

THE NEW JERUSALEM: A SIGN OF THE CONSUMMATION OF THE OPERATION OF GRACE AS ALLEGORIZED IN GALATIANS AND HEBREWS

by John Pester

*By grace you have been saved through faith...
For we are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus
for good works...Abolishing in His flesh the law
of the commandments in ordinances, that He might create
the two in Himself into one new man, so making peace...
And coming, He announced peace as the gospel to you
who were far off, and peace to those who were near...
In whom you also are being built together into
a dwelling place of God in spirit.
(Eph. 2:8, 10, 15, 17, 22)*

*These things are spoken allegorically, for these
women are two covenants, one from Mount Sinai,
bringing forth children unto slavery, which is Hagar.
Now this Hagar is Sinai the mountain in Arabia
and corresponds to the Jerusalem which now is,
for she is in slavery with her children.
But the Jerusalem above is free, which is our mother.
(Gal. 4:24-26)*

*You have come forward to Mount Zion and to the city
of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.
(Heb. 12:22)*

*The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him
to show to His slaves the things that must quickly take
place; and He made it known by signs...And he carried
me away in spirit onto a great and high mountain
and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out
of heaven from God, having the glory of God.
(Rev. 1:1; 21:10-11)*

The economical operation of the Triune God is an operation of grace, and the consummation of this operation produces a coinhering expression of the Triune God in Christ in redeemed, transformed, and glorified humanity, which is manifested as a mutual dwelling place of God in spirit, a dwelling place that is to the praise of the glory of His grace (Eph. 1:6; 2:22). Grace involves more than just the judicial bestowal of unmerited favor on sinful humanity through the redemptive death of Christ. It is also the

organic content of God's continuing economical operation of power within redeemed humanity (3:7, 20). Although this operation was initiated in our experience when the riches of Christ's redemptive death were applied through faith (v. 8; 1:7), it will be consummated in our experience only when Christ's transforming and glorifying riches have been constituted and incorporated into the church through faith. A proper pursuit and experience of these riches depend upon a revelation of Jesus Christ, who is unveiled as the fulfillment of the covenant of God's promise in Galatians and as the Executor of God's fulfilled covenant in Hebrews (Gal. 3:13-14; 4:4-5; Heb. 7:17-25). The believers' participation in the economy of the grace of God is a continuing matter of faith (10:38-39), and this continuing operation in the New Testament produces a consummation that is allegorized and signified as the New Jerusalem in Galatians, Hebrews, and Revelation (Gal. 4:22-26; Heb. 11:10; 12:22; Rev. 21—22).

The consummation of the Triune God's operation of grace in believing Gentiles and Jews, who are the human constituents of this allegorized building, is the focus of the apostle Paul's exhortations in Galatians and Hebrews respectively. In Galatians Paul speaks to Gentile believers in the church, encouraging them to run well in order to experience the freedom and enjoyment of grace in Christ through their corporate manifestation of Christ as the seed of the promise (3:16, 29; 4:27-28; 5:1, 7). In Hebrews Paul speaks to Jewish believers in the church, encouraging them to run the race with endurance by coming forward to the throne of grace in order to experience Christ's perfecting ministry as a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (12:1; 4:16; 7:11; 10:14). Those who respond to the apostle's portrayal of Christ and partake of grace as the source of the riches of Christ, will, according to Galatians, inherit the promise of sonship in the coming kingdom and consummately express the Triune God as the New Jerusalem in eternity through the supply of grace as a river (2:21—3:1; 4:5, 26, 30; 5:21). And those who run the race with the endurance of grace, will, according to Hebrews, inherit the promised rest of God as the

reality of Mount Zion in the coming kingdom and consummately express the Triune God as the New Jerusalem in eternity (1:14; 6:12; 9:15). In both Galatians and Hebrews the allegorized operation of grace consummates in a dwelling place,¹ which is further unveiled in Revelation through the sign of the New Jerusalem as the consummate signification of the fulfillment of God's economy of grace.

The New Jerusalem: a Sign of the Consummation of the Operation of Grace

In the book of Revelation the New Jerusalem is the consummate sign in a book of signs (1:1; 21:2). In Revelation John saw four major visions in spirit, each of which was conveyed through the use of signs with spiritual significance. John was in spirit on the Lord's Day when he saw a vision of the churches (1:10), conveyed through the sign of the seven golden lampstands (chs. 1—3). John was in spirit when he saw a vision of the destiny of the world (4:2), conveyed through signs related to God's universal administration in the heavens (chs. 4—16). John was in spirit when he saw a vision of the destruction of Anti-christ's religious and material spheres of influence (17:3), conveyed through the sign of Babylon the Great (chs. 17—20). And John was carried away in spirit when he saw a vision of the eternal consummation of the Triune God's economical operation of grace (21:10), conveyed through the sign of the New Jerusalem (chs. 21—22).²

John's use of signs in chapters 1 through 20 supports the point that the New Jerusalem in chapters 21 and 22 is a spiritual sign as well. It is not only the consummating sign in the book of Revelation but also of the entire Holy Scriptures. It is not logical that John would have been shown signs bearing spiritual significance in the first twenty chapters of Revelation (1:1), only to be shown a material structure in chapters 21 and 22. In principle, the revelation of the sign of the New Jerusalem ends where the revelation of the first three signs begins—in spirit, and it unveils the consummation of God's operation of grace in Christ through the fellowship of the Spirit, which is symbolized as a river of grace flowing out from the throne of God and of the Lamb (22:1).

Given the fact that there are only two seemingly casual references to grace in Revelation, it could easily be argued

that there is not much basis for regarding the New Jerusalem as the consummation of the Triune God's operation of grace (1:4; 22:21).³ The references to grace in these two verses, however, introduce and conclude the revelation of Jesus Christ that is made known through signs (1:1). In verse 4 of chapter 1 John begins with a seemingly salutary use of the term, saying, "Grace to you." In verse 21 of chapter 22 John concludes with a seemingly benedictory use of the term, saying, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen." Both verses, however, are weighty in relation to John's unveiling of God's operation of grace in the church. In 1:4 John speaks of grace in relation to the seven churches in Asia. These seven churches were not only actual instantiations of God's operation of grace at that time, but they also symbolically represent the progression of God's operation of grace throughout the age of grace.⁴ In 22:21 John concludes by commending grace to all the saints, who are the

human constituents of the New Jerusalem, for the continuance of the consummation of God's operation of grace in the church and in Christ Jesus for eternity. Furthermore, these two references to grace are inextricably linked to the Triune God, who is economically operating in redeemed humanity. The grace that is to the seven churches is from "Him who is and who

was and who is coming, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ" (1:4-5), and the grace that is to all the saints is depicted as flowing out from the throne of God and of the Lamb as a river of water of life, which John elsewhere associates with the Spirit (22:1; John 4:14; 7:38-39). Witness Lee summarizes the importance of John's reference to grace at the end of Revelation in a footnote to verse 21 of chapter 22.

