

The Time of the End

***“Thou, O Daniel,
shut up the words,
and seal the book,
even to the time of
the end: many shall
run to and fro, and
knowledge shall be
increased.”
—Daniel 12:4***

IN THE VISIONS GIVEN to Daniel by the Lord, he had seen the righteous persecuted and the wicked triumphant. The expression, ‘time of the end,’ used in our text and also in the ninth verse of the same chapter, is descriptive of a period of time when these circumstances would be changed, not suddenly within twenty-four hours, but in a reasonably short time as compared with the millenniums of the past, during which evil has usually triumphed, and evildoers for the most part have

flourished.

The time of the end, however, does not in the remotest sense signify the end of human experience on earth, such as that traditionally described by the expression, ‘end of time.’ It is, rather, that time in the outworking of the Divine plan which leads up to the establishment of Christ’s kingdom, and therefore, ultimately, the destruction of all unrighteousness, and the end of all evil, including sickness and death.

Chronologically, there is strong evidence to substantiate the fact that the prophetic time of the end began in the year A.D. 1799, one of the events marking this being Napoleon’s destruction of the temporal power of the pope, and thus the end of papacy’s power to persecute as in the past. The year 1914 was an important milestone in the time of the end, for it was the outbreak of the first World War in that year which led to the overthrow of most of the hereditary ruling houses of Europe, and a general disintegration of the pre-1914 social order.

DISINTEGRATION OF THE SOCIAL ORDER

Since that date, the world and the United States of America have seen the process of disintegration continue. A worldwide economic depression followed World War I, starting in 1929 and continuing into the 1930’s.

The world was still struggling with this depression when a second worldwide war broke out in 1939. Although the United States tried to stay out of the war, it was drawn into the conflict by an attack of the Japanese military on its naval base in Hawaii. The war ended in Europe in 1945 and a few months later in Asia. The United Nations organization that was formed at the close of World War II was hosted by the United States who had shunned its predecessor, the League of Nations.

Police action, taken by the newly founded United Nations to maintain law and order in the world, caused the United States to become involved in the Korean War from 1950 to 1953. It was a war of communist nations against noncommunist nations. The rivalry between the communist Soviet Union and its ideology and the democratic United States and its ideology, as the two superpowers of the world, led to the cold war between them that extended for decades. Each tried to influence the other nations of the world. Meanwhile, many colonial possessions of European countries were declaring independence. France lost its possession in Asia known as French Indochina (Vietnam) and that possession was partitioned into North Vietnam under communist control and South Vietnam as an independent nation. Incursions from North Vietnam into South Vietnam gradually drew the United States into another war starting in 1963. The Vietnam War did not end until 1974 when treaties were finally negotiated. This was a debilitating and unpopular war which caused severe degradation of the U.S. economy.

PROCESS OF DISINTEGRATION CONTINUES

Wars of every type and kind continue throughout the world. There were a few major conflicts such as the war between Iraq and Iran which spanned many years, and the war between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan. The Soviet Union became bogged down in Afghanistan very much like the United States was in Vietnam, and it led eventually to the economic ruin and dissolution of the Soviet Union. Iraq made peace with Iran and then tried to overrun Kuwait and was stopped by the United States in the Gulf War in 1991.

Meanwhile, the newly formed nation of Israel was attacked time and again by the Arab League, but not only managed to survive, but gained land with each conflict. They are now suffering through terrorist attacks by suicide bombers. Such an attack on the United States occurred on

September 11, 2001 and caused the loss of thousands of lives and the complete destruction of the famed Twin Towers in New York City. This led to the United States sending military troops into Afghanistan to hunt down terrorists and destroy their base of operation.

As trouble continued throughout the world, and among many nations, the United States engaged in a war with Iraq to prevent use of weapons of mass destruction by Saddam Hussein, and to oust his regime from that country. The United States went ahead with this war without the approval of the United Nations, whose inspectors were searching that country for evidence of such weapons. Although the two former superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union built up huge supplies of weapons of mass destruction during the cold war years, their negotiations to reduce stockpiles have been slow and currently are in a holding pattern. Russia (formerly the Soviet Union) has announced that such talks are to cease since the United States went ahead with the war against Iraq on its own. Meanwhile, other nations have acquired the capability of making nuclear weapons. The aim seems to be—how can the use of such weapons be controlled? This was the reason given for conducting the present invasion of Iraq.

The process of disintegration continues. It will take the power of the kingdom of Christ to save the human race from complete ruin, and it will be this manifestation of kingdom authority and power that will mark the close of the time of the end. So far as we know, the Bible does not point out the exact date for this outstanding occurrence in the Divine plan for human salvation, but we are confident that it is near—very near.

INCREASE OF KNOWLEDGE

More convincing even than time prophecies are the evidences that the foretold events of the time of the end have been, and are, taking place. In our text, two of these signs of the times are mentioned—running ‘to and fro,’ and the increase of ‘knowledge’ which has led to the running to and fro.

We might think of this increase of knowledge from two standpoints—religious and general. Partly as a result of the restraint of papal authority at the beginning of the time of the end, there soon came into being the great Bible societies, which, through the nineteenth and twentieth

centuries, have supplied to the reading public countless millions of Bibles in all the principal languages.

Prior to this Bibles were scarce, and in many countries banned. Now the general public in most countries can have and study them. Not all readers have become students of the Bible, but light from this ‘torch of civilization’ began, and is continuing, to break down many of the superstitions of the past, and to set people free from the binding influences of Satan.

While the principles of justice and righteousness set forth in the Bible had a far-reaching effect for good throughout the western world during this period, an increasing understanding of God’s great plan of salvation has been given only to the few. This is as we should expect; for, according to the Divine plan, it is not until the kingdom of Christ is established at the close of the time of the end that the knowledge of the glory of God will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.—Hab. 2:14

This present-day knowledge of God’s plan is referred to in Daniel 12:9,10 where we read that in the time of the end “none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand.” The reference is not to the brilliant of the world, but to those who are wise toward God. “The fear [reverence] of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” (Ps. 111:10) Proper reverence for the Lord includes confidence in his Word of Truth, and it is through this Word that God reveals his plans and purposes.

It is through his Word that the Lord has revealed the meaning of the events which occur during the time of the end. The unbelieving world is confused and fear-stricken by what they see coming upon the earth; but the ‘wise,’ understanding the meaning of the times in which we are living, rejoice to realize that the long-promised kingdom of the Lord is so near.

RUNNING TO AND FRO

It has been during the time of the end that all the major inventions have come, including those which have made global travel commonplace. The first steamboat was operated in 1807, and the first steam locomotive in 1831. These were very crude and slow of speed compared with modern means of travel by sea, land, and air. As knowledge has increased throughout this time of the end, the speed of travel has kept pace. Ocean liners cross the Atlantic in four days, jet planes in a few hours. Trains

travel one hundred miles an hour and more, and the legal speed of automobiles in many places is from fifty-five to seventy miles an hour, and more. Thousands are now traveling by air at speeds exceeding five hundred miles an hour and supersonic planes at one thousand miles per hour.

