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THE MITZVAH OF JEWISH SOVEREIGNTY

May 14 is the anniversary of the establishment in 1948 of the modern State of Israel.

The article below contains excerpts from articles published on May 5, 2014 by Israel National News (www.IsraelNationalNews.com) and on December 10, 2013 by “Jerusalem On Line” (<http://www.jerusalemonline.com/news>). The first article was published under the title “The Mitzvah of Jewish Sovereignty”. The basic meaning of the term “Mitzvah” is “commandment”, and hence the title “Mitzvah of Jewish Sovereignty” implies the author believes God has commanded the State of Israel to fulfill certain obligations.

The excerpts also give some insight into how Israel views its future destiny, including their leadership of the world. The emphases have been added.

* * *

One of the major reasons for the celebration of Yom Haatzmaut (Independence Day) is to rejoice in the restoration of Hebrew independence in the Land of Israel following a long and bitter exile of the majority of Jews from our soil. Yom Haatzmaut celebrates the liberation of the land of Eretz Yisrael from British rule and the re-establishment of Jewish political sovereignty over our country.

In his supplement to the Rambam’s Sefer Hamitzvot (book of commandments), the Ramban teaches that it is a Torah commandment in every generation that the Nation of Israel take control of and inhabit the entire Land of Israel.

“This (a war to liberate Eretz Yisrael) is what our Sages call milchemet mitzvah (obligatory war). In the Talmud (the “Jewish Rule Book”) Rava said, ‘Yehoshua’s (Joshua’s) war of liberation was an obligatory duty according to all opinions.’ And do not err and say that this precept is the commandment to vanquish the seven nations... this is not so. We were commanded to destroy those nations when they fought against us and had they wished to make peace we could have done so under specific conditions. Yet we cannot leave the land in their control or in the

control of any other nation in any generation... Behold, we are commanded with conquest in every generation... this is a positive commandment which applies for all time... And the proof that this is a commandment is this: ‘They were told to go up in the matter of the Spies: ‘Go up and conquer as Hashem, G-D of your fathers, has spoken to you (Hashem and G-D are Hebrew expressions for God). Do not fear and do not be discouraged.’ And it further says: ‘And when Hashem sent you from Kadesh Barnea saying, Go up and possess the land which I have given you.’ And when they did not go up, the Torah says: ‘And you rebelled against the Word of G-D, and you did not listen to this command.’” (Positive Commandment 4 of the Ramban’s supplement to the Rambam’s Sefer HaMitzvot)

The Nation of Israel is eternally commanded to conquer and implement Jewish sovereignty over our country.

“Yom Haatzmaut is the most significant world event to take place in nearly two thousand years. It was on this day that Hashem returned the Israeli Nation to the stage of history so that we may lead mankind towards a world of total blessing. It is the goal of Creation that G-d’s Ideal be fully expressed through Israel bringing humanity to an awareness of Hashem as the timeless ultimate Reality without end that creates all, sustains all, empowers all and loves all...”

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Only by establishing the Kingdom of Israel in the whole of our land can we bring mankind towards a universal blessing through illuminating the world with the light of Torah.

The modern State of Israel – the foundation of G-d's Throne in this world – **must be understood** not only as the handiwork of Hashem but also **as an early stage in the development of universal redemption** – a process that unfolds through a series of natural historic events.

While the current Jewish state has not yet reached the greatness for which it is destined, it must be recognized that the physical vessel is once again in our world and will eventually grow to reveal its exalted inner potential”.

Comment

Ascribing the words recorded in Deuteronomy 1:8—*“go in and possess the land”*—to be a commandment to them today, and to **regard not doing so as rebellion against God** (Deut. 1.26), testifies to Israel's conviction that they believe they are still God's chosen people: *“For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt”* (Deut. 7:6-8).

The statement that Israel will lead the world to **“an awareness of Hashem as the timeless ultimate Reality”** asserts that eventually the nations will recognize and acknowledge Israel as God's agent, as Ezekiel 39:22-23 declares: *“So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day and forward. And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against me, therefore hid I my face from them, and gave them into the hand of their enemies...”*.

The further claim of **prominence** in God's work of blessing all nations reflects Isaiah 2:2-4: *“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will*

walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more”. Israel will be the sole distribution point of God's instruction.

