

Seasons of Refreshing

*“Repent ye,
therefore, and
turn,—unto the
blotting out of your
sins; To the end
that in that case,
there may come
seasons of
refreshing from the
face of the Lord.”*

*—Acts 3:19,
Rotherham
Emphasized Bible*

THE APOSTLE PETER

preached a very enlightening sermon on the Day of Pentecost, and a short time later he gave another message, recorded in Acts chapter three. The background for this latter message was the miracle performed by Peter and John, in which they healed a man who had been unable to walk from birth.

(Acts 3:1-8) The people gathered there were both excited and curious about this miracle, so Peter took the opportunity to explain certain matters to them.

Peter reminded his audience, evidently mostly Jews, that they had been directly responsible for the death of Jesus, but that God had raised him from the dead. He then told them that it was through faith in Jesus that the man who had been lame was healed. (vss. 12-18) Peter then spoke the words of our opening text, hoping that perhaps

some might have had a change of heart, desiring to repent and change their course of conduct.

In the *King James* translation of our text, the last phrase reads, “from the presence of the Lord.” The Greek word translated “presence” means “face” or “countenance.” For this reason we have used the *Rotherham* translation, since it conveys more accurately the meaning of the Greek. The thought is that the turning of one’s face toward another denotes favor, or friendship, while to turn the face away is a symbol of disfavor. Moses, for example, enjoyed God’s favor, and the Scriptures say that “the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.”—Exod. 33:11

The people addressed by Peter when speaking of “seasons of refreshing” were, for the time being, very much outside of the smiling countenance of God. He assured them, however, that if they repented and turned their hearts back to God, they could have their sins blotted out and be refreshed by the return of his favor to them. Peter did not stop with the good news of “refreshing” from God, for those who then repented and turned to him.

He continued, saying, “And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things.” (Acts 3:20,21) The foretold “times of restitution,” Peter explained, had been spoken of by all God’s holy prophets. He then added, “all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed

shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.”—Acts 3:24-26

How meaningful was Peter’s explanation of God’s promises! He wanted his hearers to know that through repentance they could enjoy the smile of God’s countenance, even though they had crucified the “Prince of life.” (vs. 15) Yet, as verse 26 states, they were merely the “first” to receive this blessing. When God would again “send Jesus Christ,” there would be “times of restitution of all things.” Then, Peter says, God would “raise up” a prophet like unto Moses. Hearing and obeying him would be mandatory upon all who would live, for any who should fail to do so would be “destroyed from among the people.”—vss. 22,23

REFRESHING FROM GOD

The word “refreshing” in our text is translated from a Greek word signifying “a recovery of breath,” or reviving of life. Indeed, repentant and consecrated believers of the present Gospel Age are justified to life upon the basis of faith in the shed blood of Christ. They obtain this justified life for the purpose of laying it down in God’s service, and are begotten as New Creatures. (Gal. 2:20; Rom. 12:1; Heb. 9:14,15; II Cor. 5:17) During the next age, when mankind will be raised from the tomb, all those who “hear that prophet” and are faithful to the laws of the kingdom will be restored to actual perfection of human life.

Applying the meaningful symbols used by Peter, we see that God turned his face away from man

because of his transgression of the divine law. The psalmist wrote, "In his favour is life." (Ps. 30:5) If the refreshment of life results from God's favor, the reverse is true. Death is the result of his disfavor. Thus it was, when God no longer caused his face to shine upon his human creatures due to their disobedience, death was the result.

