

Ancient Records and the Bible

The Search for a Reliable History of Mankind

FROM WHATEVER STANDPOINT the history of man upon earth is approached, it is an amazing revelation to discover that, for the greater part of this period, there are almost no reliable secular records available to provide us with much information. Certainly there is no connected data from which an accurate chronology of man could be constructed.

Apart from the Bible, there are only fragmentary records of real consequence, and very few that relate to time. Of these, mainly found on tablets and inscriptions buried in the earth, the greater part are so vague and uncertain that they are regarded as little more than legend or myth. As such, they are wholly untrustworthy for supplying the sound data needed for establishing a connected early history of human events.

On the other hand, the Bible sets forth a record of man's earliest existence which is replete with specific events and genealogies listed in the greatest detail. It gives close attention to the matter of time, as well as furnishing specific names and places. And it does this in a way that appeals to the reader as being a reasonable and genuine account of events that actually occurred.

But can the testimony of the Scriptures in pre-Flood times, as well as in the events that follow, be accepted as trustworthy? How can we be sure that these records are truly genuine and thus commend themselves as God's revelation to mankind which preserve the details of his early existence? Before dealing directly with this issue, it will be helpful to survey some of the oldest non-Biblical data that has survived to give us a sense of its character and validity. These come from the main centers of civilization—Mesopotamia, Egypt and China.

SUMERIAN KING LIST

A list of Sumerian kings has been made available from Chaldean records quoted in a book called, *"Light from the Ancient Past,"* by I. Finegan. This list assigns ten kings before the Flood, whose combined rule lasted 432,000 years. Researchers suspect exaggeration of the times

involved, and say that the only value of the list is that it enumerates ten kings before the Flood, as does the Bible.

EGYPTIAN RECORDS

An abundance of material has been unearthed from the land of Egypt, but it is still not possible to find data sufficiently reliable to construct an accurate chronology of early man. A researcher, Margaret Murray, in a book entitled, "*The Splendar that Was Egypt*," offers some insight into the problems raised by ancient Egyptian records:

"One of the chief difficulties in the dating is the fact that the Egyptians dated from the reigning year of each king, and not from a fixed point. [Each king's reign was considered a fresh starting point.] The dating by reigning years is too inexact to be of real use unless the record is complete, which is not the case in Egypt. Therefore, any early dating can be only approximate." Ten kings of Thinis (Abydos) follow the demigods, and of these, some scanty remains were found in the royal tombs in that place.

EARLY CHINESE HISTORY

Early records of Far Eastern civilizations present a similar pattern of gross unreliability. The historian, Henry Lucas, says in his book, "*A Short History of Civilization*:"

"The study of early Chinese history is attended with almost insuperable difficulties. The numerous literary accounts of ancient Chinese writers cannot be trusted, and their statements that Chinese culture dates from hundreds of thousands of years B.C. should be received with skepticism. The oldest historical classic is the '*Shu Ching*,' or, '*Book of History*,' by Confucius. This purports to date from 22505 B.C., but is actually of late composition. "That the '*Shu Ching*' contains elements of truth is not to be denied, but it is difficult to separate the grains of historical fact from the chaff of literary embellishment."

GENESIS RECORD

In contrast with the untrustworthy nature of much of man's earliest records—and the exaggerated chronological data in particular—it is astounding to find that the Bible, from the very start in the Book of Genesis, gives the most marked attention to the matter of dates, intervals of time, and epochs. An early chapter of this book—Genesis 5—lists the

genealogy of the patriarchs, from Adam to Noah, in great detail. It is a nearly perfect specimen of chronology from beginning to end, and includes a built-in arithmetical checking procedure to assure the accuracy of the whole. It has been estimated that if Genesis 5 had been exhumed as a tablet from Egypt or Mesopotamia, it would have been hailed as the most authentic and valuable relic of all antiquity.

It seems significant that one piece of archeological evidence from Egypt, known as the “*Abydos Tablet*,” actually corroborates the Genesis genealogy of earliest man, though little has been heard of this find in recent years. Uncovered in the tomb of Pharaoh Seti I, and now preserved in the British Museum, it appears to be an accurate record of human rulers back to the first man, Adam. The list of Pharaohs is shorter than on other tablets, evidently because it omits the names of gods and demigods about the period of the Deluge. This is the feature which singles it out as of special value, in that it records only the purely human line back to Adam. A description of this table can be found in the Dawn publication, “*The Photodrama of Creation*,” where it says: “The Abydos Tablet fully agrees with Genesis. ... It shows Adam [Mena] as the first Pharaoh, and Noah the twentieth, while the intermediate eighteen correspond with Genesis with remarkable accuracy. Mena’s wife was Shesh—Hebrew, Isha—‘woman.’ Her first son was Pharaoh II—Greek, ‘eta-Khent’—‘guilty one,’ Hebrew, Kanighi; Latin, Athos; English, Cain. The table for Abel represents him as ‘the non-resistant one.’

“The Abydos Tablet shows the same order as Moses (Gen. 4-6), giving first the line of Cain down to Jabal, who was [named] Kakan. At that time, evidently, the gods and demigods began to fill the Earth with violence. Seti’s list omits the names of these. All demigods were destroyed in the Deluge. Noah is next in order with a regal title. But since he was not of Cain’s family, the Abydos Tablet there goes back, mentions Abel and Seth, and Seth’s line just as given in Genesis (untitled), down to Noah. These all, as Pharaohs, have their royal ovals, but no supertitle. After Noah (Nofru), Pharaoh XX, the line runs through his son Ham (Chamu Chufu). Appropriately, Noah’s other sons are ignored; for Shem and Japheth went to Asia and Europe, while only Ham went to Egypt.”

HIGHER CRITICISM

Beginning especially in the 19th century, the authenticity of the Scriptures with their historical reliability began to be questioned by Bible scholars themselves. At the same time that Bibles were being made available everywhere in the civilized world, the challenge of the critics was raised.

Stemming first from European theological seminaries, schools of 'higher criticism' developed, which began to cast disrepute upon the origins of the Bible and the belief that it represented the authoritative and indisputable Word of God. Liberal views of theology arose in tandem to the developing evolutionary world view which not only minimized matters of doctrine but also bluntly regarded Genesis as mere mythology. And thus, that which had come to be thought of as man's most authentic and valuable source of information of his own mysterious past, was now disclaimed even by contemporary Bible scholarship, an attitude which gradually worked its way through the ranks of society.

BIBLICAL ARCHEOLOGY

This is generally where matters stood until well into the twentieth century, when Biblical archeology assumed the status of a legitimate science. Under the leadership of such capable investigators as William Albright and G. Ernest Wright, one breathtaking discovery after another was made, much to the chagrin of critics. An overwhelming mass of evidence, brought to light from the lands of the Bible, methodically began to document the historical foundations and general chronology underlying most of the Scriptures.

Only the Creation and Flood accounts, the exact antiquity of man's past, and the later wanderings of Abraham, and the story of Moses and the Exodus remain difficult to verify. Yet, even here, the traditions of widely scattered cultures throughout the world combine to attest to the occurrence of the former events, while showing some distinctive variations from the Genesis record. And with the everincreasing tempo of archeological discovery, there is strong reason to believe that the specific exploits of Abraham and Moses will also eventually be uncovered.

A commentary on such investigations in the book, *"Essentials of Bible History,"* by the historian, Elmer Mould, said: "For a really adequate

appreciation of this vast archeological work which is under way in every corner of the ancient Biblical world, one has only to ... visit our great museums which treasure the specimens of Babylonian, Assyrian, Egyptian, and Palestinian archaeology. ... New discoveries follow every year, and from the light thus thrown upon the past there emerges a steadily deepening understanding of the Bible and the peoples who move across its pages. Much that used to be mere speculation and conjecture has now given way to certainty, [and] bafflement to understanding and appreciation.”