The increase of knowledge during this time of the end has been manifest in every aspect of human experience. The telegraph was invented in 1844. Now, almost any part of the world can be in instant communication with the world at large whenever desired. The communication of thought by radio, television, and the internet is beyond comprehension. The comforts and conveniences along all lines, produced by the foretold increase of knowledge in this time of the end, stagger the imagination. They are not yet available to all mankind, but they are here.

In the field of medical science, marvelous progress in knowledge continues to be made. The accumulative result of this is that now the average length of human life is close to seventy years, compared with a little over thirty years at the beginning of the time of the end. Medical science now predicts that soon it will not be unusual for people to live until they are one hundred twenty-five years old.

The foretold increase of knowledge has flooded the world with books, magazines, and papers, which in itself further increases knowledge. Think of the contrast between the present time and the beginning of the time of the end, at the turn of the nineteenth century, when many people were not able to read and write!

KNOWLEDGE MISUSED

While the increase of knowledge during the time of the end has brought many blessings to the human race, enriching the lives of millions both physically and culturally; through its misuse it has also added to man's sorrows, and created problems which human ingenuity is unable to solve. In the world of travel, the greatest speeds are being used for military purposes. Fighter and bombing planes, rockets and guided missiles of destruction, can now be used to destroy the enemy thousands of miles distant.

The civilized world recoiled with horror over the destruction wrought by bombing planes during World War II. But what was done then will fade into insignificance compared with what is now possible. The United

States has perfected a guided missile that can be shot through the air at a tremendous velocity, and deliver a nuclear bomb thousands of miles away.

UNCLEAN MESSAGES

As we have noted, the foretold increase of knowledge which was to come in the time of the end has flooded the world with literature. It is also constantly presenting ideas to the young and old through radio, television and the internet. Much of this information thus put into circulation is good, tending to ennoble the lives of those receiving it. Certainly we are all glad that the Bible is being so freely and widely circulated, and information about it is on the Worldwide Web.

But literature, radio, television, and the internet are not used exclusively for good purposes. These means of circulating information are also used by the wicked and the selfish with the result that the minds of men, women, and children are being debased.

MEDICAL SCIENCE CREATES PROBLEMS

The increase of knowledge in the medical field during the time of the end has been phenomenal. Great strides have been made in mental and physical hygiene, surgery, and the development of the so-called wonder drugs. The result of this is a greatly increased life expectancy, and also a greatly reduced average of child and infant mortality. In the United States the number of people past sixty-five years of age is increasing rapidly.

This, in turn, is creating a serious problem. The Social Security law is helping insofar as the actual needs of this increasing number of the aged are concerned. But people, even the elderly, must have more than food, shelter, and clothing. Every normal human being wants to be active and, if possible, creatively employed.

The Lord's people who know the Truth of the Divine plan, the wise of Daniel's prophecy who understand, are not confronted with this problem. They are glad to have all the time possible to study the Truth, and to make it known to others. For these the retirement age is a boon, for they have longed for the time when they could spend more time and effort in the service of the Lord. But to many, the increase of the lifespan has thus presented a problem. Officials of government are recognizing this, and

systematic studies are being made to discover how best to meet the situation. Furthermore, the quality of life is reduced.

No matter which way we turn we find critical conditions facing the world. International tensions do not lessen. The nerve centers of trouble shift from one part of the world to another. When a half solution is found for one situation, trouble erupts somewhere else. All of this at a time when the foretold increase of knowledge could have produced security and plenty for all nations!

The Lord knew it would be so. He knew that by permitting mankind to discover some of the secrets of nature and use them, man would also misuse them, and thus demonstrate his inability to govern himself successfully, even though equipped with the wonderful knowledge denied to former generations. Thus the time of the end is a day of preparation for the kingdom, not only in its introduction to better ways of living, but also in the fact that, apart from God, the human race would not continue to live at all, that it would foolishly and selfishly destroy itself. The need for God is being revealed.

GREAT BLESSINGS COMING

Daniel's prophecy of the time of the end takes us still further into the future. The increase of knowledge, the running to and fro, the time of trouble, are already here, and increasing. But these developments are but leading up to the glorious things which God will accomplish for mankind. The prophecies of the Bible would mean little to us did they not emphasize the Divine purpose to establish Messiah's kingdom in the earth, to do for humanity what they cannot do for themselves.

Thus the events of the time of the end lead up to a glorious deliverance for God's people, and for all who will then, when given full opportunity, become God's people. In forecasting the time of trouble which would occur in the time of the end, the Lord said to Daniel, "At that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book."—Dan. 12:1

Daniel's people are God's people, and at the close of the time of the end they will all be delivered from death. To Daniel, specifically, God said, "Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest [in death], and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." (Dan. 12:13) The Hebrew word here translated 'lot' is the one in the Old Testament used in connection

with the casting of lots. Symbolically it denotes one's destiny, or chosen place.

THE RESURRECTION

When Daniel is delivered from death in the “better resurrection,” his lot, or chosen place in the plan of God, will be among the Ancient Worthies, the “princes in all the earth.” (Ps. 45:16; Heb. 11:35-40) He will be one of those to whom, in the kingdom, the people from the east, west, north, and south will look for instruction and guidance.—Luke 13:28,29

This group of faithful ones, of whom Daniel will be one, will be the human phase of the kingdom. As ‘princes’ they will work in harmony with the spiritual phase of the kingdom composed of Jesus and his glorified church, the one hundred and forty-four thousand who stand with him on Mount Zion, and who will live and reign with him a thousand years.—Ps. 2:6,8; Rev. 14:1; 20:6

It will be at the end of the time of the end when the last of these will pass beyond the veil. We are confident that time is now drawing near. With those who will participate in the spiritual and human phases of the kingdom all raised from the dead, including those who are described as a “great multitude” of servants in the kingdom (Rev. 7:9-17), the work of delivering the remainder of mankind will speedily begin.

The Scriptures do not furnish the details, but it seems reasonable that some will escape death in the time of trouble and be the first to begin to receive restitution blessings. Increasing length of life will no longer be a problem. Feebleness will no longer accompany long life. The obedient, in fact, will return to the days of their youth. In that day they shall not say “I am sick.”—Job 33:25; Isa. 33:24

Daniel was told, and the promise is reiterated throughout the Scriptures in various ways, that the dead will be raised, that those who “sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.” (Dan. 12:2) It will be a time of trial and judgment, and many will be held in contempt because of their past until they demonstrate their sincere desire to do better. But it will be a glorious time of blessing for all who will conform to the laws of the kingdom. We believe those blessings are near!

This is the message we now have the privilege of proclaiming far and wide as we have the opportunity. One of the reasons the Lord has enabled the wise to understand the meaning of events in this time of the end is that they might bear witness to the world concerning the incoming kingdom blessings. It is this that the Holy Spirit has commissioned all the consecrated people of God to do. As members of the body of Christ we come under the commission outlined by the Prophet Isaiah, when he wrote:

“The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn.”—Isa. 61:1,2

The ‘day of vengeance’ here mentioned is manifested by the time of trouble which Daniel foretold to be one of the closing events of the time of the end. Thousands are mourning because of this trouble, and it is our glorious privilege to give them a message of comfort, to explain to them the meaning of the trouble, and to give them assurance that soon all trouble will end, that their loved ones will be restored to life and that “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. 21:4

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Facing a God-Given Opportunity

Key Verse: “Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.”

