

A New Administration

DURING THE PAST year 2000, and earlier, the United States of America was involved in preparatory efforts for a presidential election. Much time, energy, and financial resources were expended in an effort to secure new leadership for the nation. People always have great expectations of a new administration. They hope that it will bring prosperity, joy, and peace to all of its citizens.

ELECTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

How is a new administration selected? Do the people of the United States of America get to know who the best man for the task might be and then select him? Most would like to think so. In order to really know a person nominated for the highest office of the country requires much advertising. Only two major political parties in the United States of America have the financial means for supplying such advertising and although other parties nominate candidates, these are usually at a disadvantage because they lack the means for getting the public to know their nominee. Thus the presidential race became one between the Democratic party nominee, Vice President Albert Gore, and Republican party nominee, Texas Governor George W. Bush. The election was the closest ever witnessed. It took a month after the ballots were cast to determine who had won the election. The electoral votes of the State of Florida became the key factor of the election, and an attempted recount of the votes became a much-disputed issue.

The “*Economist*,” a national publication, in its December 16 issue, published an article after the election was finally decided in favor of George W. Bush. This article entitled, “*The Accidental President*,” began by saying, “Seldom has so much power been awarded to one man by such a narrow margin—and with quite so many Supreme Court justices at each other’s throats. Al Gore’s gracious concession, more than a month after the actual election, means that George W. Bush will finally be America’s next president. But Mr. Bush steps up to the victor’s podium a shadow even of the fortunate figure who first appeared to have sneaked to victory on election night. His presidency begins on an

accidental, even damaged, note. Can he recover from such a terrible start?”

The article continued, mentioning that America had greeted the final decision with relief more than with joy (on the part of some), and dismay (on the part of others). It described the actions that had been taken by both candidates in filing lawsuits in three courts: a Florida State Court, the Florida Supreme Court, and the U.S. Supreme Court. The actions taken by the justices of these courts will be the subject matter of many media articles of the future. Nevertheless, George W. Bush was declared the winner and was inaugurated as the forty-third President of the United States of America on January 20, 2001.

THE BIBLICAL NEW ADMINISTRATION

Our interest, as students of the Bible, however, is in the new administration spoken of in God’s Word. It, too, requires an election process that is mentioned by the Apostle Peter where he says, “Give diligence to make your calling and election sure.” (II Pet. 1:10) This election, or more accurately stated as the ‘selection’ by God, is found applied to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, “Israel mine elect.” (Isa. 45:4) Since natural Israel is a type of spiritual Israel, this election applies to spiritual Israel, or the bride of Christ called during the present Gospel Age. The prophet also points to the Messiah saying, “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.”—Isa. 42:1

In the New Testament we find reference to this election such as, “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;” (Col. 3:12) and “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect?” (Rom. 8:33) These are being selected by God to be “partakers of the heavenly calling.” (Heb. 3:1) They are “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” (I Pet. 1:2) It is God who will complete the election process when, through Jesus, God will “send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.”—Mark 13:27

Thus will the work of election in the two harvests—the one closing the Jewish Age, and the other closing the Gospel Age—be concluded. The

work of the new administration, which is the blessing of all the families of the earth, has been described as occurring when “the Sun of righteousness [representing Christ]” shall “arise with healing in his wings.” (Mal. 4:2) It will bring joy, peace, and everlasting life to all who wish to live obediently on a restored, perfect earth. Truly God’s ways are higher than man’s, and God’s plans above man’s. All will be accomplished through his administration, and carried out by means of his wonderful love, mercy, justice, wisdom, and power on behalf of the human family.

MEANING OF ADMINISTRATION

The dictionary definition of the word administration is ‘the act or process of administering, performance of executive duties, the execution of public affairs, a body of persons who administer.’ Administer is defined as ‘to manage or supervise; mete out or dispense; to minister; to manage or execute.’ We learn how to do this in our Christian walk.

This new administration requires that the administrators be properly prepared for their work. These are not to be “conformed to this world,” but are described as being “transformed by the renewing of” their “mind, that” they “may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”—Rom 12:2

We are to love the Heavenly Father with all of our heart and are, therefore, interested in the Biblical definition of administration and administrators. The word administration occurs in II Corinthians 9:12, and I Corinthians 12:5, and is translated from the Greek word *diakonia* which means ‘ministry.’ A companion word administer in II Corinthians 8:19,20 is from the verb *diakoneo* which means ‘to minister.’ The English word deacon is derived from this Greek word having to do with ministering, or one who serves. Jesus used this word in giving a lesson on service to his disciples saying, “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.”—Mark 10:45

MANY ADMINISTRATIONS

In I Corinthians 12:5, the Apostle Paul says, “There are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.” There are indeed varieties of services, and God is directing all. Paul implies that each one of us has something to offer, a talent to give to the Lord and to be used in his

service. As we give of ourselves, it is for the purpose of building up the members in the body of Christ. When we do this we honor our Father in heaven. In training for their part in this administration work, the various members of the body must cooperate with each other, offsetting and compensating for each other's imperfections, shortcomings, and weaknesses. We learn to do this by becoming involved with Jesus. Jesus invites us to "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; ... For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matt. 11:29,30) In this union we learn about fellowship in the body of Christ and how to be interested in the other body members.

We are indeed yokefellows together with Christ. Paul tells us this in Philippians 4:3,4, "I entreat thee also, true yokefellow." He finishes his thought with, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." We should feel this same way, for all who are in the family of Christ are bound together in the one bond of love and fellowship. This will help us to have confidence, sympathy, harmony, and common interest with our brethren. This is the same training the world of mankind will receive during God's kingdom. All will then give glory, praise, and honor to the Father under his new administration.

FINANCING THE ELECTION PROCESS

In the election process in the world, as preparation for a new administration, wealth is required to fund a campaign. Advertising is required to make known the qualifications of the candidate. How different is God's election process in preparation for a new administration. Wealth can be a hindrance, as Jesus said in Matthew 19:23.