We now have concrete examples of the verification of people and places mentioned even in the early chapters of Genesis. Chapter Ten, which has been described as the ‘Table of Nations,’ gives the genealogy of Noah’s descendants and lists the specific geographical locations to which Shem, Ham, and Japheth—the three sons of Noah and their families—migrated. Professor Albright, in his book, *“Recent Discoveries in Bible Lands,”* says:

“The tenth chapter of Genesis has long attracted students of ancient Oriental geography and ethnography. It stands absolutely alone in ancient literature, without a remote parallel, even among the Greeks, where we find the closest approach to a distribution of peoples in genealogical framework. But among the Greeks the framework is mythological and the peoples are all Greek or Aegean tribes. . . .

“Many of the names of peoples and countries mentioned in this chapter have been discovered on the monuments for the first time: e.g., Tubal—Tabal; Meshech (properly Moshech with the Greek Bible)—Mushke; Ashkenaz—Ashkuz ... Togarmah—Tegarama; Elishah—Alashi (Alashiya); Tarshish—Tarsisi ... Cush—Egyptian (E)kosh, Assyrian Kusi ... Phut—Putu; Seba and Sheba—Saba; Dedan—Ddn; Accad—Akkadu; Shinar—Shanghar ... Asshur—Assur (Babylonian Ashshur); Rehoboth—Rebit Ninua ... ; Calah—Kalkhu; Pathrusim—the inhabitants of Patorese (Upper Egypt); Caphtorim—the inhabitants of Caphtor—Kaptara; Heth—the land of the Hittites, Khattu; the Amorites are the inhabitants of Amurru, etc. In this list we have not included the numerous names of places and peoples which were already known from Graeco-Roman sources, upon all of which the monuments have shed much additional light.”

RECENT FINDS

Further light on Genesis and the Old Testament came in 1975 with the sensational discovery in Syria of the remains of the kingdom of Ebla that flourished more than 4,000 years ago. Digs at Tell-Mardikh uncovered over 15,000 clay tablets that revealed many details of this early Canaanite empire, including evidence of contact with the nomadic Hebrew peoples who wandered into their lands. The tablets are perhaps closer to the Old Testament, according to Biblical archeologist, David Freedman, than any other yet found. He reported: "Many, if not most, of the important names in the Bible have already been identified (on the tablets) and very often in almost identical form."

The name of one of Ebla's kings, Ebrum, is reminiscent of Eber in Genesis 10:21, the father of the Semites. Other names found on the tablets closely resemble Biblical names from various periods. Examples are Abraham (abramu); Esau (esau); David (daudum); Saul (saulum); Michael (mikailu); and Israel (israilu). Some of the numerous gods of Ebla, which also appear and have direct counterparts in the Old Testament, are Dagon, Baal, Ishtar and Chemosh.

The listing of the five "cities of the plain," Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Bela, mentioned in Genesis 14:2, is duplicated in an Ebla text and the names are arranged in the very same order. The tablets also refer to the cities of Hazor, Megiddo, and Gaza, but the most startling reference of all is to "urusalima"—unmistakably Jerusalem. This mention predates any other known reference to the famous city by about 1,000 years.

More recent discoveries continue the overwhelming trend of substantiating early Biblical accounts. In a December 18, 1995 article in the "*Time*" magazine, entitled, "*Are the Bible's Stories True?*" it says, "In 1986, archaeologists found the earliest known text of the Bible [from the Book of Numbers in a Jerusalem tomb] dated to about 600 B.C. ... The discovery made it clear that parts of the Old Testament were being copied long before some skeptics had believed they were even written.

"In 1990 ... hieroglyphic clues from a monolith known as the Merneptah Stele [were used] to identify figures in a Luxor wall relief as ancient Israelites. The stele (a pillar) itself, dated to 1207 B.C., celebrates a military victory by the Pharaoh Merneptah. 'Israel is laid waste,' it

reads, suggesting that the Israelites were a distinct population more than 3,000 years ago, and not just because the Bible tells us so.

“In 1993 a team of archaeologists uncovered a 9th century B.C. inscription at an ancient mound called Tel Dan, in the north of Israel. Words carved into a chunk of basalt refer to the ‘House of David’ and the ‘King of Israel.’ It is the first time the Jewish monarch’s name has been found outside the Bible, and appears to prove he was more than a mere legend.”

THE BIBLE AS GOD’S REVELATION

Modern scientific exploration and the spade of the archeologist clearly have reestablished the Bible as a valid and amazingly accurate source of the history of man. G. Ernest Wright, in his book, “*Biblical Archeology*,” says, “For the most part, archeology has substantiated and illumined the Biblical story at so many crucial points that no one can seriously say that it is little but a congeries [collection] of myth and legend.”

Likewise, Werner Keller, the renowned German researcher, in “*The Bible as History*,” says “[It became] necessary for us to revise our views about the Bible. Many events that previously passed for pious tales must now be judged to be historical. Often the results of investigation correspond in detail with the Biblical narratives. ... The Bible is a book about things that actually happened. ... The events themselves are historical facts and have been recorded with an accuracy that is nothing less than startling.”

In the preservation of the Scriptures for our benefit, surely we see the operation of Divine providence and an expression of the love of our Creator. God’s foreknowledge would have revealed that man’s carelessness, the ravages of time, and the rise and fall of civilizations, would combine to rob man of even an accurate knowledge of his own existence, unless there were direct intervention. Hence, we believe that the Bible was provided by God as the only true and connected source of history for more than three thousand years.

Concerning the question, “Is the Bible record credible?”—the excavations by dedicated archeologists, bringing to life the ruins and relics of the past, have given us a resounding affirmative answer. While not yet providing confirmation in every detail, the results thus far have been very rewarding. This is indeed gratifying to students of the Bible

who, while not requiring that the Scriptures be verified in every particular, are, nevertheless, elated by the dramatic support such finds have provided. Valid faith rests on God's Word alone, but it is also strengthened and encouraged by such additional evidences.

A commentary (Volume 2, pp. 37,38 of "*The Studies in the Scriptures*," a *Dawn* publication), summarizes the matter well when it says: "The Bible ... is the only work in the world which—beginning with Adam, the first man mentioned in history, monument or inscription—whose name, the time of his creation, and death are recorded—and from whom his descendants can be traced by name and age in successive links for nearly four thousand years—furnishes us a clear and connected history down to a period where secular history is well authenticated.

"Taken together, the history and prophecy of the Bible afford a panoramic view of the whole course of events from the creation and fall of man, to his reconciliation and restitution. The Bible is indeed the chart of all history. Without it history would be 'like rivers flowing from unknown sources to unknown seas.' But under its guidance we may trace these rivers to their springs and see their glorious ending in the ocean of eternity."

Dawn Bible Students Association

The Challenge of Change

Key Verse: “Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the LORD hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king.”

—I Samuel 10:24

***Selected Scripture:
I Samuel 10:17-26***

THIS PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE concerns Israel’s demand to have a king to rule over them. Samuel had served well as judge over God’s children, but the people wanted a change, and to be like other nations who had kings. Although he was displeased with their request and understood the dangers involved in making such demands, God assured Samuel that it was his will that their demands be met to give them necessary experiences.

“The Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.

