

## The Judgments of the LORD

**A NEW BOOK** issued recently by James Carroll, called “*Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews*,” was reviewed in the “*Time Magazine*” in January 2001. The book review said: “Here’s a historical puzzle, for those with the stomach for it. How is it that the Jews survived the first Christian millennium? The church, from the moment of its embrace by the Roman Emperor Constantine in the fourth century, enjoyed immense power and employed it with ruthless efficiency to eliminate dozens of heresies and pagan creeds. Its relationship with Judaism, its spiritual predecessor and the first challenger to its claims for Christ, was especially poisonous. Why, then, were the Jews permitted to live—and be persecuted—another day?”

### BOOK REVIEW

“The answer, provided in James Carroll’s fascinating, brave, and sometimes infuriating history, “*Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews*,” (Houghton Mifflin; 616 pages) is St. Augustine. In the year 425, shortly after Christians slaughtered the Jews of Alexandria in the first recorded pogrom, the influential church father cautioned, ‘Do not slay them.’ He preferred that the Jews be preserved, close at hand, as unwilling witnesses to Old Testament prophecies regarding Jesus. Augustine’s followers elaborated on the idea, writes Carroll: Jews ‘must be allowed to survive, but never to thrive,’ so their misery would be ‘proper punishments for their refusal to recognize the truth of the Church’s claims.’ The eighteenth century Jewish philosopher, Moses Mendelsohn, noted that were it not for Augustine’s ‘lovely brainwave, we would have been exterminated long ago.’ But it was a warped, creepy kind of sufferance, a little like keeping someone chained to the radiator instead of doing him in. And it sets the stage for countless persecutions as the Christian-Jewish saga rolled on.”

James Carroll, the novelist, a former priest and staunch left-wing Catholic, had as a target of criticism the Vatican’s 1998 apology called, “*We Remember*.” It expressed regret at Christian mistreatment of Jews over the centuries, but pinned fault on some of the church’s sinful

“members,” while holding the “church as such” blameless. The Vatican’s champions say it had no choice: the ‘church as such’ is ecclesiastical shorthand for the church as bride of Christ, which partakes of divinity and must thus be without blemish. Carroll finds the apology’s language evasive and immoral. “Anti-Judaism,” he writes, “has been at the very center of Catholic theology,” and he points to the Inquisition as chartering the foulest of abuses. He portrays Hitler as heir to such church-sanctioned haters as St. John Chryostom and Torquemada. He writes, “By tapping into a deep, ever fresh reservoir of Christian hatred of Jews,” the German dictator, Hitler, made the Catholic Church an accomplice of history’s “worst crime,” referring to the Holocaust.

The book review continues and says: “As Europe was unified under the cross, the Jews, preserved yet ghettoized per Augustine’s instructions, became the continent’s captive ‘other,’ slaughtered as a warm-up for Muslims in the First Crusade and as scapegoats during the Black Death. Whereas church historians—and philosopher Hannah Arendt in the 1950’s—distinguished between Catholic anti-Judaism and the racial anti-Semitism of the twentieth century, Carroll maintains that the demarcation first collapsed far earlier, when the Spanish Inquisition targeted Jewish converts to Christianity strictly on the basis of their ‘impure’ blood.”

## GOD’S JUDGMENTS PROPHESIED

Although this book gives a fascinating insight into Catholic Church history, and the policies set up to subjugate the Jews, we know that it was God’s intent to punish the nation of Israel, but *not* to let it perish through persecution. There are numerous prophecies written about God’s intent many centuries before St. Augustine’s time. One such prophecy is found in Jeremiah 5:11-24, which forecasts the punishments on both the northern ten-tribe kingdom, called the house of Israel (and house of Jacob), and the two-tribe kingdom of Judah. The prophecy gives the reason for this first major punishment, but also says that the Lord would not make a full end of them. The prophecy reads:

“The house of Israel and the house of Judah have dealt very treacherously against me, saith the Lord. They have belied the Lord, and said, It is not he; neither shall evil come upon us; neither shall we see sword nor famine: And the prophets shall become wind, and the word is not in them: thus shall it be done unto them. Wherefore thus saith

the Lord God of hosts, Because ye speak this word, behold, I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them.

“Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the Lord: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say. Their quiver is as an open sepulchre, they are all mighty men. And they shall eat up thine harvest, and thy bread, which thy sons and thy daughters should eat: they shall eat up thy flocks and thine herds: they shall eat up thy vines and thy fig trees: they shall impoverish thy fenced cities, wherein thou trustedst, with the sword. Nevertheless in those days, saith the Lord, I will not make a full end with you.

“And it shall come to pass, when ye shall say, Wherefore doeth the Lord our God all these things unto us? then shalt thou answer them, Like as ye have forsaken me, and served strange gods in your land, so shall ye serve strangers in a land that is not yours.

“Declare this in the house of Jacob, and publish it in Judah, saying, Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not: Fear ye not me? saith the Lord: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?

“But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone. Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest.”

## FIRST PUNISHMENT ENDED

Following the Assyrian captivity of the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel and the Babylonian captivity of Judah, the Lord permitted them to return to their homeland. He also blessed them, although they had to live under the domain of the Gentile powers of the Medes and Persians, Greece and Rome. They were given exclusive favor concerning Messiah as promised to Daniel. (Dan. 9:24-27) The seventy weeks of favor, which translates into 490 years, (a day for a year as per Ezekiel 4:6) spanned the time when Artaxerxes gave Nehemiah permission to rebuild the walls of

Jerusalem (Neh. 2:5-8) until the days of our Lord Jesus' ministry and death. The long awaited Messiah came to Israel, but was not received by them. (John 1:11 and Matt. 23:34-39) As a consequence Jesus rejected them. Their punishment this time spanned a much longer period, through most of the Gospel Age, and Israel was dispersed throughout all nations of the world.

This, too, was predicted by God in the many prophecies of the Old Testament, many centuries before it became a reality. One such prophecy was written at the time of the Persian King, Darius, by Zechariah, chapter 7:1-14, telling of Israel's failure to worship him during their captivity of seventy years in Babylon and following their return to their land; that the second punishment would come upon them. "I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate." (Zech. 7:14) As the prophecy in chapter eight of the book of Zechariah then tells of their restoration, so also does Jeremiah 32:37 tell of this restoration. "I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely."

## THE BEGINNING OF ISRAEL'S RETURN

There was to be a time limit to this second major punishment of dispersion over all the world which is called to our attention by Isaiah. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins."—Isa. 40:1,2

The word 'double' in this text does not mean 'twice as much,' as one might conclude. Rather, it is translated from a Hebrew word meaning, 'fold in two,' and refers to a like span, or period of time. First came 1845 years from Jacob's death to Jesus' death, wherein there were chiefly favors. (Punishments were minor.) Then, after Jesus died, came a like period (a double) of disfavor in dispersion and persecution. (Blessings were minor.) This like span of 1845 years ended in 1878. That year marked the beginning of a change, which involved events which would lead to a restoration of the land. This small beginning consisted of

revising the treaty of San Stefano at the Berlin Congress of nations. It included protection of minority groups in Turkey and Russia. Hence, for the first time in centuries, wealthy Jews were permitted to buy land in Palestine whereas they had not been permitted to do so heretofore. Since their dispersion they had not been permitted to own land anywhere in the western world except the United States.

