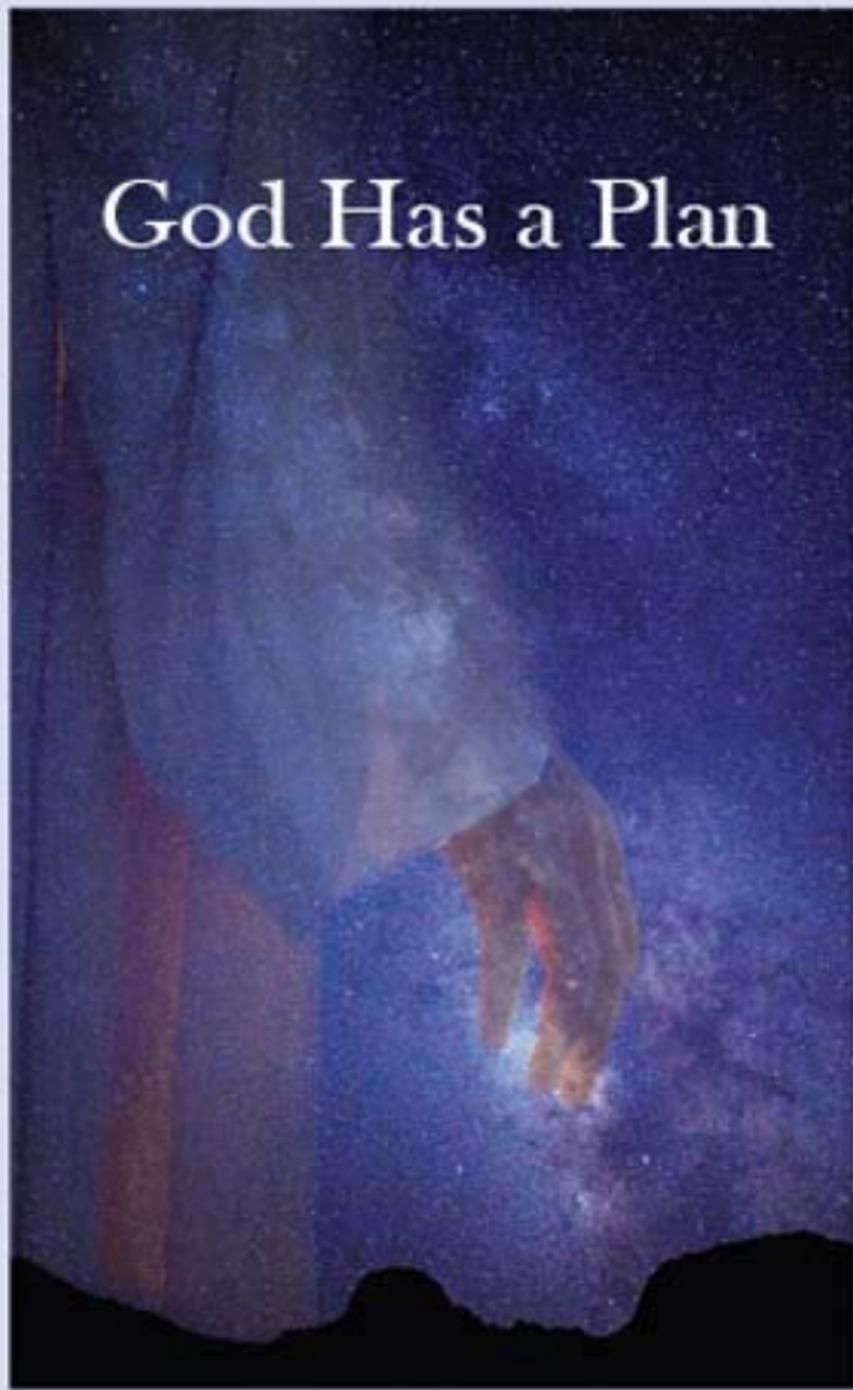


God Has a Plan



God Has a Plan

With all the scientific knowledge and technical ability displayed throughout the world, one might easily suppose that man is capable of doing almost anything and everything. But we quickly become disillusioned when we remember that, together with all the remarkable advancement within the last century, man has also been able to devise the potential for his own self-destruction as a race. To forestall the possibility of this happening, America alone is spending nearly 800 billion dollars a year for defense purposes, and other nations sums in proportion.

Human selfishness is at the root of this problem, and science does not eradicate selfishness—it only implements it. So when we look into the future, even the near future, and see ever-increasing speeds of travel; increasing plenty and luxury; more wonderful homes in which to live, and better ways of doing everything we have to do—many of them by automation—the thrill of anticipation is somewhat subdued by that other possibility that our cities, our country, our civilization, and even most of the human race itself, might be destroyed before the happy tomorrow fully matures.