According to all the works which they have done since the day I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.”—I Sam. 8:7-9

Saul was God’s choice as king to rule over the tribes of Israel, and he was well suited for the job in many ways. He was of the tribe of Benjamin whose land lay between that of the two principal tribes, Judah and Ephraim. This factor gave him the advantage to work in sympathy and cooperation with the most influential of all Israel’s people. It also eliminated any jealousy that might occur if he were of one of the major tribes.

We note also that Saul was a large man, being head and shoulders above all the rest of the people. Physical stature was a mark of great importance among the nations in historical times, and Israel was no

exception in their admiration of Saul's prominence. His impressive features appealed very strongly to the sentiments of the tribes of Israel as they sought to join the ranks of neighboring nations. The stature of a larger man would command greater respect. Another characteristic which Saul possessed, and perhaps another reason why he had been especially chosen by God for such an honorable position, was that he was humble, even as Samuel proclaimed, "When thou wast little in thine own sight."—I Sam. 15:17

In consideration of these particular distinctions which King Saul possessed, we may learn a spiritual lesson that is applicable to the Lord's people during the present Gospel Age. God is choosing from among fallen mankind those who will be kings and priests in the future kingdom under Christ. They, too, must be 'taller' than others of the human family respecting their development as 'New Creatures' in Christ Jesus, rising above the fallen tendencies of mankind. They must also be "little" (Matt. 18:3) in their own sight, humble and obedient to the will of God, realizing their unworthiness of such a High Calling in Christ Jesus. The children of Israel had chosen to reject the special relationship they had enjoyed under judges to assume a new role as a member among the nations of the world. This new rulership would bring about a dramatic change.

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The Challenge of Choosing

Key Verse: “*The LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.*”
—*I Samuel 16:7*

Selected Scripture:
I Samuel 16:11-13

SAMUEL WAS THE LAST of Israel’s judges. We witnessed Saul’s selection by God as the nation’s first king and foresaw the danger that the new king and his people faced. He feared that they would neglect the God of Israel who had directed their affairs in the past, and that this change would not solve their problems.

Saul had certain qualifications that suited him well for the task that lay before him. He provided unity among the tribes of Israel as well as good leadership for his people. He had, however, lost God’s favor because of disobedience, and therefore God announced to Samuel that he would choose a new king to replace him.

Samuel was hesitant to carry out God’s will in the matter because of his compassion for Saul, but he was sent to Bethlehem to choose the new king, and to anoint him. “The Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons.”—*I Sam. 16:1*

In fulfillment of God’s direction Samuel went to Bethlehem as directed, and was met by the elders of the city who were fearful for his reason in coming to them. He assured them, however, that he had come in peace and was there to sanctify Jesse and his sons. One by one each of seven of Jesse’s sons, beginning with the eldest, were brought to Samuel for approval, and as each one was brought to him he proclaimed that the Lord had not chosen him. When Jesse was asked if there were any other sons, he said there was one tending the sheep.

David, the youngest son, then appeared before Samuel. “He was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward.”—I Sam. 16:12,13

David was God’s choice above each of his seven brothers, a very definite and positive approval, but his anointing gave him no immediate authority of kingship until that authority was removed from King Saul’s hands by Divine providence. This first anointing of David was to indicate to his brethren that he was God’s anointed; his official anointing would not take place until Saul was deposed. Meanwhile, he was fitted and prepared by the mighty hand of God for this position.

David’s reign over Israel prefigured Christ, head and body, selected and prepared during the Gospel Age for a place in that future kingdom. Characteristics God sought in David are also desired in those of the present calling. God does not look at the outward appearance, but seeks those possessing the Holy Spirit, a humble disposition, and a pure heart.

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The Challenge of Loss

***Key Verse: “The
beauty of Israel is
slain upon thy high
places: how are the
mighty fallen!”
—II Samuel 1:19***

***Selected Scripture:
II Samuel 1:17-27***

THE PREVIOUS LESSON disclosed God’s selection of David, the youngest of Jesse’s sons, to be the new king of Israel. He was to replace Saul, who had been disobedient to God’s laws, and Samuel had anointed David with Divine approval. David did not, however, become king immediately, but waited humbly for God’s providence to be manifest in the matter.

In this lesson Divine direction is clearly seen in the final removal of Saul as king of Israel, making way for David the new king to assume authority over his people. The Selected Scripture texts record the death of Saul, together with his sons Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua, by the Philistines who were warring against the children of Israel.

David was unaware that Saul and his sons had been killed in battle. He learned of the tragedy while in Ziklag, which was a considerable distance from the event. This is an important detail, as David was too far away to be implicated in Saul’s death. Although he had been anointed by Samuel to replace Saul, he neither sought nor desired to be Israel’s king, nor did he seek the king’s death. He displayed a humble disposition and attitude while waiting upon God to reveal his eternal purpose. Rather than being relieved that his way to Israel’s throne was now made clear, David was seized with overwhelming grief. He tore his clothes, mourned, wept, and fasted—and his men did likewise.

He was surprised to discover that the man who reported the events was an Amalekite who fought for Israel in the battle with the Philistines. David learned that this was the very man who had killed Saul, at the king’s own request, after his unsuccessful attempt to take his own life rather than risk capture and humiliation by the enemy. He spoke directly to the man, saying, “How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the Lord’s anointed? And David called one of the young men, and said, Go near, and fall upon him. And he smote him that he died.”

And David said, “Thy blood be upon thy head; for thy mouth hath testified against thee, saying, I have slain the Lord’s anointed.” (II Sam. 1:14-16) The death of Israel’s king was avenged.

David mourned the loss of the king, and was not shy to openly express his grief, nor did he attempt to hide it. His personal relationship with Saul, who was also his father-in-law, had been extremely difficult at times, but he had truly loved and respected him. He was also profoundly grieved over the loss of his beloved friend and confidant, Jonathan. He spoke tenderly of his deep love for both Saul and Jonathan, as well as their love for each other.

David’s grief over Saul and Jonathan is one of the most touching events in the Word of God, and indicates the tender heart condition of the one whom God had selected to rule over the children of Israel. The loss of Saul was a challenging event, but shows God’s providence in the affairs of his typical people.

It was necessary that Saul’s reign over Israel should end. After disobeying God, the Scriptures say, “the Lord repented that he had made Saul king over Israel.”(I Sam. 15:35) Those who oppose God must cease to exist.

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The Challenge of Leadership

***Key Verse: “Also in time past, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and the LORD said to thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel.”
—II Samuel 5:2***

***Selected Scriptures:
II Samuel 2:1-7; 5:1-5***

DRAMATIC EVENTS continue to unfold in this series of Bible lessons. For instance, Israel’s political landscape had changed greatly, which proved to be a challenge to those responsible for its leadership. Prior to Saul’s reign as first King of Israel, God had been governing his people, and Samuel was the last judge. Therefore, Saul was chosen by God to be Israel’s first king. Because of Saul’s unfaithfulness, David was selected to replace him to reign over the people of Israel.

At the time of Saul’s death, David was unsure what he should do next. He had been waiting on God to give him an indication of his will, and was now seeking further Divine guidance. We read, “It came to pass after this, that David enquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the Lord said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And he said, Unto Hebron.” (II Sam. 2:1) Having so clearly received God’s will in the matter, David and his wives, and his men and their households, proceeded to go up to the city of Hebron.

David had been especially selected out from the other sons of Jesse, and had been anointed by Samuel many years earlier. (I Sam. 16:13) The anointing he received was that of God’s Holy Spirit. His prospect of ever being officially anointed as a king remained in God’s further plans. What took place in the city of Hebron was not an anointing as king over all the tribes of Israel, but only as king over the tribe of Judah. This was another evidence of God’s will in the life of David, who was a type of our Lord Jesus, who was also anointed by God many centuries later. “The men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.

