

He “Whose Right It Is”

“Thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: . . . it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.”

—*Ezekiel 21:26,27*

THE LONG CENTURIES OF

human sorrow and suffering are referred to in the Bible as a nighttime, which is eventually to terminate in a morning of joy. (Ps. 30:5) Thankfully, a firm basis of hope for the coming new day was provided in the promises of God to the patriarch Abraham, and enlarged upon as they were repeated to his descendants by the holy prophets. The promise to Abraham was that through his “seed” “all the families of the earth” were to be blessed.—Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18

In Hebrews 11:10, we read that Abraham “looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” A city is used in the Bible to symbolize a government. The city “whose builder and maker is God” which Abraham looked for would therefore be a divinely appointed arrangement—one befitting the promises which God had given him. It is doubtful that Abraham understood

all the implications of the wonderful assurances God made to him. However, he evidently understood that the promised blessing of all people would come through the agencies of a government in which his seed would in some manner have a prominent part.

This thought is borne out in a prophecy uttered by Abraham's grandson, Jacob, shortly before his death. He said, concerning his son Judah, "Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." (Gen. 49:9,10) This prophecy was given while the Hebrew people were in Egypt, where the symbol of the regal right to rule was then a couched lion. The clear implication of the prophecy is, therefore, that from the tribe of Judah there would come a great ruler, one who would establish peace—as implied by the meaning of the title "Shiloh"—and fulfill the promises which God had made to Abraham.

A HOLY NATION

Moses was raised up by the Lord to deliver the Hebrew people from Egyptian bondage, and through him God gave the nation his Law. Faithfulness to that Law would have resulted not only in life for the people, but a wonderfully exalted position for the nation. Concerning this, the Lord said, "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:

And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.”—Exod. 19:5,6

This high position to be occupied by Israel as a priestly, holy nation was, as God clearly indicated, conditional upon faithfulness to his covenant. He gave the people every possible opportunity to be faithful, exercising great patience with their waywardness and backslidings. Under the leadership of Joshua, they were taken into the land of promise, and for several centuries after his death, were without any earthly ruler. During this period, God raised up judges to deliver them when, as a result of their unfaithfulness, they fell prey to surrounding nations.

Samuel was the last of these judges. While he was filling the office of judge, the Israelites clamored for a king. They wanted to be like the surrounding nations. The Lord yielded to this request, and Saul was anointed by Samuel to be their first king. Saul ruled well for a time, but later proved unfaithful, and David was anointed to succeed him, although he did not do so until the death of Saul.

David was greatly beloved by God, and to him was made a very enduring promise. It was that the right to rule would never be taken from his family—“Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.” (II Sam. 7:16) Thus was the royal aspect concerning Abraham’s seed which was to bless all nations still further restricted. Not only would the promised ruler come from the tribe of Judah, but he would be from the family of David.

The Lord used the kingdom arrangements of Israel to be illustrative, or typical, of the much

greater kingdom which would later be established in the hands of the promised Messiah. We read concerning David's son Solomon, that he "sat on the throne of the LORD as king instead of David his father." (I Chron. 29:23) This was true of all the successive kings in David's line. Some of them were faithful to the Lord, and some were not. Regardless, however, God did not wrest the kingdom from David's line.

ISRAEL'S KINGDOM REMOVED

This typical kingdom arrangement continued until the days of King Zedekiah, who was one of several successive wicked kings. It turned out that he was the last, for it was concerning him that the Lord caused the Prophet Ezekiel to write, "Thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him."—Ezek. 21:25-27

There is great finality in the statement that the "day is come, when iniquity shall have an end." It is also an indication that the "day" which is said to have come had been foretold, and indeed it had. When God entered into covenant relationship with Israel through the law administered to Moses, he promised to care for them and bless them if they were faithful to him. However, he also warned them of dire punishments if they were unfaithful.

One of these warnings is recorded in Leviticus 26:17-28. Here various punishments are mentioned which evidently refer to their periods of captivity to the Moabites, Midianites, Philistines, and others. After warning of these relatively minor periods of punishment, however, the Lord declares, "If ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins." This "seven times" of additional punishment is mentioned four times.

It is agreed by many students of Bible prophecy that each of the "times" mentioned in this passage is equivalent to a Jewish year of 360 days. In Numbers 14:33,34 and Ezekiel 4:5-8, God provides a basis for computing these prophetic time measurements in which he says that each day should be counted for a year. Seven periods, or times, of 360 days would be 2,520 days. With each day representing a year, this would be a period of 2,520 years.