We do not wish to be prophets of doom—far from it. We are merely calling attention to man's



THE DISOBEDIENCE IN EDEN

shortcomings for the purpose of emphasizing the fact that where man will fail, God has a plan which will succeed, so that the future of the race, as depicted in the Word of God, far excels anything for which man has ever dared to hope.

This is a plan which cannot, and will not, fail; a plan in which man will be permitted to employ all his marvelous capacities, and have them directed along lines which are unselfish. Then, over and above that, God will do for man what he cannot do for himself. The future, then, is very bright; much brighter by far than scientific knowledge would indicate. It is as bright as the promises of God.

SELFISHNESS APPEARS

In calling attention briefly to God's plan we have chosen five illustrations, three of them depicting

actual events recorded in the Bible, and two illustrating the prophecies and promises of the Bible. The first of these will be recognized by all. It is the temptation scene in the Garden of Eden. The serpent, which the Bible uses to symbolize Satan, is tempting mother Eve to disobey her Creator by partaking of the forbidden fruit. We all know the consequence of this. Eve did partake, and so did Adam, with the result, as foretold, that they were sentenced to death, and driven out of the Garden of Eden to die.

However, it is important to note that which preceded the temptation. When God created our first parents in his image, he commanded them to multiply and fill the earth, and subdue it. Man was given dominion over the earth. But he was told that if he partook of the forbidden fruit of the garden he would die: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."—Gen. 2:17

In the command to multiply and fill the earth, and have dominion over it, we see the divine purpose in the creation of the human race. Man was not created and placed on the earth temporarily, later either to be taken to heaven or consigned to purgatory or hell. When he sinned he did not lose a home in heaven, but his privilege of enjoying a home on earth.

Satan, through the serpent, told mother Eve that she would not die if she partook of the forbidden fruit. (Gen. 3:4) From this falsehood there have developed, throughout the ages, all the unscriptural theories that there is no death. Death, it is said, is not really what it seems; it is a gateway into another life. But the fact remains that death is a reality,

and the “wages of sin is death.” (Rom. 6:23) The reign of sin and death has been, and continues to be, a cruel one. God’s plan alone provides escape from it.

GOD’S PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

In our next illustration we are reminded of a wonderful promise God made to Abraham. This was subsequent to the Flood. He said to this faithful patriarch. “In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” (Gen. 12:3) For two thousand years the human race had been dying, but here God promised that he would bless all the families of the earth. This was indeed a ray of hope.

Later, when Abraham’s son Isaac was grown, God asked him to offer up his boy in sacrifice. It is Abraham’s obedience to this request that our



ABRAHAM OFFERS ISAAC

second illustration portrays. God did not permit Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, but provided instead a lamb to be offered as a substitute for him. Here we have a beautiful illustration of the fact that before all the families of the earth can be blessed through the “Seed” of Abraham, a loving Father must give up in sacrifice his beloved Son.

As the plan of God unfolds, we find that it was actually the Heavenly Father himself who “gave his only begotten son” to be the Redeemer and Savior of the world. (John 3:16) God was so pleased with Abraham’s willingness to cooperate with him in this matter that he confirmed his original promise by his oath.—Gen. 22:1-18; Heb. 6:13-20

JESUS, THE PROMISED SEED

In the New Testament we are informed that the seed promised to Abraham, the seed that was to bless all the families of the earth was, in reality, Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.”—Gal. 3:16

This means that in the outworking of God’s plan for blessing all the families of the earth, Jesus is the appointed channel through which these promised blessings will flow. However, “all” the families of the earth include those who have died. Death came as a result of sin, and the condemnation of death rests upon the entire human race. This means that in order for Jesus to extend blessings of life to the people it was necessary that he give his own life for the sins of the world.



THE CRUCIFIXION

John the Baptist said concerning Jesus, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) In the Old Testament we read that Jesus was “brought as a lamb to the slaughter,” and that he made “his soul an offering for sin.” (Isa. 53:7,10) The Apostle Paul wrote that Jesus “gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”—I Tim. 2:3-6

It was this great work of redeeming the human race from death that was accomplished at Calvary. The Lord’s viewpoint on this, and what the result will be, is explained by the Apostle Paul. We quote: “Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”—I Cor. 15:21,22

Thus we see the importance of the death of Jesus in the plan of God for the blessing of all the families of the earth. That promised blessing will reach the people by means of a resurrection of the dead. It was provided for through Jesus' death, and guaranteed by his resurrection. (Acts 17:31) It will be a restoration to life right here on the earth. The people will be restored to life as humans.