After seeing all the visions and hearing all the prophecies in this book, we still need the Lord's grace. Only the grace of the Lord Jesus can enable us to live and walk according to these visions and prophecies. Not only this book but also the entire Bible closes with this grace, the grace that enables us to experience the all-inclusive Christ and participate in the Triune God that we may become His eternal corporate expression for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose, that He and we may enjoy absolute satisfaction and complete rest mutually for eternity. (Note 1)

The New Jerusalem, as a sign of God's eternal corporate expression, is an expression of grace in glory.⁵

THE BELIEVERS' PARTICIPATION IN THE ECONOMY OF THE GRACE OF GOD IS A CONTINUING MATTER OF FAITH, AND THIS CONTINUING OPERATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT PRODUCES A CONSUMMATION THAT IS ALLEGORIZED AND SIGNIFIED AS THE NEW JERUSALEM.

Consequently, one of the defining attributes of the New Jerusalem is glory: “He carried me away in spirit onto a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God” (21:10-11).

The glory of God is the expression of God, God expressed. We have been predestined for this glory and called to this glory (1 Cor. 2:7; 1 Pet. 5:10; 1 Thes. 2:12). We are being transformed into this glory (2 Cor. 3:18) and will be brought into it (Heb. 2:10). Eventually, we will be glorified with Christ (Rom. 8:17, 30) and bear the glory of God for God’s expression in the New Jerusalem. (Recovery Version, Rev. 21:11, note 1)

The glory of God in the New Jerusalem is the issue of the grace of God. The glory of God speaks to the spiritual consummation of God’s operation of grace, which is allegorized as the Jerusalem above in Galatians 4:26 and the heavenly Jerusalem in Hebrews 12:22.

In his exhortations to the Gentile believers in Galatians and to the Jewish believers in Hebrews to participate in God’s operation of grace, Paul presents a clear contrast between two covenants, one of law and one of promise (Gal. 3:17-18; 4:24; Heb. 7:22; 8:6-7), one sourced in the works of the flesh and one sourced in the operation of grace through faith (Gal. 3:2, 5; 5:4; Heb. 7:16; 9:10; 10:22), one that results in slavery to elements of the world and one that results in freedom in Christ (Gal. 4:3, 9, 24-26; 2:4; Heb. 2:15; 10:11-18), one that condemns unto death and one that imparts the divine life (Gal. 3:10-14, 21; Heb. 10:28; 7:16, 25; 10:20), one that is temporary and one that is eternal (Gal. 3:23-25; 4:4-5, 9, 30; Heb. 8:13; 9:10; 13:20), and one that is earthly and one that is heavenly (Gal. 4:25-26; Heb. 8:4-5; 3:1). Galatians draws these contrasts and applies them to Gentile believers in order to stabilize their standing in God’s operation of grace so that they can be built up into God’s corporate expression. Hebrews draws these same contrasts in relation to Jewish believers and with the same end view in mind. These contrasts, which run throughout each Epistle, are succinctly summarized in Paul’s allegorical references to the sign of the New Jerusalem in Galatians and Hebrews.

The Allegory of the Jerusalem Above in Galatians

In verses 21 through 31 of chapter 4 Paul concludes his long argument for the preeminence of his gospel (1:6—4:31), which fully unveils the operation of God’s covenant of grace, with an allegorical reference to Hagar and Sarah, who, respectively, serve as signifiers of the Jerusalem that now is and the Jerusalem above. Paul’s words in this section are a “figurative treatment of one subject under the guise of another” (“Allegory,” def. 1), and he plainly states, “These things are spoken allegorically” (v. 24). In *A Com-*

mentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians Joseph Agar Beet notes that, as with any allegory, the descriptions in this section “have another meaning beside the historical one” (131). Ascertaining this further meaning from the immediate context of the verses in this section, however, is not as simple as it seems, even given Paul’s apparent explanation of his allegorical treatment of Hagar and Sarah’s history in the Old Testament in verses 24 through 26. This is because within his affirmation of the superiority of the new covenant of grace in these verses, Paul employs another allegory to assert that two cities, both named Jerusalem—one earthly and one heavenly—are representative of these two women, these two covenants. In effect, verses 21 through 31 contain an allegory within an allegory, an allegory of a city within an allegory of two women.

The Allegorical Descriptions of Jerusalem as Above, Free, and Mother

Of these two cities, there is ample development of the allegorical identity of the first Jerusalem, the “Jerusalem which now is” (v. 25). It is the earthly, physical city of Jerusalem that is at the center of the Jewish religion and culture, being the location of the temple and the place of the priestly service and sacrifices established under the covenant of the law, which was given at Mount Sinai in Arabia. The allegorical identity of the “Jerusalem above,” however, is more ambiguous (v. 26). Since the first Jerusalem is an actual physical city, many commentators, who associate the Jerusalem above with the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 and 22, view the city, both here and in the final chapters of Revelation, as a final, eternal, and physical dwelling place for believers, that is, the ubiquitous “mansions” that Christ is supposedly preparing for us in heaven.⁶ This understanding, however, is not remotely supported by the descriptive terms that Paul uses in verse 26: “The Jerusalem *above* is *free*, which is our *mother*” (emphasis added).

The term *above* stresses superiority and distinctiveness in God’s economy rather than location in time or space. Whereas “the Jerusalem which now is” allegorically “corresponds” to a physical location in Arabia where the law was given, which in turn points to a physical city where the tablets of the covenant were physically housed and religiously enshrined (v. 25), Paul presents no similar allegorical correspondence to a physical location for the Jerusalem above. It is “above” because the operation of grace according to the covenant of the promise is superior in its distinctive ability to impart, to give, the reality of the divine life as grace (3:21).