If, as our text indicates, this long period of punishment upon Israel began when their last king, Zedekiah, was overthrown, it would mean that not until 2,520 years from then could they expect any marked degree of divine favor leading to their liberation as a people. At the time of Zedekiah's overthrow, the nation was taken captive to Babylon, and although permitted to return to their own land seventy years later, they never did regain national independence. Their kingdom, the typical kingdom of the Lord, had come to an end, and while Ezekiel promised that it was only until he come whose right it is, he explains that even then it would not be the same.

THE ROYAL MAJESTY APPEARS

Six centuries after Zedekiah was overthrown, Jesus, Israel's promised Messiah, came. John the Baptist announced his presence, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." A more correct translation reads, "The royal majesty of the heavens has approached." (Matt. 3:2, *Emphatic Diaglott*) Indeed, Jesus was the royal one whom the God of heaven had promised. He was the seed of Abraham. (Gal. 3:16) He was the Shiloh who was to come from the tribe of Judah. He was the seed of David who was to occupy the throne of David forever.—Acts 15:16

Jesus' disciples had accepted him as the promised Messiah, the Prince of Peace, the great King who was to rule "from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth." (Ps. 72:8) They believed that he would establish his government in Jerusalem, and do it right away. We are not to suppose that they understood fully all that the promised kingdom of the Lord would mean to Israel and to the world. Their chief concern at the time was evidently the liberation of their nation from bondage to Gentile dominion, specifically the Roman Empire. They asked the resurrected Jesus, "Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"—that kingdom which was overthrown in the days of Zedekiah.—Acts 1:6

They seemed warranted in such a hope. Had not the Prophet Ezekiel said that the kingdom had been overthrown merely until he would come "whose right it is"? Was not Jesus this one, the rightful one to again occupy David's throne? Indeed, it was Jesus of whom it had been written, "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.”—Isa. 9:7

These things were surely true, but what Jesus’ disciples did not at first understand was that his coming to establish the kingdom would be at his Second Advent, or presence, in the affairs of mankind. Jesus made this clear in a parable. The record is that he spoke this parable “because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.” (Luke 19:11) The parable was of a “certain nobleman” who went into a “far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.”—vs. 12

The reason Jesus related this parable at that time was because he had just announced to his disciples that he was going to Jerusalem, where his enemies were plotting to arrest him and have him put to death. He let them know that he expected to die, and was voluntarily allowing himself to be killed. They could not understand this. From their human way of reasoning, they wondered how it would be possible for a dead Messiah to establish a powerful kingdom and liberate their nation from its Roman overlords.

The parable of the “certain nobleman” evidently helped the disciples somewhat. From it they gathered that Jesus was going away for a period of time, and that the kingdom would not become a reality until he returned. To them it meant further waiting, and they knew not how long. Being heavy of heart because of deferred hopes, they went to Jesus on the Mount of Olives just a few days before he was crucified, and asked, “What shall

be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”—Matt. 24:3

It is of critical importance to note the meaning of several words in the questions asked by our Lord’s disciples. The Greek word which is translated “coming” literally means “presence.” The word rendered “world” means “age,” and also has a specific Jewish meaning of “Messianic period.” The Greek word here translated “end” is also interesting—it denotes “entire completion.”

The disciples really asked Jesus, “What shall be the sign of your presence, when, as the nobleman of the parable, you return to establish your kingdom, and what will be the sign that the time has come for the entire completion of the Messianic period?” They believed Jesus was the Messiah. They realized there was a purpose for his being with them at that time. However, since he was going away and returning later they now began to appreciate the fact that the Messianic age, or period, was to be connected with his second “presence.” They further saw that his presence would continue until the completion of the Messianic period.

