

THE ALLOTTED PORTION IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT REVEALING THE VARIED AND MEASURED FUNCTIONS OF THE MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

by John Pester

In his Epistle to the Colossians, Paul speaks of Christ as “the all-inclusive One, having the first place in all things as the mystery and embodiment of God, as the Head and constituent of the church, as the allotted portion, life, constituent, and hope of the saints, and as the Body of all positive things.”¹ In presenting these items of His preeminence, Paul begins by first referring to Christ as the allotted portion in 1:12, saying, “Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you for a share of the allotted portion of the saints in the light.” The allotted portion, signified by the promised good land in the Old Testament and Christ in the New Testament, subsumes all the items of His preeminence in Colossians and, thus, is rightfully positioned in the sequence of Paul’s presentation. As the allotted portion, He should have the first place in all things.² As the allotted portion, He is the mysterious embodiment of God. As the allotted portion, He is the Head and constituent of the church. As the allotted portion, He is the source of the life and hope of the saints both now and in the future. And as the allotted portion, He is the realization of all positive things.

Christ as the Allotted Portion in Colossians 1:12 Being the Reality of the Allotted Portions in the Old Testament

The allotted portion of Christ in Colossians 1:12 is the reality of the type of the allotment of the good land to the twelve tribes of Israel in the Old Testament. Colossians 1:12 does not use the term *lot* as a general reference to Christ, but *allotted portion*, as a particular reference to subsections of the promised land. For example, Joshua 15:1-4 describes in detail just the southern border of the lot of Judah:

The lot for the tribe of the children of Judah according to their families was unto the border of Edom, to the wilderness of Zin at the south; this was the southern extreme. And their southern border was from the end of the Salt Sea, from the tongue-shaped bay that faces south; and it went southward to the ascent of Akrabbim, and passed on to Zin, and went up south of Kadesh-barnea, and passed on to Hezron, and went up to Addar, and went around Karka, and passed on to Azmon, and went out to the brook of Egypt; and the end of the border was at the sea. This shall be your southern border.

Verses 5 through 12 then detail the eastern, northern, and western borders of Judah’s lot, which included the special features of “the bay of the sea at the end of the Jordan” (v. 5), “the stone of Bohan the son of Reuben” (v. 6), “the waters of En-shemesh” (v. 7), “the Jebusite slope (this is Jerusalem)” (v. 8), and “the spring of the waters of Nephtoah” (v. 9). These features signify unique functions measured to the members of the Body of Christ, features that are not present in other lots but are parts of the totality of the good land. See “Map of Canaan—Twelve Tribe Portions.”

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MAP OF CANAAN - TWELVE TRIBE PORTIONS



The intrinsic significance of the allotment of the land is that the possessors of the land are different. This indicates that the experience of Christ among God’s people is not the same. In God’s ordination the good land is allotted to His people in different degrees. The New Testament clearly tells us that “God has apportioned to each a measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3). We are also told that “all the members do not have the same function” (v. 4). Therefore, God gives grace to each member according to its function in the Body (Eph. 4:7). This is God’s ordination and the divine allotment. (Lee, *Life-study of Joshua* 66)

Witness Lee’s observation concerning the “intrinsic significance of the allotment of the land” is confirmed by Paul’s word in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11:

There are distinctions of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are distinctions of ministries, yet the same Lord; and there are distinctions of operations, but the same God, who operates all things in all. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for what is profitable. For to one through the Spirit a word of wisdom is given, and to another a word of knowledge,

according to the same Spirit; to a different one faith in the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing in the one Spirit, and to another operations of works of power, and to another prophecy, and to another discerning of spirits; to a different one various kinds of tongues, and to another interpretation of tongues. But the one and the same Spirit operates all these things, distributing to each one respectively even as He purposes.

Later, in verse 28, Paul refers to additional functions in those whom God has placed in the church: "First apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then works of power, then gifts of healing, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues." These additional functions are the measured and circumscribed boundaries of the saints in the light, those who have received Christ as their allotted portion.

The "same God, who operates all things in all" through the "same Spirit" to produce the distinct functions in the allotted portions, is a God of measure. In His measuring, God grants the members their necessary functions according to His accurate appraisal of their ability: "To one he gave five talents, and to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability" (Matt. 25:15).³ God's measuring, contrary to a common thought of many Christians, is not primarily negative in terms of its limitations but, rather, positive in terms of its encouragement of the development of the talents, the various functions, of the members. In 2 Corinthians 10:13-15 Paul clearly recognizes the negative limitations of God's measurement, but he actually affirms by implication the positive aspects of God's measurement, saying,

We will not boast beyond our measure but according to the measure of the rule which the God of measure has apportioned to us, to reach even as far as you. For we are not extending ourselves beyond our bounds, as if we did not reach you, for we were the first to come even as far as unto you in the gospel of Christ. We are not boasting beyond our measure in others' labors, but have the hope, as your faith is increasing, to be magnified in you according to our rule unto abundance.