—Ezra 1:3

***Lesson Scripture:
Ezra 1***

THE PERSIAN KING CYRUS the Great, defeated both the Medes as well as the Babylonians, who had earlier conquered Judah and carried many of its people into captivity. In the first year of Cyrus’ reign in Babylon, he issued an order which was the fulfillment of God’s promise recorded in Jeremiah 25:11-13 and 29:10. These prophecies speak of a period of seventy years during which the people of Judah would be in subjection to Babylon, but that after this time was complete, they would be able to return to their own land. After decades in captivity, the words of Jeremiah became a message of hope, an assurance that the time of oppression would soon come to

an end.

The royal decree of King Cyrus, given in the Key Verse, allowed the Jewish exiles to leave the land of their captivity and return to their homeland; but more than this, it encouraged them to rebuild their Temple in Jerusalem, which had been destroyed when the Babylonians conquered the city. Clearly, Cyrus’ approach to ruling the Jewish people was quite different from that of his predecessors. He believed that peace within his empire could be best maintained by presenting himself as a liberator and protector. He favored benevolent control rather than ruthless oppression, and instituted religious tolerance in the place of forced conformity.

For the Jews, however, much more was evident in the actions of Cyrus than simply benevolent and tolerant policies. They realized that favor shown by the Persian king was in reality an act of God, and saw Cyrus as God’s chosen instrument. Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1 express this understanding, and, in most remarkable language, refers to Cyrus as

God's "anointed"—the same word in the Hebrew as 'messiah.' This is the only place in the Old Testament where this term is used for a person who is non-Jewish.

How beautifully Cyrus pictures Jesus, the one who would bring about the liberation, not just of the Jews, but of the entire world of mankind, by his dying as man's Redeemer. In Jesus' own words he stated his mission, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18-19) It was through the redemptive work of Jesus that the entire world will have the opportunity in Christ's coming kingdom to return from the captivity of sin and death to a condition of perfection and life here upon the earth.

In that coming kingdom there will be a symbolic New Jerusalem, a new righteous government, which man will have the opportunity to turn to, just as the Jews were encouraged by Cyrus to return to literal Jerusalem. This New Jerusalem, however, will not contain a literal temple. As stated, "I saw no temple therein [in the New Jerusalem]: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it."—Rev. 21:2,22,23

Laying Foundations

Key Verse: “They sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.”
—Ezra 3:11

Lesson Scriptures:
Ezra 3:1-3, 6, 7, 10-13

OVER FORTY-TWO THOUSAND Israelites took advantage of the declaration of Cyrus (see [Lesson for June 1](#)), and returned to their homeland. (Ezra 2:64) In the seventh month after their return, they gathered together in Jerusalem. It was here that Jeshua the priest, and Zerubbabel the leader of the tribe of Judah, began to bring the nation back to the proper worship of God. They first “builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God.” (Ezra 3:2) Once the altar was built they began to offer “burnt offerings morning and evening.” (vs. 3) Additionally, they kept the Feast of Tabernacles, one of the three yearly feasts commanded in the Law of Moses, and afterward resumed the keeping of other feasts and

offerings given in their Law.

How beautifully the resumption of offerings upon the altar, and the various feasts of Israel, picture for us the fact that the first step of approach to God is recognition of the great sacrifice which the altar represented—the ransom sacrifice of Jesus, the Son of God. Just as Jeshua and Zerubbabel had to first build the altar before any acceptable offerings could be presented, so God offered his only begotten Son as man’s Redeemer, and Jesus faithfully carried out this mission. This was like building the altar, in order that man might once again have access to God and be able to present their offerings to him. Truly our offerings to God are only possible through Jesus, “wherein he [God] hath made us accepted in the beloved [Jesus].”—Eph. 1:6

Although Israel had begun to worship God properly, one significant thing was lacking. They had no temple in which to worship, not even the foundation of their former Temple was still standing. As Ezra said, “From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the Lord. But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid.” (Ezra 3:6) Again, Jeshua and Zerubbabel took the lead, gathering the masons, the carpenters, and those from twenty years old and upward willing to join in the work, and began “to set forward the work of the house of the Lord.” (vs. 8) Once the Temple foundation was complete, the people all rejoiced. As in the words of the Key Verse, Israel recognized that it was only the goodness and mercy of God that this work had been accomplished.

This rebuilding of the Temple’s foundation expands upon the picture previously given concerning Jesus. Not only was he given by God as man’s Redeemer, and the means by which we might be able to bring acceptable offerings to God, but Jesus is also shown to be the foundation of the spiritual temple. “Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (I Cor. 3:11) It is upon this foundation of Jesus and his example that we, as his followers, are to build our characters. Apostle Paul continues on this occasion and says, “If any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, ... If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. ... Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?”—vss. 12,14,16

Getting Back on Track

Key Verse: *“Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?”*

—Haggai 1:4

Lesson Scripture:

Haggai 1:2-14

The Jews were affected so that as it is recorded in Ezra 4:24, “Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem.”

Haggai was quick to see what had happened. He observed that the people were making excuses. They said, “The time is not come, the time that the Lord’s house should be built.” (Hag. 1:2) He also saw that, although they had stopped work on the Lord’s house, they continued to work on their personal homes. In the Key Verse the prophet chides Israel because they were dwelling in ‘ceiled’ houses; that is, houses that were enclosed and roofed, yet the house of God lay waste. He told them that because of this, some of their temporal blessings—their crops, water, clothes, and wages—would be found to be lacking. (vss. 6,9-11) Twice Haggai says to the people, “Consider [*Marginal Translation*: set your heart on] your ways.”—vss. 5,7

Rather than continue to criticize the people, Haggai instead asked them to examine their hearts. He believed that if they really did this, they would realize the error of their way and quickly return to the rebuilding work. He reiterated to them that God would be pleased if they so responded. Speaking on behalf of God, he says, “Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord.” (vs. 8) Haggai’s encouragement worked. The people “obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai

the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord.” (vs. 12) The prophet, again speaking on behalf of God, said, “I am with you, saith the Lord.” (vs. 13) The people’s spirits were once again stirred up in a positive manner, and they began to work on the house of God.—vs. 14

Sometimes we, like Israel, spend much time dwelling on the temporal needs of life and we begin to neglect the more important spiritual matters, the building of our characters after the example of Christ. We say, “I am too busy today to work for the Lord. Perhaps tomorrow it will be more convenient.” It is at these times that we especially need to heed the words of Apostle Paul, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.” (II Cor. 13:5) When we do this, we realize that the temporal things of life, though needful to the flesh, should not so preoccupy our time and efforts as to hinder us from seeking spiritual things. Jesus spoke of this in his sermon on the mount, “I say unto you, Take no [anxious] thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? ... for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Matt. 6:25,32,33) If we follow our Lord’s advice, we will be able to give priority to the more important aspects of our lives, that of making our calling and election sure.