Jesus’ answer to these questions is most enlightening. Among the signs he outlined, which would give evidence of his Second Presence and mark the time for the forthcoming completion of the Messianic purpose of blessing all the families of the earth, was a period of “great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” This tribulation, Jesus said, would be so severe that “except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved.”—Matt. 24:21,22

No one, unless inspired by God, could have foretold so accurately what is facing mankind today, and causing the hearts of people everywhere to be filled with fear. The possibility of the human race being totally destroyed is now a known fact throughout the world. Luke's report of Jesus' reply to the disciples' question quotes Jesus as saying that there would be upon the earth "distress of nations, with perplexity," and that "men's hearts [would be] failing them for fear."—Luke 21:25,26

"TIMES OF THE GENTILES"

Especially significant in Luke's report of the signs which Jesus outlined to the disciples in answer to their questions pertaining to the time of his Second Presence and the completion of the Messianic purpose, is the statement, "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." (Luke 21:24) Jerusalem here stands for the nation of Israel and their people, who were at that time under bondage to Rome.

They were already being trodden down—that is, they were a subject nation, and had been, as we have seen, for six centuries. Jesus said that this would continue until the "times" of the Gentiles be fulfilled. The Greek word translated "times" denotes a fixed period of time. It corresponds, we believe, to the seven "times" of 2,520 years of punishment upon the Jewish nation to which we have already referred, spoken of in Leviticus 26. The ending of these "times," we further understand, as well as related historical events, point us to A.D. 1914.

Jesus indicated that the end of the times of the Gentiles would bring about a changed status with respect to the Jewish people, and that this would be one of the signs of his presence. Historically, it was as a direct result of World War I, which began in 1914, one of the outcomes of which was the Balfour Declaration made in 1917, that Israel regained their statehood in 1948. They are no longer a people without a homeland, and without an independent government. They are no longer a subject people, “trodden down” by Gentile empires.

There is another aspect of Jesus’ prophecy which is equally important—the Gentile aspect. The Jewish nation was to be trodden down until the times of the Gentiles would be fulfilled. This would indicate that the time of Israel’s national subjugation would be a period during which Gentile nations would be permitted to exercise an unhindered rulership, and by God’s ordering. The Apostle Paul said, “The powers that be are ordained [ordered] of God.”—Rom. 13:1

BEGAN WITH BABYLON

Paul evidently based his assertion on a statement which the Prophet Daniel, speaking for God, made to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It was during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar that Judah’s last king—that “wicked prince of Israel”—was overthrown and the nation taken captive into Babylon. This Gentile king had a dream in which he saw a human-like image having a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet and toes of iron and clay mixed. In the dream, the king saw a stone cut out of a

mountain without hands. This stone smote the image on its feet, causing it to fall, and then ground it to powder. Then the stone grew until it became a great mountain which filled the whole earth.—Dan. 2:31-45

The Prophet Daniel interpreted the dream for the king, telling him that the “God of heaven” had given him a kingdom. (vss. 37,38) Here, at the very time that Israel lost its independence, and to the Gentile king who subjugated them, God gave dominion as the first of a long line of Gentile rulers and successive empires until the times of the Gentiles should end. Daniel explained to the king of Babylon that others would arise, as represented by the silver, brass, and iron of the image which he saw in his dream.

Historically, these were Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Then came the divisions of the Roman Empire, as depicted in the toes of the image. Thus the image prophecy reached down to the time of just over a century ago. At that time, just prior to World War I, these “toes,” represented in the various states of Europe, as governed by hereditary ruling houses, still constituted part of the Gentile dominion given to Nebuchadnezzar.

Concerning the stone smiting the image on its feet, Daniel said, “Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, . . . and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.” (vs. 35) Babylon as an empire fell when conquered by the Medes and Persians. The Medo-Persian Empire crumbled when overthrown by Greece. Likewise, the Grecian Empire fell when

conquered by Rome. Finally, the Roman Empire was divided into the many states—"toes"—of Europe.

However, Daniel declares that the gold, silver, brass, and iron image was broken to pieces together, or at the same time. This denoted that the image was not so much a picture of individual Gentile kingdoms or governments, but of something which was common to a certain succession of Gentile powers, beginning with Babylon in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, and ending in the days of divided Rome. What was common to all is that which was stated to Nebuchadnezzar by Daniel: "The God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom. . . . Thou art this head of gold."

This indicates that Babylon became the head of gold only when the "God of heaven" gave permission to rule. Indeed, Babylon existed long before this, but not as the head of gold. This same ordering, as Paul describes it, carried through to Babylon's successors. Its true meaning was understood by Jesus and the apostles, but later it was distorted, and claimed as "the divine right of kings." This divine right of kings philosophy held sway in Europe until it was destroyed as a result of World War I.

