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A World On Fire?

"You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end" (Matthew 24:6, NASB 1995)

The day after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt addressed a joint session of Congress. His speech that day, which summoned a nation to war, would become among the most iconic in American history — particularly Roosevelt's famous line describing the outrageous attack the prior day: "Yesterday, December 7, 1941 — a date which will live in infamy — the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan." In that same speech, the U.S. President declared War on Japan.

On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. Some analysts claim that it was just an escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian War that started in 2014. However, the invasion was the biggest attack on a European country since World War II.

In February 2023, Walter Reed conducted an interview with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on behalf of the Wall Street Journal. When the interview was published on February 27, it was titled, "War in the Middle East Is Closer Than You Think." Eight months later, the ruling faction of Gaza, Hamas, attacked the nation of Israel. The next day Netanyahu, in a speech before the Knesset, declared war on Hamas. The number of Israelis killed on that day was the most since the Holocaust of World War II.

Wikipedia lists six major wars currently being fought (combat deaths of 10,000 or more in the current or past year), fifteen minor wars (1000-9999 in the current or past year), twenty-one conflicts where 100-999 combat related deaths have taken place, and fourteen skirmishes or clashes where fewer than 100 combat related deaths have been reported. At least twenty countries have suffered combat casualties.

Between the 16th and the 18th centuries, war proliferated. History records at least thirty-four notable conflicts during that time, leading up to World War

I in 1914. Since recording began around 3,600 B.C., there have been over 14,500 major wars. About four billion people are estimated to have been killed. Not long ago, that was the entire population of earth. Of the past 3,400 years, historians estimate that humans have been entirely at peace for 268 of them, just eight percent of recorded history. Today's wars bring us into a new world where economic gains, the prosperity of nations, and a peaceful environment now takes a back seat to perhaps the most dangerous period in our century. This was best summarized in a 2021 essay by former statesman Henry Kissinger:

"The founding legend of modern government is a walled city protected by powerful rulers, sometimes despotic, other times benevolent, yet always strong enough to protect the people from an external enemy ... As the world emerges from the current crisis ... [it] will require restraint on all sides in ... diplomacy ... Failure could set the world on fire." As we examine the world today, a world on fire may not be far away.

China (PRC)

2023 marks the tenth anniversary of Chinese President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the largest and most ambitious infrastructure

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development project in human history. China has lent more than \$1 trillion to more than 100 countries, stoking anxieties about the spread of Chinese influence. According to *Foreign Affairs* magazine, many analysts have characterized Chinese lending through the BRI as “debt trap diplomacy” designed to give China leverage over other countries and even seize their infrastructure and resources. After Sri Lanka fell behind on payments for its troubled Hambantota port project in 2017, China obtained a 99-year lease on the property as part of a deal to renegotiate the debt. The agreement sparked concerns that Beijing’s real aim was to acquire access to strategic facilities throughout the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, and the Americas.

In Argentina, Ethiopia, Montenegro, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Zambia, and elsewhere, costly Chinese projects have pushed debt-to-GDP ratios to unsustainable levels and produced balance-of-payments crises. The U.S. State department lists many issues surrounding China, including:

Fear of arbitrary arrest, absolute control over law enforcement and the judicial system, using both to stifle calls from Chinese citizens for freedom, human rights and rule of law.

Religious freedom abuses, openly hostile to members of all religious faiths, including Uyghur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, Christians and Falun Gong practitioners. The PRC has adopted a five-year plan to bring all religious doctrine and practice in line with Communist Party doctrine.

Stifling freedom of expression through blocking access to information.

Forced Labor. Independent unions are illegal in China and employers are under no obligation to bargain with workers in good faith. The effects on workers are severe: Occupational safety and health violations are prevalent, with limited enforcement and recourse for workers who find themselves in dangerous working conditions. Workers are frequently not paid in many industries. Workplace discrimination is rampant, including recruitment practices that explicitly reference gender, age, disability, physical appearance, and marital status.

Assaulting Hong Kong's autonomy. The Government of Hong Kong has announced the postponement of elections for at least a year; enacted national security legislation that provides for up to life in prison for the crimes of secession, subversion, terrorism, and collusion with foreign powers. Authorities are removing books critical of the CCP from bookstore and library shelves, banning democratic political slogans, and requiring schools to enforce censorship of teachers and students.

The current threat of **China invading Taiwan** could provide even greater hostilities between the East and the West as the United States and other allies would be committed through agreements to provide military support to block access to trade routes. If



China, divided into 22 administrative provinces

China started a war with India, whose population is now greater than its own, it could escalate easily to include all major powers. With the growing affinity of China to Russia, any escalation could lead to a major military and economic conflict between the East and the West.

Russia

At midnight on December 31, 1991, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) officially ended with fireworks over the Kremlin. Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* (openness) failed as a last-ditch alternative to save the government following revolution and rejection of Marxist-Leninist totalitarianism.

During the 70-year USSR reign of communism an estimated 20 million citizens were killed for political reasons. After its fall a mass stockpile of nuclear weapons — 45,000 to 60,000 throughout the empire — were supposedly collected, deactivated, and dismantled. (See Allison, Graham. “What Happened to the Soviet Superpower’s Nuclear Arsenal? Clues for the Nuclear Security Summit,” HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP12-038, August 2012).

Today, Russian premier Vladimir Putin's determination to reassert Russian hegemony in the former Soviet sphere (Putin was a KGB intelligence officer from 1975 to 1991) is largely based on his view that the demise of the USSR was "a major geopolitical disaster." Currently, he is determined to "rebuff what he sees as the threat of an encroachment eastward of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization," analysts said. He is also eager to leave a legacy that repositions Russia as a superpower to be both respected and feared.

In a television interview, without citing evidence, Putin alleged that Western powers had installed Volodymyr Zelensky, who is Jewish, as president of Ukraine to cover up the glorification of Nazism. Putin tried to associate modern Ukraine's democratically elected government with the mass murder of Ukrainian Jews in World War Two by Nazi German occupiers

of Soviet Ukraine and their local collaborators.

In 2021 over 100,000 Russian military forces had amassed on Ukraine's border. Russia's follow-up invasion in February 2022 resulted in Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett advising Israelis in Ukraine to come home and all Ukrainian Jews in Ukraine to come to Israel. Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid announced, "Israel has deep, long lasting, and good relations with Russia and with Ukraine. There are tens of thousands of Israelis in both countries, and there are hundreds of thousands of Jews in both countries. Maintaining their security and safety is at the top of our considerations."

Under Putin, a former KGB operative, Russia has increased its presence in the Middle East, particularly in Syria. According to the *Middle East Eye*, when Israel expressed support for Ukrainian independence, Russia condemned Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights. Russian-supplied missile systems and other defense technology have thwarted Israeli jets seeking Iranian military targets in Syria. If airspace were to be restricted — crucial to Israel's effort to prevent Iranian aggression — Iran could freely supply terrorist groups such as Hezbollah with advanced weaponry, impacting Israel's northern border and threatening to move Israel's war on Hamas to a wider field of battle.