Failure to acknowledge Israel's status will incur sanctions: *“And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain”* (Zech. 14:16-17). The nations will be required to come to Jerusalem!

But the time has come not yet

However the time when the nations will beat their swords into plowshares has not yet come. Indeed Israel is continuing to enhance its material defences, as shown by the report below from *Jerusalem Online*.

“After dozens of years of border breaches, the last section of the border fence between Israel and the Sinai has been completed. The length of the fence is 245 kilometers long (sic), from Rafah to Eilat, and costs 1,600,000,000 NIS (500,000,000 AUD). It was one of Israel's largest projects in recent years.

After three and a half years of construction, the building of the border fence with Egypt has been completed. For two and a half years, the building of the first 230 kilometers of the fence took place. It took another year and a half to build the remaining 15 kilometers along the south-western border with Israel. The last section is characterized by deep and steep valleys, as well as hard rocks...”

“The next step is a fence on the Jordanian border”.

The fence will not prevent the firing of grad rockets from the Sinai, but it will make it very difficult to wage terrorist attacks from within Israeli territory... Part of the land border is very close to Eilat and there is a sea boundary that meets it. The border fence comes with an under-water component. The Israeli Defense Ministry is planning to build an additional sea fence and meanwhile, Israeli naval ships are dispatched to divide this section of the border.

Brigadier-General Eran Ofir worked on the fence for three years as the commander of the complex project. Now with its completion, he is not sure that this

southern fence is the last one that Israel will build and already in recent days has discussed a fence along the Jordanian border that is in the planning phases”.

Comment

The report brings into focus the prophecy in Ezekiel 38 regarding Gog of the land of Magog: “*Thus saith the Lord GOD; It shall also come to pass, that at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought: And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates, To take a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn thine hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land*” (Ezek. 38:10-12).

The prophecy that the villages will not have walls represents a different situation from times past and present—from time immemorial a wall has been an integral part of an Israeli city, including the cities of refuge: “*And the suburbs of the cities, which ye shall give unto the Levites, shall reach from the wall of the city and outward a thousand cubits round about*” (Num. 35:4). Likewise when the Israelis began to rebuild their cities in the days of Cyrus king of Persia, the walls were their first consideration: “*Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem... and have set up the walls thereof...*” (Ezra 4:12).

In Israel today there are only two widely known cities with walls—the old city of Jerusalem, and Bethlehem. Hence, if Ezekiel’s prophecy relates to individual cities, that part of the prophecy might well be considered to be fulfilled. However, if that is considered to be the case, where do the recently built walls on its national borders (and also those currently being planned), fit into the prophecy?

Safely

Another consideration is that, at the time of the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy, Israel will be dwelling safely without walls. The precise meaning of “*dwelling safely without walls*” is unclear: Strong’s Concordance defines “*safely*” (#983—“betach”) as “*properly a place of refuge; abstractly safety, both the fact (security) and the feeling (trust)*”. Hence the meaning of “betach” is ambivalent and has to be determined from the context of each occurrence.

.Young’s Concordance defines “betach” as “*confidence, trust*”, which also may be interpreted to mean either a feeling of safety based on physical resources or trust in another power to protect them.

Leviticus 26:4-5 is one passage which implies that Israel will be living in conditions of physical “factual” safety: “*Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely (betach)*”. The meaning of “betach” in this instance is factual safety because their crops could not yield their fruitage if they were plundered.

On the other hand Judges 8:11 is a verse in which the meaning of “betach” is one of feeling and not of fact: “*And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and smote the host: for the host was secure (betach)*”. Their feeling of safety was not based on physical safety because if it had been so Gideon would not have been able to gain access to slay them.

Hence a feeling of safety may be due to either substantial physical barricades (walls or gates), or a high level of trust in a third party who will protect them. Zechariah 2:4-5 describes such a “third party”: “*And said unto him, Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her*”—Jerusalem would be as a city that did not have physical walls, and would not require them because the Lord would protect her as would a physical wall of fire. Consequently the “safety” in Ezekiel 38 seems to be one of feeling rather than of fact because Israel will be dwelling without walls or gates.

