

Restitution—The Bible's Testimony

“And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution [restoration] of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”

—Acts 3:20,21

THE TERM “RESTITUTION” means restoration, and the Apostle Peter’s use of this word in our opening text is part of his prophecy of events which would follow the second coming of Christ, indicating that there is to be a period of restoration. This program calls, not for the creation of a new paradise, but for the reestablishment of the paradise which was lost.

Jesus tells us in Luke 19:10 that the Son of man came to “seek and to save that which was lost.” The accomplishment of this divine purpose is centered in Jesus. At his First Advent he “gave himself a ransom,” or corresponding price, in order that the sentence of death imposed upon mankind in Eden could be set aside. (I Tim. 2:5,6) He comes the second time for the purpose of restoring to life those who died as the result of Adam’s transgression.

If we can visualize the perfection and happiness enjoyed by our first parents before they transgressed the divine law, then we can understand, at least partially, the extraordinary changes that are to be effected in the world when the lost paradise, with all of its blessings, is restored by the returned Christ. The Garden of Eden was but a sample of what the whole earth will be like when God's program of restitution, administered by Christ, is complete.

GOD'S FAVOR RETURNS

In the verse prior to our opening text, the apostle says that "times of refreshing" shall come from the "presence of the Lord." This expression, "presence of the Lord," is translated from Greek words meaning "out from the face of the Lord." (*Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible*) This phrase suggests the thought of God's favor being manifested toward the human race. The complete thought outlined by the apostle therefore is that the second coming of Christ will usher in a period during which he would shine forth his love and kindness upon the human race, and bless them by restoring them to perfection of human life.

The apostle declares that all of God's holy prophets have foretold the coming "times of restitution." David was one of these prophets who had much to say on the subject. In his thirtieth Psalm, verse 5, he mentions it in connection with the thought of God's returning favor. He says: "For his anger endureth but for a moment; in his favour is life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." God's anger against his human creation began when our first parents disobeyed his

law. As a result, they were sentenced to death and driven out from their perfect Edenic home. Because their children were imperfect when born, the penalty of death passed on to them and to the whole human race. The entire world has been passing through a nighttime of sorrow and death.—Rom. 5:12; 3:23

While this sentence of death has continued for six thousand years, yet from the standpoint of an eternity of God's favors and blessings, it has been "but for a moment," and for each individual it has been no longer than the few brief years from the cradle to the grave.

This nighttime of God's disfavor is not to continue indefinitely. God will again turn his face toward the human race. His favor was first of all shown in the sending of his Son to be man's Redeemer, and is further demonstrated in sending him the second time to restore the race which he redeemed. David stated, "In his favour is life," which means that when God again smiles upon the human race, sickness and death will end. It means that the long night of sin, sorrow, and death will terminate in a morning of joy.

THE WORK OF REDEMPTION

The coming period of restitution is made possible by the redemptive work of Christ, accomplished at his First Advent. The Prophet Hosea refers to this, when, speaking as a mouthpiece of the Lord he says, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction."—Hos. 13:14

Notice how God's prophet, in the text just quoted, associates the ransom with the destruction of death. The New Testament explains the philosophy of this by showing that Jesus, the Son of God, was sent into the world by the Heavenly Father to be this ransom. He came to die, "the just for the unjust." (I Pet. 3:18) Paul explains that this was all according to the will of God in connection with his purpose to save mankind from death. The apostle says, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."—I Tim. 2:5,6

The benefits of the redemptive work of Christ are available to the individual only upon the conditions of knowledge and belief, so the apostle assures us that this knowledge will be "testified" to all "in due time." The due time for the world to have the knowledge of Christ's redemption testified to them will be the Messianic kingdom period, which follows the Second Advent of the Master.

ALL OF GOD'S PROPHETS

Peter tells us that the facts concerning the "times of restitution" were testified by the mouth of all God's holy prophets since the world began. An examination of the Old Testament scriptures reveals that this is true. Isaiah was one of these holy prophets. In the 35th chapter of his prophecy, he tells us the blind eyes shall be opened, the deaf ears shall be unstopped, the dumb tongue shall sing, and the lame man shall leap as a deer.

