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ. It is the more remarkable that it does not overlook the priority of Israel as God's instrument of evangelism in the dispensation of the gospel, nor go so far as to say that believing Gentiles become Israelites when they embrace the promise of salvation.

Throughout the thanksgiving prayer which opens the epistle, or at least from verse 11, Paul speaks of the Jewish believers as in the first place the inheritors of God's promised blessing. "It was his will that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, should cause his glory to be praised" (NEB). This causing God's glory to be praised took place through the preaching of the gospel by Jews to Gentiles. "And you too, when you had heard the message, and had believed it, became incorporate in Christ". Thus the Gentiles share with Israel the Divine spiritual blessing of v. 3, by which we are probably understand that blessing adumbrated to Abraham, and the inheritance in the heavenly realm.

In Chapter 2, Paul first reminds his readers that he and his fellow Jews were at one with the Gentiles in sin and judgement, as he does in Romans. He also describes the advantages of Israel in much the same way as in Romans; they have the covenants of promise, they have the knowledge of God, the commonwealth and theirs is the Christ the Messiah. All these the Gentiles lacked. Yet what now unites Jew and Gentile is not these things, but the death of Christ. By that death, the Jew was freed from the law and its curse, and "a single new humanity" was formed in which both Jew and Greek may approach God through the same Spirit.

It is here that Paul uses terms which have often been taken as indicating that the church is a renewed or spiritual Israel. The three images he employs are: citizenship in the same republic, membership of the household of God, and incorporation into the same Temple building. The figures, however, fall short of claiming an identity between Israel and the church. They are clearly partly derived from the Old Testament pictures of Gentiles going up to worship at Jerusalem, doing homage to the great king and offering their prayers in the Temple. But the figures of the commonwealth republic and also the figure of the household may well owe something to the Hellenistic conceptions of these two institutions, for in the Hellenistic republic men of many races might find a common citizenship, and membership of a household might also be open to some person of different nationality from that of the householder. Thus, in becoming fellow-citizens with the saints, Gentiles found themselves members of an altogether larger society than old Israel, a society for which "a new mankind" is finally the only adequate description.

The picture of the Temple has likewise been transformed. The foundation of the new Temple is indeed Israel, for it consists of the apostles and prophets of the Jewish Christian Church. But the greater part of the structure above is Gentile. Chapter 3 of Ephesians gives the explanation of this relationship. It was to the apostles and prophets of the Jewish Christian church that God first revealed His intention of uniting Jews and Gentiles in one spiritual church and making them joint-heirs of the promised inheritance of salvation. So when salvation was offered to the Gentiles, it was the Jews who were entrusted with the task both of preaching that gospel and also of expounding all its dimensions to the Gentiles who were ignorant of all the long centuries of God's revelation. In this sense they were the foundation of the new Temple. The syllabus of salvation was still only to be found in the Old Testament, and this had been committed to the Jews. So Paul prays for his Gentile converts that they may be strong to comprehend along with their Jewish brethren (that is, with all the saints) the length, the breadth, the depth and the height of all that God has prepared for His people.

I should not conclude without saying this. I am conscious that the picture I have drawn of the New Testament church contrasts very strangely with the church as we know it today. I have drawn attention to great New Testament arguments and weighty factors which would seem to play little or no part in our thinking today whether about missionary work or about the life of the local church. Allowing that what I have said is substantially a correct statement, there are many questions arise from it to which I do not give any answer. What, for instance, is the bearing of the Jew-Gentile question on modern missionary work and on denominational relations today? I do not know. But I am sure that we cannot by-pass the biblical pattern of things. We all tend to pick out such verses from the Bible as seem, superficially, to fit our immediate situation, or to plug a gap in our theological system. We have largely stopped asking the Bible to speak for itself. We prefer it to tell us what we want to hear. I have no doubt at all that an immense amount of interpretation of the Bible is needed in terms of our own thinking, and an equally immense amount of application to the needs of our own age. But behind both of these activities must be the endeavour first to understand the Bible in terms of its own situation.

lect. f. M.A. Judge, The Social Pattern of Christian Groups in the first Century.