Another aspect is that a feeling of safety spawns confidence, and so it may be that Israel will be living so confidently that their villages will not have physical walls or gates when Gog comes to take a spoil. Thus the Christian is exhorted to watch!■

e-PP

Consistent with current publishing trends, an electronic copy of the *Peoples Paper* is now available on line. The copy is in pdf format.

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HANNAH

The life story of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, provides several examples of faithfulness to God that may be held up as examples for the Christian to copy. Her faithfulness did not relate to the out-working of God's plan for the nations, but rather to His care for His people—how God hears prayers.

Hannah was barren in an age in which conception was seen as a sign of God's blessing. Not long after Hannah's time, Solomon wrote: "*Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth*" (Psa. 127:3-4). A lack of offspring was considered to be an indication that the Lord had withheld His blessing.

Hannah's failure to provide offspring was even more painful because her husband Elkanah had another wife, Peninnah, who reminded her she was barren: "*And he (Elkanah) had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah; and Peninnah had children but Hannah had no children. And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the LORD of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the LORD, were there. And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions: But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hannah: but the LORD had shut up her womb. And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb. And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat*" (1 Sam. 1:3-7).

A worthy portion

Elkanah gave portions to Peninnah and her children but he gave Hannah a worthy portion. The meaning of "worthy" is somewhat unclear: Strong's Concordance defines it (#639) as "properly the *nose* or *nostril*", and hence it could mean the first (or front) portion. However, of the 276 times "*aph*" occurs it is translated "anger" 171 times; anger involves emotion, hence it may be concluded that, although she was barren, Elkanah gave her a portion because he loved her. Both meanings of "worthy" would have provided Peninnah with a reason to rail Hannah, either because she received the first portion or because she received a portion even though she was barren, whereas Peninnah's family received several portions because of their number. Whichever meaning is correct, Peninnah did not relent, but chided Hannah "year by year", to the extent that Hannah did not eat.

Elkanah's response

Elkanah did not understand the cause of Hannah's grief: "*Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?*" (1 Sam. 1:8). Although Elkanah was trying to be helpful, and his questions stemmed from his love for Hannah, his questions failed to comfort Hannah: "*And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore*" (1 Sam. 1:10).

Hannah could have been discouraged by God's apparent disregard for her prayers, compounded by her husband failing to understand her grief. However she was not discouraged; indeed her faith was strengthened such that she made a vow: "*And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head*" (1 Sam. 1:11).

Numbers 6:1-21 prescribes the details of Nazarite vows. Essentially a Nazarite vow was a declaration of separation from the world and devotion to the Lord. Some of the conditions to be observed were abstinence from wine and all fruitage of the vine; no razor may be used on the head (the hair must be allowed to grow) and a person under a vow must not go near a dead body. In essence it was a formal consecration to the Lord; an expression of complete devotion to Him.

Hannah's prayer

1 Samuel 1:12-16 records Hannah's intensity in prayer: "*And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli marked her mouth. Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken. And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee. And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto*".

Hannah's sincerity and devotion were manifest by her silence—her prayer was from her heart, which is in sharp contrast to the prayers of the hypocrites in Jesus' day: "*And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that*

they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matt. 6:5-6). Hannah’s prayer did not require audible expression, neither does the Christian’s prayer, for God “... knoweth the secrets of the heart” (Psa. 44:21).

Hannah’s persistence

Hannah was persistent and completely honest in expressing her desire to have a son. She did not cease her prayers until she was certain God had heard them, the priest Eli had understood her situation, and had assured her that her prayers would be answered: “*Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him. And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.*” (1 Sam. 1:17-18).

So here is the second mark of Hannah’s faith. The turnabout of her countenance occurred only after she was confident that God had heard her prayers.

However it must be remembered that the Christian should not expect God will necessarily answer their prayers in the way they ask—the Apostle Paul’s experience is an example: “*And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*”

Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor. 12:7-9).

Nevertheless the Christian can be assured that God hears their every prayer: “*And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him*” (1 John 5:14-15). The question then for all Christians is to exercise the same kind of persistence as did Hannah, and have faith that God hears their prayers.