And they told David, saying, That the men of Jabesh-Gilead were they that buried Saul.”—II Sam. 2:4

David enjoyed respect among his own countrymen, and he also knew that the Lord was directing his affairs. The anointing oil had been poured out upon him by Samuel, yet during the intervening years he did not attempt to grasp the things given to him by promise. He had waited a long time and was willing to continue to wait upon the Lord. He recognized God’s direction in his life, for surely he was a man after God’s own heart.

There is a spiritual lesson to be noted in the life of our Lord, the antitypical David, who later became king over all Israel. Jesus, the Son of God, never considered the kingdom honors something to be grasped or usurped. Jesus waited upon God’s providence in humble and strict obedience. He, too, was directed by the Spirit of God in progressive steps, receiving the Holy Spirit at Jordan when he was immersed in those waters by John the Baptist, and later rode into Jerusalem as Israel’s king. But they rejected him. Our Lord will surely become the greater David exercising Divine leadership over the affairs of men, ruling as their rightful king.

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The Challenge of God's Promise

Key Verse: *“Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.”*
—II Samuel 7:16

Selected Scripture:
II Samuel 7:1-13, 16

GOD'S PROMISE TO KING David, in the Key Verse, is a prophecy of God's kingdom. Israel's religious life was symbolic of the grand features of the Church's call during the Gospel Age, and King David represents our Lord Jesus in his still more grand role of king over the whole world of mankind during his future millennial kingdom.

The everlasting kingdom will not come to pass with David as Israel's king, but with the rule of our Lord Jesus together with his faithful bride class of 144,000

members, who will have been found faithful to their calling. (Rev. 14:3) Our text points forward in time, and serves as God's everlasting assurance, as given to David in type, that Christ's thousand-year kingdom will truly become a reality in due time.

Historically the Israelites prospered under King David's leadership, and they enjoyed a period of abundant prosperity and security that they had not experienced at any other time in their history. Enemies had been defeated, and the Jews were finally able to permanently settle in the land which had been given to them by God. David had now become king over all of the tribes of Israel, and the Ark of the Covenant was in its rightful place in Jerusalem.

David realized that Israel's God was dwelling in a tent, while he and his family were living in a magnificent house. Taking matters into his own hands, he decided to do something about it. He wanted to build a beautiful house of cedar for the Lord. However, it was not up to him to decide matters of such importance. He did not know God's plans and intentions. God was quietly building a house of his own, and did not need David to build one for him. God's time had not yet come for the building of a temple in which to house the Ark of the Covenant. And, it would never be realized during David's reign as king. That task would be

accomplished during the reign of his son, Solomon, his successor to the throne of Israel.

Although David was granted permission to prepare the way for the building of the Temple by gathering and preparing the materials needed, he would not be permitted to do the actual construction work. His son, Solomon, was to be granted that blessed privilege.

There was to be a grander fulfillment in God's eternal design that David could not comprehend. Both he and his son, Solomon, are seen merely as Old Testament types in God's everlasting purpose. This purpose is revealed in the words of God contained in his promise to David. He said: "When thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. ... And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever." (II Sam. 7:12,13,16) This wonderful promise from God surely points to the role of his blessed Son, our Lord Jesus, the greater David, who will establish his kingdom of righteousness and reign over all the families of the earth.

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Entering into Rest

CHAPTER 4

VERSE 1 “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.”

The closing verses of Chapter 3 present the example of Israel’s failure to enter into the rest which could have been enjoyed at that time, and reminds us that the failure to do so was due to unbelief. It is this example that the apostle builds on when he writes, ‘Let us therefore fear.’ The fear referred to is not that of terror, or dread. The apostle writes that God has not given us the spirit of fear.—II Tim. 1:7

The ‘fear’ we should have, lest we come short of any promise which the Lord has given to us of entering into his rest, is that of watchfulness, or alertness, to make sure that in no way we are unfaithful to the Lord’s requirements. When the apostle speaks of coming short of ‘a promise,’ the thought is, failure to meet its conditions, for all his promises to those who are partakers of the heavenly calling are conditional upon faithfulness in doing God’s will.

Lack of faith, or unbelief, is one of the greatest contributing factors of failure. As Christians, we should be alert to avoid this pitfall. Likewise, failure to be watchful results in the weakening of faith. The blinding, paralyzing influence of unbelief caused the Israelites to fail. Noting this, we should endeavor to maintain a lively appreciation of the dangers involved in our own case, the danger of becoming overcharged with the cares of this life, or of permitting some earthborn cloud to dim our spiritual vision so that we fail to ‘enter in.’

The promise of a heavenly inheritance is so precious that nothing should prevent us from attaining it! We should prepare for it by feeding on the heavenly manna provided by the Lord, and by drinking an abundance of the water of truth from the ‘smitten rock,’ Christ Jesus. This promise is for all the consecrated. However, only those will attain who are strong in faith, like Caleb and Joshua, and who preserve their confidence through fellowship and prayer.

VERSE 2 “For unto us was the Gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.”

The word Gospel means ‘good news.’ We are accustomed to thinking of it as applying primarily to the “Gospel of Christ: ... the power of God unto salvation.” (Rom. 1:16) Paul tells us that “God ... preached before the Gospel unto Abraham.” (Gal. 3:8) In this case it was the good news that through the patriarch’s seed all the families of the earth would be blessed.

In this second verse of the chapter, Paul uses the word ‘Gospel’ to describe the good news that the Israelites would enter into their inheritance in the Promised Land. To them this meant rest from the hardships of the wilderness—the desert heat, living in tents, and other difficulties. Instead they entered into a land of beautiful hills and valleys, where there were abundant springs of living water, cool and refreshing, and an ample amount of food. This was the highest rest the Israelites, with their natural minds, could imagine. See Deuteronomy 8:7-9; 11:10-12.

This good news to Israel was, as the apostle indicates, a type of the Gospel which has been preached to us—spiritual Israel. Our ultimate rest will be enjoyed in a heavenly Canaan. The typical Israelites were not profited by the message preached to them, but this should not be so with us. We should be doers of the Word as well as hearers.

VERSES 3,4 “For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works.”

There is a rest which the people of God who are strong in faith may enjoy even before they enter into the rest ‘that remaineth.’ In this case the rest is in proportion to our measure of faith.

What is this rest? The apostle explains that it is like the rest which God entered into when the original work of Creation was finished. We are not to suppose that God was then physically tired and that he ceased all activity until he became rested. On this point the Prophet Isaiah wrote, “Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God,

the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?"—Isa. 40:28

God pronounced his creative work 'very good,' but he knew that man had to be tested, and that in this test he would fail and come under the sentence of death. God permitted this in order that the human race might experience evil and learn the terrible results of disobedience to his laws. The benefit of this experience, however, could only be gained by restoring man to life, and this could not be done unless a Redeemer was provided to give his life in place of the forfeited life of Adam. This entire work of dealing with and blessing the fallen race through redemption and restoration was placed in the hands of the *Logos*, who became Christ.

VERSES 5-8 "And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. For if Jesus [Joshua] had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day."

In these verses it is clearly shown that in the Divine plan a fixed number had been determined who would prove their fidelity to God by their complete faith and confidence in him—a faith so strong that they would be able to devote their all to him and rest completely in the belief that he would cause all things to work together for their good.

