

Immortality

INCREASING MAN'S LIFE SPAN by stopping the aging process has been given much publicity by the news media in recent years. True, the average life span of man has increased by the use of the many new pharmaceuticals to control ravaging diseases, by organ transplants, awareness of dietary needs, and generally because of the benefits accruing from the great increase in knowledge which has occurred during the latter part of the twentieth century.

This new information, known as anti-aging, is different. It is dependent on new technology, which is in the very early developmental stages. A few herbal companies have products that claim to be anti-aging, but their claims are questionable.

ANTI-AGING

The important work along this line is being done by biologists. About a year ago an article appeared in the "*New York Times*" which had the caption, "*Immortality of a Sort, Beckons to Biologists.*" The increase of man's life span today permits people to live longer, but the quality of life degrades tremendously. The work reported by the biologists in this article deals with a study that possibly might effect a profound change in the aging process, without loss of quality of life. The study is very interesting to students of the Bible from two standpoints: (1) as a scientific explanation of why man dies (confirming the death sentence of God), and (2) how everlasting life is technically possible.

All life, as brought forth upon earth by God, is composed of microscopic units called cells. These cells have the capability of growing and dividing. There is a limit, however, and eventually this process stops. As explained in the article:

"For decades biologists have known that the body's mortality is mirrored on the cellular level by an immutable rule called the Hayflick limit. Dr. Hayflick, now of the University of California, San Francisco, discovered that when tissue cells are taken from the body and cultured in a laboratory dish, they grow and divide about fifty times—the number

varies with the kind of tissue—and then lapse into senescence (growing old, aging).”

The ‘Hayflick limit’ is the scientific explanation of why man is mortal. Man’s cells stop replacing themselves and he eventually dies. The Biblical explanation concerning man dying is that it is the result of Father Adam’s disobedience and the entrance of sin into the world. The penalty of death passed upon mankind and all have come under that death penalty. The biologists use dictionary definitions of mortality and immortality that equate mortality to dying, and immortality to living forever. The Biblical definitions of mortality and immortality are not limited to the present life, and are defined as mortal meaning capable of dying (though not necessarily dying), and immortal as death-proof, or incapable of dying. Mortal means death is possible; immortal means death is impossible.

The expressions ‘immortal soul,’ and ‘undying soul,’ are so commonly used in religious conversation, it is taken for granted by those who have not made an investigation of the Biblical record that they are scriptural terms. For this reason it will be a distinct surprise to many to learn that these expressions are not found in the Bible at all. The traditional immortality of the human soul is purely a product of imagination, having no scriptural support whatsoever.

THE PENALTY OF DEATH

The first time the penalty for sin is mentioned in the Bible it is declared to be death. To Adam God said, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (Gen. 2:17) When our first parents did partake of the forbidden fruit God said to them, “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”—Gen. 3:19

This was the full limit of the penalty—a returning to the dust. Nothing more was said to our first parents concerning the result of their sins, except to outline the incidental sorrows they would experience prior to death. The final consummation of the penalty upon Adam is recorded in Genesis 5:5, where we read: “All the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years: and he died.” Ecclesiastes 12:7 has been misconstrued to mean that man possesses an immortal ‘spirit’ which cannot die, and which, at the death of the body, returns to God. We quote: “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return

unto God who gave it.” The key to a proper understanding of this text is the word ‘return.’ Both the ‘dust’ of which the body is composed, and the spirit return. This means that both revert to the prebirth condition.

The word spirit, as used in this text, is a translation of a Hebrew word which elsewhere in the Old Testament is translated ‘breath.’ It is used to define the God-given power of life inherent in the breath. In his sermon on Mars’ Hill, Paul said that in God “we live, and move, and have our being.”—Acts 17:28

At death the body returns to the dust. That should be obvious to all, and the text quoted states that the God-given power to live, the spirit or breath, also returns. It came from God as the Giver of all life, and therefore is properly described as returning to him.

WHAT IS A SOUL?

What then is the soul? The word soul in the Old Testament is translated from the Hebrew word *nephesh*. Professor Young states in his “*Analytical Concordance of the Scriptures*,” that this word *nephesh* simply means ‘animal,’ or, freely translated, ‘that which is animated, or alive—a sentient being.’ The word is used in the Old Testament in connection with the lower animals as well as man. In Numbers 31:28 it is applied to such animals as ‘beeves, asses, and sheep.’ Thus, were we to insist that the Hebrew word *nephesh*, translated ‘soul’ in the Old Testament, means *immortal soul*, then we would be bound to conclude that the lower animals also possess immortal souls—a conclusion that few would accept.

The word soul in the New Testament is translated from the Greek word *psuche*. We know this word has exactly the same meaning as the Hebrew word *nephesh*, for the Apostle Peter uses it to translate the latter when he quotes from Psalm 16:10. The apostle’s quotation is found in Acts 2:27, and reads: “Thou wilt not leave my soul [Greek, *psuche*; Hebrew, *nephesh*] in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” Peter tells us that this is a prophecy concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus—that his soul was not left in hell.