Peace

Once Hannah had made her vow, and been assured God heard her prayers, she was no longer sad. Having made her vow—her solemn commitment—she gained peace of mind, even before God had provided her with a son. In one sense her vow may be equated to the Christian’s consecration—it arose from her lack of fulfilment with life as she then knew it, she consciously devoted herself to God, and was prepared to endure the restrictions that applied to her conduct while under the vow. Her devotion was not an outward show of piety but her prayers were from her heart and without audible expression. She experienced peace when she was assured God had heard her prayers.

So the Christian must also be “*rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer*” (Rom. 12:12), and “*be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus*” (Phil. 4:6-7).■

BECOMING ONE

Marriage is the ultimate expression of unity between two human beings: a man and a woman becoming one in purpose and sympathy until their objective is achieved. From a human perspective it is an amazing concept: in spite of all that his father and mother have done for him—by providing, as a minimum, sustenance and shelter—a man leaves them and cleaves to his wife and becomes one with her: “*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh*” (Gen. 2:24).

The mystery of marriage is somewhat dispelled by the fact that it is an integral part of God’s creation: “*And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man*

should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called

Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen 2:18-23). God made Eve because in all the brute creation there was not “an help meet for him (Adam)”; thus woman is the personage God provided to be man’s helper and comforter.

Spiritual counterpart

The concept of marriage is a fundamental part of God’s plan on the spiritual plane also, being used in the Scriptures to convey the association of the church with His Son Jesus Christ: *“For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:29-32).*

The marriage of Christ and the church is not an “after thought” on God’s part—the selection of a bride for His Son was part of God’s plan from before the foundation of the world, as explained by the Apostle Paul: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world...” (Eph. 1:3-4).*

Jewish marriage procedure

“Two individuals becoming one flesh” is a process, and was reflected to some extent in the traditional Jewish wedding procedure. There were three stages in the traditional Jewish wedding: the contract, the consummation and the celebration. The picture is not applicable in every detail but overall its components reflect the commitment required by the Christian for them to be part of Christ’s bride.

The contract

In the Jewish wedding ceremony, both parties had to agree upon a binding document called the *ketubah*—they both had to be clear about and agree upon their mutual objectives and expectations. Likewise the Christian must be aware of and agree to their obligations before they enter into a contract to be Christ’s bride. Thus the initial introduction to the *ketubah* may be regarded as the individual’s calling—becoming familiar with the purpose of their calling, which is a process that is worked out over time.

At this stage the individuals were not necessarily aware of every experience that would be befall them in their future life, but the principles of their commitment had to be clearly understood, including there might be a price to be paid, just as Jacob “paid” Laban a total of fourteen years’ labor for Rachel (Gen. 29:18-28).

The cost to the Christian might include forsaking activities previously enjoyed, which in turn might lead to the loss of previous friendships: *“Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind... That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you” (1 Peter 4:1-4).* Peter simply reinforced what Jesus had said: *“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:18-19).*

The signing

When the man and woman understood their obligations they were ready for the next step: the signing of the *ketubah*. The signing signified both parties were committed to the marriage.

Regarding the bride of Christ, this step may be regarded as the Christian’s consecration—the moment when they decide to commit themselves to be part of the bride of the World’s Saviour. From that point on there must not be any looking back: *“And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).*

Preparation

When the *ketubah* was signed, the groom went to prepare a home for their new life together. The groom would not return to receive his bride until this new home was finished. This gives a new depth of meaning to John 14:2, 3: *“In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also”.*

While the new home was being prepared, the bride would prepare herself and wait expectantly but patiently for the return of her husband-to-be, not knowing precisely when he would come. She would keep a lamp burning in her window so that, when he came, he would know she was ready. In some respects this tradition may be regarded as picturing the importance of the Lord’s followers keeping their lamps *“trimmed and burning”* (Matt. 25:1-13). It may also picture the fact that the Christian does not know precisely when their bridegroom will return to

take them from their earthly home: *“Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not”* (Luke 12:40).

While waiting for her bridegroom to return the bride had to keep herself pure. In those early times virginity was of paramount importance, and Paul used this feature to exhort the Corinthians to their sole allegiance to God: *“For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”* (2 Cor. 11:2). Paul wanted God to see His church as pure. Every man who cherishes his bride and esteems her above all others likes to see her as pure and perfect, as expressed in Psalm 45: *“King’s daughters were among thy honourable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir. Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father’s house; So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him”* (Psa. 45:9-11).

