

The Address on the Envelope

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God has revealed Himself in many ways in His Word. The historic, prophetic and literary portions are usually in the form of short scrolls or pamphlets. His latest and highest communications have come to us in the form of *letters*, or, being formal and of a public character, *epistles*. When the postman brings a large stack of mail, we must first sort it out, if several receive their letters at the same address. Before we open it and read it we must make sure for whom it is intended.

In early days there were no envelopes, so the address of an epistle was always the burden of the opening lines. Hence the epistolary portions of the Scriptures are usually introduced by some specific indication as to the particular person or persons from whom the epistle comes and to whom it is to go. Peter and James are especially particular on this point.

JAMES TO THE TWELVE TRIBES

None of the Circumcision epistles so clearly indicate the class to whom it is written as the letter of James to the twelve tribes in the dispersion. Its conflict with Paul's epistles is so pronounced that Luther rejected its authority, and endless attempts have been made to find a means of reconciliation, without coming to any satisfactory solution. Once it is apprehended that this epistle is for a different people and a distinct administration, all need of reconciliation vanishes and we are not tempted to adjust one to the other.

The very name of James is suggestive. It is practically the same as Jacob, or Supplanter, who, in his career, exemplified the energy of the flesh, and whose name was changed to Israel when the flesh was subdued. The name was also applied to the nation when their crooked ways called for it rather than for the name Israel. Hence it may be taken to indicate the spiritual state of those to whom this epistle is addressed.

The epistle begins, “*James, a slave of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the dispersion.*” Nothing can be plainer than the fact that this letter is addressed to a special class. It is not for the tribes in the land; it is absolutely impossible to apply it indiscriminately to the nations without causing the utmost confusion. It is solely and exclusively for the sons of Israel outside of the land, in the dispersion.

PETER TO THE DISPERSION

Peter wrote to the expatriates of the dispersion in the upper provinces of what is now called Asia Minor. This conclusively confines it to the Circumcision, for the Gentiles were never scattered there from their own land. This cannot, however, refer to the general dispersion of the Jews, for few of them were of the faith. It doubtlessly refers to the fact that, from the dispersion of the stoning of Stephen, continuous persecutions in the land had driven many Jewish Christians into exile. After seeking an asylum from their fierce fellow countrymen among the idolaters, they found that these, too, turned persecutors because of false charges against them in an edict from Nero.

These Circumcision epistles are not addressed to us today. They doubtless will find their fullest application to the sons of Israel after the present administration of God’s grace has passed by, and God deals once more with the Circumcision at the opening of the day of the Lord. Then judgment will begin at the house of God, and they will be beset with trials, such as these epistles foretell and [maintain]. Only in such an atmosphere and at such a time will the message Peter brings be fully appreciated and really understood. Just as it was difficult for him to apprehend the epistles of Paul (II Peter.3:16), so it is only by an earnest effort to place ourselves in the position of those to whom these epistles are sent, that we shall be able to apprehend their message partially.

Peter received his commission to write these epistles from the Lord, after His ascension. On the shores of the sea of Tiberius, after the miraculous draft of fishes, he is charged to graze His sheep (John 21:15-17). This is the ministry which he fulfills in these pastoral epistles. The people addressed, unlike “*the church which is His body,*” are “*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.*”

THE EPISTLES OF JOHN

John, just as truly as Peter and James, ministered to the Circumcision, and referred to the nations as outside of the sphere of fellowship (*cf.* II John 7). Even when he widens the scope of blessing to include the whole world, he lays the heaviest stress on its relation to the favored nation. “*He is the Propitiatory Shelter concerned with our sins, yet not concerned with ours only, but concerned with the whole world also*” (I John 2:2).