In Matthew 26:38, Jesus is reported as saying, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, *even unto death*.” This is fully in harmony with the prophetic declaration concerning Jesus which says that his soul was made “an offering for sin.” (Isa. 53:10) Jesus’ *soul died*, and through that one great

sacrifice the souls of all mankind are redeemed from death, and ultimately will be resurrected from the condition of death.

Another interesting use of the Greek word *psuche* [English, 'soul'] in the New Testament is found in Acts 3:19-23. Here we have a prophecy describing the work of restoration, or resurrection, that will be carried on by the Messiah following his Second Coming and the establishment of his kingdom. We are told that then "every *soul*, which will not hear [obey] that prophet, shall be *destroyed* from among the people." Thus both the Old and New Testaments emphasize the fact that human souls are *mortal*, subject to death, and that ultimately all wicked souls are to be destroyed—not preserved and tormented as the Dark Age creeds would have us believe.

FIRST HUMAN SOUL CREATED

We note carefully the process by which the first human soul was brought into being, as this will help us to understand more clearly what a soul really is. The scriptural account is given in Genesis 2:7, which reads: "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man *became* a living soul."

The soul is here shown to be the result, or product, of a union of the body, or organism, with the breath of life—"man *became* a living soul." This passage does not say, as many in the past have erroneously supposed, that God created man and then injected a soul into him—it declares, rather, that in the creation man '*became*' a soul, which is quite different.

First, according to the record, the organism, or *body* of man was formed—out of the 'dust of the ground.' This is scientifically in harmony with the facts as we know them today, as the body of man is composed entirely of the various chemical elements found in the earth. Then, into this organism was forced the '*breath of life*'—the animating power of the air which we breathe, which is necessary to all animal life. The Hebrew word here translated '*breath*,' is *neshamah*, which, according to Prof. Young, literally means 'breath.' The fact that it was breathed into the *nostrils* of father Adam emphasizes that it was the *breath*. Certainly the nostrils would seem like a peculiar place for an immortal soul to be located.

What happened when the breath of life was blown into the nostrils of this first human organism? It became alive—or, as the text declares, ‘a living soul.’ Thus seen, the ‘soul’ is really that which results from the union of the organism with the life-giving qualities of the breath—‘the breath of life.’ A simple illustration of this is the electric light. The organism of the bulb with its internal vacuum and filament, is not the light; neither is the electricity that flows through that organism, the light; but the union of the organism with the electricity *produces* the light. Destroy the bulb (organism) or cut off the electric current (corresponding to the breath of life) and the light goes out; that is, it ceases to exist, being extinguished.

So it is with the human soul. When the body becomes impaired through disease or accident to the point where it can no longer function sufficiently to react to the life-sustaining impulses of the breath of life, the soul, or life, of the individual ‘goes out’; that is, it ceases to exist; it dies. Likewise, if for any reason or manner, the breath of life is kept from the body, as in drowning or in asphyxiation, the life also ceases—the soul ceases to exist.

THE SECRET OF LIFE

It should be borne in mind that the great secret of life, the outward manifestations of which we are able to understand to some extent, is in the hands of the Creator. He is the great Creator, not only of man, but of the lower animals as well. He is to all *life* on earth what the sun is to all natural *light*; that is, the source. It is not possible for man to form an organism, put in it some of the earth’s atmosphere, and have it live. The literal air is the breath of life both to humans and the lower animals, because it is a medium of the Creator by which means the life principle is communicated to all living things in the earth.

This life principle is not an intelligence in itself, but the power of God by which all life exists. In Genesis 7:15,22, this same breath of life is said to be a possession of the lower animals.

CELLULAR RESEARCH

What then is it that the biologists have found that makes them speak of immortality? (Correctly, they should speak of ‘everlasting life.’) They have learned how to break the Hayflick limit for cells dividing and then

ceasing to divide. The reason for cells being limited to dividing is because a DNA known as the ‘telomere’ gets shorter each time the cell divides, and when the length reaches a certain minimum, the cell is thrown into a terminal crisis. Biologists have found that a gene possessed by all cells can restore the telomere to its youthful length.

For some reason, that gene is repressed and inactive in the cells of our bodies. The recent scientific work has consisted of inserting a copy of such a gene in active form into cells to make them divide indefinitely (or forever). Such cells must be the healthy, useful cells of the human body, because there are other cells which divide indefinitely and cause death to the body. These are cancer cells. It is this particular gene that is destroyed quickly by cancer cells which divide indefinitely and cause death prematurely. Such cancer cells destroy the body’s defense mechanism.

