

The
PEOPLE
of the
BIBLE

A DAWN PUBLICATION

The People of the Bible



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Our First Parents and Their Family



THE Bible contains a revelation of God's plan of redemption from sin for fallen man and his ultimate recovery from death at the close of the divinely promised messianic kingdom. The many personalities portrayed in the Bible are vitally associated with the revelation of that plan. From one standpoint we might think of the divine plan of the ages as a great drama of

many parts, with the personalities of the Bible—both the righteous and the wicked—as actors therein. They are not actors, however, who played their roles without moral responsibility for what they did.

While our Creator and Heavenly Father has the ability to know in advance just what course his creatures will take, he has never interfered with their free moral agency. A proper understanding of the divine plan depends upon our faith in the fact that the Creator does possess such ability and therefore is capable of causing all the actions of his creatures to work together for the accomplishment of his loving designs toward them, without the necessity of interfering with their freedom to follow the course of their own choosing.

With this appraisal of the superiority of God's ability over our own, we open the first pages of the Bible with the view of becoming better acquainted with its personalities; and the first name we come to is Adam, and soon after, Eve, his wife. These two have become familiarly known to students of the Bible as "our first parents." The first reference to them is found in Genesis 1:26-28, although in this passage their names are not mentioned. In verse 26 the Lord is quoted as saying, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."

The creation of man occurred toward the close of the sixth creative day. The carboniferous qualities of the water and the atmosphere that existed before this having been absorbed into the cretaceous organisms of the sea (which formed beds of limestone) and into the rank vegetation (which went to form the coal beds), the atmosphere of earth began to be sufficiently pure to permit breathing animals to live. As the carbon-laden atmosphere became more pure, vegetation became less rank. The kinds of animals that existed changed correspondingly. The heavy-boned sloth and mammal gave place to less bony varieties of animals common today.

The specialization in the case of man's creation is shown in his vast superiority over the lower animals. He was created in the image of God. The image of his Creator consisted in his moral and intellectual likeness. It is difficult to judge from present human conditions all that is meant by God's "image," because we have no examples of perfect humanity for comparison. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" in which Adam was created. (Ps. 8:5-8; Rom. 3:23) Sin and death have reigned, and the godlikeness has been lost.

We know, of course, that the image of the Creator in which man was created is not physical. In Isaiah 1:18 the Lord asks us to reason with him. This indicates that one aspect of the divine image in man is his ability to reason. The particular subject upon which the Lord invites us to reason is sin, and its opposite, righteousness. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." This suggests the ability to know the difference between right and wrong and to appreciate the advantage of being right, or morally pure, in the sight of the Creator.

None other of God's earthly creatures has a sense of moral uprightness and responsibility. All are, as the poet has expressed it, merely "Dumb driven cattle." This quality in man we call conscience, and rarely, if ever, except in the case of the morally degenerate and insane, do we find an individual who is not to some extent checked by his conscience from doing things which his physical desires might urge. This desire to do right and to be right is, we believe, another aspect of the divine image in which man was created.

An appreciation of the fine and beautiful things of nature indicates another sense in which man was created in the image of God. The eyes of man feast upon a beautiful landscape, upon the beauties of mountains, rivers, and lakes, while a beast pays no attention to these beautiful surroundings. Nor do the lower animals have any love for music, as is the case with man.

When man, through the exercise of his senses, realizes to some extent the grandeur of the universe in which he lives, his heart instinctively goes out to his Creator in praise and adoration. He delights to bow down before him to thank him for his wisdom, power, and love, and to seek his guidance and blessing. Thus man is a worshiping creature, which we think is also a manifestation of the divine image in which he was created.

Given a Dominion

God commanded our first parents to multiply and fill the earth. Some English translations say to "replenish" the earth, but this is incorrect; the original Hebrew word here used means "fill." There were no human beings before this, so the earth could not be replenished. The human family, under the headship of Adam, was given dominion of the earth and over all the lower animals. The earth, then, was man's domain, and in this domain he was to be king.

It is important, we think, that this point should be emphasized. So many mistakenly have the thought that the Creator's intention for man was that the earth should be but a temporary abiding place, that in some mysterious way he was a spiritual being, limited temporarily to physical and earthly conditions but destined ultimately to be freed from these fleshly shackles to spend eternity in a happier, spiritual world. This theory, like so many others which have been attached to the Bible, is but a figment of the imagination, for there is no hint of it in the Book of Genesis, nor, in fact, in any other part of the Bible.

Throughout the Bible every reference we find to man's creation and to the divine purpose in his creation emphasizes the truth that his domain and eternal home was to be the earth. In a prayer to God, David wrote: "What is man, that thou are mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands;

thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.”—Ps. 8:4-8

It should be noted that the “all things” which were put under man and thus made a part of his dominion did not include the angels but only those things which belong to the earth and are a part of God’s earthly creation. If we ignore this fundamental truth of the Bible, it will be impossible for us to understand the divine plan of redemption through Christ, which provides for the recovery of the dominion which man lost because of disobedience to divine law. To those of the human race who will be restored to man’s original possession, Jesus tells us he will say, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom [or dominion] prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”—Matt. 25:34

When we turn from the first chapter of Genesis to the second, we find the details concerning the creation of our first parents. Some have misunderstood this and have supposed those whose creation in the image of God is mentioned in the first chapter are not the same as the Adam and Eve of the second chapter. The Apostle Paul removes all doubt on this matter by referring to Adam as being the “first man.” (I Cor. 15:45,47) Moreover, Paul affirms the fact that the first man was of the earth, “earthy,” not a spiritual man, in contrast with the earthly man Adam, as some have theorized.

The Creator, in the Book which reveals his purpose in the creation of man, properly sets forth in its opening chapter a brief summary of his creative work as it pertained to the earth and shows that this planet was prepared to be the home of his human creation. It shows that they were commanded to multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. Thus in a few words is shown the divine purpose concerning man. The next chapter begins the Bible’s detailed unfolding of the manner in which that purpose is accomplished.

A Living Soul

In order that we might have an important basic understanding of the nature of man, the second chapter of Genesis furnishes us with considerable detail concerning the manner in which Adam was created. Genesis 1:27 simply tells us that he was created, while Genesis 2:7 reveals how. The record is, "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."

This is the first time the word "soul" appears in the Bible. And how simple is the Lord's definition of what a human soul really is! It consists of two component parts—the body and the breath of life. The body itself is not the soul, neither is the breath of life the soul. It was not until the two were united by divine power that "man became a living soul."

First the body was created. All its organs were perfect. It had a perfect heart, but it did not beat, and lungs, which did not move. The eyes in that body were perfect, but they could not see, nor could its ears hear. Its legs were motionless and its arms lay limp at its sides. Its brain and nerves were perfectly coordinated, but not a single impulse was communicated to that brain, nor was the brain itself capable of receiving or registering a single thought.

Not until God breathed into that body the "breath of life," forcing the lungs into action, the heart to beating, and the blood circulating, did its nerves wake up and the brain function. That which, although perfect, was dead, began to live—"Man became a living soul." In the marginal translation of chapter 1, verse 30, the expression, living soul, is applied to the lower forms of earthly creatures. The expression does not mean an immortal soul but simply a living creature—a creature made alive by the wisdom and power of the Creator, who knew just how to combine a fleshly organism with the breath of life to make it live.

Science has never been able, nor will it ever be able, to discover this secret of life. God's power manifests itself in all

earthly creation, animate and inanimate. Scientists can formulate the equivalent of a grain of wheat, but it will not germinate and grow. In a cave in southern England, which a thousand or more years ago was an underground river bed, delicately beautiful ferns are now growing from seeds deposited in the crevices of the rocks when the river was flowing through the cavern. After being there for centuries in the darkness, these seeds germinated when the beams of ultraviolet ray lamps were focused upon them.

In breathing creatures—whether it be man or the lower animals—the life principle is conveyed to the blood stream through their lungs. Hence it is called the breath of life, and when the breath of life was forced into Adam's lungs and they began to function, he became a living soul. At once all his five senses began to function, and by sight, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling, ideas began to be formulated in his perfect brain, which in turn began to direct the activities of his body.

A Perfect Home

“And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.” (Gen. 2:8) What a wonderful home this was for Adam! In the garden was everything “that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food.” (vs. 9) It was not a provision merely to keep the first man alive. In addition, the Creator wanted him to enjoy life, for Adam was created with a capacity for appreciating the beautiful things with which he was surrounded.

In the garden was “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” God “commanded” that Adam might eat of every tree of the garden except this one; and he attached a severe penalty for disobedience to this command: “In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.” (vss. 16, 17) It is unimportant that we know just what variety of fruit grew on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was merely that God chose this method of placing a test of obedience upon our first parents.

Eve Created

The Lord knew that it was “not good that the man should be alone.” (vs. 18) But in order that Adam might also be brought to a realization of this, the Lord arranged that he should familiarize himself with all the animals previously created and give them names. In this way he learned that none of them was suitable as a “help meet for him.”—vs. 20

Then it was that Eve was created. God’s method of accomplishing this was unique. A portion of Adam’s own body was used, so that in reality Eve was a part of Adam, separated from him for a special purpose—for the propagation of the human race and for companionship. Adam possessed originally in his own person the masculine and feminine qualities, which subsequently were divided between him and his wife, when she was taken from his side.—Gen. 2:21-23; I Cor. 11:8

Adam, who found no congenial companionship among the beasts and the birds, now had Eve as his mate—bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. Their very difference of quality made them the more companionable to each other, because each found in the other the desired complement. They twain were one, and neither was complete without the other.

Some time after mother Eve was created, Satan deceived her, asking if it were true that God had told Adam they would die if they partook of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. She affirmed that this was true, then Satan said to her, “Ye shall not surely die.” (Gen. 3:4) This doubtless raised a question in her mind as to the integrity of God and opened the way for her disobedience.

Satan continued to cast doubt in her mind concerning God, implying that God had a selfish motive in not wanting them to partake of the forbidden fruit. “For God doth know,” he said, “that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” (Gen. 3:5) The word “gods” is here a translation of a Hebrew word that simply means “mighty ones,” and the reference

evidently is to the spiritual creatures of the universe, of which Satan himself was one.

It eventuated that in this statement Satan told the truth, and thus is demonstrated his great deceptive powers through the use of part truth and part error. After Adam and Eve had both partaken of the forbidden fruit, "the Lord said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil." (Gen. 3:22) Those in the various orders of angelic creation had doubtless already observed Lucifer's deflection from righteousness, so from observation would now know something of the operation of the principle of evil; and from the time of their creation they had been blessed through the operation of the principle of good, of righteousness.

Satan, of course, was one of the gods in the spirit world, and he had already become a sinner and would know good and evil by experience. It is possible that the statement "one of us" is a reference to him in particular. It was because our first parents had become like "one of us" that the divine penalty of death was enforced upon them.

In the New Testament we are informed that Adam was not deceived. (1 Tim. 2:14) But Eve was. Her disobedience therefore was not wholly willful. Under the influence of Satan's reasoning she evidently concluded that God had forbidden the use of the very best tree in Eden. Her conclusion may have been that God had a selfish motive in forbidding the use of this fruit, that he feared his creatures would become as wise as he.

Eve did not mention these thoughts to her husband. She decided to partake of the forbidden fruit, acquire the knowledge God was withholding, and then influence Adam to partake with her. He realized the seriousness of his wife's disobedience and probably thought of the long days before he had her companionship. Now, he concluded, he would be lonely again. Seemingly it was in desperation that Adam joined Eve in the transgression, fully aware of the penalty.

The decrees of God must stand, whether it be his promise of eternal life or his sentence of death. He had given warning

that partaking of the forbidden fruit would lead to the death penalty, and it did. A more correct translation of the penalty as God pronounced it upon Adam would read, "Dying thou shalt die." (Gen. 2:17, margin) This suggests a long period of dying, which actually was the case. Adam did not die instantly, but as the record shows, lived 930 years. This length of life seems incredible to us today, but we must remember that Adam was created perfect, whereas today his descendants have been on the downhill road of sin, sickness, and death for approximately six thousand years. Members of the human race now can offer little resistance to the seeds of death which are constantly working in them, so that those who live as long as a hundred years are exceptions to the rule.

It would seem that almost immediately upon partaking of the forbidden fruit Adam and Eve began to suffer serious consequences. They hid themselves and acknowledged to God that they were "afraid." Fear is one of the manifestations of sin. It has haunted the lives of countless millions throughout the centuries. Our first parents were afraid of God because they had discovered their nakedness. They knew before that they were naked, but in their innocence and purity it had seemed all right.

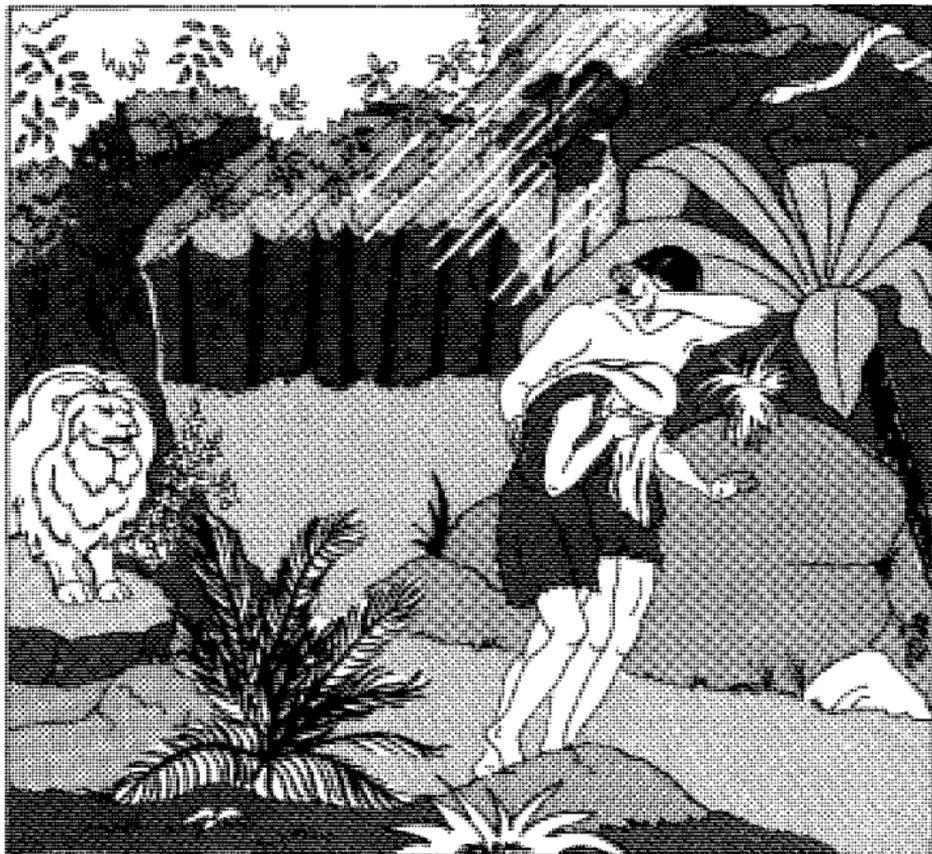
First they provided coverings for themselves with leaves. Later the Lord provided them with coverings made from skins of animals. Bible students see in this, first a symbol of man's own need of a covering for sin, and then the provision which God has made through Christ to cover his people with the "robe of righteousness," a covering which was provided through the shedding of blood, as typified by the necessary slaying of animals to furnish our first parents with adequate covering.—Gen. 3:7, 21

The Penalty Falls

When questioned, Adam explained, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." The woman, in turn, said, "The serpent beguiled me,

and I did eat.” Adam could not escape the responsibility of his own sin. Eve was also blameworthy, so they both came under the penalty which led to death.

“Unto the woman he [God] said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children.” The penalty upon Adam was, “Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”—Gen. 3:16-19



In order that this penalty might be carried out, God expelled our first parents from the garden home he provided for them. They were driven into the unprepared earth to die.

Deliverance Promised

In pronouncing sentence upon the “serpent,” the Lord spoke of a “seed,” the seed of the woman, which he said would one day “bruise” the “serpent’s” head, and of the “seed” of the serpent, which would bruise the “heel” of the seed of the woman. God also said that he would place enmity between these two seeds. Doubtless our first parents heard this statement or would know about it, and it constituted for them their only ray of hope that the great tragedy to which their sin had led would, in God’s due time, in some way be rectified.

As the plan of God unfolds from book to book of the Bible, we learn the manner in which the divine sentence of death is set aside and, as a result, Adam and his race given an opportunity to gain eternal life and have their lost home and dominion restored to them. This wonderful plan of God calls for a resurrection of the dead. Paul explains: “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

And, as hinted by the Lord in Eden, this plan of salvation will be carried out through a “seed.” This thought is enlarged upon in a promise God later made to Abraham that through his seed all the families of the earth will be blessed. (Gen. 12:3; 22:18) In Galatians 3:16 Paul explains that the seed promised to Abraham was in reality Christ, the Messiah, and in verses 27-29 of the same chapter he gives the additional information that the true followers of Jesus—those who suffer and die with him—are also considered a part of that promised seed “and heirs according to the promise.”

Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees of his day who were opposing him and who plotted against his life that they

were of their "father the Devil." (John 8:44) This indicates that the seed of the serpent mentioned by the Lord comprises those who throughout the ages have persecuted the true people of God. This spirit of persecution on the part of the Adversary's agents has furnished an opportunity for God's true people to prove their fidelity to him at the cost of suffering. The prophecies of the Bible refer to this suffering and the glory to which it leads, describing it as the "sufferings of Christ." (I Pet. 1:11) Paul wrote: "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him."—II Tim. 2:11,12

The purpose of the kingdom in which Christ and his true followers will reign together is the restoration of the human race to life on the earth, and the crushing out of all sin, and finally the destruction of the Devil himself. Paul wrote that the "God of peace" would "bruise" Satan under the feet of the Christ "shortly," that is, in his due time. (Rom. 16:20) Paul also wrote that Christ will reign "till he hath put all enemies under his feet; the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."—I Cor. 15:25,26

Cain and Abel

It was after Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden to die that their first children were born to them. Perhaps it was because of the Lord's statement pertaining to a seed that when Cain was born Eve said, "I have gotten a man from the Lord." (Gen. 4:1) Soon after this, apparently, Abel was born. These two are among the best known characters of the Bible, but there is a great deal of misunderstanding concerning them.

It has been erroneously supposed that Cain and Abel, and later Seth, were Adam and Eve's only children, hence the question which is so often asked, "Where did Cain get his wife?" From Genesis 5:4 we learn that throughout the hundreds of years of his life sons and daughters continued to be born to Adam. Some of these daughters were probably

born either before or soon after Cain and Abel. Indeed Eve's remarks when Cain was born—"I have gotten a man from the Lord," in addition to reflecting confidence in the Lord's promise concerning a seed, might also indicate joy over the birth of a son rather than daughters, as most of her previous children may have been.

In the Genesis record of the pre-Flood era of human experience, few women are mentioned by name. Nor are we to assume that all the men of that period are mentioned in the biblical record but, rather, only those related directly or indirectly to the unfolding of one or another aspect of God's plan of redemption and recovery of man from the curse of sin and death.

It is for this reason that the two names, Cain and Abel, appear in the narrative. Our first parents had sinned, bringing upon themselves and upon their offspring the penalty of death. But God's statement concerning the seed which was to bruise the serpent's head implied that something was to be done about this penalty. Yet this could not be unless the sin which led to their sentence was in some way remitted. So, having vaguely indicated his loving intentions toward his human but fallen creatures, God began to illustrate the manner in which they would be carried out, that it would be through the remission of sin based upon the shedding of blood. In both the Old and New Testaments this is clearly stated.—Lev. 17:11; Heb. 9:22

We are informed that "Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground." (Gen. 4:2) These two offered sacrifices to the Lord. "Cain brought of the fruit of the ground," while Abel "brought of the firstlings of his flock." (vss. 3,4) The Lord accepted Abel's offering but did not accept Cain's. In the New Testament we read that "by faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." (Heb. 11:4) It was more excellent because it was a flesh and blood sacrifice, which pointed forward to the shed blood of Jesus, by means of which reconciliation is provided for Adam

and all who were condemned in him. John the Baptist said concerning Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) In Revelation 5:6, 13 Jesus is referred to as "the Lamb as it had been slain."

Thus, having indicated in his statement concerning the seed which would bruise the serpent's head that the penalty of death would in some way be set aside, God began to illustrate the manner in which it would be done, that it would be through the shedding of blood, or the sacrifice of life. And it was God's own dear Son who sacrificed his life for this purpose. It was Jesus who became "the propitiation [satisfaction] for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."—1 John 2:2

The First Murderer

Cain resented the fact that his offering was rejected by the Lord, while his brother Abel's was accepted. Instead of inquiring as to the reason for this so that he might himself offer an acceptable sacrifice, he allowed anger, malice, and hatred to burn in his heart; and when the opportunity offered, he slew his brother. God said to Cain: "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him."—Gen. 4:7

When Eve said at the birth of Cain, "I have gotten a man from the Lord," it may have indicated her belief that Cain was the promised seed which would bruise the serpent's head. If so, she doubtless had communicated this belief to Cain, and this could well have been the cause of his jealousy when Abel's sacrifice was accepted instead of his own. Actually, of course, neither Cain nor Abel was to be the promised seed, for this promise was to be fulfilled through Christ. God explained to Cain that if he offered the proper sacrifice it would also be accepted. But the Lord added, "If thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." This indicates the nearness of temptation to assert his own will in the matter. Perhaps he was determined that he would be the "man from

the Lord," the ruler, even if it were necessary to murder his rival, which he did.

After this crime had been committed, the Lord spoke to Cain again and asked, "Where is Abel thy brother?" to which Cain replied, "I know not," adding those well-known words, "Am I my brother's keeper?" God knew, of course, what had happened and said to Cain, "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." (Gen. 4:9,10) Every injustice cries to God for justice, and in the outworking of the divine plan for the recovery of mankind from sin and death there will be a full balancing of the scales. All the guilty will be justly punished, and those who have unjustly suffered will receive adequate compensation.

The record states that God placed a "mark" upon Cain, so that despite his wrongdoing those who found him would not slay him. There has been much speculation as to what this mark may have been. Seemingly there is no way of knowing, as yet at least, just what it might have been, and it is wise not to speculate concerning the things we do not know with some degree of certainty.

The record speaks of Cain's wife and their children and of the fact that he built a city in the land of Nod. His wife could have been none other than one of his many sisters. The marriage of brother and sister, when both were so near to the original perfection in which Adam and Eve were created, would result in no serious consequences to their offspring as such a marriage would today.

Among the descendants of Cain was Jubal, "the father of all such as handle the harp and organ." (Gen. 4:21) This indicates that from the beginning the human family has had an appreciation of music and the ability even to make musical instruments. This, we think, reflects one aspect of the image of God in which man was created.

Another descendant of Cain was Tubal-cain, "an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron." Here, then, was the first metallurgist. The people of that early time were not dull and

brutish but intelligent and refined, enjoying the basic arts that have been the foundations of civilizations from the very beginning.

Besides, while apparently no formal code of laws had been developed, the people, being created in the image of God, were guided by their conscience and knew the difference between right and wrong. Lamech, the father of Jubal and Tubal-cain, said to his wives, "I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold." (Gen. 4:23,24) Lamech's conscience accused him of the sin he had committed.

The First Martyr

Abel has the distinction of being the first martyr, the first to suffer because of the enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Satan did not then know that the real seed of promise would be Jesus, so he set upon the task of persecuting and destroying all those upon whom he saw the favor of God manifested; and we may safely assume that he played a major part in stirring up Cain's jealousy to the point where he would murder his brother.

Jesus and the apostles received their persecution chiefly from their Jewish brethren. Similarly, during the entire age since, Christians have suffered martyrdom at the hands of so-called Christians. Thus the Scriptures foretold, saying: "Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed."—Isa. 66:5

The first death in Adam's family must have cast a great shadow. The hope centered in the divine promise that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head was temporarily snuffed out. Somewhat later on Seth was born. His name indicates that his parents hoped that he would be the man promised by the Lord. They did not know that the promised One would be the Messiah, who would come long afterward and for whose work the world still waits.

It is undoubtedly fortunate for the human that we cannot enter deeply into the sorrows and difficulties of others, except the few who are near and dear to us. Each individual, each family, has as large a measure of sorrow as it can bear. The poet, realizing the folly of unrestrained grief, has well said:

“Go bury thy sorrow,
The world has its share;
Go bury it deeply,
Go hide it with care.”

However, our experience with sin and its penalty, death, should make us all sympathetic. We should do nothing to add to the sorrows of others but everything we can to comfort them. The very best thing we can do is to point to the promises of God concerning the time coming when there shall be no more sorrow, no more dying, no more pain; when, as we read in Revelation 21:4,5, the “former things” shall have passed away; and when “all things” shall be made new.

Since the entire population of the pre-Flood world doubtless lived extraordinarily long lives and since the population was small, they must have been well acquainted with one another, and all doubtless knew the facts concerning creation as related to them by Adam. Without doubt they all spoke the same language, which would be the language Adam received from his Creator.

Enoch, “the seventh from Adam,” is one of the few between Adam and Noah concerning whom we have information, and that is scanty. The Apostle Jude tells us that Enoch was a prophet, quoting him as saying: “Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds, which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”—Jude 14, 15

The expression "ten thousands of his saints" would be more correctly translated to read, "myriads of his saints." Enoch's prophecy refers to the great judgment and kingdom work of Christ and his church. Jude said that then the ungodly would be convinced of their ungodly deeds, while the Prophet Isaiah says that when the judgments of the Lord are in the earth "the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." (Isa. 26:9) Those who then obey the righteous laws of God which they learn will be restored to perfection as human beings and live forever.

In Hebrews 11:5,6 the apostle informs us that Enoch "had this testimony, that he pleased God." He also explains that "Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him." According to Prof. Strong, the Greek word here rendered "translated" literally means to "transfer," or to "transport." In other texts it is rendered "carry over," "change," "removed," and "turn." It will be seen from these various uses of the word that it does not in itself indicate that Enoch would not die.

The Old Testament record simply is that "Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." (Gen. 5:24) In Jeremiah 31:15 we read concerning certain children who had died, that "they were not." Concerning the Sodomites, we read that God "took them away as he saw good." (Ezek. 16:50) Both of the expressions used in Genesis 5:24, therefore, are used in the Bible to denote death.

Paul says that Enoch was "translated," or "removed," that he should not "see" death. This does not necessarily imply that he did not experience death. The population of the earth was small in those days, with everyone living for hundreds of years. It is quite possible that God's reward to Enoch for his faithful devotion was in allowing him to die suddenly, perhaps in his sleep, and perhaps also before he had seen the horrors of death as experienced by others.

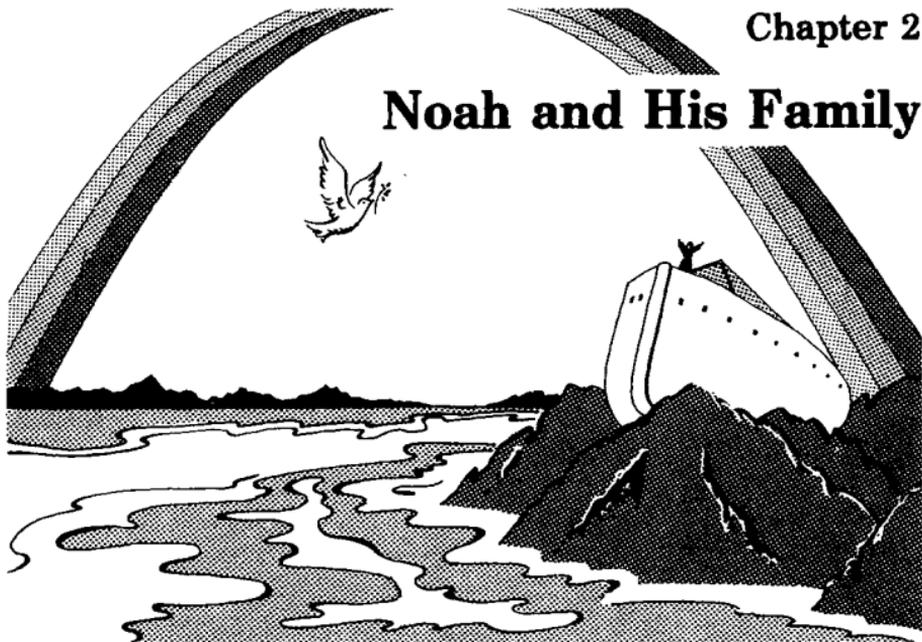
This seems a logical explanation of what happened to Enoch. Jesus said that no man had ascended into heaven, so

we know that Enoch was not taken there. In any case, the language used concerning him does not prove that all who have served the Lord throughout the ages have been taken to heaven when they died; nor does it prove that “there is no death,” as Satan implied to Eve when he said, “Ye shall not surely die.”—Gen. 3:4

Abel and Enoch are mentioned by the Apostle Paul in his list of the ancient worthies who will receive a “better resurrection.” They “all died in faith,” he explains, not having received the things which had been promised to them, “God having provided some better thing for us [the followers of Jesus], that they without us should not be made perfect.” (Heb. 11:35, 40) Abel and Enoch will both be restored to life on the earth and will take their place among the human representatives of the kingdom.

Then, also, Adam and all his descendants will be awakened from the sleep of death and given an opportunity to accept the offer of life provided through the redemptive work of Christ Jesus, the Head of the seed class, which is to bruise, or destroy, Satan and bless all the families of the earth.

Noah and His Family



“Noah was a just man and perfect [margin, upright] in his generations, and Noah walked with God.”—Genesis 6:9

NOAH is one of the best known names in the Bible, although the sacred record furnishes only a few details concerning his personal life. We are assured, however, that he “found grace in the eyes of the Lord,” that he was “perfect [upright] in his generations,” that he “walked with God,” was obedient to God; and in one of his last recorded acts, we find him offering sacrifice to God.—Gen. 6:8,9; 8:20

We know from these few details that Noah was a man of faith and righteousness. These facts are important and by themselves cause him to stand out prominently among those with whom he was associated. This prominence, however, is greatly augmented by the circumstances which surrounded his life and the marvelous manner in which God used him to save a remnant of the people from the pre-Flood world, as a seed for the beginning of a new world, the world that now is.

Some of the circumstances leading up to and making necessary the Flood are found in the narrative described as "the generations of Noah." (Gen. 6:9) The word here translated generations has the broader meaning of "history," or historical records. Judging from customs of the ancients as deciphered from tablets unearthed by archaeologists, the expression "These are the generations of Noah" would seem to be his signature to the preceding records which he had inscribed on clay or stone tablets. The remainder of verse 9, stating that "Noah was a just man, and perfect [upright] in his generations," could well be the beginning of a record inscribed by his three sons (see Genesis 10:1).

Be this as it may, chapter 6 reveals the reason for God's determination to destroy "all flesh" by a flood of waters. A shocking condition had developed within the human race. Verse 2 explains what brought this about. It says that "the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose." Verse 4 explains that the children born as a result of this unholy union became "giants," "men of renown." Soon "the wickedness of man was great in the earth," "and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." (vs. 5) Verse 11 declares that the "earth was filled with violence."

The "sons of God" who married the "daughters of men" were not members of the human family. In Luke 3:38 we are informed that Adam was a "son of God," but this relationship with his Creator was lost when he disobeyed the divine law. Besides, the human race was commanded to multiply and fill the earth; so special attention would not be called to the fact that male members of the human family took wives who bore children to them. That had been taking place from the time of creation and was not contrary to the divine will.

We acquire information on this point from the New Testament. Peter wrote, "God spared not the angels that sinned,

but cast them down to hell [Greek, **tartaroo**], and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; and spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the Flood upon the world of the ungodly." (II Pet. 2:4,5) Jude writes, "The angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day."—Jude 6

These "sons of God" who intermarried with the human race prior to the Flood were, then, angels, their sin in the matter consisting of the fact that in doing this they "kept not their first estate." The Bible was not written to reveal details concerning the angelic creations of God, but there is sufficient evidence in the Word of God to establish the fact of such creations. By comparison, for example, man was created "a little lower than the angels."—Ps. 8:5

The Scriptures reveal that the angels are widely used by God as his messengers, or servants. In ancient times, when sent on missions to one or another of God's human servants, they were authorized and empowered to materialize and take on the form of human beings. Three angels appeared to Abraham and reassured him that his wife Sarah would bear a son, and that Sodom and Gomorrah would be destroyed.—Gen. 18:1-33

These three angels, in the human bodies which they assumed for the purpose of talking to Abraham, were able to enjoy a meal with the patriarch. Evidently these materializations of the past were genuine, making possible all the normal functions of an ordinary human body. Thus the ones which "kept not their first estate" were able to beget children. It is this that the Genesis record clearly states.

The hybrid children resulting from this unauthorized union were apparently of superior mentality and physique. They became "men of renown" and "giants." And it was these, evidently, who greatly contributed to the "violence" with which the earth became filled.

While there are no direct texts of Scripture to support the thought, it seems reasonable to suppose that this bringing forth of a hybrid race was an attempt devised by Satan, who before his transgression was one of the highest of the holy angels, to substantiate the lie that he told to mother Eve when he said to her that death would not result from disobedience to God's law. (Gen. 3:4) He may have thought he could perpetuate human life by the infiltration of the life principle of spirit beings.

If so, his plan was foiled by the Creator's determination to destroy all flesh by the waters of a flood. It is at this juncture in human experience that Noah is introduced into the Bible narrative. He appears on the scene at a time when the imaginations of men's hearts were evil, and that continually, but Noah himself had held aloof from all the evil with which he was surrounded. He was upright and found favor in God's sight.

Noah was tenth in descent from Adam, through the line of Seth. When Noah is first mentioned, the record says that he was five hundred years old, being the son of Lamech, and the grandson of Methuselah. We are told of his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and informed that they had wives. It would seem reasonable to conclude that a considerable portion of the human race had become contaminated by the angels who "kept not their first estate." But there was some pure adamic stock left, among them Noah's family and his sons' wives.

Noah's Commission

It was because of Noah's uprightness and faith that God selected him to be the preserver of the human family. He "found grace in the eyes of the Lord," who said to him, "The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth"—marginal translation, "from the earth." (ch. 6:13) Verse 3 of chapter 6 indicates that this announcement to Noah was made 120 years before the Flood came.

God gave Noah instructions concerning the building of an "ark" to carry himself and his family through the waters of the Flood. These instructions are recorded in Genesis 6:14-16. It was to be made of gopher wood, better known as cypress—a kind of timber which, both for its lightness and its durability, was employed by the Phoenicians for building their vessels. The precise meaning of the Hebrew word translated ark is uncertain. The word appears only in the Book of Genesis and in Exodus 2:3 and 5. The general consensus of scholars is that it means a box, chest, or boat.

Nothing is said as to the exact shape of the ark, but its dimensions are given. It was to be 300 cubits in length, 50 cubits in width, and 30 cubits in height. The exact length of a cubit is uncertain. Smith's Bible Dictionary gives it as 21 inches. If this is correct the ark would have been more than 500 feet long, over 87 feet in width, and its height would have been about 50 feet. Obviously, this was no small boat but compared favorably in size with our average ocean-going vessels—much larger, indeed, than many of them.

The planks of the ark were to be protected by a coating of pitch—inside and outside—to make it watertight, and perhaps also as a protection against marine animals. In it there were to be a number of small compartments in which the various animals with their food supplies could be distributed. These were to be arranged in three tiers: "With lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it." Every necessary detail was provided for, including light and ventilation.

It is likely that Noah began at once the great project of building the ark. No modern machinery was available for the job. It was all handwork. Noah's faithfulness is reflected in the fact that he continued his labor until the ark was completed, which, we may assume, was not until near the time when the Flood came.

In II Peter 2:5 we are informed that Noah was "a preacher of righteousness." This also reveals his firm stand for God and for the divine principles of righteousness, for it must

have required courage to be a witness for the Lord in a world that was corrupt and filled with violence. No hint is given that anyone was brought to repentance by his preaching, although his sons and their wives were doubtless in harmony with his message. Noah's continued work of building the ark would in itself be a wonderful sermon attesting his faith in the Creator's word.

The ark completed, its living freight was then gathered into it in keeping with the Lord's instructions—a male and female each of the “unclean” animals, and seven pair each of the “clean”—also of fowls and of everything that creepeth upon the earth. Just how many animals this included we cannot know with certainty. The ark was, however, of tremendous capacity, fully adequate, we are sure, to enable Noah to comply with the Lord's instructions as to the animals he wanted carried over into the new world.

The ark loaded, and Noah and his family themselves safely within, the record says that “the Lord shut him in.” (Gen. 7:16) This was seven days before the water began to fall. (ch. 7:4) What a test of faith this must have been to Noah and his family! We can well imagine their feelings while in faith they waited, within hearing, perhaps, of the jeers of the unbelieving and godless world without.

Finally the Flood came! A very simple, yet powerful description is given of the appalling catastrophe: “The rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights . . . And the waters prevailed, and were increased greatly upon the earth; . . . and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered.” (ch. 7:12, 18, 19) While the rain lasted for forty days, the waters prevailed for another 150 days, seemingly all the while on the increase. This would indicate that the sources of the Flood were other than merely rain.

There are various theories as to what caused the Flood. The one most generally held by Bible students is based upon “The Vailian Theory,” or “Canopy Theory,” of cosmogony, which suggests that in the process of creation various

gaseous rings surrounded the earth, all of them having fallen by the time of man's creation; but that there still remained a watery ring, which, when it fell, produced the Flood. On this point we quote briefly from "The Photo Drama of Creation" scenario:

"With the collapse of the watery envelope, came the extreme heat of the tropics and the extreme cold of the polar regions, before the ocean currents modified them. The change must have been almost instantaneous. We have proofs of this. In northern Siberia an antelope was found embedded in ice. It had green grass in its stomach, which proved that its death occurred suddenly while it was feeding. Similarly, a mastodon was found imbedded in ice with food between its teeth. Thus is demonstrated that the poles were once as equable as the temperate zone, and that in a moment came such a change as could be brought about only by the breaking of the canopy."

The late Prof. Palmer Hall Langdon, of the Institute of Metals, London, upon his return from extensive work in Mesopotamia in 1929, described his finding of a great "flood deposit," which, he said, "is found extending unbroken over the whole site."

It is now well known that the ancient city of Ur, in Chaldea, where Abraham once lived, has been unearthed by archaeologists. In 1929 Sir Leonard Woolley instructed his workmen to dig a deep pit in a selected part of this ancient city. In doing this they unexpectedly found a remarkable change in the character of the soil through which they were digging. Clean, water-laid clay suddenly began to appear. It covered the sloping face of a mound and varied in thickness from eight to eleven feet. Sir Leonard Woolley came to the conclusion that the amount of water necessary to lay such a deposit would be so great that it constituted striking evidence of the Flood.

Thus geologists and archaeologists know that there was a flood throughout that area known to be the "cradle" of the

human race, and no evidence has yet been produced to refute the universality of the Deluge. We favor taking the language of the Scriptures literally, accepting the meaning which is apparent from a mere surface reading, thus believing that the Flood actually did cover the whole planet. There can be no doubt that it was universal so far as man was concerned; the human race still in its infancy, and confined as yet to a small area of the earth, was totally destroyed, with the exception of Noah and his family. This, after all, is the important truth set forth in the Word of God. How far it spread over the uninhabited globe would have no bearing on the plan of God as it relates to the human family.

After the Flood

The record states that at the end of the 150 days during which the waters "prevailed" "God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark; and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters assuaged." (Gen. 8:1) The next verse says, "The fountains also of the deep and the windows of heaven were stopped." This indicates two sources of the Flood waters—the "fountains of the deep" and the "windows of heaven." But now they were both "stopped," "and the waters returned from off the earth continually."—vss. 2,3

As the waters receded, the ark "rested . . . upon the mountains of Ararat." This was in the "seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month." (vs. 4) About three months later the tops of the mountains were seen. Forty days after this "Noah opened the window of the ark" and sent forth a raven.

He also sent forth a dove which "found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark." (vss. 7-9) Noah then waited another seven days and sent forth the dove again, and "the dove came in to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf pluckt off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth. And he stayed yet another seven days; and sent forth the

dove; which returned not again unto him any more.”
—vss. 10-12

Noah was resourceful in discovering the extent to which the water had receded, but he awaited God’s directive before leaving the ark, saying to Noah, “Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons’ wives with thee.” It was in obedience to this that “Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons’ wives with him: every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark.”—ch. 8:15, 16, 18, 19

A world had come to an end, and now a new world was beginning. Jesus referred to the “days of Noe” (or Noah), telling us that as it was “in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man.” (Luke 17:26) The correspondence which Jesus draws is the unawareness of the people in Noah’s day of the impending catastrophe which resulted in the ending of their world, and the fact that when he returned and the “present evil world” would come to an end, the people likewise would be in ignorance. Paul mentions this, explaining that the people would say, “Peace and safety,” and that then “sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child.”—I Thess. 5:1-3

It is important to note, however, that the ending of the world in Noah’s day did not destroy the earth. It was the pre-Flood social order that was destroyed. So now, the prophetic end of the world which results from Christ’s return is not the destruction of the earth but of another social order, which Paul describes as this “present evil world.”—Gal. 1:4

Baptism Illustrated

In Peter’s first epistle, the third chapter, verses 20 and 21, he mentions the “eight souls” which were saved “by water,” then adds that this was a “figure whereunto baptism doth now save us.” He is referring to Christian baptism into Christ’s death. To such as have covenanted to lay down their lives following in the footsteps of Jesus, it is essential fully to

die with Christ, else they cannot live with him. It is through faithfulness in completing this death baptism that they attain unto the “great salvation which . . . began to be spoken by the Lord.”—Heb. 2:3

This Christian baptism is into Christ, accepting his headship over our lives. This was illustrated by the family of Noah accepting his leadership and, as it were, placing their lives in his hands. But for this they would have perished in the Flood. As it was, they were brought through the Flood to safety in a new world. So it will be with all those who complete their death baptism into Christ. They will live and reign with Christ in the new world, even the kingdom of the Messiah.

Sacrifice Offered

Soon after leaving the ark Noah built an altar and on it he offered sacrifice to the Lord, which was doubtless intended as an expression of thanksgiving for the marvelous deliverance from the waters of the Flood. God, in turn, appreciated this offering, the account saying that he “smelled a sweet savor.”—ch. 8:20,21

This is the first time the word “altar” appears in the Bible, although Cain and Abel were the first to offer sacrifices to him. In this latter case the record makes no mention of altars, yet such may well have been erected. The Scriptures do not indicate just how the desire to offer sacrifice was prompted in the minds of these ancient servants of God. Evidently, however, it was in keeping with divine providence, for it pointed forward to the sacrifice of Jesus and his followers during the present age—Jesus’ sacrifice being for the redemption of the fallen race and the sacrifice of his followers a vital part of the plan of God for the reconciling of the world to God.

In recognition of Noah’s sacrifice God entered into a covenant with him never again to destroy all flesh from the earth by a flood of waters. Noah and his family were commanded to multiply and replenish the earth, or, as it is in the Hebrew text, “to fill.” God gave the rainbow as his token

for confirmation of the covenant. Evidently man had never before seen a rainbow, and for the very good reason that the flood rains were the first to fall upon the earth. In Genesis 2:5,6 we read, "The Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, . . . but there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground."

This bears out the "Canopy Theory" of creation, which suggests that a ring of dense vapor enveloped the earth prior to the Flood. The appearance of the rainbow after the Flood would be a natural token that another such deluge of water would never fall upon the earth, for it would prove that the watery canopy had fallen, permitting the sun's rays to reach the earth and, under right conditions, to produce a rainbow. The Lord explained it, saying, "It shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: and I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a Flood to destroy all flesh."—Gen. 9:14, 15

Climatic and soil conditions both underwent a tremendous change as a result of the Flood. One of these changes is reflected in the experience of Noah, as recorded in chapter 9, verses 20 and 21, where we read, "Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: and he drank of the wine; and was drunken." This indicates that Noah did not realize the effect the wine from his vineyard would have upon him. It might well be that climatic conditions before the Flood were not conducive to fermentation and that now they were, much to the surprise and chagrin of Noah.

The Sons of Noah

As already noted, Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Japheth was the oldest of the three. Shem was 98 years old, married, but childless at the time of the Flood. When his father became intoxicated, Shem, together with his brother Japheth, covered his nakedness and received his chief blessing.—Gen. 9:25-27

Japheth was the first son of Noah. The name means "enlargement." His descendants occupied the "isles of the Gentiles." (Gen. 10:5) This geographical description is believed to describe the coastlands of the Mediterranean Sea in Europe and Asia Minor. From here the Japhethites spread northward over the whole continent of Europe. They also overflowed into portions of Asia.

The portion of the earth occupied by the descendants of Shem begins at the northwest extremity with Lydia, and includes Syria (Aram), Chaldea (Arphaxad), parts of Assyria (Asshur), of Persia (Elam), and of the Arabian peninsula (Joktan). (Gen. 10:21,31) Modern scholars have given the name of Shemite, or Semite to the language (Hebrew) spoken by Shem's real or supposed descendants. Shem died at the age of 600 years.

Ham was the third son of Noah. The name means "hot, dark, or sunburned." Little is said in the sacred record concerning him except to relate his disrespect to his father and the curse which was placed upon his son, Canaan, as a result. (Gen. 9:25) This curse—"a servant of servants shall he be"—together with the meaning of his name—"sunburned"—are probably the reasons for the belief that the descendants of Ham are the dark-skinned races.

The sons of Ham are stated to have been "Cush, and Mizraim, and Phut, and Canaan." (Gen. 10:6: compare I Chron. 1:8) Egypt is recognized in the Bible as the land of Ham. (Ps. 78:51; 105:23; 106:22) Other Hamite nations were the Cushites and the Phoenicians.

One of the grandsons of Ham was the infamous Nimrod, "a mighty hunter before the Lord." The expression, "before the Lord," is thought to mean in opposition to the Lord. He founded an empire in Shinar (Babylonia), extending it northward along the course of the Tigris over Assyria, where he founded a second group of capitals, Nineveh, Rehoboth, Calah, and Rosen.

After informing us of the descendants of Noah's three sons and the different directions into which they ultimately migrated, the sacred record then relates a development fundamental to a proper understanding of human history throughout the ages. This narrative begins with the statement that "the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech." (Gen. 11:1) This one language was undoubtedly the same as that spoken by Adam. Shem would still be living at this time, and he lived before the Flood when Methuselah lived, who probably was personally acquainted with Adam.

The account relates that as "they journeyed from the East . . . they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there." Then a decision was reached to build a great city and a tower. (Gen. 11:2,3) The motive is stated in the 4th verse: "Let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." In other words, this tower was to be a symbol of unity, something to hold them together, lest they become scattered.

But the Lord did not look favorably upon the endeavor, so he brought about a confusion of languages among the builders of the tower, and they were unable to continue the work of construction. This in turn scattered them "abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth." (Gen. 11:5-9) The diversity of languages thus originating has been a remarkable thing. It has undoubtedly retarded the progress of evil and evil communications. Now, through the increase of knowledge and education, these language barriers are breaking down. This in turn has contributed to the combining of selfish interests in giant lineups of military might which threaten the very existence of the human race. But the establishment of the kingdom of Christ will prevent this ultimate result of sin and selfishness.

The tower which the people attempted to build was called Babel, which is the origin of the name Babylon, confusion, the meaning of the name deriving from the confusion of the

languages. The name is carried over into the Book of Revelation, where apostate religious systems are called Babylon, to emphasize the confusion of doctrine and practice inherent in them.

After being told of the foiled efforts of the people to construct the Tower of Babel, we are furnished with an extended list of Shem's descendants down to Abram, whose name was later changed to Abraham. It was with him that God made a covenant to bless all the families of the earth.

Abraham and His "Seed"



ABRAHAM is one of the outstanding personalities of the Bible. Although an Old Testament character, his name is mentioned seventy-four times in the New Testament. Because of his great faith he was called "the Friend of God." (James 2:23) He is first presented under the name Abram, and in Genesis 14:13 he is called "Abram the Hebrew." He was probably called a Hebrew, or Eberite, after his ancestor Eber. In the genealogical line from Eber to Abram were Peleg, Reu, Serug, Nahor, and Terah, Terah being Abraham's father. This family was a branch of the descendants of Shem, one of the sons of Noah, and it is from this name that the word Semite, or Semitic is derived.

Terah had two other sons, Nahor and Haran. The family lived in Ur of the Chaldees, where Haran died leaving a son, Lot, who would be the nephew of Abram. After Haran died, Terah took his family, including his grandson, Lot, and moved to Haran, in Mesopotamia, Abram also taking his wife, Sarai. Haran was, in reality, intended to be only a stop-over point; for Abram, at least, was on his way to Canaan.

Terah died in Haran, and then the little company proceeded into Canaan, as planned. The motive for this journey

was a statement the Lord had previously made to Abram, evidently while still in Ur of the Chaldees—"The Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."—Gen. 12:1-3

This was a remarkable promise, and Abram believed it to be true. He believed it so thoroughly that he was willing to leave Ur and go to an unknown country in order that the Lord might use him as indicated, and through him establish a "seed," or family, that would be used as God's channel of blessing to "all families of the earth."

In this we have the first demonstration of Abram's faith in the true God and in his promises. Archaeological discoveries reveal that the inhabitants of Ur, where he first lived, were moon worshipers. Probably Abram was one of the few who knew and believed in the true God. Heathen gods never speak to their worshipers, and it might well be that when the people of Ur learned that Abram was leaving home to go into an unknown country because his God had spoken to him and promised to establish him as the head of a nation, he became the object of considerable ridicule.

Another difficulty which Abram's faith had to surmount was the fact that his wife, Sarai, was barren and, it was supposed, could not have a child. But he believed that God was able to overrule this; so he stepped out on his faith and, as the New Testament explains, "not knowing whither he went."—Heb. 11:8

After Abram entered Canaan, the Lord appeared unto him and said, "Unto thy seed I will give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him." (Gen. 12:7) Traveling a little farther, he pitched his tent, "having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there

he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord.”—Gen. 12:8

About then there was a famine in Canaan, and “Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there.” In Egypt he had a very unhappy experience. According to the record, Sarai, his wife, was a very beautiful woman, and Abram feared that the king of Egypt might have him killed and take Sarai for himself. The best solution Abram could think of was to have Sarai say that she was his sister. She was, indeed, his half-sister.—Gen. 20:12

This solution to the problem might have saved Abram’s life, but had the Lord not intervened, the king would have taken Sarai. Learning the truth of the situation, Pharaoh ordered Abram and his kinsfolk to leave Egypt, which they did. The account shows that by this time Abram “was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.” (Gen. 13:2) All the while Lot and his family were accompanying Abram, and they returned north from Egypt to Bethel, where Abram had previously built an altar.

Together Abram and Lot had more cattle than the land thereabouts could support, and strife arose “between the herdmen of Abram’s cattle and the herdmen of Lot’s cattle.” Abram, in the largeness of his heart, suggested to Lot that inasmuch as there was ample land for both, an agreed upon division be made, giving Lot the first choice.—ch. 13:5-9

Lot chose the rich Jordan valley, because he saw that “it was well watered every where, . . . even as the garden of the Lord.” Sodom and Gomorrah were located in this territory. Because of their wickedness these cities were later destroyed, and Lot and his family were forced to flee. Lot’s wife, unhappy over the necessity of leaving their home, stopped to look back, “and she became a pillar of salt.” (Gen. 19:17-26) Jesus used this experience as a warning against being unfaithful, especially at the end of the present age. He said, “Remember Lot’s wife.”—Luke 17:32

“Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan,” the record states. (ch. 13:10-13) After Abram and Lot had separated, the Lord said unto Abram, “Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.”—ch. 13:14-17

Chapter 14 contains an interesting account of various warring factions in the general territory surrounding the land being occupied by Abram, leading up to his nephew Lot being taken captive, with all his possessions. Then Abram “armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan.” Abram must have been very rich indeed, in cattle and goods to require the help of more than three hundred servants.

Abram made a night attack on the enemy, rescued Lot and brought back all his goods. As he was returning from this skirmish, “Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, . . . which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he [Abram] gave him tithes of all.”—ch. 14:18-20

In one of the prophecies Melchizedek is referred to as a type of Christ—“The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” (Ps. 110:4) This prophecy is quoted in the New Testament by the Apostle Paul. (Heb. 5:6,10; 7:17) Paul explains that Melchizedek was without father or mother. This is understood to refer to his office as a priest; that he had no predecessor and no successors in the priesthood.

Melchizedek was both a priest and a king, and therefore a fitting type of the twofold office of Christ, who also is both a priest and a king. A priest is one who offers sacrifice, and

upon the basis of the sacrifice extends blessings to those for whom it is offered. Jesus offered himself in sacrifice, and during the thousand years of his kingdom will extend to mankind the blessings of life provided by his offering. He will also reign as "King of kings and Lord of lords."

The Promise Renewed

"After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in mine house is mine heir."—ch. 15:1-3

Here, perhaps, we have an indication of a slight lack of faith on the part of Abram, coupled with an effort to learn from the Lord a little more definitely just what his intentions were concerning the promised "seed." The Lord said to him, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." Abram knew that the Lord had protected him in many ways, in Egypt and elsewhere. He knew also that the Lord had richly blessed him with earthly gain, for he was rich in silver and gold and in cattle. But the one thing he wanted above all else was a "seed," the seed which the Lord had promised but had not given.