Paul speaks of himself and his collaborators in the Gospel Age work as poor, yet making many rich. (II Cor. 6:10) These faithful servants of God made many rich in hope, faith, love, and all the various aspects of the graces of God which he abundantly supplies. "For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God." (II Cor. 9:12) The apostle says that the brethren in Jerusalem were glorifying God on account of "your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men."—vs. 13

NEED FOR SACRIFICE

Another part of our training involves sacrifice, or laying down our lives, in service to the cause of truth and righteousness. We look upon this as a privilege, but the world looks upon sacrificing differently. To some, sacrifice carries with it a sense of being a fanatic, and there have been many fanatic martyrs.

The follower of Jesus renders his sacrifice to God day-by-day, hour-by-hour, experience-by-experience, on a continuing basis with every opportunity that is given. We are to give our little all. Our sacrifices may be small, but they must be all-consuming and burning, until there is nothing more to be consumed, and we have reached the end of our earthly course.

The sacrificing and suffering is clearly outlined for us by the Apostle Paul when he said, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him." (II Tim. 2:12) We also are promised, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne." (Rev. 3:21) What a blessed privilege it is for these called ones to be granted a share in the heavenly realm, and be raised to glory, honor, and immortality. "God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."—II Cor. 9:8

This ministering and giving throughout our Christian walk, and desire to give our all, is stated by Paul to Timothy, "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all." (I Tim. 4:15) The first lesson in giving was of our hearts to the Lord, but this was only the beginning and leads to the giving of our all. We must achieve godliness, and Paul told Timothy, "Godliness with contentment is great gain." (I Tim. 6:6) It is a step on the Christian ladder that leads to *agape* love.—II Pet. 1:4-8

Such love must be developed with the assistance of the Holy Spirit—and cannot be a hypocritical love. It must be genuine, heartfelt, as well as expressed by service and word of mouth. The psalmist speaks for us when he says, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer." (Ps. 19:14) This love is toward God and toward all in proportion as they are godlike, or striving to be so. It is to be a love of all that is good, right, pure, and true.

Paul explains more about this love when he writes, “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.”—Eph. 3:17-19

MAKING KNOWN THE GLAD TIDINGS

Another aspect of our training for this service of the future is in the promotion of the good news of God’s kingdom. Paul, quoting from Isaiah 52:7, wrote, “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!”—Rom. 10:13-15

THE POWER OF JESUS

When the good news of the kingdom becomes a reality, these trainees will be used by God who has a plan and guarantees its success by miracle-working power. Jesus is the ruler in that plan, not elected by the people, but chosen by God. His enemies killed him when he was on earth, more than nineteen centuries ago, but Divine power raised him from the dead. After his resurrection Jesus announced to his disciples, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”—Matt. 28:18

By the use of this ‘all power’ Jesus will have no difficulty in establishing Divine control over the peoples of earth. Associated with him in that government will be his faithful followers who, throughout the Gospel Age, have suffered and died with him. They, too, are raised from the dead in what the Scriptures describe as the “first resurrection,” that they may share with Jesus in his Divine administration.—Rev. 20:5

These will be the invisible spiritual rulers in the new social order. They will have human representatives who will be the Ancient Worthies of past ages, of whom righteous Abel was the first, and John the Baptist the last. These also will be raised from the dead before the new kingdom is ready to function for the actual liberation of the people from their

bondage to sin and death. But the important consideration is that Divine, miracle-working power guarantees the success of God's plan for solving the present problems of the nations.

GOVERNED BY DIVINE WISDOM

All the associate rulers in the Lord's kingdom, or government, will be directly under the headship of Christ, and will be wholeheartedly in harmony with all the righteous principles by which he will judge and govern the people. How wonderful are those principles!

Jesus will not be under the necessity of placating various conflicting elements and divergent interests of those who will work with him in that Divine government. As Isaiah prophesied, "He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears." (Isa. 11:3) Earth's new King will be able to read the hearts of men, and will know and understand their innermost thoughts. Through his representatives, he will deal with the people according to what they really are at heart, and not upon the basis of what they profess to be. Can we imagine what changes this will make in governmental administration!

"With righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth." (vs. 4) Under the rulership of this righteous King, the legitimate desires of all mankind will be satisfied.

EVERYONE A BENEFICIARY

The 'poor' and the 'meek' will then have someone to speak for them. David wrote concerning him, "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. 72:12-14

"All kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him." (Ps. 72:11) The great and mighty, as well as the meek and humble of earth, will recognize the virtues and qualifications of this new King. He will not pamper the rich and exploit the poor. Neither will he exalt the poor and destroy the rich.

One of the symbolisms descriptive of the effect of his rulership pictures the valleys being exalted, and the hills made low. (Isa. 40:4; Luke 3:5) This indicates a just distribution of all the bounties of earth,

and a recognition that God has made of one blood all nations of the earth. (Acts. 17:26) From God's standpoint, there are no dukes and lords, and there will be no peasants and paupers.

Beyond this, and even more wonderful, is the fact that his government will give health and life to the people—everlasting life. This is why God allowed Jesus' enemies to put him to death, and why Jesus voluntarily gave himself up to die. It was in the Divine plan that his rulership should not be over a dying race, but over one being restored to life. It was therefore necessary that he should first die to redeem mankind from death. Paul wrote that Jesus gave himself "a ransom for all," and then added, "to be testified in due time."—I Tim. 2:6

Jesus gave himself as a ransom at his First Advent, and it will be during his Second Presence that the glorious truth concerning this will be testified, or made known to all. All who, when they learn of this provision, accept God's grace through Christ and obey the laws of that 'government' which will then be upon 'his shoulder,' will not need to die. They will be restored to perfection of being, and live happily forever.