HOPE OF EVERLASTING LIFE

The cells that have sparked hope of being usable to provide the needed gene in active form are called ‘embryonic cells’ that are found in the embryo. Once the embryo is developed and born, the necessary gene in these cells no longer is active. This lends credence to the often-heard expression that as soon as a child is born, it begins to die.

How far have biologists come in the pursuit of having this gene activated in the cells of our bodies? Not very far. A team of researchers has been able to isolate some embryonic cells. Another team has been able to isolate the telomerase gene. Combining these and placing them into the human body as a transplant is a long way off. No one knows if such cells might be rejected by the body as has occurred in organ transplants, but such problems would not be faced until the distant future.

The importance of these scientific findings is the fact that the human body, as designed and constructed by God, can indeed live forever. This is why God has promised everlasting life to the ransomed, obedient children of Adam in the resurrection. The promises of the Bible are real, and not fanciful. God’s plan for man is everlasting life on Planet Earth. Man, however, in this restored and perfect condition, will not be immortal.

IMMORTALITY

The word ‘immortal’ is used only once in the entire Bible; and in that one instance it is applied to the Lord and not to man. We quote: “Now unto the King eternal, *immortal*, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever.” (I Tim. 1:17) In I Timothy 6:16 we have a passage similar to the foregoing, in which the word ‘immortality’ is used. This text is also speaking of the Lord, and reads: “*Who only hath immortality*, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting.” These two scriptural passages should definitely settle the question as to whether man, by nature, is an immortal creature. The word immortality is used four other times in the Bible, and in each case it is descriptive of a *conditional future* reward for those who in this life walk faithfully in the footsteps of the Master. We emphasize the fact again that we are not attempting to prove that there is no future life for human beings; rather, that all hope of future life, according to the Bible, is based on a resurrection of the dead. It is *not* based on the supposition that we are by *nature* immortal, hence cannot die.

We note four scriptures which refer to the Christian’s hope of being exalted to immortality with the Lord. Romans 2:7 reads: “To them [Christians] who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life.” This text shows that immortality is not now a possession of the Christian, but rather that it is something to be sought after through ‘patient continuance in well doing.’

In I Corinthians 15:53 we read: “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this *mortal* must put on *immortality*.” Here we are told that ‘immortality’ is a quality, which if it is ever to be possessed, must be ‘put on.’ The apostle explains well that we are now *mortal* beings. The next verse reads: “So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.”—vs. 54

There is one other text in which the word ‘immortality’ appears, namely II Timothy 1:10. It reads: “But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” It is evident from this passage that no one prior to our Lord’s First Advent had an

opportunity to strive for immortality as the church during this Gospel Age is encouraged to do. It shows, furthermore, that all hope of life and immortality is centered in Jesus and in his redemptive work.

For the church, the reward of immortality is mind-boggling and overwhelming! The tests of faithfulness must be thorough and severe. The standard that must be reached to receive this reward, of necessity, is very high. May God give us strength and help us to achieve this standard, and to be faithful even unto death.

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From Sorrow to Joy

***Key Verse: “Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.”
—II Cor. 2:14, New International Version***

***Selected Scripture:
II Corinthians 2:4-17***

THE APOSTLE PAUL established the Church at Corinth at the conclusion of his second journey, together with Timothy and Silas. He spent two years with them before leaving to go to Jerusalem. Enroute to Jerusalem he made a stop at Ephesus, and though the Jews wanted him to stay, he could not, but promised to return.

He did return on his third journey, after visiting other congregations that he had established on his first journey. While at Ephesus, news from Corinth reached him through the family of Chloe, of the divisions and problems that had arisen in the church at Corinth, causing Paul to

write a letter severely admonishing them.

After he sent that letter he had concerns that he may have been too harsh, and a personal explanation might help. Matters in Ephesus were so pressing, he could not go to Corinth as much as he wanted to. Paul did the next best thing, and sent Titus to see what the reaction was to his letter. Finally, after anxiously waiting months, Titus came and gave a good report on how well the brethren had received his admonitions. The second letter to the Corinthians expresses the satisfaction Paul had in learning how well they had received his letter of correction.

There was one person in particular who was involved in an immoral situation, and apparently when called to the church's attention the majority agreed with Paul, and had taken positive action. So writing to them again, he said: “I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you. If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent—not to put it too severely. The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient

for him.” (II Cor. 2:4-6, *NIV*) Rather than punish the brother more, he recommended, “Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.”—vs. 7, *NIV*

There are many experiences that we all encounter on our Christian journey in which great wrongs are committed. If true repentance is manifested when the matter is called to the offender’s attention, we must be ready to forgive and comfort. Otherwise we fall prey to the wiles of Satan’s devices. Paul reminded the Corinthian church (and us) that we are not ignorant of Satan’s devices. (vs. 11) Satan can exert a powerful influence on our decisions if we permit him to do so. By standing up for the correct principles and being ready to forgive the repentant errant ones, we become as a “sweet savour” (fragrance) unto God.—vs. 15