The Israelites who came out of Egypt failed in this test. David refers to this in Psalm 95:7,8. Paul quotes this scripture and indicates that when the psalmist used the expression 'To day' he was speaking prophetically of the present Gospel Age. But now our faith is being tested, and it behooves us to be on the alert, to 'fear' lest our hearts become hardened, and the opportunity of the heavenly calling be taken from us and given to others. The opportunities of this present Gospel Age are limited, says the apostle. We know that it will soon be over, so let us be diligent, for the "time is short."—I Cor. 7:29

Speaking from the standpoint of the typical Sabbath, and prophetically of the 'rest of faith' enjoyed by spiritual Israel, the Prophet Isaiah writes of how we may delight ourselves in the Lord, and that he will feed us "with the heritage of Jacob." (Isa. 58:13,14) Jacob gave up all his earthly

possessions, but gained instead sweet communion with the Lord, and a reaffirmation of the covenant made with Abraham and Isaac.

During the present Gospel Age we experience a foretaste of the rest that ‘remaineth,’ that perfect rest beyond the veil. We should learn to cast all our care upon the Lord, knowing that he doeth all things well. (I Pet. 5:7) Thus the burden is lifted from our own hearts and we are free to think and to enjoy sweet fellowship with our Heavenly Father and with our Lord Jesus—by faith to eat of the luscious ‘fruit’ of the ‘land of promise,’ and to drink the new wine of the kingdom. What a wonderful peace and rest results from such a full confidence in, and fellowship with, the Lord.

VERSES 9-11 “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.”

‘There remaineth ... a rest’ (verse 9) and ‘let us labour ... to enter into that rest’ (verse 11)—these two statements obviously refer to our heavenly rest, beyond the veil. And in the tenth verse, somewhat as a parenthesis, Paul speaks of our present rest of faith which, having entered, we have even now ceased from our own works as God did from his. Entering into the rest that ‘remaineth’ is dependent upon our having entered into the present rest of faith.

VERSE 12 “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

God spoke to typical Israel through Moses, Joshua, and others. Their faith was tested by the measure of their obedience to the Word of the Lord imparted to them. He speaks to us through his entire Word, and our faith is likewise tested upon the basis of our zeal in doing these things.

The Word of God is a most penetrating searchlight, as it were. It searches out even the motives behind our thoughts, as illustrated by the dividing asunder of ‘soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow.’ Nothing can be hidden from such a searching influence. Let us endeavor to keep our hearts pure, that thus our spiritual vision may be clear and our faith strong.

VERSE 13 “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”

God’s Word penetrates our innermost consciences and reveals what we are to ourselves, enabling us to compare it with what we should be. Meanwhile the Lord is also looking into our hearts and appraising the progress we are making in bringing our every thought into captivity to his will.

VERSES 14,15 “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”

When we realize that the thoughts and intents of our hearts are not right before God, we can be assured that a loving provision has been made to extend mercy to us through our great High Priest. Because we do have such a High Priest, one who is able, because of his own experiences, to deal with us sympathetically, we can with confidence, continue to ‘hold fast our profession.’ We have professed to accept Christ as our Redeemer and Savior, and to have covenanted to walk in his steps of self-sacrifice. We have professed to believe the promises of God relating to the ‘heavenly calling.’ We have undertaken to conform ourselves to all the conditions attached to those promises. But when we think of self with all its weaknesses we would lose courage and begin to ‘let these things slip,’ were it not for the knowledge that we have a sympathetic High Priest who understands when we fail. Because of this, we can with confidence ‘hold fast our profession’ in the firm belief that we will ultimately attain our goal which is Christ.

Our High Priest was tempted in all points like as we are, says the apostle; that is, he was tempted as a New Creature in the way we as New Creatures are tempted. He is our great burden bearer. He understands how great are our struggles, and what an effort it is to keep God’s will continually uppermost in our hearts and minds. He understands why we fail so often, and lack so much in those qualities of righteousness with which the Lord is pleased to see us adorned. His merit is ready for our

asking, and it makes up for our defects as long as the intentions of our hearts are right.

VERSE 16 “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

God wants us to enter into his presence with confidence, not timidly as though we were fearful he would not recognize the merit of our High Priest, in whose name we approach the throne of grace. Our present rest of faith depends upon our exercising full confidence in this loving provision, and God wants us to enjoy full rest, peace, and joy.

‘The throne of grace’—what a beautiful and meaningful description of the Divine provision of mercy for those members of the sinful and dying race whom he has taken into his family as sons! It is illustrated by the Mercy Seat in the Most Holy of the typical Tabernacle, on which the blood of the Atonement Day sacrifices was sprinkled. The Mercy Seat represents Divine justice, while the two cherubim arising out of it and looking down upon it with outstretched wings, illustrate Divine love and power ready to bear the message of justice satisfied to the world.—I Kings 8:7

It is the merit of Christ that satisfies justice and provides the antitypical Mercy Seat—the throne of grace—for all those whom Jesus is not ashamed to call his brethren. (Heb. 2:11) Through the Word, Divine love and power have brought the assurance of mercy into our hearts, so we can come boldly into the presence of God, and feel at home as we stand before his throne of grace. Surely this should cause us to exult with joy and gladness as thus we realize the heights and depths of our Father’s love. We will gain strength to ‘hold fast.’ The Lord will lovingly hold our hand as he leads us in the way of righteousness.

The Mercy of God

***“The LORD is
merciful and
gracious, slow to
anger, and plenteous
in mercy.”
—Psalm 103:8***

IN A WORLD THAT IS so full of cruelty, injustice, hatred, vice, anger, greed, mercilessness, and selfishness, the people see so little of mercy, patience, and graciousness that it is hard for them to conceive the depth and meaning of these words. But we are glad that the Lord has reserved a day (an age) in which he will

make known to the children of men the depth of his mercy and compassion, and they shall see for themselves that the Lord is ‘gracious,’ bestowing unmerited favors continually upon them, and that he is also ‘plenteous in mercy,’ or better translated, ‘abundant in loving-kindness.’ In that day (age) the people will be lifted up and blessed, and have all their needs and desires satisfied above and beyond what their fondest dreams might have envisioned.

FULNESS OF JOY

We are not among those who must wait until the Millennial Age is ushered in with power and great glory to receive and enjoy the fullness of our Father’s love, mercy, and unmerited favors. We have already received favor upon favor, mercy upon mercy, and love beyond our thought. So rich and full is the loving-kindness bestowed upon us that the psalmist, speaking for us, said, “Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.” (Ps. 63:3) There may be measures of joy that men experience in this life, but it is only in the Lord’s presence that there is “fulness of joy” (Ps. 16:11), and only such as are living in covenant relationship with the Lord at the present time can have this ‘fulness of joy.’—Ps. 50:5

In Psalm 103:9 we are told, in effect, that none must presume upon God’s love and mercy, and trample upon his laws; for, although slow to anger and plenteous in mercy, “he will not always chide [contend with the wayward]: neither will he keep [that is, retain or hold back] his anger for ever.” The point where God’s mercy and grace cease to operate is

when there is deliberate and willful opposition to his good and perfect laws. This is a stern reminder that the purpose of God's grace is not that we may continue in sin that his grace might abound, but that the grace is extended in order for us to improve our condition, and endeavor to regain the godlikeness of man's original creation.

NEED FOR FORGIVENESS

While we are still in the flesh, we continue to commit sins. The Apostle John wrote, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (I John 1:8) Hence we need to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." (Matt. 6:12) Sometimes our sins are partially willful, or due to great carelessness or obtuseness on our own part. For such sin the Lord sends chastisements to correct and punish us. We even may have secret or hidden faults which we do not realize. Accordingly, we need to petition, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults." (Ps. 19:12) But how glad we should be that the Lord "hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities."—Ps. 103:10

Oftentimes, when a person has occasion to exercise mercy and forgiveness toward others, he finds it extremely difficult. Perhaps he does it reluctantly, with a measure of ill feeling left in his heart. This is especially true when he is called upon to exercise mercy and forgiveness the second and third time. It becomes increasingly difficult as the offenses continue, because the mercy and forgiveness extended each time had been accompanied with a measure of resentment, and soon there accumulates a backlog of harbored ill feeling which revolts at the thought of extending further mercy and forgiveness.