Abram explained to the Lord that since he had no child of his own he had made his servant Eliezer his heir. In other words, to this extent he had taken the matter into his own hands. And, since the prospect of having a child of his own seemed to be fading, he may have hoped that the Lord would accept this substitute arrangement. But the Lord said to Abram concerning Eliezer, "This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir."—ch. 15:4

Verse 6 states that Abram "believed in the Lord; and he counted it unto him for righteousness." At that time there

was a renewal of God's promise concerning the land. In the fifteenth chapter the narrative returns again to the subject of the seed. No doubt Abram told Sarai, his wife, concerning God's latest affirmation of the promise concerning a seed, and that he assured him this child would be his own, not a servant whom he had adopted.

Sarai thought the matter over; realizing that she was barren, and daily getting older, she proposed to her husband that their maid, Hagar, mother a child for him, and, as she also stated it, "that I may obtain children by her." (Gen. 16:2) Of interest, in passing, is the fact that in 1901 there was discovered what is known as "The Code of Amraphel," (Gen. 14:1), a standard of ethics which seems to have been in force throughout Babylonia and Canaan at that time, and the arrangement of Abram and Sarai involving Hagar was in strict conformity with this code.

Hagar bore Abram a child, who was named Ishmael. It resulted in a strained relationship between the two women; nevertheless Abram felt that this was the solution to his problem. The Lord had said he must be the father of the promised seed, and now he had become a father. Ishmael was his very own, not an adopted heir. Ishmael was born when Abram was eighty-six years old. Thirteen years later the Lord spoke to him again and said:

"I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly." (ch. 17:2) The Lord also said, "Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."—ch. 17:5-8

Then, after outlining to Abraham the covenant of circumcision, the Lord said, "As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her." (ch. 17:15, 16) Abraham found it difficult to believe this. He "fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!"—vss. 17, 18

Just as Abraham had previously endeavored to have the Lord accept his adopted heir, Eliezer, to be the promised seed, so now, he was pleading to have Ishmael accepted. His faith was surely tested! All that the Lord had previously told him was that he was to be the father of the promised seed. Now, although he was thirteen years older, the Lord would not accept his son, Ishmael, saying instead, not only that he must be the father, but that Sarah must be the mother, even though, in addition to her barrenness, she was now ninety years old.

But the Lord would not change. He said again that Sarah would bear the promised seed, and that her child was to be named Isaac: "And I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him." (vs. 19) The Lord promised to bless Ishmael and his descendants along other lines, "but," he said, "my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year."—vss. 20, 21

A little later the Lord sent three angels, first mentioned as "three men," to reassure Abraham that Sarah would bear him a child. Sarah overheard the conversation, and like Abraham, she "laughed within herself." The Lord gently rebuked her, asking Abraham, "Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son,"

and she did. (ch. 18:14) Later we read, "The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken; for Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him."—ch. 21:1,2

Abraham's Faith Tested

Years later, when Isaac was probably past twenty, God spoke to Abraham again and asked him to offer up his beloved boy, this miracle child, as a burnt offering. This was to be done in the land of Moriah, a three days' journey from where Abraham was then living. This, again, must have been a severe test to Abraham's faith. Indeed, the Apostle Paul comments on it in the 11th chapter of Hebrews and informs us that Abraham had such great faith that he believed God would raise Isaac from the dead.—Heb. 11:17-19

So Abraham obeyed. At least he went so far as to prepare the altar and to put Isaac on it ready to be slain. He even raised his knife to slay the boy, when an angel of the Lord intervened, telling him not to harm the lad. Abraham's attention was then called to a ram, or lamb, in the bushes nearby, and he offered this ram in the place of Isaac.—ch. 22

Then it was that God confirmed his covenant with Abraham by his oath, saying: "By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice."—ch. 22:16-18

Many long years had passed since God first spoke to Abraham concerning a seed. That was while he still lived in Ur of the Chaldees. In obedience to God's call he had left that country and had been a sojourner in Canaan. He had endeavored twice in his own way to provide the seed of

promise, but the Lord had refused to accept the result of his efforts. Finally, by a miracle, Isaac was born. He had grown up, and in obedience to God's request the father had demonstrated his willingness to offer the boy in sacrifice. As a result of this the original promise, or covenant, had now been confirmed by God's oath.

How confident Abraham must now have been that he would be the head of a nation, a seed through which all other nations would be blessed! The Apostle Paul tells us that Abraham "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." (Heb. 11:10) So far as the record indicates God had said nothing to Abraham about a "city." However, a city is used in the Scriptures to symbolize a government, and Abraham evidently interpreted from what the Lord told him that his seed would constitute a government, a kingdom, which would exercise control over all other nations and be God's channel of blessing to them.

To understand Abraham's viewpoint, we must remember that nations and governments of his day were not as they are now. A reading of Genesis, chapter 14, gives a little idea of the situation in that ancient time. At least nine "kings" are mentioned in the chapter. Verses 8-12 tell of a combination of four of these lined up for battle against the other five. The four defeated the five, and took Lot, Abraham's nephew, a prisoner. Then, Abraham, with more than three hundred of his servants, defeated the four kings and their armies, and rescued Lot.

"Nations" in those days were frequently just families, with one of the family serving as tribal head, or king. Naturally, they grew larger through the centuries; but in the early days of Abraham nations were very small. The promise that he was to have a seed that would become a great nation and dominate other nations would therefore imply that his offspring would become more powerful than the others, or as Paul states it, a city, a city which would have "foundations"—sure foundations—because its Builder and Maker was God.

He knew that God was already working, for had he not given him Isaac by a miracle?

A Larger Plan

But God had a much grander and more far-reaching plan in mind than that visualized by Abraham. This is revealed to us by the many references to the seed of Abraham which we find in the New Testament. In Galatians 3:8, 16 Paul mentions the promise concerning the seed and explains it in such a way as to indicate that even Isaac, the miracle child, was not the real seed of promise. In verse 16 Paul explains that when God made that promise to Abraham of a seed, the One he had in mind was in reality Christ.

In verses 27-29 of this same chapter Paul further explains that the true followers of Christ during the present age, those who have "put on Christ," are also "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Those who compose this larger faith seed of Abraham include Gentiles as well as some of the natural descendants of Abraham, the Jewish nation.

In the fourth chapter of Galatians Paul explains this matter further, in the form of an allegory. In this lesson he endeavored to show Jewish converts to Christ that they were no longer under the Law Covenant, which was given to the nation of Israel by Moses, but under a grace covenant, which he says was represented by Sarah, the mother of Isaac. Hagar, the bondmaid of Abraham, he explains, pictured the Law Covenant, to which the Jewish nation, Ishmael, was in bondage.

"Jerusalem which is above [represented by Sarah] is free, which is the mother of us all," Paul writes, adding, "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of the promise." (Gal. 4:21-31) In this lesson Paul quotes from the prophecy of Isaiah (54:1), "Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband."

(vs. 27) This ties in with the fact that Sarah was barren for so long, illustrating that many centuries would pass, after the promise of the seed was first made, before Christ, the real Seed, would appear and before the development of the remainder of the faith seed would begin, Isaac being a type of both Jesus and those who would make up his mystical body.

Offered in Sacrifice

God's promise was that through the seed of Abraham all the families of the earth were to be blessed. In the offering of Isaac as a sacrifice, one of the prerequisites for this coming blessing is illustrated. By this illustration we are reminded 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 for human salvation and redemption unfolds, we find that it is our loving Heavenly Father who does this, that he gives his only begotten Son to die for the sins of the whole world. Although Abraham had other children, by Hagar and later by Keturah, in Hebrews 11:17 Isaac is referred to as his "only begotten son," indicating that God, by this expression, is impressing upon us that Isaac was a type of his Son Jesus, and of his church who suffer and die with him.

And this is the only condition upon which any individual can be a part of the Christ company, a part of the faith seed of Abraham, typified by Isaac; that is, by being baptized into Christ's body, which is a death baptism, a being "planted together" in the likeness of Christ's death. (Rom. 6:3-5; Gal. 3:27-29) Those who thus qualify are "heirs of the promise" and will be associated with him in his kingdom, that government which will be the channel of blessing for all mankind.

Abraham looked for a city, a government, but he did not understand the grand scale on which the promises of God pertaining to it would be fulfilled. Paul says that Abraham

looked for a heavenly city, but this simply means that he believed the God of heaven would work through his seed to bless mankind here on the earth. Abraham did not expect a heavenly reward. God promised him the land, promised it to him and to his seed—not to the faith seed of this Gospel Age, Christ and his church, but to his natural seed.

In making promises to Abraham, God said that his seed would be as the “stars” and also as the “sand.” This suggests spiritual and earthly seeds, and indeed Abraham will have a vast earthly seed. His earthly seed also is reckoned through Isaac, not Ishmael. In our next chapter we will begin an examination of the wonderful promises of God in connection with the natural descendants of Abraham.

This faithful servant of God, thoroughly believing that Isaac had been given to him in fulfillment of God’s promise, was concerned lest in generations to come the seed should become contaminated; so he did not want Isaac to take a wife from among the Canaanites. He therefore commissioned his faithful servant, Eliezer, to go into his country and to his kindred, to take a wife for Isaac.—Gen. 24:2-4

Eliezer was willing but wondered what he would do in the event the girl he chose would not return with him. Abraham explained that in this event he would not hold his servant responsible. But Abraham assured him that his mission would be successful. He said to his servant, “The Lord God of heaven, which took me from my father’s house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence.”—ch. 24:7

So Eliezer took ten camels and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. He stopped by a well of water just outside the city. It was evening, “even the time that women go out to draw water.” There he prayed for guidance in selecting the right one to be Isaac’s wife. It was to be the one who was

willing not only to give him water to drink but to give water also to his camels.

Just as he was through praying, Rebekah came to the well and fulfilled the conditions he had outlined. He gave her an earring and bracelets. Upon inquiry he learned that she was the granddaughter of Abraham's brother Nahor and therefore would qualify as being from his own people. Rebekah showed her hospitality further by inviting Eliezer to remain overnight with the family, assuring him that they had room, both for him and for the camels.

Rebekah's brother, Laban, hearing of this and noticing the bracelets and the earring and getting her personal report of what had occurred, met Eliezer at the well and graciously confirmed his sister's invitation to remain with them overnight.

During the evening Eliezer made known his mission, and all agreed that the Lord's hand was in the matter and that they were willing that Rebekah should return to Canaan with him. They suggested, however, that he should allow her to remain with them for yet a little while. Finally the choice was left to Rebekah, and she said, "I will go." (vs. 58) Thereupon Eliezer returned to Canaan, taking Rebekah with him. As they arrived near Abraham's home, Isaac met them in the field; immediately he loved Rebekah, and she became his wife.

In being offered for sacrifice, Isaac was a fitting picture, or type, of Christ and the church offering themselves in sacrifice during the Gospel Age. In the story of how Rebekah became his bride there are a number of interesting similarities to the manner in which Christ secures his bride, his wife. The Bible presents many illustrations of the oneness of Christ and his church, and the bridegroom and bride picture is one of them. "The marriage of the Lamb is come," the Revelator says, "and his wife hath made herself ready." (Rev. 19:7) It will be after this "marriage" that "the Spirit

and the bride” will say to the sin-cursed and dying world, “Come. . . . And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.”—Rev. 22:17

The custom in olden times respecting marriage differed from the custom of our day. Thus, instead of Isaac seeking a bride for himself, Abraham sought a bride for him, sending Eliezer. This harmonizes with Jesus’ statement, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” (John 6:44) Eliezer, Abraham’s servant, would correspond to the Holy Spirit, which is the drawing power of God in the selection of the “bride” class during the Gospel Age.

The family blessing upon Rebekah was, “Be thou the mother of thousands of millions.” (Gen. 24:60) Many see in this an implication that the church of Christ, the antitypical bride class, will mother in regeneration the millions of Adam’s race, the glorified Redeemer being “the Everlasting Father.”—Isa. 9:6

Sarah, Abraham’s wife, died before Isaac received his bride. After this Abraham married Keturah, who bore him six sons. Little information is given concerning these, nor are we given any further details of Abraham’s life, except the manner in which he divided his wealth before he died. (Gen. 25:1-6) He died at the age of one hundred and seventy-five years.

This, the record says, was a “good old age,” adding that when he died Abraham “was gathered to his people.” (ch. 25:7, 8) In many instances when deaths of the ancients are recorded in the Bible the statement is made that they “slept with their fathers.” The righteous among them did not go to heaven when they died, neither did the wicked go to a place of torment. They were all “gathered to their people,” they all “slept with their fathers” and are still sleeping in death, awaiting the resurrection, when, by divine power, they will be called forth from the tomb.

Abraham was buried in the “cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before

Mamre.” (ch. 25:9, 10) This was the location Abraham purchased for a burial place when Sarah died. God had promised the whole land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants, but while he lived in the land, he was a sojourner there and felt it necessary to purchase a small piece as a family burying plot. (Acts 7:5) However, this Promised Land will yet be possessed fully, and forever, by Abraham and his descendants. God’s promise will be fulfilled!

Chapter 4

Isaac, Esau, and Jacob



GENESIS 25:11 reads, "It came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac; and Isaac dwelt by the well Lahai-roi." Abraham had other children, but in the New Testament Isaac is referred to as "his only begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called." (Heb. 11:17,18) Isaac was born in fulfillment of God's promise concerning a "seed" that would bless all nations. "In Isaac shall thy seed be called," God said to Abraham, when he grieved over the demand of Sarah that Ishmael, his son by the bondwoman, be cast out.— Gen. 21:12; Rom. 9:7; Heb. 11:18

It is therefore with Isaac and his descendants that the plan of God for the blessing of all nations is associated. Nevertheless, God promised Abraham that he would make a great nation of his son Ishmael, and the genealogy constituting the beginning of that nation is given in Genesis 25:13-18. It is of special interest today, in view of world developments, to know that the descendants of Ishmael form one of the chief elements of the Arab nations, including the wandering Bedouin tribes.

In getting acquainted with the people of the Bible, our principal interest centers in Isaac rather than in Ishmael, for it is in God's dealing with him and his descendants that we can trace the golden threads of divine promise concerning the ultimate deliverance of mankind from sin and death. In our discussion of God's dealings with Abraham we found Isaac being offered for sacrifice, thus picturing Christ, whom his Heavenly Father actually gave for the life of the world. The Apostle Paul indicates also that during this age the true followers of Christ (who, together with their Head, Christ Jesus, are the real seed of promise) are pictured in Isaac—"Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise."—Gal. 4:28; 3:27-29

By an arrangement of his father, Abraham, Rebekah (the granddaughter of Nahor, Abraham's brother) became Isaac's bride. Rebekah, like her mother-in-law, Sarah, was childless for many years after her marriage, and "Isaac intreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren." As in Sarah's case, a miracle was wrought, and Rebekah bore twin boys to Isaac. They were named Jacob and Esau. Before their birth the Lord informed Rebekah what to expect, explaining that "two manner of people" would develop from her twin sons; the one, God said, "shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger."—Gen. 25:23

The firstborn was "red all over like a hairy garment; and they called his name Esau." The second one born was called Jacob, "And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents." (vss. 25-27) Their father, Isaac, who was now well along in years, had a preference for Esau because, as the account indicates, this "cunning hunter" brought him venison steak; "but Rebekah loved Jacob." Thus was created a situation leading to one of the greatest human interest stories of all time.

Esau, returning from one of his hunting expeditions ravenously hungry, said to Jacob, who had prepared himself

a meal of red pottage, “Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage, for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom,” meaning “red.” Jacob, seeing the situation, was quick to grasp an opportunity, and offered to feed his brother in exchange for the birthright, which belonged to Esau, as the firstborn.

Esau said, “Behold, I am about to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?” (vs. 32) So he sold his birthright for a meal of red pottage—thought to be a sort of lentil soup. The advantage accruing from a birthright was not, in patriarchal days, definitely fixed. Seemingly, great respect was paid to the firstborn in the household. As the family widened into a tribe, this respect grew into a sustained authority, but undefined, save by custom.

Esau evidently did not specially value this, as he considered it an indefinite benefit and was quite willing to give up his birthright for temporary tangible advantage. The record states that he “despised his birthright.” (vs. 34) The Hebrew word here translated “despised” literally means “disesteemed”; that is, he did not esteem it as having worthwhile value comparable to a bowl of lentil soup.

But Jacob thought differently. He was his mother’s favorite son. She was conscious of the fact that God had performed a miracle in enabling her to give birth to these twins, and she would be keenly aware of what the Lord told her before they were born, that the elder (Esau) would serve the younger (Jacob). It is reasonable to conclude that she had told Jacob about this message she had received from the Lord, and he, being a man of faith, would be deeply impressed.

Indeed, Abraham, having lived some years after Rebekah married Isaac, probably gave her a firsthand account of God’s wonderful oathbound promise concerning the blessing of all the families of the earth through his “seed.” This information also she no doubt related to Jacob. It is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that both Rebekah and Jacob saw in the family birthright the assurance of being heir

to the wonderful promises God had made to Abraham. To them, therefore, and especially to Jacob, who purchased it, the family birthright was not something to esteem lightly, but to value very highly. And, since God had indicated before he was born that he was to be the favored son, why not cooperate and secure the birthright by legitimate purchase?

According to the custom of the times, the parental blessing belonged to the firstborn son. To obtain this special blessing before the father died was a confirmation of the birthright. So, when "Isaac was old and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see," he asked Esau to take his weapons, his quiver and his bow, and "go out to the field, and take me some venison; and make me savory meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die."—ch. 27:1-4

While the record does not so state, it seems reasonable to conclude that Isaac had not been informed concerning the sale of the birthright to Jacob, else perhaps he would not have arranged to pronounce this special blessing upon Esau. But Esau knew it, and the honorable thing for him to do would have been to tell his father of the changed circumstances, and thus at least it would have given Isaac the opportunity to decide upon which of the twins to pronounce his special blessing.

But even though Esau did not do this, the mother, Rebekah, was watching over the interests of Jacob, whom she knew the Lord favored and had chosen. She overheard Isaac's instructions to Esau to bring him venison and receive his blessing; so she instructed Jacob to get "two good kids of the goats; and," she said, "I will make them savory meat for thy father, such as he loveth."—ch. 27:1-9

Although Isaac in his old age had lost his eyesight, Jacob explained to his mother that the father would easily detect the deceit when he felt his smooth skin and would know that he was not Esau, who was covered with hair. The mother suggested that he "put the skins of the kids of the goats upon

his hands, and upon the smooth of his neck.” (vs. 16) When Jacob brought the savory meat of the goats to his father, there was some doubt on the old man’s part as to the identity of the one before him; but Jacob insisted that he was Esau and, after some hesitation, received his father’s blessing, which in part was: “Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother’s sons bow down to thee: cursed be everyone that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee.”—ch. 27:29

Whatever other writers may have said in condemnation of Jacob and his mother in this matter, the inspired writers say nothing. Even before the twins were born God had indicated his selection of Jacob to be the inheritor of the promise made to his grandfather, Abraham. Paul emphasizes this in Romans 9:9-12. There is a definite program of election or selection in the outworking of God’s plan to bless all mankind through the seed of Abraham.

God’s program of election is not one in which he elects certain ones to be saved and foreordains that all others must suffer an eternity of torture. However, just as in a democracy a few are elected to serve the rest, so in God’s plan he has been electing the future servants of mankind and preparing them to be the channels of his promised blessings to the remainder of the world of mankind.

The Apostle Paul, quoting from Malachi’s prophecy (1:2,3), writes, “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.” (Rom. 9:13) Prof. Strong suggests that the Greek word here translated “hated” could, by extension, be construed to mean “loved less.” He gives “detested” as a stronger definition. Esau’s disposition, which the Lord had the ability to know even before he was born, would cause him to be “loved less” by God. The fact that Esau disesteemed his birthright involving God’s promises to Abraham would be sufficient reason for the Lord to be greatly displeased with him.

In Hebrews 12:16,17 the Apostle Paul speaks of Esau as a “profane person, . . . who for one morsel of meat sold his

birthright.” Paul continues to say that Esau “found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.” The marginal translation indicates that here the thought of repentance is the changing of one’s mind. A careful comparison of this text with the account in Genesis 27:33-38 indicates that Esau’s tears were associated with his plea for Isaac to change his mind and give him a blessing even though he had already blessed Jacob. It was Isaac, as the account shows, who could not be persuaded to change his mind.

Because of Esau’s attitude toward the birthright, he has become a symbol of those who esteem earthly advantage above spiritual blessings and are willing to forego their share in the exceeding great and precious promises of the Lord in order to satisfy temporarily their longings for the good things of this earth.

Esau was given the name Edom. His descendants were the Edomites, who are referred to a number of times in the Old Testament Scriptures, both historically and symbolically, in the prophecies pertaining to the end of the present age and the downfall of nominal Christianity.

Jacob’s Enforced Flight

Esau was very wroth with his brother Jacob and was determined that when a suitable opportunity offered he would slay him. Rebekah learned of this and instructed Jacob to leave Canaan and go to her brother’s home in Padan-aram. But she had a deeper purpose in this also, as her later efforts reveal. She complained to Isaac concerning Esau’s wives, who were the daughters of the Canaanite, Heth. She explained that if Jacob should also marry one of his daughters, her life would no longer be worth living.

Then Isaac, exercising the prerogative of a father in that ancient time, instructed Jacob to take one of the daughters of Rebekah’s brother Laban for his wife, adding, “God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people.” (ch. 28:3)

With these instructions, and with his blessing, Isaac sent Jacob away to Padan-aram.

At the close of his first day's journey, Jacob took stones and arranged a bed for himself. He was doubtless somewhat downhearted and discouraged. Falling asleep, he dreamed of seeing a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, with "the angels of God ascending and descending on it." (ch. 28:12) In his dream he saw the Lord standing "above" the ladder, saying to him, "I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." —ch. 28:13, 14

After assuring Jacob concerning his inheritance in the land promised to Abraham, and that through his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed, the Lord gave him assurances of personal care and protection, and that he would return to the land from which he was then fleeing. The Lord said, "Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."—vs. 15

"Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! [or how awe-inspiring!] this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." (vss. 16, 17) Jacob then erected a "pillar," or an altar, to mark the site, and called the place Bethel, meaning the house of God. Then he promised the Lord that, in return for his care and bringing him back to his father's house, he would give him a tenth of all that he gained.

The Ladder Dream

It seems reasonable to conclude that the dream in which Jacob saw a ladder reaching from earth to heaven and

angels ascending and descending upon it, represented the fulfillment of God's promise to his grandfather, Abraham, which the next morning was confirmed to him; namely, that through the promised "seed" all the families of the earth would be blessed. One of the fundamental needs, in order that these promised blessings might flow out to the people, is the reestablishment of peace and fellowship between heaven and earth.

In the New Testament Jesus explains how this will be brought about. In an evident reference to the significance of Jacob's dream, he said to Nathanael, "Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." (John 1:51) Jesus is here saying that he would, in fact, be the "ladder" upon which, or by means of which, communication between heaven and earth would be established.

We are not to think of heaven being literally opened, as Jesus' statement to Nathanael might imply. Through the Prophet Malachi, God spoke of opening the "windows of heaven" and pouring out a blessing upon the Israelites such as they would not be able to contain. (Mal. 3:10) So the opening of heaven suggests the pouring out of God's blessings; and in fulfillment of Jacob's dream the blessings to be poured out upon all the families of the earth are those contained in God's oathbound covenant with Abraham.

In Galatians 3:16 Paul explains that Christ is the real Seed of Abraham, the means by which his blessings will reach the people when the due time comes for heaven to be opened up for this purpose. So it is in keeping with this that Jesus spoke of himself as being the "ladder" upon which the "angels," or messengers, of God will convey the promised blessings of heaven to earth.

The true followers of Christ of this age, as we have seen, are also spoken of in the New Testament as being the promised seed of Abraham. They will be the chief messengers, or channels of blessing, as a part of The Christ,

which is made up of Jesus, the Head, and the church, his body, or fellow members. It is fitting that Jesus should speak of himself as the ladder in this picture, for it is only because of his redemptive work—giving himself a ransom for all—that the world can be reconciled to God and have the promised blessings communicated to them.

His Journey Continued

After erecting an altar and calling the place Bethel, Jacob “went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the east.” (Gen. 29:1) The marginal translation says that he “lift up his feet.” This seems significant. Jacob, although he had purchased the birthright from Esau and had obtained the parental blessing which went with the birthright, had not been too happy. The strained relationship between him and Esau had reached crisis proportions, making it necessary for him to flee from the country.

Under these circumstances we can well imagine how Jacob felt that first night away from home. There is no indication in the record that he had received any communication from the Lord since his father had given him his blessing. But what a change was brought about by his dream! Now the Lord had spoken to him, relating to him the promise made to Abraham and to his father, Isaac. If he had had any doubts about the course he had taken, they were gone, and now he knew that the Lord was with him. So, starting on his journey the next morning, it was with lightness of heart and a buoyant step—lifting up his feet, no longer dragging them, as it were, in despondency and fear.

In due course he reached his destination. There were no special landmarks or road signs to guide him, but Jacob assumed that he was near Haran, where his Uncle Laban lived. He saw shepherds watching their sheep near a covered well. He spoke to the shepherds and learned that they were from Haran, the place he was seeking. He found that they knew his uncle; and even while they were talking, Rachel,

one of his uncle's daughters, came to the well with another flock of sheep to be watered.

Jacob's mother had no doubt told him the circumstances under which Eliezer met her at a well; and now that he had met his possible future wife, the niece of his mother, also at a well, he was probably quite impressed. But the account indicates that he was equally impressed with Rachel herself.

Laban welcomed his nephew into his home, where he remained as a guest for a month, evidently doing what he could meanwhile to serve his uncle. No doubt he had made known his reason for leaving Canaan, and that his desire was to remain with his uncle, at least for a while. Then Laban suggested some "wages" that Jacob should receive for his work.

He agreed at once to serve Laban seven years in return for Rachel, that he might have her for his wife. Laban agreed; but at the end of the seven years, because Leah, an older daughter, was not yet married, Laban found himself in a difficult position. According to the custom of the time and of the land, it was not proper to give a younger daughter in marriage while an older one remained unwed. So the only solution Laban could think of was to give Leah, the older daughter, to Jacob, instead of Rachel, which he did.

But Jacob was not satisfied and agreed to work another seven years for the girl he really loved. Then he had both of them, which according to the custom of that time was not improper. Besides, each one of the daughters was given a handmaid; and, as in the case of Abraham and Hagar, circumstances arose which led Jacob's wives to give their handmaids to their husband to bear children for them. The four mothers bore Jacob thirteen children—twelve sons and one daughter, the daughter's name being Dinah. We will later get acquainted with the sons.

After eleven of his sons had been born, Jacob felt that he had remained in Padan-aram long enough; so he asked his uncle and father-in-law, Laban, to let him return to his

people in Canaan. He said, "Send me away, that I may go unto my own place, and to my country. Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served thee, and let me go: for thou knowest my service which I have done thee." —ch. 30:25, 26

Actually, Jacob had served much longer than the fourteen years, but he was evidently an efficient servant, and Laban preferred that he remain and offered to enter into a new contract with him. This was done, and Jacob prospered under the arrangement so that he became wealthy in flocks and herds. Laban did not fare so well, and his sons complained. Jacob overheard them saying, "Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's." —ch. 31:1

Jacob also noticed that Laban was not as pleasant to him as he had been. About then the Lord spoke to Jacob again, saying, "Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee." (ch. 31:3) Jacob then consulted with Rachel and Leah; and, although it meant the breaking of home ties for them, they indicated their willingness to go with Jacob back to Canaan and that he should do just as God had directed.

While Jacob was prospering in Padan-aram, he considered the promises of God of greater value than earthly riches; so when God directed that he return to Canaan he did not hesitate to obey. Previously, when he decided, apart from God's direction, that it was time to leave Padan-aram, he informed Laban of his decision, but Laban influenced him to remain for another six years. But now that God had directed him to return to his people in Canaan, there must be no holding back, no postponement; so he purposely did not tell his father-in-law that he was leaving.

Three days after Jacob had left, taking his wives, children, and all his earthly possessions with him, Laban heard about it. Then Laban "took his brethren with him, and pursued after him seven days' journey; and they overtook him in the mount Gilead." It was a critical time for Jacob. Not only was

Laban angry because his son-in-law had fled, but Laban had discovered that someone in the company had stolen his idols.

It was Rachel who took her father's idols. The fact that this family worshiped idols indicates that Abraham must have been almost the only one among them who worshiped and served the true God. Apparently during the years Jacob had been in close contact with the family they had not been influenced by him to give up their idols.

A heated controversy took place in mount Gilead between Jacob and Laban. Jacob finally said, "Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty." (ch. 31:42) Laban then proposed that they enter into a covenant of peace, which they did, and they erected a heap of stones to be a witness between them. Then Laban said, "This heap is a witness between me and thee this day. Therefore was the name of it called Galeed; and Mizpah, for he said, The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another."—ch. 31:48,49

The next morning Laban, bidding farewell to his daughters and their families, returned to Padan-aram, and Jacob "went on his way, and the angels of God met him," we are told. "And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim."—ch. 32:1,2

Jacob had fled from Canaan because of the anger of Esau, whose birthright he had purchased and whose special blessing he had obtained from their father through deceit. Now that he was returning, he realized that he would have Esau to deal with, or as Jacob stated it, to "appease." (ch. 32:20) Perhaps Jacob was overly concerned; for actually, entering Canaan at mount Gilead, Esau, who lived at mount Seir, would be about one hundred miles to the south.

However, Jacob probably reasoned that Esau would eventually learn that he had returned to Canaan, and he decided that he would seek a reconciliation at once. So he sent messengers to his brother, instructing them to say to

him, "I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: and I have oxen and asses, flocks, and menservants, and womenservants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight."—vss. 4,5

The messengers returned to Jacob after delivering his message and reported that Esau was coming to meet him, accompanied by four hundred men. In the New Testament we are told that "fear hath torment"; and Jacob, being fearful of Esau, imagined the worst; that is, he supposed that his brother was bringing the four hundred men as an army to attack and destroy him.

Thereupon he divided his little company of people into two groups, hoping thus that while one group was being attacked the other could escape. Then Jacob prayed earnestly to the Lord for help and protection. In his prayer he addressed the Lord as the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac, "which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee." Jacob added in his prayer that he was not worthy of all the blessings the Lord had bestowed upon him, but since the Lord had said, "I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude," he was now pleading for divine protection in this crisis.

Jacob made elaborate preparations to appease Esau. He arranged with his servants to take Esau presents—"two hundred she goats, and twenty he goats, two hundred ewes, and twenty rams, thirty milch camels with their colts, forty kine, and ten bulls, twenty she asses, and ten foals." This number of domestic animals to be sent as presents to Esau gives an indication of what Jacob's total possessions must have been.

Jacob sent his wives and family "over the brook" ahead of him, while he remained alone the night before he was to meet his brother, "and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." Apparently this "man" was a materialized angel, a representative of the Lord. The

generally accepted thought is that Jacob wrestled with the angel in prayer, although there was apparently also a physical struggle.

With the coming of morning the angel said to Jacob, "Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." The angel then told Jacob that his name would be changed to Israel, which means "a prince of God," the angel's explanation being, "as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." —ch. 32:24-29

The angel, while wrestling with Jacob, touched his thigh "and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him." Jacob was greatly impressed, and he called the name of the place "Peniel," meaning "the face of God"; for, he said, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." (ch. 32:30) The Scriptures state that "there shall no man see me [God], and live." (Exod. 33:20) Jacob saw the angel of the Lord, and it was a marvelous experience. He can be excused for saying, in his enthusiasm, that he had seen God himself.

The next morning the much feared meeting with Esau took place, and Jacob was greatly relieved. He was very happy to learn that his brother had no evil intentions toward him. In fact, it was only after much persuasion by Jacob that Esau accepted the presents the servants had brought ahead with which to appease him. Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself."—ch. 33:1-11

Esau had left Canaan and was living beyond the southern border of the Promised Land. He realized that his father Isaac's blessing upon Jacob had not enriched him in earthly goods—that whatever he had gained of wealth had come to him outside of the land which God had promised to their grandfather Abraham and their father Isaac. Having little or no faith in the future aspects of the birthright, Esau probably now reasoned that he had lost nothing, hence there was no good reason to hold enmity against Jacob.

After the meeting, Esau invited Jacob to accompany him back to mount Seir. But this was not what the Lord had commanded; so Jacob made the excuse that with all the cattle, and the women and children, they could not travel as fast as Esau with his four hundred men, and he suggested that his brother journey on ahead and he would follow the best he could.

Actually, however, after Esau started on his return journey south, Jacob traveled west, stopping temporarily at "Succoth," and then on to Shechem, a place about thirty-five miles north of Jerusalem. Here he bought a plot of land and erected an altar and called it El-elohe-Israel, meaning "God, the God of Israel," or, "the mighty God of Israel."
—Dr. Strong

Circumstances developed in Shechem which made it necessary to move on, and "God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother." (ch. 35:1) Jacob then instructed his household to dispose of the idols which were brought from Padan-aram, and they moved on to Bethel.

Arriving in Bethel, Jacob built the altar which the Lord had commanded. It was at Bethel, it will be recalled, that Abraham built an altar soon after he entered Canaan. It was here also that Jacob more than twenty years previously had in a dream seen a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending upon it. Now, by the keeping power of God, and in harmony with his gracious providences, Jacob was back at Bethel.

Here at Bethel the Lord renewed his promise concerning the land, adding that "a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins." (vs. 11) Here also God confirmed the word of the angel that Jacob's name was to be changed to Israel.

In Genesis 17:5 God promised Abraham that he would be a father of many nations. The promise to Jacob implies the

same thing. In the expression "company of nations" the Hebrew word translated "company" means an assemblage, or multitude. In God's original promise to Abraham he said that in him "all families of the earth" would be blessed. The Apostle Paul quotes this and translates it "all nations."
—Gal. 3:8

Paul indicates the marvelous manner in which this promise to Abraham and Isaac will be fulfilled in so far as the "many nations" are concerned. He says, "For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith." "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the Law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were."—Rom. 4:13, 16, 17

The faith seed of Abraham, called out from Jews and Gentiles during the Gospel Age, will constitute a spiritual, "holy nation"—under Christ, the ruling nation of earth for a thousand years. (I Pet. 2:9, 10) The human representatives of this spiritual ruling nation will be the resurrected ancient worthies, who will establish the earthly phase of the kingdom in Jerusalem.

There the natural descendants of Abraham, having been regathered miraculously from among all nations, will be given the first opportunity to receive the blessings of the new kingdom and to cooperate therewith. As the news of the kingdom spreads, the peoples of other nations will fall in line until all the families, or nations, of the earth shall recognize the authority of the new kingdom and receive the blessings of life promised through the spiritual seed of Abraham. He will then be "father Abraham" to all nations.

After the confirmation of the covenant, Jacob journeyed to Ephrath. His wife Rachel died on this journey—died giving

birth to his youngest son, Benjamin. Finally he moved on to Mamre, “unto the city of Arbah, which is Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac sojourned.”—ch. 35:16,17

Many years had passed since Jacob had left home to escape the wrath of Esau. Even at that time Isaac, his father, was an old man, and blind, but he was still living when Jacob returned. Nothing is said of their meeting, however. The last word we have concerning Isaac is that he died at the age of 180, that he “gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people.” Esau and Jacob buried him.

The biblical expression, “gave up the ghost,” simply means that he ceased breathing, the word ghost being a translation of a Hebrew word meaning breath, or wind. As we have noted, Isaac’s people to whom he was gathered were for the most part idol worshipers. We would not expect them to be in heaven, nor could we suppose that Isaac joined them in a place of torment. The expression simply denotes that they were all together in death. Job gives us the proper thought, saying, “There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest.”—Job 3:11-21

Joseph and His Brethren



THE Patriarch Jacob had twelve sons—Reuben was the oldest, and Benjamin the youngest. The others were Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, and Joseph. When, toward the close of his life, Jacob pronounced his parental blessing upon these twelve, God's promise of a coming "Seed," the One who would be the Messiah and channel of blessing to all the families of the earth, was narrowed down to the descendants of Judah.—Gen. 49:9, 10

Of all these sons of Jacob (whose name was changed to Israel) the Bible deals more particularly with Joseph, the firstborn of Rachel, the wife for whom Jacob served his father-in-law fourteen years. (Gen. 29:20, 30) This ancient human interest story begins with the explanation that "Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the

son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colors. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.”—Gen. 37:3, 4

“Jealousy is cruel as the grave,” the Scriptures declare. (Song of Sol. 8:6) This became clearly demonstrated in the attitude of Joseph’s brothers toward him. Their jealousy and hate were increased when Joseph related a dream. “Behold,” he said, “we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf.” Joseph’s brethren saw in this dream a suggestion that Joseph expected one day to be ruler over them.—Gen. 37:5-8

Joseph “dreamed yet another dream, and told it to his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.” His brothers envied him even more after hearing this dream, and his father “rebuked” him for relating it, asking, “Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?” —ch. 37:9-11

Although Jacob rebuked Joseph for relating these dreams, the record is that “he observed the saying”—as did Mary, who pondered in her heart the marvelous things which occurred when Jesus was born. (Luke 2:19, 51) Jacob seemed to sense that God was dealing with Joseph in some special manner and that he was to be a man of destiny, even as he later proved to be.

Some time after Joseph related his dreams, his brothers departed from home, going to Shechem to seek pasture for their flocks. Joseph, being quite young, remained at home with his father. They had given no outward evidence of desire to injure Joseph because of their hatred for him; so Jacob, wishing to know how his sons were getting along, asked his beloved Joseph to go to Shechem and bring back a report.

Joseph was quite willing to render this service to his father, saying, "Here am I."—vss. 12-14

Arriving in Shechem, Joseph learned that his brothers had moved on to Dothan; so he continued his journey and finally found them there. This afforded them the opportunity, for which they had apparently been waiting, to manifest their hatred toward Joseph. The account says that "when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him. And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh."—vss. 15-19

Their first plan was to murder Joseph and cast him into a pit and then report to their father that his beloved boy had been slain by a wild beast. They said, "We shall see what will become of his dreams." But Reuben, the oldest brother, while hating Joseph, could not bring himself to participate in the plot to murder him, so suggested that, instead, they cast the lad into a pit and there let him die. Reuben planned that, unknown to his brethren, he would return to the pit and rescue Joseph and secretly return him to his father.

The brothers agreed, and Joseph was cast into a pit. But instead of abandoning him there, Judah suggested that they sell him to a band of Ishmaelites who were passing nearby on their way to Egypt. They reasoned that thus the object of their hate would be out of sight and out of their way, and yet they would not be guilty of murder. All agreed to this plan except Reuben, who was not with the others when they sold Joseph. When he returned to the pit to rescue Joseph and discovered that he was not there, he "rent his clothes. And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child is not; and I, whither shall I go?"—vss. 23-30

Jacob's Deep Sorrow

One crime often leads to another. Having disposed of their brother Joseph, it was necessary to offer some plausible explanation of his disappearance to their father, Jacob. So they killed "a kid of the goats" and dipped Joseph's coat in

its blood to make it appear that he had been killed by a wild beast; and, returning home, they presented this "evidence" to Jacob, who at once reached the conclusion that his beloved boy was dead. He said, "It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces."—vss. 31-33

Jacob's entire family endeavored to comfort him, "but he refused to be comforted; and he said, "For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning." (vs. 35) It is interesting to note that the Hebrew word here translated "grave" is **sheol**. It is the first time it appears in the Bible, and it is the only Hebrew word which, throughout the Old Testament, is translated "hell." It appears sixty-five times, and is translated "hell" thirty-one times, "grave" thirty-one times, and "pit" three times. It is simply the condition of death into which both the righteous and the unrighteous go when they die, there to await the resurrection. It is not a place of eternal torture.

Joseph in Egypt

Ishmaelites and Midianites are mentioned in connection with the selling of Joseph by his brethren, and his being taken into Egypt. The Ishmaelites were descendants of Abraham, through his bondmaid, Hagar, and the Midianites his descendants through his wife, Keturah, whom he married after the death of Sarah. Evidently, the group to which Joseph was sold was mixed, hence the reference to them sometimes as Ishmaelites and sometimes as Midianites.

Arriving in Egypt, the Ishmaelites sold Joseph to Potiphar, "an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian." "And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian." (ch. 39:1,2) "The Lord was with Joseph." This is the explanation of the marvelous series of events which took place in his life, and the manner in which they finally led up to his being reunited with his father and brothers.

Joseph knew that the Lord was with him, and his faith in this fact helped him to endure trial and to remain humble in prosperity. No matter how severely he was tested, his faith in the overruling providences of God remained firm; and regardless of how much honor was bestowed upon him, he gave all the credit to the Lord. Doubtless he often thought about the dreams which, when he related them to his brothers, caused them to hate him and to sell him as a slave. He probably wondered just how they were to be fulfilled, yet the fact that God had given them to him was an assurance that all his experiences were being overruled by divine providence. So, regardless of surrounding circumstances, he made the best of them, ever looking to God for guidance and help.

The hand of God in Joseph's experiences was so apparent that even Potiphar, his Egyptian master, noticed it—"His master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand." (vs. 3) This, together with Joseph's integrity and wisdom, gave his master confidence in him, "and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand." (vs. 4) Not only did the Lord bless Joseph personally, but for his sake he blessed the Egyptian household over which he had been made overseer—"The blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field; . . . and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat."—vss. 5, 6

Joseph Betrayed

But Joseph's favorable position did not continue. Because he was a "goodly person, and well favored," Potiphar's wife became enamored of him; and when he refused her advances, she reported to her husband that his trusted servant had mocked her and that when she had lifted up her voice in a cry of alarm, he had fled, leaving his garment with her. Potiphar accepted this story and, without investigation, ordered that Joseph be put into prison.—vss. 7-20

“But the Lord was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.” The Lord had permitted Joseph to be imprisoned, yet the statement is that “the Lord was with Joseph.” (vs. 21) The Lord’s people in that ancient time, even as now, found it necessary to walk by faith. It is not so difficult to believe that the Lord is with us when all the circumstances of life are to our liking; but when things go wrong, when calamity strikes, when friends forsake us, when we are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, it requires a living faith in the wisdom and love of God to believe that he is still with us.

So it was with Joseph. The fact that he was misrepresented and put into prison did not mean that the Lord was not still with him. Joseph, though enduring hardness as a prisoner, did not despair but maintained his faith in the God of his fathers. Yes, the Lord was with Joseph. Few of the personalities of the Bible have this assurance recorded concerning them as frequently as we find it said of Joseph. Because the Lord was with him, even in prison “the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to anything that was under his hand, and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper.”—vss. 22, 23

Thus the Lord was preparing for greater events in Joseph’s life. Shortly after he had been given this trustworthy position in the prison, Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, became offended by his chief butler and chief baker, and they were put into prison and came under the jurisdiction of Joseph. In due course both these men had dreams which disturbed them, and when visited afterward by Joseph, he noticed that “they were sad.”—Gen. 40:1-6

He inquired concerning the cause of their sadness, and they told him of their dreams. Joseph, by God’s help, correctly interpreted these dreams to mean that within three days the butler would be restored to his former position of honor in

Pharaoh's house and that at the close of three days the baker would be taken from prison and hanged.—Gen. 40:7-23

When interpreting the butler's dream, Joseph asked that when he was reinstated as Pharaoh's chief butler, he speak a kind word for him, suggesting that he be released from prison. The butler's release from prison occurred on Pharaoh's birthday, and in the excitement of the occasion he forgot about Joseph and failed to mention him to the king. So Joseph languished in prison for two more years, which was a further test of his faith in and devotion to God.

But at the end of two years God's providences again began to operate on behalf of Joseph. Pharaoh had two dreams. In these dreams "he stood by the river, and, behold there came up out of the river seven well-favored kine and fatfleshed; and they fed in a meadow. And, behold, seven other kine came up after them out of the river, ill-favored and leanfleshed; and stood by the other kine upon the brink of the river. And the ill-favored and leanfleshed kine did eat up the seven well-favored and fat kine. So Pharaoh awoke."—ch. 41:1-4

Then Pharaoh fell asleep and dreamed "the second time: and, behold, seven ears of corn came up upon one stock, rank and good. And, behold, seven thin ears and blasted with the east wind sprung up after them. And the seven thin ears devoured the seven rank and full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and, behold, it was a dream."—vss. 5-7

These dreams greatly disturbed Pharaoh, especially since none of the wise men of Egypt could interpret them for him. The chief butler, because of his close personal association with Pharaoh, would know of these circumstances, and by them he was reminded of Joseph. He was chagrined to realize that he had forgotten to speak to Pharaoh concerning Joseph; but even this the Lord had overruled, for now had come a most favorable opportunity to do so.

The chief butler remembered Joseph's ability to interpret dreams, and he told Pharaoh about him. The king of Egypt

sent for Joseph at once—"They brought him hastily out of the dungeon," the record states, "and he shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh." Asked by Pharaoh to interpret his dreams, Joseph, with humility said, "It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace."—vss. 9-16

Pharaoh then related his dreams to Joseph, to whom God gave the interpretation. Joseph explained that both dreams in reality represented the same thing—"The seven good kine are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years." He also explained that the seven ill-favored and lean kine were seven years, and "the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind shall be seven years of famine."—vss. 25-27

Joseph then explained further that what God had revealed through Pharaoh's dreams was that there were to be seven years of plenty in Egypt, followed by seven years of drought and famine. That the Lord gave two dreams meaning the same thing, Joseph explained, was "because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass." Joseph then advised Pharaoh to select a wise administrator over the affairs of Egypt, that the best advantage might be taken of the seven years of plenty in preparation for the seven years of famine to follow.—vss. 28-36

Joseph Exalted

Pharaoh was greatly impressed and also realized the wisdom of Joseph's recommendation; and he said to Joseph, "Forasmuch as God hath showed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou."—vss. 39, 40

Surely the Lord was again with Joseph, not altogether for his own sake but, as it later developed, for the salvation of his people, the natural descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and his father, Jacob. He proved to be a wise food administrator; and

although given extra dictatorial powers, he did not abuse them, nor did he use his high position to undermine the confidence of the Egyptians in their Pharaoh. A dictatorship can be a great blessing if the dictator is wise, unselfish, and humble, and Joseph possessed all these qualities.

Under his leadership, which began when he was thirty years of age, the Egyptians stored enormous quantities of food during the foretold seven years of plenty. Then began the seven years of famine, which was felt not only throughout Egypt but in neighboring countries as well, reaching even to Canaan, where Joseph's father, brothers, and their families resided. It is this that presents the climax and indicates the reason for such a strange and dramatic series of circumstances in the life of the boy who had been sold into slavery in Egypt.

Joseph's Brethren Go to Egypt

While years had passed since Joseph had been sold into Egypt by his brothers, his father Jacob was still living. The whole family, however, was feeling the effect of the famine; and Jacob, having heard that there was corn in Egypt, said to his sons, "Get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die. And Joseph's ten brethren went down to buy corn in Egypt."—ch. 42:1-3

Jacob's youngest son, Benjamin, was not allowed to go with the others, "lest," as the father explained, "peradventure mischief befall him." Benjamin was very dear to his father, not only as his youngest son, but also because of the fact that his beloved Rachel, the mother, died in giving birth to him. With Joseph, his other son by Rachel, supposed dead, Benjamin would be the last living tie the father had to link him with the beloved mother.

So the ten brothers proceeded to Egypt. Arriving there and making known their mission, it was necessary that they appear before Joseph, since only upon his word could corn be sold to anyone. He recognized his brethren, but they did not

recognize him. He accused them of being spies, which they hotly denied, explaining that they were all the sons of one man, and that they had two other brothers, one of whom "was not," and that the other remained at home with their father.—ch. 42:3-13

Joseph, of course, knew that his brethren were not spies, but he decided on a course to discover whether or not they had had a change of heart since the time, because of their jealousy, they first thought to kill him, and then sold him as a slave into Egypt. So he insisted that they were spies. He proposed that in order for them to prove otherwise he would hold nine of them prisoners while the other returned to Canaan and brought their brother Benjamin down to Egypt for him to see, to prove the truthfulness of their story.

Then he locked them up for three days, after which he changed his ruling, deciding to keep only one of his brothers, while the nine returned to Canaan with food. Simeon was the one chosen to remain a prisoner in Egypt until Benjamin was brought from Canaan. Confronted with these hardships, the brothers were reminded of the wrong they had done to Joseph, and their consciences pricked them. They discussed the matter among themselves, not realizing that the great ruler before whom they were appearing could understand their language, which undoubtedly was Hebrew. It was perhaps this evidence of their repentance which caused Joseph to relent and allow all but Simeon to return to Canaan.—vss. 15-24

He not only allowed the nine to return to Canaan but commanded that their sacks be filled with corn. They paid for it, but later, as one of them opened his sack to get provender for his ass, he discovered that his money was there also. They were all afraid, supposing that they would be accused of theft.

Upon their arrival home they explained to their father, Jacob, what had occurred and why Simeon was not with them, but he refused to allow them to take Benjamin into

Egypt. He said, “My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone: if mischief befall him by the way in which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.”—vs. 38

Here again the word grave is a translation of the Hebrew word **sheol**, the only word in the Old Testament which is translated hell. It is evident that Jacob expected to go to **sheol** when he died, which indicates clearly that **sheol**, the Old Testament hell, is not a place of torment but, as the Scriptures everywhere teach, the condition of death, from which there is to be a resurrection.

Famine Continues

While Jacob was positive that Benjamin must not be taken to Egypt, as the famine continued and the family’s food supply dwindled, something had to be done; so he directed that his other sons make another trip to Egypt for food. Then Judah reaffirmed the situation, insisting that Egypt’s ruler really meant what he said about their brother Benjamin and that it would be useless to return to Egypt for food unless they complied with his conditions.

Finally, after Judah promised faithfully to be personally responsible for Benjamin, Jacob relented. He instructed his sons to go to Egypt. With the thought of presenting as favorable an impression upon the ruler as possible, he said to them: “Take of the best fruits in the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present, a little balm, and a little honey, spices, and myrrh, nuts and almonds: and take double money in your hand; and the money that was brought again in the mouth of your sacks, carry it again in your hand; peradventure it was an oversight: take also your brother, and arise, go again unto the man.”—ch. 43:11-13

While suggesting that his sons take every precaution and do all they could to win favor with Egypt’s ruler, he knew that only the Lord could really protect them and Benjamin; so he said, “God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he

may send away your other brother, and Benjamin.” (vs. 14) The brethren did as directed by their father, and in due time they arrived in Egypt and were presented to Joseph, whom they still did not know.

Joseph instructed the ruler of his house to make ready, for he would have these Hebrews dine with him that day. Naturally they at once became suspicious. Having themselves practiced treachery upon their brother Joseph, they feared what might befall them. While Joseph was out, they approached the steward of his house and offered as full an explanation as possible concerning the money they had found in their sacks and told him that they had brought this money back with them, and more besides. Then the steward said: “Peace be to you, fear not: your God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks: I had your money. And he brought Simeon out unto them.”—vss. 15-23

What more could he say to assure the men that the ruler had no evil intentions toward them! To use a modern expression, he had talked to them in their own language, speaking of their God, and the God of their father. We might gather from this that Joseph did not fail to witness to his servants concerning Jehovah, the true God. Certainly he had never hesitated to credit God for his ability to interpret dreams, and all who knew of Joseph’s past realized that he was a Hebrew, and that the God he worshiped was the God of the Hebrews, therefore the God of Jacob and of his sons who had come to Egypt the second time to buy corn.

Finally Joseph returned home, and it was time for dinner. Seeing Benjamin again, he could not refrain from weeping for joy but concealed himself in his “chamber” while doing so, for it was not yet time to reveal himself to his brethren. He inquired after their father—if he was alive, and well. They assured him that he was, for which Joseph was glad.—vss. 24-31

Finally they sat down to eat. Joseph sat alone, for it was an abomination for Egyptians to eat with the Hebrews, and he

wanted his brothers to believe, as yet, that he was an Egyptian. They marveled, though, that in being seated according to the directions of Joseph, it should be in accordance with their ages. How did these Egyptians know their ages? And why was Benjamin given five times as much as the others? They no doubt pondered these things in their hearts; nevertheless “they drank, and were merry” with Joseph.—vss. 32-34

When the time came for the brothers to start on their homeward journey, Joseph commanded his steward to fill their sacks with corn and again to put the money they had paid for the corn, “every man’s . . . in his sack’s mouth.” Besides, the steward was directed to put Joseph’s special silver cup in the mouth of Benjamin’s sack. The next morning they started for Canaan, and for home, happy in the thought, no doubt, of the joy they would soon bring to their aged father.

But a new trial was in store for them. Joseph directed his steward to overtake them and accuse them of the theft of the silver cup. They were certain, of course, that they had not stolen the cup and readily consented that if it should be found in any of their sacks, the one to whom the sack belonged should become the servant of the ruler and not return to Canaan.

The cup, of course, was found in Benjamin’s sack. Then they “rent their clothes, and laded every man his ass, and returned to the city.” (ch. 44:13) It was a dark time for them, for now it seemed certain that Benjamin would be retained in Egypt and they would have to return to Canaan and break the sad news to their father.

