

THE GOSPEL AGE

Br. David S. Doran

The term, "The Gospel Age," seems to mean many things to many brethren. Too often we fail to explain ourselves clearly because we assume that all understand what we mean by the term, while actually the listener's mind may receive a totally different idea from the same words. It is, therefore, desirable that we occasionally take time to examine what we mean when we use certain words. This is the purpose of this discussion. We hope that, by the Lord's grace, the matter will be clearer to us all as a result.

It is not unusual, even in Scripture, to have a word that contains several different meanings. Our Lord himself used the word "kingdom" very frequently; yet, do we realize how many different meanings He had in mind as He used this same word over and over again? Let's note a few examples in Matthew: (1) Matt. 5:19, 20—here "kingdom" refers to the Church in the flesh ("teachers"). (2) Matt. 8:11—"kingdom" here means the Ancient Worthies! (3) Matt. 13:24—in this parable "kingdom" refers to the experience of the Church between the two advents. (4) Matt. 13: 33—here the "kingdom" is stated to be like sin (leaven)! And indeed it is, since "kingdom" here refers to the apostate church! (5) Matt. 13:47—"kingdom" here seems to refer to the general call.

Example after example shows that the term "kingdom" is very freely used in Scripture. We have just seen it applied to: the true church; the ancient worthies; the apostate church; and the gospel message. Yet who would accuse the Lord of inconsistency? It is our responsibility, however, to learn from the context what our Master meant each time. This we must also do with the words of Bro. Russell, and of all our brethren. Let us discuss the term, "the Gospel Age" in this spirit.

We will use blackboard illustrations to help us retain the lessons. To begin, we will draw a single line on the board:

1874



We have given it a label which is the date 1874. In our discussion, we will not remove this line. It is a fixed date, and everything we find in our Scriptural examination will be related to it—but perhaps not as we might at first suppose. The meaning of this date is an item of controversy in the Church today. Regardless of your personal views about it, try not to let its presence disturb you. We will ignore it until our discussion is near completion. But its presence will teach us valuable lessons.

There are TWO BASIC and SCRIPTURAL definitions of Gospel Age. We cannot understand the matter fully until we realize and study these differing definitions. Once we understand them, we will find complete harmony in all the Pastor's works—if we take time to ask which definition he had in mind at a given moment. Of the two definitions:

ONE relates to Israel and the nominal church.

THE OTHER relates to the true church.

We will examine each separately and then compare them.

--I.--

Our first definition we will call THE DOUBLE (for reasons that will shortly be explained). We believe this definition to be basically the definition used in Volume 2 of STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES. But we will look for our definition not in the Volume, but in Scripture.

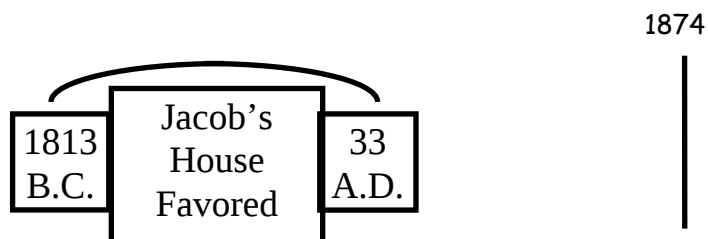
In Amos 3:2 we notice some important points: The Israelites had the exclusive favor of God. They were disobedient. God was justified, then, in punishing them.

It is interesting to ask ourselves two questions: 1) When did this favor begin? 2) How long did it last? Or, in other words, when did the punishment begin?