This point is demonstrated by Peter's query of the Lord, "How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" (Matt. 18:21) Probably to Peter's mind he would be displaying a generous degree of forgiveness when he allowed seven offenses to pass. Yet, from the Master's answer we readily see the difference between the fallen human heart and the perfect Divine heart. "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven."—Matt. 18:22

It is because men realize the hardness of the human heart that the expression, "To err is human; to forgive Divine," has found general usage. They know that misdeeds are almost unavoidable, but still they

recognize that the fallen heart is not capable of extending much mercy, and hence must look to a loving God for forgiveness.

DIVINE FORGIVENESS

When the psalmist endeavors to tell us the extent of God's mercy, he seemingly cannot find the adjective to describe it, and resorts to a comparison to convey to our minds its limitlessness! "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him." (Ps. 103:11) When he speaks of the Divine forgiveness he again makes a comparison, saying, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him."—vss. 12,13

From this we can see that each time the Lord extends mercy and forgiveness he does so completely, and does not hold any prejudice or resentment to hinder him from continuing to do so. If we could comprehend the height of the heavens, and the expanse of the universe, we would be more adequately prepared to grasp the extent of God's mercy. Likewise, when the Lord forgives, he does not do so begrudgingly, while harboring a measure of animosity. If there were any accumulation of resentment, it would be difficult to continue such limitless mercy and forgiveness—"until seventy times seven." As the poet has said, "The heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind." How our hearts should overflow with praise and adoration for such a compassionate God!

THE FRAILTY OF MAN

There is an intimacy and tenderness in God's dealings which make them comparable to the interest, compassion, and care that a good earthly father has for his children. His pity and understanding are so great, that even when our own hearts condemn us we may still go to the throne of grace for comfort; for, as the apostle says, "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." (I John 3:20) The Lord can make allowances where perhaps we cannot, because he knows better than we the weakness and frailty of our nature. "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust."—Ps. 103:14

Looking at man from the perspective viewpoint, David declares, "As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.

For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.” (Ps. 103:15,16) Man with his machines is no champion over time and the tireless grim reaper, Death. Despite what Dark Age theology and philosophy might have to say about man living on in a hereafter of bliss or torment, David maintains that man is like the flower which flourishes for a season and then withers and ‘is gone,’ or, as the *Marginal Translation* states it, “is not.” What could be a more graphic description of nonexistence, or death, than the simple words, ‘is not’?

In that men must die, some inquire, What comfort is there in the fact that “the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them”? (Ps. 103:17,18) Both the faithful and the wicked of all ages and generations have died. Can one who ‘is not,’ who is dead, appreciate mercy or righteousness? Surely not! Unless we understand God’s plan as it has been operating through the ages, David’s words offer little comfort.

GOD’S TOMORROW

Indeed, God is not extending his mercies to the dead while they are dead, nor is he a God of the dead. In Matthew 22:32 we read, “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” Jesus spoke of these patriarchs as ‘living,’ because a resurrection of the dead is to take place, and in view of this, God, “who quickeneth the dead,” is speaking of “those things which be not as though they were.”—Rom. 4:17

In the time of the regeneration, God’s mercy and righteousness will be extended to the whole world of mankind, not directly, but “by that man whom he hath ordained” to judge the world in righteousness. (Acts 17:31) So blessed and satisfying will be the conditions in God’s tomorrow that the people will be heard saying, “Lo, this is our God; ... we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”—Isa. 25:9

With the faithful of this Gospel Age, the Lord does extend his loving-kindness and tender mercy to a degree which the world cannot appreciate. Because outwardly the faithful seem to be no better off than the wicked, and perhaps less so, many have concluded that “it is vain to serve God.”

(Mal. 3:14) Shortly the real truth of the matter will come to light, and as the Prophet Malachi further declares, “Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.” (Mal. 3:18) For “then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” (Matt. 13:43) It is for these that “the Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens,” and they shall be kings and priests in the kingdom which “ruleth over all.”—Ps. 103:19

What shall we say to these things, dear brethren, elect and precious? David exhorts: “Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his Word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the Lord, O my soul.”—Ps. 103:20-22

Dawn Bible Students Association

Healing the Lame Man

IN THE TIME IMMEDIATELY after Pentecost, the activities of the Early Church are described thus: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the Temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”—Acts 2:42-47, *New International Version*

To gather those in the proper heart condition into the church, many wonders and miracles were performed by the apostles. The Scriptures do not always indicate what those miracles were, but we can surmise that they were similar to what our Lord performed during his First Advent.

COMMUNAL ARRANGEMENT

The prejudice against and persecution of the Early Church, made it necessary for them to pool their resources in order to survive. All believers sold their possessions, giving to anyone as he had need. They understood the concept of Divine love for one another—and demonstrated that love in very tangible ways.—I John 3:16

The Scriptures tell us the brethren had unity in attitude of heart and mind, and understanding of spiritual things. They met daily in the Temple, preaching the truth; and in their individual homes by night, breaking bread and praising God. They were active not only in witnessing and proclaiming the truth, but also in meeting together to build one another up.—Heb. 10:25

Eventually, the Heavenly Father brought this communal arrangement to an end, and allowed the brethren to be scattered so the Gospel message would spread to all nations. Nevertheless, the zeal and spirit of these brethren are great examples for us to follow. The psalmist captures the attitude and spirit of these brethren when he says, “O give thanks unto

the Lord; call upon his name: make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works. Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord. Seek the Lord, and his strength: seek his face evermore.”—Ps. 105:1-4

VISIT TO THE TEMPLE

Peter and John, in their zeal for service, went up to the Temple at the hour of prayer, hoping and expecting to find some opportunity there for testifying to the truth. Likewise, we should have this same zeal for the Lord to spread the Gospel message. Our responsibility to preach the Gospel at every opportunity is brought to our attention by the Apostle Paul in II Timothy 4:2: “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season.” (*NIV*) We should always be ready to give an answer for the hope that is within us. (I Pet. 3:15) In Peter’s and John’s cases, they went to the Temple looking for an opportunity. When that opportunity appeared, they took advantage of it.

We, too, should be on the lookout for opportunities to proclaim the message of truth. In our everyday contact with people there are conversations which we can turn into witnessing opportunities. There are enough troubles and difficulties in the world to enable us to present a gem of truth about Christ’s coming kingdom.

Opportunities frequently occur ‘out of season’ for us, at a time when we are trying to get something else accomplished. We might say, “This is not really a good time.” But if the Lord chooses that time, we should do our best to take advantage of it. The Lord arranges these opportunities to see how much we love the truth. He is interested in knowing if we love the truth enough to drop our plans and serve him.

THE LAME MAN

As they were about to enter the Temple, Peter and John met a man who had been crippled from birth. Every day this man was carried to the Temple gate called “Beautiful,” (Acts 3:2) where he begged from those going into the Temple courts. Since the apostles frequently went to the Temple, usually through the ‘Beautiful Gate,’ and the lame beggar was at that gate every day asking for alms, he had probably seen Peter and John before.

The Scriptures do not tell us if the beggar had heard of the Pentecostal wonders which had converted several thousand and knew that Peter and John were associated with that movement. It is possible, and if so, it might account for his readiness of faith, by which he accepted the apostle's words and hand, and was healed. However, when they first met, the lame man was not looking to be healed. He looked to Peter and John for a few coins—something on which to sustain his meager existence. What he received was so much more!