But Judah did not give up. Having promised his father that he would be personally responsible for the safe return of Benjamin, he pleaded with Joseph for his release. He explained all the circumstances to Joseph, and appealed to his sense of kindness and mercy by emphasizing that if

Benjamin were retained in Egypt it would probably break the father's heart. He said, "When I come to thy servant my father, and the lad be not with us; seeing his life is bound up in the lad's life; it shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, that he will die: and thy servants shall bring down the gray hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to the grave [*sheol*, the Bible hell]."—vss. 30,31

Then, explaining to Joseph that he had personally made himself responsible for Benjamin's safety, Judah offered to remain in Egypt as a prisoner in his place—"Let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren; for how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me? lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father."—vss. 33,34

Joseph could stand no more. He was convinced now that his brethren had experienced a change of heart since they had sold him as a slave. He ordered all except his brothers to leave his presence. Then he said to them, "I am Joseph; doth my father yet live?"—ch. 45:1-3

The record says that Joseph's brethren were troubled in his presence. The marginal translation says "terrified," and well they might be—from their standpoint, that is; for here the one whom they so grievously injured and supposed dead was before them as a powerful ruler in Egypt, and they were at his mercy.

From Joseph's standpoint, however, there was no need to fear, because he had already forgiven them. He asked them to come near to him, and he repeated: "I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life." (vss. 4,5) In the 7th and 8th verses, Joseph again stated that it was God who had sent him into Egypt, the purpose being to "preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance."

Here is the reason the story of Joseph and his brethren is recorded in the sacred Word of God. It is to show the marvelous manner in which the Lord preserved the natural seed of Abraham. It is an outstanding example of how the Lord is able to cause the wrath of men to praise him and how he is able also to protect his people against any and all vicious attacks which might be made against them by their enemies.

Nothing in the New Testament indicates that the experiences of Joseph were intended to be typical, such as, for example, Paul states concerning Isaac: "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise." (Gal. 4:28) Some interesting comparisons, however, may be made. Fired into hatred by their religious leaders, the Jewish nation put Jesus to death, even as Joseph's brethren endeavored to dispose of him.

From prison, Joseph was exalted to rulership, occupying the position of life-giver to his brethren, to the Egyptians and surrounding nations. So Jesus, cast off by his brethren, and cast into the great prison house of death, was called forth and exalted to the right hand of God and will be Life-giver to the whole world of mankind during the thousand years of his kingdom.

Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from the experiences of Joseph is the manner in which he received them. His faith in God never wavered. He never complained. And while he had every reason to be resentful of his brothers and, when the opportunity came, to punish them severely, he did not permit his heart to become bitter toward them but was ready to forgive and to bless.

His was a noble character, with a nobility based upon his faith in God. He knew that God's hand was overruling in his experiences; so he had no reason to resent whatever God permitted, nor to be bitter against those who mistreated him. It is important for all the Lord's people thus to accept what they cannot change, and to realize that if the Lord wanted it otherwise he is abundantly able to accomplish his purposes.

Jacob Moves to Egypt

After revealing himself to his brethren, Joseph's next step was to send for his father and the remainder of the family. He explained to his brothers that there were to be five more years of famine, and that this move into Egypt was a necessity if their lives were to be saved. Pharaoh concurred in this, and the land of Goshen was set aside for the newcomers. —ch. 45:6-16

Lavish arrangements were made for the return to Canaan for their father and their families. Changes of raiment were provided for the ten, and for Benjamin, five changes of raiment. He also was given three hundred pieces of silver. Twenty asses were sent to the father, "laden with corn and bread and meat." Joseph said to his brothers, "See that ye fall not out by the way." Benjamin had been favored above the others, and Joseph did not want them to become jealous over him. He knew their weakness.

Jacob was overjoyed when he was finally convinced that his beloved son Joseph was still alive and was a ruler in Egypt. He accepted Joseph's invitation, and in due course the entire family arrived in Goshen. The list of those who went to Egypt is given in chapter 46 of Genesis, the total, including the two sons born to Joseph in Egypt, was seventy. They were given a royal welcome, both by Joseph and by Pharaoh. There they "grew and multiplied exceedingly."—ch. 47:27

By now Jacob was very old. He called Joseph and obtained a promise from him that when he died his body would be taken back to Canaan for burial. Before his death he pronounced a blessing upon Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh; and upon his deathbed he blessed all twelve of his own sons. It was here that the messianic promise of a coming ruler was limited to the tribe of Judah.—Gen. 49:9,10

"When Jacob had made an end of commanding [blessing] his sons, he gathered up his feet into his bed, and yielded up the ghost [his breath], and was gathered unto his people." (Gen. 49:33) In harmony with his request he was taken to

Canaan for burial. There he was laid away in the cave of Machpelah, in the field which Abraham bought as a burial place for his wife Sarah. Jacob's funeral procession was probably one of the greatest of all time, consisting of "all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt. And all the house of Joseph, and his brethren, and his father's house. . . . And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen: and it was a very great company."—ch. 50:7-9

After Jacob died, Joseph's brethren became apprehensive of what his attitude toward them might now be; so they interviewed him to find out. He assured them that they had no cause for fear, explaining again that God had overruled all the circumstances of his life for his own good and for theirs. "Now therefore fear ye not," he said, "I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them."—vs. 21

Joseph assured his brothers also that God would surely visit them and restore them to the land which he had promised to Abraham. Being assured of this, he gave instructions that when he died his body should be embalmed, and when the exodus did occur, it should be taken with them. Commenting on this Paul wrote, "By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones."—Heb. 11:22

Joseph was one hundred and ten years old when he died, having served as a ruler in Egypt for eighty years. His dreams in which he saw, in symbol, his father and his brothers bowing down to him had been marvelously fulfilled. But he did not take advantage of the circumstances to punish them. He did not even remind them of his dreams. In exaltation, he remained humble and kind and was a blessing to his brethren and of the Egyptians. What a noble example for the Lord's people now to follow!

Chapter 6

Moses— Deliverer, Lawgiver, and Prophet



IN THE Bible, Moses is second in prominence to Jesus Christ. His name appears in the Word of God a total of 810 times, 730 of which are in the Old Testament, and 80 in the New Testament. His name appears more than 100 times in the Old Testament subsequent to his death. Throughout the more than three thousand years since he lived, reverential esteem has been held for him by the Jewish people as their great deliverer and lawgiver.

Christians see in Moses not only a great prophet but also a type of the Messiah, the Christ. The Apostle Peter, in a prophecy of the work of Christ subsequent to his second advent said, "Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me: him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you." (Acts 3:22; Deut. 18:15, 18) In Hebrews 3:5,6 Moses is referred to as being "faithful in all his house," and Christ is presented as a "son over his own house, whose house are we."

God's hand in the life of Moses was manifested from the time of his birth. Joseph, and the entire generation of Israelites brought into Egypt to escape the famine, had died. (Exod. 1:6) Meanwhile "the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them."—Exod. 1:7

The Pharaoh who exalted Joseph to such a high position in the government of Egypt had also died, and, as the record states, "There arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph." (Exod. 1:8) This king became apprehensive and said to the Egyptians, "Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land."—Exod. 1:9, 10

The Israelites had been made slave laborers and as such were useful to the Egyptian government, but the king did not want them to become too numerous. So he set taskmasters over them with orders to increase their burden of work, thinking that this would prevent them from multiplying so rapidly. But it had the opposite effect. Then the midwives were ordered to kill all the male babies as soon as they were born, but they disobeyed this order.—ch. 1:15-20

Then the king gave orders that all male children were to be thrown into the river. This "charge," or command, was given to all the Egyptians and meant that it was legal for any of the Egyptians to seize Hebrew male children at any time and any place and throw them into the river. (vs. 22) It was under such circumstances that Moses was born.

Moses' father and mother were of the family of Levi, one of Jacob's twelve sons. The mother concealed Moses for three months after he was born. Then, realizing that she could not continue to do this, "she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child

therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink. And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him."— ch. 2:3,4

In the New Testament Paul comments on this, saying, "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment." (Heb. 11:23) They evidently had faith that in some way this "proper child" would be used by God in the fulfillment of his purposes in connection with their people. They would know of Joseph's promise that the Israelites would be restored to their own land, and they may have hoped that this "goodly child" of theirs might in some way be instrumental in this deliverance.

Their faith soon began to be rewarded. Pharaoh's daughter "came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and behold the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children."—ch. 2:5,6

The sister who stood by to watch what would happen then asked Pharaoh's daughter if she should get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the child, "and Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother." (vs. 8) The mother accepted the invitation to be the child's nurse, and wages were paid her. How marvelous were the providences of God!

By this arrangement Moses was raised under the protection of the Egyptian government and became "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds." (Acts 7:22) But with his own mother caring for him, Moses also learned that he was not an Egyptian, and he was informed concerning the promises of God as they related to the Israelites, including those of deliverance from Egyptian bondage.

In the New Testament, Stephen informs us that when Moses was “full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.” (Acts 7:23) Paul states the matter more dramatically, saying, “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.”—Heb. 11:24-26

Evidently the Lord had revealed to Moses before he visited his brethren the first time that he was to be their deliverer from bondage. It was at this time that he slew one of the Egyptian taskmasters, because, as Stephen explains, “he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them; but they understood not.”—Acts 7:25; Exod. 2:11,12

It was when Moses visited his brethren the “second day” and intervened in a quarrel between two of them, that he learned his slaying of the Egyptian was known to others. Indeed, it soon became known to Pharaoh, and because of it Moses was obliged to flee from Egypt. It had all come about because he had decided to cast in his lot with his brethren. He had confidence in the promises of God, the God of his fathers. He believed that a great Deliverer, the Messiah, the promised “Seed,” would eventually come. Because of this, as Paul explains, he esteemed “the reproach of Christ [the reproach, that is, associated with belief in the messianic promises] greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.”

Moses believed the promises of God and was determined to be loyal to them no matter what the cost. He did not realize, however, what a strange turn the providences of God would take with his own experiences. God had revealed to him that he would be the deliverer of his people; but because he went about to accomplish it in his own way he was forced to flee from the country, and he lived as a refugee in the land of Midian for forty years.

As a result of his kindness in assisting the daughters of Jethro, the priest (margin, prince) of Midian, Moses was taken into his home, and later married one of his daughters, Zipporah. To him was born a son, whom he named Gershon, which means “a stranger here.” Moses gave his son this name because, as he said, “I have been a stranger in a strange land.”—Exod. 2:11-22; 3:1

God Remembered

During those forty years in Midian doubtless many times Moses thought of his people in Egypt and perhaps wondered when and how God would fulfill his promises to them. They were not unprofitable years for Moses, because he was learning to wait on the Lord and to realize that by his own strength and in his own way he could do nothing for his brethren.

“It came to pass in process of time,” the record states, “that the king of Egypt died.” (ch. 2:23) This was the king, or Pharaoh, whose daughter adopted Moses, and from whom Moses fled after killing the Egyptian taskmaster. His death is noted to indicate that the way was now open for Moses to return to accomplish the task which God had designed for him.

Meanwhile the burdens of the Israelites were being increased, and they “sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them.”—ch. 2:23-25

The Burning Bush

Moses “kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, . . . and he had led the flock to the back side of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb.” (ch. 3:1) Here “the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And

Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.”—ch. 3:2,3

Then the Lord spoke to Moses out of the burning bush, saying, “Moses, Moses,” and he answered, “Here am I.” (vs. 4) Moses was instructed to remove his shoes, for the place whereon he stood was holy ground—being made holy for the time being by the presence of the Lord, who, through the angel, was to give Moses his initial instructions regarding the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage.—vs. 5

In speaking to Moses from the burning bush, the Lord identified himself, saying, “I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” (vs. 6) The truthfulness of this narrative is confirmed by Jesus, who used it as a proof of the resurrection of the dead. He explained that Jehovah is not a God of the dead but of the living, and since he declared himself to be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who had died, it means that they are to be raised from the dead, for, as Jesus explained, “All live unto him,” that is, unto God.—Luke 20:37,38

In Moses’ day, even as now, there were many gods, but only one true and living God. It was he who had spoken to Abraham and promised that through his seed all the families of the earth were to be blessed. Moses knew about these promises and had confidence in the God who had made them; so he did not hesitate to offer himself for service, saying, “Here am I.”

The Lord then explained to Moses that the time had come when he would deliver the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt and “bring them out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey.” (ch. 3:7,8) To Moses the Lord also said, “Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt.”—vs. 10

Remembering, no doubt, his first attempt to help his people and how completely it had failed, it was logical for Moses to

ask, “Who am I, that I . . . should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?” Replying to this question, the Lord said to Moses, “Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.”—vss. 11, 12

But Moses had still another question. Forty years prior to this, when he had attempted to help his people, he was asked, “Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?” (ch. 2:14) Now he wanted to know how he would answer questions of this sort from his own people. He knew that they would demand by what authority he had come to deliver them. True, he would tell them that the God of their fathers had sent him; but then, as he said, they would want to know more than this. “They shall say to me,” Moses continued, “What is his name?” How was he to answer this question?—vs. 13

Replying, the Lord said to Moses, “I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.”—vss. 14, 15

The Hebrew word here translated “AM” in the name “I AM,” means “exist.” By its use the Lord was identifying himself to Moses and, through him, to the Israelites, as the ever-existing God, the same God who had directed and blessed their fathers, the God who had promised them the land of Canaan, who through Joseph had given assurance that they would be delivered from Egypt.

The Lord outlined a plan for Moses to follow. First, he was to “gather the elders of Israel together” and explain to them that the Lord’s time had come to deliver the Israelites, and, with the elders, he was to appear before Pharaoh and request

that the Israelites be given the privilege of going three days' journey into the wilderness, where they might offer sacrifice. (vss. 16-18) The Lord warned that permission for this would not be granted and that consequently he would bring plagues upon Egypt until Pharaoh would be willing to release the Israelites.

All of this appeared startling to Moses, who, after forty years of tending flocks for his father-in-law, had little confidence in his ability to lead his people out of bondage, especially in view of the certain opposition of Pharaoh. So again he appealed to the Lord for assurance. "They will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice," he said to the Lord, "for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee."—ch. 4:1

Then the Lord gave Moses three signs, each of them a miracle, by which he might know, and the people might be convinced, of his divine appointment and authority. He was told to cast his rod upon the ground, and when he did, it became a serpent. When he picked it up, it became a rod again. Then he was told to put his hand into his bosom, and when he did, it became leprous but returned to a normal healthy condition when he put it into his bosom the second time. He was told also that if these two signs were not convincing then he was to take water from the river and pour it upon the ground and it would become blood.—ch. 4:2-9

Convinced, apparently, that he would be able to establish the fact that the Lord had sent him, Moses then hesitated for another reason. He said to the Lord, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue." (vs. 10) Replying to this, the Lord reminded Moses that he was the Creator of the tongue, implying that Moses need have no fear. The Lord then informed him that his brother Aaron would accompany him on his mission and would serve as his mouthpiece: "He shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God."—vss. 11-17

Moses was now satisfied and made preparations to return to Egypt. Meanwhile the Lord spoke to Aaron and instructed him to go into the wilderness to meet Moses. They met “in the mount of God.” (vs. 27) Now we have Moses and Aaron serving the Lord together. Aaron later became Israel’s first high priest under the arrangements of the Law Covenant into which the nation entered with the Lord shortly after the Exodus.

Moses and Aaron “gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel: and Aaron spake all the words which the Lord had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed: and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped.”—vss. 29-31

Pharaoh Approached

With the elders of Israel agreeing to cooperate, Moses and Aaron then contacted Pharaoh, saying to him, “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness.” But Pharaoh did not take this kindly. He replied, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.”—ch. 5:1, 2

No amount of persuasion would change Pharaoh’s mind. Instead of allowing the Israelites to go, even temporarily, he increased their burdens. Then the Israelites complained to Moses, and Moses went to the Lord and said, “Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? why is it that thou hast sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered thy people.”—vss. 22, 23

This was not expressing a lack of faith in God’s ability to deliver his people but rather a request for a better understanding of God’s providences. The Lord assured Moses that in due time Pharaoh would not only let the Israelites go but would even drive them out of the land. How

the Lord brought Pharaoh to this point is recorded in Exodus, chapters 7 through 12.

God brought plagues upon Egypt, ten in all. As each of these plagues fell upon the land, Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh with God's message, "Let my people go." Each time Pharaoh declared that if the plague were lifted he would let the Israelites go, but each time he broke his word. "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth." (Rom. 9:17) This suggests that God could have brought another prince to the throne of Egypt but favored this one because of his wickedness, self-will, and obstinacy.

The Scriptures also declare that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. (Exod. 4:21) The explanation is that it was the goodness of God that hardened Pharaoh's heart. Divine goodness and generosity were shown in the removal of the various plagues as soon as Pharaoh promised to do right. This, instead of inciting him to love and obedience, led him to greater obstinacy. He determined, as he passed through one plague after another, that others could not be worse; but ultimately he paid dearly for his defiance.

The tenth plague was the severest. All the firstborn of Egypt died; but the firstborn of Israel, under the protection of the blood of the Passover lamb, were spared. By this plague Pharaoh was brought to the point, as prophesied, where he expelled the Israelites from the land.

It was in connection with this tenth and final plague upon Egypt that Israel's Passover was instituted. According to the instructions of the Lord through Moses, the Passover lamb was to be slain and its blood sprinkled upon the lintels and doorposts of the houses. The firstborn in any house where the blood was found that night was passed over, or spared.

The Apostle Paul places a typical significance upon this, saying, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." (I Cor. 5:7) Paul also mentions the "church of the firstborn." (Heb.

12:23) Israel's firstborn were delivered from death that first Passover night, and the next day all Israel were brought forth from bondage. This has its counterpart in antitype in that "the church of the firstborn" are delivered from death during the present Gospel Age, and then, during earth's new day, all mankind will be delivered from their great taskmaster, Satan, and made free from sin and death.

Moses Leads His People

Moses' greatness is attributable to the fact that he gave the Lord the glory for everything. By cooperating with the Lord he had accomplished the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage; but he kept the people reminded that it was the Lord who had brought this about. He said to them, "Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out from this place."—Exod. 13:3

Soon after they left Egypt, Moses and the Israelites were confronted with another crisis. The Lord directed the route they were to take. He "went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light." (vs. 21) By following the "cloud" and the "pillar of fire" they were led over a route which necessitated crossing the Red Sea, and when they reached the sea there seemed to be no way of crossing safely to the other side.

Meanwhile, after they had left Egypt, Pharaoh repented that he had allowed them to go; so "he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, . . . and he pursued after the children of Israel." (ch. 14:7, 8) Pharaoh and his army overtook the Israelites just as they reached the Red Sea, and the people became "sore afraid." (vs. 10) They could not go forward, and it looked as though they would be captured and returned to Egypt or perhaps killed.

So they complained to Moses, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt with us, to carry us

forth out of Egypt?’” (ch. 14:11) Moses, still trusting in the Lord, said unto the people, “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.”—ch. 14:13,14

The Lord then instructed Moses to go forward. He was told to stretch out his hand over the sea and divide it. The record is that a strong east wind blew upon the sea that night and divided the waters, enabling the Israelites to cross over on dry land. The Egyptian army tried to follow, but the waters closed in upon them, and Pharaoh and his warriors were destroyed.

The 15th chapter of Exodus contains a song of deliverance which was sung by Moses and the Israelites. Some of the opening words are, “The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation.” (Exod. 15:2) This “song” of Moses is preeminently one of salvation and deliverance. The overcoming church class of the present Gospel Age is shown in the 14th chapter of Revelation as being with the “Lamb” on Mount Sion, singing a new song and, in the 15th chapter, as singing the song “of Moses and the Lamb.”—Rev. 14:1-3; 15:3

Thus again Moses and the mighty works accomplished by the Lord through him are indicated to be typical of Jesus, the “Lamb” of Revelation, and the much larger and more important deliverance accomplished by him, even the deliverance from sin and death, first of the church of the “firstborn,” and later, during the thousand years of his reign, of all mankind.

The meekest Man

In Numbers 12:3 Moses is described as being “very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.” The thought is that Moses was self-effacing, willing to endure injustices in the common interest of his people and for the glory of God. In his difficult position as leader of God’s people

he needed this quality, for he was continually being accused by those for whom he was laying down his life.

When Pharaoh increased the burdens of the people because he was asked to give them their freedom, they blamed Moses. When they reached the Red Sea and there seemed no way of escape, they again blamed Moses, and they asked why they had been brought out into the wilderness to die. Soon after the miracle of crossing the Red Sea, when they came to Marah and found the water bitter, the people “murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?”—Exod. 15:23,24

Leaving Marah, the Israelites journeyed to Elim. There they found water. However, their destination was Canaan; so they moved on into what is described as “the wilderness of Sin.” There again they murmured, saying to Moses and Aaron, “Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full.” (ch. 16:3) Then they accused Moses of bringing them into the wilderness “to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

It was then that the Lord provided the manna from heaven to feed the Israelites. This manna came each night and was to be gathered each morning—just enough for the day’s supply—the only exception being that on the sixth day they were to gather a double portion in order to have a supply to last them over the Sabbath. Jesus referred to this heavenly manna. He said, “I am that Bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living Bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”—John 6:48-51

Thus again the experiences of Israel under the leadership of Moses are indicated to be typical of Christ and the Heavenly Father’s provision of life through him. The manna was a type

of Christ. As it provided life for all Israel, so Christ will provide life for all mankind. Moses instructed Aaron to take a pot of the manna and lay it up before the “testimony”; later it was put in the Ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy. (ch. 16:32-34; Heb. 9:4) The manna so laid up did not corrupt and was typical of the immortality which is given to the antitypical “church of the firstborn” of the present Gospel Age.

As the children of Israel journeyed, they “pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink.” (ch. 17:1) Again the people complained, blaming Moses. “Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the Lord?” But again they accused him of bringing them out into the wilderness to die.—ch. 17:2,3

As always, Moses took the matter to the Lord. This time the situation had become very serious for, as Moses said, the people were almost ready to stone him. Then the Lord instructed him to go before the people, taking “the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.”—ch. 17:4-6

In I Corinthians 10:1-4 Paul refers to the experiences of Israel in passing through the Red Sea, partaking of the manna, and drinking from the rock. He speaks of the nation as being baptized into Moses in the sea and in the cloud, as spiritual Israelites are baptized into Christ. He says that they “did all eat of the same spiritual meat,” which, as we have seen, represented Christ; and he then adds that they “drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ”; that is, it represented Christ.

Moses' Sin

In Numbers 20:7-13 we have another account of water coming out of the rock. This was at Kadesh. Verse 8 makes

the mind of the Lord clear: "Take the rod," as an emblem of authority. "Gather thou the assembly together." (On the former occasion only the elders were present.) "Speak ye to the rock before their eyes." But, contrary to God's instruction, Moses smote the rock. And God said, "Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them."

What was Moses' sin? How did he not believe God? He should not have smitten the rock. The rock was a type of Christ, and the lesson is important. Christ was to be smitten only once, for all. (Isa. 53:1-5; Heb. 9:25, 26, 28; I Pet. 3:18) No wonder God was displeased when Moses "believed him not" and smote the rock a second time, for the types of God are as sacred as are the antitypes.

Only the elders were present at the first smiting, picturing the few, the little flock of the Gospel Age. The whole assembly was together at the second bringing forth of water, picturing the blessing of the water of life, which will be to the whole assembly of man—all the families of the earth.

Moses Receives the Law

While Moses is often referred to as Israel's lawgiver, actually he acted merely as mediator between God and the people in connection with the giving of the Law. The main features of the Law were epitomized in the Ten Commandments, which he received from the Lord on Mount Sinai. He was in the mountain forty days, and when he came down bearing the tables of the Law, he found that the people had erected a golden calf and were worshiping it. This angered Moses and he destroyed the tables of the Law.

Later the Lord instructed Moses: "Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon these tables the words which were in the first tables, which thou brakest." (Exod. 34:1) Moses obeyed and again went up into Mount Sinai. We read that then "the Lord descended in the cloud,

and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty: visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation."—ch. 34:5-7



This beautiful proclamation of the "name of the Lord" has been referred to by many as the theme song of the Bible. It reveals the Lord as being a God of love and justice, "abundant in goodness and truth." It is these qualities which are revealed in the divine plan of salvation. While this proclamation was being made to Moses, the commandments were written on the tables of stone, and Moses returned and presented them to the people. When he descended from the mountain the "skin of his face shone" while he was speaking with the people.—ch. 34:29, 30

In II Corinthians 3:2-18 the Apostle Paul draws a very interesting lesson from Moses' experience in connection with receiving these tables of the Law. He speaks of Christ's followers as being "epistles of Christ," just as the tables of the Law were, in a sense, epistles of Moses. He indicates that the glory on Moses' countenance represented the glory for which we hope when we are united with Christ and reigning with him, administering the laws of his kingdom to the world

of mankind. Here again, then, we have the experiences of Moses brought over into the New Testament and shown to be typical of a greater work to be accomplished through Christ.

In Hebrews 12 Paul calls attention to other experiences in connection with the giving of the Law through Moses which were typical. At Mount Sinai there were "thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud, . . . and the voice of a trumpet exceeding loud." (Exod. 19:16) In Hebrews 12:18-22, 26-28 and Haggai 2:6,7 we have the explanation that the convulsions of nature and the sounding of the trumpet at Sinai typified a shaking time among the nations just prior to the establishment of Messiah's kingdom, in which the followers of Christ during the present age will then have a share.

In this great "time of trouble," Paul indicates, everything out of harmony with God will be shaken, or removed; but we, at the same time, will receive a kingdom which cannot be removed. As Moses, in the type, was mediator of the original Law Covenant, so Christ, and associated with him his church, will administer the laws of the promised New Covenant through which all the willing and obedient of the Millennial Age will receive everlasting life.—Jer. 31:31-34

The Fiery Serpents

Some years later, while still in the wilderness, the Israelites again complained to Moses and asked why they had been brought out into the wilderness to die. The Lord was displeased with this lack of faith and permitted the people to be attacked by fiery serpents, causing the death of many. Then Moses was instructed to make a serpent of brass and set it upon a pole and explain to the people that if those who had been bitten by the live serpents would look upon this serpent of brass they would not die.—Num. 21:4-9

Jesus refers to this incident. In John 3:14-16, he said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the

world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Jesus was lifted up on the cross to die for both the church and the world. As yet only the church class of the Gospel Age has had a genuine opportunity to look upon him. However, in the kingdom age about to dawn, he will be lifted up as the world's Savior so that all will see him, and then "whosoever believeth in him" will not "perish, but have everlasting life."

Moses' great love for his people and his humble spirit of self-effacement is beautifully revealed by an incident recorded in Exodus 32:7-14. It was when the Israelites, while waiting for Moses to return from Mount Sinai with the Law, made the golden calf and began to worship it. The Lord was exceedingly angry with this great sin, and he said to Moses, "Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation."—vs. 10

If Moses had been ambitious for promotion, this was a unique opportunity. And certainly he might well have felt justified in accepting the Lord's offer, for had not the people against whom the Lord was so angry he proposed to destroy them accused him time and time again of malicious intent in bringing them into the wilderness? But Moses viewed the matter differently. He did not think of himself but of his people, and particularly of the glory of the Lord's name.

So he prayed earnestly to the Lord not to do this thing. Why, he inquired of the Lord, should the Egyptians be given an opportunity to say, "For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth." Besides, he told the Lord, he should consider his promises to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, promises that he would multiply their seed as the stars of heaven and as the sand upon the seashore, and that he would surely give them the land of Canaan.

By this earnest plea on behalf of the Israelites, Moses displayed the true qualities of a mediator, and the Lord heard

and respected his petition. A similar incident occurred after the twelve spies returned from Canaan, the majority of whom brought back an unfavorable report. Here also the Lord threatened to destroy the entire nation and make Moses the head of a new nation. Again Moses pleaded for his people and for the honor of the Lord's name. Again the Lord hearkened to Moses and did not destroy the Israelites. —Num. 14:15-21

Faithful to the End

Even though Moses knew that he would not be permitted to enter the Promised Land, having learned the needed lesson, he remained a faithful servant of his people. His last great service is recorded throughout the Book of Deuteronomy, which describes the end of his faithful life of service and is his last, long farewell to his people, in which he admonishes them over and over again to be faithful to God and to the covenant into which they had entered with him.

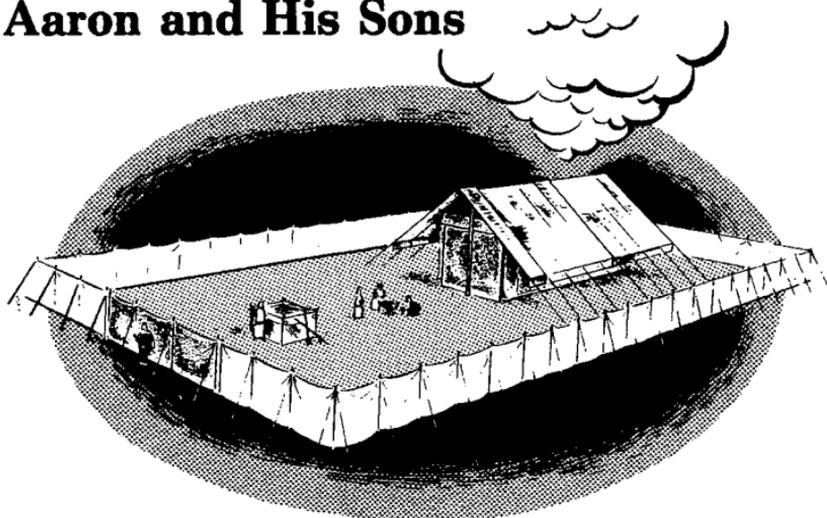
He went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, from where he could view the Promised Land. (Deut. 34:1-5) He was at this time 120 years old, his eventful life having been divided into three equal periods of 40 years each. The first of these extended from his birth to the time he fled from Egypt into the land of Midian; the second forty years he spent in Midian tending his father-in-law's flocks; the third was devoted to his leadership of the Israelites out of Egypt and during their wanderings in the wilderness.

“So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the Word of the Lord. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.” (Deut. 34:5, 6) His burial place was probably hidden to prevent its becoming a sacred shrine, as it probably would have because of the reverential esteem the Israelites had, and still have, for their great leader, emancipator, and lawgiver.

The Apostle Jude indicates that the burial place of Moses was a matter of concern even in the spirit world. He says that Michael the archangel disputed with the Devil about the body of Moses—presumably as to where it was buried. It might well be that the Devil was trying to learn of its whereabouts, that he might use it as a further means of leading the Israelites into idolatry. No man had ever come into closer contact with God and been used more wonderfully by him, but the Lord made sure that after his death Moses did not become an object of idol worship. And Moses would not have condoned that.

Chapter 7

Aaron and His Sons



AARON was the brother of Moses. He was appointed by the Lord to be a "mouth" for Moses. (Exod. 4:16) Because of this, his services and experiences for the most part parallel those of the great lawgiver. With the giving of the Law, Israel's priesthood was instituted, and Aaron was appointed the first high priest, his four sons serving as underpriests. As spokesman for Moses, he was to a large extent the actual instrument in working most of the miracles of the Exodus.

Aaron was dependent upon his brother and received his authority from him. When Moses went up into Mount Sinai to receive the Law, Aaron was left on his own responsibility, and he displayed weakness by yielding to the demands of the people to make the golden calf and to worship it. He repented of this sin, and Moses gained forgiveness for him.— Deut. 9:20

It was immediately following the making and worshipping of the golden calf that "Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me.

And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him.” (Exod. 32:26) Aaron was of the tribe of Levi, and later this entire tribe was substituted for the firstborn of all the families of Israel, to be the religious servants of the people.— Num. 3:41, 45

The Aaronic family of the Levites was chosen as the one from which the priests of Israel would be taken, by succession from father to son, Aaron being the first high priest. God’s authority to Moses for appointing Aaron and his sons to the priesthood is recorded in Exodus 28:1. The text reads: “Take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest’s office, even Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron’s sons.”

In Hebrews 5:4 and 5, where it is explained that Jesus did not exalt himself to the high position which he occupied in the divine plan, Paul says that “no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee.”

From this we see that Aaron’s position as high priest in Israel was typical of the position occupied by Jesus. In God’s arrangement with Israel the principal work of a priest was to offer sacrifice and, upon the basis of his sacrificial work, to extend blessings to the people. Thus Aaron’s position was typical of the manner in which, through Christ, the blessings which God promised through the “Seed” of Abraham will be extended to “all the families of the earth.”

The priests of Israel offered animals in sacrifice, but Jesus offered himself. And, just as in the type, both Aaron and his sons served as priests, so in the antitype, both Jesus and his followers lay down their lives in sacrifice, Jesus dying as the Redeemer of the world and the church being planted together in the likeness of his death, their sacrifice being made acceptable through his. Peter wrote, “Ye also . . . are

built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”—1 Pet. 2:5

Aaron's Consecration

Not only were Aaron and his sons appointed by God to be Israel's first high priest and underpriests, but a rather elaborate service was prescribed for initiating them into office. This service is outlined in the 8th chapter of Leviticus. It was a service which was repeated each time a new priest was installed into office.

First of all, Aaron was clothed in his garments of glory and beauty, while his sons were clothed in their white linen robes, with bonnets on their heads. Aaron's garment is described thus: "A breastplate, and an ephod, and a robe, and a broided coat, a mitre, and a girdle."—Exod. 28:4

In the service of consecration three animals were offered in sacrifice—a bullock for a sin offering, a ram for a burnt offering, and the ram of consecration. The sacrifice of the bullock for the sin offering pointed forward to the sacrifice of Jesus and his body members, the church. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on its head, indicating that it represented them. Hence everything from that time on prefigured the experiences of the antitypical priesthood in their sacrificial work during the Gospel Age.

This bullock was then delivered up to Moses, who represented the Law. To meet the demands of the Law the bullock had to be slain, "and he [Moses] slew it." Its blood was applied to the horns of the Altar, thus pointing out that the power of Christ's earthly Altar of sacrifice is in the blood, and that our sacrifice offered on this Altar is acceptable to God. (Rom. 12:1) The blood poured at the base of the Altar suggests that through the power of the antitypical blood, even the curse which is upon the earth because of sin will be removed as a result of the sacrificial work of Christ.

Moses took the hide and flesh of the bullock and burnt them with fire without the Camp. This suggests that through the sacrificial work of the antitypical priesthood, Christ and his church, the world of mankind will ultimately be delivered, the merit of this sacrifice being, of course, in the sacrifice of the perfect man, Christ Jesus. This sacrifice is a vile thing in the eyes of the unbelieving world, but God accepts it and is pleased with the heart devotion which prompts the sacrifice. The spirit of this devotion is described in the prophecy concerning Christ, which reads, "I delight to do thy will, O my God."—Ps. 40:8

The ram for the burnt offering indicates the manner in which God accepts the sacrifices of the antitypical priesthood. It was cut into pieces and laid on the Altar, the head first, followed by the other parts and the fat. Thus Jesus, the "Head" of the church, was first sacrificed, and throughout the Gospel Age the remaining parts of The Christ are being sacrificed. God's acceptance is shown by fire.

The ram of consecration reveals the effect of the spirit of consecration upon the antitypical priesthood. After slaying this ram, Moses took of the blood and put it upon each of the priests separately, thus showing that our consecration is an individual matter and places upon us an individual responsibility.

He put the blood upon the tip of the right ear, upon the thumb of the right hand, and the great toe of the right foot. Thus through our consecration we are given the hearing of faith and are enabled thereby to appreciate God's promises as no others can. Our hands are consecrated so that we do with our might what our hands find to do. Our feet are also consecrated so that we "walk in newness of life."

The choice portions of the ram, its "inwards" and "fat," represent our heart sentiments, our best powers. These were taken in the hands of the priests and "waved"—passed to and fro before the Lord—representing the fact that a consecrated offering is not given to the Lord merely for a

moment, or a day, or a year, but that we consecrate to keep our affections and powers continually uplifted, never ceasing until our sacrifice is accepted by him.

Being installed in office, Aaron and his sons were then prepared to conduct the various sacrificial services which God had outlined to Moses while in Mount Sinai. Just as their consecration pointed forward to the dedication of the antitypical priesthood and the effect it would have upon the lives of Jesus and his followers, so the sacrificial services which they subsequently conducted were typical of the "better sacrifices" of this Gospel Age, this being particularly true of the services outlined in the 9th and 16th chapters of Leviticus.

Significant in connection with the service outlined in the 9th chapter is the fact that after the work of sacrifice was over, Aaron, clothed in his garments of glory, came out and blessed the people. Thus is shown that after the better sacrifices of this present Gospel Age have been completed, the glorified Christ, Head and body, will extend to all mankind those blessings of health and life promised by the mouth of all God's holy prophets since the world began, the blessings which God promised would reach the people through the seed of Abraham.

Of special significance in the sacrificial service outlined in the 16th chapter of Leviticus, a service which was repeated each year on the tenth day of Israel's seventh month, was the fact that there were two animals sacrificed—a bullock and a goat—each one of which was treated in the same way. We believe that in this picture the bullock represented Jesus, and the goat his body members, the church. The bullock was slain first. The priest took burning coals from the Brazen Altar and incense and, putting these coals on the Golden Altar in the first compartment of the Tabernacle, called the Holy, sprinkled the incense upon them. The sweet perfume of this burning incense penetrated into the Most Holy of the

Tabernacle, where the blood was then sprinkled upon the Mercy Seat. The fat of the sin offering was burned on the Brazen Altar in the Court of the Tabernacle, and its skin and flesh were then burned without the Camp.

The goat was sacrificed in the same way, and Paul identifies the followers of Jesus with this picture, when in Hebrews 13:13 he says, "Let us go forth to him [Jesus] without the Camp, bearing his reproach." Thus Paul shows the significance of the fire and the burning of the carcass of the animals "without the Camp," as well as revealing that the church shares these experiences with Jesus.

That the followers of Christ are thus shown to be fellow sacrificers with him explains the real purpose of the Christian life, that it is not merely a matter of accepting Christ and living righteously; but, as Paul explains, it is also given unto us to "suffer for his sake," as well as to "suffer with him." (Phil. 1:29; Rom. 8:17; II Tim. 2:11, 12) It also reveals one of the principal reasons that the blessings of life promised to come through the Messiah have not yet been offered to the world. It is because the foretold and prefigured work of sacrifice is not yet finished. The church is still filling up that which is behind of the "afflictions of Christ."—Col. 1:24

The Rebellion of Korah

In the 16th chapter of Numbers there is an account of a rebellion against Moses and Aaron, led by Korah. Korah challenged the right of Moses and Aaron to have full charge of the religious affairs of the nation. Moses properly left the matter in the hands of the Lord to decide. His decision was against Korah and his sympathizers, and an earthquake opened the ground under them and they went down into the "pit" and were destroyed.—vss. 30-33

But this did not entirely put down the rebellion. The next day "the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the Lord." (vs. 41) The Lord then sent a plague

upon the Israelites, and before it was stayed "fourteen thousand and seven hundred" of the people died. (vs. 49) The plague was halted when Aaron, obeying the instructions of Moses, ran among the people with a censer in which was fire and incense.

After this, Moses gave instructions that the heads of all the twelve tribes of the Israelites bring their rods (denoting authority) to the Tabernacle, Aaron's rod for the tribe of Levi included. These rods were laid up in the Tabernacle for a day, with the understanding that whichever rod budded would signify that the tribe for which this rod stood would be the Lord's choice for conducting the religious services devolving upon the priesthood.

The result was convincing—"It came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the Tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds." (Num. 17:8) This served to convince the Israelites that only the house of Aaron, assisted by the Levites, were to serve in the religious affairs of the nation.

While the tribe of Levi had previously been substituted for the firstborn of all Israel and the Aaronic family appointed for the priesthood, apparently the Israelites had not had this sufficiently impressed upon them; and the rebellion of Korah, and the subsequent uprising of the people in sympathy with him, served a needed lesson. Now the Israelites outside of the tribe of Levi who had not been obeying the Lord's instructions in connection with coming near to the Tabernacle were fearful lest they be punished by death, but they were not.

The Lord said unto Aaron, "Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity . . . of your priesthood." (Num. 17:12,13; 18:1) Apparently the Lord was willing to forget the past, and from this time on the priestly family was made wholly responsible for the proper conduct of the Tabernacle services.

The Lord was very strict with everything pertaining to the Tabernacle and its services because it was designed as a "pattern" of better things to come. Concerning the Aaronic priesthood Paul wrote, "Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the Tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed thee in the mount."—Heb. 8:5

The priestly family having been made responsible for conducting the Tabernacle services properly, Nadab and Abihu were slain when they offered "strange fire" before the Lord. (Lev. 10:1,2; Num. 3:4; 26:61) The "strange fire" was kindled by themselves for use in their censers, instead of being taken from that which burned perpetually on the Altar. (Lev. 6:13) When these two sons of Aaron were slain, the remaining sons were forbidden to mourn, emphasizing that the Lord's decisions are always just and right.—Lev. 10:6

The Death of Aaron

While Aaron was a faithful coworker with his brother, Moses, serving as his mouthpiece and, after they left Egypt, as high priest, apparently he was not a strong character. Not only did he readily yield to the clamor of the people in connection with the erection and worship of the golden calf, but in the one instance when Moses lost his patience and failed to give glory to God for bringing water out of the rock, Aaron participated in the wrong with him.

This was at Kadesh, in the desert of Zin. The people were without water for themselves and for their beasts, and, as was their custom, they complained to Moses, Then "Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the Tabernacle of the Congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the Lord appeared unto them. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them

water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink.”—Num. 20:6-8

These instructions were clearly stated and were applied to Aaron as well as to Moses, but they were not properly carried out. With the people gathered before the rock, Moses did not speak to the rock as instructed, but to the people. He said, “Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?” Then he smote the rock twice.—vss. 10, 11

He asked, must “we” fetch you water? thus indicating that Aaron was sympathetic to his viewpoint, and they both failed to give glory to the Lord. So the Lord not only decreed that because of this Moses could not enter the Promised Land but extended the same punishment to Aaron. (vs. 12) A little later, as the Israelites journeyed from Kadesh, in the desert of Zin, they “came unto Mount Hor. And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor, by the coast of the land of Edom, saying, Aaron shall be gathered unto his people: for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah.” (Num. 20:22-24) “Meribah” means “strife,” and is the name the Lord gave to the water that came out of the rock at Kadesh.

Then the Lord instructed Moses to take Aaron and his son Eleazar up into Mount Hor and place Aaron’s priestly garments upon Eleazar. This was done, and Aaron died in the mount, being, as the account says, “gathered unto his people.” (Num. 20:26-29) The trio went up into the mountain in the sight of all the people, and after Aaron’s death, Moses and Eleazar returned in full view of the congregation; so it was at once evident that Aaron had died in the mountain.

“And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel.” (Num. 20:29) Aaron’s death was a great loss to the Israelites, for he had served them faithfully from the time he and Moses first appeared before Pharaoh to demand their release from Egyptian bondage. He had shared with Moses

their many accusations of evil intent in bringing them out of Egypt; but the people realized that only by the mercy and power of God manifested through these two faithful servants were they kept alive in the wilderness. It is no wonder that they mourned when he died.

No doubt Moses shared in this mourning, for he had been more closely associated with his brother than any of the others. Only once had Aaron shown anything but friendship and loyalty to Moses, and that was when he joined with his sister Miriam in speaking against him “because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married.” (Num. 12:1) This criticism of Moses was merely the excuse. The real reason for their opposition appears in the next verse, where we find Miriam and Aaron asking, “Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us?”—vs. 2

Miriam, years older than Moses, had stood and watched the little basket, or “ark,” in which her brother was hidden and put afloat in the waters of the river when he was three months old. She had arranged for his mother to nurse him for Pharaoh’s daughter. She had seen the providences of the Lord in this matter and had observed the wonderful manner in which the Lord had used Moses in connection with the deliverance of her people.

Aaron was also acquainted with these circumstances and, with Miriam, had witnessed the mighty miracles the Lord had performed through Moses in connection with the Exodus and the crossing of the Red Sea. Miriam, indeed, joined with other women in replying to Moses’ song of deliverance after they had crossed the Red Sea.—Exod. 15:20,21

She had some prophetic powers; so did Aaron, and apparently she became jealous of the prominent manner in which the Lord was using Moses, and Aaron permitted himself temporarily to be influenced by her. But the Lord revealed himself to them both, and they repented, although Miriam was severely punished, being stricken with leprosy.

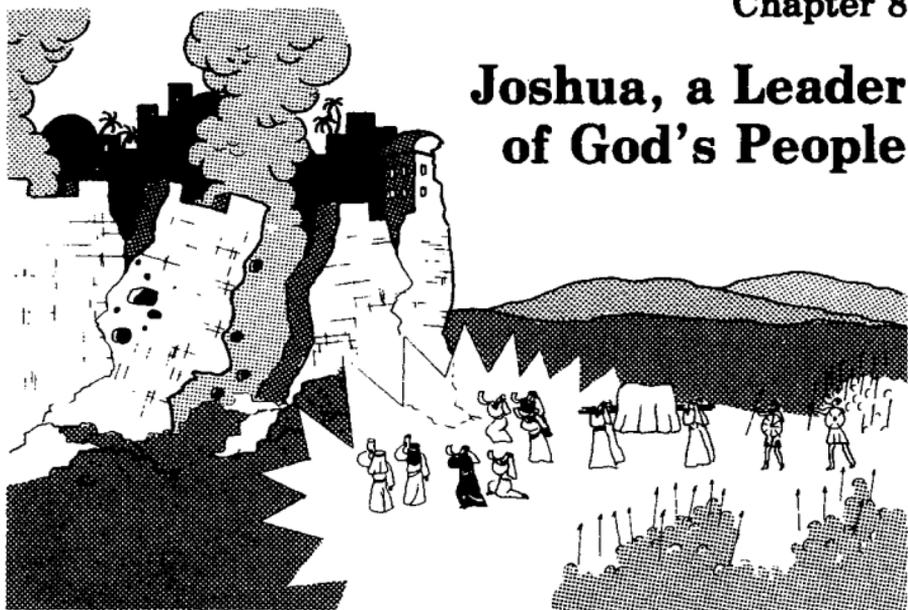
Aaron, recognizing his wrong, said to Moses, "Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned." (Num. 12:11) On behalf of his sister he said, "Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb." (vs. 12) Moses revealed the true nobility of his character by effectually praying to the Lord to heal his sister, indicating that he had graciously forgiven both Miriam and Aaron.

But this was the one exception to Aaron's forty years of loyalty to his brother. He was by his side as a "mouth," or spokesman, and was faithful in his service as high priest. An intimate, loving service which Moses doubtless remembered was the occasion when Aaron and Hur kept his weary hands uplifted to assure the victory of the Israelites over their enemies, the Amalekites.—Exod. 17:8-14

Now Aaron had been gathered to his fathers, and Moses knew that he also would soon die. The Lord had given him Aaron as a spokesman because he insisted that he was a man slow of speech. But now that Aaron was no more with him, we find Moses in the last days of his life presenting to the children of Israel one of the most beautiful orations recorded in the Bible. It is the "song of Moses" and is recorded in the thirty-second chapter of Deuteronomy.

The Lord has limitless ways of giving his people the assistance they need. Aaron had been provided to make up Moses' slowness of speech, and without doubt he very capably filled the need. But now that he was gone, the Lord gave eloquent utterance to Moses' own tongue. Thus we see fulfilled in Aaron, in Moses, and in the daily experiences of our own lives, as we endeavor to serve the Lord, the fact that the Lord helps his people in all their needs, and sustains them in keeping with the abundance of his grace. Moses expressed the thought in his parting blessings upon Israel, saying, "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."—Deut. 33:27

Joshua, a Leader of God's People



THE name Joshua means "Savior," the same as its Greek equivalent, "Jesus." The name Jesus is used twice in the New Testament with reference to Joshua, who was so prominent in the affairs of the Hebrew people during their wilderness journeys and later. (Heb. 4:8; Acts 7:45) Joshua was nearly forty years old at the time of the Exodus and is first mentioned in Exodus 17:9, where we are informed that Moses appointed him to lead an army of Israelites against Amalek in Rephidim. This choice by Moses and Joshua's later victories over Israel's enemies indicate that he had considerable knowledge of warfare as then conducted.

Later Joshua is mentioned as one of the twelve chiefs of the nation who were sent across Jordan to spy out the Promised Land. They spent forty days in this undertaking. When they returned, the twelve were unanimous in their appraisal of the vast riches and great advantages of the country; but all except Joshua and Caleb insisted that the Israelites would not be able to conquer the people of the land, many of whom, they reported, were giants.

But Joshua and Caleb, in their minority report, gave evidence of great faith in the ability of the God of Israel to help them conquer the land, and they recommended that the Israelites cross over Jordan, trusting the Lord to make good his promises to them. But the Israelites preferred to heed the majority report. Indeed, “all the congregation bade stone them with stones.”—Num. 14:1-10

The Lord was greatly displeased with this lack of faith on the part of his people, especially since they indicated that the Lord had led them into the land merely to let them die there by the sword and allow their wives and children to be a prey to the Canaanites. So he said to Moses, “How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have showed among them?”—Num. 14:11

The Lord then said to Moses, “I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they.” (vs. 12) Then Moses prayed to the Lord not to do this because it would give the surrounding nations the opportunity to say that Israel’s God was not able to bring his people into the land which he promised to give them, “therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness.”—vs. 16

The Lord replied to Moses, saying, “I have pardoned according to thy word.” (vs. 20) So he modified the punishment for the faithlessness and rebellion of the people by decreeing that all the males who were twenty years old or more when they left Egypt would die in the wilderness and therefore would not be permitted to enter into the Promised Land. That this might come about in a less precipitous manner than his first plan to destroy all the people by plagues, the Lord decreed that they would be compelled to wander in the wilderness for forty years, a year for each day that the twelve chiefs of the tribes were spying out the land.

In this way the ones most responsible for the spirit of rebellion would be punished, and at the same time God’s

ability to care for his people would be more than ever demonstrated, because it would be the women, the young, and the children—the helpless of the nation—that would be kept alive and finally enter into the Promised Land and possess it. There were to be only two exceptions to this sentence upon the males over twenty years of age, these being Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who brought back the favorable report.

Thus these two are presented to us as men of faith in the Lord, courageously confident of his ability to make good all his gracious promises to his people. The Bible gives little additional information concerning Caleb except to confirm the fact that he did enter the Promised Land, was given his portion of it, and fought valiantly to wrest it from the hands of Israel's enemies. (Josh. 14:6-15) Moses gave a wonderful testimony concerning Caleb, saying that he had "wholly followed the Lord."—Josh. 14:9; Deut. 1:36

Caleb was faithful to the Lord, and although apparently adopted into the tribe of Judah, he loved the God of Israel, and was happy to be considered an Israelite. Possibly he did not possess outstanding talents as a leader and statesman, so was not used widely by the Lord along these lines.

Joshua, on the other hand, likewise faithful to the Lord, possessed natural talents which could be used in the service of his people; so the Lord commissioned Moses to appoint Joshua to be his successor as leader of the nation. The record of this is found in Numbers 27:18-20, and reads: "The Lord said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay thine hand upon him; and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight. And thou shalt put some of thine honor upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient."

In Deuteronomy 31:23 the Lord, through Moses, gives Joshua these comforting words: "Be strong and of a good courage: for thou shalt bring the children of Israel into the

land which I swear unto them: and I will be with thee.” Joshua did not succeed Moses as lawgiver, or as a mediator between God and the nation of Israel, but merely as leader. His task was to lead the people into the Promised Land, direct them in the conquering of their enemies then dwelling in the land, and supervise the division of the land among the twelve tribes.

Soon after the death of Moses, this threefold task was undertaken by Joshua, and the account of his successes, and at times temporary failures, is recorded in the Book of Joshua. In the opening chapter we read God’s commission to him, saying: “Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea [the Mediterranean] toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast. There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swear unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the Law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.”—Josh. 1:2-7

With a background of promise such as this, Joshua had every reason to be courageous in the undertaking assigned to him by the Lord, and he was. Knowing that the Lord’s time had come for the nation to cross over Jordan and possess the Land of Promise, he did not delay. He summoned “the officers of the people” and instructed them to “pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan,

to go in to possess the land, which the Lord your God giveth you to possess it.”—ch. 1:10, 11

The tribe of Reuben, the tribe of Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh—the son of Joseph—had previously requested that they be permitted to remain on the east of Jordan in a strip of land favorable to the raising of cattle. Moses had agreed to this request, but only on the condition that the warriors of these tribes cross over Jordan with the remainder of the Israelites and assist in conquering the Canaanites, and this they agreed to do.

Joshua knew of this arrangement and said to these tribes that they were to remember the words of Moses concerning them. This portion of the Israelites were already at rest in their inheritance and enjoying prosperity; so Joshua reminded them of their pledge to assist the others, and they readily agreed to keep it. The eligible fighting men of these tribes said to Joshua: “All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go. According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee: only the Lord thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses.”—ch. 1:16, 17

These are noble sentiments. The men of these two and one-half tribes promised to obey Joshua, not merely because they esteemed him as a great leader, but because they believed that the Lord was with him, as he had previously been with Moses. This is a sound principle for the guidance of the Lord’s people in every age. To the extent that we lend our cooperation to others, it should always be on the basis of recognizing that the Lord is blessing their undertakings.

