

A Pillar in the Temple of God

*“Him that
overcometh will I
make a pillar in
the temple of my
God, and he shall
go no more out:
and I will write
upon him the name
of my God, and the
name of the city of
my God, which is
new Jerusalem,
which cometh
down out of heaven
from my God: and I
will write upon
him my new
name.”*

—*Revelation 3:12*

MANY PRECIOUS PROM-

ises to the faithful followers of the Master are recorded in the Revelation of Jesus Christ to the Apostle John. In particular, the messages to the seven angels of the seven churches each contain a promise to the faithful overcomers who respond to the invitation to follow in the footsteps of Jesus during this Gospel Age. The promise contained in the words of our opening scripture is that of becoming a pillar in the temple of God. In considering what the Word of God has

to say about pillars, it is appropriate to review their significance and also their relationship to the consecrated child of God.

PILLARS ERECTED BY JACOB

One of the earliest examples of the use of pillars is associated with Jacob's vision of the ladder, with the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. At that time, God reconfirmed the Abrahamic Covenant with Jacob, and Jacob himself also entered into a covenant with God. In commemoration of this, Jacob erected a pillar as a memorial of the event, from the very stone he had used for a pillow while he slept and beheld the vision. "Jacob awakened out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house." (Gen. 28:16-22) The word pillar in this passage signifies something that is stationed or set up—a column or memorial stone. Here it is seen that the pillar was erected by Jacob to memorialize or commemorate the agreement between God and himself, as well as to mark "God's house," the site where the Abrahamic Covenant had been renewed.

That the use of a pillar for such a purpose was appropriate was later attested to by God when he

again appeared to Jacob and identified himself as the God of Bethel. "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred." (Gen. 31:13) By so identifying himself, God indicated approval of the memorial pillar, and instructed Jacob to return to his house, to the land he had left, in furtherance of God's plan for him.

Jacob, in response to God's instructions, left Haran with his family and possessions to return to Canaan. During this journey another use of a pillar to commemorate a vow is recorded, when an agreement for peace was made between Jacob and Laban. Laban was very displeased when he discovered that Jacob and his family had departed. He pursued them in anger, and it was only by the direct intervention of the Lord that Laban agreed to the peaceful departure of Jacob, his family and possessions. "Now therefore come thou, let us make a covenant, I and thou; and let it be for a witness between me and thee. And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar. And Jacob said unto his brethren, Gather stones; and they took stones, and made an heap: and they did eat there upon the heap. . . . And Laban said to Jacob, Behold this heap, and behold this pillar, which I have cast betwixt me and thee; This heap be witness, and this pillar be witness, that I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm."—vss. 44-46,51,52

Later in Jacob's life, while dwelling in the land of Canaan, he built an altar to God, who once more appeared to Jacob. "And God said unto him, Thy

name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel. And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land. And God went up from him in the place where he talked with him. And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he talked with him, even a pillar of stone: and he poured a drink offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon. And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Bethel.”—Gen. 35:10-15

On all of these occasions, the significance of a pillar to commemorate a vow or agreement is clearly established. The primary use of the pillar was to mark the setting up or establishment of a particular relationship with God and the continuance of fellowship with him by one who had such a special association.

PILLARS OF FIRE AND A CLOUD

Another familiar scriptural use of the pillar is found in the many Old Testament passages describing the departure of the Israelites from Egypt and their years of wandering in the wilderness. This pillar took the form of a cloud by day and fire by night. The meaning of the word is simply that of a standing column, but its use in the Scriptures is in the very special sense that indicates the presence of God. When the Israelites departed from Egypt, this pillar marked the pathway of their journey,

giving them direction. “The LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.”—Exod. 13:21,22

After the Israelites left Egypt, Pharaoh’s heart was hardened and he pursued them with his army. As his forces approached their encampment, this same pillar of cloud and fire served as a protective barrier for the Israelites against the Egyptians. “The pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night.” (chap. 14:19,20) The miraculous cloud and fire denoted the presence of God, not only to the Israelites, but also to other nations, especially the Egyptians. Moses testified to God concerning this, saying, “They [the Egyptians] have heard that thou LORD art among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night.”—Num. 14:14

During the forty years in the wilderness, this pillar was with the Israelites, standing over the Tabernacle when they were encamped, and leading them to a different location when, in God’s due time, he deemed it appropriate for them to move. “The LORD appeared in the tabernacle in a pillar of a cloud: and the pillar of the cloud stood over the door of the tabernacle.” (Deut. 31:15) “Thou in thy

manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go.” (Neh. 9:19) The brightness of the cloud and the fire made the presence of God with the Israelites very evident. These pillars served as a constant reminder that he was dealing with them and that his desire was to fulfill the promises he had made to them.