War in Israel

The war between Israel and Hamas, which began on October 7-8, brought a new world risk and special attention to students of the Bible. The focus of global conflict may be shifting as American and European resources refocus on protecting their interests in the Middle East, and Russia and China develop a silent partnership. The New York Times headlined a November 3 article, "In a Worldwide War of Words, Russia, China, and Iran Back Hamas." It went on to say, "The deluge of online propaganda and disinformation is larger than anything seen before, according to government officials and independent researchers — a reflection of the world's geopolitical division." "It's just like everyone is involved," said Moustafa Ayad, executive director for Africa, the Middle East and Asia at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue. The institute, a nonprofit research organization in London, last week detailed influence campaigns by Iran, Russia, and China.

Israel declared war with Hamas after ten months of the most significant domestic political and social crisis in decades in that country. Four weeks after Hamas killed at least 1,300 Israelis and wounded more than 3,300 in a merciless assault. In Gaza, the Hamas-controlled health ministry reports that more than 9,488 Palestinians have been killed. As of this writing, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad are holding hostage more than 242 soldiers and civilians, including foreign nationals.

Iran has renewed its focus on the other countries of the Middle East, providing drones, rockets, missiles,

military training, and support to militias in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Palestinian areas. Tehran has also stepped up proxy attacks through terrorist groups on Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In February 2022, an Iranian military exercise called "Great Prophet 17" showcased the potentially devastating response to any aggression by Western or Israeli forces.

As Bible Students we view Israel as the timepiece for God's plan. The reestablishment of Jews in Palestine in the late 19th century, culminating in the birth of the nation in 1948, is testimony that the promises of Jehovah are true. "I will bring back the captivity [Hebrew: restore exiles or former state of prosperity] of my people Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be plucked up out of their land which I have given them, saith Jehovah thy God" (Amos 9:14-15). From less than 600,000 in 1948 until today, immigration to Israel has grown to where there are now more Jews in Israel than in any other country.

Although Israel today is being regathered in unbelief, a religious atmosphere is prominent in much of the land. A Gallup survey in 2015 determined that 65 percent of Israelis say they are either "not religious" or "convinced atheists," while 30 percent say they are "religious." As the sentiment regarding the Israel-Hamas war shifts towards the Palestinian cause in Western nations, antisemitism is once again growing due to Western nations' support of Israel. Interestingly, the Western world contains the last great concentration of Jewish people. According to the Jewish Agency, with 7.2 million Jews, Israel accounts for 46 percent of the world's Jewish population, the same percentage as last year. Diaspora communities' number 8.5 million. United States is home to the second-largest Jewish population, with around 6.3 million. It is followed by France (440,000), Canada (398,000), the UK (312,000), Argentina (171,000), Russia (132,000), Germany (125,000), Australia (117,200) and Brazil (90,000).



Israel in white, Gaza and West Bank part of the land of promise

Israel as a nation will remain blind until Jesus has completed his bride, the church (Romans 11:25). The land is being restored and built up; the desert is beginning to blossom as the rose; advances and discoveries in scientific and technical knowledge are beginning to spill over into the wider world to the greater benefit of man generally. Of old time Isaiah said, “They shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities; the desolations of many generations” (Isaiah 61:4). Soon the nation will be saved by Jehovah from Gog (Ezekiel 38) and then purified and converted, learning to trust God implicitly for every kind of defense and protection. Jehovah’s hand is accomplishing it, and no amount of anti-Semitism can stop it.

Wars to Cease

Throughout world history, nations, alliances, and empires have battled one another. Mankind has practiced warfare as a way of life. Historians Will and Ariel Durant concluded: “In the last 3,421 years of recorded history only 268 have seen no war” (*The Lessons of History*, page 81). “Go, behold the acts of the LORD, Who made desolations on earth, caused wars to cease to the end of the earth. The bow He has broken and splintered the spear, and chariots burned in fire” (Psalm 46:9, 10, Alter translation)

At some point, Jehovah will intervene in the affairs of man to bring violence, killing, and war to an end. “It shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of Jehovah’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains [at the head of the mountains], and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many peoples shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, 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 [instruction], and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem. And he will judge between [among] the nations, and will decide concerning many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isaiah 2:3, 4).

As long as he is motivated by selfishness, man will not voluntarily give up the spoils of war. Jehovah’s ruling over the nations and the powerful, His defense of the weak and poor, and the supplying of all mankind’s legitimate needs, will be supplemented by the teaching of true love for one another in Christ’s kingdom. This will change man’s heart and his desire to rule over one another. Cooperation will be the order and will be rewarded.

“Come, behold the works of Jehovah, What desolations he hath made in the earth [or, who has made desolations in the earth]. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; He breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; He burneth the chariots



Peace will replace war, when the Sun of Righteousness shines.

in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth” (Psalm 46:8-10).

While God will cause wars to cease by his superior power, man will actively “beat his swords into plowshares” (Isaiah 2:4). During the reign of Christ, love will replace selfishness as the motivating power that has often resulted in human conflicts. Under the administration of that kingdom of righteousness, all mankind will find satisfaction and joy. All those who died in wars, as well as all others who experienced death, will be raised to a world where war will no longer be permitted nor necessary (John 5:28, 29). Jesus, accompanied by his faithful followers of this Gospel Age, will give all an opportunity to enjoy everlasting life in peace and happiness, and in a world without war.

The experiences of the past 6,000 years, including the dying process (Genesis 2:16, 17), have tried man almost to the limit. Today, there is much worldwide distress (Luke 21:25). But the lessons learned now will be of inestimable value. They will greatly increase appreciation of the blessing of life which will be given to the people during the thousand years of Christ’s reign. Let us pray earnestly for that time.

God’s Promise to Israel

The reestablishment of Israel in the land promised to Abraham is one of the most important fulfillments of prophecy in these times. It confirms the words of the Biblical prophets. In Genesis 28:12-14, Jacob’s vision of a ladder extending between heaven and earth contained the everlasting and irrevocable promise: “I am Jehovah, the God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; 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 ground be blessed.”

God has already regathered Israel to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jeremiah told of an everlasting covenant that God would make with the returned people (Jeremiah 32:40, 41). Amos verified that the descendants of Abraham would never again be removed from the land, testifying to the miraculous deliverances seen there since the first settlement at Petah Tikvah in 1878 (Amos 9:14, 15).

During this time, the entire world would experience a similar time of travail: "The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. When they are saying, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall in no wise escape" (1 Thessalonians 5:2, 3). During this time, the regathered nation of Israel would survive while other nations fall. The events we see unfolding today show that Israel cannot always depend on allies for protection. Alliances with its neighbors will eventually demonstrate this as well.

Israel will stand in need of Divine help when the climactic point in man's history, the invasion of "Gog and Magog," takes place. This battle is recorded in Ezekiel 38 as an attack upon Jerusalem. Nations in former alliances will not be able to help or will look for benefits from such an invasion (Ezekiel 38:12-14). When the situation appears hopeless, Jehovah Himself will intervene. The defeat of Gog and Magog in Israel will decisively display the power of Jehovah: "Thou wilt make them as a fiery furnace ... Jehovah will swallow them up in his wrath, And the fire shall devour them" (Psalms 21:9).