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Hope for the Future

***Key Verse: “Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain.”
—Zechariah 8:3***

***Lesson Scripture:
Zechariah 8:1-13***

ZECHARIAH IS MENTIONED in Ezra 5:1 as one of the prophets who, with Haggai, “prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem.” (Ezra 5:1) In Zechariah 8:2, God is spoken of as “jealous for Zion.” This perhaps sounds strange compared to today’s use of the word, but it is used here and in other places in the Old Testament to stress that God demanded Israel’s sole allegiance—worship of no other gods could be tolerated. The sense of the word might best be communicated by the term zealous. God was burning with zeal to restore Jerusalem and its people, and to restore their worship of him as their God. As Zechariah prophesied of these coming events, it might seem on the surface that he was simply referring to the

immediate work then taking place of rebuilding the Temple, and the restoration of its role in Jewish life. This did happen and was a limited fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy. Yet, there was to be a later, and much more comprehensive, fulfillment that wasn’t to be understood for many centuries.

Since Zechariah’s prophecy was recorded, the history of the Jewish nation has been very checkered. His prophecy speaks of a time, yet future, when, as the Key Verse says, God ‘will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth.’ This speaks of the time when God’s kingdom, through that leadership of his son Jesus, will begin. It is spoken of as having its beginning in Jerusalem, and quickly spreading to all the corners of the earth. The prophet Micah specifically identifies the origins of this kingdom. He says, “For the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” (Mic. 4:2) Zion will be the heavenly phase of this kingdom, consisting of Jesus

and his faithful church of the present age. Jerusalem refers to the earthly phase, to be led and guided by the faithful fathers of old—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and many others who lived prior to Jesus' First Advent. Zechariah speaks of the wonderful blessings of the kingdom, a time when both the elderly and the young shall live in happiness, peace, and safety in Jerusalem. (Zech. 8:4,5) Further, he states that the people "shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness."—Zech. 8:8

As Zechariah continues his prophecy, it is evident that he is not merely speaking only of Jerusalem, or Israel, but rather Christ's kingdom. These blessings are to spread from Jerusalem and Israel to cover the entire world of mankind, Jew and Gentile. He says that as Israel has been a curse and a stumbling block to the other nations of earth in the past, they will now be a blessing to them. (vs. 13) Continuing, the prophet says, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord." (vss. 20-22) This will be the joyous time spoken of by God to Abraham, "In thy seed shall **all the nations** of the earth be blessed."—Gen. 22:18

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Celebrating Victories

Key Verse: “The children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy.”

—Ezra 6:16

***Lesson Scripture:
Ezra 6:13-22***

IT HAD BEEN NEARLY twenty years since Cyrus, King of Persia, had issued the proclamation that the Jews return to their homeland and rebuild their house of the Lord, their Temple which had been destroyed by the Babylonian armies. Almost miraculously, the rebuilding work was now done, and the Temple was finished. It had not been an easy task. In fact, if not for the leadership of Jeshua the priest and Zerubbabel the head of the tribe of Judah, and the encouragement of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the work most likely would not have been completed. As Ezra states, “The elders

of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo.”—Ezra 6:14

How true it is that any undertaking we may engage in for the service of God, we are not sufficient of ourselves to complete the task. We, as Israel did, must look to our spiritual leaders, Jesus and his apostles, for encouragement and strength to accomplish the work he would have us do. “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.” (II Cor. 3:5) Even in the day-to-day experiences of life; we must rely on God’s help through prayer and supplication to him. “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb. 4:16) The great Apostle Paul realized this in his own life. When speaking of the weakness of his eyesight, he was reminded by the Lord, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”—II Cor. 12:9

The Key Verse of our lesson points out that all those Jews who had returned from the captivity joined in the dedication of this rebuilt Temple. No doubt the ceremonies surrounding this dedication were on a much smaller scale than those which had taken place over four hundred years earlier when Solomon dedicated their first Temple. However, for this remnant of faithful Jews, the event was one of great joy, thanksgiving, and reflection upon what they had been able to accomplish with the Lord's help. As God's providence would have it, the completion and dedication of this rebuilt Temple coincided with the first month of the Jews' religious year, and so it is stated that "the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month. ... And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the Lord had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria [Persia] unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel."—Ezra 6:19,22

How important it is that God's people of today, the followers of Christ, also rejoice in dedicating their lives to God. The church is spoken of as God's dwelling place, his temple. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?" (I Cor. 3:16) Being in this symbolic 'temple' condition, we too should continually feast upon the Lord, partaking of his Truth, his example, his words, his character. Israel kept a seven-day feast, seven signifying completeness or perfection. Our feasting upon the Lord is each day, with our entire life represented as being the complete 'sevenday' feast. "Let us keep the feast, ... with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."—I Cor. 5:8

Dawn Bible Students Association

God's Plan of the Ages

(The Latter Ages)

WE HAVE LEARNED that in order to rightly divide the Word of Truth we must know in what time frame the scripture applies. Hence, in studying God's Word we learn that God has divided the time since man's creation into ages, or periods of time.

THE JEWISH AGE

The Patriarchal Age ended with the death of Jacob. On his deathbed, Jacob gathered his twelve sons around him and pronounced blessings upon each one. They were the nucleus of the nation of Israel. And from the death of Jacob to the First Advent of Christ, God's dealings were exclusively with this nation. He visited and delivered the nation from its slavery in Egypt. Through Moses, he gave this people his Law. He sent his prophets to them. Through the Prophet Amos the Lord said to Israel, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth."—Amos 3:2

Jesus came in the final years of the Jewish Age, and he respected his Heavenly Father's special appointment with Israel. When sending his disciples into the ministry he said to them, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matt. 10:5,6) This was no indication that Jesus did not love the Gentiles, nor did it mean that God's promise to bless all the nations of the earth had been forgotten. It was merely that the due time had not yet arrived for Divine favor to be extended to other than this one nation.

When Jesus was raised from the dead he removed this restriction, saying to his disciples just before he left them, "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) This broadening of the witness represented the beginning of a new age in the plan of God—the Gospel Age. During the Jewish Age God dealt with a nation as a nation. During the Gospel Age he has carried on his work through the proclamation of

the Gospel to all nations, and has accepted and blessed as his people all those who have responded to the drawing power of the Gospel, regardless of their race or nationality.

AGES OF PREPARATION

One thing, however, has been common to both the Jewish and Gospel Ages, which is that in them the work of the Lord has been to prepare a people through whom the promise made to Abraham to bless all the families of the earth would be fulfilled. The natural descendants of Abraham were given the first opportunity to become the “seed” of blessing. (Gen. 22:18) It was offered to them on a national basis, and made dependent upon obedience to God’s Law. Through Moses, God said to this nation, “If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.”—Exod. 19:5,6

The priestly family within the nation of Israel served the nation as God’s representatives in extending his blessings to the Israelites. God’s promise that upon the condition of faithfulness the whole nation would be a ‘kingdom of priests’ indicates that the nation could have become the channel of blessing, the ‘seed’ through which his promised blessing to all the families of the earth would flow.

The final test of worthiness for this high position in the plan of God came when Jesus presented himself to the nation at his First Advent. As a nation, the Israelites rejected him. The Apostle John wrote, “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” (John 1:11) This national rejection of Jesus proved the nation’s unworthiness of being a kingdom of priests.