Consummation and celebration

When the new home was ready and the bride’s preparations complete, the next stage of the Jewish wedding—the consummation—was initiated. It preceded a time of much celebration. Likewise the marriage of God’s Son with His bride will precede a time of great celebration: *“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God”* (Rev. 19:7-9).

Another aspect of the wedding is that the bride would leave her father’s house to be with her husband in a new location. In the spiritual marriage, it means the bride of Christ will leave her earthly home to be with her Husband in heaven: *“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord”* (1 Thess. 4:16-18).

Submission

The Scriptures provide admonition for both the earthly husband and wife during their future life together, based on the relationship which the church has with her Husband: *“Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves*

unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones” (Eph. 5:20-30).

The husband’s headship is not a tyranny. In the original Greek, the word “submit” is translated from the Greek “*hupotasso*”, which is a compound word: “*hupo*” implies “under” and “*tasso*” means to arrange or to put in order. So the implication is to place oneself under, so that the order in God’s creation will be upheld.

The responsibility for husbands is to “*love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it*”. This love must be enduring, as exemplified in Hosea 2:19: *“And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy”*. “Steadfast love” is translated from the Hebrew “*chesed*”; it is the kind of love that will not let go, and hence defines a love that will not forsake—a constant, unwavering love, a relentless devotion to those in a covenant relationship, whether it is between God and Israel, Christ and the Church or a husband and wife.

These are precious concepts showing how Divine love will become the ultimate reality for all mankind, and are examples of the love and dedication which all followers of the Lord are to develop now: *“And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices”* (Mark 12:29-33).■

GOD'S JUDGMENTS

"For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God. And if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17)

Perhaps two of the most basic questions human beings can ask are: where did God come from; and what is the purpose of life?

For some minds the first question begs the issue, that is, it assumes what has to be proved: that there is a Supreme Power. Those who deny the existence of a Supreme Power are titled atheists (a'-theist: no god). Such a position is attractive to those who believe their innate power is sufficient to accomplish all things. However, in spite of concerted intellectual endeavour by scientists of every faculty—physical, emotional, philosophical, spiritual, religious—no one has yet provided an unequivocal answer to the question. Indeed the Bible itself does not provide a direct answer, but starts from the basis that there is a God: *"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him"* (Heb. 11:6)—belief that God exists is a prerequisite of pleasing God.

Perhaps the most persuasive argument is that of David: *"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"* (Psa. 8:3-4). Pensive consideration of the grandeur of the heavens, the relative insignificance of mankind in general and of one's own fragile frame in particular, cannot fail to instill a spirit of wonder and subordination, which leads to an acknowledgment of the existence of a Supreme Power.

One consequence of denying the existence of a Supreme Being is hopelessness; as Paul explained regarding the Gentiles: *"That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, **having no hope, and without God in the world**"* (Eph. 2:12).

Atheism

One of the functions of a Supreme Being is to set Rules to govern its subjects, and not acknowledging the existence of a Supreme Power leads to a disregard for law and order. Such a lack of governance has been applied to Israel at various times: *"Now for a long season Israel hath been **without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law**... And in those times there was no peace to him that went out, nor to him that came in, but great vexations were*

upon all the inhabitants of the countries. And nation was destroyed of nation, and city of city: for God did vex them with all adversity" (2 Chron. 15:3-6).

Judgment

On the other hand, one consequence of a Supreme Power having prescribed Rules is that there will be a judgment regarding compliance with those Rules, hence the question when will mankind be judged?

The Biblical answer to that question is two-fold, and requires an understanding of God's program. John 12:47-48 reads: *"And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day"* (John 12:47-48). That verse states there will be a judgment for those who did not believe what Jesus said, and that that judgment would be in *"the last day"*.

Acts 17:31 explains *"the last day"* and the judgment process: *"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will **judge the world in righteousness** by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead"* (Acts 17:30-31).

However the theme text for this article (1 Peter 4:17) states that the time has come now for judgment to begin at the house of God. Thus there are two judgments to be conducted at different times—one beginning now and one to come in a future time—in *"the last day"*.