As our theme text describes, in ancient days when Israel became unfaithful, enemies were sent to chastise them. The people would cry out and God would send a prophet to both turn them back to Jehovah and deliver them. When all seems hopeless, miraculous events will take place. The Ancient Worthies, Abraham, Moses, and perhaps David, their greatest king, will rise to positions of leadership (Psalms 45:16, Isaiah 1:26). They will urge dependence on Jehovah for the victory. God will be magnified and sanctified as Israel's enemies are defeated (Ezekiel 38:16). Israel will then recognize their true Messiah and Jehovah will pour out His spirit upon them. "I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication; and they shall look unto me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son ... as one that is in bitterness for the firstborn" (Zechariah 12:9, 10).

Before this stage of history Christ's bride must be completed in glory. The subsequent deliverance of Israel will be a testimony not only to Israel, but to earth's billions. The people of all nations which came to war against Jerusalem will go up to that city to acknowledge and worship Him who brings peace and blessings to the resurrected world of mankind (Zechariah 14:16-19). Let us who hope to be part of the blessing of these billions be faithful to our covenant and look forward to the blessings which will follow!

— Len Griebs

The Times and the Seasons

"Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness" (1 Thessalonians 5:1-5 NASB).

The common tendency of the human mind is expressed by the Apostle Peter, who prophesied of the present time that the worldly will be saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation" (2 Peter 3:4 NASB). Ignorance of God's Plan is to be expected of the world, but the true people of God have the promise of His special instruction so that they need not be in darkness respecting the Divine Program.

Our world for about six thousand years has been the battlefield between the forces of light and darkness, truth and error, righteousness and sin; the Prince of Darkness, otherwise styled the "Prince of this world" (John 12:40 NASB) has led and is still controlling them.

The Prince of Light is represented in a feeble way by ambassadors who are specially cautioned by Him that they must not use carnal weapons nor carnal methods but must in meekness correct those who oppose them.

They must be subject to "the powers that be" Mark 13:25 (NASB) to the extent that their consciences will permit, and so far as is possible live peaceably with all men.

This experience of subjection to the powers of evil has been a hard lesson, difficult to learn; a trial of faith as well as of endurance, the value of which has been difficult sometimes to appreciate. But these must walk by faith and not by sight if they would please the

See TIMES, continued on page 10 ...

“If We Suffer With Him”

The Bible Teachings (Part Seventeen) – Covenants, Mediator, Ransom, Sin Offering, Atonement

“The spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together” (Romans 8:16,17).

CHARACTER LIKENESS OF JESUS

But under which Covenant does God purpose to receive the faith-justified ones as sacrificers? The answer is that the Divine proposal to the Redeemer that He sacrifice and as a reward of His sacrifice be highly exalted to the Divine nature and glory — this blessing (which belongs to Jesus only and was applied only to His sacrifice) has by the gracious plan of God been extended to include all those of this Gospel Age who have the character likeness of the Redeemer. They are invited to share in His sacrifice and are promised that if faithful they shall share in His glory.

Justice re More than Jesus’ Life

But what sacrifice is this? Could Justice call for more than a life for a life — the death of Jesus as the ransom price for the death penalty of Father Adam? Surely Not. Justice has no voice in the present proceeding of Grace. Justice, however, cannot interfere, if it is agreeable to the Great Judge and the Redeemer to accept a “little flock” of justified believers as members under the Redeemer as Head. This very matter pleased the Father and pleased the Son, and is, therefore, a part of the Divine program. These members are “elect according to God’s foreknowledge through sanctification of the spirit and the belief of the Truth” (1 Peter 1:2). Their selection is not a change in the Divine program, for they were “chosen in Him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4). Their selection was unexpected of the angels and of men and hence was a “mystery” and still is a “mystery” to mankind. “The world knoweth us not, even as it knew Him not” (1 John 3:1). But the selection of this class was always the Divine purpose. “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus foreknew us also by Jesus.”



Blessed are your eyes, for they see.

Same Program for Master and Members

Whatever, therefore, was the Divine program for the Master, the Forerunner, the Chief-priest, is the Divine program for His members — they must “walk in His steps”; they must “Suffer with Him”; they must “fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ.” If any decline so to do, he loses his place as a member of the Body. We know, nevertheless, that the full number of the “elect” will ultimately be found and every one of them will be a sacrificer, for no others are members of His Body. It is the spirit of the Head coming upon these that produces the sacrifice of the flesh (the justified flesh) “holy, acceptable to God” (Romans 12:1).

Object of Jesus’ Sacrifice

There is only one object in the sacrifice which God has provided for, the sacrifice which Jesus accomplished, and is accomplishing in all those who will become His members — that is a sacrifice for sin. It is presented to God, holy and acceptable. In this respect it differs from other sacrifices which men make; as, for instance, a father or mother may sacrifice comfort or even sacrifice life, on behalf of their offspring, but such sacrifices, however appropriate, are not the sacrifice of Christ are not of the “better sacrifices” typified in the sacrifices of the bulls and the goats.

Blessed Are Your Eyes

St. Paul calls our attention to the fact that only those sacrifices which were burned outside the camp were a Sin Offering. Next, he shows how our lord was the sin offering. Then he points out how, if faithful members of His Body, we also must suffer outside the camp — as members of the sin offering — represented in “the lord’s goat.” This sacrifice is not yet completed. It is in process. Hence the Apostle’s expression, “Let us go to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach” just as the slain goat was carried outside the camp and there consumed as the bullock had been (Hebrew 13:11-13). These matters, dear readers, are amongst the “deep things of God which no man knoweth except by the spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10). The world knows nothing about them. “To you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, but to outsiders all these things are spoken in parables” (Matthew 13:11). Outsiders are in what the Scriptures term “outer darkness”

— the darkness which belongs to this present time of ignorance and superstition (Matthew 25:30). The few have been permitted to enter into the banqueting halls and to see the glorious beauties of the riches of Divine grace.

Blessed are your eyes that see and your ears that hear. As for those who never saw they properly have our sympathy, nor should we expect so much of them as of ourselves who have been blessed with this knowledge of this important sacrifice and of its glorious reward. Furthermore, as we are now in the sifting and testing time, it must not surprise us if some who once saw eye to eye with us in these matters become blind to them and drift into the “outer darkness” as respects these matters and others — we know not how far. Truths so interweave that one lost or perverted injures presently the beauty of the entire fabric.