## ILLUSTRATION OF LAND PURCHASE

This beginning was so insignificant that, if we were to analyze the existing situation at that time, we might have concluded that this investment in a few pieces of land was foolish, and that attempts at colonization were doomed to failure. After all, Palestine was still in the dominion of Turkey. The situation was as full of despair as the one confronting Jeremiah during the time of King Zedekiah's reign—Judah's last king. Jerusalem and the land of Palestine were being besieged by King Nebuchadnezzar's armies from Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar had set up Zedekiah as a puppet king, but he rebelled against Babylon. Jeremiah had plainly prophesied to all Israel, and especially to Zedekiah, that Jerusalem would fall into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. He repeatedly told the people of Israel that this had to happen. God had willed it and they could not resist it. To resist was folly. Jeremiah was branded as disloyal and a traitor, and imprisoned. With Jerusalem besieged, and Jeremiah in prison, a most peculiar transaction was recorded in Jeremiah 32:6-15. "Jeremiah said, The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Behold, Hanameel the son of Shallum thine uncle shall come unto thee, saying, Buy thee my field that is in Anathoth: for the right of redemption is thine to buy it. So Hanameel mine uncle's son came to me in the court of the prison according to the word of the Lord, and said unto me, Buy my field, I pray thee, that is in Anathoth, which is in the country of Benjamin: for the right of inheritance is thine, and the redemption is thine; buy it for thyself. Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord.

"And I bought the field of Hanameel my uncle's son, that was in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver. And I subscribed the evidence, and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances. So I took the evidence of the purchase, both that which was sealed according to the law and custom, and that which was open: And I gave the evidence of the purchase unto

Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, in the sight of Hanameel my uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses that subscribed the book of the purchase, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the prison. And I charged Baruch before them, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Take these evidences, this evidence of the purchase, both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open; and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days. For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land."

Jeremiah, who was perplexed by these strange instructions from God, prayed to God for an explanation, as if to question why anyone would want to buy land now when Babylonian conquest was imminent. (Jer. 32:16-25) God explained by giving a lengthy review of Israel's sins and why he was punishing them. Then God told Jeremiah of the regathering of Israel to Palestine. "I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely." (Jer. 32:37) The climax to the prophecy is in verses 43 and 44. "Fields shall be bought in this land, whereof ye say, It is desolate without man or beast; it is given into the hands of the Chaldeans. Men shall buy fields for money, and subscribe evidences, and seal them, and take witnesses in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, and in the cities of the mountains, and in the cities of the valley, and in the cities of the south: for I will cause their captivity to return, saith the Lord."

Jeremiah's main interest was the possession of the land after the Babylonian captivity, but God had in mind the possession of the land following the much longer dispersion after Jesus died. This is evident from the words of Jeremiah 32:38-42, "They shall be my people, and I will be their God: And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul. For thus saith the Lord; Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them

all the good that I have promised them.” Certainly this portion of the prophecy was not fulfilled upon the return of Israel from Babylonian captivity. It still awaits fulfillment.

## GOD’S PROMISE TO ISRAEL

It is evident from these prophecies that it was not (as James Carroll’s book suggests) St. Augustine that preserved the Jews. Rather, it was God’s plan to have them survive, and anyone or any agency that might appear to be responsible for their survival was merely used of God to accomplish his will. Furthermore, St. Augustine said that Jews ‘must be allowed to survive, but never to thrive.’ The latter part of his statement is not God’s will. We see instead, in the prophecies concerning Israel, that they are to experience a final attempt to exterminate them, which is called ‘Jacob’s Trouble.’ This experience, which is given in detail in Ezekiel 38 and 39, not only tells of their survival, but also of their blessing.

The specific prophecy which mentions this trouble also says that God will make a ‘full end’ of all the nations involved, but that he will not make a full end of Israel. This promise is found in the eleventh verse of Jeremiah 30. The entire prophecy of Jeremiah 30:3-24, reads as follows:

“The days come, saith the Lord, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the Lord: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it. And these are the words that the Lord spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus saith the Lord; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace.

“Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob’s trouble; but he shall be saved out of it. For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him:

“But they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them.

“Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the Lord; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed

from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid.

“For I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished. For thus saith the Lord, Thy bruise is incurable, and thy wound is grievous. There is none to plead thy cause, that thou mayest be bound up: thou hast no healing medicines.

“All thy lovers have forgotten thee; they seek thee not; for I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the multitude of thine iniquity; because thy sins were increased. Why criest thou for thine affliction? thy sorrow is incurable for the multitude of thine iniquity: because thy sins were increased, I have done these things unto thee.”— Jer. 30:3-15

## THE END OF OPPRESSION

“Therefore all they that devour thee shall be devoured; and all thine adversaries, every one of them, shall go into captivity; and they that spoil thee shall be a spoil, and all that prey upon thee will I give for a prey. For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after.

“Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will bring again the captivity of Jacob’s tents, and have mercy on his dwellingplaces; and the city shall be builded upon her own heap, and the palace shall remain after the manner thereof. And out of them shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of them that make merry: and I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small.

“Their children also shall be as aforetime, and their congregation shall be established before me, and I will punish all that oppress them. And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them; and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me: for who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord. And ye shall be my people and I will be your God.

“Behold, the whirlwind of the Lord goeth forth with fury, a continuing whirlwind: it shall fall with pain upon the head of the wicked. The fierce

anger of the Lord shall not return, until he have done it, and until he have performed the intents of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it.”—Jer. 30:16-24

“So all Israel shall be saved,” writes the Apostle Paul in confirmation of this wonderful prophecy in Romans 11:26. Continuing, he says, “As it is written, [citations from Psalm 14:7 and Isaiah 59:20] There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, [Christ Jesus and his Church], and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” Thus, Israel will not only survive this final attempt to exterminate her, but shall turn to God to worship him as his goodness and faithfulness is revealed to them through the Christ. As Jeremiah’s prophecy plainly says, “Ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.”—Jer. 30:22

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## Hearing the Word

**Key Verse:**  
*“Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.”*  
—*Matthew 13:13*

**Selected Scripture:**  
*Matthew 13:1-13, 34, 35*

**MATTHEW CHAPTER 13** marks a turning point in the ministry of Jesus. At the beginning of his ministry we find him teaching primarily in the synagogue, as well as teaching all the multitudes who came to hear him. Now, however, we see him separating himself from the multitudes, getting into a ship with only his disciples while the crowds stood on the shore. (Matt. 13:2) Another marked difference in Jesus’ ministry is that he now, for the first time, begins to speak to his disciples in parables.

What is a parable? A parable is a narrative drawn generally from nature or human circumstance, the object of which is to set forth a spiritual lesson. Matthew 13 records seven different parables spoken by Jesus, two of which he explains. In total, there are thirty parables spoken by Jesus in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke (there are none in John). In verse 10 of our lesson, the disciples asked Jesus, “Why speakest thou unto them in parables?” Jesus knew that by speaking in this form he would ‘weed out’ those of the multitudes who only followed him for the miracles, or out of curiosity. He knew that for his hearers to understand his parables they would have to spend time in thought and meditation in order to determine the spiritual meaning. This eliminated most of the multitudes, because they did not truly desire to see and understand the spiritual truths that Jesus had come to teach.

In verse 11 of our lesson Jesus indicates that it was only to be his closest footstep followers, his true disciples, that would be given the privilege of understanding these deeper teachings. He says, “It is given unto you [my disciples] to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [the multitudes] it is not given.” Jesus further states in the Key Verse that most did not desire to see or understand, and later (verse

15) points out that their hearts were not in the right condition to receive God's Word.