Isaiah also tells us a "highway" is to be opened up for the people, a way that will lead to holiness,

or perfection. He tells that everything will be very plain on this highway—so plain that the ordinary wayfaring man, though unlearned, will not err. This agrees with other prophetic statements concerning that time, which inform us that then the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.—Isa. 35:5-10; 11:9; Hab. 2:14

The prophet assures us that there shall be no lion on this highway. (Isa. 35:9) Peter tells us of the present time that “the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” (I Pet. 5:8) According to the Apostle John, Satan is to be bound in the very beginning of the restitution period. (Rev. 20:1,2) Thus the prophet was quite correct when he said that no lion shall go up on the highway that leads back to life and paradise.

Isaiah continues his description of the highway of holiness by saying no “ravenous beast shall go up thereon.” The Bible tells us of many different beasts that have afflicted and tormented the people down through the ages. Some of these beasts are referred to by Daniel and the Revelator. They are symbolic of beastly governments of one kind or another that have exploited and oppressed the people. However, before the Messianic kingdom is established, all these “beasts” are to be destroyed; so it will be true that “no ravenous beast shall go up thereon.”—Isa. 35:9

Finally, the prophet tells us that over this highway “the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” (vs. 10) Indeed, that was God’s purpose in ransoming the human

race; namely, that they might return from death, and once more enter into the joy of living. It is a joy which will far exceed that of their former experience because they will come to know God. If obedient to the kingdom's righteous laws, they will continue to live, will abide in his favor, and will receive his blessings that "maketh rich."—Prov. 10:22

When viewed from the standpoint of these prophecies, restitution is seen to include resurrection. There are students of the Bible who are willing to admit that the second coming of Christ may result in some partial recovery of the then living generation. However, by doing so they severely limit the scope of restitution, not realizing that if all the families of the earth are to be blessed, and if there are to be "times of restitution of all things," it means that those who have died, as well as the living, must be given an opportunity to be blessed. (Gen. 12:3; 28:14) Thus, when viewed from the standpoint of prophecy, restitution is seen to include resurrection.

Job, another of God's holy prophets, expressed the hope of a resurrection, saying, "If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands." (Job 14:14,15) Thus Job expressed the belief that he would hear the voice of the Lord calling him forth from the tomb. Jesus agrees with this, and makes it more comprehensive by saying, "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his (the Son of man's) voice, And shall come forth."—John 5:28,29

SODOMITES TO BE RESTORED

Ezekiel was also one of God's holy prophets, and he lays emphasis on the fact that even such wicked people as the Sodomites are to be brought back from the grave during the times of restitution. Chiding the Israelites for their unfaithfulness, yet at the same time reminding them of their hope of a resurrection, Ezekiel says: "When thy sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate, then thou and thy daughters shall return to your former estate."—Ezek. 16:55

This, of course, does not imply universal salvation for the wicked, irrespective of their obedience to the divine law, but it does mean an opportunity for salvation to all. Jesus said concerning the Sodomites, that it would be more tolerable for them in the Day of Judgment than it would be for the people of certain Jewish cities. (Matt. 10:15; 11:24) The opportunity for everlasting life upon the condition of obedience will be offered to all during the times of restitution. How will it be more favorable for the Sodomites than for many others, such as those who lived in certain Jewish cities?

Because the Jewish nation had been greatly blessed by the Lord, their sin was against greater knowledge than that of the Sodomites. Hence it will require a greater degree of humility on their part to come back into harmony with the Lord's law. Jesus said that if the mighty works that had been done in Capernaum, had been done in Sodom, the Sodomites would have repented. (Matt. 11:21-23) Many great works will be done in Sodom. They will be awakened from the sleep of death and be given an opportunity, under the most favorable circumstances,

to repent and live, and doubtless most of them will be penitent and gladly go up on the “highway” to everlasting life.

CHILDREN TO BE RESURRECTED

Jeremiah, another holy prophet of the Lord, also spoke of restitution. In the 31st chapter of his prophecy we find a promise concerning the resurrection of children. This particular promise has to do specifically with those children who were slaughtered by Herod at the time of Jesus’ birth. It shows, nevertheless, that it is God’s purpose to restore to life all those who have gone down into death as children. How grand it will be for mothers to have their children restored to them, and to have the privilege of raising them just as though they had not died. Jeremiah says: “Thus saith the LORD; a voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the LORD; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy [death]. And there is hope in thine end, saith the LORD, that thy children shall come again to their own border.”—Jer. 31:15-17

The Prophet Daniel also foretold the coming times of restitution, indicating that it follows the great time of trouble with which the present age is now ending. In pronouncing the sentence of death upon our first parents, God said, “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Gen. 3:19) Daniel says that those “that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.” (Dan. 12:2) This, in reality, means

the setting aside of the Adamic death sentence, and the restoration of those in the sleep of death to life again. What a beautiful way of illustrating the blessed work of restitution!