From that time forward the selection of the seed of Abraham, the future channel of God’s blessings to the world, has been conducted on an individual basis. The first opportunity for individuals to qualify for this high honor was offered to the Israelites. John explains that while the nation rejected Jesus, “As many as received him [individually], to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”—John 1:12

But the number of individual Israelites who accepted Jesus was too small to make up God’s foreordained number of the seed class. So, as we

have seen, soon after Pentecost the Gospel invitation began to be extended to the people of other nations. This was in keeping with Jesus' final instruction to his disciples to go into all the world and preach the Gospel.

GENTILES INVITED

It was not the Divine intention, however, that the witness of the Gospel among all nations would convert the world to Christ. God's purpose in the work of this age, which began at Pentecost, is clearly expressed in Acts 15:14, where we read that "God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name." This 'people for his name' are called and prepared to be joint-heirs with Jesus, who is the Head of the promised "seed" class.—Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:8,16,27-29

They are shown to be with the "Lamb"—Jesus—on Mount Sion. They number 144,000 and all of them are said to have "his [the Lamb's] name and his Father's name written on their foreheads." (Rev. 14:1, *Revised Standard Version*) The first of these to be called were the individual Jews who accepted Jesus, and to whom he gave 'power to become the sons of God.' The remaining number are called out from the Gentile world, and these also are taken into the Divine family, the 'Father's name' being written in their foreheads.

The call and preparation of these, through the medium of the Gospel, has been the principal work of God in the earth throughout the age which is now ending. It is "after this" Gospel Age call of a people for his name that the work of God is extended to embrace all mankind. We read, "After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things."—Acts 15:16,17

Through David, and other kings of Israel, God ruled his ancient people. But that arrangement ceased with the overthrow of their last king, Zedekiah. The "crown" and the "diadem"—the right to rule—were then removed, and the Prophet Ezekiel stated, "It shall be no more, until he come whose right it is." (Ezek. 21:25-27) Jesus is the One 'whose right it is,' and it is at his Second Presence that he comes to establish the kingdom. Concerning this we read, "Of the increase of his government

and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”—Isa. 9:7

In this reestablished ‘kingdom’ of David, Divine rulership will not be limited to the one nation of Israel, but will embrace all nations—‘Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.’ With the inauguration of this kingdom in the hands of Jesus, and those called from Jews and Gentiles to be a people for his name, the present age closes and a new age begins. This will be the Kingdom Age. The Scriptures indicate that it is a thousand years in length, hence it is often referred to as the Millennial Age.—Rev. 20:1-4

It will be during the Millennial Age that the ‘residue,’ the remainder, of men will have an opportunity to ‘seek after the Lord,’ and this will include ‘all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called.’ (Acts 15:17) The Gospel has been widely witnessed to the Gentile world during the present age, but only a small number—a “little flock”—have responded to its call to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. (Luke 12:32) But these upon whom the Lord’s name has been called will still have an opportunity to seek after him.

Obviously, this means that the Gentiles who throughout the age did not respond to the Gospel call of self-sacrifice will need to be raised from the dead if they are to have an opportunity to seek after the Lord during the Millennial Age. And this is just what the Bible teaches. Not only will the whole world then be enlightened with a knowledge of the glory of God, but it will also be that glorious age in the plan of God when sickness and death will be destroyed, and when the dead will be raised and given an opportunity to enjoy the blessings of the kingdom.

“RIGHTLY DIVIDING”

Only by recognizing these time divisions in the plan of God, and discerning the nature of God’s work in each one, can we see and appreciate the marvelous harmony of the Scriptures. For instance, Jesus said to his disciples, “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matt. 7:14) Isaiah 35:8 reads, “An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The

way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those; the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.”

A glance at the description of these two ways shows that they are quite different. If we were to suppose that the ‘way’ mentioned by Isaiah is the same as the one described by Jesus, then we would have a contradiction. But when we “rightly” divide the Word of Truth (II Tim. 2:15), and recognize that the ‘narrow’ way Jesus described to his disciples is the one on which his sacrificing followers of this age have been walking, while the ‘way of holiness’ foretold by Isaiah is the one over which mankind will return to life during the Millennial Age, we have harmony.

During the present Gospel Age, the way of the Lord’s people has been ‘strait’ and narrow. They are invited to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, footsteps which lead to persecution, suffering, and finally to death. Those who walk in this way are “planted together” in the “likeness of his death.” They are “crucified” with him. (Rom. 6:5,6) Jesus admonishes them, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”—Rev. 2:10

Satan is ever watchful for an opportunity to deceive and discourage those who walk in the narrow way. Peter wrote concerning him that he “walketh” about, as a roaring lion, “seeking whom he may devour.” (I Pet. 5:8) True, the Lord’s people are “not ignorant of his devices,” yet his constant attacks upon them help to make the way in which they walk very difficult.—II Cor. 2:11

But it will be quite different for those who travel over the way that leads to life during the next age. No longer will it be necessary to suffer “for righteousness’ sake.” (Matt. 5:10) The opportunity to suffer and die with Jesus in order to live and reign with him will be past, so the way of holiness of the next age will not be one of sacrifice and they will not be invited to be faithful unto death, but unto life.

Satan will then be bound. No longer will he go about as a ‘roaring lion’ seeking whom he may devour. “No lion shall be there,” Isaiah assures us, “nor any ravenous beast [such as temptation to strong drink, and other evils] shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion [where the ‘Lamb’ and the 144,000 are enthroned to administer blessings of life] with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they

shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”—
Isa. 35:9,10

The ‘ransomed’ of the Lord shall return. Jesus gave himself a “ransom for all,” Paul explains, and this glorious fact is to be “testified” to all “in due time.” (I Tim. 2:3-6) So the ransomed millions of earth will ‘return’ from death that they may be made acquainted with the loving provision of everlasting life which has been made for them through the redemptive work of Christ. The ‘due time’ for this will be during the Millennial Age.

The reward for faithfulness will be perfect life upon earth, whereas the reward for faithfulness in the Gospel Age will be Divine nature for the church and a spiritual nature for the great company.

Dawn Bible Students Association

God, the Great Giver of Gifts

***“The gift of God is
eternal life through
Jesus Christ our
Lord.”***

—Romans 6:23

THE APOSTLE JAMES calls our attention to God being the great giver of gifts when he wrote, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” (James 1:17) Not only does ‘every good gift

and every perfect gift’ come ‘down from the Father of lights,’ but all things good and perfect are his gifts. It is not a matter of receiving some of our blessings from God, and some from other sources. Paul wrote, “Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?” (I Cor. 4:7) On Mars Hill Paul said, “In him we live, and move, and have our being.”—Acts 17:28

The material good things with which we are surrounded are the gifts of God, as well, also, as the ability he has given us through our five senses to enjoy them. How wonderful is the daily portion of joys of which we are made conscious through the senses of touch, sight, hearing, taste, and smell! How little would be the rose if we could neither see nor smell? The melodious harmony of music, whether produced by birds or by humans, would mean nothing if we could not hear. And there would be no joy in eating, if we could not taste.