Rahab and the Spies

Joshua was not unaware of the difficulties that confronted the Israelites in crossing the Jordan and entering Canaan. Forty years before this he had served as a spy himself and had noted how potentially strong their enemies were; but he believed then, and still believed, that the Lord would give his people victories over their enemies. He knew, nevertheless,

that the Lord expected him to use all the wisdom and skill he possessed and that the Lord would help his people only when they had done all they could to help themselves.

Possessing considerable knowledge of military strategy, Joshua felt that it was essential first of all to secure what information he could concerning the current strength of their enemies, that he might have some knowledge of what to expect after they crossed the Jordan. Consequently, he sent two spies to "go view the land, even Jericho." Joshua knew that almost immediately after crossing Jordan they would be confronted with the walled city of Jericho, and he was anxious to discover, if possible, the size of the army within that city and other information that might be helpful in planning an attack.

Entering the city, these two spies "came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there." (ch. 2:1) It was reported to the king of Jericho that these two Israelites had entered the city and were now in the house of Rahab. It was correctly assumed that they were spies, but when Rahab was requested to bring them forth, she admitted that she had seen the two men but said she did not know where they were. Actually she had taken them to the roof of her house and concealed them under stalks of flax.

Rahab reported further that the men had left about dark. "Whither the men went I wot not," she said. Then she told those seeking the spies, "Pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them." The searchers took her advice, leaving the spies on the roof of Rahab's house. Later she let them down over the wall of the city with a rope, this being possible because her house was on the wall. Following her instructions, they hid in the forest of the mountain until they could safely recross Jordan and report to Joshua.

The account is exceedingly brief, and there is nothing to indicate how much they learned except what had been reported to them by Rahab. The information she gave them was that the people were terrified at the thought of the

Israelites entering the land. “Your terror is fallen upon us,” she said, and “all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.”—ch. 2:9

Her own testimony was, “I know that the Lord hath given you the land.” They had heard of the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea forty years prior to this, and they also knew, as Rahab said, “what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.”—ch. 2:10

Then Rahab, revealing further the great fear of the people, confessed her faith in the God of Israel, saying, “As soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.” (vs. 11) Rahab then asked that the spies arrange for the protection of her family when the city was captured, and they agreed to this.

Regardless of Rahab’s past, this eloquent confession of her faith in the true God indicates a genuine desire to be in harmony with him, and the Lord honored her faith. In Hebrews 11:31 she is referred to as one of the ancient worthies. In James 2:25 her “work” in concealing the spies and sending “them out another way” is mentioned as evidence of her justifying faith. Later she married Salmon and became one of the outstanding mothers in Israel.—Matt. 1:5

Crossing Jordan

The spies reported to Joshua what they had learned, emphasizing the great fear of the people, which meant that they could easily be conquered. Evidently Joshua reached the same conclusion, for he at once began to move the people into position for the momentous crossing of the river, bringing them from Shittim close to the banks of the Jordan.—ch. 3:1

The marching orders were set forth in chapter 3. They were to follow the Ark of the Covenant and were told that when the

feet of the priests touched the water, “the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap.” (vs. 13) Verse 16 explains that this backing up of the waters took place “very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan.” This indicates the water did not pile up as a perpendicular wall near the place where the priests touched it with their feet but that the stoppage occurred at a point considerably upstream. The Hebrew word translated “heap” literally means “a piling up.” Today we would say the water backed up, which is what would have to occur to allow the water below to drain from the river bed. What caused the stoppage just at the right time the Bible does not say. To us it was a miracle, and faith accepts it without further explanation.

By this miracle Joshua’s faith was rewarded, and the people’s faith and confidence in him as the Lord’s representative in their midst must have been greatly increased. The priests carrying the Ark, when reaching the center of the river bed, stood there until all the Israelites had crossed over. They were instructed by the Lord to take twelve stones from where they stood and leave them where they lodged the first night in the Promised Land. These were to be an evidence to later generations of Israelites of the miraculous manner in which the nation was brought over Jordan. Joshua also took twelve stones and placed them in the river bed where the priests stood, “and they are there unto this day.”—ch. 4:9

First Days in the Land

The Israelites crossed over Jordan on the tenth day of the first month. (ch. 4:19) During their forty years of wandering in the wilderness, circumcision had not been practiced, so the Lord instructed Joshua to have all the males born in the wilderness circumcised. (ch. 5:2-8) Then on the fourteenth day of the month they observed the Passover. (ch. 5:10) Forthwith the manna ceased to fall, and the people began to “eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan.”—ch. 5:12

They crossed Jordan "in the east border of Jericho." (ch. 4:19) The Israelites pitched their tents at Gilgal, but Joshua knew they were not to remain here, for they had before them the task of conquering the land which they had now entered. Apparently making his own investigation, we find that "Joshua was by Jericho" when "he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?"—ch. 5:13

Under the circumstances, we can well understand why Joshua was cautious. He was in enemy territory, and it was wise to make sure with whom he was speaking. The "man" quickly identified himself, saying, "As captain of the host of the Lord am I now come." (vs. 14) The Lord's "host" mentioned here by their "captain" evidently referred to the angelic forces so often employed by the Lord for the accomplishment of his purposes. Their commander had appeared to Joshua in human form to instruct him in the proper procedure for capturing Jericho.

As we have noted, Joshua himself had had considerable experience as a military general, but he bowed worshipfully before this mighty one from the spirit world, and in the spirit of true soldierly obedience asked, "What saith my Lord unto his servant?" (vs. 14) "The captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy." His true spirit of obedience to the Lord is eloquently displayed in the four words, "And Joshua did so." (vs. 15) Happy are all the Lord's people who, when they hear his command, hesitate not to obey, but "do so."

Joshua's responsibility was great, but the Lord reassured him. Even before instructing him on the plan of action for capturing Jericho, the Lord said, "See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valor." The people of the city were fearful, and when they

realized that the Israelites had crossed Jordan, they closed the doors in the walls so that “none went out, and none came in.”—ch. 6:2, 1

Joshua's faith must have been tested somewhat when he learned from the “captain” of the “Lord's host” the method to be used for capturing this heavily walled city. As a military man he would naturally think in terms of heavy and continuous assaults upon the walls, coupled with attempts to scale the walls and thus get as many soldiers within as possible. But nothing like this was to be done. No usual military strategy was to be employed.

All of Israel's military men were to “go round about the city once” each day for six days. Seven priests preceding the Ark were to accompany them, blowing upon rams' horns. On the seventh day there were to be seven encirclements of the city. At the conclusion of the seventh round of the city the priests were to blow their trumpets, when commanded by Joshua, and the people were to “shout with a great shout.”—ch. 6:3-5

The assurance was given to Joshua that with this shout the walls of the city would crumble, and the Israelites were to march right in, every man from whence he was located. The walls did crumble, as the Lord had promised. The “Lord's host,” under the leadership of their “captain,” saw to that. The same powerful forces that caused the convulsions of nature at Mt. Sinai would have no difficulty in destroying the walls of Jericho.

The part played by Joshua and the Israelites, nevertheless, was important. For forty years, according to Rahab, or from the time they first heard of the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, the Canaanites had been fearful. Now that this much-feared people were encamped just outside of Jericho's walls, their hearts must surely have “melted” with fear. To know that an army, accompanied by priests blowing on trumpets, was encircling their city each day, but not striking a blow,

would add to their confusion. Then, with that mighty shout, to see and hear the supposedly impregnable walls of their city crumble and fall, they would be well-nigh paralyzed with fear, making it comparatively easy for the Israelites to march into the city and take possession. Had the people within the city been composed and alert, they might have held off the Israelites for a long time, even with their walls destroyed.

But the Lord knew how to gain this signal victory for them. It was just as Joshua had said, "The Lord hath given you the city." (ch. 6:16) The city was "accursed." Doubtless the wickedness of the people was great, and their presence among the Israelites as captives would have been detrimental; so the orders were that all should be destroyed "both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass."—vs. 21

In keeping with the promise of the two spies, Rahab and her family were saved and continued to dwell with the Israelites. The silver and the gold found in the city was put into "the treasury of the Lord," but the Israelites were strictly commanded not to save anything for their private use.

A Defeat Follows

Following the victory over Jericho, we read that "the Lord was with Joshua; and his fame was noised throughout all the country." (ch. 6:17) However, disappointment awaited him. The next fortified stronghold of the enemy to be taken was the small city of Ai. Following his usual custom, Joshua sent men to "go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai."—ch. 7:2

Unintentionally, they brought back a deceptive report to Joshua. Having conquered the mighty and heavily walled city of Jericho, the little city of Ai seemed insignificant; so the spies said to Joshua, "Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labor thither; for they are but few."—vs. 3

Joshua took this advice, but the small army he sent against Ai suffered a humiliating defeat. As a consequence, “the hearts of the people melted, and became as water.” (vs. 5) How quickly they forgot the miracle of Jordan and of the crumbling walls of Jericho! Even Joshua, to whom the Lord had said, “I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee,” felt that the Lord had deserted him and the people.

Verses 6 and 7 read: “Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the Ark of the Lord until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads. And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord God, wherefore has thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan!”

Time and again the Israelites had complained to Moses in much this same vein. They asked why they had been brought out of Egypt to die in the wilderness. But Moses never expressed such sentiments. Joshua did not measure up to Moses’ stature in faith and courage. Here, when in difficulty for the first time after taking over the leadership of God’s people, we find him asking the Lord, “Wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us?”

“What shall I say,” Joshua asked the Lord, “when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies? for the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do with thy great name?” (vss. 8,9) Because two or three thousand of Israel’s soldiers had been defeated Joshua imagined the worst, visualizing all Israel destroyed by the Canaanites, with even the national name perishing.

But he was concerned over something even more important. In such an event, what would happen to the Lord’s great name? The glory which had accrued to God through the deliverance of his people from Egypt, their miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, their being sustained by manna in

the wilderness, their passage over Jordan and the defeat of Jericho would be lost, if now the Israelites were to be destroyed by the Canaanites.

Joshua's reasoning was correct but was based upon a wrong premise, resulting from his lack of faith. God had no intention of allowing his people to be destroyed by the Canaanites. But there was a lesson he wanted them to learn—a lesson of obedience. He told Joshua that the Israelites had sinned and that a curse was upon them. In the capture of Jericho they had been instructed not to take any of the spoils for themselves. The silver and gold found in the city was to be put into the treasury of the Lord, but everything else was to be destroyed, and without exception.

But one of the Israelites had disobeyed this order. It was Achan, of the tribe of Judah. He coveted and stole a "goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight." (ch. 7:20,21) He had hidden this loot under his tent, supposing that no one knew about it. But the Lord knew and, because of it, allowed the defeat at Ai, in order to bring the matter to the attention of Joshua and the people in a manner to impress them with the great importance of obeying instructions if they expected him to continue fighting their battles for them.

With this situation cleared up and Achan himself destroyed as an object lesson to the people, Joshua again undertook the capture of Ai and was successful. This time he acted under direction from the Lord, who said to him, "Fear not, neither be thou dismayed: take all the people of war with thee, and arise, and go up to Ai: see, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land."—ch. 8:1

The victory was complete. And now Joshua paused long enough from further conquest to build an altar to the Lord according to instructions given by Moses. "And he wrote there upon the stones a copy of the Law of Moses, which he wrote in the presence of the children of Israel." (vs. 32) Then the Law was read to all the people. It served to remind the

people of their covenant with God and of the necessity of obedience to that covenant in order to continue receiving his blessings.

The news of Jericho and Ai spread throughout the land, and all the various kings among the Canaanites “gathered themselves together to fight with Joshua and with Israel, with one accord.” (ch. 9:1,2) But the inhabitants of Gibeon decided upon another course. By a ruse they made Joshua believe that they had come from a far country and were without food and clothing and offered to become the servants of the Israelites, “and Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live.”—ch. 9:3-27

This led to another crisis. Adonizedek, king of Jerusalem, an Amorite, heard that the people of Gibeon had made peace with Joshua; so he formed a league with four other kings—Hoham, Piram, Japhia, and Debir—also Amorites, to fight against the men of Gibeon. These, in turn, called upon Joshua and the Israelites to assist them, with the result that the Amorites were defeated. But again the intervention of the Lord played an important part in this victory for the Israelites, for “he cast down great [hail] stones from heaven upon them.”—ch. 10:11

It was at the time of this battle that Joshua called upon the sun to “stand still,” or, as the margin states, to “be silent.” Prof. Strong defines the Hebrew words used here as “to be dumb,” also “to perish.” Faith does not require an explanation of miracles, but it is important to discover as accurately as possible the nature of any miracle which the Bible relates. It is so in this case.

A casual reading of this passage suggests that the sun and the moon actually stood still for a whole day. But, judging from the literal meaning of the Hebrew word used and the fact that it was a stormy day, apparently what actually happened in answer to Joshua’s prayer was that the sun and moon remained hidden behind clouds. They were “dumb,” failing to speak in terms of light; their usual effect

“perished.” This played into the hands of Joshua and the Israelites. The Amorites were sun worshipers, and for the sun to fail to shine upon them, and for even the moon to remain hidden would cause them to believe that their god had forsaken them. Thus their morale was weakened, and, panic-stricken, they gave up the fight and fled, many of them being destroyed by the hailstones while in flight.

Joshua's Continued Victories

In the remainder of chapter 10 of the Book of Joshua, through chapters 11 and 12 are related the further victories of Joshua which the Lord gave him over the Canaanites, the latter part of chapter 12 listing the many kings destroyed. But all the land had not been conquered. In fact, as the Lord said to Joshua, “there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed.” (ch. 13:1) Verses 2 to 6 of this chapter list the remaining places to be conquered.

But, as the Lord said to Joshua, “Thou art old and stricken in years,” so he did not look to him to serve any longer as the general of Israel's armies. Instead, he directed him to go on with the task of dividing the land among the various tribes, with the expectation that each tribe, when receiving the outline of its portion in the land would undertake the task of wresting it from the Canaanites.

But this was never fully accomplished, as indicated in Hebrews 4:8, where the name Joshua is translated “Jesus.” The text states that Joshua did not give the people rest in the land. Many enemies yet remained, and these continued to plague the Israelites from time to time. God's blessings upon his typical people, even as with us, were upon the basis of their faith. Because of their unbelief they failed to enter into the full rest and blessings which might have been theirs.

Chapter 23:1 reads, “It came to pass a long time after that the Lord had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua waxed old and stricken in age.” While this speaks of Israel having rest from their enemies, it was based in some instances upon the fact that they made

peace with the inhabitants of the land, and this later led to much trouble for them. (ch. 23:11-13) Caleb “wholly followed the Lord,” and the record is that he intended to drive out enemies from his portion of the land.—ch. 14:12-14

Joshua, somewhat on the order of Moses, made a farewell speech to the Israelites (see chapters 23 and 24). He reminded the people of the wonderful manner in which God had dealt with and blessed Abraham and Isaac and Jacob; of how he had brought the whole nation out of the land of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and kept them alive in the wilderness. He recounted their miraculous crossing of Jordan, and the victories the Lord had given them since entering the Land of Promise.

With this faith-strengthening background of divine providences as an inspiration to obedience, he warned them against worshiping false gods and called upon them to continue serving the true God. “Choose ye this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served, . . . or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”—ch. 24:15

The people renewed their covenant to serve the Lord, and again Joshua warned, “If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good.” (vs. 20) Again the people affirmed their determination to serve Jehovah, the true God, saying, “The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey.”—vs. 24

Joshua was a faithful servant of the Lord, and a strong leader of God’s people. He “died, being an hundred and ten years old.” (vs. 29) Verse 31 informs us that “Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the Lord, that he had done for Israel.” What a wonderful tribute to the faithful example of this man of God!

Unlike the experiences of Moses while leading the people of Israel in the wilderness, many of which are mentioned in the

New Testament as types, we have only the two references to Joshua, one of which relates to the failure of the Israelites to enter into rest under his leadership. (Heb. 4:8) His conquering of so much of the Land of Promise cannot, therefore, be considered as being specifically typical, although many helpful lessons may properly be drawn from his experiences.

As Christian soldiers, fighting the "good fight of faith," we have many "Canaanites" to fight, and it is only by faith in the Lord and the obedient following of his instructions, making use of all the means of grace which he has provided, that we can hope to be victorious.

If we "wholly follow the Lord" as did Caleb, and are "strong" and of "good courage," as the Lord encouraged Joshua to be, exercising faith that the Lord will always be with us to help in our every time of need, we will enjoy that wonderful rest of faith now and at the end of the way enter into the rest that remaineth for the people of God.—Heb. 4:9

Chapter 9

Gideon, Abimelech, Jephthah, and Samson



DURING a period of 450 years after the death of Joshua there were no definite governmental arrangements in Israel. The record is that during this period everyone did what seemed good in his own sight. (Judg. 21:25) For the most part the trend was toward unrighteousness and worshipping false gods. As punishment for their evil ways, God permitted the Israelites to be subjected by their enemies, the Canaanites, whom they had not completely driven out of the land as he had commanded.—Judg. 2:13-15

“Nevertheless,” the record says, “the Lord raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.” (ch. 2:16) Othniel, a nephew of Caleb, was the first of these judges; and the well-known Samuel the prophet was the last. (ch. 3:9-11) Little is known of most of these judges in Israel except the simple fact, as related, that through them the Lord delivered his people from their enemies when they cried to him in their distress. One of the judges was a woman—Deborah, who through the able generalship of Barak, delivered the Israelites from bondage to Jabin, king of Canaan, whose army was commanded by

Sisera. (chapters 4 and 5) Barak is named in Hebrews 11:32 as one of the ancient worthies. Following the great deliverance under the generalship of Barak, the Israelites had rest for forty years.—ch. 5:31

Gideon, a Faithful Judge and Leader

But they did not remain faithful to the Lord and he “delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.” (ch. 6:1) They were delivered from this captivity by Gideon, whom the Lord raised up as a judge and leader. Concerning Gideon we are given considerable information.

Gideon was the fifth judge of Israel, and when first mentioned he is visited by an angel while threshing “wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.” The angel said to Gideon, “The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor.” (ch. 6:11, 12) That he was addressed as a mighty man of valor might indicate that he had already been active in resisting the enemies of Israel, or the statement could be prophetic of Gideon. Gideon’s reply to the angel was not too enthusiastic, for it was difficult for him to see how, under the circumstances, it could be said that the Lord was with him, or, in fact, with any of the Israelites; so he asked the angel, “If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.”—vs. 13

This reply does not necessarily indicate that Gideon doubted the assertion of the angel but perhaps was simply his way of getting further information and a firmer assurance. Gideon reasoned that if God performed miracles in the past to deliver his people he should be able to do so again; and Gideon wanted to be assured that this would be the case. Through the angel the Lord replied to Gideon, “Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?” Even this assurance did not convince Gideon, for he replied, “Oh my Lord, wherewith

shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.'—vss. 14, 15

Here Gideon displays the characteristic humility which has been possessed by all whom the Lord has used for outstanding service. His family was poor, and evidently circumstances were such that Gideon had been made to feel that he was of little importance in the family, hence his surprise and commendable hesitancy when the Lord indicated him to be his choice for a deliverer of his people. Again the Lord reassured this humble man, saying to him, "Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man." (vs. 16) When assured by the Lord, "Surely I will be with thee," even the humblest and the weakest of men become valiant and courageous if they have faith in him; but Gideon's faith needed bolstering. He did not doubt the Lord, but he wanted to be sure that it was the God of Israel who was communicating with him; so he again replied, "If now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me."—vs. 17

Then Gideon asked the messenger not to depart "until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee." The messenger promised to remain; "and Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it. (vss. 18, 19) Then the messenger of God said to Gideon, "Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so. Then the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight."—vss. 20, 21

The angel of the Lord had appeared to Gideon in human form, and it was only through this miraculous manifestation of divine power and the sudden disappearance of the

heavenly messenger that Gideon realized with whom he had been speaking. Then he said, "Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face. And the Lord said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die."—vss. 22, 23

Baal Worship Destroyed

Now that Gideon had been assured that the Lord's blessing was with him, he was ready to proceed with the task of liberating the Israelites from the Midianites. As a necessary preparation for this, Baal worship must be destroyed in the land. This was a severe test upon Gideon, for his own father had established a "grove" for this heathen worship.

The same night that the angel of the Lord first spoke to Gideon, the Lord said to him, "Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it: and build an altar unto the Lord thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down."—vss. 25, 26

Gideon carried out these instructions. He utilized the help of ten of his servants "and did as the Lord had said unto him." He carried out the instructions at night because he feared the reaction of his father's household and thought it would be best to have the act completed before they discovered it. Gideon did not underestimate the violent reaction of the Baal worshipers; for when the "men of the city" learned what had been done and that Gideon was responsible, they demanded that he should die.

They made this demand of Gideon's father, Joash. But his father, although he had established the altar of Baal and the grove which his son had destroyed, was a good reasoner; and he replied to those who demanded Gideon's life, "Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a

god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar.”—vs. 31

Joash had evidently been somewhat impressed with the fact that Baal had been unable to prevent the destruction of his own altar, and wisely his sympathies were moving toward Gideon, and his confidence in the God of Israel was mounting. He named his son, Jerubbaal, “saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar.”—vs. 32

An Army Assembled

An acute crisis developed. The record is that “then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel. But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon.” He blew a trumpet, and the men of his father’s household were gathered to him. He also sent messengers “throughout all Manasseh; who also was gathered after him: and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.” (vss. 33-35) Things were moving rapidly, and Gideon found himself surrounded with an army ready to follow his leadership in an attack upon Israel’s enemies. For one who had been considered least in his father’s house this must have been rather a frightening situation, and it is no wonder that he felt the need of further reassurance from the Lord.

So “Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said, Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said.” (vss. 36,37) The Lord was patient with Gideon and honored his request. The next morning, when he examined the fleece, it was thoroughly soaked, containing, as the record states, “a bowl full of water,” while the ground around it was dry. This should have been very convincing, but still Gideon was not

fully satisfied. So, to make doubly sure, he reversed the conditions, asking the Lord on the second test to let the fleece remain dry and the dew fall on the surrounding ground.

Gideon realized that he was asking a great deal, and he said to God, "Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once." Again the Lord honored Gideon's request, "for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground." (vss. 39,40) Gideon, it should be remembered, lived at a time in Israel's history when the nation had drifted into idolatry and now for years had been oppressed by their enemies. He had little or nothing in the way of personal experience or observation upon which his faith in the Lord could rest. So, like Moses after his forty years in Midian, he seemed to need assurance in various ways that he had been called to deliver his people.

It was this very lack of self-assurance that enabled the Lord to use Gideon so marvelously. However, there was another lesson the Lord wanted him to learn, which was not to depend upon the strength of numbers; for God told him that the army which he had mustered was entirely too large. "The Lord said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me."—ch. 7:2

The original size of the volunteer army that placed themselves at the disposal of Gideon was thirty-two thousand. Under the Lord's instructions he told his men that any among them who were afraid should return to their homes, "And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand." (vs. 3) Then the Lord said unto Gideon, "The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I shall say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go."—vs. 4

The test was a simple one. "Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink." (vs. 5) Only three hundred out of the ten thousand lapped the water, and these three hundred were to constitute the entire army which Gideon was to lead against the Midianites.

Further Strengthened

A tremendous army of Israel's enemies had camped in the valley of Jezreel, and no doubt Gideon needed some direct assurance from the Lord that such an array of armed strength could be routed by a mere three hundred men. So "the same night" the Lord instructed Gideon to take with him Phurah, his servant, down into the camp of the Midianites "and thou shalt hear what they say." The Lord told him that what he heard would give him courage for the attack which was to be made later.—vss. 9-11

This visit to the ranks of the enemy was made by night, and unobserved by the enemy's watchmen. "And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host." (vss. 13, 14) Hearing the account of this dream and its interpretation gave Gideon the assurance he needed that the little band of three hundred whom the Lord selected to be his army could actually rout the Midianites. Returning to his soldiers, he said, "Arise; for the Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian."—vs. 15

Gideon's three hundred soldiers had been given no arms, but now he gave each one a trumpet, a lamp, or torch, and an earthen pitcher. It is doubtful that any other army in the history of mankind has been thus equipped. Although the

record does not say so, it is likely that Gideon's method of fighting and plan of attack were directed by the Lord. Furnishing them with their weapons, Gideon separated his troops into three groups, deploying them on the sides of the hills surrounding the host of Midian encamped in the valley below. Gideon took his place with one of the little companies.

He instructed all to do as he did. When he blew his trumpet, they were to blow theirs. Simultaneously they were to break the pitchers, which were being used to conceal their torches. Then they were to shout, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon." The Midianite who interpreted the dream of his fellow had said, "This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon." (ch. 7:14) Probably many of the Midianites had heard about this dream and its interpretation; so when they heard the shout of the three hundred, they would surely think the dream was coming true.

Apparently there was more involved in Gideon's strategy than appears on the surface. Small though his army was, he had them deployed in such a manner as to virtually surround the camp of the Midianites. Ordinarily only the captains of an army would be sounding trumpets and carrying torches, and for the Midianites to hear three hundred trumpets sounding and see three hundred flickering torches surrounding them on all sides would certainly give the impression that they were being attacked by a tremendous army.

Fear and panic spread through the ranks of the enemy. Thus the "Lord set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host." (vs. 22) As the Midianites attacked each other they fled, and Gideon's victory was complete. Having accomplished the task of routing the main army of the Midianites, Gideon then "sent messengers throughout all mount Ephraim, saying, Come down against the Midianites, and take before them the waters unto Bethbarah and Jordan." (vs. 24) The men of Ephraim responded to this call, and joined thus in the fruits of victory. But these men complained to Gideon because he had not

asked them for help from the beginning. His reply was, “Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer?” (ch. 8:2) This satisfied the Ephraimites.

Gideon is one of the humblest and at the same time ablest statesmen of the Bible. When the angel of the Lord first spoke to him, he explained that he was the least of his father’s house, and he maintained this spirit of humility. He heard the Midianites use the expression, “The sword of Gideon,” but when he instructed his little army to use this as a battle cry, he added the Lord’s name, and put it first—“The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon.”

Gideon continued his campaign against the enemies of Israel until they were completely routed out of the land, although after the initial attack he used greater numbers of men. When his victories were complete, the “men of Israel said unto [him], Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian.”—ch. 8:22

But here again Gideon’s humility and proper perspective are manifested; for he replied to this request, saying, “I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you.” (vs. 23) Thus again did this faithful judge in Israel keep the Lord before his people, emphasizing that only by obedience to him could they expect to remain free and prosperous.

In defeating the enemies of Israel, there was a great slaughter of men, and from the corpses the Israelites had collected earrings of gold. While Gideon refused to be king, he requested these earrings, and his men gave them to him. Verse 26 reads, “The weight of the golden earrings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred shekels of gold; beside ornaments, and collars, and purple raiment that was on the kings of Midian, and beside the chains that were about their camels’ necks.”

With this gold “Gideon made an ephod . . . and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring

after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house.” (vs. 27) Perhaps Gideon had good intentions in making this golden ephod, not realizing the temptation it would present to the Israelites to worship it instead of God; but it was a mistake by which this great man of God was snared.

The results of Gideon’s example and faithful judgeship lasted only as long as he lived. “It came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baal-berith their god. And the children of Israel remembered not the Lord their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side: neither showed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal [a name given to Gideon by his father when he destroyed the altars of Baal. It means, ‘Let Baal plead’] . . . according to all the goodness which he had showed unto Israel.”—vss. 33-35

Gideon was the father of seventy sons, “of his body begotten: for he had many wives.” (vs. 30) A concubine who lived in Shechem bore him another son, who was named Abimelech. Departing from his father’s example, Abimelech aspired to be a king and had himself accepted as such for a time, having first mercilessly slain his brothers.

He intended to kill them all, but Jotham, the youngest son, hid himself and thus escaped. Later, because of the desire of the people that Abimelech should be their king, Jotham related one of the very interesting and pointed parables of the Old Testament. (ch. 9, vss. 7-21) In this parable Jotham describes the trees endeavoring to persuade one of their number to rule over the others. The olive tree, the fig tree, and the vine all refused, giving good reasons. Then all the trees invited the bramble to rule over them, and the bramble accepted. In its acceptance speech the bramble said, “If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon.”—vs. 15

Jotham then explained to those who had made Abimelech king that if they had acted sincerely and if they had dealt properly with his father's house then they could expect Abimelech's rulership to be a blessing to them. If not, much trouble was ahead for them; for they would find that, as with the bramble, a fire would go out from their king and destroy many and that finally the king himself would be destroyed, bringing to an end the unhappy experiment. The latter proved true—"upon them came the curse of Jotham, the son of Jerrubbaal."—vs. 57

Jephthah and His Daughter

After the death of Abimelech a series of judges were raised up by the Lord to direct the affairs of Israel, but little or no information is given concerning them until we come to Jephthah, a son of Gilead, who is introduced as being a mighty man of valor. (ch. 11:1) But Jephthah was socially ostracized by his brothers because he was the son of a harlot, and he "fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob."—vs. 3

Yet his ability as a leader and militarist was apparently recognized even by those who thought themselves socially superior; so when Israel became sore oppressed by the Ammonites, the elders sought out Jephthah and asked for his help, promising him the leadership of the nation after he defeated the Ammonites. Jephthah reluctantly accepted and was victorious, as many other Israelitish generals previously had been when the Lord's blessing was upon them.

However, Jephthah's name is prominent in the sacred record not because of his military victories, but because of a vow which he made to the Lord in anticipation of the victory which would be given to him by divine help. The vow was that whatever first came out of his house when he returned from the battle would be offered to the Lord in sacrifice.—vss. 30, 31

When Jephthah did return from the battle, his young daughter was the first to come out from the house to meet

him. The account says, "It came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back."—vs. 35

Among the noble of Israel the making of a vow before the Lord was a very serious thing. Solomon wrote that it is better not to vow, than to vow and not to pay. (Eccles. 5:4,5) Jephthah held this viewpoint; and while his vow proved to be much more costly than he had expected, having entered into such a solemn obligation, he saw no way of changing it. Nor did his daughter rebel. She understood the situation and asked only for two months in which, as the record states, "I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows." Jephthah granted this request. After the two months "she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man."—vss. 36-39

It is generally supposed that Jephthah actually offered his daughter in sacrifice, as a bullock or goat would be offered; and, indeed, a casual reading of the King James Version of the Bible rather favors this viewpoint. But the marginal rendering of verse 40 seems to give a different thought. It explains that the daughters of Israel went yearly "to talk with the daughter of Jephthah, the Gileadite, four days in a year."

This, verse 39 explains, became a custom in Israel. Obviously Jephthah's daughter must have remained alive, else the daughters of Israel could not have talked with her each year. Examining the record more carefully, it becomes apparent that what really happened was that the girl remained a virgin throughout her entire life, which, from the Israelitish viewpoint, was a tremendous sacrifice for the father to ask of her.

This thought is evident from the record. When Jephthah explained his position to his daughter, and she asked for two months' grace, she did not request these two months in order

to prepare for death, as some commentators explain, but in order to bewail her virginity. (vs. 37) When she returned and her father "did with her according to his vow which he had vowed," it is explained that "she knew no man." Indeed, as one who was led of the "Spirit of the Lord" (vs. 29), it was not possible for Jephthah to have made a vow to offer his daughter as a sacrifice, for this was contrary to Mosaic Law.—Deut. 12:30,31; Jer. 7:30,31

After his victory over the Ammonites, Jephthah found it necessary to put down a rebellion of the Ephraimites within Israel. Their rebellion was largely due to the fact that they had not been consulted in the choice of Jephthah. His period of judgeship lasted for six years.

Samson the Mighty

After Jephthah's death a number of other judges served the nation, but they are merely mentioned in the record. The next judge who is given prominence is Samson, the son of Manoah. He was raised up to be a judge because, as in the case of the others, "the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord." As punishment, "the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years."—Judg. 13:1-5

Considerable detail is given in Judges, chapter 13, concerning events leading up to the birth of Samson. His mother had been barren, and an angel appeared and announced to her that she would have a son. Manoah, her husband, was not present when this occurred, and he prayed that he might also see this visitor, who had not as yet been recognized as an angel. This request was granted, and during the interview with the angel, Manoah offered a kid in sacrifice upon a rock, and as it burned the angel ascended from them in the flame. Then, of course, they knew they had been visited by an angel, which impressed upon them the great importance to Israel of the son who would be born to them—that he would be, as the angel explained, one who would "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines."

Samson is noted for his great strength; and while, according to the standards of the New Testament, his personal life is not to be commended, at heart he evidently was loyal to the Lord, so much so that in the 11th chapter of Hebrews he is named as one of the ancient worthies. (vs. 32) Despite the irregularities in his personal life, Samson evidently had great faith in God.

In keeping with the Lord's instructions, from infancy Samson's head was not shaved, for his parents were instructed that he was to be a lifelong Nazarite. (Under the terms of the Jewish Law a Nazarite was one who was separated from the people and devoted exclusively to the service of the Lord, either for a limited period of time, or for life.) One of the outward characteristics of a Nazarite was his uncut hair.

Samson revealed to Delilah that the secret of his strength was in his hair. We are not to suppose from this that there was some mysterious way in which strength flowed from his hair to his body. The thought seems to be that as long as he retained his hair, the emblem of devotion to God, he was given power by the Lord to accomplish the mighty feats of strength recorded concerning him.

Learning the secret concerning Samson's hair, Delilah took the opportunity, while he slept, to have a man cut it off. Probably this would not have been permitted by the Lord had not this great man been breaking his vows of dedication in his flirtations with Delilah. With the hair gone, God withdrew his support, and the Philistines captured Samson, put out his eyes, and cast him into prison.

Since Samson, with the strength which the Lord supplied, had vexed the Philistines so long, they gloried over the fact that they now had him under control. They made doubly sure that he would not escape from them by binding him with fetters of brass. To celebrate this victory over the mighty Samson, the lords of the Philistines gathered together to offer sacrifices to their god, Dagon.

This gathering was in their temple, and it was a great assembly. "The house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport." (ch. 16:27) What a humiliation for the mighty Samson!

But the situation soon changed. Samson's faith came to the rescue; his hair had begun to grow again; and he asked the Lord to assist him once more, that he might avenge himself against the Philistines. The story of what followed is well known. Bracing himself between two of the pillars which supported the roof of the building, he pushed them asunder, "and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life."—vs. 30

Here again we must assume that it was strength specially given by the Lord that brought down the temple of the Philistines. All the exploits of strength on the part of Samson were just as much miracles as was the destruction of the walls of Jericho or the parting of the river Jordan. Just why the Lord chose to manifest his strength through a man, we may not know, except that it helps to illustrate that our God is in no wise limited in the methods he can use to accomplish his purposes.

An Antitypical Lesson

Interesting lessons may be drawn from the manner in which the Lord dealt with the judges of Israel, although as individuals they can hardly be classed as being typical. In the New Testament they are mentioned only once, and that is in Paul's gallery of faith heroes, whom he enumerates in the 11th chapter of Hebrews.

God's method of delivering Israel under the leadership of the judges is, however, indicated to be typical. In Isaiah 1:26 the Lord makes a promise concerning the coming time of deliverance for Israel and the world, saying, "I will restore thy judges as at the first."

Christ and his faithful followers of the present age will be the judges in that future day of judgment, with the ancient worthies as their earthly representatives. (Acts 17:31; I Cor. 6:2; Ps. 45:11) Just as Israel came under bondage to their enemies because of disobedience to divine law, so all the world is now in bondage to sin and death—Jews and Gentiles alike. But in God's due time he will raise up these judges who have been prepared in advance for the great responsibility, and through them all the willing and obedient of mankind will be delivered from death. It is a glorious prospect!

Chapter 10

Samuel, Judge and Prophet



SAMUEL was one of those who served Israel as a judge, as had Gideon, Jephthah, and others. But Samuel was more than a judge in Israel. The Apostle Peter places him as being the second of the Old Testament prophets, Moses being the first. (Acts 3:22, 24) "All Israel, from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord." (I Sam. 3:20) He was a faithful, God-fearing servant of Israel. He was the last of the judges, for it was during his time that the nation began to be ruled by kings.

The circumstances leading up to Samuel's birth, as well as the experiences of his childhood days, had an important bearing on his life as a servant of God. His father's name was Elkanah, and his mother's name, Hannah. Hannah, although married for some years, was childless. She was distressed about this, and when she went with her husband to Shiloh, to the house of the Lord, "she wept, and did not eat." (ch. 1:4-7) Hannah's husband loved her dearly and said, "Why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?"—vs. 8

But Hannah could not thus be comforted. She went to the house of the Lord and there poured out her heart to the God of

Israel. While Eli the priest was seated by a post in the Temple, she "prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look upon the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head."—vss. 10, 11

At that time Eli was Israel's high priest. He noticed from his vantage point the tenseness of Hannah while she was so earnestly praying, and he supposed she was intoxicated. He said to her, "How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee." (vs. 14) Hannah denied this charge and explained, "Out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto."—vs. 16

"Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him." (vs. 17) And the God of Israel did grant her petition. When her son was born she named him Samuel, saying, "Because I have asked him of the Lord." (vs. 20) It was this Samuel who became such a powerful figure in Israel and a prophet of God.

Hannah was true to the promise she made to the Lord, for as soon as her child was weaned she took him to Shiloh, to the house of God, and said, "As long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord"; or, as the marginal translation reads, "He whom I have obtained by petition shall be returned." Samuel, even at so tender an age, entered into the spirit of his mother's desire, and "he worshiped the Lord there."—vs. 28

The boy Samuel became a servant to Eli, the priest. Eli himself evidently loved the Lord and desired to serve him faithfully as priest; but his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who would be the underpriests, were wicked. The record says, "The sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord." (ch. 2:12) Their father knew of his sons' misbehavior in connection with their service but seemingly did nothing to

rectify the situation. He was either afraid of his sons or allowed his love for them to blind him to his responsibility toward them.

First the Lord gave a message to Eli by an angel, referred to as “a man of God.” It was a message of condemnation and a declaration of condemnation against the house of Eli, in which it was stated that the two wicked sons would die, “in one day.”—ch. 2:27-36

Then the boy Samuel enters the scene, and his first official assignment from the Lord was to confirm to Eli the message of condemnation and judgment which had been given him by the angel. We read that “the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision.” (ch. 3:1) This means, evidently, that there was no prophet in the land who could speak authoritatively for the Lord. While the Lord had miraculously directed and blessed various of his servants such as Joshua, Gideon, and others, none since Moses had been constituted a seer, or prophet; none, that is, until Samuel. But now this young man was about to be initiated as a prophet, and his first message was to be far from a pleasant one.

Samuel was initiated into the Lord’s service as a prophet while he was still very young, and in a very unique manner. From early childhood he had served Eli in the house of the Lord. Then one night it came to pass “when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see; and ere the lamp of God went out in the Temple of the Lord, where the Ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep; that the Lord called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I.”—ch. 3:2-4

Samuel did not know that this was the Lord calling him. He supposed that Eli had spoken to him, needing some assistance. He was surprised to learn that Eli had not called. He went back to bed, only to hear his name spoken again, and again he reported to Eli. He had the same experience for the third time, and then Eli perceived that it must be the Lord

who was speaking to the boy, and he told him that if he heard his name called again, to answer, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."—vss. 5-10

The Lord did speak to Samuel again, and he responded as Eli had instructed. Then the Lord gave this new prophet in Israel his first message to deliver. It was: "In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house (ch. 2:27-36): when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not."—ch. 3:12, 13

This was a difficult message for Samuel to deliver to Eli, to whom he was loyal. But the next morning, Eli, suspecting that the young man had received a message for him from the Lord, insisted that he tell it all, which Samuel faithfully did. It was a blow to Eli, but he took it well, and said, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good."—vs. 18

In due course the judgment fell upon the house of Eli, just as Samuel had prophesied in his confirmation of the angel's message which previously had been given directly to Eli. Thus was this young servant of God confirmed as a prophet. The record is that "Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord."—vss. 19, 20

Samuel Delivers Israel

As a judge, Samuel wrought a great deliverance for Israel from the hands of the Philistines, but not until these enemies of the nation had been permitted to destroy the sons of Eli and thus carry out the divine judgment against them. See I Samuel, chapters 5, 6. True to the method employed by all whom the Lord raised up as judges to deliver Israel, Samuel's first step was to call the nation back to the worship of the true God.

The record states, "Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then

put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hands of the Philistines.” (ch. 7:3) The people heeded this exhortation, and then Samuel said, “Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord.”—vs. 5

It was a great test of Samuel’s faith. While the people were gathered at Mizpeh, they were surrounded by the Philistines. But Samuel offered sacrifice to the Lord and continued to pray. Meanwhile “the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel.”—vss. 10,11

“Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.” (vs. 12) The Philistines were subdued, not only in that one encounter, but, as the record states, “they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel”—the “days,” that is, during which he served as judge.—vs. 13

The People Ask for a King

Samuel’s judgeship was terminated before his death by the demand of the Israelites that they have a king to rule over them. Samuel had appointed his sons to succeed him as judges, but they were wicked. “His sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment.”—ch. 8:1-3

“Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah. And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.” (vs. 4,5) Samuel was greatly displeased with this request, evidently for the reason that he interpreted it as a rejection of him and a failure, perhaps, to appreciate the faithful service he had rendered to the nation.

Samuel took the matter to the Lord in prayer, and the instructions he received were: "Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee."—vss. 7, 8

The Lord explained in comforting Samuel that the people had for centuries been treating him just as they were now treating Samuel. But the Lord's mercy was very enduring, and he told Samuel to hearken to the voice of the people but also to "protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them." (vs. 9) Samuel did this, and in chapter 8, verses 10 to 18 we have the prophet's eloquent account of the burdens that would be heaped upon the people and the difficulties they would encounter under the rulership of kings.

"Nevertheless, the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us." (vs. 9) How much this is like the attitude of all whose hearts are not perfect toward the Lord and whose ears are dulled to the warnings which he so lovingly gives to those who are turning in the wrong direction. In effect, the people said to God's prophet, "We hear all you say, but we are not so sure you are right; and in any case, we want a king."

Saul, the First King

While in reality the nation had rejected both Samuel and the Lord, the people did not go so far in their rebellion as to select and anoint their own king. Superficially, at least, they looked to the Lord and to Samuel to cooperate in their demand. "The Lord said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king. And Samuel said unto the men of Israel, Go ye every man unto his city."—ch. 8:22

The latter parts of chapter 10 and chapter 11 relate the circumstances leading up to the choosing and anointing of

Saul as the first king of Israel. Samuel said to the people: "Come, and let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there. And all the people went to Gilgal: and there they made Saul king; . . . and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly."—vss. 14, 15

It is in chapter 12 that we discover the real stature of Samuel as a servant and prophet of the Lord. He had yielded obediently to the instructions of the Lord to anoint a king over Israel, knowing that their demand for a king was a rejection of the Lord and of himself as a representative of the Lord. Then he presented himself to the people and asked them to bear witness if he had at any time, through his whole lifetime of service to the nation, ever defrauded or oppressed them in any way.

The people answered, "Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand." (vs. 4) Then Samuel continued, "The Lord is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found ought in my hand. And they answered, He is witness." Then briefly, yet eloquently, Samuel reminded the people of the wonderful way the Lord had cared for the nation from the time of the great deliverance from Egypt.

In this oration Samuel stressed particularly the wonderful manner in which the Lord had delivered the people every time they cried to him for help and gave up their worship of false gods. On every such occasion the Lord provided one who, working as his instrument, delivered them from the hand of their enemies. He brought the lesson up to date by reminding them that he himself had been used to deliver them from the oppressive hand of the Philistines.

Then, referring to a current situation in which the nation was in sore need of help, Samuel said, "When ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the Lord your God was your king. Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired! and,

behold, the Lord hath set a king over you. If ye will fear the Lord, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the Lord your God.”—vss. 12-14

Samuel also warned that if the people and their king did not continue faithful, “then shall the hand of the Lord be against you, as it was against your fathers.” (vs. 15) With the object, seemingly, of impressing upon the people the fact of their great sin in asking for a king to rule over them, Samuel called upon God, who “sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel. And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king.”—vss. 18,19

Having received this confession of sin from the people, Samuel then said, “Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. . . . For the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name’s sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people. Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king.”—vss. 20-25

Samuel’s Unpleasant Task

From the time Saul became king in Israel, Samuel’s chief role was that of prophet. God’s ancient and holy prophets served not only as seers to forecast future events but also to relay messages from the Lord to the nation of Israel, through its kings and otherwise. It was in this role that Samuel gave Saul instructions from the Lord to “go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but

slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.”—ch. 15:3

It is only from the standpoint of God’s plan to restore the dead to life and give them an opportunity to accept Christ, obey the laws of the messianic kingdom, and live forever, that we can understand such instructions as coming from a God of love. For the protection of the Israelites it was necessary for the Amalekites to be destroyed, and even from the natural standpoint it was more humane to destroy the women and children together with the men, rather than to leave them behind to mourn and to suffer privation and want.

But Saul did not fully comply with these instructions, and then Samuel had the unpleasant duty to inform him that he had been rejected by the Lord. Saul’s excuse for disobedience was that the people had kept some of the best of the cattle to offer in sacrifice, whereupon Samuel explained that “to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”—vs. 22

Following this unhappy experience, Samuel was instructed by the Lord to seek out and to anoint a successor to Saul to be king of Israel. Samuel hesitated, asking, “How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the Lord said, Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord.”—ch. 16:2

Samuel was instructed by the Lord to go to the house of Jesse, in Bethlehem, for he had chosen one of Jesse’s sons to be the new king. Samuel learned another valuable lesson in this experience. Jesse had a number of sons, sturdy and kingly in appearance, but none of these was the Lord’s choice. David, the youngest of them, who was tending his father’s sheep, was the one the Lord indicated as his choice. He explained to Samuel, “The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.”—ch. 16:7

In conformity with the Lord’s wishes, Samuel anointed the boy David to be king of Israel. This, apparently, was

Samuel's last official act of service for the Lord. From boyhood to old age he had served the cause of the Lord and of righteousness faithfully, and he is named by Paul in Hebrews 11:32 as one of the ancient heroes of faith, one of those who endured so much and so faithfully in order that they might obtain a better resurrection.

In all that the record reveals of the experiences of Samuel, no flaw of character is manifested. He was loyal to the Lord, even though called upon to render distasteful tasks, as in confirming the judgments of the Lord against the house of Eli and informing Saul that he had been rejected by the Lord. In these things his life of faith and faithfulness should be a great stimulus to us, as in "this present evil world" we seek to know and to do our Heavenly Father's will.

I Samuel 19:18-24 reveals that David, when persecuted, fled to Samuel and together they "went and dwelt in Naioth." This record indicates that the presence of Samuel, the prophet of the Lord, served as a protection for David, although nothing is said of any message, or messages, which Samuel may have communicated under these circumstances. Our next record of him is found in I Samuel 25:1, where we are told that "Samuel died; and all the Israelites were gathered together, and lamented him, and buried him, in his house at Ramah."

Chapter 11

The Patience of Job



JOB is one of the outstanding patriarchs of the Old Testament. The book which bears his name reveals his residence to have been in the land of Uz, and this marks him as belonging to the Aramean race, which had settled in the lower part of Mesopotamia, adjacent to the Sabeans and Chaldeans. He is thought to have lived prior to God's giving of the Law to the Israelites by Moses at Mount Sinai. Certainly no reference is made in the Book of Job to any of the Mosaic laws or to any of the ordinances associated with those laws.

Actually, all that is known of Job is what we find in his book. From the record it seems evident that he was a sort of chieftain, having immense wealth and enjoying high rank. His reputation was one of blamelessness in all the relations of life. Apparently he was a religious instructor and one who comforted the needy in their trials.—Job 4:3, 4

Job's faithfulness as a servant of God is revealed by a severe trial that God permitted to come upon him. His attitude in this trial, the lessons he learned, and his final deliverance from it help to illustrate the reason for the divine permission of evil upon all mankind and the ultimate restoration of the human race to favor with God and to health and life.

Job's trial was brought about by the evil conniving of Satan, and thus we are reminded that Satan is the mastermind who

set in motion the principle of evil, as it is first brought to our attention in the Genesis account of creation. From the operation of the principle of evil has come all the suffering which has blighted the happiness of mankind throughout all the ages.

In the first chapter of the Book of Job we are told of a meeting of the "sons of God" and that Satan appeared also among them. "The Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it." (Job 1:7) According to the Scriptures, Satan cannot be relied upon to tell the truth; but in this instance he did, as confirmed by Peter, who said that the Adversary goeth about "as a roaring lion . . . seeking whom he may devour."—I Pet. 5:8

The Lord asked Satan, "Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" (vs. 8) Satan's reply to this question was, "Doth Job fear God for nought?" This was a cleverly devised attack on the integrity of Job. Satan enlarged upon it, adding, "Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance [margin, cattle] is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face."—vss. 10, 11

This accusation suggested that Job was serving God for selfish reasons, not because he loved God and desired to live up to the divine principles of righteousness. This was a viewpoint with which Satan was well acquainted, for nearly all false religions stress the advantages gained by their devotees. Many of them offer temporal advantages, such as health, wealth, social standing, and so forth.

It is true that those who serve God faithfully are rewarded, but their chief motive for loyalty to God should be their love for him and for his righteousness. God knew that this was

true in the case of Job; so he permitted Satan to bring calamity upon him that his integrity might be demonstrated. The Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand."—ch. 1:12

Satan worked quickly. Through an invasion by the Sabeans and the Chaldeans, by fire and by storm, Job's oxen, asses, sheep, cattle, and camels were either stolen or destroyed, and his sons and daughters were killed while at a family gathering. But these calamities did not destroy Job's faith, nor embitter him against God. His reply to it all was, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."—ch. 1:21

Foiled in his attempt to shatter Job's loyalty to God by depriving him of his possessions, even his sons and daughters, Satan again appeared in the presence of God, and said, "Put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face." (ch. 2:5) Satan was given permission to afflict Job's person, although he was forbidden to take his life.—vs. 6

Job was then afflicted with boils from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. When this happened his wife turned against him and said, "Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die." This must have seemed to Job to be the final blow, yet he did not follow his wife's advice and curse God as she had suggested and as Satan desired. Instead, he replied to his wife, saying, "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips."—ch. 2:9, 10

Job's Comforters

Job had three friends who endeavored to comfort him when they heard of all the evil which had come upon him. These were Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naanathite. (ch. 2:11) While these thought to comfort Job, they actually added to his burden by accusing him of

endeavoring to conceal some gross sin or sins for which the Lord was punishing him. They were eloquent in the presentation of their viewpoints, but wrong; for, as the Lord later said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath."—ch. 42:7

In brief, the view insisted upon by these "comforters" was that God always rewards righteousness and loyalty with material prosperity and health, and also that the only ones in the world who suffer are the unrighteousness, the sinners—those who defame God and disobey his precepts.

When these comforters first appeared in the presence of Job they apparently were stunned by his condition, while Job himself was weighed down with pain and sorrow; so they all kept silent for seven days. It was a long vigil, but finally Job broke the silence. He did not curse God but rued the day that he was born and expressed his belief that it would have been better for him had he died when he was a baby, or even if he had been "as infants which never saw light."—ch. 3:16

In expressing these thoughts Job explained that had he died in infancy he would have "lain still," "been quiet," "slept," and "been at rest." (vs. 13) Since, as God later testified, Job spoke the truth, we can rely on this explanation of the state of infants in death as being correct. They are not in heaven, nor are any of them, as Calvinism teaches, predestined to an eternity of torture. Moreover, Job explains that as an infant in death he would have slept with "kings and counselors of the earth," "with princes that had gold," with the "wicked," and with the "small" and the "great."—vss. 14-19

In this third chapter of the book we have Job's opening speech to those who came to comfort him but who turned out to be accusers. What he said was the outpouring of a heart saddened by a series of calamities which would have completely crushed most and which had, indeed, caused his

wife to believe that he was cursed of God. But the reply of his comforters was no help. Eliphaz answered, "Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled."—ch. 4:3-5

This was simply telling Job that he did not have sufficient strength of character to apply to himself the instructions he had so often given to others. It reveals, however, that Job had been esteemed as a religious instructor and counselor. It probably was true, as so many in like experiences have found, that it was more difficult to bear up under trial than it was to counsel others to do so. It was cruel, nevertheless, to bring this so emphatically to Job's attention. But even worse was the implied accusation which followed: "Who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off? Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same. By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed."—ch. 4:7-9

This was equal to saying that if Job were innocent of special and willful wrongdoing he would not have been afflicted. This was then, and is now, contrary to the facts. During the reign of sin and death, while Satan is permitted to be the "god of this world," the wicked have often flourished, while the righteous have suffered. Long centuries later the Prophet Malachi wrote, "Now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered."—Mal. 3:15

Job expressed the same thought in his reply. He said, "The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure." (ch. 12:6) After listening long to his would-be friends and realizing that basically their reasoning was wrong, Job can be excused for being somewhat sarcastic when he said, "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you."—ch. 12:1, 2

Although Job was crushed by his hard experiences and did not understand why the Lord permitted them to come upon him, yet in faith he said: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. . . . He also shall be my salvation: for an hypocrite shall not come before him." (ch. 13:15,16) Job knew that all suffering would be compensated for in the resurrection, and, being weary with the pain of his affliction, he asked God to let him die—"O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave [sheol, the Bible hell] . . . until thy wrath be past."—ch. 14:13

Job knew that in death, and in God's due time, he would be remembered and called forth from the grave. (ch. 14:14,15) In chapter 19:25-27 we find him saying, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy my body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, . . . and not another."