Another of God's holy prophets was Amos, and speaking for God, he says: "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old." (Amos 9:11) David's tabernacle was a temporary structure built to house the Ark of the Covenant at the time it was restored to Israel from the hands of their enemies. The Ark of the Covenant was a beautiful symbol of the presence and favor of God. (Exod. 30:6; Num. 17:4) It was wrested from the Israelites for a time, and when it was restored to them, it meant that God's favor was again upon that nation, and this signaled a time for great rejoicing.—I Sam. chapters 4-7; II Sam. 6:1-18; 7:1

The restoration of the tabernacle of David therefore is a symbol indicating that God's favor is to be restored to Israel, after having been withdrawn from them for a long period of time. This is exactly what will happen on behalf of Israel and the whole world during the "times of restitution." This prophecy is quoted in the 15th chapter of Acts, with its fulfillment shown to be following the return of Christ, and that the Gentiles as well as the Jews will then be blessed.

We quote: "James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon [Peter] hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written;

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 15:13-17

Here we are shown that God’s purpose since the death and resurrection of Jesus has not been to convert the world, but merely to select from among mankind a little company—“a people for his name”—to be associated with the Master in the future kingdom work. Here again the glorious objective of God’s purpose of love is set forth because we are told that after this people for his name is taken out from the Gentiles, then God’s favor will return to the Jews. Then, also, “all the Gentiles” will have an opportunity to “seek after the Lord.”

SAVIORS ON MOUNT ZION

Obadiah was also one of the Lord’s holy prophets, and in the very last verse of his prophecy, he says, “Saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD’S.” Ordinarily we think of only one Savior, and indeed, Jesus is the world’s Savior. Apart from the shed blood of Jesus there could be no salvation for anyone. Nevertheless, his footstep followers are invited to share with him in the work of bringing salvation to the world. They suffer and die with him in order that they may live and reign with him in his kingdom, and his reign is for the purpose of rescuing the world from death.—Rom. 8:16,17; II Tim. 2:11,12; Rev 20:6

In Revelation 14:1 the identity of these Saviors on mount Zion is revealed. John says, "I looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on mount Zion, and with him an hundred and forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads." Now we can see what James meant by a people gathered from among the Gentiles—a people for God's name. To start with, this glorious opportunity was limited to the Jews. Although as a nation they rejected it, there were individual Jews who understood and embraced the opportunity, but not the required number. As a result, the Lord turned to the Gentiles to make up the full ordained number of "Saviors" that were to be on the symbolic mount Zion with Jesus. They all must bear the Father's name, since they are all taken into the divine family and thus become the ruling house of God in the new kingdom.

Jesus' followers who are pictured as Saviors with him on mount Zion during the kingdom period are such not because they have given themselves as ransoms. Indeed, it is not necessary that they do so. However, because of their faithfulness in following Jesus into sacrificial death they are given a share with him in dispensing the blessings promised as a result of his ransom work. When, as the prophet shows, the Saviors stand on mount Zion, it will be the time when the "kingdom shall be the LORD'S." That will be the time of restitution.

MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD'S HOUSE

Micah, still another of the holy prophets, wrote in chapter 4, verses 1-4, as follows: "In the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the

house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the Word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it.”

By referring to Daniel 2:35-44, it will be seen that the “mountain of the LORD” refers to God’s kingdom. Notice how practical are the restitution blessings that will be dispensed to the world during that kingdom period. The picture in the book of Micah begins with the “last days,” that period just prior to the kingdom’s establishment, during which the old Satanic order of things will be set aside by a great time of trouble. The people, in their distress, will look to the Lord for help and instruction as to what to do—how to extricate themselves from the ruin that has been precipitated by mankind’s selfishness and foolishness.

Then, giving recognition to the new kingdom, they will be taught of the Lord’s ways, which will be ways of peace instead of the ways of war. Economic security will also be one of the features of that new day of the Messianic kingdom. Every man

will “dwell under his vine and under his fig tree.” We are not to understand this too literally, of course, as it is merely a picture of security and happiness in which none shall make afraid. The thought is that in the times of restitution, all will be amply provided for. The provision will be permanent, lasting just as long as the individual continues to obey the laws of God.