In Matt. 23:38 Jesus gives us a clue. Speaking to the nation of Israel He states, "Behold (TAKE NOTICE!), your house is left unto you desolate." From this condemnation we can glean two important factors:

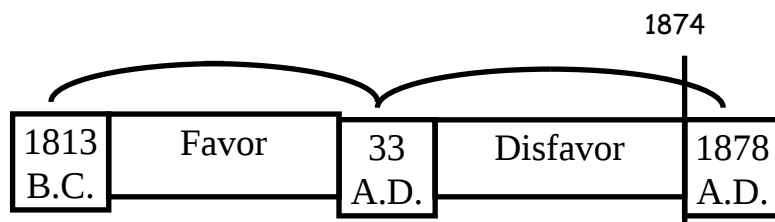
1) Israel was viewed by God as a "HOUSE", and it was condemned as a "house" rather than as individuals. Our Lord was here aware of the same fact that is mentioned by Amos 3:1, 2: that is that he dealt with them and gave them exclusive favor as a "family." Why is this important to know? Because we know that Israel was NOT the only people ever favored of God! Adam was; Abel was; Enoch was; Noah was. So Amos refers to a special arrangement: Israel was the only FAMILY to have favor. Many individuals had enjoyed His favor for various reasons. Knowing this, we can tell when this arrangement began. It began with the family of Jacob whose name was changed to Israel. So, when God says "Ye only have I known of all the families" he refers to the time of Jacob's death when He first began to deal with the "family"—the twelve sons of Jacob or Israel. This was 1813 B.C.

2) The other point we wish to note is that our Lord's condemnation began with the word "Behold." He wants us to take special notice. To do this, we must look at the prophecy of this event which we find in Zech. 9. In verse 9 we see that this particular prophecy was to be fulfilled the day that Jesus rode into Jerusalem. Verse 12 stresses that fact again when it states "even TODAY do I declare..." etc. Therefore, we have seen by comparing Amos, Matthew, and Zechariah exactly the time meant during which God favored only Israel of all the families of the earth. It began at Jacob's death in 1813 B.C. and ended in 33 A.D. when our Lord declared that their HOUSE (FAMILY) was left desolate. Let's draw this on the board:



What does this tell us? Well, we have just drawn what we usually call the "JEWISH AGE." Why did we go through all that trouble since we're not even discussing the Jewish Age? There is a reason; and the reason is that our first definition of the Gospel Age cannot be understood without first understanding what the Jewish Age is. And we have now seen that the Jewish Age is Scripturally a period of time—1845 years in length.

Now, if we return to Zech. 9:12 we can learn another lesson. The Lord had said in Amos that He would punish them for their disobedience, but He didn't say what the punishment would be. However, here in Zechariah He states that He would give them "DOUBLE." What does that mean? The Hebrew word which is here translated "double" means "as much again," or "an equal portion," or "a reflection." So to make the verse more clear in our minds we might paraphrase it like this: "On this day (just before you will have me crucified) I will tell you that as many years of favor as my Father has given you, that many years of disfavor you will now have to experience." So Zechariah thus explains to us what the punishment will be that had been mentioned in Amos. Israel's favor lasted 1845 years. Therefore, their disfavor must also last that long. Let's add their period of disfavor to our chart on the board: 33 A.D. plus 1845 years will bring us to 1878.



Other texts help us understand the importance of this new date we have located.

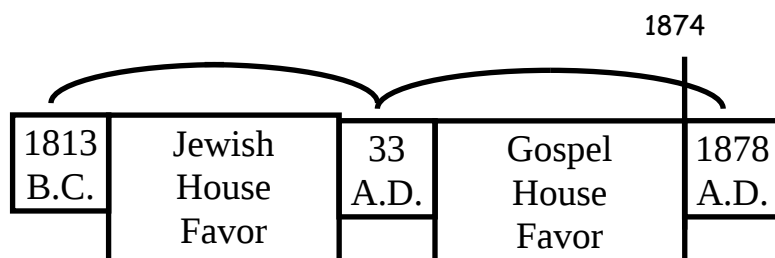
- 1) Jeremiah 16:14-18. Read this text carefully. In verses 14 to 17 the Lord is promising a return of the Jews to their own land. It is an exciting prospect! But to make it more exciting, the Lord tells us when He will do it. In verse 18 He says "FIRST" (before returning them to their land) He will make them endure the "DOUBLE"—the 1845 years. Therefore, at the end of the "double," or in 1878, we should expect to see the beginnings of Jewish resettlement in the land of Palestine. We have seen just that! History has proved these calculations correct!
- 2) Psalm 102:13. This Psalm is a magnificent prophecy of the reestablishment of Israel. Verse 13 is of particular interest in our consideration because it stresses what we have already seen. It says that the Lord has a SET TIME (the end of the "double") for returning favor.
- 3) Isa. 40:2. Again the set time is stressed if we read the marginal translation: "her appointed time is accomplished... for she hath received of the Lord's hand double."