The lesson for us is the same as it was for Jesus' disciples. We must first have a heart that is in a proper condition to hear and understand his Word. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." (Prov. 4:23) Second, we must have a desire to know his message of Truth. Third, we must study and meditate on his words in order to understand their meaning. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (II Tim. 2:15) Finally, and most importantly, we have to take those things which we learn and put them into practice in our lives. We must become sanctified, set apart, by them. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."—John 17:17

What a privilege it is for us to hear, study, and understand the secret things of God! We echo these words from our lesson, "All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet [a citation from Psalm 78:2], saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world."—Matt. 13:34,35

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## Being a Neighbor

***Key Verse: “Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.”***  
—***Luke 10:36, 37***

***Selected Scripture:  
Luke 10:25-37***

**OUR LESSON BEGINS WITH** one of the lawyers of Israel asking Jesus a question. He said, “Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25) Rather than giving him an answer, Jesus asked the lawyer what was written in the Law of Israel. The lawyer correctly responded, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.” (vs. 27) However, he asked a further question of Jesus, “Who is my neighbour?”—vs. 29

In answer to the lawyer’s second question, Jesus proceeded to tell what we commonly refer to as the parable of the ‘good Samaritan.’ Paraphrasing the parable, a man traveled from Jerusalem to Jericho. As he traveled, he came upon thieves. They took his clothes, wounded him, and left him for dead. As the man lay there, both a priest and a Levite came by, but they both avoided the man and passed by on the other side of the road. Later a Samaritan came, and when he saw the man he had compassion on him. He bound up his wounds, took him to an inn, and made sure he was cared for until fully recovered. After giving the parable, Jesus asked the lawyer the question contained in our Key Verse. When the lawyer responded correctly that it was the Samaritan that had truly been a neighbor unto the man, Jesus told him that he should go and conduct himself in a similar way.

In this parable, Jesus shows what is meant by the statement to love ‘thy neighbour as thyself.’ (vs. 27) It means to do things for others (even if it involves sacrifice), as you would want done for you under similar circumstances. In the parable, it was certain that, without help, the man traveling would have died from his wounds. The Samaritan realized that

if he had been lying wounded, he would have desired the help of a loving neighbor, and so he did not hesitate for a moment to give that help to a fellow man. On the other hand, the priest and the Levite did not show this quality of love. In fact, after seeing the man, they seemed to intentionally avoid him and passed by on the opposite side of the road.

The failure of the priest and the Levite to offer help to the man shows that many who claim to be God's special representatives are far from his favor because they do not have this quality of love. This was true with the leaders of Israel in times past, and has also been true with many of the leaders of Christendom during the present age.

On the other hand, the Samaritan, generally held in very low esteem by the Israelites, had a character pleasing to God. This shows that God is truly pleased with a reflection of his own character of love, compassion, and tender mercy, and not with an outward 'priestly' appearance. Such must be our actions and conduct in everyday life regardless of our position or background. As the Apostle Paul wrote, "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour."—Rom. 13:10

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## Praying Effectively

***Key Verse: “He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”***

***—Luke 18:1***

***Selected Scripture:  
Luke 18:1-14***

**THE SELECTED SCRIPTURE** for our lesson contains two parables, both of which show important lessons to spiritual Israel concerning prayer, specifically regarding importunity and humility, both of which must be learned in order for us to pray effectively.

In the first parable (Luke 18:2-5), we are told about a widow and her experience with a local judge of that day.

The judge was said to be an individual who had no particular regard for either God or his fellow man. One day the widow came to him, pleading that he would vindicate and grant her legal protection from an adversary who intended to do her harm. At first he would not, but later, realizing that the widow would continue to trouble him about the matter, he granted her the protection she desired, “lest by her continual coming she weary me.”—Luke 18:5

Jesus comments on the parable, saying there is a lesson to be learned from this unjust judge. He says, “Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.” (Luke 18:7-8) Certainly if the unjust judge was willing to grant the desire of the widow because of her importunity, how much more will God watch over, guide, and protect his chosen people. The phrase ‘though he bear long with them’ seems to imply that God, at times, will not immediately relieve us of the experience concerning which we have approached him in prayer. He instead waits to see if we truly are desirous of doing his will and importune him as did the widow. God is not displeased, nor is he wearied, by our continual coming to him in prayer concerning our difficult experiences. This shows him that we are sincere in our desire to have his overruling in our lives. Thus, having proven our sincerity and desire for his will to be done, he will most assuredly relieve us of the experience in one way or another.

The second parable of our lesson (Luke 18:10-13) is about two men, a Pharisee and a publican, who went to the Temple to pray. The Pharisee in his prayer thanked God that he was not sinful like so many others around him, especially as this publican who was also in the Temple. He also gave God an accounting of many of the righteous acts which he had done, boastfully saying that he fasted twice a week and gave tithes of all his possessions. The publican, on the other hand, realizing his own unworthiness, would not even lift his eyes toward heaven, but smote his breast, “saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.”—vs. 13

Jesus also comments on this parable (vs. 14), saying that the publican left the Temple in a more justified condition than did the Pharisee. He then states, “Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” (vs. 14) God’s desire for humility and abhorrence of pride in his creation is an eternal lesson to us all. As Apostle Peter says, “God resisteth [opposes] the proud, and giveth grace [favor] to the humble.” (I Pet. 5:5) The lesson that all mankind must learn is that “all have sinned” and that true justification comes “through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”—Rom. 3:23,24

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## Serving Christ by Serving Others

***Key Verse: “The King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”***  
—*Matthew 25:40*

***Selected Scripture: Matthew 25:31-45***

**TODAY’S LESSON IS JESUS’** parable of ‘the sheep and the goats.’ The specific time setting for the fulfillment of this parable is at the close of Christ’s thousand-year kingdom, when judgment shall be rendered concerning each individual’s worthiness to live eternally on the earth and enjoy the boundless blessings of God’s goodness. However, the principles of Christian living and conduct contained in the parable are applicable in all ages and to all people. We want to focus on these principles in the current lesson.

The parable portrays two groups of people, one likened to sheep and the other to goats. A king, who is given the responsibility of judging these two classes, places the sheep on his right hand, representing favor, and the goats on his left hand, representing disfavor. The sheep, he says, inherit a kingdom (Matt. 25:34), but the goats he sends away to destruction. (vs. 41) Jesus gives the reason for the clear distinction between the sheep and goats. He says concerning the sheep, “For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.” (vss. 35,36) To the goats he says just the opposite. They did not give him meat, drink, nor did they take him in, clothe him, or visit him when sick or in prison.—vss. 42,43

It is interesting that in the parable both the sheep as well as the goats respond to the king’s statements by asking how they did, or did not do, these things. (vss. 37-39,44) They never had personal access to the king and thus never had any opportunity to do these things personally for him. The king, in the parable, represents Jesus. He only lived on earth for a little more than thirty-three years, and so we might ask the same question.

If we are like the sheep we might say, “How could I be credited as serving him?” or, if like the goats, “How could I be expected to serve him?” since in neither case have we actually had the opportunity to serve him personally.

Jesus gave both the sheep and the goats, and us, the answer to these questions. He says to the sheep, “Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” (vs. 40) Contrariwise to the goats, “Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.” (vs. 45) In this answer Jesus gives us the primary lesson of the parable. We cannot serve him personally because he is not here for us to physically do so. However, we can, and must, serve him by serving one another. As we look for and use opportunities to serve one another, we are counted as doing it unto him, just as if he were the one receiving our service. On the contrary, if we neglect the privileges of doing things for one another, we are reckoned as having also neglected him, and will not be found worthy to be on his right hand. Jesus said, “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.”—John 15:12

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## Approaching Mount Sion

**THROUGHOUT THIS EPISTLE** Paul has presented various incentives to faithfulness, and assures the Hebrew brethren that despite the difficulties of the narrow way of sacrifice the Lord's grace will be sufficient for their every time of need. In the second and third verses of this chapter he mentions the "joy" that was set before Jesus which enabled him to endure "the cross" and despise "the shame" which was heaped upon him by the "contradiction of sinners." Beginning with verse 18, the apostle, in a most eloquent manner, sets a wonderful joy before the Hebrews and before us, the joy of participation in the Messianic kingdom with all the called and faithful ones whom the Lord will similarly honor and bless.