With the lack of God's favor came sickness, suffering, and sorrow. The blessings experienced by those upon whom God causes his face to shine have been unknown except by comparatively few throughout the ages. Only a relatively small number have, by faith, sought the Lord and been taken into his confidence and shown his plans and purposes. For most, however, the present nighttime of sin and death has been characterized by the nightmares of fear, lest the uneasy lot of today be engulfed in worse calamities tomorrow. How well Job expressed it when he said, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble."—Job 14:1

The bitterness which followed in the wake of transgression, when God turned his back upon his human creatures, is not to last forever. In the same verse quoted earlier from the Psalms, we also read, "weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." It was the withdrawal of divine favor that caused darkness to settle over the race, taking away human happiness and peace. The coming of Jesus, however, as the gift of God's love and the "light of life," implies the return of favor to those who accept him and obey his laws.—John 3:16; 8:12

This is what Peter meant when he said that "seasons of refreshing" would come from "the face of the Lord." That refreshing has come through

faith to those who have repented throughout the present age and given themselves in full consecration to God. Likewise, in the next age, God will cause his face to shine upon, and refresh, all mankind who then will hear “that prophet,” and obey from the heart the laws of Christ’s kingdom then operating throughout the earth. Indeed, “seasons of refreshing” imply life and light. The wilderness of sin and death has been as arid as the night has been dark. David called it “the valley of the shadow of death.”—Ps. 23:4

WORLD PRESENTLY KNOWS NOT GOD

The Bible speaks of a famine in the land for “hearing the words of the LORD.” (Amos 8:11) How true this has been. Man has suffered greatly because he has not heard and understood God and his true character. As a result, he has groped through the darkness in an endeavor to find some comfort, hope, or assurance that out of all the present uncertainties and afflictions, there will come a happy tomorrow. In doing so, however, man has laid hold upon the poisoned waters of error and superstition, the drinking of which, instead of refreshing the soul, has filled his mind with deceptions and imaginations that have plagued him all the more. Satan, the great deceiver, has ever been ready to offer one or another of his false concoctions, mixed for the express purpose of deluding man’s mind concerning the character and purposes of God.

In the confusion caused by the various false teachings of Satan, those affected are not able to properly reason, and have become blind and deaf to the light and sounds of the Bible which ring out the assurance

that “God is love.” (I John 4:8,16) The Bible states plainly that “the wages of sin is death.” (Rom. 6:23) Yet, many whose minds have been deceived by Satan’s lies insist that eternal torture, not death, is the penalty for sin. As we look at both Christian and non-Christian beliefs alike, we find, with few exceptions, that attempts to approach God and understand his purposes are thwarted by various misleading notions and theories. These, in turn, instill fear into the hearts of the people and obscure their vision of the one true God, the Creator of heaven and earth.

GOD’S COUNTENANCE LIFTED UP

Once the needed lessons are learned by man from his experience in this “famine” condition of separation from divine favor, God will lift up his countenance upon mankind, and all who repent and obey will be refreshed in heart and soul. After more than six thousand years in the wilderness with the Creator’s back turned toward him, what an abundance of refreshment and favor will result from the return of God’s face toward man.

Peter told his audience, some of whom had been party to the crucifixion of Jesus, that they could, through repentance and by faith, be refreshed as a result of the redemption provided in Christ Jesus. It is upon the basis of this same redemptive work, and the opportunity for life which it provides, that mankind will be similarly refreshed. Without this “ransom for all, to be testified in due time,” the human race would remain in darkness, and the famine resulting from the loss of God’s favor would continue spreading its blight of death. (I Tim. 2:5,6) We thank God for the assurance that he will soon

lift up his countenance upon the people and they will be refreshed.

Man's refreshment will be along many lines. They will be refreshed with a true knowledge of God and of his plan for their eternal life and happiness. They will be refreshed with the assurance of peace, security, and prosperity of heart, mind, and body. They will be refreshed with health, mentally and physically, so vibrant that sickness of all kinds, even the disease of old age, will become but vague memories of the past, for "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain."—Rev. 21:4

No single word picture is adequate to portray fully the contrast between the experiences of man during the time God's favor has been withheld from him, and the time, now close at hand, when the Creator will lift up his countenance upon the fallen race to refresh the people. It is not an understatement to say that it will be as different as the brightness of noonday and the darkness of midnight. Even with such a comparison as this, our finite minds fail to grasp the full significance of what "seasons of refreshing from the face of the Lord" will mean to this poor, groaning creation.

