

God's Plan of the Ages

The Divine Solution to Mankind's Myriad Problems

***"That now may be
made known . . . the
much diversified
wisdom of God,
according to a plan
of the ages, which
he formed in the
anointed Jesus
our Lord."***

—Ephesians

3:10,11, Emphatic

Diaglott

THE 2016 UNITED STATES

presidential election is still more than a year away. Yet, it seems as though many candidates have been "running" for that office since the last election was decided in November 2012. As of this writing, a total of twenty-two "major" candidates are running for the highest office in

the land—six Democrats and sixteen Republicans—one Republican having recently dropped out of the race. The seventeen Republicans who initially declared their candidacy for the presidential race represent the most in our country's history for a single major political party. Already, three debates have been held among various Republican candidates,

with nine more scheduled by mid-March of next year. Democratic candidates also plan at least six debates between now and the end of March.

Our purpose in mentioning the foregoing is not to enter into a discussion as to the merits of any individual candidate. Many of them, perhaps all, have a desire to make this country better and to attempt resolution of its myriad problems and challenges. Below is a partial list of the issues facing the next president, as published recently in a major Midwest newspaper:

Immigration policy reform and enforcement

Death penalty debate

Drug policy reform and legislation

Gun control reform

Abortion and related fetal research controversies

Higher education loan reform

Evaluation of civil rights progress

Federal deficit reduction and balanced budget

Tax reform

Debate concerning homosexuality and other
morality issues

Global warming and environmental concerns

Energy debate

Campaign finance reform

Social Security and Medicare solvency

Welfare reform

Crumbling infrastructure in many areas—roads,
bridges, pipelines, to name a few

Severe weather and wildfire response

Blighted cities and resulting lower property values

Need to upgrade airport security and electronics

Funding of first responders and continued need
for cohesive communication

Potential overwhelming of Federal agencies as they deal with these issues

It is worthy to note that the above list only describes domestic issues. We can add to this the multitude of foreign policy concerns which affect the United States on a daily basis. These encompass every region of the world, and touch on all aspects of life—economic, political, social, and religious. To lay out such a catalog of domestic and foreign problems before our presidential candidates might make us wonder why any of them desire to seek this office at all.

To their credit, various candidates have attempted to come up with “plans” to resolve some of the tough issues facing the country today. In doing so, however, they have for the most part chosen to put forth ideas which they believe will be the most popular and garner the most votes. To put it another way, rather than devising well thought-out plans which in the long-term might benefit the country as a whole, most amount to little more than applying short-term “patches” to the problems. Such ideas often sound good within the framework of political rhetoric, speeches, and debates; however, these plans lack foresight and the wisdom of real solutions that would ultimately benefit all.

We believe it is not an overstatement to say that pride and selfishness are at the root of most of the problems facing this country, as well as the entire world. Likewise, it is pride and selfishness which hinder genuine efforts to resolve these problems. Furthermore, this is not limited to just the leaders of nations, and to candidates running for public

office, but includes the masses of people. Mankind in general has fallen victim to Satan's chief character trait of pride. Just as this ungodly attribute of Satan caused him to fall eternally from God's favor, so it has been the cause of much sin, sorrow, and evil among humanity, and has been the chief hindrance to man's ability to solve the problems he faces.

We are not, however, prophets of doom—such is far from our belief. Rather, we are merely calling attention to man's shortcomings for the purpose of emphasizing the fact that where man and his short-sighted plans will fail, God has a plan which will succeed. This plan has been in operation since the foundation of the world and is, as our opening text states, a “plan of the ages”—past, present, and future—based on nothing less than the “wisdom of God.” It is a plan which promises a glorious future for the human race, as depicted in the Word of God, and which, when completed, will far exceed any outcome for which man has ever dared to hope.

God's plan will not fail. It is a design in which man will be permitted to employ all his marvelous capacities and have them directed along lines which are unselfish. God will do for man what man cannot do for himself. The future is very bright, much brighter by far than current world conditions would indicate. It is as bright as the promises of God. With this in view, let us look at the major features of this “plan of the ages,” as spoken of in the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation.