**VERSES 18,19** "Ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more."

This is a reference to the experiences of Moses and the Israelites in connection with the inauguration of the typical Law Covenant. Similar language to this is used in Joel 2:1,2, which is a prophecy of the "day of the Lord," that period in the Divine plan when the long-promised kingdom of Christ is about to be established in power and great glory in the earth. 'Fire,' 'darkness,' 'tempest,' and 'thick darkness' are all used symbolically in various prophecies to describe the great Time of Trouble which immediately precedes the full manifestation of kingdom glory to the world and the inauguration of the New Covenant.

**VERSES 20,21** "(For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.)"

'They could not endure that which was commanded.' Exodus 20:18,19 refers to this and verse 19 reads, "They said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die." In

Deuteronomy 18:15-18 Moses refers to this request of the people that God speak no more to them lest they die, and promises that the Lord will raise up another “Prophet” to them, “from among their brethren,” one who would be able to give them that which they desired at Horeb, which was life. It is this promise that Peter quotes in Acts 3:22, indicating that it will be fulfilled during the “times of restitution of all things” following the Second Coming of Christ. Thus again do the Scriptures confirm the fact that the inauguration of the Law Covenant is typical of what occurs following the return of Christ to establish his kingdom and to inaugurate the New Covenant.

**VERSE 22** “Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels.”

In the Greek text, the word which is here translated ‘come unto’ is one which means ‘approached to.’ (*Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) The antitypical mount Sion is the Lord’s kingdom. That kingdom was not established at the time Paul wrote this epistle, so it could not be true that the Hebrews had come unto it in the sense of being in the kingdom and reigning with Christ. But they were approaching unto that kingdom. The hope of the kingdom was their inspiration, and the goal for which they were striving was joint-heirship with Jesus in that kingdom. Revelation 14:1 pictures the entire “little flock” (Luke 12:32) class, together with Jesus, the “Lamb,” on mount Sion. In a prophecy concerning Jesus as king supreme in the kingdom, the Heavenly Father said, “Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.”—Ps. 2:6

The church throughout the entire age has also been approaching unto ‘the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.’ This is the city for which Abraham looked, “whose builder and maker is God.” (Heb. 11:10) It is shown in Revelation 21:2 as “coming down from God out of heaven.” It is another symbol of Christ’s kingdom. It will not be a humanly constituted government, for its authority and power come from God ‘out of heaven.’ The hope of reigning with Christ in this ‘city’ has been one of the inspirational joys of the entire church.

In this city, God, the fountain of life, will exhibit to mankind the principles of righteousness contained in his eternal laws, and show the people how to apply them in their daily affairs of life. The foundations of

that “new Jerusalem” will not be a great army or navy, but the Divine principles of righteousness and truth.

The church has also been approaching ‘an innumerable company of angels.’ This is clearly a reference to those angels which the Lord has made as “a flame of fire,” and who have been sent forth “to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.” (Heb. 1:7,14) These holy and invisible messengers of God have had a very prominent part in the development of the church. We do not know how many of these unseen servants of God there are, but among them there are some assigned especially to the Lord’s people. All along the way, and in every changing experience of life, our guardian angels have been present to guide us in the paths of righteousness, and to protect us from harm. What a joy it will be to meet and fellowship with them!

**VERSE 23** “To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.”

Jesus said, “Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.” (Luke 10:20) And we are approaching unto, and will ultimately meet with, all whose names have been thus enrolled. The ‘church of the firstborn’ is a more comprehensive expression than the “church of Christ.” The use of the word firstborn takes our minds back to the type, and to the fact that it was the firstborn of Israel who were saved from death by the blood of the Passover Lamb.

After the nation left Egypt, the tribe of Levi was substituted for the firstborn, and set aside to be the religious servants of the people. From the Levites the priests of Israel were chosen, the high priest being typical of Christ, and the under-priests representing the church of Christ. (Heb. 3:1; I Pet. 2:5,9) The Levites in general were the servants of the priests, and represent those pictured in Revelation 7:9-17 as a “great multitude” who serve God day and night in his temple. Paul includes these in the ‘general assembly,’ by describing it as the church of the firstborn.

What an inspiration it is to know that we are approaching unto such a wonderful company of God’s people! There will be Paul and Peter and John, and all the apostles and other faithful ones of the Early Church, besides those dear ones whom we have personally known and loved. It is

a joy even now, at meetings and conventions, to fellowship with those of like precious faith. How much greater will be our joy when, having reached the end of the way of sacrifice, we join this general assembly, not temporarily, but to be with them forever! Who could faint, or grow weary, when such a glorious prospect is held up before us?

We will meet our loving Heavenly Father, ‘the Judge of all.’ Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” (Matt. 5:8) Fortunately, the only ones who ever will see him face to face will be the pure in heart, and being thus pure, they will delight to be in the presence of him who is Judge of all, for they will have nothing to fear. “In thy presence is fulness of joy;” wrote David, “at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”—Ps. 16:11

The ‘spirits of just men made perfect’ to whom we are approaching are evidently the Ancient Worthies. They will, of course, be in the human, or earthly, phase of the kingdom. Nevertheless, the church will be in communication with them. All the Ancient Worthies were ‘just men,’ being justified by their faith. “They without us,” however, as Paul states, could “not be made perfect.” (Heb. 11:40) With the church complete and beyond the veil, the ‘making perfect’ of the Ancient Worthies will quickly follow. Thus as we look forward to the glorious consummation of our hopes, we visualize, with the other rewards to which we are approaching, the great joy of meeting and working with the Ancient Worthies.

**VERSE 24** “To Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.”

When we get the proper setting of this passage, and realize that the Mediator of the New Covenant is but one among many things to which we are approaching, it is clearly apparent that Paul is not telling us that the New Covenant is now functioning and that the Church is under it with Jesus as the Mediator. This is no more true than that the kingdom was established at Pentecost, or that the Ancient Worthies were resurrected at the beginning of the age; or that the church throughout the age has had the privilege of fellowshiping with the angels face to face; or have had the blessed privilege of meeting God the Judge of all, and enjoying the pleasures of his presence. In fact, just as all these joys are still future, and

we are merely approaching unto them, so is the New Covenant. The text is a conclusive proof of this important truth.

We are also approaching unto the ‘blood of sprinkling,’ which speaks better things ‘than that of Abel.’ Abel’s blood cried out for vengeance, but the blood of Christ will speak of justice being satisfied, and that God’s love and power are ready to assist the dying world back to life and to fellowship with the Creator.

The thought of ‘sprinkling’ takes us back to the type, when “the book, and all the people” (Heb. 9:19) were sprinkled with the blood of the typical Law Covenant. The church “drink[s]” Jesus’ blood, and is cleansed by it. (John 6:53) We are also represented as using the blood as a covering or “robe of righteousness.” (Isa. 61:10) The symbolism of sprinkling seems to have been used particularly to describe the sealing of the New Covenant. I Peter 1:2 is interesting in this connection, for in this text the apostle tells us that our sanctification, or setting apart to God’s service by the Holy Spirit, is “unto” the “sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ,” not by that sprinkling. In other words, the purpose of our sanctification is, among other things, that we might participate with Jesus as ministers of reconciliation, or comediators of the New Covenant. The blood will be Christ’s, but if faithful, we will have a share in the work of sprinkling.