PILLARS OF SOLOMON’S TEMPLE

A more traditional use of pillars mentioned in the Bible is found in the erection of buildings, particularly in the construction of the Temple of Solomon. They were used to support the roof and various projections, and even served as support for the bearing weight of the walls. Of more interest, however, are two pillars described as standing in the porch of the Temple. These were not used in the construction of the Temple, but seem to have symbolic significance related to the unfolding of God’s plan of the ages. “He cast two pillars of brass, of eighteen cubits high apiece: and a line of twelve cubits did compass either of them about, . . . And he set up the pillars in the porch of the temple: and he set up the right pillar, and called the name thereof Jachin: and he set up the left pillar, and called the name thereof Boaz. And upon the top of the pillars was lily work: so was the work of the pillars finished.”—I Kings 7:15,21,22

The names of these two pillars are significant. Jachin means “he shall establish,” and Boaz means “in it is strength.” When combined, these two

expressions bring to mind the promise of God concerning the permanence and strength of the kingdom that would be established by David's seed. "When thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. . . . But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever."—II Sam. 7:12,13,15,16

PROPHETIC SIGNIFICANCE

The plan of God and the experience of Israel's kingdom following Solomon verify that this promise of God to David was not fulfilled at that time. It is, in reality, a prophecy of the future kingdom of Christ to be established in the Messianic age as a result of the redemptive work of Jesus, who came as a descendant and heir to David's throne. Associated with him at that time will be those who, during this Gospel Age, have responded to the invitation to follow Jesus by yielding their bodies "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."—Rom. 12:1,2

When Peter asked the Master what they, who followed in his footsteps, would receive, Jesus replied,

“Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, . . . and shall inherit everlasting life.” (Matt. 19:28,29) Our glorified Lord also declared, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” (Rev. 3:21) The two pillars set up on the porch of Solomon’s typical Temple for all to see, were thus a prophetic witness and testimony of God’s promise to Abraham and confirmed to Isaac and Jacob, for the eventual blessing of all the families of the earth. (Gen. 12:3; 22:15-18; 26:4,5; 28:14) This promise will be fulfilled by Jesus and his faithful footstep followers in the kingdom for which we pray, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”—Matt 6:10

The Prophet Isaiah proclaimed God’s Word regarding that kingdom when he described the strength and justice of the government that would ultimately be established in the earth as a result of the birth and work of the Messiah. “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.” (Isa. 9:6,7) This kingdom will bring everlasting peace to the world of mankind, in fulfillment of the promise to

David. It is certain, because the “zeal of the LORD of hosts” will execute it. Zechariah also speaks of this kingdom and informs us that the temple of the Lord, the true church, will be built by Jesus. “Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: . . . he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne.”—Zech. 6:12,13

PILLARS OF A SPIRITUAL HOUSE

The prophecies of Isaiah 4:2; 11:1-10; and Jeremiah 23:5,6, identify the promised Messiah, Jesus, as the Branch. During this Gospel Age he is building a spiritual temple, identified by Paul as a house of sons: “Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.” (Heb. 3:6) The Apostle Peter also describes the development of this spiritual house. “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up . . . sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” (I Pet. 2:5) It is this specially chosen class—those who respond to the invitation to run the race for the mark of the prize of the High Calling in Christ Jesus, and are begotten of the Holy Spirit—who become potential stones or pillars in the temple of God. If faithful unto death, each one will be privileged to share with Jesus in the work of blessing all the families of the earth when the glory of God fills his true temple and his Spirit is shed forth throughout the earth.

For the present—until the spiritual temple is completed—those who respond to the Gospel Age

call are being built up as individual stones or pillars. “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” (Eph. 2:19-22) Paul, when writing to the Corinthians, additionally said, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”—I Cor. 3:16

APOSTLES WERE PILLARS

The Scriptures tell us that these same apostles, who left a record of the inspired Word of God, were themselves considered pillars. As we today think of ones who have been faithful servants of God, who have provided much support for others associated with them, so did Paul describe some of the apostles in his time. “When James, Cephas [Peter], and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen [the Gentiles], and they unto the circumcision [the Jews].” (Gal. 2:9) Those who “seemed to be pillars” were ones thought of and perceived as being strong in the Truth and having the reputation of being used by God in preaching sound doctrine and proclaiming God’s promised kingdom.