SIN APPEARS

In calling attention to the key elements of God's plan, we will consider numerous scriptural passages,

some of which narrate actual events, and others that present prophecies and promises of the Bible. The first of these is the temptation which took place in the Garden of Eden. The “serpent,” which the Bible uses to symbolize Satan, tempted mother Eve to disobey her Creator by partaking of the forbidden fruit. Both Eve as well as Adam partook and, as a result, they were sentenced to death and driven out of the Garden of Eden.

What preceded the temptation is important to note. When God created our first parents in his image, he commanded them to multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. Man was given dominion over the earth. However, he was told that if he partook of the forbidden fruit of the Garden he would die: “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”—Gen. 1:26-28; 2:16,17

In the command to multiply and fill the earth and have dominion over it, the divine purpose of the creation of the human race is revealed. Man was not created and placed on the earth temporarily, later to be taken to heaven or consigned to purgatory or a hell of torment. When our first parents sinned, they did not lose a home in heaven, but their privilege of enjoying a home on earth.

Satan, through the serpent, lied to mother Eve, telling her that she would not die if she partook of the forbidden fruit. (chap. 3:4) From this falsehood has developed, throughout the ages, all the various theories that there is no death. Death, such theories claim, is not really what it seems, but is a gateway into another life. The fact remains, however, that death is indeed a reality, the Scriptures stating clearly that “the soul that sinneth, it shall die,”

and “the wages of sin is death.” (Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 6:23) The reign of sin and death has been, and continues to be, a cruel one. God’s plan alone provides escape from it.

The sentence of death pronounced on our first parents, and by heredity their progeny, was sure. However, in veiled language God provided a glimmer of hope. He cursed the serpent, Satan’s agent, for what he had done. God then told Satan, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head.” (Gen. 3:14,15) “Seed” refers to offspring, and the word “bruise” as used in this verse means to crush or snap. In a literal sense, to crush or snap the head of a serpent is to kill it.

The import of God’s words here, however, was with regard to Satan. In his statement was contained the declaration that a future seed, or offspring, of the woman, Eve, was to be the means by which Satan would be eventually bruised and crushed—that is, destroyed. Furthermore, this promise of a “seed,” who would accomplish great works such as this for man’s benefit, was to become a central theme of the Bible, and the key to understanding God’s “plan of the ages.”

GOD’S PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

In our next scriptural account, which was subsequent to the Flood, we are reminded of a wonderful promise made to Abram, whose name was later changed to Abraham. God said to this faithful patriarch, “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” (Gen. 12:3) For two thousand years the human race had been dying, but here God promised

that he would bless all the families of the earth. This was another ray of hope.

Later in Abraham's life, when his son Isaac was grown, God asked him to offer up his son in sacrifice. Abraham, fully trusting God, was obedient to this request and was poised to slay his son. God saw that Abraham would have carried out the sacrifice, and did not permit Isaac to be killed, but provided instead a lamb to be offered as a substitute for him. God counted the matter just as if Isaac had been slain. He then spoke again to Abraham, saying, "Because thou . . . hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: . . . in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."—Gen. 22:15-18

In the two aforementioned promises to Abraham, a "seed" is once again pointed out. God promised that at some future time all mankind would be blessed "in" Abraham's seed, but before these blessings could come, a loving father must give up in sacrifice his beloved son. He further indicated that this offering would be shown as being that of a lamb.

God was so pleased with Abraham's obedience in this matter that he confirmed his original promise by the swearing of an oath. (vs. 16) Paul recounts this oath, as recorded in Hebrews 6:13-20, and indicates that the entire episode of Abraham's offering up Isaac in sacrifice pointed forward to something of vital importance in the plan of God. Indeed, it was the Heavenly Father himself who "gave his only begotten Son" to be the Redeemer and Savior of the world.—John 3:16

JESUS, THE PROMISED SEED

In the New Testament we are informed that the seed promised to Abraham, the seed that was to bless all the families of the earth, was in reality Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."—Gal. 3:16

Additionally, the New Testament tells us that the seed God promised to mother Eve which would "bruise," or destroy Satan, is likewise Christ Jesus. "We see Jesus," Paul said, who now is "crowned with glory and honour," but who first "should taste death for every man; . . . that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." This Jesus, Paul adds, "took on him the seed of Abraham."—Heb. 2:9,14,16

Thus, we see that in the outworking of God's plan for blessing all the families of the earth, Jesus is the appointed channel through which these promised blessings will flow. However, we are reminded that "all" the families of the earth include those who have died. Death came as a result of sin, and the condemnation of death rests upon the entire human race. Before Jesus could extend the blessings of life to the people, it was necessary for him to give his own life for the sins of the world.