The "Double" IS the Gospel Age!—or at least one definition of it. (See Vol. II, top page 210) But we haven't seen why. We have only seen that this 1845 years was a period of Israel's separation from God. We must look further into Scripture to prove that this same period actually means more.

During the period of Israel's disfavor, a NEW arrangement exists and is recognized by God. Our first clue of this is found in Isa. 8:14. Note here that Jesus is called a stone of stumbling to both the houses of Israel. What could this mean? The Lord in Matt. 23:38 only cast off one house—"your HOUSE is... desolate." But Isaiah said BOTH (which means TWO) houses would stumble over the Lord. Before answering what the other house is, let's look to a New Testament Scripture for another clue.

Rev. 2:9 will help us. The Lord says "I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." Here we see that there is another "house" of Israel. But the Lord views it as the "house (synagogue) of Satan." But note: they say they are Jews—antitypical Israelites. And it is THIS HOUSE, the synagogue of Satan, that will also stumble over the Lord.

But what does all of this mean in our discussion? Just this: the time when the first (natural) house of Israel is in disfavor is the SAME TIME when the second (spiritual) house of Israel is in favor. And we have seen Scripturally that is that period of 1845 years in length dating from 33 A.D. to 1878 A.D. But instead of calling this the SECOND JEWISH AGE (which would be appropriate in a way), we call it the GOSPEL AGE because it is characterized not by the Jewish Law, but by the Gospel message. Let's retitl our chart now that these matters have been discussed.



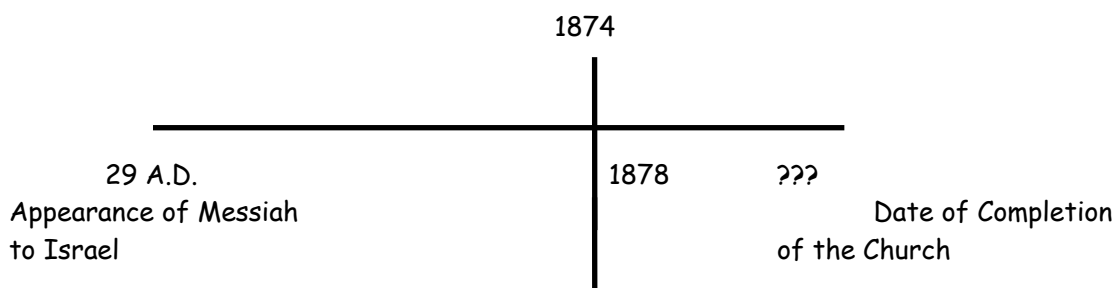
So, we have completed our first (and most limited) definition of *GOSPEL AGE*. By this definition, the *GOSPEL AGE* is primarily a SET TIME: a time of favor for the "family" of churchianity; a time of disfavor for "family" of fleshly Israel.

II.

The second definition of *GOSPEL AGE* is quite different—yet just as Scriptural. But where the first definition dealt with "houses" and dates, the second definition deals with individuals. We will name this definition "THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRUE SEED," and we will note that this definition is the primary one used in the first Volume of *STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES*. Again, however, we will look not to the Volume for our definition, but to the Scriptures.