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The Promise of Power

Key Verse: “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost [Spirit] is come upon you: and 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

***Selected Scripture:
Acts 1:3-14***

LUKE THE HISTORIAN is credited with writing the Gospel which bears his name, as well as the Acts of the Apostles. (Luke 1:3,4; Acts 1:1) Both letters are addressed to Theophilus, a follower of Christ of very high esteem. These inspired writings provide a reliable and comprehensive account of the early and rapid development of the Christian Church. They cover the period from the ascension of our Lord (Luke 24:51), to the end of the second year of the Apostle Paul’s imprisonment in Rome.—Acts 28:30

In this lesson our Lord Jesus had assembled his apostles to give them his final instructions before parting from them. Their mission, as he had previously taught them, was a spiritual one. They

were to ‘feed his sheep,’ continue the work which he had begun, and to follow him in that ministry. But, to accomplish that great work, they would need the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. This was to be a special blessing which they would receive from God’s hand that would bring to remembrance all things that he had spoken unto them, and to guide them into all Truth.—John 14:16,26; 15:26

During the forty days leading up to this special event Jesus had been gradually teaching his disciples many different and important things. They began to realize the purpose of his ministry and tragic death, and that the kingdom honors that they were anticipating were not to be received immediately. They were entering a new era in the Divine arrangement. Jesus said, “that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost [Spirit] not many days hence.”—Acts 1:4,5

The apostles had been expecting the Master to establish an earthly kingdom in their own day, and that the nation of Israel would be restored to their former glory as a part of our Lord's taking dominion over the earth. They perceived that he was about to leave them and they were anxious to learn what lay ahead. They were to learn, however, that it was a spiritual inheritance and kingdom to which they had been invited, and that it was future. The promised Holy Spirit would soon be given to them as a helper and guide. Jesus said, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost [Spirit] is come upon you."—vss. 7,8

During the present Gospel Age the Lord's people, beginning with those who were witnesses at Pentecost, have been representatives of his teachings and character. This important spiritual message has not only gone out to those in Jerusalem, or Judea and Samaria, but even unto the uttermost parts of the earth. With this parting lesson our Lord Jesus began to ascend into a cloud that received him out of their sight. They would understand that he was now gone from them as a spiritual being, and they remembered his words, "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."—John 16:7

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Empowered by the Spirit

Key Verse: “Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost [Spirit].” —Acts 2:38

Selected Scripture: Acts 2:1-4, 37-47

LAST WEEK’S LESSON concerned the events prior to our Lord’s ascension before Pentecost. The apostles, who were witnesses to the occasion, had been informed that they were to be special representatives of the Lord, and that the Holy Spirit would soon be given to them for that great work of feeding the flock of new believers in Christ.

Now the apostles were waiting together in expectation and readiness for the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. They had not been told when this great event would occur. It is written, “Suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there

appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost [Spirit], and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”—Acts 2:2-4

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the consecrated believers at Pentecost was evidence that our Lord had appeared in the presence of the Heavenly Father after his ascension, and that he had offered the merit of his sacrifice, completed fifty days earlier, on behalf of his footstep followers. The giving of the Holy Spirit testifies to God’s acceptance of that sacrificed life. A new dispensation was beginning, and this manifestation of Divine providence gave Jesus’ followers a new standing before God. They were now accepted in the Beloved and counted as joint heirs with our Lord Jesus, even as the sons of the Most High. The Apostle John wrote, “As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”—John 1:12

The sound of wind, the appearance of cloven tongues of fire, and the ability to speak unknown languages serves to emphasize the great power of God that had been directed toward his people, and was now instrumental on their behalf. That power filled the whole house where the disciples were gathered. Wind is an apt illustration of the Holy Spirit because it is powerful and yet unseen. With this great event the apostles received the spirit of tongues and other miraculous gifts for the special purpose of preaching the Word of God. Outward demonstration and miraculous gifts were necessary to impress upon the apostles and other believers of this special calling and relationship with God. Although it was a faith class that was being instituted, there had to be assurance among the followers of Christ Jesus that they had been divinely accepted.

At the beginning of the Gospel Age these special manifestations of the Spirit were given for a limited time and purpose. They were not intended to be a permanent arrangement, and were not given to any others after the apostles finished their earthly courses in death. Those of this faith class during the present Gospel Age do not receive the Holy Spirit in this manner. We, and all others as members of his body, come under the influence of that Spirit because of our faith in him. By this marvelous arrangement we are begotten to the new spiritual nature and thus become participants in the blessed promises.

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Empowered for Service

Key Verse: “When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.”

—Acts 4:13

***Selected Scripture:
Acts 3:1-10; 4:1-4,13***

THE APOSTLES, having been with Jesus at the time of his ascension, and later given the power of the Holy Spirit together with its miraculous gifts, had been sent forth as special representatives of the Lord, and teachers of the Truth to many new believers. Those believers, and others, who were witnesses of the great power given to the apostles were overwhelmed with the things that they said and did in the name of Jesus.

This lesson opens with Peter and John walking toward the Temple together at the hour of prayer. Outside one of the gates they found a man who had been lame and unable to walk since birth. He was begging for assistance from those

who were passing him on their way into the Temple, and when he saw the two apostles he also asked them for charity. He was unprepared, however, for the miracle-working power that was about to be manifested on his behalf by these apostles.

“Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.”—Acts 3:4-8

Many of the townspeople had recognized the young man as the one who was accustomed to regularly begging at the Temple’s gate called “Beautiful.” (vs. 2) They watched as he rose to his feet, walking and leaping before them. The onlookers were filled with wonder and

amazement at the demonstration of Divine power working through Peter and John, and they crowded around the apostles and the man who had been healed. “When Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?” (vs.12) Peter clearly acknowledged that it was God’s power at work in this miracle, and not their own.

The gift of healing, and other evidences of the Holy Spirit, were given to the apostles when the Early Church was being established. Jesus had died, was resurrected, had shown himself to his disciples, and ascended into the heavens. These special manifestations of Divine direction were given to emphasize that Jesus’ offering for sin had been accepted by his Heavenly Father, and that a new dispensation was beginning.

During the present Gospel Age, and since that early period, the Lord’s people have no longer received these special powers. Our spiritual relationship with God is one of faith in Jesus, and we receive spiritual understanding and guidance through the Word of Truth for our consecrated spiritual walk. The outward demonstrations of this power are no longer required.