The term *free* points to the condition and issue of the covenant of grace (2:4; 5:1, 13); it does not refer to things freely given but to the condition of being free from the demands of the law, which can continue to enslave those

who are genuine heirs of the promise but who are immature in the divine life (4:1). *Free* also refers to the freedom that issues forth from the believers' identification with a person—Christ—not a place. Our freedom in Christ Jesus includes

- (1) release from the bondage of the law, implying liberation from obligation to the law and its ordinances, practices, and regulations;
- (2) full satisfaction, with a rich, supporting supply;
- (3) the enjoyment of true rest, without being under the heavy burden to keep the law; and
- (4) the full enjoyment of the living Christ. (Recovery Version, 2:4, note 2)

The term *mother* speaks of organic generation in the divine life, and in verses 21 through 31 of chapter 4, there is a clear emphasis on the birth, growth, and maturity of the believers who will inherit the promised sonship by not nullifying the grace of God. Abraham's "two sons," as much as the "maidservant" and the "free woman," are the focus of Paul's allegory, and primacy is clearly given to the one "born through promise" (vv. 22-23). Those who are born of promise in reality are also "born according to the Spirit" and positioned to inherit the superior blessing of the Spirit as the promise of God's covenant to Abraham (vv. 29-30; 3:14). The Jerusalem above, who is "our mother," speaks of our receiving of initiating grace in the past through regeneration, of our receiving of constituting grace in the present to mature us into sons and heirs, and of our receiving of sustaining grace in eternity future through our full union in life with the eternal dispensing Triune God. With grace as our mother, we have been regenerated with the divine life by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8). With grace as our mother, we are currently growing in grace as children of promise and being constituted in the divine life as sons and heirs according to promise (2 Pet. 3:18; Gal. 3:29), and we will inherit the full manifestation of the divine life according to God's promised covenant of grace (Rom. 4:16; Gal. 3:18). As our mother, the Jerusalem above is not a physical place that we will inhabit in the future in heaven; it is the consummate expression of God's operation of grace that imparts the fullness of Christ into us as grace upon grace.

There are many significant spiritual terms in Galatians, including *grace, peace, gospel, revelation, freedom, slavery, works of law, hearing of faith, curse, blessing, promises,*

covenant, inheritance, life, righteousness, seed, household of faith, new creation, and Israel of God, but the one that most closely corresponds to the descriptive terms associated with the Jerusalem above is *grace*. In Galatians there are seven direct references to grace. These references speak of the initiation of God's operation of grace (1:3, 15, 6; 6:18), the distinctiveness of this operation in Paul's defense of the gospel (2:9), and the freedom derived from living according to the operation of grace (v. 21; 5:4). The spiritual realities demonstrated in these references to grace correspond to the three allegorical descriptions utilized by Paul in regard to the city that consummates God's operation of grace: *mother, above, and free*.

The Demonstration of Grace as Mother in God's Calling in the Gospel

The association of *grace* with *mother* in Galatians begins with Paul's acknowledgement of the Father as the source of grace: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3). Our Father is the God of all grace (1 Pet. 5:10), and the grace that Paul commends to us from Him is the divine life that initiates and sustains our living in the new covenant. It is the empowering source, the mother, of our life of faith (2 Tim. 2:1; 1 Cor. 15:10). Thus, the grace that comes from the Father of grace, the God of grace, is our mother, the grace of God. Without the God of grace coming to us as grace through faith, we would still be strangers to the covenants of the promise rather than being sons of the free woman, who have been born through promise (Eph. 2:12; Gal. 4:23). And without the God of grace coming to us as grace through faith, we would still be alienated from the life of God rather than being sons and heirs of the grace of life (Eph. 2:12; 1 Pet. 3:7). At best, we would be under the child-conducting preservation of the law, but without a genuine experience of grace as our mother, the condition and consummation of our living would still be one of slavery and curse, rather than blessing.

When the Father of grace comes to us as grace, this grace, as our mother, operates in us and initiates a calling according to grace: "It pleased God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me" (Gal. 1:15-16). The source of Paul's calling was grace, and when the Galatians

WITHIN HIS AFFIRMATION OF THE SUPERIORITY OF THE NEW COVENANT OF GRACE, PAUL EMPLOYS ANOTHER ALLEGORY TO ASSERT THAT TWO CITIES, BOTH NAMED JERUSALEM, ARE REPRESENTATIVE OF THESE TWO WOMEN, THESE TWO COVENANTS.

responded to Paul's gospel of grace by the hearing of faith, grace similarly operated in them to initiate a calling from the Father of grace: "I marvel that you are so quickly removing from Him who has called you in the grace of Christ to a different gospel" (v. 6). The gospel of grace, which initiates God's calling, involves more than mere doctrine. Through the hearing of faith (3:2), the gospel of grace imparts the grace of God by revealing the God of grace as the Son in us through the promised Spirit (1:16; 3:14). When the gospel of grace openly portrays Christ and His riches, including His redemptive death (v. 1), there is a response of faith (v. 2), and this response is the result of receiving the Spirit in our spirit as grace: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen" (6:18). The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that is our mother is with our spirit, and it is continually available as the source of the riches of Christ because we have been joined to the Lord as one spirit. By continually receiving and enjoying the supply of grace in our spirit, Christ is formed in our inner being, and the riches of Christ are lived out and expressed in the practical circumstances and environment related to our calling and service (4:19; 2:20). Grace, as a mother, was so demonstrated in Paul's calling and in his service in defense of the gospel.

The Demonstration of Grace as Above in Paul's Defense of the Gospel

The association of *grace* with *above* can be seen in the apostles' response to Paul's defense of the gospel: "Perceiving the grace given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and to Barnabas the right hand of fellowship" (2:9). The gospel of Christ is not according to man (1:7, 11); it is higher than man and higher than what can be preached by an angel from heaven (v. 8). It is a gospel from above because it comes from the Most High God (Heb. 7:1), and when Paul went to Jerusalem to lay before the apostles the gospel of grace that he proclaimed among the Gentiles, his defense was a convincing demonstration of the distinctive and superior operation of God's grace in his being. When Paul defended his gospel before the apostles in Jerusalem, he did not prevail because he presented a more convincing argument related to the content of his gospel. In fact, Paul does not mention any doctrinal points in verses 1 through 10 of Galatians 2. He only speaks of the apostles' recognition of the fact that the God of grace, who was operating in Peter, was similarly operating in him. Paul prevailed because his defense was a living demonstration of the grace that had been constituted into his being. It was this high, distinctive, and superior display of grace that convinced the apostles.