This expression is reminiscent of the incense on the golden altar in the Holy of the Tabernacle, representing the obedience of the saints. The obedience manifested during fiery trials can be likened to the perfume generated as incense comes in contact with the fiery coals. How glad we are that the Father stands ready to forgive through the blood of his Son and that we can express our joy in prayer to him.—Rev. 8:3

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From Suffering to Triumph

Key Verse: *“We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.”*

—II Corinthians 4:8, 9

Selected Scripture:
II Corinthians 4:5-18

IN ADDRESSING THE Corinthian brethren about the necessary experiences of the Church, Paul tried to make clear what he had said to other congregations. “We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22) Some in the church of Corinth thought otherwise. In his first letter, Paul said to some of them, “Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you.” (I Cor. 4:8) The mistaken notion that some had was that the testing was over and the glory to come was now due.

On that occasion the Apostle Paul used sarcasm to drive his point home to them, saying: “We are fools for Christ’s sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised.”—vs. 10

In this second letter the Apostle was making certain that they had not lost sight of the need for suffering for Christ. He used his own experiences as a model, emphasizing to them that God is aware of their hardships and will bring them to triumph by his great power. Paul had described the glorious ministry of reconciliation, that they (and we) are being trained to implement, using the giving of the Law to natural Israel as a picture and comparing it with the New Covenant to be established through the ministry of the church. To be qualified to be part of this ministry they had to endure hardship. These were not matters that would be understood by the world, who were successfully blinded by the Adversary.—II Cor. 4:4

In contrast, their experiences (and ours) are like the preparation of the earth for habitation when God’s first act was to command the light to shine out of darkness: “Let there be light: and there was light.” (Gen. 1:3)

The light of God shone into their hearts, giving them (and us) “the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (II Cor. 4:6) We, however, are still bound by our flesh, having this treasure in an earthen vessel. (vs. 7) This is so because God is to have the glory, and not us.

Although the pathway for participation in this ministry is through suffering of present experiences, there can be no comparison of these present experiences with the glory that shall be ours! For this reason the Apostle Paul alludes to these difficult experiences as but “light affliction, which is but for a moment, [and which] worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”—vs. 17

Nothing can stand in the way of this achievement because the power of God is behind it. Hence we know “that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.” (vs. 14) As Paul explains, all this is for our benefit so that the grace which is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

The sacrifice of our lives, then, is to show everyone our willingness to die with Jesus. We do this so that his life (character) may be revealed in us, as we strive (Rom. 8:29) “to be conformed to the image of his Son.” This, then, is the triumph that shall be achieved through the sufferings of the present time.

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From Reluctance to Joyful Giving

Key Verse: “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”

—II Corinthians 9:7

***Selected Scripture:
II Corinthians 9:1-13***

THE APOSTLE PAUL WAS well acquainted with the poverty of the brethren in Judea. He and Barnabas were sent by the Church of Antioch to them with a gift, when a drought in the land added to their normal hardships. (Acts 11:28-30) The persecution and opposition of the brethren in Judea by the Jews was very severe. Many could not find employment because of the prejudice against them. Hence, at every opportunity the Apostle Paul tried to enlist the aid of brethren in other lands to help them.

It appears that during his two years in Corinth, this matter was discussed and the Corinthian brethren were eager to help those in Judea. This generosity was often mentioned to other congregations by Paul. The trouble and strife that arose in Corinth following Paul's departure had interfered with their following through with their commitment. There may also have been a reassessment of their commitment by some.

The subject of giving is always a delicate matter. Paul had broached the matter in this letter by calling attention to the Macedonian brethren who had endured severe persecution by their fellow countrymen, but yet were eager to help although impoverished.—II Cor. 8:1-5

The greatest example was our Lord, Jesus Christ, who “though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.” (vs. 9) We are to follow his example. Giving must always be from the heart, and never forced. In following the example of our Lord in giving we will be sowing and reaping bountifully.

Paul lays these principles down as being taught in Proverbs 11:24-28. These showed that freewill giving is blessed by God. “One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to

poverty.” (Prov. 11:24, *New International Version*) Several verses quoted below from Proverbs chapter 11, *NIV*, teach the same lesson:

“A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.”—vs. 25

“People curse the man who hoards grain, but blessing crowns him who is willing to sell.”—vs. 26

“He who seeks good finds good will, but evil comes to him who searches for it.”—vs. 27

“Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf.”—vs. 28

And Proverbs 19:17, *NIV* reads: “He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done.”

The development of such a spirit of generosity is pleasing to the Heavenly Father. It is for this reason that he loves a cheerful giver. The way of the present evil world, and of the fallen human nature, is to be selfish and is contrary to God’s character. God is always giving, and we are always receiving. The more we give, the more we receive.