Read Rom. 11:25. Paul states that "Blindness in part is happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. This statement is full of meaning to us. Before examining it, however, we want to note an important distinction. We have been talking about Israel's *DISFAVOR*. Paul here mentions Israel's *BLINDNESS*. It is MOST IMPORTANT to remember that disfavor and blindness are *TWO DIFFERENT THINGS*! We have already proved that the *DISFAVOR* was a punishment for disobedience and that it was specified that the disfavor would end in 1878. But *BLINDNESS* was not the punishment for disobedience; it was the *RESULT* of disobedience. Paul tells us clearly that the blindness ends at a different time than the disfavor. He says the blindness lasts *UNTIL THE CHURCH IS COMPLETE*!—until the full number of Gentiles come into the body of Christ. This is the whole purpose for their blindness. To what are they blind? They are blind to the high calling—not to God's plan. Jews know more about God a plan for an earthly Kingdom through Israel than all the church systems put together. So, even though we are nearly 100 years past the end of Israel's disfavor, we still find them in blindness respecting Christ—a proof to us that the Church is not yet complete.

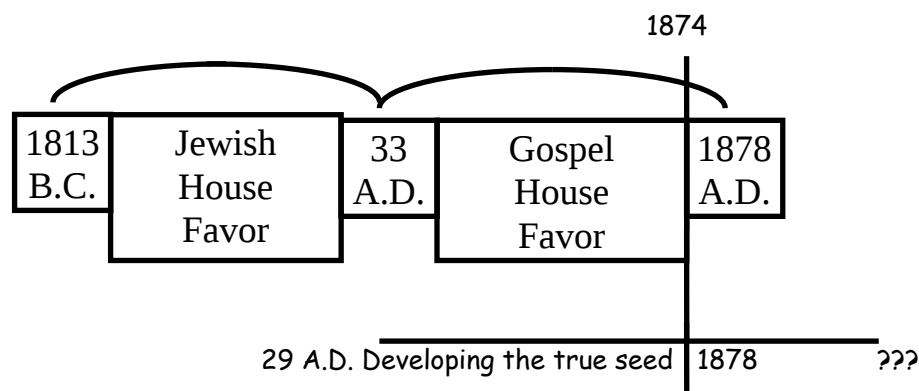
In this one verse of Rom. 11:25 Paul has given us our second definition of *GOSPEL AGE*. He tells us that it lasts from the time Israel was first blind to their Messiah until the Church is complete—a date which is yet a mystery to us all. Let's diagram what Paul said:



This is the very way Bro. Russell explains *GOSPEL AGE* on the Chart of the Ages. Notice under *GOSPEL AGE* it says "from Jesus' baptism to the completion of the Church which is His body." (Also note reprint page 5697, par. 12, "The Gospel age will not fully end, we believe, until the Gospel message ends; and that will be when the door is shut, when the last member of the very elect shall have passed beyond the veil.")

Notice how flexible the term *GOSPEL AGE* really is. Our second definition both *STARTS* and *STOPS* at different dates than our first definition! Little wonder that it is easy to be misunderstood! In at least one sense, this second definition is the more important of the two—at least it's the one which, when it ends, will mean the most to the world and the Church. Paul says so. Look in Rom. 8:19 and 22. He says that the whole creation is waiting for that date! In verse 23 he adds that we too (the Church) groan within ourselves waiting for that day! It seems clear, then, that our second definition, unlike our first, is NOT a set time, but a SET WORK: the perfecting of the body of Christ.

We have now shown the two definitions. In that respect this discourse has ended! However, since this topic has been a subject of so much misunderstanding, it will be wise to use what we have just learned to see how it relates to other features of the plan. First, let's draw both definitions on the board so that we can visually compare them:



III Other Considerations

It is now time to consider the first vertical line we drew on the board and labeled 1874. This is the date of the Lord's return. But notice an amazing thing! Neither of our definitions had anything to do with this date! This is often very surprising to Bible Students. Both definitions of GOSPEL AGE have the age ending AFTER this line. Look again. Check for yourself. This needs explaining!