When Paul presented his gospel to the apostles, they perceived that grace had been given to him; that is, they acknowledged that his gospel and his living bore the undeniable distinctive of grace and that, by virtue of the

superior nature of grace, his ministry was not from man but from God. Hence, they extended the "right hand of fellowship" to him, identifying him with the Body and the Body with him. The apostles recognized the grace that had been given to Paul, and they realized that its operation in him had been manifested through his proclamation of the truth of the gospel to the Gentiles. Thus, they received Paul into the fellowship of the Body and, by extension, acknowledged that his ministry to the Gentiles was an enlargement of the fellowship of the Body. Grace, as being above, was demonstrated in his defense of the gospel and in his living according to the gospel.

The Demonstration of Grace as Free in Paul's Living according to the Gospel

The association of *grace* with *free* can be seen in Paul's living according to the gospel, a living under the covenant of grace in a condition of freedom from the slavery of the law. In 5:1 through 6:17 Paul, having fully revealed the contents of the gospel of grace in 1:6 through 4:31, begins to address the matter of the practical walk of God's children. The defining characteristic of this walk is freedom in Christ from the yoke of slavery imposed by the observance of objective standards in the pursuit of righteousness, as exemplified in the practice of circumcision (5:1-6). According to Paul's realization, the Galatians' return to living in slavery under the old covenant in contrast to remaining in the freedom of the new covenant in Christ was a fall from God's continuing operation of grace: "You have been brought to nought, separated from Christ, you who are being justified by law; you have fallen from grace" (v. 4). There is a clear connection in verses 1 through 4 between *grace*, *Christ*, and *freedom*. In these verses the condition of grace, the freedom that the Galatians initially gained in Christ through the hearing of faith, is not only identified as a consequence of the freeing work of Christ (v. 1), but it is also equated with their receiving of Christ Himself.⁷ When the Galatians received the Son through the Spirit, they received Him as grace, and this grace was the source of profit to them (v. 2), but when they turned from Christ back to religious observances (v. 3), they separated themselves from Christ (v. 4). This separation was not a fall from their initial salvation, which is eternally secure based on God's righteousness, but it was a fall from God's continuing operation of grace. Without grace, the freedom for which Christ had set the Galatians free was forfeited.

In contrast to the Galatians, Paul, having also received the initial saving grace of Christ, was empowered by grace to express the living Christ in his flesh in faith (2:19-20). In essence, Paul's living was an extension of the incarnation of Christ, another coming of Christ as grace, and thus he declared, "I do not nullify the grace of God" (v. 21). Rather than making Christ's death of none effect, Paul's living according to the gospel was a display of grace

that substantiated and authenticated the reality of God's ongoing operation of grace. And in his living, he was free from the works of the law and free to live to God to inherit the promises that had been graciously given under the promised covenant of grace (vv. 16, 19; 3:18).

The Pursuit of Grace in Galatians

The promise of grace is a promise of inheritance, and the promise of inheritance speaks of a consummation of grace, which is allegorized as the Jerusalem above, the Jerusalem that is free, and the Jerusalem that is our mother. The believers' inheritance of the consummation of grace is assured by the faithfulness of God in His righteous acceptance of Christ's death on the cross on our behalf. In eternity future, all believers will inherit, experience, and enjoy the full consummation of the grace as the Jerusalem above. Galatians, however, speaks of another inheritance—the inheritance of the kingdom of God (5:21).

The inheritance of the kingdom of God refers to the enjoyment of the coming kingdom as a reward to the overcoming believers. It is not the same as a believer's salvation; rather it is a reward in addition to the believer's salvation. (Recovery Version, v. 21, note 2)

The coming kingdom is the millennial kingdom that a believer will inherit only if there is a practical realization of the operation of grace in his daily living and pursuit of the Lord. Such a living does not practice "such things as fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, divisions, sects, envyings, bouts of drunkenness, carousings, and things like these" (vv. 19-21). Rather, such a living displays the "fruit of the Spirit," including "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control" (vv. 22-23), within the context of God's corporate new creation (6:15-16).

Galatians is a call for believers to steadfastly participate in God's ongoing operation of grace in order to be qualified to inherit the kingdom in the coming age, which will be a foretaste of the full consummation of grace as the Jerusalem above for eternity future. Thus, the focus of Galatians is on the pursuit of our promised inheritance through our living out of Christ as grace. Since the necessary precondition for our successful realization of the inheritance of the coming kingdom has been accomplished

through Christ's enactment of the new covenant, our pursuit can be hindered only if we fall from grace back to weak and poor elements that cannot supply us with the divine life that is needed for our growth and our maturity as sons (4:3, 9), as exemplified by the covenant of the law which cannot give life (3:21).⁸

In *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on St Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, Ben Witherington III argues that Paul is not presenting a contrast between the manners of our justification, that is, between works or faith, but between the manners of our living, that is, between the covenantal sources of our living.⁹ "The Galatians are confronted with a choice between two covenants and thus two manners of living faithfully before God. They are already Christians, the question is which covenant and covenantal stipulations will they live by?" (367). These covenantal stipulations are embodied in Paul's gospel, which is not focused on

the forgiveness of sins for our justification but on our inheritance of the promised blessing of sonship through the operation of grace. While the former understanding of the gospel truthfully presents justification as being the issue of grace through faith, it speaks only of the initial operation of grace. The latter understanding of the gospel speaks of a continuing operation of

grace that is not nullified through a misguided pursuit of perfection by the flesh (3:3).

The flesh inclines to keep the law and is tested by the law; the Spirit is received and enjoyed out of faith. God's economy delivers us from the flesh to the Spirit that we may participate in the blessing of the riches of the Triune God. This cannot take place by the flesh keeping the law but by the Spirit being received out of faith and experienced through faith. (Recovery Version, 3:3, note 2)

Paul reminds the Galatians that they had received the Spirit through the hearing of faith so that he could encourage them to continue to receive the Spirit through the hearing of faith unto their perfection as sons and heirs in the divine life through the operation of grace (vv. 2, 5). All his comments to the Galatians and even his observations concerning his own conduct and that of the genuine but misguided Jewish believers, who were promoting the law as the source of perfection, are focused on the living of the believers after their initial salvation. He marvels that the Galatians are so quickly removing from Him who

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called them in the grace of Christ (1:6). He expresses concern that he would in no way run in vain (2:2). He rebukes those who are not walking in a straightforward way (v. 14). He stresses the need for the believers' perfection in the divine life, and chides those who turn to weak and poor elements of the world for this perfection (3:3; 4:9). He encourages the Galatians to stand fast and not be entangled again with a yoke of slavery (5:1). He reminds them that they were running well and exposes those who are hindering their pursuit (vv. 7-12). He reminds the Galatians that their sowing unto the Spirit will issue in a reaping in the proper season (6:7-9). And he encourages the Galatians to walk by the rule of the new creation to arrive at their promised status as sons and heirs (vv. 15-16).