Accusations Continue

Job's comforters continued to accuse him of special sin, emphasizing in various and seemingly plausible ways that all his troubles were due to the fact that God had forsaken him, or even worse, was specially punishing him. But Job knew better than this. True, he could not fathom the meaning of his calamities, but as the psalmist later expressed, he had "great peace." (Ps. 119:165) All of God's faithful servants have enjoyed this peace of heart, and their attitude has been like Job's, who said of God, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

It is false reasoning which insists that suffering on the part of God's people of necessity means that they are being punished by God for special sins. Many of the most faithful servants of God have been allowed to suffer physically. Consider the long list of worthies mentioned in the 11th chapter of the Book of Hebrews. Think of Jesus, and the apostles! The light of God's countenance shone upon all these, yet he permitted them to suffer.

James wrote: "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy."—James 5:10, 11

In a taunt at Job, Eliphaz the Temanite said, "Acquaint now thyself with him [God], and be at peace." (ch. 22:21) Those who are truly acquainted with God do enjoy peace. The storms of life may rage tumultuously around them; their "sea of life" may be turbulently rough, with the waves of adversity pounding relentlessly upon their souls; yet their knowledge of God and the justice of all his ways gives them peace—the "peace of God, which passeth all [human] understanding." —Phil. 4:7

But this was not what Eliphaz meant. He implied that all of Job's adversities had come upon him because he was a sinner and that the only way he could have a serene and peaceful life, a life without calamity and trouble, was to become acquainted with God and be willing to obey his righteous laws. This must have cut deeper into Job's heart than the boils that afflicted him. How well he must have known God to be able to say, "He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."—ch. 23:10

Job's only difficulty was his inability to understand the reason for his suffering. But he was sure of one thing—he was not a willful sinner. He knew also that he was not trying, as his "comforters" insisted, hypocritically to cover his sins. In an effort, perhaps, to reassure himself of this, if not to convince his comforters, we find him in chapters 29 and 31 recalling the happier days of his life and the many ways in which he served the people and never wronged any of his fellow men. From this, Job's friends concluded that he considered himself righteous in his own eyes.

After Job had made his final attempt to show that he had not willfully transgressed God's law or injured any of his

fellow men, his three comforters had nothing further to say. Then Elihu, a younger man, who had been listening to the discussion, spoke up. Through the first chapter of his reply Elihu said little or nothing of importance. He explained that he had kept silent out of respect for the others, because they were older. While he avowed he would not accuse Job but wanted only to help him, the only explanation he had to offer was, as the others had insisted, that Job was suffering at the hand of God because he was a sinner. He said concerning Job, "He addeth rebellion unto his sin, he clappeth his hands among us, and multiplieth his words against God." (ch. 34:37) What Elihu seemed to forget or to be unaware of was that trials and testings can overtake the saintliest of men.

God Answered

Finally God answered. (chapters 38 through 41) He did not accuse Job of special sin. He knew that Job was righteous at heart, even as he had told Satan. (ch. 1:8) Under great stress, and in combatting his comforters, Job may have over-emphasized his righteousness and thereby implied that God was responsible for his suffering. But he did not directly accuse God of bringing his trials upon him and had even said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Job's difficulty was his lack of full comprehension of the glorious characteristics of God—his wisdom, justice, love, and power. God knew this; so in his reply he set before Job in a very wonderful manner how his greatness was manifested in the works of creation.

To read and reflect upon God's answer to Job should give anyone a very exalted vision of the greatness and glory of God. Indeed, a reverent study of the chapters in which this reply is contained should do much to convince even an unbeliever of the fact that there is a supreme and intelligent Creator.

"There is a God—all nature speaks,
Through earth, and air, and seas, and skies;

See! from the clouds his glory breaks
When the first beams of morning rise.”

In order to impress Job, and before he had finished his answer, God said to him, “Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? he that reproveth God, let him answer it.” (ch. 40:2) Job then understood the Lord’s lesson, and he replied, “Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further.” —vss. 4,5

The vision of himself which the Lord had shown to Job had the same effect upon him as upon Isaiah, when this prophet saw the Lord “high and lifted up.” Isaiah said, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, . . . for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” (Isa. 6:1,5) A proper appreciation of the Lord, such as he gives to his people today through the truth of his gracious plan, should cause us all to humble ourselves before him and acknowledge our unworthiness of his grace.

God continued to reveal his wisdom and power to Job as seen in his marvelous creative works. (chapters 40 and 41) And Job’s appreciation of the majesty of the Lord increased. He “answered the Lord, and said, I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” —ch. 42:2-6

Through his experience, and through the marvelous vision he had been given by God, Job learned to know and appreciate his Creator as never before. Like millions of others throughout the centuries, he had heard of God. Indeed, to the extent of his understanding, he had faithfully served God.

But never before had he truly seen God in the sense of understanding the glorious attributes of his character. And to “see” the glory of God was to make him realize his own nothingness as well as his imperfections which hindered him from rendering the perfect service that was due to his exalted Creator.

Job’s reaction to his experiences justified God’s confidence in him, and now that he had proved his integrity the trial was lifted. But first his three comforters were dealt with. The Lord instructed them to take “seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job.” —ch. 42:8

Restitution

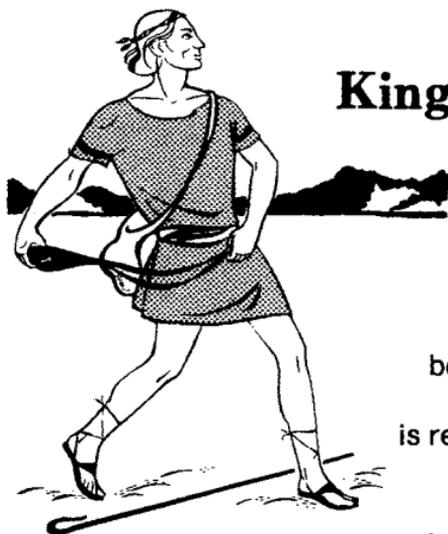
Job’s friends did as the Lord instructed them, “and the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.” (vs. 10) The word “captivity” is used a number of times in the Old Testament to denote the state of death, the dead world of mankind being held prisoners in death. God has promised to restore death’s prisoners held in captivity.

Job had not actually died, but, as he observed himself, “I am escaped with the skin of my teeth.” (ch. 19:20) When his sons and daughters and all his possessions were taken from him he said, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither.” (ch. 1:21) Job, in other words, might well be considered an illustration of the whole dead world of mankind, with his restoration an illustration of the “times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” —Acts 3:19-21

The record states that “the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning.” (ch. 42:12) He became wealthier than ever, and “he had also seven sons and three

daughters.” (vs. 13) And in all the land there were no women so fair as the daughters of Job. After his trial Job lived for 140 years, “and saw his sons, and his son’s sons, even four generations.” (vss. 15,16) How richly he was rewarded in compensation for the evil which was permitted to come upon him! And so it will be with all mankind. The permission of evil will contribute to the everlasting blessing of all the willing and obedient.

Kings Saul and David



KINGS Saul and David are both prominent personalities in the Old Testament. Sufficient is recorded of each to be the basis for a lengthy discussion, but because many of their experiences were so closely associated, we

think it best to consider them together. Saul was the son of Kish. The description of him states that he was “a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people.”—I Sam. 9:2

The information we are given concerning David is that he was the youngest son of Jesse, a keeper of his father’s sheep, and that he “was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to.” (I Sam. 16:11, 12) Both these men were apparently well-favored specimens of humanity, but as we trace their activities we can see why the Lord considers it so important to look on the heart of an individual rather than on the outward appearance.—I Sam. 16:7

At first, Saul seemingly was humble. When he sensed that he had been chosen for some special service, he said to Samuel, “Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin?” (I Sam. 9:21) Later Samuel said to Saul, “The Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou . . .

shalt be turned into another man; . . . for God is with thee.”
—ch. 10:6,7

Saul was presented to the people as king at Gilgal. When it became known that this son of a Benjamin family was the Lord's choice for king, he was nowhere to be found. “Therefore they inquired of the Lord further, if the man should yet come thither. And the Lord answered, Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff.” (ch. 10:22) The fact that Saul was keeping out of sight on such an important occasion seems to suggest that he felt insufficient for the task assigned to him. However, since the Spirit of God had come upon him, and he had received various evidences of God's direction in his choice (see chapters 9 and 10), it may be that his hiding “among the stuff” revealed a lack of faith in God and in the Lord's ability to help him.

But the people showed no hesitancy. Presenting Saul to them as their king, Samuel said: “See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said God save the king.” (ch. 10:24) Then “Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his house. And Saul also went home to Gibeah; and there went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched.”—vss. 25,26

Saul's Opportunity

Saul did not at once exercise his authority as king of Israel. But when Nahash the Ammonite “came up, and encamped against Jabesh-gilead” and threatened to “thrust out” the “right eyes” of the Israelites, the “Spirit of God came upon Saul, . . . and his anger was kindled greatly,” and, taking command of an army which he quickly raised, he defeated the Ammonites.—ch. 11:1,2,6

Perhaps one reason Saul had not asserted himself prior to this is that “the children of Belial said, How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no presents.” (ch. 10:27) But now that he had delivered the Israelites from the oppressive hands of the Ammonites “the

people said unto Samuel, Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign over us? bring the men, that we may put them to death.”—ch. 11:12

But Saul did not agree to this. He said, “There shall not a man be put to death this day: for today the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel.” (vs. 13) “Then said Samuel to the people, Come, and let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there. And all the people went to Gilgal; and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal; and there they sacrificed sacrifices of peace offerings before the Lord; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.”—vss. 14, 15

The rejoicing of the people under the rulership of Saul was not destined to continue long. After he had reigned two years he chose three thousand men, two thousand of whom he kept under his own direct command, and one thousand were delegated to the command of Jonathan, his favorite son. Jonathan, young and ambitious, “smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it.”—ch. 13:1-3

Saul realized that this would stir up the animosity of all the Philistines against the Israelites, so he began to muster an army of defense. The men were summoned to Gilgal, and seemingly Saul had arranged with the aged Samuel to meet them there to offer sacrifice on behalf of Israel, thus to assure that the Lord would be with them in the coming battle against the Philistines. But Samuel did not arrive within the time agreed upon, so Saul offered the sacrifice himself. This was exceeding his jurisdiction and was contrary to the arrangements of the Lord; and Samuel said to him: “Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee: for now [had you been faithful] would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel forever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee.”—ch. 13:13, 14

Samuel here spoke prophetically of David, whom later he anointed to be Saul's successor as king of Israel. It is noteworthy that from Saul's first transgression against the commandment of the Lord, he was rejected. In this respect no mercy, no second opportunity, was given to him. Later, when Saul again disobeyed the Lord, his rejection was reaffirmed. This was when he was commanded to go "and smite Amalek." He was instructed to "destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." (ch. 15:2, 3) The Lord in his wisdom knew that it would be best for the Amalekites if they were all put to sleep in death until the time came for them to be awakened and given an opportunity to be enlightened and to enjoy the blessings of the messianic kingdom.

Saul was victorious in his battle against the Amalekites and had it within his power fully to carry out the Lord's instruction. But he did not do so. He spared the king, Agag, and "the best of the sheep and the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but everything that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly."—vss. 8, 9

The Lord then made it known to Samuel that Saul had again disobeyed. Samuel went to the king at Gilgal, where Saul met him and said, "blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord." (vs. 13) Here he sinned again by attempting to misrepresent the facts to Samuel. But Samuel said, "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" (vs. 14) Saul explained that the people had saved the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the Lord, but all the rest had been destroyed. Saul contended that it was the people who had spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, as though he was not personally responsible for this failure to obey the Lord's instructions.

Then Samuel reminded Saul of the time he was anointed king over Israel—"when thou wast little in thine own sight."

(vs. 17) Saul's exaltation had, as the expression is often used today, "gone to his head." He now imagined that he was wiser than the aged Prophet Samuel, who had given him the instructions of the Lord concerning the Amalekites.

Throughout the ages, many who have started out humbly in the service of the Lord have similarly been affected by a measure of prominence with which they may have been favored by the Lord. Such proudness of heart manifests itself in various ways and not infrequently by a tendency to be overcritical of others and by the assuming of superior judgment in matters pertaining to the service of the Lord and his people. Saul thought that his way of serving the Lord was superior to Samuel's. It seemed obvious to him that the Lord would be pleased to have sacrifices offered to him. But he was mistaken. Samuel said to him: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord: Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king."—vss. 22, 23

No Mercy Shown

Saul acknowledged his sin and asked for pardon. "Pardon my sin," he asked of Samuel, "and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord. And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel." (vss. 25, 26) Samuel had, as we have seen, previously told Saul that the Lord had rejected him, and now Saul himself had sealed this rejection by his further flagrant violation of the Lord's command. No mercy was shown to him so far as his kingship was concerned, although we are glad that this will not deprive him of an opportunity to gain everlasting life under the laws of Christ's kingdom, when as one of the "unjust" he will be awakened from the sleep of death.—Acts 24:14, 15

Following this final and complete rejection of Saul as the rightful king of Israel, God instructed Samuel to anoint another to take his place. This was David, the son of Jesse, of Bethlehem. He was the one Samuel had prophetically referred to as a man after God's own heart.—I Sam. 16:1-13; 13:14; Acts 13:22

Although David was now anointed to be king of Israel, he did not assume the rulership of the nation until the death of Saul. Meanwhile, the lives of these two men were frequently and dramatically brought into close contact. Saul's first acquaintance with the newly anointed king was when he was taken into the royal palace as a harp player, Saul, of course, being unaware of David's anointing.

The record states that when the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, an "evil spirit from the Lord troubled [margin, terrified] him." (ch. 16:14) His servants recommended that they find a good harp player who by his sweet and soft music could soothe the king's nerves. He consented, and David was the one selected. "Wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, Send me David thy son, which is with the sheep." (vs. 19) In harmony with this request Jesse sent David to Saul, who was greatly pleased with the young man. The account says that Saul "loved him greatly." (vss. 20, 21) In addition to playing the harp for the king during his spells of nervousness, David became his armorbearer.

But Saul's love for David was not to continue very long. It was not a time of peace in Israel, for now the Philistines "gathered together their armies to battle," and it was necessary for the Israelites to do the best they could to defend themselves. To make the situation worse, the Philistines sent out a giant to challenge the Israelites, a man "whose height was six cubits and a span."—ch. 17:4

This heavily armed giant "stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? am not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he

be able to fight with me, and kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us. And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together.”—vss. 8-10

When the Israelites heard these words, they, including Saul, were greatly dismayed. Three of David’s brothers were in Saul’s army, but David had returned home to care for his father’s sheep. For forty days the Philistine giant appeared and hurled his defiance to Israel’s army. David learned about the situation when, in response to his father’s request, he had taken a supply of cheese to the officers of Israel’s army and inquired concerning the welfare of his brothers.

David, brave and confident, volunteered to meet the giant in battle, much to the dismay of Saul and others. It was his defeat of the Philistine giant that brought him into prominence before the people and kindled the murderous jealousy of Saul against him. However, it is in David’s encounter with the giant that we begin to see why he was considered a man after God’s own heart.

When David revealed his determination to accept the challenge of the giant, Saul insisted that he wear his armor, but the young shepherd boy declined because he had not proved it. He chose instead “five smooth stones out of the brook,” deciding that he would rely on his slingshot to slay Israel’s enemy. “And the Philistine came on and drew near unto David; . . . he disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance. And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? and the Philistine cursed David by his gods.”—ch. 17:40-43

Then David answered, “Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee.” (vss. 45,46) Here David’s true character is

revealed. He had faith that God would give him victory over the giant, and in advance of that coming victory, he hastened to give the glory to the Lord.

David was victorious. The giant was slain. This destroyed the morale of the Philistine army, and they were easily put to rout, and thus was Israel delivered from the oppressive hand of their enemy. But in the minds of the Israelites David was given the credit for this defeat. Soon, and in appreciation, the women were shouting that while Saul had slain his thousands, David had slain his ten thousands. (ch. 18:7) This was more than Saul could bear.

David was brought back into the household of Saul. He was given Saul's daughter Michal, who loved the young hero. Saul's son, Jonathan, also greatly loved David. The record is that the "soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul."—ch. 18:1

But it was different with Saul. The record is that he was "afraid of David, because the Lord was with him, and was departed from Saul." (vss. 12,15) So this wicked king determined in his heart that David must die. He attempted to murder him with his javelin but failed. Then he endeavored to prevail upon both Jonathan and Michal to work with him to bring about David's death. Instead, they used their knowledge of their father's intention in order to save David and enable him to escape.

For a time, seemingly, Jonathan persuaded Saul not to press his anger against David but to let him live. Saul agreed. But soon "there was war again: and David went out, and fought with [against] the Philistines, and slew them with a great slaughter: and they fled from him. And the evil spirit from the Lord was upon Saul." (ch. 19:8,9) So again he endeavored to murder the shepherd boy but failed.

Saul's heart attitude toward David had not changed. In his jealousy he could not bear to see David praised for his victories over Israel's enemies. The statement that an "evil spirit from the Lord" came upon Saul should not be

understood to mean that God directly filled his heart with evil. Rather, the Lord knew Saul's heart condition, and he simply permitted circumstances to arise which would cause the wicked and rejected king to manifest his true disposition so the people might know why the Lord had rejected him from being king and why David had been anointed to succeed him. The people did not immediately know this, but the Lord knew that later they would understand.

Jonathan and David

A very deep friendship developed between Jonathan and David, a friendship which more than once cost Jonathan the ill will of his father, Saul. When, through the advice and assistance of Michal, Saul's daughter, who had become David's wife, David escaped from the murderous designs of his father-in-law, he sought out the aged Samuel, and related his trials to him.—ch. 19:11-18

But Samuel made no attempt to enter into the controversy; and, realizing that Saul was still plotting against him, David sought out Jonathan at Ramah. Jonathan endeavored to reassure David on the ground that his father would do nothing unless he revealed his plans to him. David was not too sure of this. However, he followed the advice of Jonathan, who aided him again in escaping the wrath of Saul.—ch. 20

Jonathan said to David, as they separated, "Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, The Lord be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed forever." (ch. 20:42) After this David was for some time hunted by Saul, who did all he could to find and kill him. On two occasions Saul, while sleeping, was at the mercy of David, but David spared his life. David looked upon Saul as the Lord's anointed, so he would not take the responsibility himself of destroying him, even though it would mean safety for himself.

In this as in other matters, David took the Lord into consideration. Saul, on the contrary, even when knowing the

will of God, did not hesitate to go contrary thereto. It was for this reason that the kingdom of Israel was wrested from him and, after his death, given to David. But David's waiting for the Lord's due time was a severe test upon him, especially since all the while his life was in danger from the angry Saul.

The Witch of Endor

Saul continued his course of disobedience to the Lord right to the end of his career, his last sin being to consult a witch concerning an impending battle with the Philistines. (See I Samuel 28:3-20) The Philistines had again assembled their armies to fight against Israel, "and Saul gathered all Israel together, and they pitched in Gilboa. And when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled. And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets."—vss. 4-6

"Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her." (vs. 7) As if to emphasize Saul's willful sin in this matter, the narrative is introduced by the information that "Saul had put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land." (vs. 3) He knew that this ancient form of spiritualism was condemned by the Lord and in this respect had endeavored to carry out the Lord's will.

But when Saul realized that the Lord would no longer communicate with him, either directly or indirectly, he turned away from the Lord to seek information through a channel which he knew was under divine condemnation. In doing this, however, it was not with any thought of ascertaining the Lord's will but simply of learning, if he could, how he would fare in the impending battle with the Philistines.

Saul, in compliance with his request, was taken to a witch—the witch of Endor. He disguised himself, for he knew that the witch would be afraid and would not cooperate if she realized that the king of Israel, who had placed a ban upon her activities, was in her presence. Then she asked him whom

she should “bring up” to him, and he said, “Bring me up Samuel.” (vs. 11) Samuel had died, but for some time before his death he had not communicated with Saul concerning the will of the Lord. He knew that God had withdrawn his favor from the wicked king and so withheld his own services from him.

But Saul, in his fear and wickedness, was easily deceived. The witch discovered that it was Saul who was in her presence and assumed that she had been tricked. But Saul assured her that she would not be harmed, and then she described an old man who she said had ascended out of the earth. “And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself.”
—vs. 14

Then Saul heard a voice speaking to him, which he supposed to be Samuel’s. The “voice” reiterated Saul’s rejection by the Lord and predicted defeat of the Israelites by the Philistines, adding, “Tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me.” (vs. 19) Saul understood this to be a prophecy of his death, and he was “sore afraid.”—vs. 20

Those who believe that humans have “immortal souls” which continue to live after the body dies are prone to use this narrative in an attempt to prove their error. They claim it proves that Samuel was not really dead, else he could not have been called up by the witch. But a close examination of the account leaves much to be desired in the way of proof that righteous souls, such as Samuel’s truly must have been, go to heaven when the body dies.

For example, the record states that the supposed Samuel came up out of the earth. So far as we know there is no one who believes that righteous souls go into the earth when the body dies. Again, the “voice” predicted that Saul and his sons would be with Samuel the next day, meaning that they would be killed. This would mean that the righteous and the wicked live together after death, which is also contrary to the popular belief on this subject.

The true explanation of this episode in the life of the wicked King Saul is that evil spirits (“fallen angels”) impersonated the dead Samuel, deceiving both the witch and Saul. Actually, the “voice” which spoke to Saul gave him no information which he did not already possess. He knew that he had been rejected by the Lord, and he realized also that with the mighty armies of the Philistines closing in around him he was sure to lose his life. That is why he had gone to the witch. He had hoped against hope that he would be told something he could do that would result in a restoration of the Lord’s favor and that, with the Lord’s help, the Philistines might yet be defeated.

But he was disappointed. Neither the witch nor the evil spirits with whom she worked could change matters. All they could do was to reaffirm his fears. But even so, the “voice” was inaccurate in predicting the time of the king’s death. He was not killed the next day, but several days later.

A detailed account of Saul’s death is presented in I Chronicles, chapter 10, verses 1-7. Jonathan and his other sons were slain first. Then Saul was wounded. Fearing what the Philistine soldiers might do to him should they find him in a weakened and helpless condition, he asked his armorbearer to kill him, but he refused. Then Saul fell upon his own sword, killing himself. Thus came to an inglorious end this first king of Israel, who, to begin with, was little in his own eyes but became proud, disobeyed the Lord, and died an outcast from divine favor.

After Saul’s death, David became one of Israel’s most beloved kings.

David—King, Prophet, Psalmist



WE HAVE become acquainted with David, the shepherd boy and youngest son of Jesse, of Bethlehem, whom the Lord directed Samuel to anoint king of Israel in place of Saul, the first king over God's chosen people. We saw David's bravery manifested in the slaying of the giant Goliath of the Philistines and noted the foiled attempts of Saul to slay this shepherd boy and harp player because his jealousy was aroused against him.

It was following the death of Saul that David began to reign as king. His kingship was first recognized by the tribe of Judah, over which the initial part of his reign lasted seven years and six months. During this time he lived at Hebron, and here he was formally anointed by the people of Judah.—II Sam. 2:1-5; 5:4, 5

Gradually David's power increased, and finally the united voice of all Israel called him to be king. Then, and for the third time, he was anointed king, and there was a festival of three days to celebrate the happy event. (I Chron. 12:38, 39) One of David's first acts after becoming king was to secure Jerusalem, which he seized from the Jebusites, and there he established his royal residence. Thenceforth Jerusalem became known as the "city of David."—II Sam. 5:9; I Chron. 11:7

The establishing of Jerusalem as the capital of the nation introduced a new era in David's life and in the history of the

kingdom of Israel. He became a king on the elaborate scale of the great oriental sovereigns of Egypt and Persia, with a regular ministration and organization of court and camp. He also founded a dominion which for the first time embraced the entire prophetic bounds of the "seed of Abraham."—Gen. 15:18-21

During the succeeding ten years, the Gentile nations surrounding Israel caused David considerable trouble; but for the most part he was victorious in his battles with them and reduced to a state of permanent subjection the Philistines on the west, the Moabites on the east, the Syrians on the north-east as far as the Euphrates, the Edomites on the southeast, and finally the Ammonites.—II Sam. 8:1-6,14; 10:1-19; 12:26-31

David's reign was marked not only by conflicts with outside nations but also by rebellion within his own household. The revolt of his beloved son, Absalom, brought on a crisis which sent him forth a wanderer as in the days when he fled from the jealous Saul. The final battle of Absalom's rebellion was fought in the forest of Ephraim and terminated in the accident which led to the rebellious son's death. After this David reigned for a time in comparative peace.—II Sam. 18; 20:1-22

The "Sure Mercies of David"

God spoke of David as being a man after his own heart. This was not because he never yielded to the weaknesses of his flesh but because at heart he was loyal to God and desired above everything else to please the Lord. Saul's great sin was his flagrant and willful disobedience of God's commands, while David's was simply a failure to control his passions; therefore the two men were judged differently by the Lord.

Because of Saul's sin the kingdom was removed from his family, and David, a member of another family, was anointed in his stead. This was not the way God dealt with David. Indeed, God made a covenant with David that under no cir-

cumstances would the kingdom be wrested even from his descendants. This covenant is referred to as the “sure mercies of David,” the “mercies” of David because mercy would need to be extended in order to carry it out. (Isa. 55:3) The original statement of this covenant is recorded in II Samuel, chapter 7.

David, when finally gaining a measure of peace, decided that he would like to build a “house” for the Lord. He said to Nathan, a prophet of the Lord, “See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains.” Nathan said to David, “Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the Lord is with thee.” (vss. 2, 3) Nathan encouraged David in his laudable ambition without seeking instructions from the Lord. That night the Lord spoke to Nathan and instructed him to inform David that he would not have the privilege of building him a house. Doubtless the king was greatly disappointed over this, but the Lord gave him a compensating portion, for it was in this connection that he made a special covenant with him, which we quote in part:

“When thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his [Solomon’s] kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men. . . . But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established forever before thee: thy throne shall be established forever.”—vss. 12-16

God had not shown mercy to Saul, but he had to David. Despite David’s sin, God had exalted the kingdom of Israel in his hands and had made him a great king. And now God had covenanted to preserve the kingdom within David’s family “forever,” even though his descendants, including his son Solomon, who would succeed him on the throne, would trans-

gress his laws. David was greatly impressed by this, and replied to the Lord:

“Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant’s house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God?”—vss. 18, 19

Reference is made in the 89th Psalm to God’s covenant with David. Verses 2-4 read: “I have said, Mercy shall be built up forever; thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens. I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish forever, and build up thy throne to all generations.” Verses 28 and 29 read: “My mercy will I keep for him forevermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure forever, and his throne as the days of heaven.”

The full understanding of this covenant with David is possible only through recognition of the fact that David’s throne was typical of the messianic kingdom throne, on which Jesus sits as King. However, God’s providences in protecting the typical throne in the hands of David’s natural descendants are remarkable, as will be seen by a study of the experiences of the Davidic kings down to the overthrow of the last one, Zedekiah, when the nation was taken captive to Babylon.

This was in the year 606 B.C. It was then that the Prophet Ezekiel wrote concerning Zedekiah: “And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, thus saith the Lord God; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it; and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.”—Ezek. 21:25-27

Here the typical kingdom of David ceased, but God's covenant was not broken. Ezekiel did not say merely that the kingdom should be "no more," for this would have implied a broken covenant. Instead he explained that it would be no more "until **he come** whose right it is." In other words, the active operation of the covenant was merely suspended until the rightful King appeared.

Note the prophecy of the birth of this One "whose right it is" to occupy forever the throne of David: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder. . . . Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."—Isa. 9:6,7

In the annunciation to Mary, the angel said concerning the child who would be miraculously conceived: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."—Luke 1:32,33

Thus we see that Jesus came as the rightful King to sit on the antitypical throne of David. However, Jesus' enemies put him to death, and the antitypical ruling house of David seemed doomed, even as had the typical throne on many occasions. But just as in the past, so again, God intervened. He raised the King—his King—from the dead.

Paul associates the miracle of Jesus' resurrection with the "sure mercies of David." In a synagogue in Antioch he said: "We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he hath raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to

corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.”—Acts 13:32-34

Thus we see that David was very honorably used by the Lord in being constituted a type of the King of glory. It will be through this antitypical house of David that God’s promised blessings will flow to “all the families of the earth.” Concerning the purpose of Christ’s second coming, James states: “After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; . . . that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord.”—Acts 15:16, 17

David was not permitted to build a house or temple for the Lord; but under his rulership much of the material for the Temple, which was later built by Solomon, was prepared and assembled. David was thankful for this, and “blessed the Lord before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all.”—I Chron. 29:10, 11

David recognized that as king of Israel he was merely a representative of the Lord, who was the real Ruler. He sat on the “throne of the Lord,” not on his own throne. (I Chron. 29:23) Thus the kingdom of Israel was typical of the messianic government, in which the representative of Jehovah will be his beloved Son, Christ Jesus, and associated with him his footstep followers of the Gospel Age.

David reigned, in all, forty years—seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. “He died in a good old age, full of days, riches and honor: and Solomon his son reigned in his stead.” (I Chron. 29:27, 28) His life had consisted of some failures but many victories. To exalt the name of his God, the God of Israel and the world, the Creator of heaven and earth, was his dominating ambition. Whether

strumming sweet melodies on his harp, writing psalms of trust in God and praise to his holy name, or driving back the enemies of his people in battle, the law of his God was his principal meditation and his greatest delight.

David the Prophet

In addition to being Israel's outstanding king, David was also greatly used by God as one of his "holy prophets." His prophecies are found in the Book of Psalms. They pertain largely to the sufferings and death of Jesus, his resurrection, the future glories of his kingdom, and the blessings which it will shower upon the people of all nations. The church's association with Jesus, in suffering and in glory, is also foretold by David.

Psalm 16 prophesies the death and resurrection of Jesus and the supreme confidence he would have in the promises of his God to deliver and exalt him to his own right hand, where there would be pleasures forevermore.

In Psalm 22 is a prophecy by David foretelling Jesus' experience while hanging on the cross. Jesus is represented as saying, "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture." (vs. 18) Hanging on the cross, and watching the Roman soldiers divide his clothing among themselves and then cast lots for his costly outer garment, Jesus recognized the fulfillment of this entire prophecy, and, mustering what he could of his ebbing strength, he began to quote the psalm, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—vs. 1

The Second Psalm prophesies the triumphant victory of Jesus, as King, at his second advent, when he subdues the nations under him and rules them "with a rod of iron." In the 96th and 98th Psalms we have additional prophecies concerning the kingdom, showing that it will also be a time of righteous judgment: "Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall the trees

of the wood rejoice before the Lord: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.”—Ps. 96:11-13

David the Psalmist

As a writer David is referred to more often as a psalmist than a prophet, although he is only once thus described in the Bible. The text is II Samuel 23:1, and here he is referred to as “the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel.” It is in his psalms that the true and sterling character of David is revealed, and in reading them we understand better why the Lord referred to him as a man after his own heart.

Many of David’s psalms abound with praise to God—“I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.” (Ps. 34:1-3) Again: “O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise, even with my glory. Awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early. I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: and I will sing praises unto thee among the nations. For thy mercy is great above the heavens: and thy truth reacheth unto the clouds. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: and thy glory above all the earth.”—Ps. 108:1-5

Many of David’s psalms reflect the stormy periods of his reign as king and his struggles to hold his enemies at bay. The 9th Psalm reads: “I will praise thee, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will show forth all thy marvelous works. I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing praise to thy name, O thou most High. When mine enemies are turned back, they shall fall and perish at thy presence. For thou hast maintained my right and my cause; thou satest in the throne judging right. Thou hast rebuked the heathen, thou hast destroyed the wicked, thou hast put out their name forever and ever.”—vss. 1-5

When victory over his enemies was delayed, David's faith was tested; and these heart-searching experiences he also reveals by psalm: "How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? forever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?"—Ps. 13:1,2

When his son Absalom rebelled against him, David was forced to flee. Although his throne was temporarily wrested from him, David continued to trust in the Lord, and wrote: "Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise up against me. Many there be that say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head. I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about."—Ps. 3:1-6

David's earlier experiences in life as a tender of his father's sheep also lend richness and depth to his writings. How wonderfully his shepherd psalm has contributed to the comfort of the Lord's people through the centuries—"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."—Ps. 23

Because David's heart was right in the Lord's sight, goodness and mercy did "follow" him all the days of his life. His writings, expressive of his own deep meditations, and

beautifully poetic, are also inspired by the Lord. As we have noted, many of them are prophetic. His shepherd psalm has a grand fulfillment in the lives of the antitypical David class throughout the Gospel Age. These, more than David, can say, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Who but a godly king, whose desire was to rule righteously that his subjects might be blessed, could have foretold so eloquently the rulership of the Messiah of Israel as did David, when he wrote: "He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment. . . . He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy. . . . In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth."—Ps. 72:2, 4, 7, 8

The description of Messiah's kingdom and its blessings, which the Holy Spirit inspired David to describe in this psalm, made him feel, seemingly, that there could be nothing more he need ask of God; so he wrote: "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name forever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen! The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended."—vss. 18-20

The Wisdom and Glory of Solomon



SOLOMON was the youngest son of David. Bathsheba was his mother. The name Solomon means “the peaceful one.” He succeeded David as king of Israel, and the meaning of his name highlights one of the outstanding characteristics of his reign in contrast to his father’s rulership. Throughout most of David’s reign Israel was at war with one or another of her heathen neighbors, but during Solomon’s reign the nation was at peace.

The typical nature of the kingdom of Israel continued under Solomon, for we read that he “sat on the throne of the Lord as king instead of David his father.” David was so well-respected and honored as king that the nation gladly accepted the choice of Solomon as his successor, and “all Israel obeyed him. And all the princes, and the mighty men, and all the sons likewise of King David, submitted themselves unto Solomon the king.”—I Chron. 29:19-24

Even more important, the Lord’s blessing was upon Solomon. The record is that “the Lord magnified Solomon exceedingly in the sight of all Israel, and bestowed upon him such royal majesty as had not been on any king before him in Israel.” (I Chron. 29:25) Jesus used the expression, “Solomon in all his glory.” (Luke 12:27) The Queen of Sheba, hearing of the wisdom, riches, and glory of Solomon, decided

that she would journey to Palestine and see for herself. Her report was that the half had not been told.—I Kings 10:1-13

II Samuel 12:25 suggests that Solomon, as an infant, was given into the religious care of the Prophet Nathan, who gave him the name Jedidiah, meaning “beloved of the Lord.” Under the wholesome care of both David and Nathan, Solomon was nurtured in the reverence of the Lord, and when he became king his great desire was to rule righteously and in a manner which would be pleasing to God.

When David became old and feeble and it was apparent that he could no longer conduct the affairs of state and would soon die, Adonijah, another son, attempted to establish himself as successor to the throne. The Prophet Nathan learned of this and, together with Bathsheba, conveyed the information to the feeble David, who in turn, and in keeping with a pledge he had made to Bathsheba, directed that Solomon be anointed as his successor.

This anointing ceremony took place at Gihon, and there Solomon was proclaimed king of Israel to succeed his father David. A few months later David died, and Solomon found himself in full possession of the throne. During the early months of his reign he seems to have concerned himself mostly with consolidating his position as king, by ordering the death of Adonijah and two others—Joab and Shimei. David thought these worthy of death, but he had spared them, mentioning them to Solomon and suggesting that he use his wisdom in dealing with them but to see to it that they were put to death. Solomon also banished Abiathar, one of the two high priests in Israel at that time. Zadok then became the sole high priest. Solomon doubted the loyalty of Abiathar for, although he had been faithful to David in a number of crises, he sided with Adonijah in his effort to usurp the throne.

In I Kings 3:3 we read that “Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places.” The expression “high

places” denotes arrangements set up on hilltops for the worship of heathen gods. While many faithful servants of God in Old Testament times did offer sacrifice to Jehovah in “high places,” it was expressly forbidden in the Law given to Israel through Moses.

Even the Prophet Samuel offered sacrifice in a “high place” at Mizpeh. Probably Solomon, whose father had been anointed king by Samuel, would know about this and would not consider it especially displeasing to the Lord if he did the same. And, while attention is called to the fact that it was not the proper thing for Solomon to do, he is not particularly censured for it, for he went to Gibeon to offer sacrifice where was located a “great high place,” and it was there that the Lord appeared to the king in a dream, and said to him, “Ask what I shall give thee.”—I Kings 3:4,5

Solomon’s Request

In reply to this offer by God, “Solomon said, Thou hast showed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. And now, O Lord my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?”—ch. 3:6-9

This was a noble request, and “the speech pleased the Lord.” (vs. 10) The Lord, of course, granted Solomon’s request for wisdom, and Solomon has gone down in history as the wisest of all men. His request, however, reveals that even before the Lord specially blessed him with understanding he had a large measure of inherent wisdom. The fear, or

reverence, of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, Solomon later wrote; and this young king did love and reverence the Lord.—Prov. 9:10

The Lord assured Solomon that he would be given not only wisdom but also riches and honor. He said to the king: “Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honor: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days.”—vss. 12-14

Wisdom Displayed

This first really prominent scene in Solomon’s reign is one in which we see the inherent goodness of his character, his humility, and his great desire to do right. He desired to rule and judge God’s people righteously, justly. The first illustration given us of his wisdom is the case of the two women who came to him to settle their dispute as to which of them was the true mother of a baby.

Each of these women had given birth to a baby, but one of the infants had died. Thereupon the mother of the dead child stole the live one from the other mother, replacing it with her dead infant. The mother whose child still lived detected the fraud, and a dispute arose between the mothers; so they appeared before Solomon to settle the controversy for them.

Naturally each insisted that she was the mother of the live child. Today, blood tests could have been made to determine parenthood, but medical science had not advanced to this degree in Solomon’s time. However, he settled the controversy in a very unique manner. Since the women could not agree, he ordered that a sword be brought to him with which the live infant could be cut in two, and a half given to each mother. The mother of the dead child agreed to this,

feeling, no doubt, that she would rather the infant be killed than be given to its real mother. But the real mother protested. True mother love could not bear to see the baby thus destroyed. She would rather the other woman have possession of the child if thus it could be kept alive.—
I Kings 3:16-28

Solomon at once, and wisely, commanded that the child be given to the mother who protested against its being killed, saying, "She is the mother thereof." "And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment."—vss. 27, 28

Solomon's wisdom was further displayed in his organizational ability and in his peaceful foreign policy. I Kings, chapter 4, tells about his many "princes" and "officers," and the duties assigned to them. In this chapter also we learn something about the size of his royal family from the amount of food that was required each day. Verses 22 and 23 read, "Solomon's provision for one day was thirty measures of fine flour [at least 165 bushels], and threescore measures [at least 330 bushels] of meal [Josephus makes these amounts twice as much as we have indicated], ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and an hundred sheep, besides harts, and roebucks, and fallowdeer, and fatted fowl."

This daily supply was provided by "twelve officers over all Israel, which provided victuals for the king and his household: each man his month in a year made provision." (vs. 7) Each of these officers would thus have eleven months to assemble the food supply for Solomon's table for one month. The tremendous number who ate at the king's table seems to be accounted for to some extent in verse 29, which reads, "God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the seashore."

God gave Solomon "largeness of heart," meaning that he had a desire to bless his subjects. He was hospitable and

enjoyed having as many eat at his table as possible. Under his rulership “Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating, and drinking, and making merry.”—vs. 20

Solomon’s peaceful rule foreshadowed the reign of Christ. We read concerning the period of his reign that “Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan [in the north] even to Beersheba [in the south].” (vs. 25) The “vine and fig tree” symbolism of security and prosperity is later used in the prophecy of Micah 4:1-4, outlining some of the blessings to reach all nations during the reign of Christ.

Building the Temple

King Solomon’s fame was enhanced by his building the Temple, the “house” of the Lord—an undertaking which was denied to David, his father. David had explained to Solomon that he had not been permitted to build the Temple. He said, “The word of the Lord came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight.”—I Chron. 22:8

David, although denied the privilege of building the Temple, did not lose his zeal for the project and was permitted by the Lord to assemble much of the material for it. In the marginal translation of I Chronicles 22:14 he explains to Solomon that in his “poverty” he had “prepared for the house of the Lord an hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver; and of brass and iron without weight; for it is in abundance: timber also and stone have I prepared; and thou mayest add thereto.”

So it was that when Solomon started to build the Temple there was already much material assembled for it. But as suggested by David, Solomon set about to “add thereto.” First he entered into an agreement with Hiram, king of Tyre, to hew and bring “cedar trees out of Lebanon” to the Temple site. Hiram had been friendly with David; indeed, the account

said that he was “ever a lover of David”; and Solomon was thus encouraged in requesting his services and the services of his people, the Sidonians, to cut and transport the cedar trees which he needed. He said to Hiram, “Thou knowest that there is not among us any that can [has] skill to hew timber like unto the Sidonians.”—I Kings 5:1-10

Solomon displayed much wisdom in all the necessary organizational work for such a gigantic undertaking. We can get some idea of what was involved in the construction of the Temple from the statistics which have been reliably computed by scholars. For example, according to Lange, the gold and silver alone which was accumulated by David, who confessed his poverty, has a present-day value of from two to three billion dollars. The total number employed on the project was 183,000, of whom 30,000 were Israelites, who worked by rotation of 10,000 a month. There were 153,000 Canaanites, of whom 70,000 were bearers of burdens, 80,000 hewers of wood and stone, and 3,300 overseers.

The parts were all prepared at a distance from the site of the Temple. When they were brought together the whole immense structure was erected without the sound of hammer, axe, or any tool of iron. (I Kings 6:7) The whole area enclosed by the outer walls formed a square of about 600 feet. The sanctuary was comparatively small, inasmuch as it was intended only for the ministrations of the priests, while the congregation of the people assembled in the court.

It would be too tedious for our present purpose to consider all the details of the Temple's construction, the grandeur of its appointments, etc. We will simply mention in passing that the New Testament suggests two antitypical lessons taught by this glorious Temple. Primarily, the Temple was a meeting place between God and the people, and in the New Testament we are informed that the true followers of Jesus of this age are being built up as a spiritual temple each one being a living stone in this antitypical temple. When this spiritual temple is completed, it will, for a thousand years, be the

meeting place between God and men. Through this wonderful arrangement, reconciliation will be made between God and all the willing and obedient of mankind during the thousand years of the reign of Christ, the antitypical King of Peace.

Even while this spiritual temple is being prepared, each individual who is being shaped for a place in it is admonished to consider his own body the temple of the living God. We are, as individuals, even now ministers of reconciliation. It is only through the consecrated followers of the Master that those today who are seeking after God are able to find him, and then only as many as the Lord chooses to call. Jesus said, "Ye are the light of the world," and scripturally we could add that the Lord's people are now the only light of the world.

The Dedication

Even with the immense army of men who were employed in gathering the material and building the Temple, it required seven years to complete the undertaking. When it was completed we are given another intimate look into Solomon's heart of reverence for Jehovah and also his great wisdom. His success, his riches, had not, as we might say today, "gone to his head." He was still able to keep matters in their proper perspective.

This is clearly revealed in his appraisal of the Temple as it stood in all its glory. With all the immense wealth that was represented in it, both of material and of labor, one less wise than Solomon might have reasoned that God would be under obligation to those who had built it for him and would actually condescend to live in it. But Solomon knew better. He had a much higher appreciation of the great God of Israel than probably many of his day had attained.

Solomon's prayer of dedication begins with verse 22 of I Kings, chapter 8. Beginning with verse 26, we quote: "And now, O God of Israel, let thy word, I pray thee, be verified, which thou spakest unto thy servant David my father. But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and

heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?"

What humility is here manifested! Here was the great Temple standing in all its glory before the multitude who had gathered for the dedication, with their eyes fixed on their idol, Solomon; yet in his prayer he acknowledges that the God of Israel would not condescend to dwell in this glorious building at all. "The heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee," he said to his God, "how much less this house that I have builded?"

As Solomon continues his prayer, he simply requests that the Lord's "eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which thou hast said, My name shall be there: that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place." (vs. 29) And then, still recognizing that God would not leave his holy habitation in heaven to dwell in any temple that human hands could construct, Solomon continues his prayer, "And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest, forgive."—vs. 30

Solomon understood the provisions of the Law Covenant with Israel, that if Israel obeyed the Lord they would be blessed, and if they disobeyed they would be punished. So in his prayer he mentioned a number of the possible punishments which might come upon Israel for their sins. If they were "smitten down before the enemy"; when "heaven is shut up, and there is no rain"; "if there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, or if there be caterpillar; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities; whatsoever plague, whatsoever sickness there be; what prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and

forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men).”—vss. 33-39

Solomon's Writings

In I Kings 4:32 we read concerning Solomon, “He spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five.” A few of these were recorded and have come down to us in the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Canticles, or The Song of Solomon. These books are a valuable part of the Old Testament writings. In them are furnished very important truths. The Book of Proverbs is a collection of profound yet practical axioms of truth, which are both enlightening and inspiring. Here are a few:

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (ch. 1:7) “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.” (ch. 3:5) “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” (ch. 4:23) “The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.” —ch. 10:22

In Ecclesiastes 3:19-21 we are informed that man and beast both have the same breath, or spirit; that they both go to the same place in death. Solomon evidently knew of the heathen teaching that “there is no death,” that man has an “immortal soul” which cannot die; so he asks who can prove that the spirit, or breath—as it is in the Hebrew text—of man goeth upward, and the spirit of a beast goeth downward at death. His own answer is that they both go to the same place.

In Ecclesiastes 9:10 Solomon furnishes an excellent definition of the Hebrew word **sheol**, translated “grave” in this text, but in many places in the Old Testament translated “hell.” He writes that there is “no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave [**sheol**, hell], whither thou goest.”

His Unwisdom

In I Kings 10:23,24 we read: “King Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom. And all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart.” But Solomon did not maintain this high reputation. One of the evidences of the Bible’s authenticity is the very candid manner in which it relates all the facts concerning its important characters. Solomon would have been held in much higher respect had the truth concerning the closing years of his life not been recorded. But they were, and we find the record in I Kings, chapter 11. The narrative begins with the statement, “But King Solomon loved many strange women.” These were heathen women, with whom the Israelites were forbidden to intermarry. This was his first wrong step.

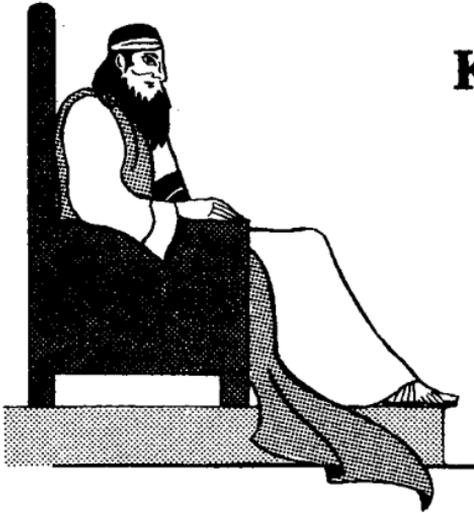
Then verse 4 reads, “It came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.” He went so far as to join in the heathen worship of his many wives, and even built “an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods.”—vss. 7,8

Because of this sin the Lord told Solomon that the kingdom would be taken from him, explaining, however, that he would not do this in his day, “but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son. Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to thy son for David my servant’s sake, and for Jerusalem’s sake which I have chosen.”—vss. 12,13

Solomon’s glory waned from this pronouncement until the time of his death. The Lord indicated to one named Jeroboam that after Solomon’s death he would become ruler over ten tribes of Israel. Solomon heard of this and sought to have Jeroboam killed, but he failed. Jeroboam escaped to Egypt. It

was under these unhappy circumstances that Solomon, after reigning forty years, “slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father.”—vss. 42, 43

Kings of Judah and Israel



SOLOMON'S son Rehoboam succeeded him on the throne. His mother was the Ammonite princess Naamah. (I Kings 14:21,31) Early in his reign the nation of Israel became divided; and although the Lord foreknew and foretold this division, it occurred largely as a result of Rehoboam's un wisdom in disregarding the wishes of the people to be relieved of the burden of taxation imposed upon them by Solomon as one of the means by which he had attained and maintained the riches and glory of his kingdom.

The insurrection against Rehoboam was led by one named Jeroboam, whom King Solomon had raised to the rank of superintendent over the taxes and labor exacted from the house of Joseph. (I Kings 11:28) Solomon became aware that Jeroboam was seeking an opportunity to exalt himself as ruler, and although the Prophet Ahijah, speaking for the Lord, gave Jeroboam the assurance that if he were obedient to God's law he would be established at the head of a dynasty equal to that of David's, Solomon sought to have him killed, evidently to prevent the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Thereupon Jeroboam fled to Egypt but returned when he was notified that Solomon had died. And now, at the head of a

people's committee, he "spake unto Rehoboam, saying, Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee." (I Kings 12:3,4) Rehoboam requested that they give him three days to think the matter over, and these were granted.

First, the new king consulted the "elder statesmen" of Israel, those who had served in the government under Solomon. These men had observed much through the years. They knew that by reducing the cost of government—through eliminating some of the pomp and glory—the burden of taxes could be lightened and the whole nation be benefited. Their advice was: "If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words unto them, then they will be thy servants forever."—vs. 7

Seemingly, however, Rehoboam was desirous of being a glorious and rich king, rather than a servant of the people, so he did not take kindly to the advice of his elders. Then he "consulted with the young men that were grown up with him, and which stood before him." (vs. 8) These were his friends, and, as he had hoped, they gave him the sort of counsel he wanted. As it is in the case of so many when asking advice, Rehoboam really desired his own way and was merely seeking someone to agree with him, and his young friends accommodated him. They said to him: "Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions."—vss. 10, 11

The Rebellion

When the people were thus rebuffed by Rehoboam, they rebelled against him and made Jeroboam their king—all, that

is, except the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and a few individuals from the other tribes who lived in the land of Judah. (vss. 17, 20, 23) Verse 15 explains that “the cause was from the Lord, that he might perform his saying, which the Lord spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat.”

But Rehoboam did not give up easily. He “sent Adoram, who was over the tribute [a tax collector]; and all Israel stoned him with stones, that he died.” (vs. 18) Then, returning to Jerusalem, Rehoboam raised an army of 180,000 “chosen men” and was ready to wrest control of the ten tribes from Jeroboam by force, but the Lord interfered with this plan. Through “Shemaiah, the man of God,” Rehoboam was told, “Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel.” “This thing is from me,” the Lord said to the king of the two tribes.—vss. 21-24

This breach in the nation was never healed. There continued to be the two kingdoms. The ten tribes were known as the “Northern Kingdom” and the two tribes as the “Southern Kingdom.” Generally speaking, the Northern Kingdom was referred to as Israel and the Southern Kingdom as Judah, although the tribes of Judah and Benjamin were Israelites also, being, like the other ten tribes, the descendants of Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel. The last king of the two-tribe kingdom is called a “prince of Israel.”—Ezek. 21:25

Although the Lord foretold the division of the ten tribes from Judah, he gave assurance that his covenant with David would stand—“that David my servant may have a light always before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there.” (I Kings 11:36) Whatever the Lord’s purpose was in permitting the ten tribes to break away from Judah, it is from Judah that we must look for the fulfillment of the messianic promises. A very important one of these promises was made by Israel to his son Judah, saying, “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.’’—Gen. 49:10

Peaceful relationships were not established between the Northern and Southern kings during Rehoboam’s reign. In the fifth year of his reign the country was invaded by the Egyptians and other African nations, under Shishak. Jerusalem itself was taken, and Rehoboam secured an ignominious peace only by the sacrifice of the treasures with which Solomon had adorned the palace and temple. (I Kings 14:25-31) There were no important events during the remaining seventeen years of his reign.

Idolatry Established

Jeroboam had a good understanding of people, which he utilized to strengthen his kingly hold over the ten tribes. Although these had rebelled against Rehoboam and had made Jeroboam their king, they had no thought of separating themselves from their brethren in their religious worship, the center of which was in the great temple at Jerusalem. Ordinarily, at least once a year the majority of the people would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, which would usually be at the Passover season in the spring.

Jeroboam knew this, and in it he saw a threat to the solidarity of his kingdom. He knew that if his subjects mingled with those of the Southern Kingdom in their religious worships it would lead to an understanding along other lines and they would begin to wonder why two governments were necessary in such a small country. So he made arrangements elsewhere for their religious worship.

This led to Jeroboam’s fall from divine favor. To him God had promised: ‘‘And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee.’’ (I Kings 11:38) But Jeroboam did not ‘‘hearken.’’ In order to keep the ten tribes from going to

Jerusalem for religious worship, where they would mingle with their brethren of Judah, he established idol worship, setting up two golden calves, one at Bethel and the other at Dan.

Concerning these the record states: "This thing became a sin. . . . And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi." (ch. 12:25-35) Jeroboam explained his move to the people saying: "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."