The Apostle Paul attributed to Jesus the words, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35) In Luke 14:12-14, Jesus explains this matter.

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From Confrontation to Growth

Key Verse: “*Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?*”

—II Corinthians

13:5, *New*

International Version

Selected Scripture:

II Corinthians

13:1-14, *NIV*

THE FIRST LETTER WRITTEN to the Corinthians chided them for their failure to understand God’s plan, and for permitting fleshly weaknesses to interfere with proper Christian development. This second letter was conciliatory, but the apostle was not forgetting how they had slipped so easily after his departure. Hence he wrote, “I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent. On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others.”—II Cor. 13:2, *NIV*

It is noted that the Apostle mentions having seen them a second time, and in both II Corinthians 12:14 and 13:1 that he was to see them a third time. There are

only two visits to Corinth recorded in the Book of Acts, and therefore, it is believed by many commentators that Paul was able to slip away from Ephesus for a brief, unrecorded visit to Corinth for disciplinary action. He would see them again a third time, and he would not tolerate loose behavior by those who had sinned. He had already said to them, “I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.”—II Cor. 12:21, *NIV*

At the same time, the apostle realized that he was limited in what he could do personally for them. Therefore, in concluding this second epistle to them, he was also placing them in God’s hands. It was up to them to examine themselves, as he says in our Key Verse. They were to test themselves by comparing their conduct with that of Jesus Christ, their model and Savior. If they should not see progress being made in being

conformed to the image of Christ, they should be very concerned, because they would be failing the test being placed upon them. What would they need to do to be successful? Paul says: “Aim for perfection.” (II Cor. 13:11, *NIV*) All of us must aim for perfection. How hard we try is what counts in God’s sight. None of us can ever hope to be perfect in this present life, but we must try. “Listen to my appeal.” We must follow Christ even as the Apostle Paul followed him. Paul told the Corinthians: “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.”—I Cor. 11:1

“Be of one mind.” (II Cor. 13:11, *NIV*) Again, the one mind all should have would be the mind of Christ. Paul wrote to the Philippian brethren, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 2:5) It is a mind of humility, of dedication to God, and such should be our minds. “Live in peace.” Where there is strife there is unhappiness and trouble. If a concerted effort is made to follow peace with every man we will be fulfilling God’s law of love.

In his final salutation Paul said, “The God of love and peace shall be with you.” So it shall it be with all who make a sincere effort to be built up in the most holy faith, which was Paul’s desire for his Corinthian brethren.

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Jacob Blesses His Sons

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

VERSES 1,2 “And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days.

“Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father.”

Having adopted his grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh, sons of Joseph, into his family and pronounced a blessing upon them, Jacob then sent for his own twelve sons in order that he might impart a blessing to them before he died. What he said to them was also in the nature of two prophecies, for he explained that he wanted to reveal that which would befall them “in the last days.”—vs. 1

This is the first of fifteen references in prophecy to the ‘last days,’ or ‘latter days,’ as the same general period is also called. The other fourteen are as follows: Numbers 24:14; Deuteronomy 4:30; 31:29; Job 19:25; Isaiah 2:2; Jeremiah 23:20; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39; Ezekiel 38:16; Daniel 2:28; 10:14; Hosea 3:5; Micah 4:1. A study of these will show that Jacob’s prophecy and blessing, as spoken to his sons, extends to and embraces the Messianic Age, having a relationship both to the First and Second Advents of Christ.

We are not to understand, however, that what he said with respect to every one of his sons was so all-embracing. So far as his words pertaining to the Messiah and his kingdom were concerned, these were contained only in his prophecy concerning Judah. In the case of the other sons, what promises he did make had to do particularly with comparatively minor things, such as their portion in the Promised Land.

VERSES 3,4 “Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power:

“Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father’s bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch.”

Reuben was Jacob's firstborn son, Leah being his mother. The scriptural references concerning him, on the whole, present a favorable view of his disposition. To him the preservation of Joseph's life appears to have been due. The sin which apparently caused him the loss of the high honor of being the head of the tribe from which the Messiah would be born is recorded in Genesis 35:22.

Jacob intimates that by nature Reuben should have been of excellent dignity and strength of character, but instead he was as 'unstable as water'; that is, easily stirred up emotionally, as water boils over a fire, but quickly cools off when the fuel is removed. Actually, no blessing at all was imparted to Reuben, and no prophecy given concerning him.

VERSES 5-7 "Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. "Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel."

Simeon and Levi were the second and third sons of Jacob by Leah. The mention of their cruelty is evidently a reference to the revengeful massacre which they perpetrated, as recorded in Genesis 34:25. This was evidently the sin which robbed them of the firstborn rights forfeited by Reuben. To them went a meagre blessing—"I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel." Apparently this is prophetic of the fact that in the division of the land following the Exodus, the tribe of Simeon was limited to a portion within the grant of land given to the tribe of Judah. The tribe of Levi was given no inheritance in the land, although they were honorably used in connection with the service of the Lord, evidently because of the noble stand they took in a time of crisis. See Exodus 32:1-29.