ANOTHER FEATURE

Without further information concerning God's plan for the blessing of the people, we would naturally conclude that the work of blessing should have commenced soon after the death and resurrection of Jesus. We know that it did not. People continued to suffer and to die, even as before. And the Bible explains why. The reason is that in his plan God provided that there should be a "little flock" of faithful followers of the Master selected from the world of mankind, who, when the time of blessing arrived, would be associated with Jesus in the work of dispensing peace, health, and life to mankind.

In Galatians 3:27-29 we are informed that true Christians, represented as those who are baptized into Christ, are one with him, and are part of Abraham's "seed, and heirs according to the promise." For nearly twenty centuries the work of selecting these for their future work has been in progress.

It is to these that Jesus promised to prepare a place, and, when he returned, to take them unto himself, that they might be with him in his kingdom. (John 14:2,3) It is to these that Jesus said,

“Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”—Luke 12:32

THE KINGDOM HOPE

A long chain of promises in the Old Testament, and continuing in the New Testament, reveal that Jesus would establish a worldwide government in the earth, and that it would be through the agencies of this government that God’s promised blessings of life would be extended to the people. One of the promises of Jesus’ birth declares of this great One that “of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.”—Isa. 9:6,7

The Scriptures reveal that while Jesus came at his First Advent to suffer and to die for mankind, he returns at his Second Advent to set up his kingdom for the purpose of blessing the people. It is during the time of his Second Presence as a mighty ruler, “the King of kings,” that the world will be enlightened concerning the true God, and given an opportunity to obey divine law and live forever.—Rev. 19:16

The wonderful manner in which world conditions today are fulfilling the prophecies of the Bible gives us every reason to believe that we are standing right at the threshold of the long promised Messianic kingdom. The Prophet Daniel identified our day as “the time of the end,” and indicated that at this time there would be a great increase of knowledge, and much running to and fro in the earth.—Dan. 12:4

The expression, “time of the end,” does not mean the end of time. Neither does it refer to the traditional burning up of the earth. Rather, it refers to the end of the reign of sin and death. It means the

time when, by divine intervention in the affairs of men through the establishment of the Messianic kingdom, all the evils Daniel sees in our day such as war, exploitation, hunger, sickness, and death will be brought to an end.

THE EARTH TO ABIDE FOREVER

So far as the earth is concerned the Bible clearly tells us that it is to abide forever. (Eccles. 1:4) The Lord assures us that he did not create the earth in vain, but formed it to be inhabited. (Isa. 45:18) As we have learned, God's plan was that man should live on the earth forever. This is his home. This means that man will not destroy himself with nuclear bombs, and that even those who are killed in war, by whatever weapons may be used, will be restored to life.

When Jesus was asked concerning the time of his return, he foretold that then there would be



DANIEL SEES OUR DAY

“great tribulation”—or trouble, so great that unless those days should be shortened no flesh would survive. (Matt. 24:21,22) It is this very situation that is confronting the world today, but Jesus assures us that this time of tribulation will be shortened; that all flesh will not be destroyed.

OUR DAY IN PROPHECY

Essentially all the important world developments of our day are foretold in the prophecies of the Bible. We call special attention to the great increase of knowledge, and the much and rapid travel of our time, as foretold by Daniel. Our illustration of this tells the story more eloquently than it would be possible to do with words.

It might be difficult for the younger members of our generation to realize that the things portrayed in this illustration have not always existed, especially that most of them did not exist until the twentieth century. Man has not attained to this gradually throughout the ages of the past, but suddenly, and in our day. Thus we have a remarkable fulfillment of the Bible’s prophecy concerning the near approach of Messiah’s kingdom.

Daniel also foretold, concerning this time of the end of the reign of sin and death, that there would be a “time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.” (Dan. 12:1) This is the “great tribulation” referred to by Jesus. (Matt. 24:21,22) Jesus also spoke of it as a time when there would be “distress of nations, with perplexity,” and when the hearts of the people would be looking with fear to the things coming upon the earth.—Luke 21:25,26

Here, also, we have an accurate description of our day. All nations of the earth are distressed, and fear of what may be coming upon the earth fills the hearts of the people everywhere. The Scriptures do not indicate in detail just how destructive the situation will become before the authority of Christ's kingdom asserts itself, and saves the human race from its own folly.

However, one thing the Scriptures do make plain is that man's selfish, exploiting institutions are all to be destroyed. It is the remnants of these, as symbolized in our final illustration, that our little group of earnest seekers after the Lord's blessings have turned their backs upon, as they gaze out into the future age and its promised blessings.