From this time on to the final overthrow of the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians, the worship of Jehovah was not restored by any of the ten-tribe kings. Thus did Jeroboam and his successors forfeit all claim to the conditional promise which God had made, to establish a permanent ruling house through them. When the kingdom fell there were no divine promises to give any hope that it would be re-established, as was the case with Judah. The record is: "This thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off, and to destroy it from off the face of the earth."—I Kings 13:34

This foretold cutting off of the ten-tribe kingdom did not occur at once. A long line of kings followed Jeroboam, eighteen in all. They were:

| | | |
|--------|-------------|-----------|
| Nadab | Ahaziah | Zachariah |
| Baasha | Jehoram | Shallum |
| Elah | Jehu | Menahem |
| Zimri | Jehoahaz | Pekahiah |
| Omri | Jehoash | Pekah |
| Ahab | Jeroboam II | Hoshea |

Not one of all these kings served the Lord God of Israel. The record reveals that every one of them followed in the evil footsteps of Jeroboam. Finally, during the reign of Hoshea the Lord permitted the Assyrians to take the ten tribes into captivity, which brought to an end this succession of wicked kings.

II Kings 17:21-23 reads: "He [the Lord] rent Israel from the house of David; and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king: and Jeroboam drave Israel from following the Lord, and made them sin a great sin. For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them; until the Lord removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day."

The Kings of Judah

Beginning with Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, there were in all nineteen kings who reigned over the two-tribe kingdom of Judah, besides one queen who usurped rulership and reigned for six years, that is, Athaliah. Exclusive of Rehoboam, Judah's kings were:

| | | |
|-------------|----------|------------|
| Abijah | Amaziah | Amon |
| Asa | Uzziah | Josiah |
| Jehoshaphat | Jotham | Jehoahaz |
| Jehoram | Ahaz | Jehoiakim |
| Ahaziah | Hezekiah | Jehoiachin |
| Joash | Manasseh | Zedekiah |

Some of these kings of Judah were faithful to the Lord; some were not. Abijah—he is called Abijam in I Kings 15:1—reigned three years. During this time the Lord gave him an outstanding victory over the army of Jeroboam, king of Israel. (II Chron. 13) It would appear, nevertheless, that the heart of this king was not right in the sight of the Lord, for we read that "he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father. Nevertheless for David's sake did the Lord his God give him a lamp in Jerusalem, to set up his son after him, and to establish Jerusalem."—I Kings 15:3, 4

When tracing the experiences of the kings of Judah, one is impressed with the frequent references revealing God's determination to fulfill his covenant with David. Thus, while

Abijam, or Abijah, was not perfect before the Lord, the rulership was continued in his family, and his son Asa succeeded him upon the throne of Judah.

Asa was one of Judah's righteous kings. He reigned forty-one years. The record is that he "did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, as did David his father." Also that "Asa's heart was perfect with the Lord all his days." (I Kings 15:11, 14) It is interesting to note that in mentioning the sins of all the various kings of Israel the record states that they walked in the ways of Jeroboam. But frequently, when reference is made to the righteous kings of Judah, they are compared with David.

King Jehoshaphat

Jehoshaphat was also a good king. The history of his reign is recorded in II Chronicles, chapters 17 through 21, to verse 3. He was one of the best, most pious and most prosperous kings who reigned over Judah. He reigned twenty-five years. The record states that "he walked in the way of Asa his father, and departed not from it, doing that which was right in the sight of the Lord."—II Chron. 20:32

We also read that "the Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim; but sought to the Lord God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel." (II Chron. 17:3,4) Again we read concerning Jehoshaphat that "his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord: moreover he took away the high places and groves out of Judah."—II Chron. 17:6

In his work of reform in Judah this good king sent Levites, the religious servants of the nation, throughout the cities to teach the Law to the people. The Lord blessed him abundantly. He became rich and was influential, even among many of Judah's Gentile neighbors. "The fear of the Lord," we read, "fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah, so that they made no war against

Jehoshaphat. Also some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents and tribute silver; and the Arabians brought him flocks, seven thousand and seven hundred rams, and seven thousand and seven hundred he goats.”
—II Chron. 17:10,11

Jehoshaphat was contemporary with King Ahab, of Israel, who was one of the most wicked of the ten-tribe kings. One of the serious mistakes of Jehoshaphat’s reign was a temporary alliance he made with Ahab to fight against the Assyrians at Ramoth-gilead. In this battle Ahab was killed. Jehoshaphat was delivered but reprovved by a servant of the Lord, who said to him: “Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord.”—II Chron. 19:2

The Lord later, nevertheless, showed his favor toward Jehoshaphat by delivering Judah from an attack by the Moabites, Ammonites, and others, who combined their forces against him. The king’s reverence for the true God and his heart love for him are revealed in his prayer for help in this emergency. He said, “We have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee.”—II Chron. 20:12

Not only were Judah’s enemies defeated, but Jehoshaphat and his men collected a great spoil, and they “returned . . . to Jerusalem with joy; for the Lord had made them to rejoice over their enemies. And they came to Jerusalem with psalteries and harps and trumpets unto the house of the Lord. And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries, when they had heard that the Lord fought against the enemies of Israel.”—II Chron. 20:27-29

Subsequent to this, Jehoshaphat formed another unholy alliance. It was with Ahaziah, Ahab’s successor as king of Israel. They agreed to build a navy to go to Tarshish. But the Lord was against this arrangement, and the ships were destroyed. Reaching the end of his reign, he “slept with his

fathers . . . in the city of David. And Jehoram his son reigned in his stead.”—II Chron. 21:1

Jehoram's Wicked Reign

Jehoram did not walk in the righteous ways of his father. He was appointed because he was the firstborn, but to strengthen his position as ruler over Judah he had his younger brothers murdered, as well as other princes of Israel. (II Chron. 21:4) He reigned eight years, “and he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab: for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife: and he wrought that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord.”—vs. 6

But again the “sure mercies” of God in his covenant with David operated, for we read: “Howbeit the Lord would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that he had made with David, and as he promised to give a light to him and to his sons forever.” (vs. 7) But the Lord’s disfavor was against Jehoram himself and his family. The Prophet Elijah sent a letter to him, calling attention to his sins and prophesying that he would be afflicted with a loathsome disease of the bowels and would die. This prophecy was fulfilled, and while this wicked king of Judah was buried in Jerusalem, his remains were not put in the honored “sepulchres of the kings.”—vss. 12-20

Ahaziah's Short Reign

Ahaziah, Jehoram’s son, reigned but one year. He was an idolater, which is understandable when we consider that his mother Athaliah was a daughter of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. We are informed that “his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly.” (II Chron. 22:3) Ahaziah (called Azariah in verse 6) joined hands with Jehoram, son of Ahab, king of Israel, to fight against the king of Syria at Ramoth-gilead. Jehoram was wounded, and Ahaziah visited him. Thus he was in the vicinity “when Jehu was executing judgment upon the house of Ahab.” And, although he endeavored to hide from Jehu and his men, they found him

and slew him. We read that the “destruction of Ahaziah was of God.”—vss. 5-9

Athaliah Usurps the Throne

After the death of Ahaziah, his mother Athaliah “arose and destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah.” (vs. 10) This was her way of exalting herself as the ruler of Judah. Doubtless, also, this was prompted by Satan in an effort to destroy God’s ruling house and thus prevent the birth of the promised “seed,” the One who was to “bruise” his “head.”—Gen. 3:15

But the Lord had a willing servant to protect his own. Ahaziah’s sister, the wife of Jehoiada the priest, saw what was being done by Athaliah, and she kidnapped Ahaziah’s youngest child, then but an infant, and “put him and his nurse in a bedchamber.” (vss. 10-12) There he was hidden from the designing Athaliah for six years.

In the seventh year Jehoiada the priest sent “captains of hundreds” throughout Judah and summoned all the Levites “and the chief of the fathers of Israel, and they came to Jerusalem. And all the congregation made a covenant with the king in the house of God. And he said unto them, Behold, the king’s son shall reign, as the Lord hath said of the sons of David.” (ch. 23:1-3) Jehoiada the priest then issued instructions covering a well-laid plan of precaution against any harm coming to the young heir of David’s throne and, when the proper moment came, anointed and crowned the boy, Joash, as king, with the proclamation, “God save the king.”—vss. 4-11

There was great rejoicing, the playing of various instruments, and the singing of praises. Athaliah heard the celebration and “came to the people into the house of the Lord,” and when she realized what had taken place she cried, “Treason, treason.” But it was too late. Jehoiada the priest had his plan too well organized for this usurper to hinder its full accomplishment. The people were with the priest and

were enthusiastic over their new king. Athaliah was put to death; for, in reality, she was the one who was guilty of treason.—vss. 12-15

Then Jehoiada, knowing what the real bond of union in Judah should be, “made a covenant between him, and between all the people, and between the king, that they should be the Lord’s people.” (vs. 16) The priest then organized the proper religious services of the temple. The young king was “brought down . . . from the house of the Lord: and they came through the high gate into the king’s house, and set the king upon the throne of the kingdom. And all the people of the land rejoiced: and the city was quiet, after that they had slain Athaliah with the sword.” —vss. 17-21

Under the tutelage of Jehoiada, the faithful priest, Joash was reared in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord.” (Eph. 6:4) When old enough to take over the reins of government, he commanded that money be collected from the people for the repair of the temple and the replacement of “the dedicated things of the house of the Lord” which Athaliah had bestowed upon Baalim.—ch. 24:7

The people co-operated with enthusiasm. We read: “All the princes and all the people rejoiced, and brought in, and cast into the [money] chest, until they had made an end” of repairing the temple. There was sufficient money, both for the repair work and for the needed “vessels to minister, and to offer withal, and spoons, and vessels of gold and silver.”—vss. 8-14

Jehoiada the priest “waxed old, and was full of days when he died; an hundred and thirty years old was he when he died.” (vs. 15) With his influence over Joash gone, the king did not continue his righteous course. Instead, he yielded to the wishes of certain “princes” in the land to forsake the house of the Lord and again institute the worship of heathen gods. Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, protested but was stoned to death by the commandment of the king. Swift

retribution followed, and Joash became diseased and was slain by his own servants after the Syrians had left destruction behind them.—II Chron. 24:23-27

Kings of Judah and Israel



KING Joash was succeeded by his son, Amaziah, who began his reign when he was twenty-five years old. A brief summary of his reign is given in II Chronicles 25:2, which reads, "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart." The record in II Kings 14:3 adds the explanation, "yet not like David his father." Instead, "He did according to all things as Joash his father did."

After establishing himself as king, Amaziah slew all those who had conspired against and murdered his father, Joash. He did not slay their children, for the Law of the Lord said, "The father shall not die for the children, neither shall the children die for the fathers, but every man shall die for his own sin."—II Chron. 25:4

The Law Covenant that God made with the Jewish nation was typical of the New Covenant. Concerning the time when the New Covenant will be operative, the Prophet Jeremiah wrote: "In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man

that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.”—
Jer. 31:29-34

Amaziah planned war on the Edomites and hired one hundred thousand men of the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel to augment his own army. A servant of the Lord warned him against using these, explaining that the Lord was not with the Israelites. He explained to Amaziah that if he used the men of Israel he would be defeated but if he went to battle against the Edomites without them the Lord would more than make up his need and he would be victorious. Amaziah followed the instructions of the “man of God” and was victorious. However, he “brought the gods of the children of Seir, and set them up to be his gods. . . . Wherefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against Amaziah.”—
II Chron. 25:5-15

Flushed with his success, he challenged the king of Israel to battle but was completely defeated, and he was taken to Jerusalem as a prisoner by King Joash, of Israel. In the twenty-ninth year of his reign he was murdered at Lachish. He had gone there from Jerusalem for safety.—
II Chron. 25:13-28

King Uzziah

Uzziah, sixteen-year-old son of Amaziah, was chosen to succeed his father. He reigned fifty-two years, and during most of this time he was faithful to the Lord, and Judah prospered. He was an industrious king. “He loved husbandry,” the record states. (II Chron. 26:9,10) But he was also a militarist and raised a huge army of more than three hundred thousand men, well trained and well officered. It was one of the first mechanized armies.—vss. 11-15

Uzziah did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, “according to all that his father Amaziah did.” (vs. 4) This is but a partial compliment. Amaziah served the Lord in the beginning of his reign but was unfaithful at the end. This was also the case with Uzziah. The record states that “when he

was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the Temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the Altar of Incense.”—vs. 16

Burning incense on the Temple Altar was the prerogative of the priests of Israel. No one else had the right to do this, not even the king. Nor did Uzziah undertake this ignorantly, for the priest, Azariah, “went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the Lord.” They reasoned with him, saying, “It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense.”—vss. 17, 18

They asked Uzziah to “go out of the sanctuary,” but he refused and became angry. Suddenly he was smitten with leprosy, from which he was never healed. He died a leper. (vss. 18-21) Thus again we have an example of how pride can develop in the heart and, even after a lifetime of faithfulness, cause one to transgress against the Lord. How timely is the admonition, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”—Prov. 4:23

During Uzziah’s reign a great earthquake occurred in Judah.—Amos 1:1; Zech. 14:5

Jotham was the next king of Judah. He was somewhat on a par with his father, Uzziah, so far as his faithfulness to the Lord was concerned. The record is, “He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Uzziah did: howbeit he entered not into the Temple of the Lord. And the People did yet corruptly.”—II Chron. 27:2

Apparently he accepted things as he found them, not bothering to institute needed reforms in the religious life of Judah. However, “he prepared his ways before the Lord his God.”—vs. 6

After Jotham came Ahaz, who was a wicked king. “He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim. Moreover he burnt incense in the

valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel.”—II Chron. 28:2,3

This valley of the son of Hinnom is in the Greek language called Gehenna, meaning land of Hinnom. It is one of the words in the New Testament which is translated “hell.” The fire god Molech was worshiped in the valley of Hinnom. According to Jewish tradition, the image of Molech was of brass, hollow within. The tradition reads: “His face was that of a calf, and his hands stretched forth like a man who opens his hands to receive [something] of his neighbor. And they kindled it with fire, and the priests took the babe and put it into the hands of Molech, and the babe gave up the ghost.”

A later, God-fearing king of Judah, Josiah, terminated these abominations in the valley of Hinnom by polluting the place, rendering it ceremoniously unclean by spreading over it human bones and other corruptions. (II Kings 23:10, 13, 14; II Chron. 34:4-7) It became the common cesspool of the city of Jerusalem. Jesus used it as a symbol of everlasting destruction of incorrigible sinners, those not worthy of everlasting life.

King Hezekiah

Hezekiah (the might of Jehovah) was the twelfth king of Judah. He was the son of the apostate Ahaz. He was one of the most faithful and illustrious kings of Judah. Concerning him the record states, “He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done.” (II Chron. 29:2) This is a real compliment. The wicked kings of Israel are all compared to Jeroboam; the partially righteous rulers of Judah are compared to one or another ruler who displayed much the same degree of faithfulness. Few are compared to David, the man after God’s own heart, and Hezekiah is one of these (see also II Kings 18:3, 5-7).

His father, King Ahaz, in his wickedness, had pillaged and mutilated the holy Temple of the Lord; and Hezekiah’s first

act was to purge, repair, and reopen the Temple so the sacrificial services could be resumed therein. (II Chron. 29:3-11) In connection with this noble effort Hezekiah said, "It is in mine heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel, that his fierce wrath may turn away from us."—vs. 10

We read further concerning Hezekiah: "In every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the Law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered." (II Chron. 31:21) The restoration of the Temple and its services is an example of how this righteous king did everything "with all his heart."—II Chron. 29:4-36

Another measure taken by Hezekiah was to reinstitute the yearly Passover. Ordinarily the Passover was commemorated in the first month of their religious year. But some time elapsed after Hezekiah became king before the priests and the Levites—and the people also, for that matter—were prepared to keep the Passover. Under the wicked Ahaz the worship of Jehovah had been completely set aside. Ceremonially, the priests, Levites, and people were all unclean.

While Hezekiah instituted his reforms immediately upon his becoming king, the priests and Levites were not prepared, ceremonially, to administer the Passover in the first month of their religious year, as was proper under the Law. Hezekiah therefore took counsel with the "princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem," and it was agreed that for once they would commemorate the Passover in the second instead of the first month of the year.—II Chron. 30:1-4; Nu. 9:9-11

"So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beer-sheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the Passover unto the Lord God of Israel at Jerusalem: for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written." "Letters from the king" went out saying: "Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and he will return to the

remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria.”—II Chron. 30:5-7

There is an important point here which should not be overlooked. By the time Hezekiah became king of Judah, the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel, which was instituted by the wicked King Jeroboam, had fallen, and a large portion of the people had been taken captive to Assyria. But there was a sizable remnant of the ten tribes still in Palestine, and it was to these, as well as to the people of the two-tribe kingdom of Judah over which Hezekiah ruled, that the letters of invitation were sent to gather at Jerusalem to commemorate the Passover.

Hezekiah urged the Israelites not to be stiffnecked, like their fathers, but to yield themselves to the Lord to serve him, promising that if they did his fierce wrath would turn away from them. Hezekiah promised further: “If ye turn again unto the Lord, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him.”—vs. 9

The account says that those who delivered these letters to the Israelites were laughed to scorn and mocked. But not by all, for we read: “Nevertheless divers of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem. Also in Judah the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king and of the princes, by the word of the Lord. And there assembled at Jerusalem much people to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the second month, a very great congregation.”—vss. 11-13

The “much people” who assembled for the Passover were very enthusiastic. For several generations those of the ten-tribe kingdom had been serving false gods and doubtless had very little, if any, knowledge of the requirements of the Law preparatory to observing the Passover. In their enthusiasm

they rushed into the observance unprepared. We read, “A multitude of the people . . . had not cleansed themselves, yet they did eat the Passover otherwise than it is written.” Hezekiah knew, however, that they were not willful in this, and “prayed for them, saying, The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary.”—vss. 18,19

“Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.” (I Sam. 16:7) Hezekiah seemed to know this and was himself taking the Lord’s viewpoint of these Israelites who had so enthusiastically returned to the worship of the true God. The Lord answered his prayer favorably, and the people were healed. It was a happy and blessed occasion. We read: “The children of Israel that were present at Jerusalem kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness: and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, singing with loud instruments unto the Lord. And Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the Lord.”—vss. 21,22

An Enemy from Without

After Hezekiah restored the worship of the true God of Israel, the land was invaded by Sennacherib, king of Assyria. The Assyrians had already conquered the ten-tribe kingdom, and now the purpose was to capture Jerusalem and bring the two-tribe kingdom into subjection. Hezekiah was keenly aware of this evil purpose and “took counsel with his princes and his mighty men to stop the waters of the fountains which were without the city: and they did help him.” (ch. 32:1-4) They also stopped “the brook that ran through the midst of the land, saying, Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water?”

One source of Hezekiah’s strength as king of Judah was his willingness to consult with his princes and other leading men of state in matters of importance. This reveals his humility,

and in humility there is strength. But even more important to him than the advice of his partners in the government was his reliance upon the Lord. He did all he could to prepare the land, and Jerusalem, against the expected attack, and then to a large gathering of the people which he had summoned “in the street of the gate of the city” he said: “Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him: with him is the arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested [margin, ‘leaned’] themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.”—II Chron. 32:6-8

Verse 9 of this chapter informs us that Sennacherib sent messengers to Jerusalem who endeavored to persuade those guarding the city, and all the people, to forsake Hezekiah and surrender in order to save their lives. The Prophet Isaiah was contemporary with Hezekiah and was in Jerusalem at the time. In chapters 37 and 38 of his book he fills in the information that when this effort failed, the persuasive eloquence of one named Rabshakeh was employed in an effort to induce Hezekiah to surrender.

His chief line of attack was to convince Hezekiah and his associates that their God was helpless to protect them against the strength of Sennacherib’s army. In reality it was a blasphemous attack against Jehovah. Despite his strong faith in the Lord, Hezekiah was greatly disturbed. He sent messengers to Isaiah, who said unto them; “Thus shall ye say unto your master, Thus saith the Lord, Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumor, and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword of his own land.”—Isa. 37:1-7

Rabshakeh returned from his master, Sennacherib, bearing a threatening letter to Hezekiah. Hezekiah read the letter and then took the matter to the Lord in prayer. He concluded his

prayer, saying, "Now therefore, O Lord our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord, even thou only."—Isa. 37:14-20

Like many of the wonderful prayers recorded in the Old Testament, the burden of this one was the honor and glory of Jehovah's name. And God's prestige was at stake. The kingdom of Judah was the Lord's kingdom, which, for his servant David's sake, he had promised to protect; so he replied to Hezekiah through Isaiah, saying concerning the king of Assyria: "He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the Lord. For I will defend this city to save it for my own sake, and for my servant David's sake."—Isa. 37:33-35

The Lord kept his word. He sent an angel and destroyed 185,000 of the Assyrian army in one night. (vs. 36; II Chron. 32:20,21) "Thus the Lord saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all other, and guided them on every side."—II Chron. 32:22

Few men in history, even among the Lord's servants, have been able to remain humble when highly honored. The fame of Hezekiah spread "so that he was magnified in the sight of all nations from thenceforth." (vs. 23) He became ill, "sick to the death, and prayed unto the Lord: and he spake unto him, and he gave him a sign." (vs. 24) The marginal translation reveals that this sign was a "miracle" which the Lord wrought in behalf of the king. It was indeed a miracle (see II Kings 20:8-11). Isaiah reveals that Hezekiah was restored to health and given fifteen years more of life.—Isa. 38:5

But with all these favors from the Lord, "Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up." (II Chron. 32:25) He forgot for the time that his great success and popularity were not due to

his own wisdom and strength but to the Lord. When threatened by the Assyrians, he donned sackcloth and sprinkled ashes upon himself and cried to the Lord for help. The Lord delivered him and his people, and now he was accepting the glory for himself.

The Lord was displeased with this and decreed wrath upon Hezekiah and upon Judah and Jerusalem. But this good king was only temporarily overtaken by the sin of pride. The marginal translation of verse 26 says that he humbled himself for "lifting up" his heart. Because of this, the foretold wrath upon Judah and Jerusalem was postponed until after Hezekiah died.

The son of King Baladan of Babylon, having heard that Hezekiah had been sick, sent messengers with a letter of condolence. It was but a ruse, for actually these messengers served as spies. Trusting them, Hezekiah showed them all his "precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armor [margin, 'jewels'; Hebrew, 'vessels,' or 'instruments'], and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah showed them not."—Isa. 39:1, 2

This was not a willful act on the part of Hezekiah, but nevertheless Isaiah explained to him what the result would be; namely, that in a later time all this treasure would be seized by the king of Babylon. But Hezekiah was assured that this calamity would not come upon Judah while he lived. "Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken," he said to Isaiah, "For there shall be peace and truth in my days."—Isa. 39:8

Kings of Judah and Israel



FOLLOWING the death of Hezekiah, his son Manasseh became king of Judah. He was the thirteenth king of the two-tribe kingdom of Judah. He ascended the throne at the age of twelve and reigned fifty-five years. But it was not an illustrious reign, as was that of Hezekiah, his father. The record is that he “did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel.” —II Chron. 33:2

Manasseh restored the heathen idols and their worship, which had been destroyed by his father. He “made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel. And the Lord spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken.”—II Chron. 33:9, 10

Then the Lord “brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon.” (vs. 11) This unexpected interference by the Lord had a salutary effect upon Manasseh. The record states: “When he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him.”—vss. 12, 13

The Lord heard the king's prayer and delivered him from his captivity in Babylon. Thereupon Manasseh did his utmost to restore the worship of the true God throughout the land "and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel. Nevertheless the people did sacrifice still in the high places, yet unto the Lord their God only."—vss. 16, 17

"So Manasseh slept with his fathers, and they buried him in his own house: and Amon his son reigned in his stead." (vs. 20) While, as a result of severe discipline from the Lord, Manasseh had repented of his sin, he did not gain the right to be buried in a sepulchre of the house of David. He was not looked upon by the Lord or by the people as one of the truly good kings of Judah.

Amon his son reigned in his stead, but he was king of Judah for only two years, and during that short period he did "that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as did Manasseh his father: for Amon sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them; and humbled not himself before the Lord, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more."—vss. 22, 23

A conspiracy was formed against Amon by his own "house," and he was slain. After this, the people conspired against those who had slain the king and killed them. Then the people made Josiah, Amon's son, king in his stead.

Judah's Last Good King

Josiah was only eight years old when he began to reign, and he was king of Judah for thirty years. He was the last of Judah's righteous kings. The record is that "he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left."—II Chron. 34:1, 2

When Josiah was only sixteen "he began to seek after the God of David his father." Four years after this "he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images. And

they brake down the altars of Baalim in his presence; and the images that were on high above them, he cut down; and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images, he brake in pieces, and made dust of them, and strowed it upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them.”—vss. 3, 4

Verses 5 to 7 of the chapter continue to describe Josiah’s work of destroying heathen worship throughout Judah, and not only throughout Judah, but Israel as well. It is important, historically, to remember that the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel had fallen, and while many from the ten tribes had been taken captive into Assyria, there were still many left in the Holy Land, and these now naturally came under the rulership of the kings of Judah. So, Josiah extended his work of reformation throughout Israel as well as Judah.

With this work well under way, Josiah’s next godly act was to set about repairing the holy Temple in Jerusalem, so that the worship of the true God might be reinstated there. This was in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he was twenty-six years old. For this important undertaking he secured the services of Shaphan, Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah, the son of Joahaz the recorder.

Hilkiah was the high priest at the time, and he cooperated by making available funds which had previously been collected by the Levites—money which had been donated by the people of Judah and also by “all the remnant of Israel.” (vs. 9) This money was turned over to the workmen who had charge of the repair work, and the work proceeded to the glory of God.—vss. 10-13

The funds for repairing the Temple had been collected in advance and stored in the Temple. “When they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the Lord, Hilkiah the priest found a Book of the Law of the Lord given by Moses.” This was a sensational find, and the book was taken to Josiah the king and read to him.

While the king had endeavored at the early age of sixteen to draw near to the Lord and through the years had

championed the cause of the God of Israel and Judah, he did not realize the many ways in which the nation had transgressed those laws until he heard the Book of the Law read to him. "It came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the Law, that he rent his clothes."—vs. 19

At the time there was a prophetess in Jerusalem named Huldah. Apparently she was recognized for her righteousness and loyalty to the Lord and had the confidence of the people, and even of the king. The king recognized that for generations the people of both Judah and Israel had come far short of obeying the Law which had been given to them by the Lord at the hands of Moses; and after hearing this Law and its penalties read, he was properly concerned over the fate of the nation. So he sent messengers to Huldah to get what he believed would be an authoritative statement of what to expect.

The reply from Huldah was much as Josiah had thought. The prophetess said: "Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah." (vs. 24) But Huldah had a word of comfort for Josiah. She reported the Lord's words for him: "Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord."—vs. 27

Even Josiah's righteousness, however, could not prevent the judgments of the Lord from being inflicted against the disobedient people of Judah and Israel. But God did postpone the calamity for Josiah's sake. He promised, "Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same."—vs. 28

Thus Josiah was assured that peace would reign in the land as long as he lived. There is an interesting sidelight to this promise of the Lord. Josiah was to fall asleep in death, which meant that his eyes would not see the evil that would later come upon the nation. This is contrary to the view that the dead are more alive than ever and that they see and know everything that is occurring in their former habitat. Instead, we have here another example of the Bible's consistent teaching that "the dead know not anything."—Eccles. 9:5

A Covenant Made

A long time had passed in Judah without any detailed knowledge of God's Law, except as it had been handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. When Josiah learned how much there really was to the Lord's Law, he made a covenant to "keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book."—vs. 31

Even the wording of this covenant—"with all his heart, and with all his soul"—had evidently been taken out of the Book of the Law which had been found in the Temple. Not only did the king enter into a covenant with the Lord to obey the Law, but he also enjoined "all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers."—vs. 32

Josiah pressed his work of reformation throughout "all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel, and made all that were present in Israel to serve, even to serve the Lord their God. And all his days they departed not from following the Lord, the God of their fathers." (vs. 33) Here again we see that the remnant of the ten-tribe kingdom came under the jurisdiction of the king of Judah, who in reality was the only rightful ruler of the nation, being of the lineage of David. The supposition that God continued to deal with and specially bless the people of the ten tribes who had previously been

taken captive into Assyria is a myth and is wholly unscriptural.

The Passover Kept

Josiah continued his work of restoring the worship of Jehovah, the God of Israel. He next called upon the people to observe the Passover. He called upon the priests and the Levites to make everything in readiness for this celebration, which was to be held properly on the fourteenth day of the first month. The king personally donated the huge number of thirty thousands lambs and kids for the purpose, and three thousand bullocks. "These were of the king's substance." —ch. 35:7

The "princes" of the land gave willingly twenty-six hundred small cattle, and three hundred oxen, and others also donated "five thousand small cattle, and five hundred oxen" for use in connection with the Passover. "So the service was prepared, and the priests stood in their place, and the Levites in their courses, according to the king's commandment." (vss. 8-10) Verse 18 declares that "there was no Passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet."

The good King Hezekiah had called upon the people to observe the Passover; but, not having the Book of the Law as a guide, there were probably certain features of the ceremony not properly carried out. Besides, under Hezekiah it was observed in the second month instead of the first. Probably these are among the reasons for the statement that not since the days of Samuel had the Passover been kept as it was this time under the jurisdiction of Josiah.

An Early Death

"After all this, . . ." verse 20 states, "Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by Euphrates: and Josiah went out against him." Necho sent ambassadors to Josiah, explaining that he had not come to fight against him. Necho was really the pharaoh of Egypt at the time and was

later to be permitted to extend his control over Judah. But God had promised Josiah that he would not see the evils that would come upon the land, and apparently Necho realized that he was not yet to attempt to subjugate Judah.

But Josiah insisted upon going to battle against Necho and in so doing was mortally wounded. He was taken back to Jerusalem, where shortly afterward he died. He had been a good king, and "all Judah and Jerusalem" mourned for him.—vss. 22-24

The Prophet Jeremiah was now in Judah, and he also, and understandably, lamented the death of the young King Josiah. The marginal reference cites Lamentations 4:20 as Jeremiah's reference to Josiah. The text reads, "The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen." Possibly the thought here is that because God had promised Judah peace during Josiah's lifetime he was as a shadow of protection to the people, but now that he was dead, the evils foretold in the Book of the Law were sure to fall. Certainly Jeremiah, a prophet of the Lord, would know this.

Judah's Fall

Only four more kings were to reign in Judah before the people were taken captive to Babylon. The first was Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah. He was the last to be made king by the people, and he was permitted to reign only three months. He was two years younger than his brother Eliakim (whose name was changed to Jehoiakim by the king of Egypt) and may have been chosen by the people as king rather than his brother because the people saw in him certain characteristics of righteousness. Under the many years of reformation by Josiah, it is reasonable to believe that the people would give some consideration to this in choosing their new king.

But the penalty of the Law was about due to fall upon the nation. The "seven times" of special punishment were soon

to begin to count. (Lev. 26:18, 21, 24, 28; Dan. 4:16, 23, 25, 32) Nothing the people could now do would avert this evil coming upon them. Thus, Necho of Egypt was permitted to move in and dethrone the king whom they had chosen and to make his older brother king instead, and Jehoahaz was taken captive to Egypt.—II Chron. 36:1-4

Jehoiakim reigned eleven years, “and he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God.” (vs. 5) By this time Babylon was gaining the ascendancy over Egypt, and Nebuchadnezzar dethroned Jehoiakim “and bound him in fetters, to carry him to Babylon.” However, Jehoiakim served Nebuchadnezzar for three years. It was only when he rebelled that he was dethroned and taken to Babylon.—II Kings 24:1

Jehoiakim’s eight-year-old son then was made king, but he reigned only three months and ten days when Nebuchadnezzar took him to Babylon and appointed Zedekiah king instead. Zedekiah was twenty-one years old, and he ruled eleven years. The record is that “he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the Lord. And he also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar. . . : but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the Lord God of Israel.”—II Chron. 36:11-13

Under Zedekiah’s rulership the people also departed from the Lord, following the example of their king. “They mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy.”—vs. 16

The end of the typical kingdom of Judah had come. The Chaldeans moved in, the city and Temple were destroyed, and Zedekiah, with his subjects, was taken captive. God pronounced his judgment upon Zedekiah through the Prophet Ezekiel, saying: “And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, thus saith the Lord God; Remove the diadem, and take off the

crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.”—Ezek. 21:25-27

When Zedekiah was dethroned, the typical kingdom of Judah came to an end. But God’s covenant with David remained sure. God ruled in Israel through the various kings who sat upon his throne, but this arrangement was to cease—not forever, but “until he come whose right it is,” and this, of course, is the Messiah, the Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

This real King of Israel and the world is the One described by Isaiah as “The Prince of Peace,” of whom it is written: “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”—Isa. 9:6, 7

Thank God for the assurance that his “zeal” will bring about the fulfillment of all his glorious promises of blessing for the people under the rulership of the messianic kingdom. May his promises continue to be an inspiration for us to serve him faithfully and to look forward with joy to the triumph of righteousness under the rulership of his Anointed, the great antitypical David.

Chapter 18

Elijah the Tishbite

ELIJAH is one of the most colorful personalities of the Old Testament. He was a faithful servant of God and an outstanding prophet. The New Testament

identifies him and some of his important works as being of a typical nature. And yet, the only information the Scriptures give us as to his background is that he was a Tishbite, "of the inhabitants of Gilead." He is referred to in the Bible five times as Elijah the Tishbite. It is thus that he is introduced to us in I Kings 17:1.

The name Elijah signifies, "My God is Jehovah," and it is difficult to think of a name more appropriate for this courageous servant of Jehovah. We first find him standing before the wicked King Ahab of Israel, saying, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word."—I Kings 17:1

Physically, Elijah stood before Ahab when he uttered these words; but he looked beyond this wicked king, in faith believing that in a more important sense he was standing before Jehovah. Thus he acknowledged the authority of Jehovah and displayed his defiance of the Baal-worshipping kings who had departed from their worship of the true God of Israel.



Ahab was angry over Elijah's announcement that there would be no rain except by his "word," and at once this wicked king determined that he would kill the prophet. But the Lord protected his servant, saying to him: "Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook: and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there."—vss. 3, 4

The Lord fulfilled his promise. Safe in his retreat by the side of the brook Cherith, Elijah was fed by ravens night and morning, and he drank from the brook. This continued for a considerable time. The record does not say just how long. According to the marginal translation of verse seven, at "the end of days" the brook dried up. The expression "end of days" suggests a definite time period.

In James 5:17 we learn that the total period during which by Elijah's "word" it did not rain in Israel was three and one-half years. His fleeing from Ahab and Jezebel and finding shelter by the brook Cherith was apparently at the beginning of this period, and the drought continued until the prophet's victorious challenging of the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel.

During all this time Elijah was in a "wilderness," in the sense of being isolated, and was protected from the wrath of Ahab and Jezebel. When the brook Cherith failed, the Lord instructed the prophet to go elsewhere and indicated that he would continue to protect him. The Lord said, "Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee."—vs. 9

Elijah obeyed but discovered that the widow to whom the Lord sent him was virtually without food, having no bread, and only a "handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse." (vs. 12) When Elijah found her she was about to make up the last cake possible with her bit of meal and few

drops of oil, with the idea that she and her son would eat it and thereafter die of starvation.

So now it was time for another miracle. Through the power of Jehovah, who had caused the ravens to feed Elijah by the brook, the meal and oil continued to increase sufficiently for the needs of the widow and her son and the prophet as well. Elijah said to the widow: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth." (vs. 14) In fulfillment of this promise the family had food.

After the "full year" mentioned in the marginal translation of verse 15, the widow's son became ill, and it proved to be a sickness unto death. "His sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him." (vs. 17) Then the widow said to Elijah, "What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?"—vs. 18

Life Restored

Elijah offered no explanation but took the dead child to his own bedchamber and put him on his own bed. In prayer he asked the Lord: "Hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son? And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again. And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived."—vss. 19-22

A wonderful miracle! The power which creates life had restored life. But a word of explanation is in order here. An inappropriate translation gives the impression to many that the boy's "soul" was a personality, separate from his body, which escaped when the child died but was forced to return by the miracle which restored life. But this is not the case. The word soul here is translated from the Hebrew word

nephesh, which literally means “living creature.” However, this word also, according to Prof. Strong, means, abstractly, “vitality.”

What the record states, properly translated, is that when, through Elijah, the lifegiving breath was forced into the lungs of the child, he began to breathe, and the vitality which had left him returned. Thus he again became a living creature. It is only because of traditional misunderstanding concerning the meaning of the word soul that its use in this passage conveys the wrong thought to many readers.

The Test on Mount Carmel

With the awakening of the widow's son from the sleep of death, Elijah's sojourn in Zarephath seems to have been nearing its end. The next chapter opens with the statement: “It came to pass after many days, that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year [of the drought], saying, Go, show thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.”—ch. 18:1

Elijah proceeded to obey. On the way he met Obadiah, governor of Ahab's house, one of the few in Israel who continued to reverence Jehovah. Prior to this, when Jezebel had ordered the destruction of all the Lord's servants, Obadiah had concealed, and thus saved, a hundred of them from death. Now he was searching throughout the land for possible springs of water.

“And as Obadiah was in the way, behold Elijah met him.” (vs. 7) Elijah requested Obadiah to notify Ahab that he was ready to meet him. Ahab had been searching in many places for Elijah in order to have him slain; and now it seemed incredible to Obadiah that this much sought after prophet of the Lord would voluntarily present himself before the king. But Elijah assured him that this was exactly what he intended to do; so Obadiah complied with his wishes.

But Elijah was not surrendering to the king. It was at this meeting that he proposed a test to demonstrate to the people

that Jehovah is the true God. He called upon Ahab to summon all the prophets of Baal (of which there were 450) and 400 prophets of the groves to Mount Carmel and have them prepare a sacrifice to their god. Elijah proposed that two bullocks be provided by the people and that the prophets of Baal should choose one and he would take the other. Baal's prophets were to offer their bullock first, and then Elijah would offer his.

Elijah said to the prophets of Baal: "Call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken." (vs. 24) Just previous to this Elijah had said to the people: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word."—vs. 21

Long under the domination of the Baal-worshiping kings of Israel and deceived by an outward show of strength by the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, the people were hesitant to express themselves. They doubtless reasoned that to keep silent was the better part of wisdom. But the test proposed by Elijah appealed to their good judgment. They could see that it was fair, and they realized that a God who could show his acceptance of a sacrifice offered to him by miraculously consuming it with fire would of necessity be the true and living God, and One also who would protect and bless those who served him. So they answered Elijah, "It is well spoken."

The test began. The prophets of Baal prepared and presented their bullock to their god and called upon him to show his acceptance by fire. There was no response. They cried to Baal from morning until noon. No answer. The marginal translation of verse 26 states that they "leaped up and down at the altar." But still Baal did not respond.

Now Elijah's anticipated triumph over the worshipers of Baal expresses itself in a bit of justifiable sarcasm. He

mocked the frenzied prophets, saying: "Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked." The prophets of Baal seemed to think that this was good advice so "they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them."—vss. 27, 28

But their crying aloud and cutting themselves was of no avail. Baal did not answer, although they continued their efforts until the time of the "evening sacrifice." Then came Elijah's opportunity. "He repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down," using twelve stones, one stone for each of the tribes of Israel. The bullock was cut in pieces and placed upon the altar.

After this Elijah instructed that four barrels of water be poured upon the sacrifice and upon the altar. This was repeated twice, making a total of twelve barrels of water which were used. The altar and the sacrifice were soaked, the water filling the trench surrounding the altar. Elijah made sure that no one could justly charge that a fraud had been perpetrated.

Then "Elijah the prophet came near, and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench."—vss. 36-38

"And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God." (vs. 39) It was a great victory for Jehovah. Elijah directed that all the prophets of Baal should be slain. The same day the drought was broken. In fact, Ahab had to

hasten down from the mountain before the approaching torrents of rain, Elijah running ahead of him.—vss. 41-46

Jezebel's Wrath

King Ahab reported to Jezebel what had happened and that the prophets of Baal had been slain. But she was not willing to accept the situation, as Ahab apparently was, and vowed vengeance upon Elijah. She sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them [the prophets of Baal] by tomorrow about this time."—vs. 2

So Elijah was again forced to flee for his life. In the New Testament James informs us that Elijah was a man of "like passions" as we. (James 5:17) He was bold in facing Ahab and in challenging the prophets of Baal because he was confident that the Lord was with him. Apparently, however, beyond this the Lord had not indicated just what course he was to take; so when Jezebel threatened his life he had no alternative but to flee from her wrath.

His servant fled with him as far as Beersheba. Leaving him there, Elijah proceeded for another day's journey into the wilderness "and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." (vss. 3,4) At this point Elijah must have been very discouraged. He had fled for his life from the wrath of Jezebel, but now he asked God to let him die. Perhaps he was perplexed. For such a sudden change in circumstances to occur after this signal and glorious victory on Mount Carmel would tend to make the prophet wonder just what the Lord's will might now be.

Utterly exhausted from his flight from Jezebel, Elijah fell asleep under the juniper tree, and while he was sleeping an angel of the Lord awakened him, saying, "Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baked on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again."—vss. 5,6

“And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.” (vss. 7,8) At Horeb Elijah found shelter in a cave. The Lord asked, “What doest thou here, Elijah?” and he replied: “I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.”—vss. 9,10

The Lord then instructed Elijah to stand “upon the mount before the Lord. And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind, an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake, a fire: but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.”—vss. 11,12

Elijah was impressed. “He wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave.” Then he heard a voice asking, “What doest thou here, Elijah?” Elijah repeated what he had said when asked the same question prior to the mighty demonstration which he had just witnessed. He still felt that he alone was left in all Israel as a true and loyal servant of Jehovah.—vs. 14

“Yet Seven Thousand”

Elijah was mistaken in supposing that he was the only one who was loyal to Jehovah, as many others since have been similarly mistaken. The Lord informed him that there were “seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.” (vs. 18) The Apostle Paul refers to this in Romans 11:2-5 when emphasizing the fact that while Israel had in his day rejected the One who was the greatest of all the

prophets, and the Messiah as well, there was a remnant which remained true to God.

Elijah had asked God to let him die. Instead of granting this request, God now gave him a further assignment of service. "The Lord said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria." (vs. 15) He was also instructed to anoint Jehu to be king over Israel, and Elisha to take his place as a special prophet.—vs. 16

"So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him." (vs. 19) Traditionally, Elijah's mantle was a cape of sheepskin. The Bible's reference to it as a symbol of authority to serve in the name of the Lord has supplied the world with one of its most familiar figures of speech. How many realize when reading or hearing of a noted person's mantle falling upon another that this language stems from God's dealings with Elijah?

It must now have been obvious to Elijah that his service as a prophet was nearing an end. But there was still an important assignment for him to fulfill. He was instructed to "go down to meet Ahab King of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it." (ch. 21:18) Naboth was the peace-loving Israelite who, through a conspiracy conceived by the wicked queen, Jezebel, was killed in order that she, together with Ahab, might take possession of his vineyard.—I Kings 21:1-14

It was fitting that Elijah, who had been used by God on previous occasions to defy and rebuke Ahab and Jezebel, should now be the one to prophesy the judgments of the Lord that would come upon them. They had threatened his life and had done all they could to destroy him, but now Elijah was commissioned to say to Ahab, "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even

thine.” (vs. 19) “And of Jezebel also spake the Lord, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezereel.”—vs. 23

II Kings chapter 1 records a final service rendered by Elijah, as prophet, in rebuking King Ahaziah for seeking information concerning his health from Baal-zebub instead of Jehovah.

His work over, Elijah was directed by the Lord to Bethel, thence to Jericho, and finally to Jordan. He knew now that his passing was to be as dramatic as his courageous life of service—that he would be taken away in a whirlwind. (II Kings 2:1) Reaching Jordan, Elijah “took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two [Elisha, his successor, was now with him] went over on dry ground.”—vs. 8

Not long after this, “it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.” (vs. 11) Thus the eventful and courageous service of one of the greatest men who ever lived suddenly reached a consummation, ending, we might say, almost literally in a blaze of glory.

Referring to the home and throne of God, Jesus said, “No man hath ascended up to heaven.” (John 3:13) Apparently, therefore, the “heaven” to which Elijah was taken in a whirlwind was merely the earth’s atmosphere. He was dramatically removed, and as far as Elisha was concerned, he saw him snatched away by the force of the whirlwind and did not see him afterward. Actually, of course, Elijah died and will remain asleep in death until he is brought forth in the “better resurrection,” for which all the Ancient Worthies endeavored to prove worthy.—Heb. 11:13,35,39,40

The Transfiguration Vision

Near the close of Jesus’ ministry he took Peter, James, and John with him into a mountain. There they saw Jesus

transfigured before them, and there also appeared Moses and Elijah. By some this is taken to mean that Elijah did not die but was alive in heaven and thus able to appear on the Mount of Transfiguration. However, as they came down from the mountain, Jesus said to his disciples who accompanied him, "Tell the **vision** to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead."—Matt. 17:9

From this it is clear that it was merely a vision that the disciples saw on the mountain, that Moses and Elijah did not actually appear. Deuteronomy 34:5 states that "Moses the servant of the Lord died." His burial place has been kept a secret, perhaps because the Lord knew that the people would be tempted to convert it into a shrine to be worshiped. Elijah also died, and his burial place is likewise unknown, perhaps, by divine providence, for the same reason.

The Apostle Peter later explained that in the vision on the mountain they saw "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (II Pet. 1:16-18) In other words, it was a vision pertaining to the time of Christ's second visit to earth, when the long-promised messianic kingdom would be established. Moses was the mighty lawgiver of Israel, and Elijah was an outstanding prophet and reformer. The work represented by these two stalwarts of righteousness will, under Christ, be carried forward to a glorious completion. The law of God will be written in the hearts of the people; and the true worship of God will be permanently established worldwide, as Elijah established it temporarily in Israel by the demonstration which he arranged on Mount Carmel.

The Antitypical Elijah

Through the Prophet Malachi the Lord said: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." (Mal. 4:5,6) This prophecy became well-known by the religious leaders of Israel, and when John the Baptist began

his ministry he was asked if he was the foretold Elijah. (Elias, the Greek form of the word, is used in the New Testament.) John disclaimed that he was the Elias of promise. Jesus said to his disciples that if they could receive it, John was the Elias. Evidently Jesus meant that if the ministry of John the Baptist had accomplished a work of reformation in their hearts, then to them he was the foretold Elijah.

An angel, in a prophecy given to Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, said concerning John that he would turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord, and then added: "And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:16, 17) John did minister in the "spirit and power of Elijah," and in the hearts and lives of some he accomplished an "Elijah work" of reformation; but he was not in the fullest sense of the word the foretold Elijah which was to come.

We could go into a more detailed study of the prophecies pertaining to Elijah who was to come, but for our present purpose we believe it will be sufficient to state that there seems to be scriptural reason to believe that the church in the flesh is a further fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy. The church has failed to reform the world, even as John the Baptist failed to reform Israel. Malachi foretold an alternative fulfillment of the prophecy in the event of such failure—"lest I smite the earth with a curse."

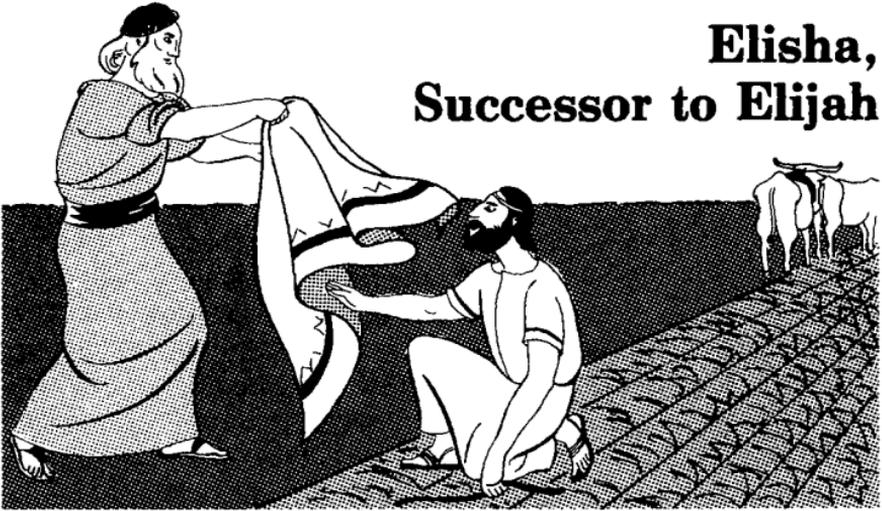
Because John the Baptist failed in his work of reformation and of preparing Israel to receive the Messiah, the foretold "curse" came upon that nation in A.D. 70-73. Because the church has failed to reform the world, the curse is now upon all nations in the form of "a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation."—Dan. 12:1

But eventually the world will be reformed through the agencies of the kingdom, the kingdom which will be under the spiritual direction of the glorified Christ, Head and body.

Thus the work of restoring the worship of the true God, and even of raising the dead, as prefigured in and by Elijah, will have its complete fulfillment during the coming age of “restitution,” the “restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”

The detailed study of these prophecies reveals that even the length of time when Elijah was in the “wilderness” and no rain fell in Israel was typical, also the unusual manner in which his ministry was brought to a conclusion. Truly Elijah the Tishbite was wonderfully used by the Lord, both in his personal ministry and as one of the typical personalities of the Old Testament. When all the ancient worthies are restored to life in the “better resurrection,” we are confident that Elijah will be prominent among them as one of the “princes in all the earth.”—Ps. 45:16

Elisha, Successor to Elijah



THE first time the Bible mentions Elisha is in I Kings 19:16. Here we read the Lord's instructions to Elijah to anoint him to be "prophet in thy room." Elisha served as prophet in Israel for sixty years. He is referred to once in the New Testament, under the name Eliseus. (Luke 4:27) Here Jesus refers to one of Elisha's miracles. Otherwise his name appears only in connection with his own activities as recorded in the First and Second Books of the Kings. Elisha was the son of Shaphat. His name means "God his salvation." Certainly God did protect Elisha throughout his long period of service and used him in connection with many miracles, even the raising of the dead.

Apparently, when Elijah received instructions from the Lord to anoint Elisha, he at once left the cave on Mount Horeb "and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him." Thus Elijah indicated to Elisha that he would be his successor. Elisha was quick to grasp the significance of Elijah's action. He knew that he was being called into the service of the Lord for the remainder of his life.

Elisha immediately decided to accept the responsibility and made but one request—"Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee." (I Kings 19:20) Elijah granted this request; and Elisha, instead of merely bidding his father goodbye, made a farewell feast for his family and friends, slaying one of the yoke of oxen to provide meat for the occasion. The genuineness of Elisha's intentions seems to be indicated by the fact that he used "the instruments of the oxen" as fuel in boiling their flesh. It indicated that he did not expect to return to his old vocation. There is a good example in this for all who enter into the Lord's service. No one should think of enlisting in the Lord's cause for any period of time shorter than life. To make this a firm decision right at the start does much to guard against indecision and faltering later.

We have the simple statement that after the farewell feast was over Elisha "arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him." (vs. 21) What a beautiful reflection of Elisha's humility! Elijah had thrown his mantle upon him, and he was anointed to be a prophet; yet he willingly filled the less honorable position of servant to Elijah, not just for a few days, but for a number of years. Here also is an object lesson which all the Lord's people might well take to heart, especially in these days when the world looks so favorably upon one who is a "go-getter."

The Lord's consecrated people have always had to battle against the spirit of the world. The influences of the world have varied in detail throughout the age. Today one aspect of the world's spirit is the glorification of "success." It is appealing to the natural mind yet should not be permitted to induce Christians to be office seekers in the church. Elisha was quite happy to wait the Lord's "due time" for promotion to the active service of a prophet.

After Elijah's first contact with Elisha, we hear nothing more of Elisha until very close to the end of his master's life. II Kings 2:1 reads: "It came to pass, when the Lord would

take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal." Elijah suggested to Elisha, "Tarry here, . . . for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel." But Elisha replied: "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel."—vs. 2

Here Elisha's great devotion to the senior prophet is reflected. At Bethel the "sons of the prophets" interviewed Elisha, asking him if he knew that his master was to be taken from him that day. He replied that he knew this, but he was determined to be with his master to the very end. Elijah announced that he would go next to Jericho and urged his servant to remain at Bethel, but again Elisha insisted on continuing with his master. Their next stop was Jericho, and Elisha was asked to remain there; but he refused, saying again, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." (vss. 3-6) From Jericho they journeyed to Jordan.

Reaching Jordan, Elijah smote the "waters" of the river with his mantle, the waters parted, and the two crossed on dry ground to the other side. Then Elijah said to his servant, "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee." To this Elisha replied, "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." Elijah said that this was a "hard thing" but assured Elisha that if he should see him when he was taken away, "it shall be so unto thee."—vss. 8-10

What did Elisha mean by a "double portion" of Elijah's "spirit"? Actually the word "portion" is not a good translation. The Hebrew word used here is elsewhere translated either "mouth" or "speech" or "word," or in other ways related to speech. For example, in Proverbs 5:4 it is translated "twoedged" sword. It is evident that even here the reference is, symbolically, to speech, for in Proverbs 12:18 Solomon says, "There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword." (See Hebrews 4:12.) In Exodus 4:10 his same Hebrew word is translated "speech" in a

statement in which Moses says to the Lord, "I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue."