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Spirit Empowered Obedience

***Key Verse: “Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.”
—Acts 5:29***

***Selected Scripture:
Acts 5:27-36, 38-42***

THE PREVIOUS LESSONS of this series in Acts dealt with the establishment of the Early Church. The disciples had been privileged to witness our Lord’s ascension into the heavens forty days after his resurrection. Later, they were given power of the Holy Spirit as evidence that Jesus’ ransom sacrifice, on behalf of their sins and of the world’s, had been accepted by the Heavenly Father. The apostles were thus commissioned to go forth as special representatives of God with the message of

Truth to those who had an ear to hear. This lesson focuses on the importance of obedience to God as a requirement for carrying out that work.

Remarkable manifestations of God’s power had been demonstrated by the apostles, such as healing many of the sick and afflicted. This brought the indignation of the religious leaders of Israel who had them thrown into prison as a result of preaching the doctrines of Jesus. Their plight was short-lived when God’s angel released them during the night. But they were again commissioned to preach the word of Truth, and early the next morning they went to the Temple to teach the people. When the high priest, and others, learned what had happened, the apostles were brought before the religious council.

The high priest directed his inquiry to the men of God saying, “Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” (Acts 5:28) It was then, with much courage and conviction, that Peter and some of the other apostles responded by saying, “We ought to obey God rather than men.”—vs. 29

Peter, and the others with him, reminded the members of the council that they were responsible for our Lord’s death, and that it was God who had raised him from the grave. Furthermore, they explained that Jesus

had been highly exalted by God because of his sacrificial ministry, and that through him was repentance and forgiveness of sin possible for the children of Israel. The apostles, and the power of God's Spirit working through them, was evidence that these things were true. However, the council's response was met with further anger, even to the point of wanting to kill those who dared speak of Jesus, or claim to be his followers.

At this point Gamaliel, a Pharisee of good reputation, reminded the other members of the council not to involve themselves in further slander in this matter. When he rose to speak he said, "Now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God." (Acts 5:38,39) Gamaliel's admonition serves to teach a valuable lesson. Sometimes those who think they are serving God may be serving the cause of Satan instead, and pride in any form leads away from the Lord and the Truth.

The apostles continued to preach the message of Jesus daily in the Temple. They did not fear man, but were ready to obey God at any cost in carrying on the blessed work that had been given to them to do.

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Patterns of Heavenly Things

IN THIS CHAPTER Paul outlines in detail some of the important features of God's typical dealings with Israel in connection with the Law Covenant, as well as the Tabernacle and its services. All Israel was blessed under that typical arrangement, but the priests were the ministers of the people, and only the high priest entered into the Most Holy of the Tabernacle on the Day of Atonement. In considering the antitype, it is essential to keep in mind that throughout the epistle Paul identifies the church of this age as the antitypical priesthood, not the antitypical camp of Israel; and in this chapter (as also in Heb. 6:19,20) he reveals that the joint-heirship of the church with Jesus means that she enters into the antitypical Most Holy with him, and shares his work as the world's great High Priest. If we keep this antitypical position of the church in mind, we will have no difficulty in understanding properly any part of the Book of Hebrews pertaining to the covenants and the sin offering.

CHAPTER 9

VERSES 1-5 "Verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat; of which we cannot now speak particularly."

'Of which we cannot now speak particularly'—Paul did not write this epistle for the purpose of explaining the typical significance of all the details of the Tabernacle and its services, but refers to these and other types of the Old Testament in his effort to revive the faith and zeal of the Hebrew brethren by emphasizing that in Christ, and in their association with Christ, they could realize the fulfillment, the substance, of all that God had promised through their prophets, and had illustrated by the

Tabernacle and its services. It is true, nevertheless, that his incidental references to the types throws much light upon their true meaning, which otherwise we would not be able to understand.

The point Paul is stressing in this reference to the typical Tabernacle and its services is the fact that it was related to the first, or Law Covenant. It was part of the mediatorial arrangements of that covenant. Bringing that lesson forward to the present age, it means that now there is also a tabernacle, and sacrifices, and that the church as the 'brethren' of Christ, participate with him in all these, even to entering into the antitypical 'Holiest of all.'

In Paul's itemizing of the various articles contained in the typical Tabernacle, the *King James Version* places the golden altar of incense in the Most Holy. The *Vatican Manuscript*, however, places it correctly in the first Holy, as is so clearly shown in the Old Testament. This is obviously correct, for the 'Holiest of all' represents heaven itself, the presence of God, and there is no sacrificial work carried on in heaven, as would be suggested by the presence of an altar in the Most Holy.

Each of the three articles of furniture in the Holy of the Tabernacle represents the spirit-begotten church. The table of shewbread pictures the church holding forth the Word of life; the candlestick shows the church in the role of light-bearer, while the golden altar is typical of a sacrificing church. It is the smoke of the burning incense sacrificed on the altar and penetrating into the Most Holy that prepares the way for an acceptable entrance into glory, the hoped-for abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Ark of the Covenant represents the church, Head and body in glory. In the ark was the golden bowl of manna, representing the immortality of the Christ; Aaron's rod that budded showing the elect quality of those who are to bless the world; and the tables of the Law, suggesting not only that the Christ has fulfilled the righteousness of the Law, but will serve in the great work of writing God's law in the hearts of the people during the Mediatorial Age, the thousand years of the kingdom.

In the Ark of the Covenant we have foreshadowed the four great attributes of Jehovah. The mercy seat proper—the slab of gold which covered the Ark of the Covenant and on which the blood of atonement

was sprinkled—represents Jehovah’s justice, the two cherubim foreshadow his love and power, while the ark itself (the golden chest) represents his wisdom.

VERSES 6-10 “When these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: The Holy Spirit this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.”

The services rendered by the priests in the first Holy (vs. 6) were the morning and evening care of the lamps, the morning and evening offering of incense, and the weekly care of the shewbread. This was done by the priests, and the church is a part of the antitypical priesthood.