Mankind's death sentence

Romans 5:12-14 reads: *"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come)".* Those verses imply that there has already been a judgment passed on mankind—all have sinned (*"transgressed the law"*—1 John 3:4) and been sentenced to death, even those who have not sinned in the same way as Adam transgressed.

The verses also state that there is no sin if there is no law, which is consistent with Jesus' statement that He is not judging those who have not "heard" His words. However His word will judge them in "*the last day*"; at that time all will know Him: "... *for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea*" (Isa. 11:9). The prophet Habakkuk confirms Isaiah's prophecy: "*For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea*" (Hab. 2:14).

Jesus' coming to earth

Having reached this point, the question to be addressed now is why did Jesus' come to earth more than 2000 years ago?

Paul answered that question in his letter to Timothy: "*This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief*" (1 Tim. 1:15). Paul continues and states that Jesus' mission was to be a ransom price, to pay the price so that all mankind may be released from the condemnation inherited from Adam: "... *God our Saviour... will have all men to be saved... For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time*" (1 Tim. 2:3-6). An important element in Paul's explanation is the implication that the ransom has been paid but mankind has not yet been released—the fact that the ransom has been paid will be testified (that is, shown to be true) in due time, and that will be in the time explained by John: "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live*" (John 5:25). Thus the fact that Jesus has paid the ransom price will be testified as prophesied by Hosea many centuries ago: "*I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death...*" (Hosea 13:14)

The Apostle Paul explained to the Thessalonians that all this will happen when Jesus comes to earth again: "*For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first*" (1 Thess. 4:16).

The church's judgment

However 1 Peter 4:7 states that the judgment of the "*house of God*" began in his day, and so the question may be asked for how long will their judgment last? The answer is that it will continue until the church is complete—until all those whom God has called to be members of the bride of Christ have successfully completed their course, the Apostle Paul being one of the first: "*For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good*

fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

A further aspect of the church's judgment is the manner in which it is being conducted. A judgment involves more than just the pronouncement of a verdict: there's a long process—due process—to bring in or gather evidence to determine the character of what has happened. The Christian's trial continues throughout their life as Peter explains: "*The trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ*" (1 Pet. 1:7). The Christian's trial is a trial of faith, that is, a trial of "*patient continuance in well doing*" (Rom. 2:7) which must be practised until their life's end if they are to gain the prize for which they have been called: "*But 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). Hence the Christian should "... *think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you as though some strange thing happened to you*" (1 Pet. 4:12), because Jesus told His disciples: "... *ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved... The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord*" (Matt. 10:22-24). The ultimate goal is given by John in Revelation 2:10: "*Be thou faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life*".

Rewards

God's standard for judging Christians is the development of love—love for Him and love for others, including their opponents. Jesus said: "*But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you*" (Matt. 5:44).

Trial and testing are part of that judgment, but their purpose is also to develop character. Sometimes it is difficult to understand the experiences that befall the Christian, but God knows what is best for them. God puts them in circumstances that develop their weaknesses—Job 23:8 reads: "*Behold, I go forward but he is not there; backward but I cannot perceive him; when he acts on the left I cannot behold him; he turns on the right, I cannot see him. He knows the way I take, and when he has tried me I shall come forth as gold*". God's oversight everyday of the Christian's path is how He directs them even though they may not understand. In the end they will see Him, and rejoice in the their glorious reward—a reward that will never pass away. ■

THE BLESSING OF ALL NATIONS

“And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 26:4).

God’s promise to Abraham, that it would be through his seed that all the families of the earth would be blessed, is a centre-piece of the Christian faith. It is the hope of a better time for the whole world of mankind that makes the Christian faith reasonable and sensible. If the benefits of Jesus’ sacrifice were limited to those who profess to be Christian, in 2014 only about one third of the world’s population of 6,900,000,000 would benefit.

However, to make God’s promise to Abraham meaningful, several aspects of the promise require clarification (definition). Some are:

- identification of the “seed”;
- the nature of the blessing;
- who is included in “all nations”; and
- when they will be blessed.

The concept ascribed to any one of the above aspects directly affects the concepts that may be logically ascribed to the other aspects. For example, if the blessing is understood to be restitution to conditions such as existed in the Garden of Eden, the time of the blessing has not yet come, which in turn poses the question who or what constitutes the “seed”? On the other hand, if the seed is deemed to be Jesus Christ, the blessing may be some other facet of God’s plan, such as life in heaven. Consequently the meaning ascribed to any one facet of the promise is critical in understanding the other aspects.