Grace, which operates in the believers to reveal Christ, live Christ, and form Christ in us (1:16; 2:20; 4:19), is the central focus of Galatians. This grace is distinctive and superior in contrast to the covenant of the law; it is liberating in contrast to the covenant of the law, and it is ever supplying in contrast to the covenant of the law. Thus, for the Gentile believers in the region of Galatia, it is the focus of Paul's exhortation and God's operation, the consummation of which will be realized as a coinhering expression of the Triune God in Christ in redeemed, transformed, and glorified humanity, an expression that is allegorized as the Jerusalem above. This emphasis on the consummation of the operation of grace is also at the center of the apostle's exhortation to the Jewish believers in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The Allegory of the Heavenly Jerusalem in Hebrews

Paul's unveiling of the gospel of the grace of Christ in Galatians, which begins in 1:6 and ends in 4:31, culminates in a single allegorical reference to the Jerusalem above in verse 26 of chapter 4, and his unveiling of the ministry of the grace of Christ in Hebrews, which begins in 1:4 and ends in 10:39, culminates in a single allegorical reference to the heavenly Jerusalem in verse 22 of chapter 12. This reference to the heavenly Jerusalem, in turn, points to the sign of the New Jerusalem in Revelation, and it, like the allegory in Galatians, is realized by the Hebrew believers' receiving of grace in God's ongoing economical operation. Although the reference to the Jerusalem above in Galatians is contained in a section describing the "allegory" of Hagar and Sarah, and thus clearly allows for allegorical interpretation, the heavenly Jerusalem is not so clearly identified as being allegorical in nature. But it is. And this is confirmed by the allegorical context of the three references to the city of God in Hebrews. In chapter 11 Paul presents a

brief history of faith—from God's creation, through all the generations of God's chosen people, to the New

Testament believers (v. 40)—to prove that faith is the unique pathway by which God's seekers receive His promise and take His way. (Recovery Version, 11:3, note 1)

Each of these examples of God's chosen people serves as a type of a living that is according to the new covenant reality of faith, and thus, Paul effectively ascribes allegorical significance to all the histories contained in this chapter. In his account of Abraham's experience of faith, Paul focuses on only one aspect of God's promise—the promise of the good land,¹⁰ saying,

By faith Abraham, being called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt as a foreigner in the land of promise as in a foreign land, making his home in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the fellow heirs of the same promise; for he eagerly waited for the city which has the foundations, whose Architect and Builder is God. (vv. 8-10)

What is interesting in this allegorical presentation of Abraham's history is Paul's reference to "the city which has the foundations, whose Architect and Builder is God," because a city is not explicitly or even implicitly contained in Jehovah's specific promise to give Abraham the land "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates" in Genesis 15:18. Even in the larger context of Jehovah's promise in verses 7 through 21 in this same chapter, there is no reference to a city. According to Hebrews 11:10, however, this promise is interpreted as a promise of a city. Thus, the land in Genesis consummates in an allegorized city in Hebrews, through Paul's use, again, of an allegory within an allegory. According to Witness Lee, the allegorical city that Abraham eagerly awaited must be interpreted in relation to the other allegorical references to this city, including

the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22), the Jerusalem above (Gal. 4:26), the holy city, New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2; 3:12), which God has prepared for His people ([Heb. 11:16]), and the tabernacle of God, in which God will dwell with men for eternity (Rev. 21:3). (Recovery Version, Heb. 11:10, note 1)

It is easy to interpret this city in Hebrews as a physical city, but such an interpretation ignores the allegorical context and significance of the term *heavenly* as it is consistently utilized in Hebrews and subsequently applied to *country* in 11:16 and *Jerusalem* in 12:22. All the references to heavenly speak of condition, not location. Even though Christ is seated on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens and is ministering from the heavens as a High Priest (8:1), He is higher than the heavens (7:26), indicating that the issue of His person and work is a heavenly effect, not a transport to heaven. The

heavenly person and work of Christ in Hebrews result in a heavenly calling of which we have partaken (3:1), they are conveyed to us as a heavenly gift of which we have tasted (6:4), they are reflected through examples and shadows of the heavenly things (8:5; 9:23), they bring us into the reality of a heavenly country (11:16), which consummates in the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22).

The concept of this book is focused on the heavenly nature of the positive things. First, it points out to us that Christ today is sitting in the heavens (1:3). He entered into the heavens (9:24). He passed through the heavens (4:14) and became higher than the heavens (7:26). Then this book unfolds to us the heavenly calling ([3:1]), the heavenly gift (6:4), the heavenly things (8:5), the heavenly country (11:16), and the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22). Also, it tells us that we are enrolled in the heavens (12:23) and that God warns us today from the heavens (12:25). All the things in the Old Testament that were held by Judaism were of an earthly nature. In this book the writer's intention was to show the Hebrew Christians the contrast between the heavenly nature of the New Testament and the earthly nature of the Old Testament that they might forsake the earthly things and attach themselves to the heavenly.

(Recovery Version, Heb. 3:1, note 3)

In 11:16 Paul writes that the patriarchs longed for a country that was better than the physical land of their sojourning, "that is, a heavenly one," and he concludes the verse by noting that their seeking pleased God to the point that "He has prepared a city for them." The city that God has prepared in a heavenly country is a heavenly city, the heavenly Jerusalem: "You have come forward to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (12:22). Accepting a physical interpretation of the heavenly Jerusalem also requires that one accept a temporal one as well, but the notion that the heavenly Jerusalem is a physical city that God has or, in some people's mind, is preparing for us as our future home in heaven is not supported by verse 22.¹¹ This is because Paul speaks of the Hebrew believers having already come to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. He does not speak of coming in the future. Our coming to the heavenly Jerusalem is equal to our coming forward to the throne of grace (4:16), which throne is realized in our regenerated human spirit indwelt by the Spirit of grace

(v. 12; 10:29). Thus, the heavenly Jerusalem is an allegory of the grace that is with us all (13:25), a grace that brings us into a heavenly condition on earth and that qualifies us to enjoy the consummation of grace in the coming millennial kingdom and in eternity future as the New Jerusalem.