Only the high priest went into the Most Holy, and then only once each year, which was on the typical Day of Atonement—an exception being when the Tabernacle was to be moved: then it was the high priest’s duty to go into the Most Holy and cover the ark and mercy seat in preparation for moving. The yearly visit of the high priest in the Most Holy was to sprinkle the blood of atonement on the mercy seat ‘for himself, and for the errors of the people.’

Jesus is the one in the antitype who ‘sprinkles’ the blood—his own blood—on the heavenly mercy seat, the ‘throne of grace.’ It was not necessary that he do this for himself individually, but in the antitype the church is the body of the great High Priest; so it was essential that he ‘appear in the presence of God for us.’ As in the type the high priest also sprinkled the mercy seat with blood on behalf of ‘the people,’ so it will also be in the antitype.

The statement ‘once’ each year cannot be taken too literally. The thought is that in one service each year the high priest frequented the Most Holy. In this one service, however, he actually went into the Most Holy twice, and twice sprinkled blood on the mercy seat—first, the blood

of a bullock, and on his second entry, the blood of the Lord's goat. More about this as Paul unfolds the lesson.

The blood was sprinkled, the apostle says, for the 'errors' of the people. The Greek word here used has as its root meaning the thought of ignorance, of not knowing, which strongly suggests the idea of shortcomings, or sins which are not willful, those which are due to inherited weaknesses. In other words, Adamic sin.

Paul explains that the restriction which limited the high priest to entering into the Most Holy on the Day of Atonement signified that the way into the antitypical 'Holiest of all was not yet made manifest.' In chapter six Jesus is referred to as the 'Forerunner' in entering into the antitypical Most Holy, hence the first. It was Jesus who opened the way to this heavenly reward, doing so when he appeared "in the presence of God for us." (vs. 24) None could be a partaker of the heavenly calling until Jesus came. He "brought life and immortality to light." (II Tim. 1:10) We again emphasize that this heavenly calling, partaking with Jesus in the priestly work, is for the church alone, whereas the world will be blessed with earthly life through this spiritual priesthood.

It is not difficult for those of us who were never under the Law Covenant arrangement to realize that those typical sacrifices and ordinances could not take away sin, hence could not give one the sense of a guiltless conscience before God. The situation with Hebrew Christians in the Early Church was probably quite different. To them, those visible things perhaps had a great degree of reality, especially if their faith could not easily grasp the invisible, spiritual arrangements of the antitypical priesthood. Paul therefore more than once in the epistle emphasizes that the old arrangements were never intended to be anything more than 'figures' of the 'better things' to come, and encouraged the Hebrews to take a firmer hold of these better things.

The ultimate to which the typical sacrifices and other services under the old Law Covenant pointed forward was what Paul speaks of in verse ten as 'the time of reformation.' This is what Peter describes as the "times of restitution." (Acts 3:21) While in the antitype the priesthood of the Gospel Age benefits from the sacrifice of Christ, even as did the priesthood in the type, the priestly service was then performed on behalf of all Israel. In the antitype, the blessing of Israel and the world is the

final objective of the work of the present age, the antitypical Day of Atonement. That blessing will be the reformation and restoration “spoken by the mouth of all God’s holy prophets since the world began.”

VERSES 11-14 “Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

The typical sacrifices could not purge the conscience, but the blood of Christ can. This is the substance of Paul’s argument in these verses. He speaks of the blood of Christ as being the antitype of the blood of both the bulls and goats offered by Israel’s priests. In the Divine arrangement for sin atonement, there is no other blood antitypically than the blood of Christ. The church shares in the sin offering work, as foreshadowed by the sacrifice of the Lord’s goat on the typical Day of Atonement, but this is possible only because of the blood of Christ. Blood symbolizes life, and the life which we sacrifice is the life we receive by faith from him. We have no life of our own, being condemned to death because of sin.

VERSE 15 “For this cause he is the Mediator of the new testament [covenant], that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.”

‘For this cause.’ For what cause? The cause of sanctifying, purifying and the purging of conscience. The blood of Christ accomplishes this necessary cleansing from sin for his body members, the church, but the cleansing work of Christ’s blood does not stop with the church; for, as Paul explains in this text, it is for this purpose also that he is the Mediator of the New Covenant.

These verses in Hebrews can be understood properly only in the light of God’s plans to bestow blessings upon Israel and all nations during the age to come. There is the erroneous view that the New Covenant is now

functioning, that at Jesus' death it immediately took the place of the Law Covenant, and that now all believers are being blessed under it.

But how much more meaningful the passage is when we recognize the distinction between the 'servants' and those whom the Lord is preparing to serve when the servant class has been completed. It is the same difference which should be discerned between those who are now being prepared to be the future kings of earth as joint rulers with Jesus, and the subjects over whom they will rule. It is the same difference we should recognize between those being prepared to judge the world, and the people of the world who, in the future judgment day, are to be judged by them.

VERSES 16,17 "Where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth."

The 'testator' of the New Covenant is primarily Christ. Certainly there could be no move toward the making of this covenant until Christ died. As outlined in the Scriptures, there were to be called from the people those who would participate with Christ in the administration of its laws. Not even the selection and preparation of these could begin until the death of the Testator, although the fact that they are being selected does not imply the functioning of the covenant itself. Indeed, the covenant cannot function until all its servants have been selected, prepared, and qualified to serve.

VERSES 18-20 "Neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you."

As Paul here explains, it was after Moses had spoken every precept of the Law to 'all the people' that the typical covenant was dedicated with blood. No one will argue that the pure Gospel has not yet been explained to all the people. But when the New Covenant actually goes into full operation this will be the case for then none will need to say to his neighbor, "Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them."—Jer. 31:34

VERSES 21,22 “Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.”

Exodus 24:6-8 makes it clear that the sprinkling of the ‘book and all the people’ followed the sprinkling of the “altar,” or, as Paul details it, ‘the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry.’ Paul evidently made no attempt to give these two uses of the blood their proper sequential order. The sequence set forth in the Exodus account, however, is in keeping with the antitype; for, as we have seen, the blood of Christ is first used to sanctify the servant class—those who will serve the New Covenant as the heavenly, or spiritual sanctuary.