Sifting and Testing

Our expectation must be that the differences will increase, and that the loss of spiritual sight will ultimately extend to other features of the Divine Plan. We have nothing but sympathy to express for such. Indeed, to us their case is most “pitiable. It is practically a hopeless case, too, whereas some of those who have never seen and never tasted we may hope will yet see and taste of this grace. But to those who see and then become blind our Lord says, “If the light that is in thee become darkness, how great is the darkness” (Matthew 6:23). It would be better not to have known the way of Truth than to have departed from the holy command. It is not for us to judge one another, but to leave all in the Lord’s hands, assured that He makes no mistakes. We may have thought their hearts all right, when the Lord may have seen them to be all wrong. But the results will show. And what we could not read and should not have attempted to read of unfaithfulness to the Truth, will be manifest to themselves in the Lord’s, time and way. Let us not forget that He that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified (His members) are all one. He is in us all. In our consecration we lose our humanity and all of its rights, exchanging these for our spiritual membership in the Body of Christ (Z1909, 154).

“FOR THIS HE DID ONCE”

“Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s; for this he did once, when he offered up himself” (Hebrews 7:27).

Book of Hebrews

In studying the Book of Hebrews, it is well to keep in memory that the Apostle’s thought was not to give a detailed explanation of the types of the law, but merely to prove to the Jews that they should look beyond the high priests and the under-priests of the Aaronic order for a greater Higher Priest of our

¹“I am very sorry I would have liked to heart—back to you so that he could take your place in chains for me while I am in chains for the government.” But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced. Perhaps the reason he was separated

²“Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.

³“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

⁴“that we do not drift away. For we are spoken of as angels who do every violation and every evil of every kind. How shall we ignore such a great salvation, which was first announced to us by the Lord, was confirmed to us by the word of an angel, and was sealed by the Holy Spirit distributed according to our will.

Jesus Made Like His Brothers
It is not to angels that he speaks, but to men. “But there is a place where one has testified:

⁵“What is man that you are? You made him a little lower than the angels. You crowned him with glory and honor and put everything under him. In putting everything under him, that is not subject to decay, he subjected it to himself. But we see Jesus, who is little lower than the angels, with glory and honor because he died, but he lives, and by his death he has brought us to life.”

The Book of Hebrews

profession (order) and a superior under-priesthood, “a royal priesthood.” In the text above quoted, St. Paul is drawing attention to the fact that a repetition daily and yearly of the sacrifices of the law on a higher plane is not to be expected, but rather that the One Priest (Christ, Head and Body) in the one antitypical Atonement Day accomplishes the entire work which will usher in full forgiveness and reconciliation to all the people. This in type was done in the one Atonement Day and the antitype of that Atonement lay is not yet ended. It will close with the end of this Gospel Age. It will close when the last member of the Body of Christ shall have suffered with the Lord, “Filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ” (Colossians 1:24).

The Anointed One

The first offering of the Day of Atonement was the bullock which typified the man Jesus. It was because of this offering and by the act of consecration that our Lord became the Anointed One — “the High Priest of our profession.” As the spirit-begotten High Priest our Lord for three and a half years offered up Himself, His manhood, in sacrifice. He finished that offering, typified by the bullock, at His death. Then, as shown in the type, He took the blood of the bullock and proceeded into the Most Holy, “there to appear in the presence of God for us” — the “household of faith.”

Goat Follows Bullock

In the type the typical high priest, after offering the first sacrifice and after applying its blood on behalf of the body (the under-priests) and his house (the tribe of Levi), laid his hands on the Lord’s goat and slew it and did with it as with the bullock, except that its blood when taken into the Most Holy was differently applied — on behalf of the other eleven tribes, who represented all nations, people, kindreds and tongues of humanity.

Two Parts of One Sacrifice

These two offerings and their distinctly separate sprinklings of blood were both parts of the one Atonement Day service — “this He did once.” Two deaths are clearly shown and two blood sprinklings; and on behalf of two different classes; but they were,

parts of the one sin atonement. Just so our Lord, during His earthly ministry, was dying daily, yet it was one sacrifice; so also when we fill up a share of His sufferings, dying daily, it is part of His sufferings and sacrifice, which He is still accomplishing in us once for all — this He does once and will never repeat. All sacrificing of this sort will end with this age — He will accept no further members of the Body of Christ, no additional members to “the royal priesthood.”

Fellowship of Mystery

As we have repeatedly shown, the first Atonement Day sacrifice was our Lord’s sacrifice of His own flesh, the man Jesus, and the second sacrifice was that of His adopted members — those justified by His blood and consecrated to His service even unto death. These accepted by the Lord are sacrificed by Him as parts or members of Himself; and their blood (death) is counted in as a part of the blood of Christ — “dead with Him.” This is the “Mystery” hidden from previous ages and generations. The “fellowship of this Mystery” was granted to the Jews and Gentiles of the “little flock” of the called and chosen and faithful.

Lord’s Hand (Power) on Head of Antitypical Goat at Pentecost

Our Lord as the High Priest laid His hand upon the Lord’s goat at Pentecost. His power (hand) there came upon His followers accepting their consecration and bringing to them the trying experiences as His members which faithfully endured will, according to the Divine plan, grant them a share with Him in His divine nature and Kingdom. It is not the suffering of the Church that counts, but the sufferings of Christ. It is because we are counted in as members of Christ, “members in particular of the Body of Christ,” that we are permitted to be His members on the Spirit plane and to share the glories and honours of our (Head). “If we suffer with Him, we will reign with Him.” “If we be dead with Him we shall live with Him.”

Sufferings of Christ Continue in His Members

Thus, the sufferings of Christ, while in one sense of the word ended at Calvary, in another sense of the word continue in His members; this is a “Mystery” to many. The sufferings of Christ are still in process and His faithful ones are still filling them up. St. Peter tells us that the prophets of old spake of the sufferings of Christ and of the glories that should follow. His sufferings of Christ Jesus were followed by His personal glorification, demonstration of which was given at Pentecost; but the glory mentioned in this text has not yet been accomplished. It awaits



Jesus began his service at Jordan.

the completion of the sufferings of Christ — the sufferings of the members: “For if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26). “When He shall appear in glory, we shall appear with Him.” We shall be glorified together if we suffer with Him as His members.

When Millennial Kingdom Will be Ushered In

With the Jews there was a Day of Atonement every year, with its sacrifices repeated year by year continually. But with Christ there is but one antitypical Atonement

Day and when its “better sacrifices” shall have been accomplished — when the great antitypical High Priest shall have finished the work of offering up Himself, including His members, thereafter there will be no more sufferings of Christ for anybody to fill up. The glory of the Millennial Kingdom will then be ushered in. The sins of the whole world will be blotted out so far as God is concerned and the High Priest of our profession will be a Priest upon His throne (Head and members) after the order of Melchisedec (Z1909, 153).

“PRESENT YOUR BODIES LIVING SACRIFICES”

Result of Failure to See the “Mystery”

Whoever fails to see that the Church as “Members” of the Christ suffer with Him sacrificially (after being “justified by faith in His blood”), will be logically bound by and by to interpret the sacrifices and sufferings in some other way. This our opponents already do. They say that we offer merely “the sacrifice of thanksgiving” (Psalms 116:17), “the sacrifice of praise to God” (Hebrews 13:15).