**VERSE 25** “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.”

In this verse Paul reverts to the opening theme of the epistle, that “we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.” And the reason these things we have heard are so important is that they represent the voice of God which has reached us through his beloved Son, for in these “last days” God has spoken to us by his Son.—Heb. 2:1; 1:1,2

**VERSE 26** “Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.”

The literal earth—that is mount Sinai—shook at the voice of the Lord when Moses mediated the Law Covenant. But Paul, quoting from Haggai 2:6,7 informs us that the heavens also are to be shaken in

connection with the setting up of Christ's kingdom. Through Haggai, the Lord said, "Yet once [more], it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come."

The shaking of the literal earth in the type foreshadowed the shaking of the symbolic heavens and earth in the antitype. Peter explains that this shaking will be so severe that "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." (II Pet. 3:10) In reply to questions asked by the disciples concerning signs of the Master's Presence, he replied that the "powers of the heavens" would be "shaken."—Luke 21:25,26 (*WED*)

The reference in all these prophecies is to the present 'heavens' and 'earth', the spiritual and material phases of "this present evil world." (Gal. 1:4) The spiritual or religious elements of our present social order are already terribly shaken, and they are fast losing their power over the people. This bears convincing testimony of the fact that we are at the very end of the age; that the kingdom to which the whole church has been approaching is now very near; and in the realization of this every Christian should truly rejoice.

**VERSE 27** "This word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken [marginal translation, "may be shaken"], as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain."

'Yet once more,' this is to be the final shaking, and it is brought about by "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation," but Jesus adds, "no, nor ever shall be." (Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21,22) The things which will be shaken, or removed, during this trouble will be the ones 'that are made,' that is, the man-made governments, institutions, societies, customs, and standards. These, for the most part being built upon the foundation of selfishness, will not stand up under the shaking and the "fire" of God's "jealousy" by which the whole symbolic earth, is to be "devoured."—Zeph. 3:8

But there will be some things which cannot be shaken. These will be the things pertaining to the kingdom of Christ. In Psalm 46 we are told that we should not fear though the "earth be removed," and the

“mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.” (vs. 2) But we are also given the assurance that “she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.” (vs. 5) The preparation of the kingdom began at Pentecost, and throughout the age those associated with it have been approaching its completion, when it will rule the nations with power and in great glory. Hence it will never cease to exist, so is represented by Paul as remaining.

**VERSE 28** “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”

We are ‘receiving’—Greek, ‘associated with’—a kingdom which cannot be moved. Concerning it Daniel said, “It shall stand for ever.” (Dan. 2:44) This being true, ‘let us have grace’ or, as the thought here seems to be, gratitude. Our gratitude to God for his favor in extending to us the privilege of being associated with such a glorious kingdom, should move us to give all, even life itself, in his service, and to do so with reverence and godly fear—“Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.”—Heb. 4:1

**VERSE 29** “For our God is a consuming fire.”

This does not mean that God is a torment Deity. It is simply an affirmation of the fact that God is opposed to all sin and unrighteousness, and ultimately will destroy everything that is out of harmony with his holy will. He has made a wonderful provision of grace through Christ which makes acceptable the service of those whose hearts are perfect toward him, but his law still stands that “the wages of sin is death.” (Rom. 6:23) This ‘present evil world’ is now being ‘devoured’ by the ‘fire’ of God’s ‘jealousy,’ but if we keep our hearts pure, and serve him acceptably through Christ, we will have an abundant entrance into the new kingdom, even the kingdom of Christ.

## The Ministry of Angels

***“The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.”***  
**—Psalm 34:7**

**JESUS SAID**, “In my Father’s house are many mansions” (John 14:2), and we know from other disclosures of God’s Word that there are different orders of sentient beings on the spirit plane of existence. (Eph. 1:21, Col. 1:16) There was Michael, the Archangel, on a plane above all others—cherubim and seraphim. There is a

wideness in the vast domain of God, which is comparable only to the wideness of his loving mercy. He has seen fit to employ certain spirit messengers in his dealings with mankind, and we have come to know something about them.

### GOD’S MESSENGERS

We believe that the Heavenly Father governs mankind in part through these messengers who, as royal ministers from him, come direct from the courts of heaven. They are invested with adequate power to bless, instruct, guide, protect, and deliver the true children of God throughout their earthly course.

These messengers are spoken of in Job 38:7 as having participated in the general rejoicing that followed the creation of man near the close of the sixth creative day. Job 38:4 and 7 read, “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? ... When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?”

The angelic sons of God had long been witnesses of the great creative work that had been carried on under the direct supervision of the Logos, for “all things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.” (John 1:3,4) Evidently this heavenly host had been appointed to positions of responsible service, and they thus shared to some extent in the accomplishments of the different creative days.

They were committed to duties which they had performed in obedience to Divine command, and were possessed of developed, intellectual

minds. They could well understand that in the creation of perfect human beings with powers of procreation, this new order of beings constituted a complete departure from likeness to any previously existing sentient being.

We know from God's Word that these are special servants of God. We believe they are imbued with the fullness of desire to hold to the Divine purpose in all the issues of Divine Truth and grace, and that they carefully watch the unfoldings of infinite wisdom and love, radiant with holy delight in the mighty trusts to which they are appointed.

## THE FIRST REBELLION

When Jehovah unveiled to their sight the splendor of his finished work of Creation, all their glorious ranks broke forth in shouts of joy. While from then until now they have continued to perform high ministries between heaven and earth, a dark cloud of sin, and the effect of selfish desire translated into sinful action, was soon to cast a terrible shadow over the joys of the new Creation in Eden. There was a brilliant, beautiful, and powerful angelic being, Lucifer, who said in his heart, "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: ... I will be like the most High." Of him it is recorded, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!"—Isa. 14:13,14,12

Thus arose the first rebellion in the universe of God recorded in the Scriptures. Others of the angelic host fell later from their high estate. Legions of holy angels have remained true to their sacred trusts, and they have special interest in the uplift of mankind. It was by an apostate from their own ranks that the pure, fair creatures of paradise in Eden were seduced.

The terrible curse of sin and death was wrought by the malicious scheme of angelic envy. As the holy angels survey the sorrows of our world, they must feel humiliating sadness that those who were once pure and loyal as themselves should have been the betrayers of mankind.

## THE ANGELS' INTEREST IN MAN

The holy angels are further interested in our race as the objects of the Savior's love and redemptive work. They are bound to Christ by profound affection. They love and adore him as the only begotten Son of God. They see in him the promised and certain victor over evil, and the

rightful and mighty ruler in God's due time of our present alien world. They share in Christ's love for mankind.

As allies of Christ they are the "ministering spirits" of the saints, sent forth to serve the "heirs of salvation." (Heb. 1:14) The loyal angels are spoken of in the Scriptures in terms which imply that their number is so great that it baffles the human mind to give expression to it. Jesus said he could in an instant call to his aid more than twelve legions of angels. A single one of these angels of the Lord smote one hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians in one night. (II Kings 19:35) The Bible declares that they "excel in strength."—Ps. 103:20

Familiar with the works of God, how vast must be their understanding of natural and sentient forces! They are the guardians of the good of the earth, also the sleepless watchers over our lives and destinies, and as sentinels at the gates of danger. Though they salute us with no audible voices and cheer us without visible signs, their presence and their ministries are as real as when they gave announcement of the birth of Jesus with song and flashing glory.

## ANGELS IN OLD TESTAMENT TIMES

The ministry of angels occurred in Old Testament times, and the service of the holy angels has been recorded in Israel's affairs. The patriarchs knew their voices, and were familiar with their visitations. It has been asserted as highly probable that in all the instances narrated in the first fifteen chapters of Genesis, in which the Lord is said to have spoken to Noah, Lot, and Abraham, the audible voice was that of an angel—Jehovah speaking by his commissioned messengers.