VERSES 8-12 "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. "Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?

“The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.

“Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass’s colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes.

“His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.”

Judah was the fourth of Jacob’s sons by Leah, and because of the sins of the other three, he inherited the blessing of the firstborn, which in this instance was the honor of heading the tribe from which the “King of kings, and Lord of lords” (I Tim. 6:15) was to be born. The name Judah means ‘praise.’ His mother praised the Lord when he was born, and his father said that Judah’s brethren would praise him.

Remembering that this prophecy was given amid Egyptian surroundings, meaning is added to Jacob’s reference to Judah being a ‘lion’s whelp,’ and a ‘couched lion.’ In Egypt at that time a couched lion was symbolic of the right to rulership which was vested in the reigning Pharaohs. The seed promised to Abraham was to be a great ruler. Isaac and Jacob in turn inherited this promise, and now Judah was also to be a ‘lion’s whelp,’ that is, the one to inherit God’s royal promise.

As Jacob explained, this ‘sceptre’ was not to depart from Judah, ‘nor a lawgiver from between his feet.’ This particular prophecy is given recognition in Revelation 5:5, where Jesus is referred to as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah.” And Revelation 5:11-13 seems clearly to indicate the larger fulfillment of Jacob’s prophecy pertaining to the praise that would come to Judah, or the tribe of Judah.

‘Until Shiloh come.’ (vs. 10) The word Shiloh means ‘peaceable,’ and one of the prophetic titles ascribed to Christ is “The Prince of Peace.” (Isa. 9:6) ‘Unto him shall the gathering of the people be.’ Paul may have had this in mind when, in Ephesians 1:10, he wrote “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times” God will gather together “all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.”

Verses 11 and 12 appear to be symbolic descriptions of the great prosperity of the tribe of Judah in relationship to the other tribes when they became settled in the Promised Land. When the land was divided, Judah was assigned a choice portion.

VERSE 13 “Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for an haven of ships; and his border shall be unto Zidon.”

Zebulun was the sixth, and last, son born to Jacob by Leah. The tribe of Zebulun is very obscure in the Scriptures. Jacob’s prophecy that the tribe would ‘dwell at the haven of the sea’ and be for ‘an haven of ships,’ is in keeping with a statement of Josephus, the Hebrew historian of the 1st century, to the effect that Zebulun’s allotment in the land reached on the one side to Lake Gennesaret, and on the other to Carmel and the Mediterranean.

VERSES 14,15 “Issachar is a strong ass couching down between
burdens:
“And he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute.”

Issachar means ‘reward.’ The land allotted to this tribe was, historians claim, among the richest in Palestine. It is this aspect of the territory of Issachar which appears to be alluded to in Jacob’s blessing. It would seem, however, that the tribe of Issachar was not overly ambitious. Comfortably located in fertile territory, the prophecy indicates that the tribe would prefer to pay tribute to the Canaanites rather than engage in the struggle to expel them.

VERSES 16-18 “Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel.

“Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.
“I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.”

The prophecy that Dan would judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel was apparently fulfilled in the judgeship of Samson. See Judges 13:25 and 15:20.

The reference to Dan as a ‘serpent’ that bit the ‘horse heels’ reminds us of the serpent in the Garden of Eden. Mother Eve was beguiled by that ‘serpent,’ and the tribe of Dan helped to beguile others in Israel to worship heathen gods, being the first of the tribes to go into idolatry.

Having given a prophecy reminiscent of the influence of Satan in Eden, and of his continuing beguilement of the people, Jacob expresses his hope of ultimate salvation from evil and its results, a prophecy which

originally was expressed as the seed of the woman bruising the serpent's head. All will be glad and rejoice in that salvation.—Isa. 25:9

VERSE 19 “Gad, a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last.”

Little information is given in the Scriptures concerning Gad. When his mother (Zilpah, Leah's maid) gave birth to him, Leah said, “A troop cometh,” and so she named him Gad, which has that meaning. (Gen. 30:11) His father said concerning him that a troop would overcome him, ‘but he shall overcome at the last.’ What we know about the tribe of Gad indicates that they were a warlike people.

VERSE 20 “Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties.”

The tribe of Asher is another concerning which not much is said in the Scriptures. In the division of the Promised Land the Asherites were given the maritime portion of the rich plain of Esdraelon, probably for a distance of eight or ten miles from the shore. This territory contained some of the richest soil in Palestine, and it may be this fact that caused Jacob to prophesy concerning this tribe that ‘his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties.’

VERSE 21 “Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words.”