In that light the first issue addressed in this article is who or what is the agent through whom the nations will be blessed. However it is acknowledged that adopting that starting point might lead to prejudiced conclusions regarding the other aspects of the promise. Diligent study is required.

Through Abraham

There are at least three possibilities regarding through whom the blessings will flow.

In the King James Version, Genesis 28:14 reads: *“And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: **and in thee** and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed”*. The words *“in thee”* imply the blessing will come, at least in part, through Abraham himself.

However it seems likely the expression *“in thee”* is supplied by the translators, because the words are not

referenced in either Strong’s Concordance or Young’s Concordance. It has not been possible to establish whether they are implied by the idiom of the Hebrew language, but the fact that they are included in the Revised Version and the New International Version adds weight to that understanding.

Following that line of reasoning, the next question may be what blessing will Abraham personally impart? One verse of Scripture that may be considered to describe a blessing imparted directly by Abraham is Matthew 8:11: *“And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven”*. In one sense it will be a blessing to sit down with Abraham in person, however whether that will be a fulfillment of the promise that the blessing will be to all nations depends on who is considered to come from the east and the west, and whether that privilege comprises the blessing.

The only nation named in the Scriptures as coming from the east and west is the re-gathered Israelites, prophesied in Isaiah 43:5 and Zechariah 8:7-8: *“Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness”* (Zech. 8:7-8). Consequently, it might be difficult to accept that Abraham personally will be an agent through whom the promise *“to all nations”* will be fulfilled, even in part.

The nation of Israel

Referring back to Genesis 28:14, Abraham’s seed is described in terms that may be applied to the nation of Israel—*“thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth”*, and Isaiah 41:8-9 supports that understanding: *“But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, **the seed of Abraham** my friend. Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away”*. Verse 9 refers to events after Abraham’s day, and therefore applies to the **nation** of Israel and not just to the individual named Jacob (Israel).

That the nation of Israel will be a channel through which the other nations of the earth will be blessed is well supported in Scripture: Zechariah 8:20-23 reads:

“Thus saith the LORD of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you”. The nations coming to Jerusalem to learn of the Lord’s ways means the nation of Israel will be a channel through which the Lord’s blessings will flow.

That Israel will be an instrument which God will use to bless all the nations is exemplified by Israel being a link between Egypt and Assyria (Mesopotamia, or Iraq): *“In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance”* (Isa. 19:23-25). Israel will have a pivotal role in the blessing of those nations.

When the blessings will flow

If the seed is the nation of Israel it seems reasonable to conclude the blessings would not, indeed could not, flow until the nation of Israel is sufficiently established to enable the blessing to flow through them. And that proposition calls into question the status of the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel already is a world leader in several fields of scientific endeavour—more than 80 nations went to Israel in November 2011 to learn about water conservation and usage techniques, which means that, in some respects at least, Israel could already be deemed to be sufficiently well established for God to distribute blessings through them. That is not to say technology is the nature of the blessing the Lord is going to shower upon the nations, but merely that Israel is already sufficiently established for the Lord to use it should the other factors be in place. And there are other factors.

One of the other factors might be the heart condition of the nations, which in turn calls up the demise of the present political and social orders. Ezekiel 38 is a chapter which contains several details regarding the demise of Gog, two of which are:

- verses 5-6 which list several other nations who will come with Gog, which may indicate there will be an alliance of those nations; an alliance that might take

some time to formalize, and so the time has not yet come for the nations to be blessed;

- as mentioned earlier in this issue, verse 11 states that Israel will be dwelling safely without walls, again indicating that the time of blessing is still future.

Thus if the nation of Israel is the seed to which the prophecy refers, there are some developments yet to occur before the prophecy will be fulfilled, and hence the prophecy refers to a time future from 2014.

Christ as the seed

Another plausible understanding of the seed is that it is Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:14-16 reads: *“That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith... Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ”*.

As well as identifying the seed as Christ, in those verses Paul states that the blessing will “*come on the Gentiles*” and that the blessing is “*the promise of the Spirit*”. Paul’s explanation confirms that one aspect of the blessing is the giving of the Holy Spirit, and that the expression “*all nations*” means the Gentiles.