The Pursuit of Grace in Hebrews

Our qualification to enjoy the inheritance of grace in the millennial kingdom, which is a principal component of the Epistle to the Hebrews, depends upon our pursuit of grace in God's ongoing economical operation in this age. This is the focus of Paul's exhortations related to grace. There are seven references to grace in Hebrews, and all of them show that the operation of grace is uniquely human in orientation, beginning with the incarnation of the Son in humanity: "We see Jesus, who was made a little inferior to the angels because of the suffering of death, crowned with

glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death on behalf of everything" (2:9). According to John 1:14 and 17, grace came when the Word became flesh, and according to Hebrews 2:9, the Son tasted death in His humanity by the grace of God, which was intrinsic to His incarnated divinity. In His incarnated living the Son tasted death on

behalf of everything by the grace of God. Although He was full of grace in His divinity, this grace sustained Him in His humanity. Furthermore, it was expressed in His humanity so that God's intention and will could be fulfilled in humanity (10:7, 9). He, thus, serves as the prototype of one who serves God by participating in God's economical operation of grace, making it possible for us to find this same grace in our human living by coming forward to the throne of grace: "Let us therefore come forward with boldness to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace for timely help" (4:16). The help that we need in God's operation of grace is help that is needed in time, in the totality of our human sojourning in time; it is not merely some help that is provided in a time of need.

All our time is a time for grace, but we need boldness in order to access this grace. The boldness that we need to come forward to the throne of grace is the same boldness that we need in order to enter into the Holy of Holies in the blood of Jesus (10:19). The Holy of Holies is the location of the throne of grace, and the throne of grace is in our regenerated human spirit.

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The very Christ who is in heaven is now also in our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22). As the heavenly ladder (Gen. 28:12; John 1:51), He joins our spirit to heaven and brings heaven into our spirit. Hence, whenever we turn to our spirit, we enter into the Holy of Holies. There we meet with God, who is on the throne of grace. (Recovery Version, Heb. 10:19, note 1)

To meet and fellowship with God in our spirit is a matter of receiving grace through the impartation of the law of the Spirit of life in our inward parts, which transforms us and constitutes us with the riches of Christ. We can be bold to enter into such a fellowship because of the blood of Jesus. To forsake this opportunity and to return to the law insults the Spirit of grace, who carries out God's operation of grace:

By how much do you think he will be thought worthy of worse punishment who has trampled underfoot the Son of God and has considered the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing and has insulted the Spirit of grace? (v. 29)

In order to participate in God's operation of grace, we need to be intimately related to the Spirit of grace, especially in our circumstantial experience of the Father's loving discipline, which He has ordained for our sanctification (12:5-10). With grace, our hanging-down hands and paralyzed knees can be set straight (v. 12). And with grace, our lame feet can be healed in order for us to follow straight paths in our walk as sons (v. 13). We need the sustaining and supporting power of grace in order to not forfeit our birthright: "Looking carefully lest anyone fall away from the grace of God" (v. 15). If the fallen and profane tendencies of our flesh are not kept in check by the grace of God, our inheritance of the birthright will be rejected (vv. 15-17). Our birthright is the promised coming kingdom: "Therefore receiving an unshakable kingdom, let us have grace, through which we may serve God well-pleasingly with piety and fear" (v. 28). Through our participation in God's operation of grace, we are saved from the bitter and profane elements in our being and are properly positioned as sons to inherit the manifestation of the kingdom that we have already received in reality through grace.

Paul's teaching concerning the pursuit of grace for the gaining of the kingdom is in contrast to various strange teachings: "Do not be carried away by various strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be confirmed by grace, not by the food of sacrifices, by which those who walk were not profited" (13:9). Paul's teaching concerning grace had a confirming impact, because grace was actually conveyed and imparted in his spoken and written utterances. The conclusion of Paul's teaching in Hebrews consummates in an allegorized city of grace, the heavenly Jerusalem, and thus, it is fitting that he concludes his

entire Epistle with the most fitting interpretation of this allegory: "Grace be with you all" (13:25). This final utterance succinctly presents the divine reality in God's economy: Grace, being the coming of the Son with the Father by the Spirit into humanity, is now with us, and just as grace operated in the coinhering living of the incarnated Son in the days of His flesh, it is available to operate in our human living in order to bring us into the consummation of our corporate inheritance of the Triune God. Such an inheritance will display the riches of His grace in glory, which is most appropriately signified as a city above, a heavenly city, a new city.

Grace: Generating Mother, Consummating Expression

Grace, which produces a corporate expression of the Triune God in redeemed, transformed, and glorified humanity, is allegorized as the Jerusalem above in Galatians, the heavenly Jerusalem in Hebrews, and the New Jerusalem in Revelation. Grace is the source of this expression as a mother and the consummation of this expression as a city. This consummating expression is not a physical city; it is the believers, who have been corporately constituted with the riches of Christ through their participation in the operation of grace and who will be to the praise of the glory of His grace. **AC**

Notes

¹The term *dwelling place* in the New Testament and even in this article must be understood allegorically. It, like the New Jerusalem, refers to the mutually coinhering reality of the immanent Trinity that has been enlarged to include redeemed, transformed, and glorified humanity. The Lord spoke of the mystical realization of this term through His resurrection on the evening before His crucifixion, when He declared, "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you" (John 14:20), and He spoke of the mystical expression of this term on that same evening, when He prayed, "That they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that You have sent Me" (17:21).

²My division of the content of the book of Revelation is taken from Witness Lee's outline of Revelation contained in the Recovery Version of the Bible.

³The scant use of the term *grace* in Revelation is equally evident in John's Gospel. In the introduction to his Gospel (ch. 1), John uses the term *grace* four times in verses 14 through 17. In verse 14 John speaks of the incarnated Word as being full of grace and reality, in verse 16 he speaks of the believers receiving of Christ's fullness and grace upon grace, and in verse 17 he contrasts the provision of the law through Moses with the coming of grace and reality through Jesus Christ. After verse 17 there is no further reference to grace in the entire Gospel, not even in his non-customary ending to the Gospel (21:25). His seemingly

minor use of the term could be understood as an indication of its minor significance, but its prominent presence in the introduction, its strong relationship to Christ's person and to the believer's experience of Christ, and its stark contrast to the law as the means of receiving and experiencing the fullness of Christ all argue for a deeper appreciation of the importance of the term. Prior to the incarnation, grace was not present in the realm of human creation. When the incarnated Christ came, however, grace came. The fullness of His being is known through grace, and grace, rather than the law, is the means through which redeemed humanity receives and expresses the fullness of the Triune God (Eph. 1:23). James Moffat's comment on *grace* in these verses in John is helpful.