Sacrificing of thanksgiving — Wrong Application

True, we answer, the word sacrifice is used in that broad sense, even though it is a pleasure rather than a sacrifice to praise God, as the word sacrifice is now generally used. This sacrifice under the Law was represented in the “peace-offerings” and “thank-offerings.” But St. Paul also urges us, “Present your bodies living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God” (Romans 12:1). He as well as the Master intimates that there is a more difficult sacrifice than the offering of praise before us when we forsake all and take up our cross to follow Him in the narrow way. St. Paul urges, “let us go to Him outside the camp, bearing the reproach with Him.” He identifies these words with the Sin-offering by pointing out that the blood of both the bull and the goat of sin-offering was taken by the Priest beyond the second veil into the Most Holy. He

identifies it again by His reference to the burning of both “outside the camp.” Compare Hebrews 13:11-13 and Leviticus 16:27. If once you saw the beauty of this application of the “better sacrifices” and see it not, confess the blindness that has come upon you and seek the precious eye salve of Divine supply.

Sufferings of the Church and the Great Company

So far from the “sufferings of Christ,” which we experience, being sufferings for sins, the reverse is true. Even the “great company” suffers not for its own sins, but suffers the “destruction” of their justified flesh (as the “scape-goat”), because they fail to sacrifice it.

What “The Acceptable Time” Means

This is the one peculiar and distinctive feature of the Gospel Call of this Gospel Age, differentiating it from the preceding and the succeeding ages. Some of the past, from Enoch to John, had the sacrificing spirit and did lay down their lives in the service of the lord and righteousness, but God did not accept them as sacrificers. Our Lord’s great sacrifice was necessary first for our actual justification before God. Since then, is the opportunity for believers who have the same sacrificing spirit — “Present your bodies living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God.” “Now is the acceptable time” — “The acceptable year of the Lord” — the time in which God will accept your sacrifices, because He accepts you as “members” of the Body of the Christ, the Great High Priest, the Great Mediator of the New Covenant (Isaiah 61:2, Luke 4:19, 2 Corinthians 6:2, 1 Peter 2:5, Ephesians 1:6, Romans 12:1).

Limitation of “The Acceptable Time”

In the future age “the acceptable time” will be past — the Antitypical Atonement Day will be at an end. Satan will be bound, and none will any more suffer for righteousness’ sake.

Ancient Worthies In the Next Age

Now note the import of this. The Ancient Worthies will get restitution blessings as a part of the world.



Abraham, one of the Ancient Worthies

“Instead of thy fathers, they shall be thy children” (Psalms 45:16). They will be the first-born children of “the everlasting Father.” Under the new order of things, they will be made the earthly agents or representatives of the Kingdom. And the world will get restitution blessings also as, under the New Covenant they obey the great Mediator. But why is this? Is there partiality with God that we of this Gospel Age alone of all mankind have the offer of a spiritual or heavenly inheritance?

Does Call of Church Instead of Ancient Worthies Show Partiality?

No, we answer! The gift in every case is the same, namely, restitution of earthly rights secured by our Lord’s sacrifice of His earthly rights. The whole difference is that we live in the “acceptable year (or time) of the lord” and willingly take advantage of the privilege afforded. That privilege is restricted to those who have ears of faith and hear the “glad tidings” now and fleeing from sin become servants of righteousness and present their “bodies living sacrifices holy and acceptable to God.” We receive of our Redeemer earthly restitution rights by faith, and sacrifice these with whatever we have of earthly advantage. All such are accepted as “members” of the Christ, under the Redeemer their Head, the Prophet, Priest, Mediator and King of the world.

Beguiling Others of the Prize

Whoever sees this, sees “the Mystery hid from past ages and dispensations, but now made manifest unto the saints — Christ in you [which is, that you are His ‘members,’ and that this fact is the only ground for] the hope of glory.” Whoever helps to blind those who have once seen this great “Secret of the lord” (Psalms 25:14) is beguiling them of the prize (2 Corinthians 11:3), whether he knows what he is doing or not. Whoever loses sight of the fact will cease to strive for it. And the fact that the Lord led into the light of “Present Truth” and showed us the “Secret,” the “Mystery,” implies that He would not let us be plucked out of His hand and away from His leading unless the heart was at fault.

Re Those Who Lose Sight of the “Mystery”

Nor is it necessary for us to specially condemn the hearts of those who are now losing their sight of what they once claimed to see as clearly as we. Some of them may be merely blinded by dust and may be recovered; and find their chief trial along, the line of humility in the matter of acknowledging their error, let us neither do nor say anything to make their way back more difficult. let us apply the principle rather to ourselves. let us find comfort, peace and joy as well as caution in the assurance that if our hearts are loyal, God by myriads of agencies is able and willing to keep our poor heads! (Z 1909, 376).

TIMES, Continued from page 5 ...

captain of their salvation. For centuries the prayer has gone up to God from their hearts, “How long, O Lord!” Revelation 6:10 (NASB) Reason assures them that it cannot be the Divine purpose to forever permit the victory of sin and death under the Prince of Darkness.

God represents Himself as a great Husbandman. Each Age is a “season” and bears its own crop. Each Age has its own time for the ploughing of the field, the sowing of the good seed and the harvest work. As Bible students we have already noted the work accomplished in the Age which ended with the Flood, the different work accomplished during the Patriarchal Age and the still different work accomplished during the Jewish Age, which lasted from the death of Jacob and particularly from the giving of the Law, down to the death of Jesus.

Our Lord’s ministry of three and a half years was a harvest time to the Jewish people in the close of their Age of favour or day of visitation. He said to His disciples, “I send you forth to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour; other men laboured and ye are entered into their labours” (John 4:38). The ploughing and sowing connected with the Jewish Dispensation was in the far past. The Egyptian bondage served to do a ploughing work, as did Israel’s escape from that bondage and the forty years of wandering in the wilderness before they reached Canaan. The giving of the Law and the establishment of them as a people, the lessons of their sacrifices, and the exhortation of their Prophets, all constituted a seed-sowing, harrowing and cultivating experience.

In the end of their Age, the Jewish Age, Jesus gathered the ripe fruitage of that experience — those sanctified thereby and developed in character and obedience to God. The crop gathered by our Lord and the Apostles in the Jewish harvest numbered thousands. These were gathered out of Judaism and from under the Law Covenant into Christianity — gathered under a Grace Covenant applying only to the “Church which is the Body of Christ.” This Grace Covenant, under which they become associated with Messiah, reads, “Gather together My saints (holy ones) unto Me,” saith the Lord, “those who have made a Covenant with Me by sacrifice” (Psalms 50:5). All

coming thus into relationship with Jehovah as members of the Body of Christ came by way of the cross — through a recognition of their own imperfection, and of Jesus and His sacrifice as the satisfaction for their sins, a covering for their blemishes, by which alone their sacrifices were rendered “holy and acceptable to God” (Romans 12:1).

The reaping work of the Jewish Age merged into the sowing work of the Gospel Age as the invitation to become joint-sacrificers with Jesus was extended to those having hearing ears amongst nations aside from the Jews. For twenty centuries this sowing work, with painful experiences and various cultivations, has been in progress.