Solomon wrote, “Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God.” (Eccles. 5:19) It is noteworthy, that in making provision for our first parents in the Garden of Eden, the Lord provided trees that not only would be good for food, but also “pleasant to the sight.” (Gen. 2:9) It was God’s desire that his human creatures enjoy themselves, and he designed that every function of life should be a pleasure.

In Psalm 115:16 we read, “The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord’s: but the earth hath he given to the children of men.” Despite man’s rebellion against his Creator, he still receives bountifully from his

hands. God “maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” (Matt. 5:45) God is impartial in bestowing earthly blessings upon his creatures. It is man’s sin and selfishness that have led to the inequalities and hardships which are everywhere apparent.

Christians who are walking in the way of sacrifice, following in the footsteps of Jesus, learn to accept with thankfulness what the Lord provides along temporal lines, because they have faith to believe that Divine wisdom knows what is best for them as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. Paul wrote, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: ... to be full and to be hungry.” (Phil. 4:11,12) If the Lord permitted the great Apostle Paul to be hungry at times, we should not be surprised if he does not always make the bountiful earthly provision for us that we may think we need.

To Timothy Paul wrote, “Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.” (I Tim. 6:6,7) Job is an outstanding example of resignation to the loss of earthly riches. In quick succession he lost his oxen, asses, sheep, and camels. Then word came to him that his sons and daughters were all killed by a storm which demolished a house in which they were having a party. Job’s reply to this great calamity was, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” (Job 1:21) Happy is the Christian who has faith to believe in times of temporal loss that the Lord, for his best spiritual welfare, sometimes takes away as well as gives.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

While we properly rejoice in, and are thankful for, all the good earthly gifts which come to us from the ‘Father of lights,’ our chief interest is in his spiritual gifts, which can be enjoyed only upon the basis of faith. Fundamental among these is the gift of salvation. Paul wrote, “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”—Eph. 2:8

Salvation has been provided by God’s grace; it is his gift, which we accept by faith. The gift of salvation was brought to man through Jesus,

who said, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) Paul speaks of Jesus as God’s “unspeakable gift,” for which we should ever give thanks.—II Cor. 9:15

Jesus was given to be man’s Redeemer nearly two thousand years ago, yet comparatively few of earth’s teeming billions since have really appreciated this gift. The vast majority do not yet know the meaning of the angelic message, “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”—Luke 2:10,11

If, through the Truth of the Divine plan, we have grasped the depth of meaning contained in the angel’s announcement of Jesus’ birth, it is because of another gift from God. We read, “The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live.” (Ps. 119:144) We may not have used these exact words, but it is certain that before the eyes of our understanding were opened to see the beauties of present Truth we prayed earnestly for understanding; and the Lord heard our prayers and “inclined” unto us, as it is stated in Psalm 40:1.

We remember the case of Peter. Jesus had asked his disciples what the public thought of him—who did the people say he was? Some thought he was John the Baptist; some thought he was the promised Elijah; others believed that he was Jeremiah raised from the dead, or one of the other prophets. “But whom say ye that I am?” Jesus asked his disciples. Peter replied, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Then Jesus said to Peter, “Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”—Matt. 16:13-17

No amount of ‘flesh and blood,’ or human reasoning, will enable us to understand the Truth. To his disciples Jesus said, “It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 13:11) At the time when “holy men” of old, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, were recording the great truths of the Divine plan as they centered in the Messiah, the Redeemer and Deliverer of mankind, even the angels desired to understand, but were not permitted to do so. (I Pet. 1:10-12; II Pet. 1:21; Matt. 13:17) How grateful we should be for the gift of discernment that we have been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God!

THE HOLY SPIRIT

We read the words of Jesus, saying, “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” (Luke 11:13) God will give us of his power that we might be able to know and do his will! The ministry of the Holy Spirit which God gives to his consecrated people touches every aspect of our lives as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a marvelous gift!

By the Holy Spirit we are begotten to a new hope of life, even the Divine. The Holy Spirit anoints, or authorizes, us to be ambassadors for Christ; and, as ambassadors, to proclaim glad tidings to the meek and to bind up the brokenhearted. (Isa. 61:1-3) We are “sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,” assured that if we remain faithful all our needs will be supplied, and that we will be given strength to overcome unto the end, and thus receive the ‘crown of life.’—Eph. 1:13

The Holy Spirit bears “witness” to us that we are the children of God, Paul wrote in Romans 8:16,17. This ‘witness’ is given through the written Word which was penned by the “inspiration of God, ... That the man of God may be perfect, [complete, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*] thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (II Tim. 3:16,17) ‘Thoroughly furnished’! How reassuring that through the gift of the Holy Spirit, every good thing we need as New Creatures is being supplied. We need only to be emptied of self that the Holy Spirit of God, in all its blessed ministrations, may fill and enrich our lives as we continue to set our affections on things above.

MINISTERING SPIRITS

We read, “He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.” (Ps. 91:11) The Lord is not limited in the number, or kind, of messengers he can use in the guidance, care, and protection of his people. He can even make the wrath of men and of devils to praise him. Today he may use a brother or a sister in the Truth to impart to you the blessing you most need. Tomorrow, if you are willing and prepared, he may use you as a messenger to help someone else over a rough place in the narrow way.

We believe, also, that the Lord uses the holy angels as “ministering spirits” to serve those “who shall be heirs of salvation.” (Heb. 1:13,14)

These, also, are his gifts to us. And what precious gifts they are! Speaking of our guardian angels, Jesus said that they “always behold the face” of the Heavenly Father. (Matt. 18:10) David wrote, “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.”—Ps. 34:7

How reassuring is the word ‘encampeth.’ Our guardian angels do not just occasionally come near to see how we are getting along. No, instead, they encamp, or live, right with us; and besides, they always behold the face of our Heavenly Father; that is, at any time a need arises they can go to the Father, and from him have that need supplied. Could we ask for more?

THE MINISTRY OF SORROW

We are not to suppose that these wonderful gifts of God mean that we will escape all trial and suffering. Quite to the contrary, for one of God’s gifts is the privilege of suffering with and for Christ. We read, “Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” (Phil. 1:29) The value of this gift is at once recognized when we remember that it is only if we suffer with Christ that we will be counted worthy to reign with him. The gift of the Spirit’s witness is valid only “if so be that we suffer with him.”—Rom. 8:16,17

But suffering with Christ is quite different from the trials and burdens of life with which we were all more or less weighed down before coming to the Lord and having lavished upon us all his bounteous gifts. This contrast is brought to our attention by Jesus, when he said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”—Matt. 11:28-30

The Master has given us rest. The burden of care and worry with which we were weighed down and almost crushed has been lifted. We have cast our burdens upon the Lord, and he has given us peace in the assurance that God’s great plan of salvation is the solution for all the problems of the world, and our own as well. Our own perplexities have been solved by accepting his will in place of our own imperfect and faltering plans.

‘Take my yoke upon you,’ Jesus said, ‘for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’ His yoke and burden are light because he shares them

with us. Because we know that he with whom we have become yokefellows will never permit the burden to become too heavy, and that we will never be crushed under its weight; and since he is always near to help, we have rest, the rest of faith in him.