BEGGAR REPRESENTS THE HUMAN FAMILY

This lame man pictures the human family, lame and unable to walk in God's path due to the inheritance of sin and death. The Apostle Paul describes their inability to do God's will and walk in his paths. "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."—Rom. 3:10-12, *NIV*

The lame man was hoping for an improved life, as the Apostle Paul writes: "The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."—Rom. 8:19-22, *NIV*

The whole creation, the entire world of mankind, is waiting for their liberation from the effects of sin and death. Lame and blind, they are without hope and without God in the world. (Eph. 2:12,13) They are unhappy; they are dissatisfied—searching for happiness and peace but not finding it. We can look around us today and see that no one is finding peace and satisfaction, hope and fulfillment. They are not finding it in their churches, in their political movements, in their financial affairs, in their social organizations, nor in any of the passions they pursue. And the longer things go on, the more unhappy and dissatisfied people are becoming.

Our Lord Jesus prophetically described our day and this growing unhappiness and fear, saying, "On the earth, nations will be in anguish

and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”—Luke 21:25,26, *NIV*

THE HEALING OF THE LAME MAN

When Peter and John encountered the lame man, he asked for money and Peter responded to his request in a very different way: “‘Look at us. ... Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.’ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the Temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.”—Acts 3:4,6, *NIV*

When Peter responded, ‘Look at us,’ the lame man gave them his full and undivided attention, expecting to receive something from him. After commanding him to walk, Peter reached down, helped the lame man to his feet, and as the lame man cooperated with the apostle his feet and ankles were healed. But the lame man did not stop there! Once on his feet, he followed the apostles into the Temple, walking, jumping, and praising God.

HEALING PICTURES THE KINGDOM WORK

This experience points to the healing that will take place in Christ’s kingdom. The entire human family is ‘lame,’ waiting near the courts of God, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. The Christ, as represented by Peter and John, appeared—not with material wealth, not with gold or silver—but with the power of God secured by the sacrifice of Jesus.

The removal of the curse, and the opening of a path for mankind back into harmony with God is described by the Prophet Isaiah: “Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. ... And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it, it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it. No lion will be there; nor will any ferocious beast get up on it, they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter

Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.”—Isa. 35:5,6,8-10, *NIV*

This prophecy tells of both the physical and the spiritual healing of the human family that will take place in Christ’s kingdom. Their physical disabilities of blindness, deafness, lameness and an inability to speak will be cured—just as Peter healed the lame man, and our Lord healed the man born blind. (John 9:7) These physical afflictions are all part of the curse. When the blood of atonement is applied on behalf of the human family and the curse is lifted, these vestiges of the curse will also be lifted—demonstrating God’s power, wisdom, and love. It will be this demonstration that will soften man’s stony heart so that God’s laws can be written therein.

Mankind is also spiritually blind and deaf to the words of God. They are unable to speak of God’s Truth to one another, and sin prevents them following God’s instructions and walking in his paths. In Christ’s kingdom, God promises to heal these afflictions so that all may “call upon the name of the Lord, ... with one consent.”—Zeph. 3:9

THE KINGDOM HEALING

The kingdom arrangement and the new environment for the human family is also described by Isaiah: “The Lord has sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm [Christ]: ‘Never again will I give your [Jerusalem’s] grain as food for your enemies, and never again will foreigners drink the new wine for which you have toiled; but those who harvest it will eat it and praise the Lord, and those who gather the grapes will drink it in the courts of my sanctuary.’ Pass through, pass through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway! Remove the stones. Raise a banner for the nations.”—Isa. 62:8-10, *NIV*

The oppression of the weak will come to an end in Christ’s kingdom. Israel will no longer be trodden down by her enemies. Instead, those who harvest grain and those who gather grapes will eat the fruit of their labors and praise the Lord. This statement will have a literal fulfillment—no man will build and another inhabit; no man will plant and another eat. (Isa. 65:21-23) Selfishness will come to an end!

There is also a spiritual fulfillment to this statement. Those who harvest the Word of the Lord will partake of it—and praise the Lord.

Those who gather grapes will drink the new wine or doctrines of Truth in the courts of Jehovah's sanctuary. (Joel 3:18) In the kingdom, as each human being partakes of the Truth, absorbs the instructions in righteousness they receive from Zion [the church] and Jerusalem [the Ancient Worthies], they will be blessed, they will praise God and they will draw nigh to the courts of Jehovah's sanctuary. They will pass through the gates, into the Holy City, into the New Jerusalem and back into harmony with God.

It will be the responsibility of 'the church' to prepare a way for the people, or to 'cast up the highway.' That way will lead out of the prison-house of death and sin, and out of the degradation and darkness of this present world back to the Truth, the perfection of human life, and sonship with God. The 'stumbling stones' will all be gathered out; the mountains of difficulty shall be leveled, and valleys of despair and discouragement shall be filled up, that the King's highway may be most favorable.

HEALING PROCESS OF THE KINGDOM

Many other scriptures in the Old Testament describe the healing process of the kingdom, and the relationship between the church and the world of mankind. One is: "This is what the Lord says: 'In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances, to say to the captives, Come out, and to those in darkness, Be free! They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill. They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat upon them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water. I will turn all my mountains into roads, and my highways will be raised up.'"—Isa. 49:8-11, *NIV*

During the present Gospel Age God has helped the church. He has kept them and will make them a covenant for the people to restore the earth, to reassign the desolate inheritance, to release the captives from the prison-house of death and release those in the darkness—blindness—of this present evil world.

The church, as part of the Christ, will be used to mediate the New Covenant. Under that covenant, the Christ will provide food and water to the human family along the way of holiness—not literal food, but

spiritual food and water of God's Truth. As a result, no one will hunger for the Word of the Lord because the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the great deep. (Isa. 11:9) All shall know him from the least unto the greatest.—Jer. 31:34

MAN'S RESPONSE TO THE HEALING

The lame man healed by Peter and John was an 'Israelite indeed.' His response to his healing is indicative of how positively, how joyously, the human family will respond to their healing in Christ's kingdom. As it is written, "In that day they will say, 'Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.'"—Isa. 25:9, *NIV*

GOD'S LAW IN THEIR HEARTS

How does God write his Law in people's hearts, and yet not violate mankind's free moral agency? This heart transformation will be accomplished through the experiences he brings upon them. The great love of God for his human family as it is finally revealed through the establishment and functioning of Christ's kingdom will stir within the hearts of man a reciprocal love for their Heavenly Father. This is how it has worked in the lives of those being chosen today. They love God because he first loved them. (I John 4:19) When the world's blindness is removed and they both see God's goodness and are the beneficiaries of God's great love, it will stimulate their hearts to love him, and become obedient to his laws.

PETER'S SERMON

When the people in the Temple saw the lame man walking, they were amazed as to what had happened to him. While the lame man held onto Peter and John, the people ran up to them at the place called Solomon's porch and gave Peter the witnessing opportunity he was waiting for. Peter begins his lesson, saying:

"Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he [Pilate] had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to

you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see."—Acts 3:12-16, *NIV*

Strengthened by the Holy Spirit, Peter stood fearlessly before the men of Israel. He gave the glory to God and his Son, Jesus, for the miracle and then launched into the lesson on the resurrection of Jesus. Peter reminded the Jews of their fathers, and the promises of God they had inherited through the fathers. He went on to mention how their nation rejected the Messiah, desiring instead that a murderer be released to them. Although the Roman soldiers crucified Jesus, the Jews were actually responsible for his death. But God, by his mighty power, raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him above every name that is named. (Eph. 1:20-22; Phil. 2:9,10) It was by faith, Peter and John's faith in Jesus—his sacrifice and his resurrection—and the power of the Holy Spirit, that the lame man had been cured.