The clue to this passage in the Prologue is to be found in realizing that 'grace and truth' (reality) is substantially a periphrasis for 'gracious Reality' or 'real Grace.'...The Johannine view of truth as reality, i.e. the upper world or life of God which is the sole reality, determines the meaning of the phrase. Since 'truth' is the divine nature, or, as John also loves to call it, 'light,' it is ever imparting itself, and in order to make this clear he brackets it with 'grace.' Hence 'full of grace and truth' means 'full of self-communicating divine life,' and the self-communication is not an emanation but God giving Himself through His Son in generous love to men. Such is the transcending privilege of Christianity, to experience this outgoing of God in gracious love for the sake of taking men into His own life. (368-369)

The Gospel of John is John's testimony of the self-communication of the divine life in Christ to redeem and glorify those who have received Him as grace (1:12). Grace is synonymous with the operation of the divine life, and his use of the term *life*, as it pertains to the eternal, divine, uncreated life of God in this Gospel, is ever present. Of his numerous references to life, two verses sufficiently highlight its importance: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (v. 4), and "I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly" (10:10). The life that was in Christ is realized in our experience as grace, which brings us into the reality, the truth, the shining of God as light. In order to receive this life as grace, it was necessary for Christ to come through incarnation (1:14; 6:33), to be crucified for the release of the divine life (3:16; 6:51), and to be resurrected as the Spirit to impart this life into those who believe into Him (5:21, 24; 6:40, 47, 63; 7:39; 10:28; 17:2; 20:31). Furthermore, the abundance of this divine life is realized in our continuing experience

of grace upon grace. Thus, grace does not disappear from the Gospel of John after 1:17; rather, it becomes the foundation upon which John's Gospel of life is built.

⁴See messages 10 through 16 in Witness Lee's *Life-study of Revelation*, published by Living Stream Ministry, for a detailed survey of the history of the church as it is symbolically represented by the seven churches in Asia in Revelation 2 and 3.

⁵The Triune God's economical operation of grace results in glory being in the church and in Christ Jesus for eternity (Eph. 3:21). According to Ephesians, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with the Spirit as our every spiritual blessing, has predestinated the believers, as the church, to be to the praise of the glory of His grace, with which He graced us in the Beloved (1:3-6). In order to accomplish the predestinated purpose of the One who works all things according to counsel of His will, the Son has redeemed us through His blood, according to the riches of His grace, and then caused these

riches to abound to us in all wisdom and prudence so that we would be to the praise of His glory (vv. 7-8, 11-12). In order to apply these riches, the Spirit has sealed us with Himself as the pledge of our inheritance unto the redemption of the acquired possession so that we would be to the praise of His glory (vv. 13-14).

⁶Commentators struggle to provide a definitive explanation of Paul's reference to the Jerusalem above. This struggle is heightened by the paucity of explanation from Paul himself. While Paul speaks of the correspondence between Hagar, the covenant of the law, which was given at Mount Sinai in Arabia, and the physical city of Jerusalem, he provides no such detailed correspondence to the Jerusalem above. Thus, in *Galatians: Letter of Liberation*, Charles Swindoll asks,

What is the "Jerusalem above"? Remember, Paul is building a contrast here. Hagar corresponds to the literal, earthly Jerusalem, which is inhabited by the Jewish people, who are slaves under the Law. The Jerusalem above, represented by Sarah ("our mother") must, therefore, apply to a nonearthly Jerusalem and all those saved by grace. (94)

He later qualifies this answer with other possible explanations that he has encountered, saying, "Some scholars see this Jerusalem above as the church universal, all those redeemed in Christ. Others see it as heaven, God's dwelling place, which is inhabited by the souls of the redeemed" (94). Swindoll's suggestion that the Jerusalem above could be regarded as either the "church universal" or a "dwelling place, which is inhabited by

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the souls of the redeemed,” is considered by Robert Govett in *Govett on Galatians*. He rejects the first interpretation and argues adamantly for the second.

She is then a city, in contrast with the earthly, and the now existing, Jerusalem. God’s better city is above, and has yet to appear. It is a real city, the outcome and abode of the men of the new covenant, as old Jerusalem was of the old covenant. Jerusalem was the city which God chose, when Israel was at rest in the inheritance of the law and the kingdom of David. So, then, the Jerusalem above is the centre of the better country, the heavenly, the settled and eternal abode of God’s saved ones. It is the city of the twelve foundations, for which Abraham looked.

Jerusalem above is not the church. That is not a city in heaven, a city yet to come. The members of the church are the sons of Jerusalem. “Which is our mother.” The promise which God made to Abraham is free. The children of the promise are free, like their mother. Believers alone shall dwell in that heavenly city; the evil are to be cast out: Rev. xxi, 27. (151-152)

Govett summarizes his understanding that the Jerusalem above is a physical city when he marvels that “a multitude whom none can number shall enter at her gates, and dwell with God in the mansions prepared by Christ” (154). In contrast to Govett’s certitude, Joseph Agar Beet in *A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* is more circumspect in his willingness to assign physicality to the Jerusalem above. Thus, he endeavors to find spiritual applications for the term *Jerusalem above*.

Jerusalem above: or the above Jerusalem. Cp. ‘the heavenly Jerusalem,’ Heb. xii.22; ‘the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven,’ Rev. xxi.2; ‘the city having the foundations,’ Heb. xi.10; ‘the city to come,’ xiii.14. It is the future home of the saved, looked upon as a city and a metropolis. The above different conceptions of it, we may harmonize by conceiving it as already existing in the purpose and forethought of God and influencing the thought and action of men. This city is *free*, with all that pertains to it. Restraint is needless there, and unknown. *Our mother:* that city is a mother, and we are her children. For it is the source, by the laws of spiritual generation, of our spiritual life; a life which partakes the nature of its source: in other words, our spiritual life is an outflow of the eternal and divine forces which will find their visible and necessary manifestation in that future city. (135)

In his commentary on this section of Galatians, Beet, nevertheless, alludes to physicality, speaking of the New Jerusalem as “the future home of the saved,” but he also allows that its designation as a city is more indicative of a spiritual reality, and hence, that it should only be “looked upon as a city.” Thus, at some level, Beet recognizes that he is still dealing with an ambiguous allegory. Swindoll ends his examination with an acknowledgment of the ambiguity of the term, while at the same time being willing to regard it as a physical place. He says,

“Whatever Paul’s exact meaning, it’s obvious that this ‘Jerusalem’ represents those saved through faith in Christ. It is a place and a people characterized by freedom, not by enslavement to the Law” (94).