God has usually spoken to man by his holy angels, except when he has spoken by the prophets, or by his Son. (Heb. 1:1,2) As Hebrews 2:2 records, "The word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward."

Early cases of angelic intervention involved Hagar twice. In the second instance she was in the desert, alone with her ill and starving boy, the bread and water exhausted, she sat apart from him, and sent forth into the veiled heavens her cry of despair. An "angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation. And God opened

her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink.” (Gen. 21:17-19) This record of Hagar’s experience can be taken by us as a lesson, that when there is no earthly ear to hear, nor heart to pity, the penitent, imploring prayer of a righteous person will be heard.—James 5:16

When Abraham was ninety-nine years of age, sitting at noontime in the opening of his tent, he was surprised by the approach of three strangers with royal bearing, to whom he responded by advancing and bowing himself to the ground before them, and by offering them ample hospitality. (Gen. 18:1-10) These strangers were angelic messengers having materialized in human form for the purpose of their visit. They had come to announce to Sarah and Abraham that a child of Divine intention should be born to them in their extreme old age.

Notwithstanding the teachings of science and the laws of nature, this strange angelic announcement stood fast. Never has any angel gone forth from the presence of the Most High to any nation, people or person with uncertain tidings. The ‘word spoken by angels’ is as the utterance of the lips of God; and though thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers conspire to thwart its accomplishment, not one jot or tittle shall fail.

## JUDGMENTS OF GOD

This angelic group, however, was on a double mission. When their visit to Abraham and Sarah was ended, they went their way toward the doomed cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and at eventide two angels, not three, entered the gates and stood before Lot, the only righteous man in all the metropolis of Sodom.

At the break of the following day, those ministers of mercy to Lot, and of wrath to Sodom and Gomorrah, hastened to lead forth the elect to be saved out of the two doomed cities. When they entered Zoar there burst forth torrents of brimstone and fire; and the smoke of their swift destructive force rose over all of the countryside about them.—Gen. 19:1-25

Another angelic manifestation to be found in the Scriptures involved Jacob fleeing from the wrath of Esau, his brother. It was at the close of day that Jacob, a weary and lonely fugitive in the midst of an open field with darkness only for a curtain and the stars for his sentinels, came to a place called Bethel to get some sleep.—Gen. 28:11

In his sleep he saw a ladder, reaching from earth to heaven, thronged with angels on errands of peace and blessing, serving between God's footstool and his throne. (Gen. 28:12) These messengers were not sent to a glamorous court, but to one lone wanderer. Here in type and prophecy are depicted angel vigils over the weary and exposed pilgrims of earth. Over and over again we bring to our minds the comforting assurance of our text, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."—Ps. 34:7

These words of the psalmist, are a source of comfort to the true Israel of God. Jesus said in Matthew 18:10, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."

Truly 'the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him.' They do not come and go simply in great and dire perils, just when the righteous are well nigh lost. They are never absent, but always on duty, fully armed and vigilant.

They formed a cloud of darkness between Israel and Pharaoh's pursuing hosts. They were a wall of consuming fire between God's people and their pursuers, and a front and rear guard as the cherubim kept the way of the tree of life amid the splendors of Eden. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"—Heb. 1:14

Further words of warning are given by the apostle to the Hebrews, "If the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation."—Heb. 2:2,3

## DANIEL'S REVELATIONS

In the light of these, and many correlative scriptures, it is a lack of trust to question or dispute that to the holy angels are committed important ministerial trusts connected with bringing about salvation for the church, and restitution for the world spoken of by all of the Old Testament prophets, and by Christ and the apostles as well.

The inspired revelation of Daniel is very interesting. His predictions cover all the great governments of the world and include the Messianic advent, the crucifixion and the resurrection of our Lord. Also included

are the return of Christ to earth, the raising of the dead, the destruction of all that is evil, and the establishment of an everlasting kingdom of righteousness and peace on the earth.

Much of Daniel's instruction came to him through an angel. In much that Daniel foresaw, and about which he made prophetic predictions, the angel Gabriel was his authority. (Dan. 8:16; 9:21) We have been given to know that the words spoken by angels to the prophets have stood, are standing, and will continue to stand fast until their fulfillment.

Daniel was a captive in a foreign land, but he was true to his people and to the God of his fathers. He resisted the fascinations and corruptions of court life, and challenged the admiration of his enemies by the exalted purity and dignity of his character and conduct. God honored him as few men have been honored.—Dan. 10:11-14

The honors, however, bestowed upon Daniel by the king awakened in the hearts of certain subordinate officials of the government the most cruel jealousy. By a wicked plot he was cast into a den of ferocious lions. A miracle was wrought on his behalf. Standing erect by Daniel's side was a holy angel.

Then the voice of Darius the king was heard, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?" Then Daniel answered, "O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me."—Dan. 6:20-22

## ANGELS ANNOUNCE CHRIST

Angels played important roles in preparing for the birth of our Lord, and in the events of the Christ child. An angel was sent to Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist. Zacharias was overcome with fear at the presence of the angel visitor; but the angel said, "Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John."—Luke 1:13

Zacharias, however, knowing that both he and his wife Elisabeth were "well stricken in years" could scarcely accept such joyful tidings, though they came from the lips of an angel; and he said, "Whereby shall I know this?" (vs. 18) and the angel answered and said unto him, "I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to

shew thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed.” (vss. 19,20) Instantly, Zacharias’ priestly lips were sealed, and he beckoned to wondering people who stood by, remaining speechless.

Likewise, the first announcement of the Savior’s birth was made by an angel. The First Advent sermon was preached by an angel. The first redemption song ever sung to mortal ears burst in wondrous melody from a multitude of angel voices.—Luke 2:13-15

Later the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph, who was told to arise, take the young child, Jesus, and his mother, and flee into Egypt, “and be thou there until I bring thee word.” (Matt. 2:13-15) Accordingly Joseph and Mary, in instant obedience to the Divine command, took the child and set forth to go to Egypt.

Nor did their heavenly guardian forget his trust; for when Herod was dead he again visited Joseph and Mary in Egypt at Divine command. (Matt. 2:19-23) The holy angels kept watch over the child Jesus, fulfilling this prophecy, “He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all they ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.”—Ps. 91:11,12

The scene of the resistance of Jesus to the snares of the great Adversary was in the wilderness, away from the sight and sympathy of men. He was alone in the sense that up to then he had no selected and announced ministry, no human companions or followers. Yet he was not alone, for the guardian angels of heaven were close about him, subject to call as his holy bodyguard, his allies, swift and powerful ministers from the Father to his beloved Son. Throughout all of his earthly career they attended him day and night. They still serve as his messengers of love and power to all who look with faith for his appearing.

It was an angel from heaven that rolled away the stone from the tomb of our Lord. Upon the explanations and instructions given by an angel depends, largely, our hope of the Savior’s return, the resurrection of the dead, and the reign of the Son of God on the throne of David.

## MINISTERS TO THE HEIRS OF SALVATION

Certain it is that the same holy, powerful beings who gave attendance to the Savior all through his earthly career, and ministered to him in all

his trials and sufferings, really and constantly attend all his saints, even the poorest and weakest.

They guard their steps from danger; deliver them from the “snare of the fowler” (Ps. 91:3); defend them against the assaults of demons; and assuage their sorrows. They provide for their necessities, and strengthen them for all of their toils and labors of love. Truly the ‘angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.’