In these verses Paul speaks of not boasting beyond his measure, which is the custom of some, showing his contentedness to remain within the measured boundaries of his allotment. He speaks of not extending himself beyond his bounds, showing his awareness of and adherence to God's measured allotment of Christ. And he speaks of not boasting beyond his measure in others' labors, showing his acknowledgement and appreciation of the varied fruitful functions of other members in the Body. The issue of Paul's willingness to remain within the measured boundaries of God's allotted portion was a positive manifestation of increasing faith and magnified hope unto abundance in the believers under his care. The measure of one's allotted portion is equivalent to the measure of the gift of Christ, and grace is given for Christ as the allotted talent to not be buried: "To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Eph. 4:7). When the measured gifts of Christ as the allotted portion are exercised, the issue is a corporate expression of God in Christ as the temple of God.

The Various Functions Being for the Building of the Temple of God in the Old and New Testaments

The functions of the members, who have been allotted a portion of the land, are for the building of the temple, a corporate manifestation of Christ on earth. The goal of the possession of the good land in the Old Testament was the building of a dwelling place for God on earth, fulfilling His desire in type for image and dominion as expressed in Genesis 1:26. God carried the wandering children of Israel "all the time until eventually He gained a people who were ready to enter into the good land, possess it, enjoy it, and build in it a temple, a house, for God" (Lee, *Life-study of Deuteronomy* 7). In their enjoyment of the good land, the children of Israel realized and developed the unique features of their allotments. In the New Testament the realization and development of the unique

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features of the allotted portions of Christ, especially in the meetings of the church, build up the church as the dwelling place of God: "What then, brothers? Whenever you come together, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up" (1 Cor. 14:26). When the church is built up through the coordinated function of the allotted portions in the members, all the building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord (Eph. 2:21).

The Measured Functions in Paul's Co-workers

Paul's fellowship in Colossians 4:7-17 reveals the measured functions of his co-workers. Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow slave in the Lord, made known all the things concerning Paul to the church in Colossae, bringing them into Paul's fellowship and comforting their hearts (vv. 7-8). Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, similarly made known all the things concerning Paul to the church in Colossae (v. 9). Aristarchus accompanied Paul in his imprisonment in Rome, and Mark conveyed Paul's commandments (v. 10). Justus's mere presence was a consolation to Paul (v. 11). Epaphras struggled in prayers on behalf of the church in Colossae so that they would stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God (v. 12). Luke attended to Paul's physical needs as a beloved physician (v. 14). Nymphas hosted the church in his house (v. 15). And finally, Paul, in his capacity as a senior co-worker, admonished Archippus to take heed to the ministry which he had received in the Lord and fulfill it (v. 17). In these verses Paul's fellowship reveals the measured function of Christ as the allotted portion of saints living in the light.

Paul thus concludes his Epistle to the Colossians by illustrating the living of saints in the light according to their allotted portion of Christ as measured out by the God of measure. This reinforces the primacy of his initial reference to Christ as the allotted portion of the saints in the light in 1:12. As the allotted portion, Christ can be experienced in all the preeminent aspects that Paul reveals in the subsequent chapters of Colossians. As the allotted portion, He can have the first place in all things. As the allotted portion, He can be experienced as the mysterious embodiment of God. As the allotted portion, He can be experienced as the Head and constituent of the church. As the allotted portion, He can be experienced as the source of the life and hope of the saints both now and in the future. And as the allotted portion, He can be experienced as the realization of all positive things. What a wonderful allotment! **AFC**

Notes

¹This insight related to the subject of Colossians is supplied by Witness Lee in the *Recovery Version of the Bible*, published by Living Stream Ministry, 2003.

²See Deuteronomy 6:13: "It is Jehovah your God whom you shall fear, and Him whom you shall serve," and Luke 4:8: "Jesus answered and said to him, It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve.'" Service defines the place that a matter is given in one's heart, and thus, the true service that believers give to God results in their giving Him the first place.

³In their public ministry, both Watchman Nee and Witness Lee, based on their experience, defined ability as eighty percent natural constitution from birth and twenty percent constitution from training.

Works Cited

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