First note that 1874 is not only the date of the Lord's return, but also, according to the testimony of Scripture and of Bro. Russell, it is the beginning of the antitypical Sabbath Day, The Millennial Age, The Times of Restitution of All Things, The Judgment Day, and Christ's Kingdom and Reign. If you have not personally come to these same conclusions, please stay to see how the GOSPEL AGE definitions harmonize with these thoughts. We sincerely believe you will see how the controversy has come about.

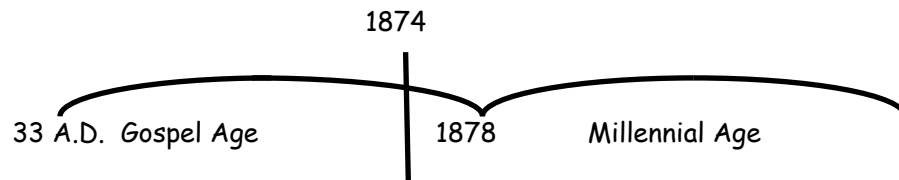
Notice that since both GOSPEL AGES last past 1874, that if the Millennium begins in 1874 IT IS NOT NECESSARY FOR ONE AGE TO END FOR ANOTHER TO BEGIN. Why is this? Let us make an astounding statement to get us thinking: "The Millennial Age is in no way related to the Gospel Age." Now, any good Bible Student can find many exceptions to that statement! Then why was it made? Let us illustrate with an example: 1) This is the atomic age. 2) This is the twentieth century. Do these two statements conflict? No. Why not? Because it is possible to have a kind of age (the atomic age) in process at the same time with a certain measurement of time (the twentieth century). The Gospel and Millennial ages relate the same way. You see, the Gospel Age is a period during which a specific work is going on. The Millennial Age is a specific measurement of time; it is the SEVENTH DAY, the Sabbath. It comes when it is due, regardless of what work is in progress-just as the twentieth century came regardless of the fact that history didn't change its course at the last midnight of the nineteenth century. Thus the Gospel Age has overlapped not only the beginning of the seventh millennium ("The Millennial Age"), but it also has overlapped the sixth millennium and part of the fifth millennium! So then, we can make the following two statements without fear of contradiction:

- 1) This is the Gospel Age.
- 2) This is the Millennial Age.

Occasionally we explain the fact that we are in two ages by simply stating "The ages overlap." This is true from the charts we have drawn. But it is not always advisable to give such a short answer to such a complex question. It often creates a larger communication barrier than existed at first!

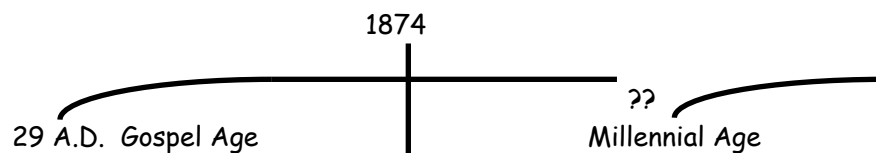
Let's examine three misconceptions about the relationship of the Gospel Age to the Millennial Age.

1) The first false idea is "The Gospel Age (first definition) ended in 1878, therefore the Millennial Age began there." On the board, this would look like this:



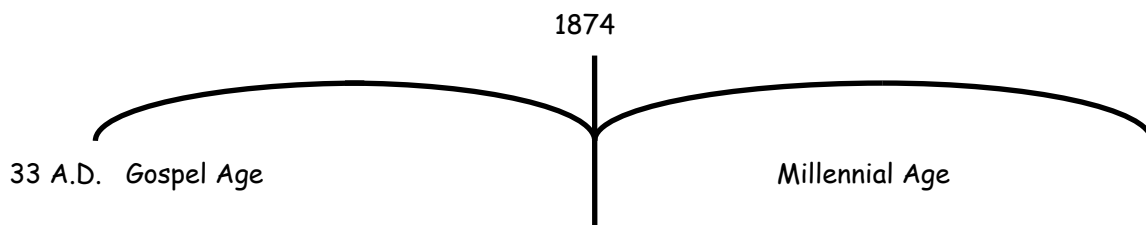
This is untrue. Erase it from the board and from your minds. It is UNSCRIPTURAL.