From this basic meaning of the Hebrew word translated "portion" in Elisha's request to Elijah, it would seem that he asked to have his ability of expression through speech greatly increased so that Elijah's spirit, which was the Spirit of the Lord, might be more fully manifested through him. Elisha had been a farmer and probably without much experience in expressing himself to others. He may have felt somewhat as Moses did when he told the Lord that he was "slow of speech." The Lord provided a mouthpiece for Moses, but he was just as capable of increasing Elisha's ability to speak, to the extent necessary to enable him to accomplish the work assigned to him. The Lord's arm is never shortened.

When Elisha saw his master taken from him, he cried, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." (vs. 12) Elisha then took up Elijah's mantle which had fallen on him—not at the time Elijah was taken away, but when he had first met his successor while plowing—and he returned to the bank of Jordan and smote the water with the mantle, saying, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"—vs. 14

This was a natural question to ask, for, after all, while Elijah's mantle had fallen on him eight years before and he had been anointed to take his master's place, up to this time he had been merely a servant. He had not been given definite evidence that the Spirit of the Lord would be upon him as it had been upon Elijah, in the sense of enabling him to perform miracles. The answer to his question was quickly forthcoming, for when he smote the waters they divided, even as they did when smitten by Elijah. When the "sons of the prophets" saw this, they said, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him."—vss. 14, 15

The Search for Elijah

The sons of the prophets had also seen Elijah taken up in the whirlwind, but to them it did not signify that the Lord had

taken him to heaven. They said to Elisha that perhaps “the Spirit of the Lord hath taken him up, and cast him upon some high mountain, or into some valley.” (vs. 16) They asked Elisha’s permission to send out a searching party for Elijah’s body. At first Elisha refused to grant permission, but when the sons of the prophets insisted, he yielded, warning them, however, that they would not find the body.

Had it been true, what an excellent opportunity this was for Elisha to tell these sons of the prophets that Elijah had been taken to heaven to be with the Lord. Having the Spirit of the Lord upon him, Elisha knew that this would not have been the truth. He understood the matter correctly, that the body of Elijah had been hidden, even as was the body of Moses, for reasons known best to the Lord.

The Waters Healed

After the division of the waters of Jordan, Elisha’s next miracle was the purifying of Jericho’s water supply. He attributed this accomplishment to the Lord, saying: “Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land.” (vs. 21) So will the Lord cause to flow out to the people the “pure river of water of life,” as promised in Revelation 22:1.

Elisha went from Jericho to Bethel, and on his way some children mocked him, and he “cursed them in the name of the Lord.” (vs. 24) Then two “she bears” came out of the bushes, as the account says, “and tare forty and two” of the children. This seems like a cruel reprisal for calling the prophet baldheaded. It is likely, though, that the translation makes it seem worse than it really was. At least we are not informed just how badly the children were torn. They may simply have received some scratches and a bad scare.

Elisha’s Eloquence

In answer to his request, Elisha was given great power of speech. When the king of Israel, the king of Judah, and the king of Edom appeared before him at the suggestion of

Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, to seek advice in connection with a serious danger which confronted them in their war against Moab, Elisha said to the wicked king of Israel: "What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother [prophets of Baal]. . . . As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee."—II Kings 3:12-14

Thus, in a straightforward manner, and without compromise, Elisha let the wicked king of Israel know that, except for Jehoshaphat, the good king of Judah, he would pay no attention to him. But for Jehoshaphat's sake he cooperated. It seems that the main difficulty in the situation was that the land through which the three kings were marching their armies in an effort to outflank the king of Moab was without water. The Lord revealed to the prophet that apart from rain, the "valley" would be filled with water the next day "that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts." True to the word of the Lord, "there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water."—vss. 15-20

The Increasing Oil

Elisha's next miracle was on behalf of a widow, whose husband had been one of the sons of the prophets. She was in debt, and her creditors had threatened to take her two sons as bondmen. The prophet asked just what she did possess, and she replied, "Thine handmaid hath not anything in the house, save a pot of oil."—II Kings 4:1,2

Elisha then instructed the widow to borrow all the vessels she could from her neighbors. He told her to take the vessels inside, and her sons also, and to start pouring from her one "pot of oil" into the borrowed ones. She did as instructed, and the oil kept increasing until all the vessels were filled. She sold enough of the oil to pay her debt, and there was plenty left on which she and her sons could live. Another marvelous miracle!

Essentially every incident the Bible records of Elisha's life pertains to a miracle. From this standpoint, the Spirit of the Lord rested upon the prophet in an abundant measure. Nor was he partial as to who benefited from his miracle-working power. Verses 8 to 38 of II Kings, chapter 4, present a touching story involving two miracles. The first was giving power of conception to a childless woman, and then, years later, when her boy died of a sunstroke, raising him from the dead. Thus again is presented an exhibition of the power of God, which will, in his own due time, awaken all the dead.

Then there was the miracle of purifying the poisoned "pottage." This was followed closely by another miracle, in which a small amount of food was increased sufficiently to feed a hundred men. (II Kings 4:38-44) This, on a smaller scale, was similar to Jesus' miracle of feeding the multitude on the shore of Galilee.

A Leper Cleansed

Leprosy in Bible times was incurable, and even now no sure cure has been discovered. It is a fitting symbol of the blighting disease of sin and death, which can be permanently cured only through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus and by the divine healing power which will be exercised on behalf of the world of mankind during the thousand years of Christ's reign.

One of Elisha's outstanding miracles illustrates the restorative powers of the kingdom, when the "Sun of righteousness" arises "with healing in his wings." (Mal. 4:2) He healed Naaman, a leper, "captain of the host of the king of Syria." As we have noted, Elisha was impartial in the bestowing of his benefactions. Whether it was a widow of Israel or a Syrian army officer needing help, he was willing and ready to serve.

Naaman learned of Elisha through a Jewish maiden who had been taken captive to Syria and there "waited on Naaman's wife." Elisha's home was in Samaria, and when Naaman finally reached there he fully expected that a

prophet so great as to be able to cure leprosy would certainly make much ado about it in the way of outward demonstrations. But not so. Elisha did not even appear before Naaman. He simply sent word to him to go and wash in the Jordan River seven times.

Naaman was insulted. He said concerning Elisha: "I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage."—II Kings 5:11,12

Naaman's servants came to the rescue, as it were. They reasoned with him, saying: "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?" (vs. 13) Naaman saw the reasonableness of this, and he went and washed in the Jordan as Elisha had instructed. He was forthwith healed of his leprosy.—vs. 14

The Syrian captain was appreciative and recognized that he was healed, not by Elisha, but by the God of Israel, who was glorified by the miracle. Naaman said: "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant." (vs. 15) Elisha was not serving the Lord for earthly gain, so he refused to accept Naaman's gift. He was glad that Naaman had been healed and said to him, "Go in peace."—vs. 19

But Elisha's servant was not so noble. By a clever ruse he obtained for himself some of the valuables that Naaman had brought as a reward for Elisha in the event he was really healed. Here again, however, the power of the Lord through Elisha is manifested. Without being told, and without seeing what was happening, the prophet detected the fraud and said to Gehazi, his servant: "Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep,

and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed forever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.”—vss. 26,27

Syrian King Baffled

The next major episode in Elisha’s dramatic career was in connection with the king of Syria, probably a successor to the one whose captain of the host, Naaman, had been healed of leprosy by the prophet. This Syrian king “warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp.” (II Kings 6:8) In a miraculous manner Elisha secured this information and reported it to the king of Israel, enabling him to keep out of danger.—vss. 8-10

This happened a number of times, and the king of Syria became suspicious. He called his servants and inquired of them which one was for the king of Israel. He assumed, under the circumstances, that one of his servants was revealing his plans to Israel’s king. But not so. One of his servants replied, saying that none of them was for the king of Israel, “but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber.”—vss. 11, 12

It is not necessary for us to understand the manner in which Elisha heard the private words of the king of Syria. It could easily be, however, that an angel of the Lord was here acting as “spy” and communicating to the prophet the vital information needed for the protection of Israel. But whether in this or in some other manner, we know that the Lord is never without ability to accomplish all his good purposes.

The Syrian king was slow to learn this lesson. Apparently he believed what his servant told him of Elisha’s ability to hear his privately spoken words, yet he imagined he could outwit the prophet and take him a prisoner. Therefore he instructed his servants to spy on Elisha to discover where he

was staying so that he might capture him. He was told that Elisha was in Dothan.—vs. 13

Acting on this information, the king surrounded Dothan by night with a great army—“horses, and chariots, and a great host.” (vs. 14) Elisha’s servant, rising early the next morning, discovered the situation, and in despair he said to Elisha, “Alas, my master! how shall we do?” (vs. 15) Elisha replied: “Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his [Elisha’s servant’s] eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.”—vss. 16, 17

Actually, of course, the “horses” and “chariots of fire” which the young man saw in his vision were but symbolic of the mighty forces that were at the command of Elisha’s God for his protection and the protection of those associated with him in the divine cause. Jesus said to Peter that if he wished he could ask his Heavenly Father and he would send more than twelve legions of angels for his protection. (Matt. 26:53) It is likely that many of these holy angels were actually near Elisha during this time when the king of Syria was threatening him. This is true of all the Lord’s people, for do we not read, “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them?”—Ps. 34:7

Elisha did not have to wait long for the attack from the soldiers who had surrounded Dothan during the night. In the crisis he prayed to the Lord, asking that these men be made blind, and his prayer was answered. Then, informing them that they were in the wrong city and that the man they were looking for was elsewhere, he asked them to follow him. The soldiers supposed they were being led to Elisha, when in reality they were being led by him, and they were soon in Samaria, in the presence of Israel’s king and Israel’s army.

Then the “man of God” (vs. 15)—for so Elisha was often called—asked the Lord to open the eyes of the Syrian

soldiers. This the Lord did. (vs. 20) What an embarrassing moment it must have been for them! The king of Israel asked if he should slay them, but, instead, Elisha ordered that they be fed and sent home. What a humane and loving procedure—and more effective than slaughter. This ended, for the time at least, the attacks upon Israel by Syria. The king of Syria finally realized that there were forces protecting Elisha and the Israelites with which he could not cope.—vss. 21-23

Famine in Samaria

The kings of Israel did not serve the Lord faithfully and could not therefore expect to have his protection. Double trouble came upon the Samaritan section of the country, which was the home of Elisha—famine, and invasion by a later king of Syria, who besieged the country, rendering the famine still more acute. The famine was so serious that women were eating their children. “An ass’s head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove’s dung for five pieces of silver.”—II Kings 6:24-29

The king of Israel blamed Elisha for the trouble rather than recognizing it was from the Lord. He instructed his trusted servant to seek out Elisha with the intent of murdering him. He said, “God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day.” (vs. 31) Again, the Spirit of God, giving Elisha powers of discernment, came to his rescue.

The servant who was sent to Elisha by the king of Israel and who was speaking for him said, “Behold, this evil is from the Lord; what should I wait for the Lord any longer?” (vs. 33) Elisha had different information from the Lord: “Thus saith the Lord, Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.” (ch. 7:1) This was too much for the king and his servants to believe. Even if the Lord should open the windows of heaven and pour down rain, crops would not mature in twenty-four hours to bring down the price of food, as Elisha had prophesied.

The resources of the Lord, however, were quite adequate to fulfill this prophecy. The Syrian soldiers besieging the city had, by God's power—probably another service rendered by the angels—been made to hear “a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host.” (vs. 6) This led them to believe that the king of Israel had “hired . . . the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians” to come upon them. They were filled with fear, and to a man they rose up in the night and fled, leaving behind them tremendous supplies of food, “their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life.”—vs. 7

Four lepers, themselves starving, having decided that they would risk entering the Syrian camp in the search for food even if it would mean their death, discovered what had happened and reported it to the king of Israel. Just as the Lord can, and does, use his holy angels as messengers, so he is also able to use lepers, as he did in this case. The king of Israel was suspicious, claiming the Syrians had merely feigned a flight in order to induce the people to come out of the city for the food they had left behind, and then they would suddenly come out of hiding and destroy them.

But this was not the case. The sensational “sound effects” broadcast by the angels were effective, and the Syrian army had actually fled. Now the Israelites could help themselves to the food they had left behind. Thus was Elisha's prophecy fulfilled. His prophecies concerning the death of one who served the king of Israel in the effort to slay the prophet also came true. Again the Lord was glorified, for Elisha was acting merely as his servant.

Jehu Anointed

One of the last official acts of Elisha was to authorize one of the sons of the prophets to anoint Jehu to be king of Israel. (II Kings 9:1-10) Jehu was the one used by the Lord to destroy the house of Ahab—wicked king of Israel—and Jezebel, his notoriously wicked wife. Thus came about the

fulfillment of the prophecy given to Elijah by the Lord. (I Kings 19:16, 17) Actually, the Lord had instructed Elijah to anoint Jehu. The fact that Elisha did it—even though through his proxy, one of the sons of the prophets—helps to emphasize how completely the Lord recognized him as Elijah's successor. Elijah's mantle fell on him, which meant that he could act for Elijah, and he did in the anointing of Jehu.

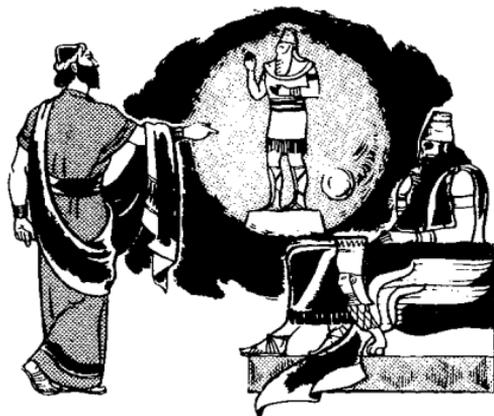
II Kings 13:14-21 presents Elisha's deathbed experiences. Joash, king of Israel, visited him, and "wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." This expression was used by Elisha when he saw Elijah taken from him. Its significance is not clear, but evidently King Joash repeated it as his way of indicating to Elisha that the end of his life seemed near. In a very unique manner Elisha gave utterance to his last prophecy concerning the smiting of Syria.—vss. 15-19

Then Elisha died and was buried. But still another miracle was associated with him. A band of Moabites invaded the land, and they were discovered by some who were burying one of their comrades. These, in haste, "cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet." (vss. 20, 21) Elisha, of course, had nothing to do with this, for he was dead. Just why the Lord would restore the man's life under such circumstances is not clear.

Elisha's service as a prophet was truly outstanding. His prophecies, however, pertained only to local events in the experiences of Judah and Israel. They were not of the long-range variety such as those whose writings comprise so many of the Old Testament books. But the prophet's many miracles did point forward to the kingdom age in the divine plan, when such miracles as healing the sick and raising the dead will be everyday events among the people all over the earth, continuing until all the willing and obedient of that time will be fully restored to perfection and there will stretch out before them the glorious prospect of eternal life.

Chapter 20

Daniel—Exile, Statesman, and Prophet



WHEN the two-tribe kingdom of Judah was overthrown by Nebuchadnezzar and the Jewish people taken captive to Babylon, Daniel, then a young man, was among the captives. While apparently too young previous to this to occupy any official position in Judah's tottering kingdom, he was nevertheless favorably known, and the Prophet Ezekiel refers to him as an example both of righteousness and of wisdom.—Ezek. 14:14,20; 28:3

Daniel was selected, together with three other young Hebrew captives, to be trained for special service in the Babylonian government. Being chosen for this purpose in keeping with the stipulation outlined in Daniel 1:3 indicates that Daniel and the other young Hebrews had been very closely associated with the royal family of Judah. Apparently Nebuchadnezzar felt that there was something to be gained by bringing these young Hebrews into his government, and there was.

They were to have the best of treatment, even during the period of their training. "The king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king." (Dan. 1:5) "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with

the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank." He requested "of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself." (vs. 8) The prince of the eunuchs, who had charge over these young trainees for the government, was fearful of disobeying the king's wishes in the matter; so Daniel requested that he and his Hebrew friends be given a ten-day trial on the plain food to which they were accustomed, to see what the result would be.—vss. 10-13

The prince of the eunuchs consented "and proved them ten days." At the end of ten days their "countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat." This settled the matter. The king's meat and wine were removed, and the four Hebrew "children" were permitted to live on their own diet of "pulse" and water.—vss. 14-16

All four of these were of the tribe of Judah—Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The prince of the eunuchs gave them all Babylonian names—Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. While the latter three of these went through some very interesting and, at times, trying experiences (see chapter 3), Daniel—Belteshazzar—was the most prominent among them. Verse 17 (ch. 1) says concerning the four, "God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams." Thus Daniel stands out from the others as being one of the Lord's holy prophets, and we find that some of the most important prophecies of the Bible were uttered by him and recorded in the book which bears his name.

Other young men besides Daniel and his three friends had been selected for the three-year period of training. At the "end of the days" Nebuchadnezzar had them all brought before him. "And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. And in all

matters of wisdom and understanding that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.”—vss. 18-20

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

In the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, and therefore prior to the end of the three-year period during which Daniel and his friends were trained “to stand in the king's palace,” the king had “dreams, wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep broke from him.” He sent for the “magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to show the king his dreams.”—ch. 2:1,2

The king did not remember his troublesome dream, and it was this that presented a real problem to the magicians, astrologers, and sorcerers. The king sensed that they were seeking time in order to discuss the matter and make up a fictitious dream and give its interpretation. He became angry at this and ordered that all the wise men of the realm be killed. Daniel and his friends were included among these, although Nebuchadnezzar had not asked them to tell him his dream.

When Daniel learned of the situation he counseled with his three friends, and they prayed earnestly to the Lord for help, and the Lord answered their prayer. That night, in a dream, the Lord revealed to Daniel the details of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation. Daniel immediately contacted Arioch, the “captain of the king's guard,” whose duty it was to carry out the order of execution against the wise men of the realm, and said to him, “Destroy not the wise men of Babylon; bring me in before the king, and I will show unto the king the interpretation.”—ch. 2:24

The true nobility and humility of Daniel is revealed in this experience, in that he gave all the glory to the Lord. After the information was revealed to him, Daniel at once thanked the Lord for it, saying, “Blessed be the name of God forever and ever; for wisdom and might are his. . . . I thank thee, and

praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter."—ch. 2:19, 20, 23

When taken before the king, Daniel again emphasized that it was not by his wisdom that the dream and the interpretation were known to him. Referring to God, Daniel said to the king, "He that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass." (vs. 29) This placed an important thought in the king's mind; for after he had been told his dream and its interpretation, he said to Daniel, "Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldst reveal this secret." (vs. 47) What an important lesson this is for all the Lord's people!

The Humanlike Image

In his dream Nebuchadnezzar saw a humanlike image having a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet and toes of iron and clay mixed. He saw a stone cut out of the mountain without hands, which smote the image on its feet, causing it to fall, and grinding it to powder; and the "powder" was blown away "like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors." Then the stone which smote the image grew until it became a great mountain which filled the whole earth.—ch. 2:31-35

Interpreting the dream, Daniel said to Nebuchadnezzar: "Thou O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold."—vss. 37, 38

This announcement to Nebuchadnezzar by one of God's holy prophets marked the beginning of a very significant era in the outworking of the divine plan of the ages. It was the

beginning of that period referred to by Jesus as the "times of the Gentiles"—the "times," that is, during which the Lord would permit a certain succession of Gentile powers to dominate in world affairs and even to hold his own people in subjection.

This was to be a period of seven symbolic times, each one of which would be three hundred and sixty years in length, making a total of 2,520 years. (See following pages.) This time measurement began with Nebuchadnezzar in 606 B.C., and therefore ended in A.D. 1914. It did not mark the beginning of Gentile nations, nor should we expect the closing of the period to mean the sudden end of all Gentile nations. As Daniel clearly explained, it was then that the God of heaven gave Nebuchadnezzar a kingdom and dominion. It was this authorization that ended in 1914, and naturally with it began the rapid deterioration of the kingdoms involved.

Daniel explained to Nebuchadnezzar that after Babylon there would arise three other kingdoms. History reveals these to be Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. To these also the God of heaven gave dominion. Paul wrote in the days of Rome, "The powers that be are ordained [margin, ordered] of God."—Rom. 13:1

But there was not to be a fifth world power. The legs of iron pictured the Roman empire, but coming to the feet we find disintegration and division represented. Clay becomes mixed with the iron; and the final picture is of the toes, symbolizing the ten general divisions of the states of Europe, which once constituted united Rome.

It was the feet and toes of the image that were smitten by the stone cut out of the mountain without hands. The expression "without hands" suggests that it was brought about by God's supervision and power. And so it is. After explaining that the smiting of the image with this "stone" caused its downfall and destruction, Daniel indicates it to mean that "in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed; and the

kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”—Dan. 2:44

Thus, in the first prophecy uttered by Daniel, he forecast more than twenty-five hundred years of Gentile history, culminating in the establishment of the long-promised kingdom of Christ. Who but a prophet of God could have foretold so accurately the rise and fall of mighty empires, the disintegration and division of the fourth and last, and the final overthrow of these divisions as we are witnessing it today? Surely this gives us confidence that Daniel’s prophecy concerning the kingdom of God that was to succeed Gentile rule can also be depended upon; and it means that we are living at the very threshold of the divine kingdom.

Daniel Exalted

The king was greatly pleased with Daniel’s ability and made him a “great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon.” (vs. 48) Here we observe another noble trait of Daniel’s character. In this hour of exaltation he did not forget his three friends but requested of the king that “he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego over the affairs of the province of Babylon.” This request was granted.

Daniel maintained his high position in government throughout essentially the entire period of Israel’s captivity, which was seventy years, as chapter 1:21 says, “even unto the first year of King Cyrus.” In this service of the government, Daniel was both faithful and fearless.

In chapter 4 we are told of another dream of Nebuchadnezzar’s which Daniel interpreted. This dream indicated that the king was to dwell with the beasts and “eat grass as oxen” for a period of “seven times.” (vss. 16, 23, 25, 32) Doubtless when Daniel had told Nebuchadnezzar that he was represented by the head of gold on the great image that he saw in this dream, he must have been pleased. It was a pleasant

message for Daniel to present to the king. But now to tell him that he was to become insane and live with the beasts for seven years was something different. This required courage. But Daniel did not hesitate. The dream was fulfilled for seven literal years, until Nebuchadnezzar knew "that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men." This, we believe, foreshadowed the seven symbolic "times of the Gentiles," a period in God's plan to prepare all mankind to "honor the King of heaven."

The Handwriting on the Wall

The years passed, and Belshazzar succeeded Nebuchadnezzar as king of Babylon. He "made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand." (ch. 5:1) It was a drunken, riotous feast at which the king and his lords, his wives and his concubines, drank wine from the "golden and silver vessels" which Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the Temple in Jerusalem. "They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, and of iron, of wood, and of stone."—vs. 4

But the merriment soon ceased. "In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote." (vs. 5) Little wonder that "the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another." He had cause for alarm.

As was the custom, the king sent for the astrologers and the soothsayers to read and interpret what had been written on the wall; but they were unable to do so. Then Belshazzar was troubled even more. The queen reminded him of Daniel, whom Nebuchadnezzar had made "master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers." Here, she explained, is a man of "excellent spirit, and knowledge and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and showing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts."—vss. 10-12

The queen urged the king to “let Daniel be called,” and he did. The king asked him, “Art thou that Daniel, which art of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Jewry?” Belshazzar said to Daniel that he had heard about him and about his great wisdom. He told Daniel that if he could explain the writing which had appeared on the wall he would be “clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold” about his neck and be made “the third ruler in the kingdom.”—vss. 13-16

Again Daniel’s nobility and courage appear. He said to the king, “Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation.” (vs. 17) But Daniel was in no hurry about it. First he reminded Belshazzar of God’s dealings with Nebuchadnezzar his father, who, while receiving his kingdom from the Lord, had exalted himself and for this was severely punished, being made to dwell with the beasts.—vss. 17-21

Then Daniel said, “And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven.” (vs. 22, 23) This again took courage but was a necessary prelude to the interpretation of the handwriting on the wall, that mysterious “MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.”—vss. 24, 25

The interpretation was brief but, to the king, crushing: “God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.” Immediately Belshazzar commanded that Daniel be clothed with scarlet and a chain of gold put about his neck. He also issued a proclamation that he be made the third ruler in the kingdom. This, however, was the last proclamation to be made by Belshazzar, for “in that night,” the record states, he was slain.

It was that night that the city of Babylon was conquered by the mighty army of Cyrus. Traditionally, Cyrus is said to have

had his soldiers dig a trench to bypass the waters of the river Euphrates, which ordinarily flowed under the walls and through the city, and thus allowed his army to enter the city through the river bed.

Daniel Again Tested

Babylon had fallen, and now the Medo-Persian Empire, represented by the breast and arms of the image seen by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream, was taking shape. Cyrus, apparently, was the first emperor, but Darius became king over the city and province of Babylon, probably by delegated authority from Cyrus. The records are not clear as to exactly what did occur at this point.

Darius set over the kingdom “an hundred and twenty princes,” and over these he appointed three “presidents,” of whom “Daniel was first.” We read that “Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm.” (ch. 6:1-3) This was too much for the other presidents and princes, who coveted the first place in the realm, which had been given to Daniel; so they conspired against him.

In laying their plans to have Daniel removed from his position and, if possible, put to death, they paid him the greatest tribute that could ever be given to a servant of God. They said, “We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.” (vs. 5) Appealing to the king’s pride, they urged him to sign a decree that for thirty days it would be unlawful for anyone to petition “any god or man,” except Darius himself.

The king did not discern the real purpose of this decree, and since it honored him, he signed it. A law of the Medes and Persians could not be changed; so those who conspired against Daniel knew that if they could spy on him and find that he continued to pray to his God despite this thirty-day

decree, the king would have no alternative but to have him cast into a den of lions, which was the punishment prescribed for offenders.

Daniel knew about the decree, but he did not permit it to hinder his worship of Jehovah, the God of Israel. Openly, before his window, three times a day he continued to pray, as his custom was. The case was brought before the king, who then realized the trick that had been played upon him but could do nothing to free his beloved Daniel. All he could do was to trust that Daniel's God would deliver him.

Daniel was cast into the den of lions during the evening, and all that night the king was greatly agitated. Going to the den the next morning, however, he was delighted to find that Daniel had not been harmed but that, as Daniel explained, God had "sent his angel" to "shut the lions' mouths." Thus Daniel had again won a victory of faith and of courage.— ch. 6; Heb. 11:33

Daniel the Prophet

Daniel's encounter with the jealous presidents and princes of the Medes and Persians is the last record we have of his association with governments. While he was highly honored by both Nebuchadnezzar and Darius, there is little doubt that Daniel's chief interest was in his God and in his fellow exiles, the children of Israel. And he was greatly used by God as a prophet, in addition to the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's two dreams.

Daniel had a dream of his own which was prophetically very significant. It is recorded in chapter 7. In this dream Daniel saw "four great beasts" which "came up from the sea, diverse one from another." The first was like a lion, the second a bear, the third a leopard. The fourth was very different from any beast Daniel had ever heard of. It was "dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly."

Most Bible students agree that these four beasts picture the same four world powers that were represented by the

image which the king of Babylon saw in his dream. The difference is that here the kingdoms are seen as beastly and ferocious—God’s viewpoint of them—as against man’s view, in which Nebuchadnezzar saw them as powerful and glorious.

Daniel’s vision of the four beasts covers the same period of time as that pictured by Nebuchadnezzar’s image, ending with the preparation for the kingdom of God. The fourth beast seen by Daniel had ten horns, corresponding to the ten toes of the image; but a “little horn” grew up among the others, supplanting three of them. This little horn had “eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things.” Daniel watched the vision until he saw the thrones, or kingdoms, pictured by these horns, cast down, “and the Ancient of Days did sit.”

Students agree that this fourth beast pictured the Roman Empire, and the “little horn” (which replaced three of its ten) was symbolic of papacy, which fastened itself upon Rome. The important consideration is that this “beast” continued until the time came for the saints to “possess the kingdom.” (Dan. 7:18, 22) This fourth beast is then given to the “burning flame,” symbolic of destruction, while the “kingdom and dominion and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven” is “given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.”—Dan. 2:44; 7:11, 27

The Seventy Weeks

Chapter 8 records another marvelous vision and prophecy, but too many details are involved to attempt even a summary in this brief study. Chapter 9 of Daniel outlines the circumstances leading up to the prophecy of the “seventy weeks” of exclusive favor upon natural Israel, ending with the coming of the Messiah.

In the opening verses Daniel explains that he knew from the prophecy of Jeremiah that the captivity of the nation was

to last for seventy years. (Jer. 25:12) He was concerned lest the sins of his people, even during their captivity, had made them unworthy to be set free at the close of the seventy years; so he earnestly prayed to the Lord concerning the matter. Verses 4-19 record this prayer, one of the most eloquent to be found in the Bible, revealing Daniel's great reverence for the Lord and love for his people.

While he was praying, the angel Gabriel whom, he said, he had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched him about the time of the evening oblation. "And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding." (vss. 21,22) Then Gabriel told Daniel that "seventy weeks are determined upon thy people, and upon the holy city." Later the seventy is broken down into three periods of sixty-two, seven, and one; the seven and sixty-two being linked to make sixty-nine.

These are prophetic weeks, in which each day represents a year, and therefore would be a total of 490 years. They were to begin to count from the issuing of a decree authorizing the rebuilding of the city and walls of Jerusalem. This decree was actually issued by King Artaxerxes in the year 454 B.C. Sixty-nine weeks of the prophecy, or 483 years, were to reach to "Messiah the Prince." This was at the baptism of Jesus, when he was anointed by the Holy Spirit to be the Messiah. In the "midst" or middle of the seventieth symbolic week of seven years he was to be "cut off" in death for the sins of the world. And then three and one-half years were to remain, during which the privileges of the Gospel were restricted to the Jewish nation. It was at the conclusion of this seventieth symbolic week that the Gospel went to the Gentiles, Cornelius being the first convert.

The "Time of the End"

In chapter 10:1 we are told that in the "third year of Cyrus, king of Persia a thing was revealed unto Daniel, . . . and the

thing was true, but the time appointed was long; and he understood the thing and had understanding of the vision." In these visions shown to Daniel he saw little prospect of real deliverance and prosperity for his people. Because of his great interest in them, this caused him to mourn. In this case he mourned for three full weeks.

Then another angel was sent to him and gave him a symbolic preview of important events leading up to what is described in chapters 11:40 and 12:4 as the "time of the end." We cannot consider the details of this subject in this brief study. However, the prophecy of chapter 11 does bring us to the beginning of the "time of the end."

Then chapter 12 opens with the statement, "At that time shall Michael stand up, the great Prince which standeth for the children of thy people." Here, at last, was something for which Daniel was looking, that is, someone who would stand up for his people. And he was assured that "at that time thy people shall be delivered." Even so, the standing up of Michael was first to result in a "time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation."

Here we are on more familiar ground, for Jesus quotes this prophecy and applies it to the time of his second presence. (Matt. 24:21, 22) "Michael," then, is Christ, and it is within the "time of the end" that he returns to prepare for the establishment of his kingdom, to deliver God's people, and to raise the dead; for verse 2 adds that at this time "many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake."

But while Daniel was given a measure of understanding concerning some of the visions shown to him, with this one he was to "shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end." When the time of the end came, he was informed, it would be marked by much running to and fro and a great increase of knowledge.—vs. 4

Without doubt we are now living in the time when this prophecy is being fulfilled. We are witnessing the "increase

of knowledge” and the “running to and fro.” And we are right in the midst of the greatest time of trouble that the world has even seen, so great that Jesus said unless it were shortened no flesh would survive. It is just this that is now feared by world leaders and others.

But as for Daniel, the beloved of God, he said: “I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?” (vs. 8) But again he was put off—“Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.” (vs. 9) But, thank God, Daniel will one day understand. The Lord further said to him, “Go thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest [in death], and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.”—vs. 13

Daniel’s lot “at the end of the days” will be among the other ancient worthies, whom the Lord will make “princes in all the earth.” (Ps. 45:16) He is one of those who will receive the “better resurrection” mentioned by Paul. (Heb. 11:35) What a marvelous prince he will be to assist in administering the affairs of the kingdom of God!

Chapter 21

Cyrus, Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah



THESE are the men who were in strategic positions of authority and influence when the Lord's time came for the Hebrew people to be released from their captivity, which had begun under Nebuchadnezzar and continued through the fall of Babylon into the ascendancy of the Medo-Persian Empire. It had been prophesied that this captivity was to last for seventy years. (Jer. 25:9-11; II Chron. 36:22,23) Now these years had passed, and "the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia," to make a proclamation throughout the land, granting liberty to the captives.

Cyrus's proclamation read: "The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God) which is in Jerusalem." (Ezra 1:2,3) There were further details in the proclamation, making provision to cover the

cost of the return and the erection of the Temple; and all the Hebrews were called upon to contribute what they could toward this undertaking.—vss. 4-6

One wonders just how the Lord may have stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to issue this proclamation. The question naturally arises also as to how Cyrus knew that the “Lord God of heaven” had given him all the kingdoms of the earth. The answer to both these questions seems to be in the fact that the Prophet Daniel had for a short time been in very close contact with Cyrus and was probably used by the Lord to direct the king in what he was to do.

As we learned in our previous study, Daniel was a young man when the captivity began and, together with three other young Hebrews, was drafted into the service of King Nebuchadnezzar. Through his brilliance and integrity and the overruling providence of God, he was promoted to the position of prime minister, which he held until the overthrow of Babylon.

His ability to interpret the handwriting on the wall at once brought him into favor with Darius, the new ruler, who set him over the whole realm.” We read that “this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian,” who succeeded Darius. (Dan. 6:28) Apparently, however, Daniel was not long in the court of Cyrus. Chapter 1:21 of his book informs us that he continued to the first year of Cyrus, and Ezra 1:1 states that it was in the “first year of Cyrus” that he issued his proclamation of liberty to the Hebrew captives, and no mention is made of Daniel in connection with the return of his people to the Holy Land.

By this time Daniel would have been an old man, and he apparently lived into the reign of Cyrus for only a few months. And it seems reasonable to conclude that it was during these few months that this faithful servant of the Lord bore testimony to his new king concerning the role the Lord had designed for him in the outworking of his purpose for Israel’s return from captivity.

Daniel was a student of the Lord's prophecies. We know this from chapter 9:2, which reveals his thorough acquaintance with the prophecy of Jeremiah concerning the seventy years of captivity. He would certainly also know of the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the Lord's use of Cyrus. (Isa. 44:28; 45:1) Here the Lord refers to Cyrus as his "anointed," that is, the one he had appointed to proclaim liberty to the Hebrews; and also as his "shepherd," the one who would and did make every provision for the care and protection of the Hebrews in connection with their return and the rebuilding of the Temple. It is reasonable to conclude that Daniel called Cyrus's attention to this prophecy and that this had much to do with stirring up his spirit to take action in the matter.

A part of this "stirring up" effort by Daniel may also have been in calling Cyrus's attention to the information revealed in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in which he saw four world powers depicted by gold, silver, brass, and iron of a human-like image. (Dan. 2:36-38) Here Nebuchadnezzar, head of the Babylonian Empire, had been given dominion by God, and Daniel explained that after him would arise another; that is, a second world power, of which the same thing would be true; namely, that the authority to rule would be given by the God of heaven. If Daniel related this to Cyrus—and it seems reasonable to suppose that he did—it would explain the Persian king's statement that God had given him all the kingdoms of the world.

One cannot but reflect upon the faithfulness of Daniel in giving this testimony to Cyrus and upon how the Lord uses his people in connection with the outworking of his purposes. Doubtless Cyrus possessed a large degree of nobility. However, if Daniel called his attention to the prophecy of Isaiah 45:1-4, he would know that it would be to his great advantage as ruler of the empire to do the bidding of Israel's God. He could also have learned from Daniel something of the ability of Jehovah, such as in the deliverance of the three

Hebrews from the fiery furnace, and of Daniel himself from the mouths of the lions.

Zerubbabel

The name Zerubbabel means “born at Babel, that is Babylon.” While among the Hebrews who took advantage of Cyrus’s decree to return to Palestine there were many of the original captives, Zerubbabel was not one of them. Born in Babylon, he would be a younger man, although old enough to be the head of the tribe of Judah. Later he was called the prince of the captivity.

The fact that Zerubbabel had been given the Persian name Sheshbazzar might indicate that he was in the king’s service even during the captivity. When Cyrus issued his decree of liberty and the authorization for rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel was charged with the responsibility of leadership in the undertaking. The golden vessels of the Temple, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken to Babylon, were placed in the custody of Zerubbabel, to be returned to Jerusalem for use in the rebuilt Temple. (Ezra 1:7-11; 2:1,2) Cyrus also appointed Zerubbabel governor of Judea.

Zerubbabel was an ardent servant of the Lord, and under his leadership the work of rebuilding the Temple was soon started. In the seventh month after the captives had arrived safely in their own land, the priests, together with Zerubbabel, “builted the Altar of the Lord God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God.” (Ezra 3:1,2) They also “kept the feast of tabernacles as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required.”—Ezra 3:4

“But the foundation of the Temple of the Lord was not yet laid,” although much had been contributed for this purpose. (Ezra 3:5-7) It was in the second year after the return from captivity that Zerubbabel, with the assistance of Jeshua and “the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites” and all they that came out of captivity unto Jerusalem “ap-

pointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the Lord.”—Ezra 3:8

“And when the builders laid the foundation of the Temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the Lord, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.” (vs. 10) It was a time of great rejoicing, although on the part of the original captives who remembered the former Temple, there was a heart pang and they “wept with a loud voice; . . . [but others] shouted aloud for joy.”—vss. 12, 13

Opposition

“When the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the Temple unto the Lord God of Israel; then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do.” (ch. 4:1, 2) Zerubbabel recognized this as a ruse to provide an opportunity to sabotage the work; so, together with the other leaders of the people, he said to them, “Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God.”—vs. 3

Their hypocritical offer of help rejected, “the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building.” They hired lawyers to seek legal means of interfering with the work. Finally, after the death of Cyrus, they sent a message to King Ahasuerus, accusing the Israelites of wrongdoing in building the Temple. Still later a letter was sent to King Artaxerxes, explaining that the Jews were rebuilding the “rebellious and the bad city,” and demanding that a search be made “in the book of the records of thy fathers” for the purpose of proving that Jerusalem had been a rebellious city.—ch. 4:6-16

Actually, the Israelites had not at this time started to build the walls of the city. It was the Temple that was being rebuilt. But these shrewd enemies of God’s people led the king to believe that it was the city and its walls that were being built. Naturally the “records” of the “fathers” would prove that

the Israelites had never been too cooperative with their heathen neighbors, so the reply came back from the king that the work of building was to cease. And it was stopped.
—vss. 17-24

God's Prophets Speak

Years passed with no further work being done to rebuild the Temple. Then the Lord raised up two prophets—Haggai and Zechariah—and through them “stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua, the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God.”—Hag. 1:14

Just as before, however, the enemies of Israel endeavored to hinder the work. But by now Zerubbabel and the people were more determined than in the beginning. Their zeal for the Lord and their courage to do his bidding strengthened them to defy their enemies. Asked by whose authority they were resuming the building of the Temple, they replied that it was by the authority of their God. Added to this was the information that, years before, a decree had been issued by King Cyrus that the Temple should be built.—Ezra 5:3-16

Again a letter was sent to the king of Persia, the overlord of Palestine, explaining the situation, and asking that a search be made to discover whether or not such a decree had been issued by Cyrus. Darius was now king of the empire which overthrew and succeeded Babylon, not, however, the Darius who became king when Babylon first fell and who exalted Daniel to such a high position in his government.

The search of the records was made, and Cyrus's decree was found. Darius was governed by it and sent back word: “Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place.” (Ezra 6:7) Besides, Darius commanded that his non-Jewish representatives in Palestine should use “the

king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river," to help pay the expenses of building the Temple. Darius also commanded that "young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven," and also "wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem," be supplied "day by day without fail: that they may offer sacrifices of sweet savors unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons."—vss. 8-10

As a result of this favorable decree from Darius to the "elders of the Jews" and "the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo," "they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king."—vss. 14, 15

There was great rejoicing when the Temple was finally completed, and it was dedicated with a great deal of ceremony. Haggai, one of the prophets used by the Lord to stir up the spirit of Zerubbabel to resume the work of rebuilding the Temple, also prophesied concerning a still greater temple. We read: "For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts."—Hag. 2:6, 7

In Hebrews 12:26, 27, Paul quotes from Haggai 2:6 and applies it to the "great time of trouble" which prepares the world for the Messiah's kingdom. The "house," therefore, which Haggai said the Lord would fill with his glory, is the antitypical temple of God—Christ and his church in glory, the spiritual phase of the kingdom.

Ezra the Scribe

With the building of the Temple completed, no more mention is made of Zerubbabel. Instead, attention is focused

on Ezra. This was in the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia—the second king by this name. By way of introduction the record reads: “This Ezra went up from Babylon: and he was a ready scribe in the Law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him.”—ch. 7:6

With Ezra on this journey to Jerusalem from Babylon were “some of the children of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims.” (vs. 7) Nethinims were men who assisted the Levites in their more laborious tasks.

We are told that “Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.” (vs. 10) He went to Jerusalem with the authority and full support of King Artaxerxes. The king granted liberty to as many of the Israelites remaining in Babylon as desired to go with Ezra. He also supplied silver and gold to purchase “bullocks, rams, lambs” to be offered upon the Altar in the newly constructed Temple in Jerusalem.

But more money was provided by the king and his counselors than would be needed to get the sacrificial services of the Temple established, and Ezra was told that the additional funds could be used in whatever way might seem good to him and to his brethren. (vss. 16-18) Vessels were also provided for the Temple services, “And whatsoever more shall be needful for the house of thy God, which thou shalt have occasion to bestow, bestow it out of the king's treasure house,” the king commanded.—vs. 20

Seemingly, Cyrus, Darius, and now Artaxerxes, were not entirely unselfish in their generosity toward the Lord's people. They had been keen observers of events and had learned that the God of Israel was to be respected, that he had power to either prosper or thwart the plans of any or all nations on earth as he might choose. Verse 23 reveals Artaxerxes' reasoning in the matter. It reads: “Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for

the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?"

The king's further instructions to Ezra were: "And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not." (vs. 25) Artaxerxes also commanded concerning any who would not obey the laws of the God of heaven as administered by Ezra, that judgment be "executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment."—vss. 25, 26

Ezra greatly appreciated the cooperation of the king and gave credit to his God for it, saying: "Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart. . . . And I was strengthened as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me."—vss. 27, 28

Ezra was indeed a faithful servant of the Lord, courageous in doing that which he recognized to be right. A problem confronted him in connection with the journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. There was a large company of them, and they would attract the attention of unfriendly people in the country through which they passed and would be the easy prey of those who "lay in wait by the way."—ch. 8:31

Ezra said: "I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him." (vs. 22) Ezra had testified boldly to the king as to the ability of God to care for his own, and now it would seem inconsistent to ask for soldiers to protect them.

Ezra and his company carried much silver and gold with them, and this made the journey even more dangerous. But he arranged a day of fasting and prayer before they started.

Then, placing the treasures in the custody of twelve priests and their brethren, he said unto them: "Ye are holy unto the Lord; the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering unto the Lord God of your fathers. Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the Lord."—vss. 28, 29

Ezra's faith and courage were rewarded by the Lord, and the company got through to Jerusalem unharmed, with their treasures intact. Then followed the offering of sacrifices and the delivering of "the king's commissions unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors on this side the river: and they furthered the people, and the house of God."—vss. 33-36

Ezra proved to be a courageous reformer in Israel. During the years that followed Cyrus's decree authorizing the return of the Israelites to Palestine, many of those who did return had intermarried with non-Hebrew people of the land. This was contrary to the Law of God, and Ezra knew that as long as this condition existed the Lord's blessing would not be upon them as richly as would otherwise be the case. Ezra took this matter very seriously to heart, and in chapter 9, verses 5-15, we find his eloquent prayer of confession and appeal to the Lord for guidance and blessing in righting this wrong. Chapter 10 records the action taken by Ezra and reveals the effectiveness of his work.

Nehemiah

Ezra's faithful service to his God comes again into the narrative in association with another stalwart in Israel—Nehemiah. Nehemiah was a cupbearer in the court of Artaxerxes, and when we first learn of him he had not yet gone to Palestine. He was residing in the winter palace of the kings of Persia in Shushan.

Hanani, one of his brethren, together with other men of Judah, returned from Jerusalem and visited Nehemiah. From

them he learned of the deplorable state of his people in Judea, the "great affliction" through which they were passing, and that the walls of Jerusalem were still broken down, not having been rebuilt since their destruction when the nation had been taken into captivity in Babylon. When Nehemiah learned this he "wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven." (Neh. 1: 1-4) Nehemiah's prayer was one in which he confessed the sins of Israel and pleaded for the prosperity of his people, based not upon merit but upon divine mercy.— 1:4-11

Nehemiah decided that he would, if possible, secure the king's cooperation in a proposed visit to Judea on behalf of God's people. He said to the king: "Let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah: and a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into." Nehemiah testifies that "the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me."—ch. 2:1-8

The story of Nehemiah's success, against great odds, in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem is well known to most students of the Bible. It is recorded for the most part in chapters three and four of the book which bears his name. Israel's enemies sought to hinder the work, as they did the rebuilding of the Temple. First, they hypocritically offered cooperation. Nehemiah sensed their insincerity and, instead of leaving his work to interview them, sent word, saying: "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"—ch. 6:3

Then these enemies endeavored to frighten Nehemiah with a story that the king had been informed that the Israelites were planning a rebellion and would make Nehemiah king. Nehemiah knew that this also was merely a trick and told them so. But the impact of these efforts was discouraging.

Nehemiah said: "They all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands." The success of this great man was his utter dependence upon God.

His Work As Governor

Nehemiah was not only a great builder, but, being appointed by the king to be governor of Judea, he ruled wisely and with equity. This is shown particularly in chapter five. It seems that the Israelites themselves were oppressing one another as opportunity afforded. Nehemiah was angry over this. He consulted with "himself," the narrative states, and then "rebuked the nobles and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother."—vs. 7

He instituted a reform which did away with this evil, calling attention to his own example, in that as governor he had not accepted the remuneration that ordinarily went with that office. He realized that he would be taking money which really belonged to his brethren, for his salary would not be sent from Persia but would be from funds raised by taxation in Judea. Furthermore, at his own table he fed "an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers," besides those who came to Judea "from among the heathen." (vs. 17) These sidelights reveal the true character of Nehemiah.

The Law Restored

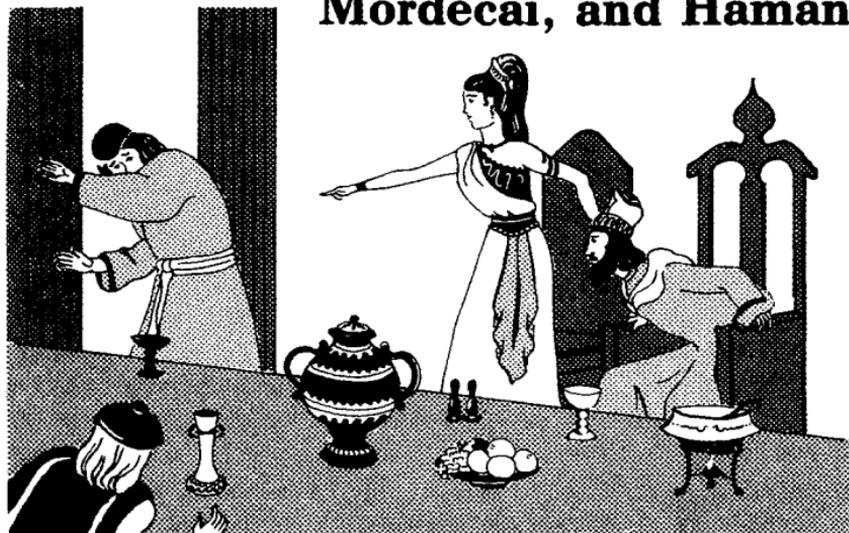
After the walls of Jerusalem had been rebuilt, Nehemiah had the inhabitants registered. After this, Ezra enters into the narrative again. He and Nehemiah and the Levites called for an assembly of the Hebrews and read the Law of God to them. "And Nehemiah, . . . and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law."—ch. 8:9

Still later than this, and evidently also under direction of Nehemiah, a group of the leaders in Israel drew up a special

covenant outlining various obligations to the Lord. The points mentioned in this covenant were not new, being included in the Law Covenant mediated by Moses. Perhaps the makers of this covenant concluded that these points called for special emphasis. Nehemiah was the first signer of the auxiliary covenant, and tradition has it that the signers as a group formed the basis for what later developed into the Jewish Sanhedrin.—chs. 9, 10

Nehemiah's last work of reformation was a cleansing of the Temple from occupation by non-Jews and by priests who had married heathen wives, and also seeing to it that the services of the Temple were properly conducted. There was in Judea also a habitual pollution of the Sabbath, and this, too, was corrected by Nehemiah. Through all his faithful service Nehemiah sought nothing for himself except the favor and blessing of the Lord. In connection with several of his courageous acts he uttered a simple prayer to his God. It appears in the last verse of his book—"Remember me, O my God, for good."

Queen Esther, King Ahasuerus, Mordecai, and Haman



THE events related in the Book of Esther occurred subsequent to the decree of King Cyrus which gave the Hebrew captives in the Medo-Persian kingdom the privilege of returning to their own land of Palestine. Close to fifty thousand took advantage of this provision of liberty, but other thousands did not. These considered it to their advantage to remain in the country to which they had been exiled.

The background of the story, in which Esther is the chief personality, is outlined in the first chapter of the book. In this chapter we are informed of the fabulous wealth of King Ahasuerus and of a sumptuous feast which he made for the leading families of the city and provinces. These were the power and glory of Media and Persia. Following was another feast for seven days, for all the people of the palace.

In verses 10 and 11 we are told of the natural result of such unrestrained feasting and drinking; for on the final days,

when the kings and the nobles were partially intoxicated, they acted very foolishly. The king sent for the queen (Vashti) to come before the nobles and exhibit her beauty. The queen refused to make a spectacle of herself in this manner before the crowd. The king's wrath was inflamed, and together with his lords, he decided that Vashti should be deposed and another chosen in her place. So the great feast ended in folly and trouble for the king's household.

Chapter two relates the method used by the king for a new queen to be selected. According to Herodotus there were seven Persian families of the first rank of nobles, and the king usually chose his wives from among these. But this time, and in the Lord's providence, Esther was chosen. Esther was a cousin of Mordecai, "a Benjamite, who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away." —vss. 5,6

Esther's father and mother had died, and her cousin Mordecai "took her for his own daughter." "The maid was fair and beautiful," the record states. (vs. 7) Among all the virgins who were brought before Ahasuerus to select a new queen, Esther was the one chosen. "Then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast; and he made a release to the provinces, and gave gifts, according to the state of the king."—vs. 18

Esther, acting on the advice of her cousin, had not revealed to the king that she was related to Mordecai and was therefore a Jewess. Soon, and doubtless also in the providences of the Lord, Mordecai learned of a plot against the king's life. He informed Esther about it, and she in turn reported it to the king in Mordecai's name. This placed Mordecai in high standing with the king.—vss. 21-23

Haman

Chapter three unfolds another facet of this remarkable story. It tells of one of the king's servants named Haman and

how the king promoted him "above all the princes that were with him." His exaltation was the preparation by Satan of a plan to destroy the Jewish people. Ahasuerus commanded that all his servants should bow down to Haman, "but Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence."—vs. 2

"Then the king's servants, which were in the king's gate, said unto Mordecai, Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?" (vs. 3) In replying to this question, Mordecai said that he was a Jew, probably explaining that it would be contrary to his religion to bow down to any man, especially a Gentile.

When this information was given to Haman, an insane madness seized him, and he planned not merely to punish Mordecai but to destroy all the remnants of the Jewish nation still in the land. Haman reported the circumstances to the king in such a way as to make the Jews seem an utterly pernicious, worthless, and dangerous people. (vs. 8) The falsehoods told to the king were much like those reported against the Jews by the people of Samaria in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.—Ezra 4:11-16

Haman asked the king for a decree authorizing, at a time appointed, the destruction of all the Jews in the land, offering to pay into the king's treasury ten thousand talents of silver, probably from the booty expected to result from the slaughter. (vs. 9) The king consented and "took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman" to be used in signing the many copies of the decree that would need to be dispatched throughout the various provinces of the realm. (vss. 10-15) The king's ring had attached to it the royal seal, which carried the full authority of the empire behind it. Additionally, he granted Haman all the property of the Jewish families executed. In the East, confiscation usually follows execution. The lives of the whole Jewish people were given into his hands.

At this point in the story it would seem as though Satan had triumphed, that the Jews would certainly be destroyed. But

God was watching over them. The strange chain of circumstances by which they were delivered from this plot is one of the most interesting and astonishing accounts in human history. Chapter four reveals that when Mordecai received word of Haman's plot against him and his people, he "rent his clothes, put on sackcloth with ashes," and went out into the city streets with a great and bitter cry.—vs. 1

Mordecai even came before the king's gateway to the palace, although none could enter the palace clothed with sackcloth. Indirectly, the mourning and wailing of Mordecai was reported to Esther. She demanded to know the reason for this untoward behavior. The chamberlain Hatach, had to go out into the city streets to meet Mordecai, who laid the matter before him, showing him a copy of the decree. He asked Hatach to show the decree to Esther and urge her to make supplication to the king to release the Jews from such a doom.—vss. 5-9

But here arose a difficulty which apparently made it impossible for Esther to present a petition to the king. The law was that none could enter into the king's presence, in the inner court of the palace, without the king's invitation. The penalty for disobeying this law was death. The only exceptions were those to whom the king would hold out the golden sceptre to signify that the caller could come in to present his petition. Esther stated this rule to Mordecai, explaining that she had not been called by the king for thirty days, which apparently indicated to her that for the time being she was not standing very high in his favor. The situation seemed desperate.