The blessing of faith

Paul’s line of reasoning is consistent—in verses 8-9 he explained: *“And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then **they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham**”*. Thus those to whom God has given His Holy Spirit **are blessed in the current time**. Such an assertion is in accord with Jesus’ words: *“But **blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear**”* (Matt. 13:16).

Understanding (believing; having faith) that Jesus is the Messiah, and understanding how God is working out His plan through Him is indeed a blessing: *“But God... for his great love wherewith he loved us... hath raised us up together... That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God...”* (Eph. 2:4-10).

Summary

Thus there are various justifiable interpretations of the promise to Abraham, but all of them are made possible because of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ: *“For the Son of God, Jesus Christ... was not yea and nay, but in him was yea. For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us”* (2 Cor. 1:19-20).■

THROUGH THE EYES OF JOSHUA (PART 3)

The story so far: The Israelites have left Egypt and crossed the Sea of Reeds.

Miriam, the elder sister of Moses and Aaron, led the Israelites in a wonderful song of triumph; although she was aged about 90 at the time, she led the dancing, too, and there was a great celebration.

I said earlier that when we set out, we had no idea where we were headed, but we soon learned from Moses that we did have an ultimate goal, which was to reach what he called 'The Promised Land': the Land of Canaan, which had been promised to our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so long before – a land which God had said would be 'flowing with milk and honey'. It was an exciting prospect!

Now, had we taken the quickest route north, following the old coast road which hugs the Mediterranean coast (known as 'The Way of the Philistines', or 'The Way of the Sea'), we could, in theory at least, have reached the Promised Land in a week or two. There were a couple of other good north-easterly routes we could have used too, but Moses knew very well that Egyptian military patrols would be using those roads all the time, and we would have been just walking into trouble.

So, when we set out from the far side of The Sea of Reeds on the next stage of our journey, we found ourselves heading in a south-easterly direction, using the far less frequented path which led towards Mount Sinai, through difficult desert terrain – a route used mainly by shepherds with their flocks, by a few merchants heading towards Midian and by the camel trains which traveled to and from the ancient marble quarries and copper-mines, of which there are several in the Sinai area.

We may have got away from the Egyptian army, but we weren't out of trouble yet, by a very long chalk! The first problem about moving a very large number of people through the desert, together with all their flocks and herds, is always going to be finding enough fresh water for them. But of course Moses was a vastly experienced desert traveler – after all, he'd spent forty years moving around the Sinai Desert, shepherding Jethro's flocks, so he knew better than any of us where the best oases could be found; even so sometimes those oases were simply too far apart, and that's when the trouble would start.

The first leg of our journey took us through what's called 'The Desert of Shur' with not an oasis in sight. Each family carried its own supply of water, of course, in skin bags, but after a few days, we needed

to find somewhere to re-fill them, and somewhere for the animals to drink.

Three days on, we came across an oasis, but the water there proved to be bitter – people called it 'Marah', which means just that! – and there was a lot of grumbling. They aimed their spite mainly at Moses, but he took their complaints straight to God, who showed him a special piece of wood; Moses threw it into the water, which immediately became sweet to drink. Quite remarkable!

Next stop: Elim, a really beautiful oasis, near the Red Sea, with twelve separate pools of fresh water and seventy big palm-trees; we camped nearby, and for once there was general satisfaction in the camp.

We moved on from there, some six weeks after we had left Egypt, but now things got really tough. No water in sight, and precious little food, either – just miles of barren desert. Once again, there was grumbling, still mainly aimed against Moses and Aaron. People were saying to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There, we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert, in order to starve this entire assembly to death".

Now it is perfectly true that – although the Egyptians used us as slave-labour – the Land of Goshen, where we had all lived, was one of the most beautiful and fertile parts of the Nile Delta, so we had never been short of food or fresh water, and there had been plenty of rich pasture for our flocks and herds.

But now, there was absolutely no need for the people to be grumbling so much at Moses and Aaron, who I felt were doing a great job for us all, under very difficult circumstances. I said as much, and I heard later that what I had been saying did in fact reach the ears of Moses.

(To be continued)■

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