We are not unaware of our enemies—the world, the flesh, and the Devil. When these enemies come in upon us like a flood, we would fear and quake before them, and probably fall, but for the realization that greater is he who is for us than all the forces which are marshaled against us. (Isa. 59:19) We know that the raging flood of opposition will not overwhelm us, for the promise is that “the Lord sitteth upon the flood; yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever [that is, he is always in complete control of the situation]. The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace.”—Ps. 29:10,11

FUTURE GIFTS PROMISED

Not only have we been made rich by the bountiful gifts of God which even now are our privilege daily to enjoy, but still there are more to follow. These future gifts will result in a fullness of joy quite beyond the ability of our finite minds to comprehend. It will be joint participation with Christ in the joys which he attained when he was highly exalted to the presence and right hand of our Heavenly Father. Prophetically, the Master’s anticipation of this future glory and joy are described in Psalm 16:11, which reads, “In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”

This future glory was first given to Jesus by promise, and in prayer to his Father he said concerning his disciples, “The glory which thou gavest me I have given them.” Again, “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me.”—John 17:22,24

After his resurrection and glorification, Jesus confirmed this hope of glory to his church in a series of promises recorded in Revelation, chapters two and three. This glory is so great, and involves so much, that no single symbolism or metaphor is adequate to convey to our minds the “things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” (I Cor. 2:9) Indeed, even with the aid of all the illustrations and promises of God concerning our “hope of glory,” we still can but partially comprehend—looking at them “through a glass, darkly.”— Col. 1:27; I Cor. 13:12

Here are some of the promises to the faithful overcomers, those who gain the victory, not in their own strength, but through Christ. “Be thou faithful unto death,” Jesus said, “and I will give thee a crown of life.” (Rev. 2:10) “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna.” (Rev. 2:17) “He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations.” (Rev. 2:26) “I will give him the morning star.” (Rev. 2:28) “The same shall be clothed in white raiment.” (Rev. 3:5) “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God.” (Rev. 3:12) “To him ... will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”—Rev. 3:21

When Jesus was still with his disciples, he knew of the Father’s plans for them to be associated with him in the future glory of the kingdom, so he made the promise, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32) Not only will the Heavenly Father bestow this gift of kingdom glory upon the overcomers, but, as Jesus assures us, it will be a pleasure for him to do so. As we find joy in giving, so it will be a delight to our God to give us the kingdom. What will this gift of the kingdom mean? To Jesus, the Heavenly Father promised, “I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” (Ps. 2:8) As we have seen, Jesus promised the overcomers that they also would be given “power over the nations,” adding, “even as I received of my Father.”—Rev. 2:26-28

In another promise to the ‘little flock,’ God said, “I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages: That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves.” (Isa. 49:8,9) What a blessed prospect! Think what it will mean to be given the privilege, the authority, and the power to call forth the prisoners of death, and give them the opportunity of inheriting the lost dominion of earth, the dominion that was made desolate by sin and its penalty, death!

WHAT WE CAN GIVE

The Lord’s gifts to us are truly more than can be numbered. They include the temporal blessings of life which he knows we have need of, and extend to and include all the marvelous arrangements which have

been made for our guidance, sustenance, and growth as New Creatures. How true are the words of Paul, who wrote, “My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 4:19

What can we do in return for all of God’s gifts so lavishly bestowed upon us? Proverbs 23:26 answers, “My son,” says the Lord, “give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.” From one standpoint this seems like a very simple thing to do; that is, to give our hearts, our affections, to the Lord. That is all we have, however, to give. Our bodies are imperfect and dying, and we could not give that which is under condemnation. All that we possess was given to us by the Lord in the first place.

But we can give the Lord our hearts. We have been created free moral agents, and God will not commandeer our affections. He can have them and use them only if we willingly, and out of love, surrender them to him. The invitation, ‘Give me thine heart,’ is merely another way of expressing the thought of full surrender to the Lord and the dedicating of ourselves to the doing of his will.

The temporal blessings of life are enjoyed by believers and unbelievers alike, the invaluable spiritual gifts which are so precious to us become ours to enjoy only upon the basis of full surrender to the Divine will. But to thus give the Lord our hearts, while it begins with a definite commitment of consecration, requires a lifetime to complete. It is a daily surrendering to him of all that we hold dear. We may give our hearts to the Lord today, and reserve them for ourselves or for others tomorrow. Consecration is a daily laying down, a daily giving up.

In addition to asking for our hearts, the Lord also says, ‘And let thine eyes observe my ways.’ Before we gave our hearts to the Lord, we chose our own ways. We planned our lives to suit our own best interests. But now, having given our hearts to the Lord, it means that we observe his ways, and are guided by them. Basically, the Lord’s ways are the ways of love, expressed in giving. He gives us food and clothing. He gives us his Holy Spirit. He gives us discernment. He gives us his Word. He gives us guardian angels. He gives us rest and peace. He gives us promises of coming glory and honor in the kingdom. He supplies all our needs, temporal and spiritual.

The Father's crowning gift is his own beloved Son. It is because he so loved the world, and you and me, (John 3:16) that he gave his only begotten Son to be the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. (I John 2:1,2) This, and all of God's gifts, are made to those not in a position to repay. Nothing we can give to God would add to what he already possesses, nor by withholding can we make him poor. He gives, not for a reward, but because he loves. This is the great example set before us by the liberality of our God.

This is the way of God which we are bidden by him to observe. It is the way of unselfishness, the way of love—a love that impels to give, to lay down, to sacrifice, to serve, to bless, to comfort, to cheer. It is in the doing of these things that God takes pleasure, and by observing and doing them ourselves we will find our greatest joys, and be most like God.

Paul quoted Jesus as saying, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35) It is more blessed, because it is being like God. We are richly blessed by God's gifts to us; and by observing his ways of giving, and practicing them, his gifts become even more precious, because we share them with others.

None of God's gifts to us are scanty. They are generous and bountiful, but the joy of receiving them is increased as we share them with those in need. This is particularly true with respect to the knowledge of God's plan which he has given us. If we keep this Truth to ourselves, it will become commonplace and lose its luster of importance; but if we share it with others, its joy-inspiring power in our lives continually increases.

The world has special occasions for giving—Father's Day, Mother's Day, birthdays, Christmas, and others. The giving that is inspired by these occasions brings a blessing to the givers. Any occasion which prompts a manifestation of love toward another helps to keep burning the oftentimes low flickering light of love in human hearts. How much happier the world would be if the spirit of love and giving was the mainspring of life every day!

It is so with God; and when his great plan of salvation is complete, and the whole world of mankind is fully restored to the sunshine of his love, the people will know that even during the dark night of sin and death God continued to give in order that they might eventually live. They will then know the real purpose of his greatest of all gifts, the gift of his beloved

Son. And if we observe his ways, we, too, will not limit our giving to any certain day, or days, but every day we will be gladly sharing with others the bounties of God's gifts to us.

Thus will we continue to share in the pleasures of our generous and loving Heavenly Father, the One from whom comes 'every good gift and every perfect gift.'—James 1:17

May Heaven sustain thee day by day,
And make thy generous heart of love
Rejoice through all the pleasant way
That God directs thy feet to move.