⁷“It is not that as the offense was, so also the gracious gift is; for if by the offense of the one the many died, much more the grace of God and the free gift in grace of the one man Jesus Christ have abounded to the many” (Rom. 5:15). This verse does not speak of grace as a free gift from Jesus Christ but of the free gift of Jesus Christ who comes in grace. The free gift that comes in grace is the one man Jesus Christ, whose humanity has been divinized through the process of His incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection, making His humanity communicable as grace.

An early twentieth century report on the doctrine of grace by Protestant theologians, entitled “The Theology of Grace,” provides a broad perspective on grace primarily in relation to Christ’s satisfaction of God’s righteous requirement, but there is also some recognition of grace in relation to our receiving of Christ:

Grace is regarded as a free gift bestowed upon man, issuing from the loving will of God especially as made known in the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection. It was thought of either as mediated by the Spirit or the very gift (as love) of the Spirit Himself. Essentially it is, as St. Thomas put it, a “kind of participation in the Divine Nature” (cf. 1 Pet. i.4). (8)

⁸The two covenants, rightly understood in the context of God’s economy, are not antithetical to each other but rather complementary. There also is no equivalence, because grace is clearly superior to the law, and the law is subordinate in service to the coming of grace (Rom. 5:20; Gal. 3:23-24). Only the superior covenant of grace can produce sons and heirs, because only it is able to give life (v. 21). Without the ability to give the divine life, the law, being outside of man and being made weak through the flesh of man (Rom. 8:3), cannot be fulfilled in order to satisfy God’s righteous requirement (v. 4), which is the basis for the free giving of grace (3:24). This reality is signified by the river of water of life that flows out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the New Jerusalem; that is, with the satisfaction of God’s righteousness (the throne) through the obedience of the One unto death on the cross (the Lamb), grace (the river) abounds (Rev. 22:1; Rom. 5:19-20).

⁹Witherington highlights an emerging understanding of Galatians that differs from the long-standing Lutheran view that Galatians speaks primarily of the matter of justification by faith. Given the church’s loss of the truth of justification by faith, Luther’s recovery of this truth related to God’s initial operation of grace was surely needed and ordained by God, but this truth in Galatians serves only as a foundation for Paul’s presentation of the truth related to God’s consummating operation of grace, which is realized through the inheritance of the kingdom and the producing of the Jerusalem above through the believers’ participation in God’s continuing operation of grace. Witherington writes:

There has of late also been something of a Copernican revolution in the thinking about what Galatians is really all about and what Paul is combating. The Lutheran focus on the issue of how one gets into the people of God or gains right standing with God (justification by grace through faith), has been shown not to be the central focus of the letter, but rather an important and foundational presupposition for his argument about how those who are already Christians should live. The arguments, however, are about going on not getting in. Nor is Paul combating either legalism (a particular attitude about law) or libertinism, and he is certainly not replacing either one of these with some sort of antinomian message of unbounded freedom or freedom without obligation. The old clichés about Paul's view of the Law will simply no longer suffice, any more than the old antithesis between Gospel and Law will. (356-357)

¹⁰Paul's account of Sarah's experience of faith focuses on the other aspect of God's promise to Abraham—the promise of seed, reinforcing the allegorical significance of grace as mother.

¹¹A footnote in the Recovery Version on *Mount Zion* in verse 22 summarizes the relationship between the word *heavenly* and the reality of grace:

The things mentioned in vv. 22-24 are heavenly and spiritual, in contrast to the earthly and physical things listed in vv. 18-19. These things signify the side of grace, where both the firstborn and the spirits of righteous men are saved by grace. The people under the old covenant came to the side of the law, whereas we Christians, who are under the new covenant, come to the side of

grace. Hence, we are not under the law but under grace (Rom. 6:14). This portion of the word ([Heb. 12:18-24]), like Gal. 4:21-31, shows us that we are not under the bondage of the law but under the freedom of grace to be the heirs of the inheritance. This is our birthright! We should not give this up by falling away from grace ([Heb. 12:15]), but should have grace (v. 28). The things on the side of grace are heavenly. (note 1)

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Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians

The promise given to Abraham was the unveiling of God's desire. When God made the promise to Abraham, He opened His heart and unveiled the desire of His heart...His desire was to give Himself as a blessing to the nations...With God's promise to Abraham there are two main aspects: the aspect of the nations being blessed and the aspect of the good land. On the one hand, the nations would be blessed through Christ's redemption. On the other hand, Christ, typified by the good land, is the embodiment of the Triune God as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit as our enjoyment and bountiful supply. God's promise to Abraham with these two aspects was the unveiling of the desire of God's heart. God's promise to Abraham involves much more than justification by faith. Yes, we are told that Abraham believed God and that it was reckoned to him as righteousness (3:6). However, we need to see that God's dealing with Abraham involved much more. The gospel preached to Abraham was actually the unveiling of God's heart. Two thousand years after the desire of God's heart was unveiled to Abraham, Christ came. When Christ came, grace came. Grace is the Triune God processed to become our enjoyment. Such a grace is the fulfillment of God's promise, the fulfillment of God's desire...It is correct to say that the fulfillment of God's promise is both by grace and by the living person of Christ, for this living person is Himself the grace. Today we are enjoying this grace, this living person, who is now the life-giving Spirit within us...Praise the Lord that the grace we enjoy is Christ, and Christ is the life-giving Spirit! Because we have grace, Christ, and the life-giving Spirit, we are children according to Spirit. How blessed we are to have the hearing of faith and by it to receive grace! We have seen that the desire of God's heart, the promise given to Abraham, is fulfilled by grace and that grace is Christ as the life-giving Spirit. This Spirit is now in our spirit and makes us children according to Spirit. This is the revelation in Galatians 3 and 4.

From the *Life-study of Galatians* by Witness Lee, pp. 215-217