RESTITUTION

Peter did not stop there. He continued with the lesson: "Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets."—Acts 3:17-21, *NIV*

Peter explained that the death of Christ fulfilled what God had foretold through the prophets, namely that Christ would be rejected, suffer, and die. But through his death we might all gain life. He then offered them the invitation to sonship. This invitation was conditional. "If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."—Exod. 19:5,6, *NIV*

Peter invited them to repent and turn toward God—to be converted so that their sins might be blotted out. The same invitation has been

extended to us, and how thankful we are. We have repented, we have been converted, or turned, toward God, and we are endeavoring to walk in Jesus' footsteps, that we might be faithful until death and receive the crown of life—and thereby have our sins, not just covered, but wiped clean.

In a larger sense, the 'seasons of refreshment' refer to the blessings that will be poured upon the human family in Christ's kingdom. If we trace the Greek word translated 'refreshment' back to its original root, it means the recovery of breath [or life]. This is exactly what will be accomplished by Christ's kingdom. Mankind, if obedient, will recover their breath, the breath of life!

MILLENNIAL AGE

Peter pointed down the stream of time to when our Lord would return to set up his kingdom, and to actually restore all things which had been promised by the mouth of all God's holy prophets. Our Lord has returned and will accomplish that restoration—a restoration in which his objective is to wipe away every vestige of the reign of sin and death, and return the race to its original position of perfection, dominion, sonship and everlasting life. In that kingdom:

“He [God] will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And 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.”—Rev. 21:3,4

In that kingdom, “all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him. For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight.”—Ps. 72:11-14

How thankful we are that God has revealed these truths to our eyes. Indeed he has opened our hearts and minds to the beauty of his plan of salvation for the entire human family. In that kingdom, the Christ will call the human family from the prison-house of death, heal them of all their diseases and open their eyes to the glory of God and the beauty of his Son's kingdom. The human family will be restored to all that was lost.

What a great privilege will be ours, if faithful, to participate in this healing work.

The great promise of restitution and the opportunity to help in its fulfillment should stimulate our zeal and faithfulness in serving the Lord—that we might make our calling and election sure.

Dawn Bible Students Association

Unity and Diversity

UNITY AND DIVERSITY EXIST in the church of God. The two words express widely different thoughts.

1.) Oneness (or unity) in the church is called to our attention in the Psalms, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.”—Ps. 133:1

2.) Diversity approved likewise exists in the church, as mentioned by the Apostle Paul: “Now there are diversities of gifts.”—I Cor. 12:4

GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

The Apostle Paul, in commenting on this diversity, says: “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”—Rom. 12:6-8, *Revised Standard Version*

From this passage it is clear that diversity in the church is not related to the doctrines of the truth, nor the spirit of love in which those doctrines are held; but rather to the activities of the brethren. The maintenance of a unity of spirit and purpose where these diversities exist may in some instances be difficult. Paul realized this, so he exhorts us to manifest love in our cooperation with the brethren. We quote:

“Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality.

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly, never be conceited. Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of

God; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ No, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”—Rom. 12:9-21, *RSV*

ONENESS

The great importance of unity or oneness is also stressed by the Apostle Paul. He says, “Walk worthily of the calling with which you were called, with all humility and gentleness; with patience, sustaining each other in love; using diligence to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the uniting bond of peace; there being one body and one Spirit, as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one immersion; one God and Father of all, he who is over all, and through all, and in all.”—Eph. 4:1-6, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

The ‘body’ illustration of the manner in which the various members of the church are related to one another, as Paul uses it later in this chapter and in I Corinthians 12:12-27, reveals clearly both the unity and the diversity which exist among the Lord’s people. In this illustration Jesus is the Head. The head is the controlling power in the human body, and all the members of the body serve one another in obedience to the head. So it is with Jesus and the church, which is his body.

Our identification and oneness with Christ should be our constant meditation. We should endeavor to yield ourselves in humble obedience to him, allowing his mind to control us. We should hold firmly to our Head, as Paul admonishes, “from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.”—Col. 2:19

What a close and blessed relationship! This unity with Christ means that his love “constraineth us.” (II Cor. 5:14) The Greek word for ‘constrain’—*sunecho*—means ‘holds us together.’ There should be no schism or division in the body of Christ, and will not be when the members have a proper and loving care one for another. Paul wrote: “For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”—Rom. 12:4,5, *RSV*

True unity can exist in the body of Christ only in proportion to the degree of Christlikeness controlling each of its members. In Colossians

3:16, Paul admonishes us to let the word of Christ—his commands—dwell in us richly in all wisdom. We are also to note well the example of his life—his loving, compassionate heart, his humility, gentleness, patience, faithfulness, and his self-sacrificing spirit. We should note especially the loving zeal with which he always sought to know and do his Father’s will—“I delight to do thy will, O my God.”—Ps. 40:8

As with Jesus, so with his consecrated followers—the full testimony of God revealed by the Holy Spirit through the Word guides and instructs. To the extent that all are heeding these instructions there is sure to be unity, both of faith and of practice. The Scriptures clearly teach that the present mission of the church is the perfecting of the saints for the future work of service; to develop in herself every grace; to be God’s witnesses in the world; and to prepare to be kings and priests in the next age.

WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL

While there are diversities of opportunities for serving one another in the body of Christ, and for cooperatively proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom, all are to ‘speak the same thing.’ There cannot properly be diversities of doctrines. Paul wrote: “Faithful is God, by whom you were invited into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord. Now I entreat you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye may be knit together in the same mind and in the same sentiment.”—I Cor. 1:9,10, *WED*

Writing to the church at Philippi from his prison home in Rome, Paul urged the brethren to stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together [vigorously cooperating] for the faith of the Gospel. He exhorted them further to noble conduct and dauntless courage, saying:

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear omen to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict which you saw and now hear to be mine.”—Phil. 1:27-30, *RSV*

LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Jesus, and Paul, and others in the Early Church suffered because they faithfully bore witness to the truth. As members of the one body we should be responsive to the will of the Head, who declared of his body members that they were to be the “light of the world.” (Matt. 5:14) Concerning this end of the age, Jesus said that “this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” (Matt. 24:14) Through the vigorous cooperation of the body members everywhere, and Bible Society activity, the Master’s prophecy is now being fulfilled. And how we praise the Lord for the diversified methods and opportunities which are now ours for the proclamation of his glorious Gospel.

In his infinite wisdom, the Lord is still graciously and lovingly permitting the true Gospel to be preached in all the world—for a testimony. But for how long? The period yet allowed in the Divine plan for this work to continue may be very short: we do not know. What we do know is that as long as we have breath we should remember our beloved Master’s words, ‘Ye are the light of the world.’

Thus, while giving ‘all diligence’ to make our calling and election sure, let us be mindful of our privileges of serving the fellow members in the body of Christ. And as Paul also wrote, let us “do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the Word of life.”—Phil. 2:14-16

Diversities of activities, yet a oneness with Christ, who said, “Without me ye can do nothing.” (John 15:5) A variety of operations, but one loving motive engendered by the Holy Spirit. Differing labors of love, yet with one mind and with one mouth glorifying God. This is indeed the ‘good fight of faith.’ And how encouraging it is to realize that Jesus was in the forefront of this battle, that he has shown us the way. As he was faithful in all things, including his activity in bearing witness to the truth, let us also be faithful—even unto death—and our Heavenly Father will give the increase according to the riches of his grace.

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