Now in turn we have arrived at the harvest of this Gospel Age — the reaping time, the time of gathering into the garner — beyond the veil — by the power of the First Resurrection. “None of the wicked shall understand but the wise shall understand” (Daniel 12:10), is the Lord’s declaration. Our text declares that “Ye, brethren, are not in darkness” respecting this time. This implies either that the brethren are very few, or that a considerable number of them have not yet become sufficiently awake to a discernment of the times and seasons in which we are living. Many of the brethren and many of the world and many of the “wicked” do realise that we are living in strange times and under peculiar conditions. These try to persuade themselves, however, that what we see today is merely a recurrence of what has repeated itself time and again during the past centuries. Thus these lull themselves, saying, “Peace and safety!”

This attitude is what the Scriptures foretold, “For when they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them” (1 Thessalonians 5:3 KJV). It is only brethren, who are privileged to have the clearer light respecting present and future conditions. We know that we are in the Harvest time of this Age — the reckoning time — the testing time — the time when the “wheat” is to be gathered into the heavenly “garner” — the time when the field is to be cleared of all “tares” in a fiery trouble — the time when the ploughshare of trouble will be run through the world of mankind to prepare the whole world for the New Dispensation.

So accurately timed is every feature of the Divine Plan, that it all fits perfectly. The Harvest of the present time is the gathering of the fruitage of this Gospel Age — the gathering of the “Church of the First-born, whose names are written in heaven” — those who have made a Covenant with Jehovah by sacrifice.

The Head, the Messiah, developed and glorified twenty centuries ago, is Jesus. The members of the Body of this Messiah have been gathered from every nation, first from the Jews and then from the Gentiles. God’s call and selection of saintly sacrificers in this Gospel Age ignores all sectarian, denominations, and national lines. “The Lord knoweth them that are His”



We are now in the Harvest of the Gospel Age.



The saints are being sealed in their foreheads.

(2 Timothy 2:19). The winds of violence, “the powers of the air (Ephesians 2:2), which will shortly be loosed, and which will produce the terrific “storm,” are being held back until the sealing of God’s servants on their foreheads shall have been accomplished.

This sealing on the forehead implies an intellectual appreciation of heavenly things and is intimately associated with the harvest work — the sealed are the ripe wheat being gathered for the heavenly garner. As soon as the sealing work shall have been accomplished the winds of strife and trouble will be let loose according to the Master’s declaration, and the result will be a “time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation” (Matthew 24:21) — no, nor ever shall be the like again. The awful lessons which will then be learned by humanity will be sufficient for all time. The strife, the hatred, the malignity, the anarchy of that day of trouble are depicted in various places in the Word of God.

The troubled times impending are indeed declared to be a time of Divine wrath, and we must not lose sight of that feature of it. Divine Justice has indignation against inequity and selfishness in general, for selfishness is but another name for sin. All sin is selfish, and all selfishness is sin. The captains of industry, of education, of wealth, have today greater opportunities and therefore greater responsibilities than the kings of the earth, for their dealings with their fellowmen.

Similarly, there are leaders of the people, presidents, and secretaries of unions, etc., who are also captains, and who also have great responsibility.

All perceive that the world of humanity is rapidly nearing a crisis. The almost miraculous opening of the eyes of understanding which God has recently granted has brought to the world mechanical inventions and chemical processes which are making the world rich with amazing rapidity.

Although these blessings are in considerable measure reaching the masses of mankind and uplifting all to a higher plane of comfort, nevertheless general

education has opened the eyes of human understanding correspondingly. The ordinary people are looking with amazement at the luxury of the rich as the barbarians of old looked upon the much lesser splendors of Rome. They are covetous, they are hungry for what they term their “share” of the bounties being dispensed by Providence with so lavish a hand. Even if the vast increase of wealth that has been brought about by the increase in knowledge were to be evenly distributed, we doubt if it would satisfy these new-born minds.

How glad we are that the Bible shows that the culmination of the conflict will bring everlasting peace — a just, loving, equitable and satisfactory adjustment of earth’s affairs, under Messiah’s glorious reign of a thousand years.

Someone may ask, would these same difficulties not beset any new government which Messiah or others might institute? Will not the element of selfishness forever persist in the human heart, and will not this imply that to all eternity, there will be a strife of selfish interests? We answer, No. The Divine Plan solves the problem perfectly. Jesus has demonstrated His unselfishness as respects earthly things. His laying down of His life not only proved His loyalty to righteousness, and to the Father’s will, but proved also His unselfishness — His love — “greater love hath no man than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

This Friend of humanity is to be the great King of the world, Christ in the New Dispensation, and His associates in the Kingdom, the Bride class, are to be such only as have His spirit and disposition of obedience to the Father’s will, self-sacrifice and love for fellowman — unselfish love. Under present conditions, these may not always be known, nor their true character and unselfishness be discerned, because they have the treasure in “earthen” vessels which do not always fully represent their true benevolence of heart. “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves” (2 Corinthians 4:7 NASB).

The Divine provision is that such of these as shall demonstrate their unselfishness of heart and loyalty to the Lord shall be given new bodies in the resurrection — “sown in weakness, they will be raised in power; sown in dishonour, raised in glory,” sown a human body, with Adamic weaknesses and fleshly imperfections, they will be “raised spirit bodies” — perfect, complete, lacking nothing (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

These, in association with their Redeemer, will constitute the Kingdom class which is to rule the world for a thousand years under the Headship of Jesus. Surely, we can trust these, we can have confidence in them. The fact that God has selected them, and that He is pleased to give over to them the rulership of the world for a thousand years, testifies beyond peradventure their worthiness and capability.

That Government will not be a republic, but a monarchy, a theocracy, a Divine Kingdom. Christ and His Bride will be the King and Queen of the New Dispensation, supplanting Satan and the fallen angels, who for centuries have been in control. The Kingdom of God will be as invisible as the kingdom of darkness has been. It will operate through human agencies, as does the other. But even its human agents have been provided. The Scriptures inform us that the worthy ones of the Jewish Dispensation and before, will be the princes in all the earth who will represent Messiah's Kingdom amongst men. Not only so, but they will be perfect men, made so by participation in the "resurrection of life." How grand the prospect! (John 5:29).

The time of trouble will be awful, as typed in the terrible trouble which came upon the Jewish nation following the harvest work of their Age. Then will come the levelling process, which in the Divine order will prove to be a blessing to everybody. In other words, the socialists and anarchists are not so far from

a correct conception of what must ultimately prevail, but they are far astray respecting the methods by which it shall be obtained. Their attempt to grasp the rudder of the world's affairs shows an awful lack of appreciation of the mighty influences with which they seek to contend. Their efforts will merely precipitate upon themselves and upon others the terrible trouble which the Scriptures foretell.

God's people are distinctly warned that they must keep hands off, must not interfere with the powers that be. Their reliance must be upon the Lord and not in the use of carnal weapons. James, writing on this subject, declares the coming trouble, and tells that it will be especially severe upon the rich. "Go to now, ye rich men; weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you" (James 5:1). No doubt the troubles will be equally upon the poor; but to them they will seem less severe since they have been accustomed to less. To God's people is the message, "Be patient, brethren, the coming of the Lord draweth nigh," "Wait ye upon Me, saith the Lord" (Zephaniah 3:8).