GOD'S CITY

In the distance we see the dim outlines of a city, the holy city of God. This, of course, is merely a symbol. In the Bible a city is used to symbolize a government. We are familiar with this use of language. To us Washington stands for the American government, London for the British, and Moscow for the Russian. So in the Bible, particularly in the Book of Revelation, we are told of a "holy city" which comes down from God out of heaven. This is God's new government, and its Head will be Christ Jesus.—Rev. 21:1-5

Jesus said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36) So we are told that his government, his city, originates with God. It is not of human origin. It is not set up by the wisdom or power of fallen man. It is a divine government, and its laws will be God's laws. It will be through



A NEW AGE DAWNS

obedience to these laws that mankind will be blessed, in fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham that through his Seed all the families of the earth will be blessed.

THE WATER OF LIFE

That blessing, we are assured, will include the destruction of sickness and death. Describing conditions in the earth when God's holy city, or government, has accomplished the purpose of its reign, the revelator said, "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

In another promise of the Messianic kingdom and its blessings, we have the kingdom pictured as

a throne—“the throne of God and of the Lamb.” (Rev. 22:1) Flowing out of this throne is the river of life. On the banks of the river are trees of life. In addition to the life-giving fruit of these trees, we are told that their leaves are for the “healing of the nations.” (Rev. 22:2) Truly the people of all nations now do need to be healed!

This great blessing is soon to reach all mankind. Just as our first parents were driven out of their garden home, and deprived of the fruit from its life-giving trees, so during the Messianic kingdom now near, and because Jesus took the sinner’s place in death, all of Adam’s children will be invited to come and partake of the tree of life and the water of life freely.—Rev. 22:17

DEAD TO BE RESTORED

As we have already briefly noted, it is not only the living generation that will receive the life-giving blessings of Messiah’s kingdom. God has promised that during the reign of Christ all who have died are to be restored to life and given an opportunity to enjoy these same blessings. If this were not so, the plan of God for the salvation of the human race would come far short of the Creator’s loving purpose toward his human creatures.

The hope of the resurrection of the dead is centered in Jesus, the Redeemer. (I Cor. 15:21,22) During his earthly ministry Jesus gave several marvelous demonstrations of the ability of divine power to restore the dead to life. One of these was the awakening of Lazarus from the sleep of death, the account of which is recorded in John 11:1-44.

Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha. They lived in Bethany. Lazarus became ill at a time when Jesus was conducting his ministry in Galilee, which was far north from Bethany. The sisters sent word to Jesus that their brother was sick, supposing that he would come to Bethany as quickly as possible. Jesus received the announcement, but instead of hurrying to Bethany and to Lazarus, he waited for two days, and then said to his disciples, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." Jesus' disciples thought that he referred to natural sleep, and said to Jesus, "Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well." To them this was evidence that Lazarus was recovering.

THE SLEEP OF DEATH

Then Jesus revealed to his disciples what he meant. He said to them, "Lazarus is dead." In this brief conversation one of the important truths of the Bible is brought to our attention, which is that those who die are not alive in heaven, hell, or purgatory, but in a state of unconsciousness, which Jesus likened to sleep. Not only is sleep a state of unconsciousness, but those who sleep awaken from their unconscious state; and so it will be in the case of those who sleep in death. Divine power, exercised through Christ, will awaken all those who thus "sleep."

The death that entered the world because of Adam's transgression would have been permanent had it not been that divine love provided a Redeemer. (John 3:16) Because Jesus took the sinner's place in death, everlasting oblivion has been turned into a temporary sleep from which the Bible promises

an awakening. In the case of Lazarus, Jesus gave us assurance of this by demonstrating the ability of divine power to fulfill God's promises by awakening Lazarus from the sleep of death.

ALL TO BE AWAKENED

On another occasion Jesus said, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment." (John 5:28,29, *Revised Version*) Here Jesus explains that those who, in this life, have "done good" according to God's standards will, when awakened from death, at once receive their reward of eternal life; while all others will be brought forth to a "resurrection of judgment."

The Greek word *krisis* is translated judgment in the *Revised Version*. It has the same meaning as our English word crisis; namely, a time of testing. To pass a crisis means to pass through a severe experience successfully. So the unbelievers, when awakened from the sleep of death, will be subjected to disciplinary experiences designed to teach them the ways of the Lord. If they pass this crisis, and learn to obey the laws of the kingdom, these too will have the opportunity of partaking of "the water of life freely."—Rev. 22:17

Let us rejoice that God has a plan which will restore all the dead to life and give them the opportunity to live in peace, health and happiness forever on a perfect Earth, man's eternal home. It is a plan that we should only expect from a loving and faithful Creator! ■