Angelic power, under Divine commission, is superior to physical law. Untouched, Peter’s chains fell off, and the huge iron gate seemingly opened of its own accord at the angel’s approach. Wherever God’s presence is, angels are there to be found. If our Heavenly Father trusts them to manage weighty affairs of Divine ministration, ought we not to accept with confidence the inspired assurance that all these are ‘ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?’—Heb. 1:14

John was sent to Patmos for banishment and solitude; the Lord turned the banishment of this faithful servant into an occasion for the most remarkable revelation of the Divine purpose. Events covering the rise and fall of nations, and the progress and experience of the church thenceforth to its glorification and kingdom honors, were unfolded and seen by John. These revelations were intended for the enlightenment of the saints through the centuries to follow, including the last phases of human history under the order of the present evil world, and the opening of the new order.

We believe that God has been pleased to give his angels charge over us, not only for our protection from such evils as might otherwise befall us, but that he may endear us and them to each other, with greater resulting joy when we later meet in the kingdom of our Father. Meantime, while we may not worship angels, we may “esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake.”—I Thess. 5:13

The time will come when the voice of “every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, . . . and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”—Rev. 5:13

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***Dawn Bible Students Association***

## Sowing and Reaping

*“The harvest is the  
end of the world  
[Greek, age]; and  
the reapers are the  
angels.”*

—*Matthew 13:39*

**THE BIBLE IS MORE** than a textbook of religious precepts designed to govern human behavior through endless generations. Most see it as helping men and women to live better lives here that they might be prepared for happiness beyond the grave. To understand the Bible correctly it is essential to recognize that there are time

elements in the plan of God—ages and dispensations which have a beginning and come to an end. In these, there is a ‘sowing’ and a ‘reaping’ with respect to the work of God accomplished in them.

The Bible reveals an orderly progression in the Divine plan. Ultimately it is to reach a glorious consummation in the reconciliation of the sin-cursed and dying race to God, the Creator, and the restoration of the people to everlasting life and happiness. This, the Bible shows, is to be accomplished through Christ, who at his First Advent died to redeem mankind from death. During his Second Presence, through the agencies of his kingdom, he will accomplish the foretold work of “restitution” spoken by the mouth of all God’s holy prophets since the world began.—Acts 3:19-21

Even before Christ’s First Advent there had been various changes of dispensation in the outworking of the Divine plan. One of these occurred at the time of the Flood, when the “world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished.” (II Pet. 3:6) During a period of more than six hundred years after the Flood the voice of God was heard only by a few patriarchs, particularly Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God promised Abraham that through his “seed” all the families of the earth would be blessed. (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18) This promise was inherited by Abraham’s son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob. (Gen. 26:4; 28:14) When Jacob was nearing death he voiced a prophecy concerning his son Judah, indicating that the ‘seed’ of promise was to come through his family, or tribe.—Gen. 49:9,10

Following the deliverance of the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt, God, through Moses, gave them his Law, which was epitomized in the Ten Commandments. But this was merely a means to an end. The Lord knew that the Israelites, being members of the fallen and dying human race, could not keep his Law inviolate. In the New Testament the Apostle Paul explains that the Law was a “schoolmaster” to teach the necessity for the redemptive work of Christ, that only through a Redeemer could mankind be rescued from sin and its penalty, death.—Gal. 3:24

During the Jewish Age God sent his prophets to Israel to admonish and warn the nation, and to prophesy the coming of the Messiah, the promised Seed. Many of the prophecies associated the hope of the Messiah with the idea of a “kingdom,” a “government,” which would be established by him, and through which the promised blessing of all the families of the earth would be accomplished. Thus the Prophet Isaiah foretold that “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.”—Isa. 9:6,7

#### IN “DUE TIME”

It was in God’s own “due time” that Christ came, first to die for the sins of the people, and later to establish the foretold kingdom through which the redeemed would be blessed. (Rom. 5:6,17-21) In announcing the first presence of Christ, John the Baptist said, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) Preaching in the wilderness of Judea, John said, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matt. 3:1,2) What may be a better translation of this statement emphasizes that the ‘King’ of God’s promised kingdom had appeared. Thus, in these two announcements, one identifying Jesus as the ‘Lamb of God,’ and the other as the promised King, the twofold work of Christ is revealed; that is, his sacrificial work to redeem the people, and his kingdom work by means of which all the families of the earth were to be blessed.

Throughout his ministry Jesus emphasized both of these aspects of the Divine plan for the recovery of the human race from sin and death. He taught that he would give his flesh in sacrifice for “the life of the world.” (John 6:51) He also said much about the promised kingdom. Because his disciples “thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear,”

Jesus related a parable concerning “a certain nobleman” who “went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.” (Luke 19:11,12) Through this parable and other teachings of the Master we learn that the due time for the establishment of the Messianic kingdom is not until his return at his Second Advent.

Nevertheless, through his parables and otherwise, Jesus associated the preparatory work of the intervening age, when his people would be waiting for his return, with the idea of the kingdom. Thus, most of his parables are introduced with the words, “The kingdom of heaven is likened unto.” (Matt. 13:24) So it is in the parable of the wheat and the tares, from which our text is taken. This parable does not illustrate the kingdom established in power and great glory—except in a very brief statement at the close—but rather, the effort of Satan to hinder the preparatory work of the kingdom, and the manner in which he would counterfeit this work of the Lord.

## THE PARABLE

The parable tells of a “man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat.” The “servants of the householder” who sowed the wheat suggested that they uproot the tares and remove them from the field. But the ‘householder’ said, “Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.” Then he instructed his servants, saying, “Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.”—Matt. 13:24-30

Jesus explained “He that soweth the good seed, is the Son of man.” (vss. 37-43) From this it is clear that the sowing of the ‘good seed,’ the ‘wheat,’ represents the work of Jesus in selecting his apostles, and through them, the establishing of the Early Church. In a very special way Jesus himself was responsible for this work, both through personal instruction to his disciples, and by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

The “field” in which the good seed was sown, Jesus said, was the “world.” While the wheat sown personally by Jesus was not scattered throughout the whole world, he commissioned his disciples to preach the Gospel, making disciples from among all nations (Matt. 28:19,20) and

his last instructions to them were, “Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”—Acts 1:8

The good seed he explained, “are the children of the kingdom.” Jesus is the great King in the kingdom of promise, the kingdom through which all the families of the earth are to be blessed; and the Scriptures reveal that the work of the Lord throughout the present age has been the calling and preparation of a company of people who will share with him in the honor, glory, and work of the kingdom. To these Jesus said, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”—Luke 12:32

The ‘children,’ or sons, of the Heavenly Father are, through the Scriptures, begotten to the glorious hope of joint-heirship with Jesus in the kingdom. They are, as Paul wrote, “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” (Rom. 8:17) Concerning the same class the Apostle Peter wrote, “If ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”—II Pet. 1:10,11

The apostles and others in the Early Church understood that the kingdom would not be set up in the earth until the return of Christ. They looked forward to that great event in the plan of God, confident that if they walked faithfully in his footsteps even unto death, they would then be raised from the dead to live and reign with Christ. When approaching death by execution, Paul wrote, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”—II Tim. 4:7,8

Jesus promised that all overcomers of this age would be exalted to rulership with him. “To him that overcometh,” he said, “will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” (Rev. 3:21) It is recorded, “Thou hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign upon the earth.” (Rev. 5:10, *New American Standard*) These are the same ones who, in the twentieth chapter of Revelation, are said to come forth in the “first resurrection” to live and reign “with Christ a thousand years.”—vss. 4-6

Truly, then, these are the children of the kingdom. They have learned of the glorious kingdom which God has promised, the kingdom through which ‘restitution’ blessings are to be made available to all the families of the earth. In the beginning of the age the apostles and other disciples of Christ were inspired by this glorious hope. Their hope of reigning with Christ in the kingdom enabled them to suffer patiently with and for him. They looked forward to his return, when they would be with him and “see him as he is.”—I John 3:1-3

As the parable indicates, however, an ‘enemy’ sowed ‘tares’ among the wheat—that is, among the children of the kingdom. These tares, Jesus explained, are “the children of the wicked one,” and the enemy who sowed them “is the devil.” (Matt. 13:38,39) This sowing of the tares, the parable indicates, was done ‘while men slept.’ This obviously refers to a time after the apostles fell asleep in death. While they lived they were the guardians of the church, and it was not possible for the Devil to be very successful in his effort to sow tares among the wheat.