Just as Babylon existed prior to receiving authority to rule from the "God of heaven," there are still Gentile governments in Europe even now, some 100 years after 1914. However, they are no longer upheld by the divine right of kings philosophy. That philosophy, which was common to all the Gentile governments involved in the symbolic image seen by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream, has perished. Today's rulers of the remnants of the "toes" of the

image exercise, for the most part, minimal authority and power in world affairs, and none claim any longer to be ruling by divine right.

It is no coincidence that the same circumstances, and beginning at the same time, which brought the downfall of the divine right of kings, also led to the national independence of Israel little more than three decades later. These events of historical fact provide a solid basis for the conclusion that we have seen the fulfillment of the sign given by Jesus—"Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." It is true that all the promises pertaining to the restoration of Israel are not yet fulfilled, and the Gentile nations are still trying to prevent a complete collapse of their social order. However, the prophecies we have cited point out merely the beginning of the events to which they apply, not their completion. Indeed, what marvelous events have already occurred since the end of the long period of the "times of the Gentiles."

HE "WHOSE RIGHT IT IS"

These events, particularly those encompassing the past one hundred years, provide many indications that the climax of God's Messianic purpose is at hand, and the exalted Jesus—the one "whose right it is" to rule Israel and all nations—is invisibly present. On one hand, through him are being fulfilled such prophecies as Psalm 2:9, which, referring to Gentile kingdoms, says, "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." On the other hand, as the one "whose right it is" to rule, he has

directed the process by which Ezekiel 20:33-38 is being fulfilled. In this prophecy concerning dispersed Israel, the Lord says, “Surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you: And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out.”—vss. 33,34

Much fury, in particular the persecution culminating in the Holocaust, was required to uproot the people of Israel from the countries in which they lived, and to cause them to long for and return to the Promised Land. Even now, however, these are, in many cases, looking to their own strength and do not know that it has been their Messiah who has overseen their progress as a nation. As verse 35 of this prophecy states, while they have been brought into their own land, they are still in the “wilderness of the people.”

The people of Israel, although no longer a subject nation, are in much the same confusion politically and economically as the rest of the world. The same “perplexity” and “fear” that fills the hearts of the Gentiles plagues them also. (Luke 21:25,26) However, this will not always be so, for God’s ultimate purpose is to bring them into “the bond of the covenant.”—Ezek. 20:37

This is the New Covenant which the Lord has promised to make “with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah,” in which he will write his law “in their hearts,” and “in their inward parts.” (Jer. 31:31-34) The Apostle Paul explains that this covenant will be made when the Deliverer

comes out of Sion, and turns away ungodliness from Jacob.—Rom. 11:26,27

Sion, or Zion, is used in the Scriptures to symbolize the spiritual phase of the Messianic kingdom in which Jesus is the chief ruler. “Yet have I set my king [the one whose right it is] on my holy hill of Zion,” declares God. (Ps. 2:6) In Revelation 14:1, a hundred and forty-four thousand are shown with Jesus on Mount Sion (Greek for Zion). These are Christ’s faithful followers of the present Gospel Age. This spiritual ruling company is again pictured in Obadiah 21, where the prophet says that he saw “saviours . . . come up on mount Zion,” and adds, “the kingdom shall be the LORD’S.”

Already, the one to whom “all power” was given “in heaven and in earth” is set upon the symbolic hill of Zion. (Matt. 28:18) His faithful footstep followers of this age are in process of being gathered with him. The first to receive the blessings of the kingdom through the completed Christ, head and body, will be a faithful remnant of the Jews, those who recognize Jesus as their Messiah and say, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” (Matt. 23:39) This remnant—including the resurrected Ancient Worthies of old, who will help instruct the people—is to constitute the beginning nucleus of those with whom God will establish his New Covenant and bless.

These blessings will then flow out and expand until all Israel and the rest of mankind are brought to rest and peace in the Lord, and to perfect human life—contingent upon heart obedience to the righteous laws of the kingdom. As we have seen, this glorious consummation of the Messianic purpose is

near. Already the preliminary work is in process. The old and selfish order of fallen man is crumbling. Israel is being assembled and made ready, even though it is still in a measure of unbelief and amid great trouble. To use Paul's language, they will soon be "received." He says, "What shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead," for the people of Israel, and eventually, for all mankind. (Rom. 11:15) Let us, then, rejoice that he has come "whose right it is," and that soon "his government and peace" will know no end.—Isa. 9:7 ■