The clue to the character and application of John’s ministry, both personal and written, lies in the Lord’s question to Peter (John 21:22), “*If I should be wanting him to be remaining till I am coming, what is it to you?*” The Lord did not say that he actually would remain alive until His return, but we have little room to doubt that, in spirit, this is true. His writings have special application to those who enter the Kingdom without dying and provide the doctrinal basis of the Kingdom itself. This is further confirmed by the fact that, in his apocalyptic visions, John enters the Kingdom, in spirit.

It is a striking fact that John never appeals to his apostleship in his epistles. In the second and third letters he is simply an elder. This accords with the private character of these short notes, yet it un-

doubtedly reflects the waning authority of the twelve apostles as the apostasy of the chosen nation developed. They are not given any place in Jerusalem in the latter part of the book of Acts.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

Hebrews resumes the subject of the book of Acts. Those associated with the twelve apostles and James, whose destiny is the Kingdom as promised by the prophets, are left in a distressing situation due to the national defection of Israel. This book deals with the problem of these Pentecostal believers and takes them back to the same position as was occupied by the patriarchs and prophets of old, as explained in the eleventh chapter. They died in faith, not having received the promises.

Though the title, "Hebrews," is not inspired, the opening strain shows that this epistle is addressed to Israelites "*whose are the fathers*" (Romans 9:5), and who alone had the oracles of God. No author is given. This is an inspired omission. It is a grave mistake to seek to supply one. The author was not Paul, for he wrote in II Thessalonians 3:17, "*The salutation is in my hand which is a sign in every epistle: thus am I writing.*"

THE EPISTLES OF PAUL

In his epistles Paul always prefixes his name, and usually follows with the character he assumes in writing and a concise description of those whom he is addressing. The name "Paul" has a strange sound to one accustomed to the Hebrew titles of so many of the ancient scrolls. Of course, Paul was an Israelite, like most of the other sacred penmen; but God changed his Hebrew name, Saul, to a foreign one, "Paul." This change was made at that crisis in his career when he was severed from his associates for a special ministry to the nations (Acts 13:2-3). Not only that, but the very first time that we read of the evangel being proclaimed directly to a Gentile, not a proselyte, we are told casually that Saul "is also Paul." Furthermore, this Gentile was also called by this name, for he was the proconsul Sergius Paul. Still more significant are Paul's dealings with Elymas, the magician, who sought to pervert the proconsul from the faith. He undoubtedly is representative of Israel, and foreshadows the opposition to Paul's ministry for the nations. The climax is capped by Paul's miracle, so unlike his other gracious deeds. He brought blindness on the apostate Jew "*until the appointed time.*" What a marvelous miniature of Paul's ministry! During Israel's blindness he brings salvation to the nations (Acts 13:6-12).

The name "Paul" is in full accord with his ministry. Though usually taken as a Roman name meaning "little," it seems far more likely that it is Greek (though the Latin also has this root), from the element *pau*, meaning "CEASE," from which our English word *pause* is derived. His name always should suggest to us the *pause* in God's dealing with Israel, the interval during which the nation is blind, like Elymas, until the appointed time. How suggestive this is! Every time we attempt to enter one of Paul's epistles we are notified that what follows is to be applied during the period of Israel's blindness – and the fact that all of his epistles are thus marked, stamps them as one, and identifies them with this period when God's grace goes out to the nations.

Paul introduces himself according to the character of the epistle. Is it concerned with service? Then he speaks of himself as a slave. Is it authoritative? Then he appears as an apostle. Where fellowship is the theme, he associates others with him in his salutation. The Perfection epistles – Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians – are fine examples. As he alone is the authoritative revelator of the secret

of the joint body, he presents his credentials in Ephesians as an *apostle*; as service and fellowship are uppermost in Philippians, he introduces himself as a slave, along with Timothy; as Colossians is concerned with correction and communion, he again is an *apostle*, along with Timothy.