Although we may not fully appreciate the richness of God's loving provisions for man's recovery and blessing, it is a truth harmoniously taught throughout the Word of God. As such, it is not mysterious, vague, or beyond ability to be comprehended. It has, as its roots, the oft-repeated promise of the Bible that it is God's plan to bless "all families of the earth" with life, peace, security, health, and happiness.—Gen. 12:3; 22:18; Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:8

RESTITUTION ALSO PROMISED

A time of refreshing through justification to life by faith came upon those who repented as a result of Peter's preaching. Part of this refreshment, which has come to all the called and chosen of the present age, has been the prospect of having a share, with Christ in his kingdom, in the work of recovering the human race from sin and death. Peter called this work restitution—"times of restitution of all things." (Acts 3:21) According to *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*, the Greek word here translated "restitution" means "restoration." While on earth, Jesus said that he came "to seek and to save [restore] that which was lost." (Luke 19:10) His First Advent prepared the way for man's return to God through the provision of the ransom. During his Second Advent, Christ, along with his faithful footstep followers of the present age, will oversee the work of man's restitution and the restoration of everything he lost as a result of sin, suffering, and death.

Job was one of God's "holy prophets" of whom Peter spoke. His whole life's experience was a portrayal of God's dealings with the human race. Job was a faithful servant of God, but divine wisdom permitted affliction to come upon him, just as God has allowed evil to afflict the entire human race. However, God eventually intervened on behalf of Job, his health was restored, and blessings of life, similar to those he had lost, were restored to him. After learning the lessons of his experiences, Job exclaimed, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee."—Job 42:5

To figuratively "see" God will perhaps be the most refreshing experience enjoyed by man as a result

of his restoration, when divine favor is returned to him. There have been many among the billions who have lived and died that have heard of God “by the hearing of the ear.” His name has been professed by the lips of multitudes, but has truly been in the hearts of only a few. Only when given a correct knowledge of God in the Messianic kingdom will man be able to “see”—perceive, consider—him with eyes of understanding. Even Job will then “see” God much more clearly than was possible during the time when death was reigning in the earth.

While his affliction was still weighing heavily upon him, Job asked God to let him fall asleep in death until the time of divine disfavor was past. (Job 14:13) Job was willing to die because he had faith that the time would come when God would turn his face back toward mankind, that the dead would be restored to life, and be refreshed by the blessings of his favor. “I will wait,” Job said—wait in the sleep of death—until “thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.” (vss. 14,15) Indeed, man is God’s creation, the work of his hands. Man has fallen from his original perfection, but God’s work in creating him has not been in vain. He will hear God’s call from death, and live again!

TIME REQUIRED

The limitations of our finite minds make it difficult to visualize the work of restitution in all its aspects. Time enters into it as an important element for consideration. We are so accustomed to thinking in terms of our own short span of life that we may

be inclined to suppose what God has promised to do must be accomplished speedily, perhaps in a period similar to today's average lifetime of seventy to eighty years. The Scriptures tell us, however, that a thousand years is set aside in the plan of God for the accomplishment of this purpose.—II Pet. 3:8,9; Rev. 20:4,6

The Prophet Malachi speaks of the time when “the Sun of righteousness” will “arise with healing in his wings.” (Mal. 4:2) When the healing rays of the “Sun of righteousness” begin to manifest themselves, those who respond and are blessed will perhaps realize they no longer need to die. Then, those asleep in death will begin to be awakened. All the billions who have ever lived will be educated in the knowledge of God and his righteous ways and works, and be given ample time to conform their thoughts, words, actions—yea, their hearts—to the divine will. Not until the end of that age of healing sunlight will all the mist of darkness be scattered, and all the desert conditions of the past be made fruitful and plenteous.

It will require the entire Messianic reign of Christ and his church to bring to completion the blessing, refreshment, and restitution of mankind. Even then, the only ones to be blessed eternally by the life-giving rays of that “Sun of righteousness” will be those who respond in heart obedience. Those who close their minds and shut up their hearts to the light, refusing to conform themselves to the divine will then made known, “shall be destroyed from among the people.” (Acts 3:23) For all others there will be eternal “seasons of refreshing from the face of the Lord.” ■