The Exodus account explains that Moses used half the blood for the ‘altar,’ and with the other half he sprinkled the book and the people. This, harmonizes with the two sprinklings of the blood on the mercy seat on Israel’s annual Day of Atonement—first the blood of the bullock, and then the blood of the goat. In both instances the blood points forward to the merit of Christ’s sacrifice, and both types teach that there were to be two applications of the antitypical blood, first for the church, and then for the world. There is no remission of sin for either class aside from the shed blood of Christ.

VERSES 23-26 “It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”

The apostles knew that some time was to elapse before their Lord would return. They all expected to die and be resurrected when that great event occurred. Nevertheless, they believed that Jesus’ First Advent marked what Paul here describes as the ‘end of the world.’ To them the “night” was “far spent,” and the day was “at hand.”—Rom. 13:12

With this thought in mind, it was not difficult for Paul to see the significance of the two sprinklings on Israel's typical Day of Atonement as that which in antitype occurred 'once.' It was, indeed, but one ceremony in the type, its many occurrences being the year-by-year repetition. In the antitype, in the 'end of the world [age],' there is but one ceremony in which Christ puts away sin. But in this one service there is, as shown in the type, the two sprinklings, and the two appearances—the first is for 'us,' the church of Christ, and the second will be for all the people.

VERSES 27,28 "As it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

Verse twenty-seven is frequently misused to prove the erroneous theory that there is no probation after death, that the destiny of each individual is unalterably fixed the moment he dies. The text has no direct reference to the death of humanity in general; but even if it did, the language proves that judgment is not rendered at the time of death but 'after' death, and the Scriptures generally bear this out. After humanity goes into the Adamic death, they will be raised from death and given another, an individual, judgment or trial for life.

The text, however, is really continuing the discussion of sacrificial death. The 'men' referred to seem clearly to be Israel's high priests, and this is borne out by the Greek definite article, "the." (See "*Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*") They died sacrificially as represented in the animals they offered. If they did not carry out every detail of the service according to the Lord's instructions, they would be judged unworthy to enter into the Most Holy with the blood, and would die as they passed under the second veil.

So Christ was once offered, Paul continues. He did not offer a bullock as did the high priest in the type, but offered himself. Had he been unfaithful in this offering he would have died the 'second death,' and would not have been raised from the dead, therefore could not have appeared in the presence of God for us. But he was faithful, and assurance has been given all men of this, said Paul on Mars' Hill, "in that he [God] hath raised him from the dead."—Acts 17:31

He appeared for the church at the beginning of the age. The evidence of this was the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. But he is to ‘appear’ again, not in sacrificial robes, but in glory, and the evidence will be the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh. This will be on behalf of ‘them’ that look for him. Note again the distinction between ‘them’ and ‘us,’ as in verses twenty-four and twenty-eight. Those who ‘look for him’ will doubtless embrace practically all mankind as they become acquainted with the love of God and with the wonderful provision he has made through Christ for their salvation—their restoration to human

Dawn Bible Students Association

God's Light Bearers

***“The LORD is my
light and my
salvation”
—Psalm 27:1***

DARKNESS IS USED IN the Bible as a symbol of separation from God and of a lack of knowledge concerning him and his purposes toward mankind. “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all,” the Apostle John wrote. (I John 1:5) Those who know God as

he reveals himself through his Word, and who are endeavoring to do his will, are scripturally represented as walking “in the light.” All others are said to be walking “in darkness.”—I John 1:6,7

DARKNESS COVERS THE EARTH

This symbolic darkness settled down upon mankind as a result of sin, our first parents being the original sinners. They chose to disobey God's law, and by so doing brought death upon themselves and upon all their progeny. Paul wrote, “As by one man's disobedience many [that is, the whole human race] were made sinners.” (Rom. 5:19) This means that ‘darkness’ has covered the earth since the days of Eden. Indeed, it is referred to by the Prophet David as a nighttime experience concerning which he wrote, “weeping may endure for a night,” and then added the reassuring promise, “joy cometh in the morning.”—Ps. 30:5

During this long and dreary night, when, for the most part, the people have been without God and without hope, he has had his witnesses in the earth, who, either by God's hand upon them or by their own faithful testimony concerning him, have been as lights in a dark place. At no time have these witnesses convinced any considerable number of people of the truth pertaining to God, but they frequently have served as guides to those who have sought after God in an earnest endeavor to find and serve him.—Acts 17:27

GOD'S EARLY WITNESSES

Going back to the time of the Flood, we find that Noah was a witness for Jehovah, the Creator. The Apostle Peter informs us that Noah was a “preacher of righteousness.” (II Pet. 2:5) He did not reform the world of his day, but he was a light in that world because he bore witness

concerning God and the purpose of God in connection with the coming Flood. Noah's stand for God and for righteousness was vindicated by the coming of the Deluge.

During all those centuries prior to the First Advent of Jesus, God demonstrated his keeping power in the lives of his witnesses in a miraculous manner, and this tended to increase the effectiveness of their testimony. Through the Prophet Isaiah the Lord promised, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper," and this was literally true in connection with all his faithful witnesses during those ancient times.—Isa. 54:17

The enemies of Joseph sold him as a slave into Egypt, but through the wonderful providences of God he became the ruler of Egypt and the savior of his people. How wonderfully this demonstrated the power and the glory of Joseph's God! There is no record that Joseph ever preached a long sermon about God. His life of faith, and the occasional 'word in season' by which he made known his faith, were more eloquent than any discoursing he could have done, especially since God openly vindicated his faith and rewarded his faithfulness.

MOSES GOD'S LIGHT BEARER

Later, when a pharaoh came to power in Egypt 'who knew not Joseph,' the Israelites, then living in the land and greatly increased in number, were made slaves. In the providence of the Lord, Moses was raised up to deliver them. The name and glory of God were at stake as Moses and Aaron appeared before the king to demand the release of the Israelites.