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The Great Commission

***“Ye shall be
witnesses unto me
... unto the
uttermost part of
the earth.”***

—Acts 1:8

THE WORDS OF OUR TEXT were spoken by Jesus to his disciples shortly before he left them to return to his Father in heaven. It was forty days after his resurrection, and ten days before Pentecost.

When the disciples “were come together” they asked Jesus, “Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts

1:6) The longings of the disciples that their nation be restored to its independence, and that the Messianic kingdom begin to function, is understandable. They were disappointed when their Master was crucified, but now they knew by “many infallible proofs” (vs. 3) that he had been raised from the dead, so they hoped that the time had come for their kingdom desires to be realized.

They doubtless recalled Jesus’ parable of a “certain nobleman” who went into a “far country” to receive a kingdom and then to return. (Luke 19:11,12) Jesus had been away. At least they had seen very little of him since his crucifixion. Perhaps many days had elapsed from the time of his last appearance until he met with them on Mount Olivet for this final short interview. Perhaps they may have thought he had already been to that ‘far country’ and now had returned and would establish his kingdom.

Whatever their reasoning, they soon learned that the time had not come for the kingdom to be set up, and for Israel to be freed from the Roman yoke. “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power,” Jesus said to them. (Acts 1:7) This has been a lesson which all the Lord’s people have had to learn. There are times and seasons in the Divine plan— very definite ones—but in most instances their significance has not been understood prior to the time of their application.

The time features of the Divine plan relating to this end of the age were not understood in advance, or until the period to which they applied had

been reached. Now, many of those important milestones are in the past, and many of the Lord's people, like the disciples of old, feel like asking, 'Wilt thou at this time' establish the kingdom? Again the Lord's answer comes, 'It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.'

This is a difficult lesson to learn. Over and over again time 'stakes' have been placed, only to see them recede into the distant past with nothing apparently significant occurring in connection with them. Yet, new dates are set which may also prove to be meaningless. There is great sincerity associated with this endeavor. But is it not still true that the times and the seasons are in the Father's hands? The hope is that the dates, if not too far in the future, will stimulate zeal and courage to press on in the narrow way. Discouragement may result when the dates prove to be wrong. It is much better to keep ourselves reminded that our consecration is unto death, and to gird on the armor of Truth with the determination that we will keep fighting the good fight of faith until we have finished our course in death.

Jesus had more than a negative reply for the disciples when they asked him about the time. He not only told them that it was not for them to know the times or the seasons, but also that there was work for them to do. They were to tarry briefly at Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them, and then they were to be his witnesses, beginning at Jerusalem, and carry the message unto the uttermost parts of the earth.

The circumstances are somewhat different today, but in principle the situation is very much the same. The last genuine time measurement thus far revealed in the Divine plan was the ending of the Gentile times in 1914. World developments since then have turned what was a disappointment to many at that time into a glorious assurance. Like the 'infallible proofs' given to the disciples that Jesus had been raised from the dead, we now stand in awe at the indisputable evidences that the "times of the Gentiles" did end in 1914, and that consequently the kingdoms of this world are being broken to pieces like a "potter's vessel."—Luke 21:24; Ps. 2:9

But the last members of the 'feet' class are still this side of the veil. Doubtless the Lord is sympathetic with our efforts to find out how much longer it will be ere the kingdom is established. However, we are left here

because there is still a work to be done. The Lord's consecrated people are still witnesses for Jesus and for the Word of God. Through our witnessing, the Lord continues to carry on the harvest work which marks the "end of the world [age]."—Matt. 13:39

If the Lord should speak directly to us today as he did to the disciples on Olivet, his admonition would be very similar. He would remind us that the important thing is not to discover when the last members of the church will pass beyond the veil and the kingdom be established, but to be faithful as his witnesses, seeing to it that the Truth we proclaim to others, working in conjunction with the experiences of life as they are overruled by Divine providence, is shaping us as New Creatures more and more into the Divine image.

GOLDEN OPPORTUNITIES

In many places in the world conditions were never more favorable for proclaiming the Truth—not favorable in the sense that large numbers are ready to accept the message, for they are not. But favorable in that there is little outward opposition.

Those sincerely looking for a better understanding of the Bible and of the plan of God are only to be found as one here and one there. We are speaking now of those ready to embrace the Truth fully, and consecrate themselves to the Lord. Millions would like to know the meaning of present world distress. When they hear the Truth they listen briefly, and perhaps say in their hearts, I hope it is true, but are not willing to pay the price of espousing an unpopular cause. However, even these receive a measure of comfort.

But, whether they hear, or whether they forbear to hear, it is our privilege to tell the whole world these blessed tidings. Our world of activity may be a restricted one, or the Lord may grant us wide opportunities of service. In any case, our responsibility is to be faithful. Those first disciples were given an expanded opportunity to witness for Jesus through the gift of tongues. By this means, Jewish representatives of many parts of the then-known world heard the message while they were in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost.

But the disciples did not stop with this. As arrangements could be made, they traveled from place to place themselves, and thus a knowledge of Jesus and the kingdom was spread abroad. Today we also

have our individual opportunities of bearing witness to the Truth, by word of mouth and by the printed page; and cooperatively we can project the message by radio, television and the internet throughout the far reaches of many continents.

Truly it is a wonderful time in which to be living! We know that the full fruition of our hopes must be near. The fact that we do not know exactly when gives faith the opportunity to rise above our own uncertainty and lay firm hold upon the promises of God, while we continue to lay down our lives in his service. Those first disciples did not have to wait long for the Holy Spirit to come, but when it did come they “were all with one accord in one place.” (Acts 2:1) We today are not waiting for a new Pentecost, but we are waiting for deliverance, and for the kingdom.

It is as important to us as it was to those in the ‘upper room’ that we all be ‘with one accord in one place.’ We should be in one accord with respect to the great foundation doctrines of the Truth, such as the ransom, and we are. Also, symbolically speaking, we should be in one place, the place of full devotion to the Lord, to the Truth, and to one another, standing together for the defense and proclamation of the Gospel of the kingdom. By this spirit of true Christian oneness, we can all be in one place, whether we live in America, Europe, Africa, Asia, or Australia.

On all of these continents, consecrated hearts and voices are being lifted up in praise to God for his goodness in blessing them with “ears” that could hear, and hearts that could appreciate the “joyful sound” of present Truth.—Matt. 13:16; Ps. 89:15

The general public today has been made conscious of the fact that the world in which they live is much larger than their own little local community. The Lord’s people have become aware of this also, and particularly through the promises of God that, if they are faithful unto death, he will use them as channels of blessing for all the families of the earth. So it is natural, and a source of rich blessing, to realize that our fellowship in the Truth is worldwide.

When we allow the realization of this fact to possess us, and consider the difficulties with which some of our brethren are confronted, our own trivial cares and problems do not seem nearly so important. When we consider that God is giving strength to his people in every land, regardless

of how severe their trials may be, it gives us courage to press on faithfully in the use of the opportunities which are ours for continuing to lay down our lives as ambassadors of Christ.

Jesus said, 'Ye are my witnesses.' This is still true.

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