Jerome

Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus, in English Jerome, is known as the greatest Christian scholar of all time. Jerome single-handedly translated the bible into Latin, producing what we now know as the Latin Vulgate translation.

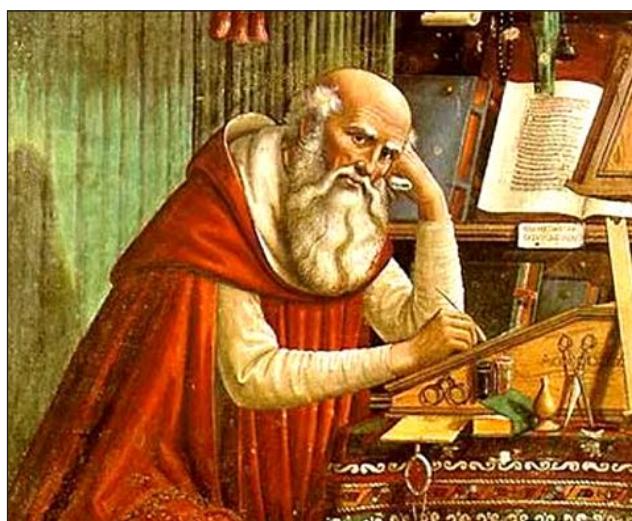
Jerome was born in the Roman town of Striden, Dalmatia (which is believed to be in modern Croatia or Slovenia) around the year 342-347 CE. He was born to wealthy Christian parents who commenced his education at home before sending him to Rome around the age of 12 where he continued studies under Aelius Donatus, who was training him in skills required to pursue a career as a lawyer. His education also included philosophy, Greek and Latin.

Despite having been raised by Christian parents, Jerome himself did not become a Christian himself until he was nearing the end of his time in Rome. Subsequently, he decided to be Baptised around the year 366, after grappling with the guilt he felt from living a life of loose morals during his time in Rome.

From Rome, Jerome spent around 20 years travelling around with friends, visiting places around Gaul, Italy, Thrace, and Turkey. During his travels he met with many different Christian groups, and their discussions lead him to begin his studies in theology. His longest sojourn was at Antioch, where his travels were stopped by him and two of his travelling companions becoming seriously ill; the two companions did not survive.

During his illness he had a dream that God was condemning him for his secular studies, and so he

vowed never again to own or read pagan literature. This dream prompted Jerome to move to the harsh Syrian desert Chalcis and live amongst a group of Christian Hermits, where he lived a life of self-discipline and abstinence. This was a very challenging time for Jerome. The conditions meant that his skin was burnt by the sun, he had to sleep on the ground, and he became quite thin. To ease his loneliness, he was forced to learn Syraic in order to communicate with the natives he was living with. As a way of distracting himself from the misery of the situation he turned his attention to learning Hebrew from a Jewish convert that was also living amongst the Hermits. He also furthered his studies in Greek.



Jerome (Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus)

Jerome remained in the desert for 2 years, after which time political pressures were beginning to rise within the church. It began to affect the desert region. He was suspected of being a heretic. This prompted him to return to Antioch, where he was reluctantly ordained as a priest. He accepted the priesthood on the conditions that he would be able to continue in his monastic style of life and studies, and that he would not be obligated to perform any priestly duties. From here he soon departed for Constantinople, where he continued his studies of the scriptures and Greek under Gregory Nazianzen. It was here that he began translating sermons into Latin. He remained there for around 2-3 years.

In 382 Jerome was requested by Pope Damasus I to return to Rome to sit on the Council of Rome and to work as his secretary. It was during this time that Pope Damasus commissioned Jerome to do a revised translation of the Vetus Latina (Old Latin Bible). He also spent his time running classes for Widows and virgins that were interested in the monastic way of life and answering their questions regarding scripture.

After the death of Pope Damasus in December 384, he decided to leave Rome. After some travel, he settled in a monastery in Bethlehem in 386, where he focused his studies on the Hebrew language. Around 390 he had begun to translate the Old Testament into Latin. Unlike previous translators, Jerome decided to do this using only the original Hebrew text, without referring at all to the Septuagint. He made this decision based on the fact that the Septuagint

had been rejected by mainstream Jews who felt it held many mistranslations, contained the apocryphal books which were not in the original Hebrew version, as well as being heavily influenced by Greek culture. He completed this work by 405. As well as his translation works, Jerome was known for his temper, as he vehemently opposed those that he felt were teaching false doctrine. He also devoted the final 15 years of his life to writing Biblical commentaries and other works. He died in Bethlehem on September 30, 420.

Jerome ensured that the Latin Vulgate not only made the Bible more accessible for the common people of the time, but he also strived to ensure its accuracy making it the main Bible used for English translations of the Bible even in modern times. For over a thousand years it was the most commonly used translation of the Bible. There are many famous quotes recorded of Jerome, but the one that best summarises the way he lived his life was, “Good, better, best. Never let it rest. ‘Til your good is better and your better best.”

The Vulgate not only made the Bible more accessible for the common people of the time, but it is one of the main Bibles used for English translations of the Bible. For over a thousand years it was the most commonly used translation of the Bible.¹

(1) There had been several Old Latin translations. Some say there were almost as many different Latin translations as there were manuscripts. (There are four or five editions of the Vulgate, too. Stuttgart is best, but Wordsworth-White is not far behind it.)

The River Euphrates

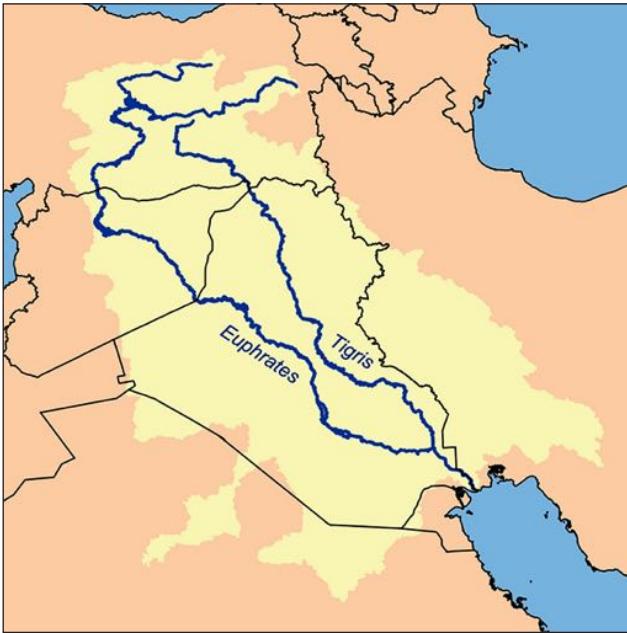
“On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: “To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates” (Genesis 15:18, NASB).

Euphrates (you FRAY tease) is the longest river of Western Asia and is one of the two major rivers in Mesopotamia, the other being the Tigris River.