Moses was powerless to accomplish the Lord's design for his people, but he stood loyally on the side of the Lord, and in the name of the Lord demanded deliverance for the Israelites. We know the result. Plague after plague fell upon the Egyptians, and finally the death of their firstborn. Then the king demanded that the Hebrew children leave the country, which they did.

Pharaoh changed his mind, however, and sent his army to recapture the Israelites. Again the Lord intervened, opening up a passageway through the Red Sea for his people, and allowing the waters to close in on Egypt's army as they tried to follow. Then was heard that majestic song of deliverance, "I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed

gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation.”—Exod. 15:1,2

ISRAEL'S LACK OF FAITH

This brilliant testimony of God's ability to fight for and deliver his people did not impress the Israelites sufficiently to enable them to put their full trust in him to go forward and possess the promised land. They rejected the report of the two faithful spies, Caleb and Joshua, and voted against trying to drive the Canaanites out of the land. Because of this, God allowed them to wander in the wilderness for forty years.

Even so, he miraculously cared for them. He provided manna from heaven, and water gushed out from a rock to refresh them. He provided them with a Tabernacle as a center of worship. During all that time, as Moses reminded the Israelites, “Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years.” (Deut. 8:4) Moses knew that it was the Lord who cared for his people during their wilderness journey, but he feared lest they forget, and reminded them that it was Jehovah “who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint.”—Deut. 8:15

It was the Lord who did these things for Israel. Through his dealings with them despite their own lack of faith, they were being used as his witnesses. This continued to be true under the leadership of Joshua. By another miracle, he enabled them to cross over the river Jordan and possess the promised land.

CRUMBLING WALLS

Immediately upon entering Canaan the Israelites were confronted with the fortified and walled city of Jericho. No progress could be made in possessing the land until this city was conquered but they were incapable of doing this in their own wisdom and by their own strength. And then it was as “Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand.” Joshua challenged this ‘man,’ asking, “Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?”—Josh. 5:13-15

The man with the drawn sword identified himself as the “captain of the host of the Lord”—the Lord's angelic hosts. As a messenger of

the Lord this ‘man’ outlined to Joshua the strategy to be employed in capturing Jericho. Joshua followed these instructions, and the walls of the city crumbled before them—“So the Lord was with Joshua; and his fame was noised throughout all the country.”—Josh. 6:27

Another outstanding victory which brought glory to the Lord was Gideon’s defeat of the Midianites by his little band of three hundred. Again it was the Lord who gained the victory. When Gideon’s three hundred, carrying out the instructions of their leader, broke the earthen vessels letting the light of their torches shine out in the darkness, and blew their trumpets and shouted, “The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon,” “the Lord set every man’s sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host [of Midianites]: and the host fled.”—Judg. 7:20-22

JEHOVAH IS GOD

God also manifested his glory in a very outstanding manner through the Prophet Elijah. Through the influence of Jezebel, King Ahab’s wife, Israel had been led into the idolatrous worship of Baal. By the Lord’s direction Elijah arranged for a test to be made on Mt. Carmel that it might be demonstrated whether or not Jehovah or Baal was the true and living God. It was agreed that the one who would cause fire to come down from heaven and consume a sacrifice offered to him would be the true God.

There was a tremendous gathering on and around Mt. Carmel that day. Elijah insisted that the priests of Baal give their demonstration first, which they did, but they had no results. All day they agonized and cried unto Baal, but Baal did not respond. Elijah taunted them saying, “Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.”—I Kings 18:27

The priests of Baal continued their agonizing cries to their god until the time of the “evening sacrifice.” (vs. 29) Then Elijah invited the people to draw near to watch the test he would make. He prepared an altar and placed a sacrifice upon it. Then, in order to demonstrate that no trickery was being practiced, he dug a trench around the altar and filled it with water, drenching the altar and the sacrifice with water. Then Elijah prayed:

“Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.”—I Kings 18:36,37

In response to this eloquent prayer asking that God vindicate his own name before his people, fire came down “and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God.”—I Kings 18:38,39

ASSYRIAN ARMY DESTROYED

During the reign of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, in a campaign of aggression, demanded that Jerusalem be surrendered to him. He sent a messenger to Hezekiah asking for his surrender, but the demand was not granted. The messenger was sent again, with the following message:

“Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed; as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph, and the children of Eden which were in Thelasar? Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivah?”—II Kings 19:10-13

This was a direct challenge to the ability of Israel’s God to thwart the design of Sennacherib to capture and enslave Jerusalem. Upon the advice of the Prophet Isaiah, King Hezekiah prayed earnestly to Jehovah, saying:

“O Lord God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; ... Lord, bow down thine ear, and hear: open, Lord, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God. Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands, And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men’s hands, wood and stone: therefore they have

destroyed them. Now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only.”—II Kings 19:15-19

The Lord replied to this prayer through the Prophet Isaiah, assuring the prophet and the king that he would indeed defend Jerusalem, “for mine own sake, and for my servant David’s sake.” And he did. We read, “It came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh.”—II Kings 19:34-36

GOD’S GLORY IN BABYLON

God’s chosen people were not faithful to him, and he allowed them to be taken captive to Babylon. Among them, however, were a faithful few whom, as individuals, he used as his witnesses during the period of their captivity. Notable among these were Daniel and his three young friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The “prince of the eunuchs,” under whom they first served, changed their names to Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.—Dan.1:6,7

Daniel first came into prominence before the king when, by the Lord’s help, he was able to recall Nebuchadnezzar’s dream for him and interpret its meaning, after the “magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans,” had failed in their attempt to do so. (Dan. 2:2) This was a most effective witness for Jehovah, causing the king to acknowledge to Daniel, “Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets.”—Dan. 2:47

Daniel was then made ruler over the entire province of Babylon, “and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon.” (vs. 48) Daniel, in turn, remembered his three young friends, and requested that they be appointed his assistants. This request was granted.