The revelation of the secrets depends on the authority of Paul as an apostle. There were not wanting those¹ who questioned or denied his right to the title. He was not one of the twelve. He could not qualify for such a place. He did not become an apostle until after the main ministry of the twelve had been accomplished. The one who took Judas' place had to be taken from among those who had been with Christ [the whole] time from John's baptism until His ascension (Acts 1:21-22). This was the one condition, and Paul had not been with Him at all. Moreover, his apostleship was based on the very reverse of this. It was necessary that he should *not* know our Lord until after His ascension, for he is the apostle of Christ Jesus the glorified, not Jesus Christ the rejected Messiah.

The title "apostle" often has been defined as "one sent"; but it has not the usual element for "send." This is *pemp*. "Apostle" is made up of two elements, *apo*, "from," and *stel*, "put." Its literal meaning is to put someone at a distance, as a representative. Its nearest English equivalent is *commissioner*. An apostle was given a commission, with authority to enforce it. The commissions for the twelve were given them by the Lord while He was yet with them. Paul did not receive his from them or through them, but from the Lord Himself. The vast differences between his commissions and those of the twelve should show how utterly impossible it is that Paul should be numbered with the eleven.

Apostolic authority was by no means confined to the twelve. Among the Circumcision there must always be so many, and no more or less, for Israel's twelve tribes call for twelve rulers. Yet no such condition determines the number of apostles among the Uncircumcision. Paul, however, is so great that he overshadows the others far more than Peter does his fellow apostles. Indeed, it is probable that, if we confine ourselves strictly to this final and culminating revelation of God's purpose, Paul is its only apostle. Though Timothy is included in the salutation to Colossians, his apostleship is not recognized there. He is simply brother Timothy; and, now that the men have passed away, and Paul alone has left inspired epistles, he has become for us the one and only apostle, the only authority in doctrine and practice.

Repeatedly, Paul ascribes his apostolic office to the *will* of God (I Corinthians 1:1; II Corinthians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; II Timothy 1:1). None of the twelve do this. They were chosen by Christ in accord with the revealed *counsel* of God. Their commissions, their careers, all about them, were in line with Jehovah's promises in the Law and in the Prophets and in the Psalms. Some details and developments may have been secret, but their whole course was in keeping with a program previously prepared.

One of the special points in Paul's call was that he should know God's will (Acts 22:14). This cannot refer to a knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures, but to matters still unrevealed. It was Paul's special privilege to explore new and unknown fields of God's purpose. To be appointed an apostle by His will is suggestive of a fresh departure in the divine activities.

THE ADDRESS OF EPHESIANS

When Paul indicates the destination of his letter, he characterizes those to whom he is writing. He sends [the epistle to] Ephesians "*to all the saints who are also believers in Christ Jesus*" (Ephesians 1:1).

1. *i.e.*, there were many.

It is said that an expert can read the history of a man's health by looking at his teeth. So we can see the apostasy from Pauline teaching in the interpolations and mistranslations and interpretations of these simple words.

It is evident that the force of "*being ... in Christ Jesus*" was lost very early. As is the case today in many quarters, the names and titles of our Lord had no special significance. Indeed, in the highest evangelical circles the irreverent use of our Lord's personal name is very painful to sensitive spirits. How few would recognize the great distinction between "Christ Jesus" and "Jesus Christ"! Yet this is the point in this address.

All who are in touch with God are holy ones or saints. This is the most inclusive name by which they can be known. From Adam and Abel to the last to be called in the eons to come, in every era, and in all of the various administrations, not only men but messengers are called holy ones, or saints. When Paul wrote this epistle the saints were divided into two classes. One group, associated with the twelve apostles, mostly of the Circumcision and proselytes, were proclaiming Jesus Christ as the rejected Messiah. The other group, associated with Paul, mostly of the Uncircumcision, recognized His present heavenly exaltation, which is expressed concisely and forcibly in the title Christ Jesus. To this class this epistle was sent.