The river is approximately 2,780 kilometres long. It is formed by the union of two branches, the Kara (the western Euphrates), which rises in the Armenian highlands of today's eastern Turkey, north of Erzurum, and the Murat (the eastern Euphrates), which issues from an area southwest of Mount Ararat. The upper reaches of the Euphrates flow through steep canyons and gorges, southeast across Syria, and through Iraq (ancient Babylon). The Khabur and the Balikh River join the Euphrates in eastern Syria. Both rivers have their origins in Turkey. Downstream, through its whole length, the Euphrates receives no further water flow. The river merges with the Tigris River before emptying into the Persian Gulf.

Because the river could be navigated by small vessels for 1950 kilometres it was a major trade route and there are the ruins of many ancient cities mentioned in the bible located along its course, including Babylon, Kish, Carchemish and Ur.

In the Bible the Euphrates is referred to as “the River Euphrates,” “the great river, the River Euphrates,” or only as “the River.” The Euphrates was one of four rivers whose source was the springs of water originating in the Garden of Eden. “Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is Pishon; it flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. The gold of that land is good; the bdellium and the onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it flows around the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Tigris; it flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is



the Euphrates." (Genesis 2:10-14 NASB) It is the only river out of the four mentioned that there is no details of its course or what it may yield.

The Euphrates is next mentioned in the promise to Abram. It was to form the northern boundary of the land promised to Abram and his descendants. "On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates'" (Genesis 15:18 NASB). When Israel was preparing to enter the land of promise, God re-iterated his promise to their fathers. "If you are careful to keep all this commandment which I am commanding you to do, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and hold fast to Him, then the LORD will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess nations greater and mightier than you. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours; your border will be from the wilderness to Lebanon, and from the river ... Euphrates, as far as the western sea" (Deuteronomy 11:22-24 NASB). The land was given to Abraham unconditionally because of his faith. However, for Israel to gain control of the land, they had to keep the commandments.

King David

The Israelites did not gain control of all the land until King David defeated Hadadezer, king of Zobah and took possession of the land through to the Euphrates. "So the LORD gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. And the LORD gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hand. Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass" (Joshua 21:43-45 NASB). King Solomon inherited and maintained this land as recorded "Judah

and Israel were as numerous as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance; they were eating and drinking and rejoicing. Now Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt; they brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life." (1 Kings 4:20-21 NASB)

The Euphrates played another important part in the lives of Israelites. It signified the divide between those who served the True God and those who "served other gods." "Joshua said to all the people, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River, and led him through all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac" (Joshua 24:2-3 NASB).

The Israelites are reminded "I gave you a land on which you had not laboured, and cities which you had not built, and you have lived in them; you are eating of vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant. Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." The people answered and said, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods" (Joshua 24:13-16 NASB).

As followers of Christ there is the lesson that we too must stay on the right side of the Euphrates River. The side that Abram left pictures the ruler of this world Satan, while the other side represents the acceptance of Christ as our master and King. Like the Israelites, must say "We will serve the Lord."

The river Euphrates is mentioned twice in Revelation: "Saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates'" (Revelation 9:14 NKJV).

"Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared" (Revelation 16:12 NKJV).

The history of the Euphrates River gives some of the clues to understand these verses. The Euphrates stood at the boundary of those who believed in God and those that believed in other gods. Babylon was destroyed in Daniel's time by the drying up of the Euphrates allowing Darius to take the city. The drying up of the Euphrates could signify the loss of protection of Babylon and thus bring about its destruction at the end of the age.

For more information: herald-magazine.com/2018/01/01/trouble-in-the-harvest

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While it is our intention that these columns be used for teachings strictly in accord with the Lord's Word, we cannot accept responsibility for every expression used, either in the correspondence or in the discourses reported.

Subscription payment can be made payable to:

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PO Box 402, Rosanna 3084

(Or email for direct deposit details)

Convention

Australian General Convention

Online Convention, January 26-28, 2024, EDT
<https://meetings.dialpad/room/australianconvention>
Friday 7-9 pm, Sat. 9 am-4 pm, Sun. 9 am-1 pm
Information: australianbiblestudents@gmail.com

The Bible Teachings

On the Covenants, Mediator, Ransom,
Sin Offering, and Atonement.

This book was published by the Berean Bible Institute in the 1970's, setting out the Bible teachings on topics eluding many in the Christian world. Pages 6-9 in this edition of the Peoples Paper is the next part of this 274-page book. Brethren may read more of the content through the Berean Bible Institute's official webpage.

www.australianbiblestudents.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/The-Bible-Teachings-on-the-Covenants2.pdf

The Creator Won't Ask...

- What kind of car you drove but will ask how many people you drove who didn't have transportation.
- The square footage of your house but will ask how many people you welcomed into your home.
- How many fancy clothes you had in your closet but will ask how many of those clothes helped the needy.
- About your social status but will ask what kind of class you displayed.
- How many material possessions you had but will ask if they dictated your life.
- What your highest salary was but will ask if you compromised your character to obtain that salary.
- How much overtime you worked but will ask if you worked overtime for your family and loved ones.
- How many promotions you received but will ask how you promoted others.
- What your job title was but will ask if you performed your job to the best of your ability.
- What you did to help yourself but will ask what you did to help others.
- How many friends you had but will ask how many people to whom you were a true friend.
- What you did to protect your rights but will ask what you did to protect the rights of others.
- In what neighbourhood you lived but will ask how you treated your neighbours.
- About the colour of your skin but will ask about the content of your character.
- How many times your deeds matched your words but will ask how many times they didn't.

When there is nothing left but the Creator, that is when you find out the Creator is all you need.

Memorial

"Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24-25).

The Lord's Memorial this year falls on Sunday, 21 April, 2024, after sundown. An online service will be provided for brethren starting at 1900 hours AEST. Details of the service can be obtained by emailing — australianbiblestudents@gmail.com

The Opening of a New Year

STANDING at the portal of the opening year
Words of comfort meet us, hushing every fear;
Spoken through the silence by our Father's voice,
Tender, strong and faithful, making us rejoice.
Onward, then, and fear not, children of the day;
For His Word shall never, never pass away.

"I, the Lord, am with thee, be thou not afraid;
I will help and strengthen, be thou now dismayed.
Yea, I will uphold thee with Mine own right hand;
Thou art called and chosen in My sight to stand."
Onward, then, and fear not, children of the day;
For His Word shall never, never pass away.

For the year before us, oh, what rich supplies!
For the poor and needy, living streams shall rise;
For the sad and mournful, shall His grace abound;
For the faint and feeble, perfect strength be found.
Onward, then, and fear not, children of the day;
For His Word shall never, never pass away.

He will never fail us, He will not forsake;
His eternal covenant He will never break;
Resting on His promise, what have we to fear?
God is all-sufficient for the coming year.
Onward, then, and fear not, children of the day;
For His Word shall never, never pass away.

Author: Frances R Havergal, 1836-1879
Music: F. J. Haydn, 1732-1809