Naphtali means ‘wrestling.’ Jacob's prophecy concerning this tribe is rather obscure in meaning. The expression, ‘he giveth goodly words,’ may mean that he would give cause for goodly words. If this is the thought, its fulfillment may be in the fact that in Deborah's song of praise over the defeat of Sisera, she gives special praise to Naphtali and Zebulun for their heroism in the battle.—Judges 4:10; 5:18

VERSES 22-26 “Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: “The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: “But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:) “Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb: “The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my

progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.”

In bestowing his blessing upon Joseph, Jacob first of all recounted the wonderful manner in which God had already cared for this favorite son, that although his enemies had tried to destroy him, his ‘hands were made strong’ by the hands of the Almighty God of Jacob. The clause shown in parenthesis, ‘from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel,’ is evidently intended to impress the thought that from the God of Israel come all blessings, and that in preserving Joseph, the Lord through him had preserved all Israel, thus keeping alive the nation from which the great shepherd and stone of promise would come.

These two terms are among the many which refer to the promised Messiah. Surely God’s providences over Joseph, that he might be the savior of all Israel, constitute a wonderful manifestation of God’s ability to fulfill his promises concerning the ‘seed’ through which all the families of the earth will be blessed!

God’s blessings upon Joseph’s tribe, future from Jacob’s day, were manifested chiefly in the prolific increase of their numbers—‘blessings of the breasts, and of the womb.’ Compare the “blessing” (Deut. 33:1) of Moses upon the tribe of Joseph as recorded in Deuteronomy 33:13-17.

VERSE 27 “Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil.”

According to this prophecy, one of the chief characteristics of the tribe of Benjamin was to be that of fierce cruelty. There are a number of references to Benjamites which bear this out; for example: Judges 3:15-30. King Saul was a Benjamite, and note his characteristics as revealed in I Samuel 11:6-11. Saul of Tarsus was a Benjamite, and before the Spirit of God began to mellow his heart he was a cruel persecutor of the church.

VERSE 28 “All these are the twelve tribes of Israel: and this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them.”

The parental blessing of Jacob was bestowed upon all twelve of his sons in contrast with Isaac’s blessing, which was limited to the firstborn alone—or to Jacob who purchased the right to receive the blessing of the

firstborn. True, the royal blessing bestowed by Jacob was limited to Judah, nevertheless the other tribes were not ignored—Jacob had something to say to them all, although in some cases the blessings were limited.

This contrast, we think, helps to establish the difference in God's method of dealing with his people during the Patriarchal Age and the Jewish Age. During the former, he dealt with individuals only—the patriarchs, each in turn. But beginning with the death of Jacob, God's dealings were with all twelve tribes as a nation. To them as a nation were his promises made. To them as a nation he gave his Law. When they sinned they were punished as a nation; and when they continued to reject him, their iniquity coming to the full, they were rejected as a nation. This was one of the main characteristics of the Jewish Age.

VERSES 29-33 “And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, “In the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a buryingplace. “There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah. “The purchase of the field and of the cave that is therein was from the children of Heth. “And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.”

Jacob had a strong faith in the promises God had made to his grandfather, Abraham—so strong that he knew his people would not remain in Egypt, but would eventually be delivered and brought into Canaan. On the strength of this belief he desired that he be taken back there to be buried.

He gave specific instructions to his sons concerning his burial place, saying that he wished to be laid away with Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and with Leah, one of his own wives.

Having pronounced his blessings upon his sons, and having instructed them concerning his burial, Jacob ‘gave up the ghost, and was gathered

unto his people.’ Later, his sons carried him to “the field of Machpelah” for interment, but this was after he had been gathered to his fathers—an expression which denotes merely that he joined his fathers in the state of death, where “the wicked cease from troubling; and ... the weary be at rest.” (Job 3:17-19) The word ghost is a translation of a Hebrew word meaning ‘breath.’ No imaginary white-robed phantom escaped from Jacob when he died. He simply gave up his breath, or stopped breathing.

Dawn Bible Students Association

The Cross

***“God forbid that I
should glory, save in
the cross of our Lord
Jesus Christ.”
—Galatians 6:14***

THE WORD CROSS HAS been translated from the Greek word, ‘*stauros*,’ which referred to a torture stake used as an instrument of capital punishment in the days of our Lord’s First Advent. There were several types in use. One was a single pole, or stake. Another had a crossbar at

the very top to form a ‘T.’ Yet another had a cross bar at three-quarters of the way from the ground, which is the conventional cross used as an emblem by Christians. A fourth was two stakes crossed to make an ‘X.’

CROSS CONFIGURATION

Much debate has taken place among some Christian groups as to which configuration was actually used to crucify our Lord. We think that it was the conventional cross used by Christians, because if a single stake were used, or any other configuration, it would not have been possible for Pilate to have a sign nailed to the cross above our Lord’s head.— Matt. 27:37; Luke 23:38; John 19:19-22

Of far more importance is the answer to the question, “What does the emblem of the cross mean to us?” We realize that many have died on a cross, but our Lord’s death was the only one in which the victim was innocent—“holy, harmless, undefiled” (Heb. 7:26)—entirely unworthy of a death sentence. He was the only one, therefore, whose dying was wholly voluntary; the only one who needed not to die, had he so willed it.