No more correct or concise direction could be given for delivery of this epistle. It is not for unbelievers, but for saints. It is not for those in Jesus Christ, but those in Christ Jesus. Try as we will, we cannot find any better address for the envelope, even though we should add much to it. It is for some Jews and some Gentiles; hence we cannot easily draw a line there. Though mostly for the Uncircumcision, it also includes some of the Circumcision. We cannot use this distinction. There is only one way to divide them, and that is their attitude toward Christ, as expressed in the two titles Jesus Christ and Christ Jesus.

Since the significance of the title "Christ Jesus" was lost, this sentence in the salutation has been beyond apprehension of the copyists and translators; hence they have tried to remedy the apparent fault. So the scribe of Alexandrinus, or someone before him, added "in Ephesus" in order to make sense. It is most likely that this epistle was sent to Ephesus as well as to all of the Pauline *ecclesias*, and there may have been a tradition to that effect which led to the insertion of this phrase. Yet the character of the epistle is such that it is clearly a circular letter, one copy of which might be addressed particularly to Ephesus, but which is by no means to be confined to that *ecclesia*.

We are confirmed in this position by the fact that both *Vaticanus* and *Sinaiticus*, the most ancient of our texts, were originally written without "*in Ephesus*."

This epistle contains no local allusions. The apostle has no special place in mind. The theme is developed along the broadest lines. There are no special expedients as in Corinth, no corrections as in Galatia and Colosse. Every part of the epistle applies to all the *ecclesias*. It is of such a character that it could not be withheld from any saint in Christ Jesus, in any place or at any time. It applies to us today as fully as if we had just received it fresh from the pen of Paul.

This epistle was for all of the saints in Christ Jesus. It should have been sent to all of the saints who had come under Paul's teaching. It would not have been understood by any others. Since it was *written* for them, surely it must have been *sent* to them. Only some of these were at Ephesus. Others were

at Corinth and Thessalonica and in Galatia, as well as in Philippi and Colosse, wherever Paul and his preaching had penetrated.

PAUL'S EARLIER EPISTLES

In the adjustment era preceding the present secret administration of God's transcendent riches of grace, Paul wrote his epistles to the Thessalonians and to the Romans, the Corinthians, the Galatians, as well as his first letter to Timothy. The question arises, did the revelation of the secret in Ephesians and its companion epistles annul the previous revelation completely, and ignore its recipients, so that Romans to Galatians and Thessalonians are obsolete, or do they still stand just as they are, so that Ephesians is a mere addition to their message? Or is there a third course indicated, between these two extremes, their acceptance as a whole, yet with modifications in detail to accord with the later revelation? Is this epistle addressed to those in Christ Jesus to whom Paul wrote his previous epistles?

The third item of the secret settles these questions for us satisfactorily. We are *joint* partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus, through the evangel of which Paul *became* the dispenser (Ephesians 3:6-7). Note the past tense of *became*. It tells us that Paul is speaking of the evangel which he *had* preached. It is limited by the title "Christ Jesus" to that which is recorded in his previous epistles, and does not include his ministry in the synagogues in Acts. In this evangel the nations had been partakers, but not *joint* partakers.

Broadly speaking, we have a complete answer to our questions here. All of Paul's previous epistles are definitely declared to be ours, yet with such modifications as the abrogation of Israel's priority involves. Ephesians does not restate Paul's previous evangel, for all they needed was the ability to adapt it to the larger light.

To conclude: the opening portions of the non-Pauline letters clearly indicate that the subjects concern the nation of Israel and the Kingdom on earth which was promised to them. Paul's epistles are written to those who, like himself, had been severed from the rest, and associated with Christ in glory, rather than in His rejection. Today, notwithstanding the fact that the church knows nothing of this, and follows the twelve apostles and rejects Paul and his teaching, the message heralding the Kingdom to come from heaven to the earth is no longer in force. By grace, all are associated with the risen and ascended Christ. Let us pray that God would reveal to His saints the transcendent glory which is theirs in "Christ Jesus."

Unsearchable Riches

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