After the apostles died, however, the Devil did get in his work. This was accomplished in a very deceptive manner. Paul said to the elders at Ephesus, “Of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” (Acts 20:30) As time went on, and as the apostles foretold, these ‘children of the wicked one,’ the tares, set up a counterfeit system of Christianity, described by Paul as the “mystery of iniquity.” (II Thess. 2:7) Church history reveals how accurately these predictions of Jesus and the apostles were fulfilled.

This has been the state of Christianity as seen by the world throughout most of the Gospel Age. The tares have always been preponderantly in the majority. The imposing systems of religion established by them have been what the world has recognized as the church. Being a counterfeit of the true children of the kingdom, they have established a kingdom, even kingdoms, of their own. The aggregate of these has been called Christ’s kingdom. Having joined hands with civil governments in an effort to establish kingdom authority in the earth, these have lost sight of the return of Christ and the establishment of the real kingdom of promise.

The fact that the tares are referred to by Jesus as the children of the wicked one does not mean that they have been, or are, unregenerate, lawless people. It is simply that their outlook, hope, aims, endeavors, are

not in keeping with the hope of the kingdom set forth in the Word of God. They are those of the wicked one in his attempt to thwart the purpose of God and cause God's people to lose sight of his promises to establish the Messianic kingdom, and, through its agencies, fulfil his promises to bless all the families of the earth.

Meanwhile, however, in every part of the age there have been a few of the wheat class, a few children of the kingdom. They have at times been almost lost among the tares, but they have been there. Church history reveals this, showing that there have always been those who looked for the return of their Lord and the establishment of his kingdom. These have been small in number, a "little flock" (Luke 12:32) indeed—frequently but one here and there—but by the Lord's grace they kept the kingdom hope alive, even while, as the parable shows, they grew together with the tares.

### COMES THE HARVEST

The parable reveals that the admixture of tares with the wheat was not to continue forever, but only for the one age in the Divine plan. At the end of the "world" (Greek, *aión*, meaning 'age') there was to be a "harvest"—a harvest in which the tares would be "gathered" into bundles and "burned," and the wheat gathered into the Lord's garner, or "barn."—Matt. 13:30,40

In Jesus' explanation of the parable he said that the tares would be burned in a "furnace of fire." (vs. 42) Since at the end of the age there are countless tares, and they are scattered throughout the earth, it is evident that it is not a literal 'furnace' in which they are burned. The Prophet Malachi gives us the proper thought, saying that "the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up."—Mal. 4:1

It is a 'day' in the outworking of the Divine plan that burns 'as an oven.' This day is elsewhere described in the prophecies as the day of God's vengeance. (Isa. 34:8) In language less figurative, the Bible describes this day as one in which there was to be "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation," a time when there would be "distress of nations, with perplexity," "a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness."—Dan. 12:1; Luke 21:25,26; Joel 2:2

In this symbolic furnace of fire which engulfs the whole world of mankind, all false systems of religion are destroyed. This results also in the destruction of the tares, not necessarily as individuals, but as tares, in the sense that they no longer will be looked upon as being part of the Lord's kingdom arrangements. They were adherents of a counterfeit kingdom which, in the great Armageddon struggle at the end of the age, is destroyed, together with all the selfish and sinful institutions of the earth.

### “AS THE SUN”

In the end of the age the wheat is also gathered, not to be burned in the great ‘time of trouble,’ but to “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” (Matt. 13:43) The Prophet Malachi, after telling us that the ‘day cometh that shall burn as an oven’—that oven in which the tares are destroyed—says that then also the “Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings.”—Mal. 4:2

The glorious hope of all the children of the kingdom of this age is to be associated with Christ, the ‘Sun of righteousness,’ in the kingdom work of blessing all the families of the earth with life and happiness. The parable, revealing the work of the present age completed, shows the wheat class as a part of the great Sun of Righteousness, which then arises ‘with healing in his wings.’

### THE REAPERS

Jesus explained that the ‘reapers’ whom he would send forth into the harvest would be the ‘angels.’ The Greek word here used is one which means a ‘messenger.’ It could be a heavenly or an earthly messenger. It is sometimes used in the New Testament regarding inanimate objects. Since the angels of the parable gather the tares into bundles and burn them, and also gather the wheat into the Lord's barn—implying the exaltation of the children of the kingdom to live and reign with Christ—it is evident that a considerable variety of messengers are used in this figurative harvest.

The angels, or messengers, which gather the tares into bundles and cast them, figuratively speaking, into the furnace of the great time of trouble which destroys all the selfish institutions of this ‘present evil world,’ are all the various forces which directly and indirectly contribute to bring

about this dramatic change in world affairs. To the extent that the Truth of God's Word, as proclaimed by his consecrated people, enters into the gathering of the tares, they are the messengers whom the Lord uses.

The Lord's people are more vitally concerned with the harvesting of the wheat, for they take part in this work in a very real way. The work of the Jewish Age, which began with the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, ended with a harvest. The Law was designed by the Lord as a schoolmaster to prepare the nation of Israel for the Messiah. When he came, there was a harvest call of Truth designed to reach all the Israelites who were in heart condition to receive him. The true wheat then, even as now, was very much in the minority.

In keeping with the harvest illustration Jesus said to his disciples, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." (Matt. 9:37,38) The disciples to whom these words were addressed were among the wheat which was then gathered by the proclamation of the kingdom message. When reached by the message, they in turn became messengers of the Lord in the harvesting of additional wheat.

The same conditions prevail at the end of the present age. While the final exaltation of the wheat into the heavenly garner, or barn, is accomplished by Divine power exercised through channels beyond our comprehension, their preparation for this ultimate position in the kingdom is brought about by the harvest message of Truth. And it is our privilege as messengers of the Lord to proclaim the Gospel of the kingdom for this purpose.

## NOW IN THE HARVEST

There are many prophecies of the Bible which reveal that we are now living in the end of the age. Since Jesus said that the harvest work of gathering the wheat would take place in the end of the age, there should be evidence that such a work has been, and is being done; and there is unmistakable evidence that this is so. In Revelation 14:6-8,14,15 we have a description of the harvest work at the end of the age in which Jesus is shown to be present as the Chief Reaper. He is figuratively represented as sitting upon a cloud with a "sharp sickle"—a reaping instrument—in his hand.

In this harvest scene an “angel,” or messenger, is shown “having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.” (vs. 6) The ‘everlasting gospel,’ the Gospel of the kingdom, was, as we have seen, lost sight of by the church soon after the death of the apostles. The word Gospel means ‘good news,’ and during the Dark Ages the God-dishonoring theory of eternal torture was substituted for the good news of the kingdom, and the claim made that the church-state systems of Europe were the kingdom of Christ.

In order, therefore, that the everlasting Gospel might again be proclaimed, it had first to be restored to the true people of God. This was done in fulfillment of Jesus’ promise that when he returned he would gird himself and serve the household of faith with “meat in due season.” (Luke 12:37,42) This meat in ‘due season’ is the Truth due to be understood and proclaimed in the harvest time at the end of the age. The time is now fast approaching for the establishment of the glorious kingdom of Christ. Soon the wheat gathered into the barn will, with her Lord, shine forth as the sun for the blessing of all the families of the earth.

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