But Nebuchadnezzar soon forgot what he had confessed concerning Jehovah being the ‘God of gods, and a Lord of kings.’ He wanted to be recognized as supreme ruler, and his gods worshiped in the realm, so he had a great image erected symbolizing his authority as civil ruler, and his right to demand that the people worship his gods. He commanded that all officials of the realm, at a given signal, bow down and worship this

image. Those who refused to obey were to be cast into a fiery furnace. Apparently Daniel, because he “sat in the gate of the king,” was exempt from this command.—Dan. 2:49

His three friends, however, were not. Enemies, jealous of the position to which these Hebrews had been appointed, reported that they had not obeyed the king’s command to fall down before his golden image. In a rage Nebuchadnezzar summoned the three Hebrews before him, demanding to know if the report were true. They assured him that it was. Then he indicated his willingness to give them another chance, but made it plain that if they still defied his edict they would surely be cast into the fiery furnace. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, saying:

“O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us ... out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.”—Dan. 3:16-18

DIVINE POWER MANIFESTED

We remember the outcome. The three Hebrews were cast into the fiery furnace—a furnace in which the fire was burning so furiously that the king’s servants who hurled them into it inhaled the flames and died. But the three Hebrews were protected by Divine power.

The king, then probably a little uncertain as to whether or not he had acted wisely, peered into the fiery furnace after the flames subsided somewhat, and discovered not only were the three Hebrews alive, but there was a fourth person with them, “like the Son of God.” (Dan. 3:25) Only the cords which bound them had been burned, and as a result of this, the king saw them walking about in the fire. Then he called them forth from the flames, and said:

“Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king’s word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God. Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut

in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort.”—Dan. 3:28,29

We might go on recalling these thrilling incidents in which the Lord glorified himself in the eyes, not only of Israel, but frequently of the surrounding nations. These observed the wonderful manner in which he fought for his people and delivered his faithful servants. These three Hebrews were witnesses of Israel’s God, not so much because they explained his glorious characteristics to the people, but because he manifested his favor to them on account of their unwavering faithfulness to him.

“YE ARE MY WITNESSES”

The Lord himself sums up this viewpoint for us very clearly and beautifully, saying:

“Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters [as in the passage of the Red Sea], I will be with thee; and through the rivers [as in the crossing of Jordan], they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour; I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee.

“I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no saviour. I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore, ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God.”—Isa. 43:1-3,11,12

In the intervening verses of this revealing chapter the Lord indicates that his future dealings with his people Israel would also witness to his glory. Verses six and seven read; “I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.”

This is a reference to the regathering of scattered Israel as it is being accomplished at the present time. There are many prophecies which show

that this would take place at the end of the present age. We will quote one of these for confirmation:

“Behold, the days come saith the Lord, that it shall no more be said, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers. Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the Lord, and they shall fish them; and after will I send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them.”— Jer. 16:14-16

The fact that the natural seed of Abraham are now going back to the promised land in unbelief, motivated, not by their love for God but by their desire for security, does not disprove the beginning of the fulfilment of these wonderful prophecies. It should be noted that their present exodus from the nations is likened to their exodus from Egypt. At that time the motive was to escape from slavery, and it was because of their lack of faith and their rebellion against their God that they were allowed to wander in the wilderness for forty years.

That we should expect to see them go to Palestine in unbelief is clearly indicated by the prophecy of Ezekiel 20:33-37, which reads:

“As I live, saith the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you: and I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face. ... And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.”

GATHERED IN UNBELIEF

Several important facts appear in this prophecy of Israel's return to the promised land. One is that God rules over them in his 'fury' in order to accomplish it. This language does not describe the voluntary returning of a people motivated by love for their God. They are first brought into 'the wilderness of the people.' This expression indicates that for a time the returned exiles would be in the same confusion and unbelief as the world around them. God pleads with them 'face to face.' He would not need to

plead with them if they were wholeheartedly for him and had accepted Jesus as their Redeemer.

After they are caused to pass under Jehovah's 'rod' of punishment they are finally brought 'into the bond of the covenant.' This shows that when they are first restored to Palestine they are not in covenant relationship with God. Jeremiah 31:31-34 informs us that the time is coming when the Lord will make "a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah." But this will not be until they have been brought 'under the rod' of discipline, and after their eyes have been opened to behold the glory of the Lord.

The prophecy of Ezekiel, in chapters thirty-eight and thirty-nine, gives us a clue as to when this will take place. Evidently Israel is to become much more firmly established and prosperous in the promised land than at present, sufficiently so to attract aggressor hordes from the north and other quarters to mount an attack against them. It will be in this attack that God will again fight for his people as he did in the days of old.

The prophecy states that Jehovah will plead against the leader of Israel's enemies "with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone."—Ezek. 38:22

ENLIGHTENMENT OF THE NATIONS

The result of this will be the opening of the eyes of the nations to the glory of God. And not only so, but Ezekiel 39:7 declares, "So will I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel; and I will not let them pollute my holy name any more: and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel."

Thus, as God brought glory to his name by the wonderful manner in which he dealt with Israel in the past, it will yet be so again. In this way they will continue to be his witnesses, not because they are diligent in making known the virtues of his character, but because, as in the past, he will protect and deliver them, and will forgive their transgressions. Along this line the Lord further declares to Israel:

"Thou hast brought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve

with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities. I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.”—Isa. 43:24,25

The Apostle Paul enlarges upon this thought when, in forecasting the return of Israel to covenant relationship with God after ‘the fulness of the Gentiles be come in,’ he says:

“So all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”—Rom. 11:26-33

So, after many centuries of patient waiting, during which the Lord has chastised Israel in their exile among the nations, he will bring them back to himself, and enter into covenant relationship with them. Paul informs us that this will also mean “life from the dead.” (vs. 15) Yes, all Israel, the living and the dead, will again be used by the Lord as a means of revealing his glory to them and to all the nations. So again they are to be his witnesses, even though, as the Lord explains, one of their contributions to this end was their sins, calling for the exercise of his mercy and love.