2) The second false conception is "The Gospel Age (second definition) is still going on; therefore the Millennium can't begin until it ends." Look at this on the board:



This is just as untrue. Erase this from the board and from your mind.

3) The third misconception is "The Millennium began in 1874; therefore the Gospel Age ended there." Look at this also on the board:



This is obviously untrue. When we looked in Scripture for our definitions, we found NO EVIDENCE to end the Gospel Age at 1874. Erase this also.

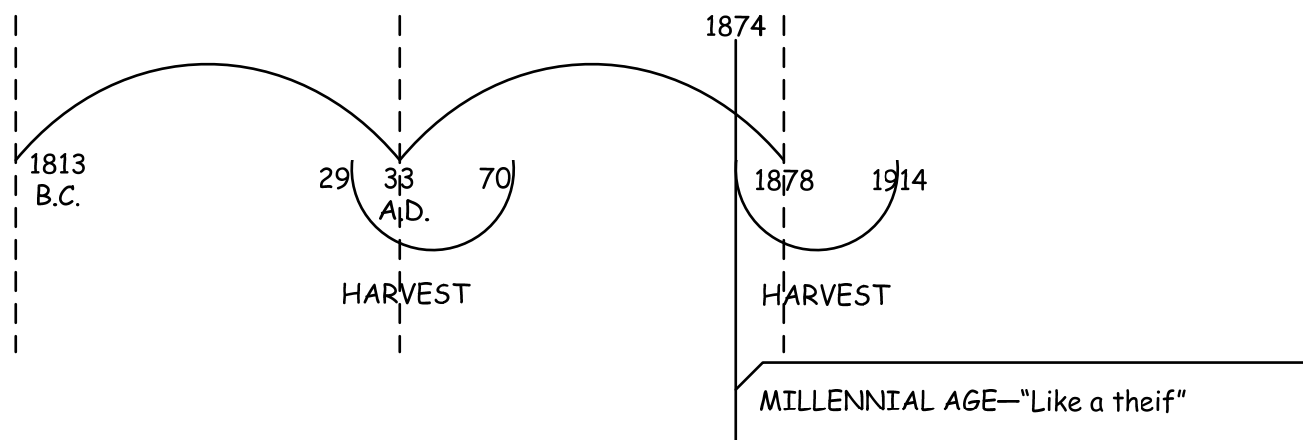
Sometimes we explain ourselves by saying: "Oh, the age ended, but the work is still going on." Brethren, this is about as confusing an answer as we can give! We are really COMBINING in our heads the two separate definitions; remember, one was based on TIME, the other on WORK.

To conclude our discussion of this matter, we will show why two definitions of Gospel Age became necessary, and also show where the Pastor explains and justifies the necessity for making these distinctions in our minds. Originally, Bro. Russell only had one definition of the age. This was true because he expected the Church to be complete at the same time that the chronological features culminated. Let's notice how the Pastor thought up until 1914. It will help us understand the matter clearly.

1) Bro. Russell knew that the Jewish and Gospel Ages were each 1845 years long just as we have discussed. He called them PARALLEL AGES because they were identical twins as far as time was concerned.

2) He was also aware of our Lord's teaching that "the harvest is the end of the age. Both ages ended in harvests. It was, then, only reasonable to assume that both harvests were also identical twins as far as time was concerned. The Jewish harvest began in A.D. 29 at our Lord's baptism. That was $3\frac{1}{2}$ years before the age ended. That harvest lasted $36\frac{1}{2}$ years past the end of the age for a total of 40 years, at which time the terrible time of trouble destroyed the city of Jerusalem. Therefore, since the Gospel Age

harvest was parallel, it must begin $3\frac{1}{2}$ years before the age ended and also extend $36\frac{1}{2}$ years after the end of the age to cover the 40 year period from 1874 to 1914, at which time, Bro. Russell reasoned, the terrible time of trouble would thoroughly destroy Christendom. Let's add these harvest periods to our diagram of the Gospel Age (first definition):