John the Baptist saw Jesus, and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) Isaiah prophesied concerning Jesus that he would be "brought as a lamb to the slaughter" and that he made "his soul an offering for sin." (Isa. 53:7,10) God had counted

Abraham's seed, Isaac, as being offered fully in sacrifice, and had also provided a lamb, which was slain, to carry out the picture to its completion. Jesus fulfilled both parts of the picture. He was the Son of God, and the Lamb of God. He was the greater Isaac, the seed of Abraham, and the greater "Lamb that was slain." (Rev. 5:12) How harmonious is the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, with regard to this great truth of God's plan of the ages!

The Apostle Paul wrote that Jesus "gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." (I Tim. 2:3-6) This great work of giving "himself a ransom for all" was accomplished at Calvary, though the "due time" has not yet come for it to be "testified" to all. The Lord's viewpoint on redemption is explained by the Apostle Paul: "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."—I Cor. 15:21,22

The benefits of the ransom will be "testified" to the people after they are raised from the dead. They will then be given the understanding of what Jesus' death and resurrection have provided for them—the opportunity of restoration to perfect life on earth, and the receipt of all God's promised blessings. (Acts 17:31) All who, by obedience to God's righteous laws, abide "in Christ," will be "made alive" in the fullest sense—physically, mentally, and morally perfect human beings. Thus, we see the importance of the death of Jesus in the plan of God as a "ransom for all," and for the blessing of all the families of the earth.

ANOTHER FEATURE

Without further information concerning God's plan for the blessing of the people we would naturally conclude that this work of blessing should have commenced soon after the death and resurrection of Jesus. We know that it did not. People continue to suffer and die, even as before. The Bible explains why. There was yet another component in God's plan. God provided for a "little flock" of faithful followers of the Master to be selected from the world of mankind, who, when the time of blessing arrived, would be associated with Jesus in the work of dispensing peace, health, and life to mankind.

In Galatians 3:27-29, we are informed that true Christians, represented as those who are "baptized into Christ," are counted as one with him and are part of "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." For nearly twenty centuries, the process of selecting these for their future work has been taking place.

It was for these consecrated, faithful ones that Jesus promised to "prepare a place," and, that when he returned, he would receive them unto himself, that they might be with him. (John 14:2,3) These would then join him in the work of administering the blessings of God's kingdom. Jesus said, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."—Luke 12:32

THE KINGDOM HOPE

A long chain of promises in the Old Testament, and continuing in the New Testament, reveal that God will establish a worldwide government, or

kingdom, in which his promised blessings of life will be extended to the people. One of the promises of Jesus' birth declares of him that "of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end."—Isa. 9:6,7

The Scriptures reveal that while Jesus came at his First Advent to suffer and die for mankind, he returns at his Second Advent to set up a kingdom for the purpose of blessing the people. During this period of his Second Presence, Christ, along with his faithful "little flock," will be a mighty ruler, "KING OF KINGS." (Rev. 19:16) In this kingdom, the world will be enlightened concerning the true God and given an opportunity to obey divine law and live forever.

The manner in which world conditions today are fulfilling many prophecies of the Bible gives us the assurance that we are standing at the threshold of the long-promised Messianic kingdom. The Prophet Daniel identified our day as "the time of the end." He indicated that at this time there would be a great "time of trouble," man would "run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." — Dan. 12:1,4

The expression "time of the end" does not mean the end of time, nor does it refer to the traditional burning up of the earth. Rather, it denotes the end of the reign of sin and death. The "time of the end" signifies the time of divine intervention in the affairs of men through the dissolution of this "present evil world," in preparation for the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. War, exploitation, hunger, sickness, death, and all other evils of the present world will be brought to an end.

THE EARTH TO ABIDE FOREVER

Concerning the earth, the Bible clearly states that “the earth abideth for ever.” (Eccles. 1:4) The Lord assures us that he did not create the earth “in vain,” but “formed it to be inhabited.” (Isa. 45:18) As we have learned, God’s plan is that man should live on the earth forever. This is his home. Man will not be permitted to destroy himself or his earthly home with nuclear weapons, pollution, or any other form of annihilation.