A UNIVERSAL RELIGION

Habakkuk was a holy prophet of the Lord, and he tells of that day of restitution, saying that “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.” (Hab. 2:14) Zephaniah, another of God’s prophets, also tells of the God-given enlightenment which will come to the people at that time. “For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.”—Zeph. 3:9

The blinding influences of Satan will be dispelled by the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. The pure language—the instruction—which will then be turned to the people, shall, as the prophet says, result in all mankind calling upon the name of the Lord to serve him with one consent—that is, shoulder to shoulder. Thus will the true knowledge of God be restored during those times of restitution.

The Prophet Zechariah, who also spoke for God concerning that glad day of restitution, goes into detail in explaining how the enlightening influences of the kingdom period will affect the people. He says: “It shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: But it shall be one

day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light.” (Zech. 14:6,7) The thought here is that of gradual enlightenment. It is easy to see how that will be brought about. The Messianic kingdom will first of all be established with the living generations. When we realize the size of planet Earth, and the myriads of people who live upon it, we can understand why some time will elapse before all will come to know of the new kingdom. It will take time, also, for the people to get rid of their superstitious ideas concerning God, so that they will be able to know him aright.

Then there will be all the billions who have died, who, when raised from the dead, will need to be instructed in the true knowledge of God. They have not learned anything while in the grave. (Eccl. 9:10) Hence as they are brought forth from the tomb they will need to learn about the true God in order to have an opportunity to obey his laws. The work of enlightening the people will go on throughout the entire thousand-year “day” of the kingdom.

That period is referred to as being partly light and partly dark. That is, it will be a time when the people are having their blindness and superstition gradually removed. Until the work is complete, there will still be some symbolic darkness in the world, but in the evening, or close of that glorious day, it will be fully light. By then, the enlightening and healing influences of the “Sun of righteousness” as prophesied by the Prophet Malachi, will have scattered all the mists of darkness, and the knowledge of God’s glory shall then fill the earth.—Mal. 4:2

TANGIBLE BLESSINGS

The result of Christ's Second Advent is to be a glorious one. The blessings to be dispensed through the administration of his kingdom are to be very practical. Upon the testimony of all God's holy prophets who foretold the times of restitution, these blessings are to be: enlightenment concerning the true God and his plan; an end to all the countless superstitious beliefs that have plagued a bewildered world since the days of Eden; freedom from disease of all kinds; release from Adamic death; no more wars; and economic security for all.

All of these very practical and satisfying good things of the Messianic kingdom will not be dispensed unconditionally. The Apostle Peter is very careful to remind us, when telling us of the times of restitution, "it shall be, that every soul that shall not hearken to that prophet," and continues to sin willfully after coming to a knowledge of righteousness, will be cut off in death.—Acts 3:23, *American Standard Version*

God gave Adam and Eve dominion over the earth and the things of the earth. The obedient ones of that future day, which we believe will include the vast majority of mankind, shall have the original dominion restored to them. Thus, again, we have the thought of restitution, the restoration of paradise, worldwide in scope and effect. What a glorious hope this is for the poor, sin-sick and dying world.

Consider the changes that will be brought about as a result of the destruction of disease and death. Think of other changes due to the fact that there shall be no more war. Visualize the results that will come about when the people learn to know and to

love and to sincerely serve the true God. Contemplate what it will mean when love takes the place of selfishness as the motivating principle back of all human activity.

Ponder, too, the changed viewpoint when people will not need to think about and plan for death. Envision an eternity of joy stretching before them instead of a short, hectic existence made up, at best, of only a small portion of happiness, and the rest, disappointment and sorrow. To put in the words of one of God's inspired and holy prophets, think of the time when "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

While this may look impossible to us, perhaps, because we have never seen anything like it before, nothing of this kind is impossible with God. Life itself seems impossible to us; that is to say, we do not fully understand what life is. Who is wise enough to tell us the philosophy of a heartbeat? Yet God, the Creator, created the heart and the heartbeat, and the same God is abundantly able to restore in the billions of humans the heartbeat that once haltingly pulsated with a measure of life, but finally succumbed to the ravages of death, because God's justice had decreed that no imperfect human creature could continue to live.

This glorious "restitution of all things" is to be accomplished by the Messianic kingdom which is soon to be established. Let us continue to pray for that day, as Jesus taught us: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."—Matt. 6:10 ■