3) It is plain to see that this definition of Gospel Age would never have needed any changing if the Church had been glorified in 1914. And there were other reasons to think that 1914 would definitely bring everything to a close. From a totally separate prophecy in Daniel, Bro. Russell learned that the 2520 years that the Gentiles would be permitted to rule would also end in 1914. Everyone would have jumped to the same conclusion that he did! And his dates WERE CORRECT! The ONLY mistake was assuming that 1914 would see the COMPLETION of the work. That's a pretty small mistake when compared with everything that was RIGHT about his conclusions!

References showing the Pastor's Corrections

We have seen how our first definition of Gospel Age related to a "HOUSE." This "house" was the nominal church. But it was important in God's sight. His little ones were in that house! He had said, through Jesus, "Let them (wheat and tares) grow together until the harvest."

Here was the Pastor's clue after 1914. These words of our Lord said in essence: The Chart represents the house. But at harvest time my little ones will come out of that house, so a new picture must be drawn to show that I deal in the harvest not with the house, but with my individual saints to complete my body.

And this is what the Pastor did. He drew a new chart—our second definition—to show the course of the TRUE SAINTS separate from the nominal "house." But he drew this chart in WORDS, not in lines. Notice: Vol. II, 1916 foreword, p. xi—"We should have noted that these parallels follow the NOMINAL SYSTEMS to destruction in both cases and DO NOT indicate the time of the glorification of the New Creation."

To paraphrase his words, he just said: THERE ARE TWO GOSPEL AGES—ONE FOR THE NOMINAL HOUSE and ONE FOR THE TRUE SAINTS. Reprint page 5950, "The parallels affected MERELY the nominal Jewish house there, and the nominal Christian house here... NO parallels as between the Pentecostal Church and the true Church now are to be looked for... The parallel belongs to the NOMINAL JEWISH SYSTEM which went to destruction, and to the NOMINAL GOSPEL CHURCH which is now going to destruction."

Amazingly enough, these are not really thoughts new to the Pastor's post-1914 thinking. Note that he said the same thing in 1891: Volume III, page 150, "All the time features connected with the Jewish harvest (though they sometimes INDIRECTLY related to the faithful), had their DIRECT BEARING upon the GREAT NOMINAL MASS."

Brethren, study for ideas, not for words. Don't condemn your brother for what you THINK he believes. Most of us believe the same beautiful truths—sometimes in different words. Only a few are dangerously perverting the IDEAS as well as the words. Don't believe of your brother what you have heard he believes. Ask him. Discuss it with him. Don't pigeon-hole him as being on the "other side." This is what Satan wants you to do. Don't let him. "Let brotherly love continue..." Heb. 13:1.

BOUND BY INVISIBLE BONDS.
(By Benjamin H. Barton)

Across our native land and beyond the distant sea,
A humble, longing people, would lift up their hearts to Thee.
O Father, how we're scattered, how our tents are pitched apart,
But we long to be together, with the loved ones of our heart.

But, Father, in our scattered state, we thank Thee for the chain
That binds our hearts in unison, while we on earth remain;
The bond which makes it possible, though scattered far and wide,
To love so close and love so dear each member of that Bride.

We're glad, e'en though the flesh is bound unto a certain place,
The spirit's free in thought to be with every child of grace.
We're with each brother in His work, no matter where he be:
In prayer, in love, in daily thought, to wish him victory.

And even where a saint may be whom we have never met,
Some isolated gem, perchance, no brother's seen as yet,
Sweet waves of love go from that heart to each devoted soul,
Unintroduced by earthly form, we've reached communion's goal.

So, loved ones, while we miss your face, we know your heart is here.
We've felt the power of your prayers, effectual and sincere.
The many miles that intervene may keep the flesh apart,
But with it there's a closeness naught of earth can e'er impart.