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THE COLOSSIAN EPISTLE (Part 2)

ETERNAL - SUPERNAL - TERMINAL

THE COLOSSIAN REPLY TO CHURCH ERROR

By: Charles D. Alexander

“And He is the Head of the Body, the Church”.
Colossians 1:18

February 17, 2008

The February 10th audio was lost therefore the Bible Study discussion skips until noted.

JEHOVAH’S ERRING WIFE IN HOSEA

As though to make certain that we understand plainly his intention to give the O.T. prophecies to the Church in a gospel and heavenly interpretation, Peter a few verses later quotes the prophet Hosea in proof of the fact that the Church was all along the objective and the true fulfillment of O.T. prophecy. We quote from 1 Peter 2, vs. 10 “Which in time past were not a people but are now the people of God; which had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy”.

(See Hosea 1:9 and 2:23)

To make doubly sure we are not mistaken in Hosea’s prediction that the Church takes the place of Israel, we have Paul stating the same thing in Romans 9:25-26, quoting precisely the same prophecy of Hosea.

That Peter and Paul interpret these verses as being descriptive of the N.T. Church is beyond question a token of the principle therein established of the true and spiritual method of the interpretation of prophecy. Our expositors for the most part find in the words of Hosea only the promise of a restored Israel in the fleshly,

natural sense. But Peter and Paul view it otherwise. Hosea's prophecy is built around Jehovah's relationship with Israel as with an erring wife who commits whoredom against her husband. That Gomer the daughter of Diblaim (Hosea 1, vs.3) never existed as an actual wife of the unhappy prophet is clear from the remarkable signification of the name. The name Gomer signifies "completion" and indicates here that the apostasy of the people of Israel was complete. The name Diblaim is a dual form in the Hebrew and means a cake usually of figs composed of two layers and signifies the two nations, Judah and Israel. In the names of Hosea's prophetic children (or rather Jehovah's) is shown the impending rejection of both houses of the Israelitish nation, Israel and Judah. In the child Jezreel is figured the end of the dynasty of Jehu (which meant the end of the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel). The other two children are Lo-Ruhamah and Lo-Ammi. "Lo" in Hebrew denotes the negative. Hence the meaning given in the first chapter of Hosea, "No longer mercy" and "No longer my people", which describes the casting off of both houses of Israel and Judah under the dreadful sentence, "I will not be your God" (vs.9).

That this judgment (finally fulfilled in the disaster of A. D.70), was intended to indicate the end of the earthly people as touching their special relationship with God, and the continuation of God's purpose and promise in the N.T. Church is shown clearly in Hosea 1:10 which we have already quoted. The rejection of the earthly people is shown by this verse to be only the starting point of a new and more glorious chapter in the history of the people of God, when their numbers would be increased worldwide so as to be innumerable as the sands of the sea and would far outreach the boundaries of the earthly nation, for "It shall come to pass that in the place where it is said ye are not my people there shall it be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God". That this is the N.T. Church there can be no manner of doubt for Peter says it is - that the prophecy has already been fulfilled.

He goes further and tells us that this is the new or heavenly Zion where the temple is no longer of stone and lime but composed of "living stones" built upon the great corner stone, Christ, which God has "laid in Zion". He shows that the true people of God are the stones of that spiritual temple and they are therefore "a chosen generation a royal priesthood a, holy nation, a peculiar people".

Could inspired language make it more plain that the Church is the fulfillment of prophecy? If Hosea's predictions are the pattern of all true interpretation we have Peter's authority for declaring that all O.T. prophecy of the restoration of the kingdom of Israel is realised in the Church and nowhere else. All natural figures

therefore such as Ezekiel's vision of the new temple, the building of the walls of Jerusalem, the throne of David, the pre-eminence of the kingdom, are to be interpreted spiritually in precisely the same manner as some of our friends have succeeded so well with reducing the measurements and furnishings of the tabernacle and temple of O.T. times to gospel terms and heavenly doctrine (as Peter does with the living stones of the N.T. temple). We admit the accusation of our friends that by these interpretations we "take all the curses and give them to the Jew and take all the blessings and give them to the Church" - because this is precisely what James (Acts 15, vs. 14-17) and Peter and Paul do in the N.T. and (if we may say so with profound reverence) what Our Lord Himself does in the Gospel.