Thus it is a good work to desire to be a pillar, to be shaped by Jesus and used by our Heavenly Father now, to be kept faithful and submissive to his will,

that we might be used in his plan to bless all the families of the earth. God has identified the faithful followers of Christ, the called out ones from the world of mankind during the present age, as the pillars upon which he will establish the new earth. “The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD’S, and he hath set the world upon them.” (I Sam. 2:7,8) God has purposed and determined that this shall be accomplished. “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”—Isa. 55:11

OUR ENDEAVOR TO BE A PILLAR

As we strive to be a spiritual pillar in our daily lives, we are in reality endeavoring to develop the “mind of Christ,” because it is he—the chief cornerstone of the temple—upon which we are being built. Recalling his mindset, we are reminded of the importance that “whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might,” and “whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” (Eccles. 9:10; I Cor. 10:31) These were the motivations which guided Jesus, and they are to be ours as well. In addition, we are not to ever doubt that God has properly prepared and equipped us to do what he asks and expects of us. When God appeared to Moses in Horeb, instructing him to return to Egypt and lead the Israelites forth from bondage, Moses expressed doubt that they

would believe and follow him. God answered by asking, “What is that in thine hand?”—Exod. 4:2

This calls attention to the fact that God’s power will enable his servants to profitably use whatever the Lord provides in doing his will. Taking advantage of opportunities such as visiting isolated brethren, calling those who need encouragement, and writing letters or emails of support and comfort, can provide a blessing to the recipient and opportunity for spiritual growth to the one performing such a service. We must be ever on the lookout for opportunities to show forth to others the same love that our Heavenly Father has shown to us. Our spiritual growth as pillars or living stones is dependent upon loving service, for “we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.”—I John 3:14

Our daily experiences are given to us that we might recognize and know the hand of God and respond by seeking his counsel and striving to do his will in all things. If we but wait upon the Lord, he will supply what is necessary, for “what hast thou that thou didst not receive?” (I Cor. 4:7) It is to our Heavenly Father’s praise that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Rom. 8:28) Therefore, in all things we can in full faith be confident that “no trial has assailed you except what belongs to man; and God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tried beyond your ability; but with the trial, will also direct the issue, that you may be able to bear it.”—I Cor. 10:13, *Emphatic Diaglott*

In this way the called out ones are being fashioned as pillars, as living stones, being shaped and

polished, that they may be “fitly framed together . . . unto an holy temple in the Lord,” “which temple ye are.” (Eph. 2:21; I Cor. 3:17) The true church of the ever-living God, the body of Christ, is thus to be established as pillars on the cornerstone of Jesus. To each of these pillars, our glorified Lord has promised, reiterating the words of our opening text, that he “will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.”

A NEW CITY AND NEW NAME

The features, blessings and purpose of this “city of my God, which is new Jerusalem,” have been described with these words: “Glorious City of Peace! whose walls signify salvation, protection and blessing to all who enter it, whose foundations laid in justice can never be moved, and whose builder and designer is God! It is in the light which will shine from this glorious city (kingdom) of God that the nations (people) will walk on the highway of holiness, up to perfection and to full harmony with God.”—*Studies in the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, pp. 295,296

Not only is the name of New Jerusalem promised to the overcomer, but also the name of my God, “my new name.” Paul, in writing to the Philippians, describes the power of that name. “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, . . . And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 2:9-11) Jesus,

our glorified Lord, has already received this new name which, in his promise to his faithful footstep followers, he states he will write upon each pillar—upon “him that overcometh.” It was because of this that Jesus, after his resurrection, was able to declare, “All power [authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”—Matt. 28:18

During the present Gospel Age, our Heavenly Father is extending an invitation to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Speaking prophetically of this, the Lord, through the psalmist, said, “Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.” (Ps. 50:5) To those who respond to this invitation, Jesus promises that, if faithful, they will be made pillars in God’s temple and share with him in bringing forth, to the glory of God, the promised blessings to mankind during the Messianic age.

The pillars and the temple are thus seen to be a memorial to God’s promises. During Christ’s Messianic kingdom, and throughout the ages of ages to come, they will verify God’s presence and guidance in the outworking of his plan for man’s salvation. His attributes of love, power, wisdom, and justice will be evidenced in Jesus’ redemptive work as the cornerstone or central pillar. Christ’s body members will be the other pillars of God’s temple, having faithfully developed the “mind of Christ.” Together, the Christ, head and body, will attest to the reality of the successful climax of God’s plan and purposes. For on these pillars, symbolically speaking, will be supported the new earth—God’s righteous kingdom—and the culmination of his promise to bless all the families of the earth. ■