When Jesus was asked concerning the time of his return and the end of this present world order, he reiterated the prophetic words of Daniel quoted earlier, saying that there would be “great tribulation,” or trouble. So great would that trouble be, Jesus said, that “except those days should be shortened,” no flesh would survive. (Matt. 24:3,21,22) This is the very situation which confronts the world today, as borne out in the opening paragraphs of our lesson. Jesus assures us, however, that this time of tribulation “shall be shortened.” All flesh will not perish, and this means that the earth also—man’s home—will likewise not be destroyed.

OUR DAY IN PROPHECY

Many of the important world developments of our day are foretold in the prophecies of the Bible. We have already called special attention to the great increase of knowledge and rapid travel—running “to and fro”—of our time, as foretold by Daniel. Younger members of our society may not fully appreciate the fact that most of these changes began to take place just a little more than a century ago. Man has not attained these gradually through the

ages of the past, but suddenly, and in our day. Here again, we have a remarkable fulfillment of the Bible's prophetic testimony concerning the approach of Messiah's kingdom.

Daniel's prophecy of a "time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation," and Jesus' similar prediction of "great tribulation," are accurate descriptions of our day. (Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21,22) All nations of the earth are distressed, and fear of what may come upon the earth fills the hearts of people everywhere. Jesus spoke of our day as a time when there would be "distress of nations, with perplexity," and when the hearts of the people would be "failing them for fear," as they witness "those things which are coming on the earth."—Luke 21:25,26

The Scriptures do not reveal in detail how destructive the situation will become before the authority of Christ's kingdom asserts itself and saves the human race from its own folly. However, God's Word does make plain that man's selfish, exploiting institutions are to be destroyed. The Apostle Peter tells us that the present symbolic "heavens" and "earth" of Satan's evil world order will be "dissolved," and says that it will be replaced by a new arrangement, a "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."—II Pet. 3:10-13

GOD'S CITY

In the Bible, a city is used to symbolize a government. We are familiar with this use of language. To us Washington stands for the American government, London for the British, Moscow for the Russian, and so forth. In Revelation 21:1-3, we are told of a "new heaven and a new earth," reminding us of the words

of Peter just considered. Using highly symbolic language, this passage in Revelation also speaks of a “holy city” which comes from God in heaven. (vs. 2) This is God’s new government, the “new heavens,” and its ruler will be Christ Jesus and his “little flock” of faithful associates. This righteous government will reign over the “new earth,” for the ultimate purpose that mankind “shall be his people, and God himself shall be . . . their God.”—vs. 3

Jesus said to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world.” (John 18:36) This signifies the fact that his government, his city, originates with God. It is not of human origin. It is not set up by the wisdom or power of fallen man. It is a divine government, and its laws will be God’s laws. Through obedience to these laws mankind will be blessed in fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham that through his “seed” all the families of the earth would be blessed.

THE WATER OF LIFE

Those blessings, we are assured, will include the destruction of sickness and death. Describing conditions in the earth when God’s holy city, or government, has accomplished the purpose of its reign, the Revelator continues in chapter 21, saying, “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.”—vss. 4,5

In another symbolic promise of the Messianic kingdom, it is pictured as a throne—“the throne of God and of the Lamb.” (Rev. 22:1) Flowing out of this throne is a “pure river of water of life.” On

“either side of the river” is a “tree of life.” In addition to the life-giving fruit of these trees, we are told that their leaves are “for the healing of the nations.” (vs. 2) How necessary it is that the people of all nations be healed from their diseases—physical, mental, and moral!

This great blessing is soon to reach all mankind. Our first parents were driven out of their Garden home and deprived of the fruit from its life-giving trees. However, during the Messianic kingdom now near, and because Jesus took the sinner’s place in death, all of Adam’s children will be invited to come and eat of the “tree of life” and “take the water of life freely.”—vss. 14,17

In the foregoing pages we have only touched upon some of the highlights of God’s great plan of the ages. It is our hope that this brief consideration of a portion of the Scriptures’ harmonious testimony might stir up our minds to an even fuller study and appreciation of the Word of God. In so doing, let us all the more rejoice in “the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God.”—Rom. 11:33 ■