"Therefore say I unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruit thereof. And whomsoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whosoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder."

Matthew 21: 43-44

THE EXPOSITION RESUMED

Having done what we could to clear the ground by stating the Pauline doctrine of the Church as the **BODY OF CHRIST**, we now proceed to a brief sketch of the remainder of the Colossian epistle.

Paul's epistles to Ephesus and Colosse were written while under house arrest in Rome and they came in the same mailbag by the hand of Tychicus and Onesimus to their respective destinations - near neighbours in Asia Minor. Onesimus also carried a personal note from Paul to one of the principal officers of the church at Laodicea (another neighbouring town), a man of wealth and influence named Philemon. Onesimus traveled hopefully to be welcomed and received by his old master, no longer as a runaway bondman, but now converted and a brother beloved.

The Ephesian and Colossian epistles naturally have much in common having been written at the same time and in the same place by the same hand but they also have distinctive features which give to each a special significance.

In that to Ephesus Paul traces the origin of the Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ back to a divine decree eternal in its nature and transcending all time and all creation ("He hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world")

(Ephesians ch. 1, vs.4).

In Colossians Paul wrestles more particularly with the problem of Jewish encroachment upon the integrity of the Church and devotes the whole of the second chapter to a refutation of the claims of false Judaizing teachers who sought to bring the Church under the dominion of O.T. ordinances -circumcision, dietary laws, sabbaths, priesthood, festivals and new moons. His method of doing so was to establish first the supremacy of Christ over all things in heaven and earth, and secondly to show that the coming of Christ to save and redeem His people by His incarnation, His atoning death and His glorious resurrection and ascension established a new order which took precedence over all which had gone before. This meant that the Jewish order was to be seen not as a permanent feature of God's plan but as an interim and preparatory phase until the incarnation of Christ. Since Christ has come and established His kingdom on the imperishable and immovable rock of His own divinity and His redeeming work upon the cross, the types and shadows and disciplines of the Old Covenant have given way to the inward and spiritual realities of the New Covenant or as Paul so uniquely puts it in Ephesians, "He hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" - not in earthly and rudimentary institutions.

The audio resumes at this point.

Refer to John 3:35.

Old Testament types of which Jesus is the fulfillment.
Luke 24:13-53; John 5:39-47

THE PASSING OF THE JEWISH COVENANT

For Jewish believers, while the Temple still stood, Paul tolerated the continued observance of the old ordinances until it pleased God to remove them in His own time. This the Lord did within ten years of the writing of Paul's epistles, by releasing upon the Jewish nation (still unbelieving after forty years of divine patience since the crucifixion), the Roman legions in a stupendous act of providential vengeance when Temple, priesthood, sacrifice and nation fell in. A.D. 70-73. Writing about the same time in the Epistle to the Hebrews, Paul predicted the early removal of the Old Covenant relics in the sentence which we have in Hebrews 8, v.13: "In that He saith a new covenant, He hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away": Paul perceived

that the old Jewish order, even while he was writing, was about to vanish into history.

For Gentiles the old ordinances (sacred though they were because ordained by God through Moses) had no relevance. The believer was perfect already in Christ and must not be brought under the bondage of religious rites which were not only obsolete but subversive of the Gospel. Paul saw (as he makes clear in all his writings) that to yield to Jewish prejudice and to revert to Jewish forms on this point was to destroy the Church and abolish the cross of Christ. Nothing less than this was at stake and he took steps to protect and assert the Church's faith and the integrity of her standing in Christ, even though Peter and Barnabas were carried away by the Jewish dissimulation. (See Galatians 2, vs.11-13)