WHY DID JESUS DIE?

Why, then, did our Lord die? We note the existence of extensive suffering in the world today, and the reign of sickness, sorrow, pain, and death. These are obvious and undeniable facts, and everyone has been exposed to their effects. Who has not been touched? What circle has it not invaded: What home has it never entered?

“There is no flock however watched and tended
But one dead lamb is there.
There is no fireside howsoever defended
But hath one vacant chair.”

No power of man can bring the reign of death to an end. No mere philosophy can do it; no ordinary march of civilization; no discoveries of science; no changes in earthly, man-made governments can abolish the process of sin, pain and death. Nothing but the almighty power of God will suffice.

The Scriptures reveal that by the disobedience of one man, Adam, “sin entered into the world, and death by sin.” (Rom. 5:12) But we rejoice to know that by one man, Christ Jesus, comes “the resurrection of the dead.” (I Cor. 15:21) So we “behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) He is the channel of blessing—the very hub, around which the Heavenly Father is pleased to have his great plan and purpose revolve.

The theme of Jesus at all times was, “Lo, I come ... to do thy will, O God.” (Heb. 10:7; Ps. 40:8) And the Father’s loving purpose, as expressed in I John 4:10, was: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation [or satisfaction] for our sins.” Also in I John 2:2 we read, “not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”

God’s dear Son, in his prehuman condition, joyfully accepted this offer made to him of being a colaborer with his Father on behalf of the poor dead and dying world. He left the heavenly court and willingly laid aside that heavenly glory which he had next to the Father. In due time he was born in the flesh, and subsequently became the man Christ Jesus. “Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”—II Cor. 8:9

At thirty years of age he made a full consecration unto death. His ministry and sacrifice continued, as from Jordan to Calvary he poured out his very being unto death. This sacrificial life was consummated on the cruel cross, where he gave up his life—a “ransom for all.”—I Tim. 2:6

Death, which so sadly and surely affects the whole human race, is the logical and legal penalty for sin (Ezek. 18:4), not only because it has been plainly declared so in God’s Word, but also for reasons grounded in the

Divine character—even the righteousness of Jehovah. “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23), and the sinfulness of sin cannot be ignored. Therefore the penalty of death upon the race, condemned through Adam, could not be lifted without a ‘ransom’—a ‘corresponding price.’ The one (Adam) created perfect, afterwards sinned and brought death to himself and to all his posterity.

“Since through a man [Adam], there is death, through a man [Christ Jesus], also, there is a resurrection of the dead; for as by Adam all die, so by the Anointed also, will all be restored to life.” (I Cor. 15:21, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) “Ye were not redeemed [or set free by payment of a price] with corruptible things, as silver and gold, ... But with the precious blood of Christ.”—I Pet. 1:18,19

WHY CRUCIFIXION?

Our Lord died by means of crucifixion between two criminals. This would doubtless mean to him the depth of humiliation. Every noble Christian prizing purity in his own heart would find it especially detestable to be so misunderstood as to be numbered with transgressors, murderers, thieves, criminals—actually accounted to be one of them.

Jesus loathed sin and utterly opposed it, in every sense of the word! From the Heavenly Father’s standpoint, permission that his beloved Son should be numbered with the transgressors was evidently to be a demonstration to angels and to men of his Son’s loyalty of heart under the most extreme and severest of tests. And Jesus “humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”—Phil. 2:8

It would seem that it was not so much the shadow of death that confronted our Lord so prominently, but the shadow of the cross—the shame, dishonor, ignominy, defilement of the cross. One who hangs upon a cross is accursed of God, and is one that defiles the land. “Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” (Gal. 3:13) “He that is hanged is accursed of God.”—Deut. 21:23

Thus Jesus demonstrated, not only his willingness to die, but his willingness to die in the most despicable manner. He demonstrated thereby his full self-renunciation, the complete deadness of his own will, and the thorough aliveness of his own heart and mind to his Father’s will.

Here is a sublime lesson for us! Full self-renunciation to that consecration; the complete deadness of our own will, denying self until there is no self; and the thorough aliveness of our own heart and mind to our Father's will are necessary to follow Christ. There is no room for self-pity, because self is to be dead.

If we suffer as a Christian, are persecuted, reviled, abused by language as Jesus was, should we revile or join the ranks of the persecutors in retaliation? We must not even take offense, because self is to be denied utterly.

As we view our Lord upon the cross, after having faithfully completed his sacrificial walk from Jordan to Calvary, we recall that, "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." (Heb. 5:8) Though he was perfect, "he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." (vs. 9) Jesus was made perfect through suffering, and he was faithful in bearing his cross.

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