When Esther's reply reached Mordecai, he realized the seriousness of the situation but felt sure from the prophecies that God would not allow his people to be destroyed. So he sent word to Esther that if she was not willing to risk her life for her people, then deliverance would come to them from some other source. He warned, though, that in such an event she could not hope to escape, for she also came under the

decree of destruction. This message was very emphatic, referred to in the record as a "command."

Nevertheless, Mordecai had words of great encouragement for Esther. "Who knoweth," he said, "whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (vs. 14) The Lord's people in all ages have been greatly strengthened in the performance of their privileges and duties by the realization that the providences of God were definitely operating in their lives. Doubtless Esther and her cousin had both been watching for the meaning of her exaltation to be queen. Indeed, Mordecai had engineered it, and obviously for the very purpose of being in a position to make conditions throughout the realm more favorable for his people.

Now he sensed how wonderfully the Lord had blessed his efforts, and the suggestion to Esther that God was responsible for the position she occupied gave her the needed courage and determination to risk her life for the salvation of her people. She sent word to her cousin to have all the Jews of the city fast for her, and this doubtless included prayers on her behalf. She added: "I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish."—vss. 15, 16

On the third day from the beginning of the fast the time had come to act. Esther put on her royal apparel and stood in the inner court of the palace, opposite the entry of the throne room. The usual location of the throne in this room was such that from the raised position of the dais the king could look beyond the door into the court; so he saw Esther standing there waiting for an indication from him that she was welcome to enter his presence. What a tense moment it must have been for this beautiful queen!

Not only was Esther's own life at stake but the lives of her people as well, including Mordecai. Her faith in the watch-care of Israel's God over his people was rewarded, for the king extended his golden sceptre, indicating that Esther should come in to him to present any matter she might have

on her mind. She touched the top of his sceptre as she bowed into his presence, which was an acknowledgment of the king's authority, and a gesture of her own obedience and submission to him. The king was more gracious to her than she could have dared hope, for he offered to grant her anything she wished up to half of his kingdom.—ch. 5:1-3

It must have been strengthening to her faith to have the king make so generous an offer; for, after all, she had a very large and serious request to present to him. The destiny of thousands of her people who had been ordered slaughtered was involved, so she proceeded cautiously. She did not at once reveal to the king the nature of her request but, instead, invited the king to a banquet which she had prepared. She also requested that Haman be present at the banquet. She felt that the king would understand that this was but in preparation for her real petition, and he did.

King Ahasuerus gave instructions for Haman to make haste to appear with him at the feast which Esther had prepared. While partaking of the wine, the king pressed Esther to make known her request, assuring her again that he was prepared to grant her anything up to half of his kingdom. But Esther was still cautious and wise. Instead of divulging at once the favor she desired of the king, she asked that he and Haman join her the next day for another feast, promising that then she would make known her request.

Haman left the feast with a very exalted opinion of his own importance. He thought that surely he must be on the road to a very high position in the government since he was thus honored by the queen. "Pride goeth before destruction," the Scriptures tell us. (Prov. 16:18) Instead of wondering what could be the motive for such unusual honor being bestowed upon him—for so it seemed—Haman gloated over his experience, and especially in the fact that he had been invited to appear with the king at another feast on the following day.

But Haman's joy was somewhat lessened by the fact that as he left the king's palace and passed by Mordecai in the king's

gate, this obstinate Jew—as Haman had concluded him to be—refused once more to recognize him. (vs. 9) But for the moment Haman refrained from any outward act of violence. When he reached home he sent for his friends and his wife, Zeresh, and told them of the wonderful thing which had happened to him, rehearsing, as a reminder to them, the wonderful way he had previously been promoted by the king, gloating also over the fact of the further invitation for the next day.

But with it all he was depressed and frustrated and said, “All this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate.” (vs. 13) Quickly Haman’s wife, who seemingly would stop at nothing in order that her husband might be happy, suggested that a gallows be erected on which Mordecai could be hanged. And to this all his friends consented, as the account shows. Do this, she said to Haman, then “go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet.” In other words, why should a mere Jew stand in her husband’s way of complete satisfaction and joy? (vs. 14) This solution to his frustration appealed to Haman, and he gave orders to have the gallows erected.

Intervention

That night King Ahasuerus was unable to sleep. To pass the time away, and probably also with the thought of inducing sleep, he commanded that the book of records of the affairs of state be brought and read to him. In the reading he was reminded of the time when Mordecai had reported a treacherous plot against him and had thereby saved his life. He inquired: “What honor and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Then said the king’s servants that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him.”—ch. 6:1-3

Whether as a matter of custom or as a token of genuine appreciation, the king decided that some great honor should be bestowed upon Mordecai; and he inquired who was in the court, as though to choose one who would properly carry out

his instructions in this matter. Perhaps the king had even heard the approach of footsteps and knew that some high dignitary in his government must be in the court.

Ironically, it was Haman, seeking an audience with the king to get permission to hang Mordecai. But before Haman could voice his request, the king asked him what, in his opinion, should "be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor?" (vs. 6) Haman concluded that surely the king must be referring to him, so he outlined a procedure which he thought befitting to a personage so wonderful as to be the only guest to share two feasts prepared for the king by the beautiful queen, Esther. He said to the king:

"Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head: and let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honor, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honor."—vss. 8,9

Even while speaking these words, Haman was doubtless gloating over seeing himself thus being honored by the king, concluding also that one standing so high in the king's favor would have no difficulty in obtaining consent for the murder of Mordecai. But his selfish and murderous delight was shortlived; for hardly had he finished outlining the procedure when the king ordered him, as one "of the king's most noble princes," whom he had recommended to carry out the ceremony, naming Mordecai, the Jew, as the man whom he was thus delighted to honor.—vs. 10

Haman obeyed the instructions of the king (vs. 11), humiliating though it was to do so. Then he hastened home "mourning, and having his head covered." (vs. 12) He related to his wife and friends what had happened to him, but

this time they had no comforting words to offer or suggestions to make as to how he might counter the king's action and get rid of Mordecai. Instead, they said to him, and very truthfully: "If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him."—vs. 13

How right they were! Doubtless the background of this prediction was their knowledge of the manner in which God had protected his people throughout their captivity in Babylon and in connection with the return of many of them to Jerusalem. They probably knew of the experiences of the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace and of the way Daniel had been delivered from the mouths of the lions. From what they knew of the past they realized that the Jews had a power to protect them with which it was not wise to trifle.

Evidently Haman's wife and friends had overlooked this when they suggested that Mordecai be hanged. Or they might have reasoned that the Jews who did not return to Jerusalem when given the opportunity were no longer subject to the care of their God. But when they realized the very strange turn of events which compelled Haman to be the instrument in honoring Mordecai instead of hanging him, they sensed what was happening and advised Haman accordingly.

Swift Retribution

Even while Haman's wife and friends were warning him against making further attempts against Mordecai, the king's chamberlains came and hurried him away to attend "the banquet that Esther had prepared." (vs. 14) At this second banquet the king again asked Esther to present her petition. "Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favor in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request: for we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish."—ch. 7:1-4

The king had not expected a request of this sort. First of all, he had not known that his queen was a Jewess, and perhaps for the moment did not associate her petition with Haman's decree that all the Jews in the realm be slaughtered. But he loved the queen, and regardless of who was involved, he demanded further information. Then it was that Esther pointed out Haman as being the man responsible for the plight of her people. She said, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman."—vss. 5, 6

"Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen," and well he might be. (vs. 6) The king, too angry to reach at once a conclusion as to what should be done, left the room and went out into the palace garden to consider the matter. Two surprises had been presented to him by his queen, and all in a very few words. He learned that Esther was a Jewess and that his trusted Haman was a wicked plotter. No wonder he needed a little time to think things over.—vs. 7

Meanwhile Haman used these moments of escape from the king's wrath to petition Esther for his life. In his anxiety he even threw himself across the couch on which she was reclining, and there the king found him when he returned from the palace garden. Attributing an evil motive to this, the king said, "Will he force the queen also before me in the house?" At the king's bidding his servants quickly rushed in and covered Haman's face; and at the king's command he was hanged on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai.—vss. 8-10

Now at the time there was no doubt in the mind of any Jew who knew the circumstances, that Esther had "come to the kingdom for such a time as this." Nor did the king love her any less when learning that Esther was a Jewess. She now explained to the king her relationship to Mordecai, and he was exalted to take the place of Haman in the government, while Esther was given Haman's house, which she turned over to Mordecai.—ch. 8:1, 2

But the threat against the Jews of the realm had not been fully set aside. The law of the Medes and Persians was “that no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed.” (Dan. 6:15) King Ahasuerus had issued the decree calling for the slaughter of the Jews, and it could not be changed. The best that he could do under the circumstances was to authorize his new prime minister, Mordecai, to issue in his name any sort of counter decree that might seem best to deal with the situation.

Acting upon this, Mordecai dictated a decree to the king's scribes, authorizing the Jews to make suitable preparations and, when the day of slaughter mentioned in the former decree arrived, to defend themselves. With two decrees in force, the result naturally was that only those who really hated the Jews would act on the former, while all others in the realm would either remain neutral or else assist the Jews.

The day for the attack had been set far enough in advance to permit a knowledge of the decree to reach every province in the realm, and while the counter decree was issued some two months later, there was still sufficient time for it also to be dispatched to every corner of the empire. When the fatal time arrived, there was a mild sort of civil war, in which the enemies of the Jews suffered most. But it was soon over, and the vast majority of Esther's people were saved.— chapters 8 and 9

The Jews still commemorate this great victory over their enemies by the “Feast of Purim,” from the word “pur” meaning lots—from the fact that lots were cast by Haman and his friends to set the date for their planned slaughter of the Jews. Since it was turned into a day of deliverance, the Jews properly continue to commemorate the event with feasting and rejoicing.

Chapter 23

Naomi, Ruth and Boaz



THE last two verses of the Book of Ruth read, "Salmon begat Boaz, and Boaz begat Obed, and Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David." It was David whom the Lord chose as the one through whose line the Messiah would come, and one of the chief purposes of the Book of Ruth was to enlarge on the overruling providences of God in continuing the genealogical chain that connects David with the royal line of Judah. Jacob had prophesied, "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."—Gen. 49:10

Instead of simply informing us that Boaz married a Moabitess woman, the Lord caused this fact to be embellished in one of the most beautiful stories of all time. The opening verse of the book locates the time of the story during the period of the judges. This period began a short time after the death of Joshua and continued to Samuel, who served as the last of

Israel's judges. In Acts 13:20 we are informed that this was a period of four hundred and fifty years.

During this time there was a famine in the land of Israel, and an Israelite by the name of Elimelech decided that he would move to the land of Moab, where he supposed conditions were more favorable. He took with him his wife, Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. Soon thereafter Elimelech died, leaving Naomi a widow. Then her two sons married women of Moab. The name of one was Orpah and the name of the other, Ruth.

But after ten years these two sons of Elimelech also died. Naomi then had no one in Moab of her own kin, and hearing that conditions were now better in the land of Israel, she decided to return to her home country. And here is where the beauty of the story begins. Her daughters-in-law were evidently living with her at the time, and as she started on the return journey to Palestine they accompanied her.

But Naomi considered the matter and concluded that it would be better if Orpah and Ruth remained in Moab. She said to her two daughters-in-law: "Go, return each to her mother's house: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept."
—ch. 1:8,9

At first both the young women refused to heed Naomi's advice, saying to her, "Surely we will return with thee unto thy people." (vs. 10) But Naomi was quite insistent, and finally Orpah did decide to return to Moab and to her own people. But not Ruth. She said to Naomi: "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."
—vss. 16,17

Touched with this expression of love and devotion on the part of Ruth, Naomi no longer insisted that she return to her own people. "So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?"—ch. 1:19

Bethlehem was evidently but a village at that time, with essentially the entire population being acquainted with one another. And, although many years had passed since Elimelech and Naomi had left to go to the land of Moab, she was remembered when she returned, and apparently a hearty welcome was extended to her. But Naomi, while glad to be back among her own people, was nevertheless sad when she reflected upon what had happened in her life since she had left.

She said to the people of Bethlehem: "Call me not Naomi [meaning pleasant], call me Mara [meaning bitter]: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." (vss. 20, 21) There is here an acknowledgment of a wrong course which had been taken by Naomi and her husband in leaving the land of Israel to go into a strange land simply because they thought it would be economically better for them. God had given the Holy Land to his people, and he had promised to bless them in that land. To leave this provision and leave the Lord's people was disregarding the Lord's promises, due, probably, to a lack of faith in him.

Beginning of Harvest

Naomi and Ruth reached Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest. The famine had long ceased, and the land evidently was abundantly yielding its increase. The harvesters were already at work, and apparently the only immediate opportunity of gaining a livelihood was for Ruth to become a gleaner in one of the harvest fields. Leviticus 19:9 sets forth the Lord's law governing the privilege of the

gleaners. It was a special provision for the poor. The "corners" of the fields were to be left unreaped, and the grain was not to be too carefully gathered from the remainder of the fields.

The gleaners did not wait until the harvest was finished before beginning their work. Rather, they worked at the same time as the regular reapers. This is rather an important illustration of the "harvesting" of the Lord's "wheat" at the end of the age, as foretold in Jesus' Parable of the Wheat and the Tares. Although the parable says nothing about "gleaning" in connection with this work of "harvest," should we wish to include this detail we would have to consider it as representing small opportunities enjoyed by some during the time of harvest.

There was no question about Ruth finding an opportunity to glean. The law of God guaranteed her this privilege. It was merely a question of which field she would select in which to glean. Chapter 2, verse 3, explains that Ruth just happened to select a field which was owned by a kinsman of Naomi's husband. His name was Boaz, who is described as "a mighty man of wealth." (vs.1) It might have seemed to Ruth that she just happened to select the field of this wealthy kinsman of her mother-in-law; but, unknown to her, the Lord's providences were at work, for his promises concerning the lineage of the tribe of Judah and the house of David were at stake.

The fact that this kinsman of her husband had become a mighty man of wealth doubtless helped to impress upon Naomi the mistake that was made in going to Moab. She returned poor, while the kinsman who remained had become wealthy. Boaz was unmarried, although by now he would not have been a young man.

Ruth went to work in the field of Boaz. Soon he came also to the field, evidently just to see how the work was progressing. He noticed Ruth and realized that she was a stranger. He asked the foreman of the reapers, "Whose damsel is this?"

(ch. 2, vs. 5) “The servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab.”—vs. 6

Boaz was at once interested and sympathetic. He had heard about the Moabitish damsel who had returned to Bethlehem with Naomi, his kinsman’s widow, but this was the first time he had seen her. He appreciated her industrious effort to secure a living for Naomi and herself, but especially for Naomi, who was no longer a young woman. (ch. 1:12) Ruth’s devotion to her mother-in-law was indeed commendable.

Boaz spoke to Ruth, saying, “Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens.” (ch. 2:8) He continued, “Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them.” To further reassure her, Boaz said, “Have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn.”—vs. 9

Ruth was deeply moved by this gesture of interest and friendship by Boaz, for after all she was not an Israelite, but a Moabitess, at least by birth. She had, however, by profession, cast her lot in with the Israelites when she said to Naomi, “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.” These were not mere words but a true expression of her heart; and now Israel’s God was blessing her through Boaz, and she was deeply grateful, saying to him, “Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?”—vs. 10

Boaz’s answer was direct and to the point. It reveals that while this was the first time he had seen Ruth, he had heard much about her that was favorable. He said, “It hath fully been showed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come among a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given

thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.”—vss. 11, 12

Here the true character of Boaz is revealed. He realized that Ruth had made a great sacrifice in leaving her own people and her own country in order to remain with Naomi and minister to her needs. Ruth loved Naomi, and it is reasonable to assume that one of the things that had inspired this love was the manner in which Naomi’s religion influenced her life. Ruth could see that devotion to Israel’s God had wrought a beautiful character, which induced her devotion and love. It was not in ignorance that Ruth had said to Naomi, “Thy God shall be my God.”

Boaz understood these circumstances. He knew that now, in favoring Ruth, he was favoring one who was at heart a true Israelite, regardless of where she might have been born. He knew that Israel’s God poured out his blessing upon those who are at heart devoted to him and to his people, so he did not hesitate to do the same. Ruth had come to trust under the “wings” of Jehovah, and he wanted her to be assured that she had made no mistake in so doing.

The friendliness of Boaz toward Ruth was not merely in words. He invited her to eat with the reapers, and he personally passed her the “parched corn,” which apparently was the substantial part of the meal. Then he instructed his reapers to allow Ruth to glean “even among the sheaves, and reproach her not.” This was a favor not ordinarily granted to gleaners. He also instructed them to drop some of the grain purposely so she would be sure to get a good supply. And she did. That night she returned to Naomi, taking with her an “ephah of barley.” We cannot be certain just how large a quantity this was. In Leviticus 6:20 we find instructions concerning a meat offering that was to consist of one-tenth of an “ephah.” This one-tenth of an “ephah” was sufficient to make a cake for a morning and evening sacrifice. So ten times this much would seem to be a generous portion of barley to glean in one day. But this was the way Boaz wanted it to be.

Naomi Pleased

Naomi had a good meal that evening, and after it was over she asked Ruth, "Where hast thou gleaned today?" Ruth told her, and then Naomi said, "Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen," or, as stated in the margin, "one that hath right to redeem." Then Naomi counseled Ruth to follow the instructions of Boaz and continue gleaning in his field, remaining close to his maidens. This she did and was faithful in her gleaning work until the full end of both the barley and wheat harvest, meanwhile continuing to live with her mother-in-law.

Now, the harvest over, Naomi concluded that it was time for her to make some suggestions concerning further procedure. She was acquainted with the Jewish law with respect to the redemption of property by a near kinsman and also the provision of the law that a childless widow should be taken to wife by a near kinsman. Here, she correctly concluded, was a situation in which these provisions could be carried out to the advantage of all concerned.

As we have noted, Boaz was evidently no longer a young man. He highly esteemed Ruth, appreciating her loyalty to Naomi and her purity of character. If he had thought of her at all from the standpoint of marriage, he had not so indicated. He perhaps concluded that Ruth, being still a comparatively young woman, would not be interested in such an old man. Naomi, however, made plans to change his mind.

She had evidently studied the habits of Boaz and knew that on a certain evening he would be winnowing barley on his threshing floor. She instructed Ruth to make proper preparation, including an anointing with oil—probably romantically perfumed—and go to the threshing floor, but to remain out of sight until Boaz had finished eating and drinking. "And she went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother-in-law bade her."—ch. 3, vs. 6

“And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn: and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down.” (vs. 7) His first sleep over about midnight, Boaz discovered that there was a woman lying at his feet. Naturally he was somewhat disconcerted, and he demanded, “Who art thou?” The answer came, “I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.” The marginal translation reads “one that hath right to redeem.”—vss. 8,9

Boaz at once understood the implications of this reply; namely, that Ruth was saying she desired him to marry her and redeem the land which Naomi was offering for sale. The law of the Lord governing this matter is set forth in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. From Ezekiel 16:8, where the Lord makes use of this custom to illustrate his relationship to Israel, it becomes apparent that Ruth’s suggestion that Boaz spread his skirt over her, if acted upon, would be considered by her as a proposal of marriage.

Boaz was much pleased by this suggestion and was doubtless flattered. He said to Ruth: “Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter: for thou hast showed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followest not young men, whether poor or rich.” This statement is most revealing. Ruth had been kind to her mother-in-law in her old age, and besides, as Boaz indicates, had shown no interest in the young men of the community but was now offering herself to him, a man old enough to address her as “daughter,” to be his wife. All things considered, this displayed Ruth’s genuine interest in the welfare of the family into which she had married.

Boaz indicated at once his decision to act favorably upon Ruth’s request. But he was an honorable man, and he knew that there was a kinsman, as he said, “nearer than I.” He felt obligated to give him first opportunity. He asked Ruth to lie down until morning, promising that he would seek out the

nearer kinsman and give him the opportunity to redeem the inheritance. If he declined to do so, “then,” he said, “will I do the part of a kinsman to thee.”

Ruth returned to Naomi in the morning and told her about what had happened. Naomi had a good understanding of human nature. She said to Ruth, “Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man [Boaz] will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day.”— ch. 3:18

And Naomi was right. Boaz acted at once. He proved to all concerned, and in harmony with the arrangements set forth in Deuteronomy 25:5-10, that the nearer kinsman was not interested in the proposition; so he bought the land from Naomi and married Ruth. It is a beautiful and interesting story and, as we have said, supports what would otherwise be a weak link in an important genealogical line from which Jesus, the promised Messiah of Israel and the Savior of the world, was born.

God's Holy Prophets



“And He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you; whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:20,21

AMONG the very important people of the Bible are the holy prophets of the Old Testament. The majority of these servants inspired of God wrote books which bear their names, and these are often referred to as the “major” and “minor” prophets, this distinction being determined by the length of the books which they wrote. There are four major prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The minor prophets number twelve: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

These, however, are not the only “holy prophets” of the Old Testament. There are five others: Moses, Samuel, Job, Solomon, and David. In the New Testament, Jude speaks also of Enoch, “the seventh from Adam,” as being a prophet. (Jude 14) We have already reviewed some of the experiences and characteristics of this latter group, so are now merely

identifying them as among those used by God as prophets, or seers, to foretell coming events in the outworking of his divine plan for the redemption and restoration of the sin-cursed and dying race. We have also previously become acquainted with Daniel, the fourth of the major prophets.

We know little of the major and minor prophets except what is revealed by their writings. Unlike Moses, Samuel, Solomon, and David, they were not used by the Lord as lawgivers or judges or kings, their niche in the divine arrangement being largely as writers of prophecies.

Isaiah

According to verse one of Isaiah's prophecy, he was the son of Amoz. The "vision" which enabled Isaiah to prophesy concerning "Judah and Jerusalem" came to him during the reign of four of Judah's kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. The immediate service of Isaiah, and of the other prophets, was on behalf of God's people with whom they were contemporary. But more important than this was the fact that under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit they foretold important coming events relating to the plan of God.

The Apostle Peter refers to this larger ministry of the prophets, saying that they foretold "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." (I Pet. 1:11) In the 53rd chapter of Isaiah's prophecy we have a notable example of this. He describes the suffering and death of Jesus, saying that he would be "brought as a lamb to the slaughter." Then, in conclusion, he says of Jesus that he would be given "a portion with the Great." This is a prophecy of Jesus' high exaltation to the right hand of the throne of God.—vss. 7-12; Rev. 3:21; Heb. 8:1; 12:2

In our text, in which Peter refers to all God's holy prophets since the world began, he says that they also prophesied concerning "the times of restitution of all things" which would follow the second coming of Christ. The prophecies pertaining to Christ's suffering apply to his first advent, while those which describe the work of "restitution" refer to

his second presence. Thus the work of both advents was foretold by the “holy prophets” of God.

Isaiah wrote eloquently concerning “the times of restitution.” In chapter 33, verse 24, he says concerning that future time that the inhabitants “shall not say, I am sick.” In chapter 25, verses 6-9, he describes the work of Christ’s kingdom, which is the work of restitution, and says that then death will be swallowed up in victory and that the people will be glad and rejoice in the Lord’s salvation.

Jeremiah

The name Jeremiah means “Jehovah has appointed.” He began his service as a prophet during the reign of Josiah, king of Judah, and his ministry continued until the nation was overthrown in the reign of Zedekiah and the people taken captive to Babylon. Jeremiah was not taken to Babylon, however, but left with the few whose duty it was to be “vine-dressers” under the Babylonish government. Later, most of these fled to Egypt for their safety, taking Jeremiah with them; and it is believed that the prophet died in Egypt.

Jeremiah is known as the prophet of doom. This is because the Lord commissioned him to call attention to the sins of the nation and the calamities that would fall upon them because of their idolatries. This message was so condemnatory that Jeremiah for a time hesitated to declare it; but then, as he testified, the word of the Lord was in him as a fire shut up in his bones, “and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.”—ch. 20:9

Serving as a prophet during the declining years of the kingdom of Judah, when there was corruption within the nation and enemies without, he brought much suffering upon himself because of his ministry. During the closing scenes of Zedekiah’s reign, Jeremiah was charged by the princes with hindering their war efforts; the king gave them permission to do with the prophet what they desired, and they threw him into a miry prison pit to die. He was rescued from this

horrible place by an Ethiopian eunuch, Ebed-melech.
—ch. 38:6-13

When Jeremiah was first called by God to serve as a special prophet, he sensed the difficulties attached to such a mission and also realized his own weakness. He said, "Ah, Lord God, behold, I cannot speak; for I am a child." Then the Lord said unto him: "Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdom, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant."—ch. 1:6-10

Thus the Lord gave Jeremiah the loving assurance of help in every time of need; and in view of the commission given to him, the prophet was many times in need of divine protection. His commission over the nations and the kingdoms to "root out, and to pull down, and to destroy," and later to "build, and to plant," should not be construed to mean that he would literally destroy and rebuild nations. The thought is, rather, that he was commissioned to utter prophecies covering first a work of destruction and then a time of restoration.

Jeremiah fulfilled this commission with respect to both the nation of Israel and the world of mankind as a whole. He prophesied the calamities which, even in his own lifetime, came upon his own people when Zedekiah was overthrown and the nation taken captive to Babylon. He foretold that this captivity would last for seventy years and that then the Gentile nations responsible for it would be punished.—Jer. 25:8-14

In chapter 30, verses 18 and 19, Jeremiah prophesied that the city of Jerusalem, desolated by Israel's enemies when the nation was taken into captivity, would be rebuilt, and that out

from this place there would again “proceed thanksgiving and the voices of them that make merry.” Thus we see that Jeremiah forecast the destruction of Judah and the regathering and rebuilding which would follow the captivity.

But Jeremiah’s prophecy takes on a much wider scope than this when viewed in the light of the divine plan. In chapter 16, verse 13, he forecasts a much greater scattering of the people than was true in connection with the Babylonian captivity. He declares that they would be “cast . . . into a land that ye know not, neither ye nor your fathers; and there shall ye serve other gods day and night; where I will not show you favor.”

From this later and greater captivity, Jeremiah foretold they were also to be delivered. Continuing in this same chapter, Jeremiah declares that the Lord would restore his people from all the lands whither he had driven them and would “bring them again into their land.”—ch. 16:14-17

In chapter 31:31-34 Jeremiah, speaking again for the Lord, tells of a time when a New Covenant would be made “with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah,” a covenant in which the law of God would be written in the people’s hearts and in their “inward parts.” This describes a restoration of at-one-ment between God and man and is one of the promises of restitution which Peter declared had been spoken by the mouth of all God’s holy prophets. “In those days” of restitution, declares Jeremiah, “they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children’s teeth are set on edge; but everyone shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.” (ch. 31:29,30) Father Adam ate the “sour grape” of sin, and all his progeny have suffered death as a result. But in the times of restitution mankind will be released from Adamic condemnation, and the only ones who will die then will be those who, individually, and willfully, disobey the divine law.

Ezekiel

The Prophet Ezekiel, according to his own testimony, was a

priest, and the son of Buzi. He was taken captive to Babylon prior to the full overthrow of the Jewish nation, and it was in Babylon that the word of the Lord came to him and he wrote his prophecy. (ch. 1:1-3) Little more than this is known of the personal life of Ezekiel. Historians say that he was distinguished by his stern and inflexible energy of will and character.

Since he was one of the holy prophets, we would expect to find in his prophecy some reference to the times of restitution of all things, and in this we are not disappointed. In chapters 37 through 39 of his book, we find a remarkable prophecy of the restoration of Israel, picturing the desolated and scattered condition of the nation as a "valley of dry bones," which, the Lord explains, "are the whole house of Israel."—ch. 37:11

These "bones" are seen to come together, flesh and skin are formed on them, and finally life is given. This latter, we learn, describes the result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the restored Israelites, the result of which will be the opening of their eyes to know the Lord. The final result of this will be that the Lord will not hide his face from them any more. One of the mighty acts of God which will contribute to removing Israel's blindness will be his intervention on their behalf when attacked by aggressor hordes from the "north" in the final phase of the great time of trouble.

In the 16th chapter of Ezekiel's prophecy, verses 44-63, there is another remarkable promise of restitution involving the resurrection of the dead—the Israelites and the heathen as well. Verses 60 to 63 reveal that after these are made free from the captivity of death they will be brought into covenant relationship with God.

Hosea

In the opening verse of his prophecy Hosea identifies himself as the son of Beerai and informs us that the word of the Lord came to him during the "days of Uzziah, Jotham,

Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.”

Much of Hosea’s prophecy is in the nature of a warning against Israel and Judah because of the sinful, idolatrous tendencies of both these segments of the Jewish nation. Hosea calls upon the people to repent and return to Jehovah, their God, and be at peace with him. But they did not repent and, as we know, the kingdoms of both Israel and Judah were destroyed.

Like the other holy prophets, Hosea did not fail to speak of the times of restitution. In chapter 13, verse 14, he prophesies the destruction of death and of the grave, **sheol**, the hell of the Old Testament. This he explains will be brought about by the Lord through the provision of a “ransom.” This great truth is enlarged upon in the New Testament, the final version of it being in Revelation 21:4, where we are told that “there shall be no more death.”

Joel

Joel, the second of the twelve minor prophets, was the son of Pethuel. Beyond this nothing is known as to the personal history of Joel. (ch. 1:1) Nor does Joel himself indicate when he served as prophet, but it seems reasonably certain that it was during the period of the kings. Some have conjectured that it was probably during the reign of Joash, king of Judah.

Without being specific in detail, Joel prophesied that calamities would come upon the nation during “the day of the Lord.” While in some respects these predictions were fulfilled upon the nation in connection with its overthrow and Babylonian captivity, it seems clear that there is a larger fulfillment during the “day of the Lord” (Jehovah) at this end of the Gospel Age, when Christ is present prior to the establishment of his kingdom.

In Matthew 24:29 Jesus quotes from Joel 2:10, indicating the fulfillment to be still future from his day. From this and other quotations from the prophecy, which are found in the

New Testament, we know that Joel wrote of events much more momentous than those which occurred when the nation was overthrown and taken captive to Babylon in 606 B.C.

Chapter 2, verses 28-30, is quoted by Apostle Peter in his pentecostal sermon. (Acts 2:16-19) Peter applies it to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which occurred at the time. It was at Pentecost that the Lord poured out his Spirit upon his "servants and handmaids." But "after," that is, during the Millennial Age, he will pour out his Spirit upon "all flesh." Thus did Joel foretell another aspect of the glorious work of restitution.

Amos

Amos was a native of Tekoa, in Judah, which was about six miles south of Bethlehem. Seemingly he traveled north into the territory of the ten-tribe kingdom and there exercised his ministry. Amos also foretold the dire calamities that would come upon the nation because of its sin, and he suffered persecution because of his faithfulness.—ch. 7:10-17

Through Amos the Lord said to Israel, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." Then the question is raised, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (ch. 3:2,3) Here the reasoning is that, since the Lord had made himself exclusively the God of Israel, he expected undivided loyalty from his people. If they could not thus worship and serve him, they could not continue to walk with him.

In verses 11-15 of the last chapter, Amos forecasts the regathering of Israel, at the end of the present age, and the building again of the "tabernacle of David that is fallen." In Acts 15:13-18, this prophecy is quoted and its complete fulfillment indicated to be at the second presence of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom, when the "residue of men" will have an opportunity to call upon the Lord and be blessed.

Obadiah

We know nothing of Obadiah as a person and can only conjecture as to the time he wrote his prophecy. It is a one-chapter prophecy, and in the 11th verse reference is made to the time when the people were carried away captive, and foreigners cast lots “upon Jerusalem.” This might indicate that Obadiah prophesied after the captivity in Babylon began and was himself one of the captives.

However, Obadiah, like all the other “holy prophets,” failed not to mention the times of restitution. He does this in the last verse of his prophecy, where he speaks of “saviors” who were to “come up on mount Zion” at a time when the “kingdom shall be the Lord’s.” This is clearly a reference to the thousand-year kingdom of Christ, when Jesus, the Savior, and his faithful footstep followers, will be reigning for the blessing and salvation of “all the families of the earth.”

Jonah

The Book of Jonah reveals that the ministry of this prophet was more particularly directed toward the people of Nineveh rather than to the Israelites. The Lord directed him to go to this great city and to “cry against it,” for, as the Lord said, “their wickedness is come up before me.”—ch. 1:2

But Jonah was not disposed to obey the Lord. Instead, he decided he would flee away from the Lord and go to Tarshish. He undertook to make this journey by ship, but a storm arose which threatened the safety of the ship. Those in charge of the vessel concluded that their difficulty was caused by the presence of Jonah, for he had told them that he was fleeing from his God. Upon his own recommendation he was cast into the sea, the “mariners” hoping that this would save their ship from further danger.

But Jonah was not drowned. Instead, he was swallowed by a “great fish,” and three days later he was cast up on the shore near the city of Nineveh, where the Lord had directed him to go. Now he was ready to fulfill his commission to “cry

against the city,” and he did so. His message included a prophecy that the city would be destroyed. As a result of this warning the Ninevites repented, and the Lord changed his arrangement for the destruction of their city.

Concerning this we read, “God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.” (ch. 3:10) This was fully in keeping with God’s methods of dealing in matters of this kind. For the Lord’s own explanation of the principle involved, see Jeremiah 18:1-10.

“But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.” (ch. 4:1) Jonah then told the Lord that he had feared this change would be made and that this was the reason he attempted to flee to Tarshish rather than deliver the message of condemnation against Nineveh. He said, “I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness.”—vs. 2

Then Jonah went outside of the city, where he “made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow.” The Lord then caused a gourd to grow up over the booth to shade it from the heat of the sun. Jonah was pleased with this. But “God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.” Again Jonah was displeased with the Lord and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.”—vss. 4-8

The Lord then drew a lesson for Jonah. He said: “Thou hast had pity on the gourd, . . . which came up in a night, and perished in a night. And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?”—vss. 10, 11

Jonah himself makes no direct reference to the restitution blessings during the Kingdom Age, but through his observance of the exercise of God’s mercy he witnessed the operation of a divine principle by which all mankind will be given an opportunity to repent, turn to the Lord, and be saved

from death. Thus the book which bears his name proclaims the prospect of salvation for a lost world.

Micah

Micah is the sixth in order of the minor prophets. Little is known of the circumstances of Micah's life. He gives the time of his service in the opening verse of his book as being "in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah." His prophecy, he states, is what "he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem."

He calls upon the people to "hearken" and to let the Lord be witness against them "from his holy temple." "For," continues Micah, "the Lord cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth." (vss. 2,3) The "high places" referred to were centers of idolatry, a sin from which the nation of Israel was seldom entirely free. While Micah's prophecy had a limited fulfillment in the destruction of the nation, it will have a wider fulfillment during the kingdom of Christ, when all mankind will learn to know and to serve the true God.

Micah's contribution to the great kingdom theme of restitution is principally in chapter 4, verses 1 to 4, where he assures us of the ultimate establishment of the Lord's kingdom—symbolized by a mountain—and says the people will flow unto it and obey its laws. This, he reveals, will result in the end of war and in economic security for all mankind, symbolized as dwelling under one's own vine and fig tree.

Nahum

Nothing is known for a certainty concerning Nahum, as a man. He speaks of himself as an Elkoshite, an evident reference to his birthplace; but there is much uncertainty among scholars as to just where this was, whether in Palestine or Assyria. Nahum describes his prophecy as "the burden of Nineveh," meaning the doom of that great city which was spared when Jonah testified against it. Verses 5-9 of the first chapter, while having a local setting in the destruction of Nineveh, are evidently designed by the Lord to

be descriptive of a more far-reaching “time of trouble” which results in the overthrow of this “present evil world.” This is the time of trouble foretold by Daniel, which results from the standing up of Michael. (Dan. 12:1) Its purpose is to destroy Satan’s empire and thus prepare the way for the establishment of Messiah’s kingdom. That kingdom will bring about the answer to every Christian’s prayer, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.” This will mean the complete restoration of all that was lost through original sin. And Nahum assures us that “affliction shall not rise up the second time.”—vs. 9

Habakkuk

Habakkuk is another of God’s “holy prophets” of whom we know almost nothing. He does not even give his father’s name or the place of his birth. The burden of his message is the sin and iniquity of his nation and how long the Lord would permit this evil situation to continue. Sensing that the Lord would use the Chaldeans to punish Israel, Habakkuk found this difficult to understand; for, after all, they were more wicked than his own people. He prays earnestly to the Lord for a better understanding of God’s viewpoints and ways, then says, “I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me.” —ch. 2:1

“And the Lord answered me and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.” (ch. 2:2-4) In Hebrews 10:35-39, this prophecy is quoted and applied to the time of Christ’s second presence. We know, then, that the “vision” here referred to applies to an understanding of the divine plan with which the Lord’s people would then be favored, an understanding which includes God’s reason for the permission of evil.

In chapter 2, verse 14, Habakkuk assures us that the time is coming when “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” This is, in part, Habakkuk’s contribution to the general theme of the prophets concerning the times of restitution of all things.

Zephaniah

Zephaniah is the ninth of the minor prophets. In the opening verse of his prophecy he traces his pedigree to his fourth ancestor, who he asserts was Hizkiah, believed by scholars to be the celebrated Hezekiah, one of the good kings of Judah. This, and the further information that he prophesied in the days of Josiah, another king of Judah, is about all we know of Zephaniah as a person.

Zephaniah foretold the dire calamity that would come upon Israel and Judah, and he expanded his prophecy to embrace the worldwide time of trouble that was eventually to come upon all nations. This he describes as the “fire” of God’s “jealousy,” which would devour, or destroy, all nations. He calls attention to restitution blessings that would follow the destruction of man’s social order, saying that then the Lord would “turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent.”—ch. 3:8,9

Haggai

Haggai, the tenth of the minor prophets, was the first to prophesy following the nation’s captivity in Babylon. While there is no definite information on the subject, it is generally believed that he was one of the captives who returned. The returned exiles had ceased in their work of building the Temple, and one of the main purposes of Haggai’s prophecy seems to have been to stir up zeal for resuming this work.—ch. 1:2-4

Chapter 2, verses 6 and 7, reads: “Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I

will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come." In Hebrews 12:26 this prophecy is quoted and applied to the time of Christ's second presence and the establishment of his kingdom. It is, therefore, Haggai's reference to the kingdom blessings of restitution.

Zechariah

Zechariah was contemporary with Haggai, and in his prophecy he cooperated with Haggai in stirring up the enthusiasm of the returned exiles to resume their work of rebuilding the Temple.

Zechariah's contribution to the kingdom theme of restitution is found particularly in the closing chapter of his book. He describes the "day" of Christ's kingdom as one during which the mists of superstition and darkness will be dispelled so that in the "evening it shall be light." "The Lord shall be king over all the earth," he assures us, and "in that day there shall be one Lord, and his name one."—ch. 14:6-9

Malachi

Malachi is the last of the Old Testament prophets. There is no certain knowledge of his personal history, although it is generally believed that he was born after the nation's captivity in Babylon. The exact date of his service as a prophet is not definitely known but is generally believed by scholars to be after the Temple had been rebuilt.

Like the other Old Testament writers, Malachi qualifies as one of God's holy prophets who foretold the coming times of restitution. In chapter 4, verse 2, he describes the life-giving blessings of Christ's kingdom, saying that "the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings." The "Sun of Righteousness" is Christ, the One referred to in chapter 3, verse 1, as "the Messenger of the covenant," that is, the New Covenant, under the terms of which Israel and the whole world will be restored to at-one-ment with God.

John the Forerunner



THROUGH Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, the Lord declared, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me." (Mal. 3:1) This prophecy is quoted in Mark 1:2 and applied to John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus. In Mark 1:3, John is identified as the one fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 40:3, which speaks of "the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." In John 1:28, the Apostle John applies this latter prophecy to John the Baptist.

The Lord's statement, "Behold, I will send my messenger," is significant, for John's birth was a direct result of the overruling providences of God. The account of this is found in Luke 1:5-25. The circumstances parallel to some extent the experience of Abraham and Sarah in connection with the birth of Isaac, in that Zacharias and Elizabeth, who became the parents of John, "both were now well stricken in years," and Elizabeth was "barren."

The miracles associated with the birth of John convinced Zacharias, his father, a priest in Israel, that momentous things in the plan of God were happening. This conclusion was confirmed when his wife's cousin, Mary, visited them and they learned of the angel Gabriel's announcement to her

that she was to be the mother of Jesus, who would be the promised King to sit on “the throne of his father David.” (Luke 1:32) Zacharias said concerning his son:

“Thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”—vss. 76-79

The only information the Bible furnishes concerning John from the time he was a baby until he began his ministry is contained in Luke 1:80. This text reads, “The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel.” It is safe to assume that during his maturing years in the desert he prepared himself for his coming ministry by self-discipline and communion with God. Desert life itself would call for courage and strength of character.

Matthew 3:1 reads, “In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea.” Verse 5 says that “then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan.” This indicates that John did not go from place to place in the conduct of his ministry but that the people went to him. When they did, they found a man with “raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.”—vs. 4

Jesus made a revealing observation concerning John’s desert ministry and his clothing. After John’s disciples departed, “Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet, for this is he, of whom it is written, Behold I send

My messenger before Thy face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee.”—Matt. 11:7-10

The miraculous circumstances associated with the birth of this “more than a prophet,” his manner of life, and the general expectation that some great one was about to appear caused many to be attracted to him. (Matt. 3:5) He called upon his hearers to repent, and those who did he immersed in water, as a symbol of their cleansing from sin.

John was outspoken in his ministry. Taking note of the Pharisees and Sadducees in his audience, he said to them, “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” Then he told them the only way they could escape from this wrath, saying, “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.”—Matt. 3:7,8

The “wrath to come” mentioned by John was not eternal torture in a fiery hell but the baptism of fire which was to come upon the nation of Israel because of the national rejection of their Messiah. This wrath fell upon the nation in A.D. 70-73, when Jerusalem was destroyed and the people scattered. Continuing his symbolic prophecy concerning the destruction of the nation, John said, “The axe is laid unto the root of the trees.”—vs. 10

Who Was John the Baptist?

“The Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem” to ask John, “Who art thou?” (John 1:19) He made it clear to these investigators that he was “not the Christ.” (vs. 20) Then they asked, “What then? Art thou Elias?” Again his answer was, “I am not.” Their final question was, “Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.”—vs. 21

The question asked John, “Art thou Elias?” was based on the prophecy of Malachi 4:5,6, which reads, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord; and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”

This prophecy describes a work of reformation such as John was conducting in Israel, and it was natural that he should be asked whether or not he considered himself to be this foretold Elijah.

Those who believe the false theory of reincarnation seize upon this prophecy to indicate that the Bible supports their theory, claiming that it suggests the return of the Prophet Elijah as another personality. But this is not the correct thought. The Prophet Elijah was a great reformer in Israel, and because of this his name is used in the prophecy to indicate the nature of the work to be attempted by the one it foretells.

John denied that he was the foretold Elijah, yet Jesus said to his disciples referring to John, that "Elias is indeed come." (Mark 9:13) This does not contradict John's statement concerning the matter. The more complete viewpoint is expressed to his disciples in Matthew 11:14, where Jesus is quoted as saying to his disciples, "If ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come." This means that to those who repented under the ministry of John and were prepared to accept Jesus, he was the promised Elijah, for he had accomplished the foretold work of reformation in their hearts and lives.

The prophecy of the coming Elijah suggests an alternative fulfillment—"Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." In other words, if the attempted work of reformation failed, the foretold "curse" would come upon the nation of Israel. This curse was in reality what John referred to as "the wrath to come." (Matt. 3:7, 8) John also described it as "a baptism of fire," which, as we have noted, came upon the Jewish nation in A.D. 70-73. While a few were converted and prepared to accept Jesus by the ministry of John, the nation as a whole was not; so the foretold curse fell, destroying the nation and scattering the people throughout the earth.

Since John himself denied that he was actually the foretold Elijah, we are warranted in looking for a larger fulfillment of

Malachi's prophecy. We believe that that larger fulfillment began with Jesus and was continued by his true followers throughout the entire age. Just as John preached repentance, so also did Jesus. Matthew 4:17 reads, "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

When Jesus sent his disciples into the ministry, we read that they "went out, and preached that men should repent." (Mark 6:12) Speaking on Mars' Hill, Paul said that "now" God "commandeth all men everywhere to repent." (Acts 17:30) In proclaiming the message of repentance, Jesus and his true followers have continued the Elijah work throughout the entire age.

But a general failure also accompanies the effort in this larger application of the prophecy. A few have repented, even as did a handful under the preaching of John; but the world as a whole has continued on in its sinful, selfish ways. So, again, the alternative fulfillment of the prophecy must come, not upon one nation this time, but upon all nations. This foretold curse is, as a matter of fact, already upon the world in the form of "a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation."—Dan. 12:1

But this does not mean that the foretold Elijah work of repentance and reformation will never be accomplished. It will be accomplished during the time of Christ's kingdom. Under the typical Elijah, the people of Israel were led to repentance and to a return to the worship of Jehovah, the true and living God. And so it will be under the administration of Christ's kingdom. A "pure language," or message, will be turned to the people; the knowledge of the Lord will fill the earth, and as a result of that enlightenment, the people will "call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent."—Zeph. 3:8,9; Isa. 11:9

"That Prophet"

The priests and Levites who were sent to interview John inquired of him if he were "that Prophet." (John 1:21) Again

John replied that he was not. This question evidently related to a prophecy of Moses in which he said, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken."—Deut. 18:15

The Apostle Peter quoted this prophecy and applied it to the kingdom work of Christ to be accomplished during the "times of restitution of all things." (Acts 3:19-23) John knew that he was not this great Prophet that Moses had promised, and in response to the question, "What sayest thou of thyself?" he replied, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the Prophet Esaias."—John 1:22, 23

John had a humble opinion of himself and of his place in the divine plan. Asked why he baptized, since he was "not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that Prophet," he replied: "I baptize with water: but there standeth One among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose."—John 1:25-27

We read that "the next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (vs. 29) John explained further that the One who had instructed him to baptize with water—which, of course, was God—had told him, "Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Spirit."

John did not understand the full implications of this, but he did take it to mean that the One upon whom he saw the Spirit descend would be the promised Messiah, and "the Son of God." (vss. 33, 34) Later there arose a discussion between some of John's disciples and the Jews: "And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, He that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to Him."—John 3:26

This was more a statement than a question—a statement implying that Jesus was attracting more followers than John. John was quick to catch the implication and replied: “A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the Bridegroom: but the friend of the Bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom’s voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.”—John 3:27-30

If those questioning John thought that he would be disturbed or discouraged over the fact that Jesus was securing a larger following than he, they were wrong; for John was willing, and glad, to have it this way. It was just what he expected; for, as he said, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” He knew that having announced the presence of the Messiah, his own mission was now practically fulfilled. Since the One for whom he had been commissioned to prepare the way had come, the work of preparation was over.

We are not to suppose that John understood clearly all the details of the divine plan. Doubtless much that he said was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This might well be true with respect to his observation concerning the Bridegroom and the bride. In Revelation 19:7 reference is made to the marriage of the “Lamb,” whom John referred to as the “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” Under this symbolism Jesus would be the Bridegroom, and his “wife” would be the bride. This bride class is composed of his faithful followers, beginning with the apostles, who at Pentecost received from Jesus the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

John did not live until Pentecost so did not have an opportunity of becoming a part of the bride class. Thus, all he claimed was the great joy of being the “friend” of the Bridegroom, the one who had heard his voice. “This my joy,”

he said, "is fulfilled." John was content with this happy part in the divine arrangement. He did not complain because he could not be a part of the bride class.

Jesus, of course, also recognized that John would not be one of the called-out ones of the Gospel Age, who, if faithful, would live and reign with him in the heavenly phase of the kingdom. Jesus said, "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." (Matt. 11:11) Jesus explained the reason for this. He said that "all the prophets and the law prophesied until John." (Matt. 11:13) John was the last of the prophets. Commencing with Jesus a new age in the plan of God began, the age during which the kingdom of heaven class, the "bride" of the Lamb, has been called from the world through the Gospel and made ready to live and reign with Christ a thousand years.

John's Faith Tested

John, in his righteousness, reproved "Herod the tetrarch" for marrying his brother Philip's wife, and because of this he was cast into prison. (John 3:19, 20) This was a severe test of his faith; for, having announced Jesus as the promised Messiah, he doubtless believed, even as Jesus' disciples later supposed, that the kingdom of Christ would "immediately appear." (Luke 19:11) This being his expectation, he naturally would wonder why he should find himself in prison when he was dedicated to be one of the faithful subjects of the new kingdom, a "friend" indeed, of the King.

It would seem that he had begun to wonder if Jesus was the promised Messiah. However, as he remained in prison, word reached him that the "works of Christ" were continuing; so he sent messengers to inquire of Jesus, "Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" —Matt. 11:2, 3

Jesus' reply to this inquiry was direct and to the point. He said: "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me." —Matt. 11:4-6

The Scriptures do not inform us as to whether or not this reply gave John the reassurance which he sought. Probably it did, for he would know that these miraculous works were to be expected of the Messiah. He could not know that the real age of worldwide miracles was nearly two thousand years in the future. Jesus was then performing miracles, even raising the dead, and for all John knew this work would continue and increase. Had he not said that Jesus would increase?

True, John was without an explanation as to why the miracle-working Christ allowed him to remain in prison. But Jesus had said in his reply, "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." This suggested the possibility of a test, and probably John determined that he would not be offended even if Jesus did not come to his aid.

Like all the others in the ancient worthy class, John "died in faith, not having received the promises." (Heb. 11:13) It was on Herod's birthday. The daughter of Herodias danced before him, and he was so pleased with her that he promised to give her anything she asked. The mother had instructed her daughter to request the head of John the Baptist. This she did. "The king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her." —Matt. 14:1-12

This seemed like an inglorious end to a faithful career of service in the Lord's cause, but it was not really so. John had been loyal to God and to the divine principles of righteousness. Being put to death as he was gave him a further opportunity to prove his faithfulness. When, in that

“better resurrection” (Heb. 11:35) promised for all the ancient worthies, he is brought forth to be one of the “princes in all the earth,” (Ps. 45:16) he will rejoice and will continue his faithful service, not as the forerunner of Christ, but as one of the human representatives of the kingdom.

Jesus, the First and the Last



“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.”—Revelation 22:13

IT HAS been said that Jesus is the center of history. Certainly he is the center of the divine plan of salvation which is revealed in the Bible. Jesus said to the Jews of his day, “Before Abraham was, I am”; that is, I existed. (John 8:58) Even before Adam was created, Jesus, as the Logos, the “Word,” was participating with his Heavenly Father in the works of creation. He was “the beginning of the creation of God.” (Rev. 3:14) He was the only direct creation of God, and as John testifies, “Without him was not anything made that was made.”—John 1:3

Although Jesus did not personally write any of the Bible, Revelation, the last book, written by the Apostle John, is introduced as “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Rev. 1:1) In next to the last verse of the Bible, Jesus speaks through the Apostle John, saying, “He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen.” Realizing that the second coming of Jesus would ultimately result in the glorious triumph of righteousness and the promised blessing of all mankind with health and life provided through Jesus’ work of redemption, John responded, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

The name Jesus signifies Savior. It is the Greek form of Jehoshua (Joshua). How appropriate is this name when we realize that Jesus came to be the Savior of all mankind—a savior from sin and from its penalty, death. The title “Christ,” as in Jesus Christ, signifies “anointed.” Applied to Jesus, it denotes that he is the One sent and authorized by Jehovah to fulfill all the wonderful promises recorded by the Old Testament prophets pertaining to the redemption and restoration of the world from sin and death.

It has been prophetically stated that the name of the anointed of God would be “Emmanuel,” which means “God with us.” (Isa. 7:14; 8:8; Matt. 1:23) This, indeed, is properly one of Jesus’ titles, because he was, and will continue to be, God’s representative among mankind. John expressed the thought correctly when he wrote, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”—John 1:18

Jesus said concerning his Heavenly Father, “Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape.” (John 5:37) This proves that the only way the people of Jesus’ day heard and saw Jehovah was through the example and teachings of Jesus. But Jesus did the works and spoke the words of his Heavenly Father; so properly the title Emmanuel belonged to him.—John 12:49

His Birth

Jesus was born of the virgin Mary. God was his Father, in the sense that it was by divine power that the life principle of the Logos—one of Jesus’ titles, particularly during his pre-human existence—was transferred to the womb of Mary, and in due time Jesus was born as a human babe and became a man. Paul wrote concerning this that Jesus was “made in the likeness of men” and was “found in fashion as a man.”—Phil. 2:7,8

Jesus’ birth marked a division in the reckoning of time, so that now we have the B.C. and A.D. dates, meaning before

and after Christ. This division of time, however, was not used until several hundred years after Christ. Even now this turning point in time is not wholly correct. According to accurate reckoning, the birth of Jesus occurred about one year and three months prior to the generally accepted date.

Prophecy Fulfilled

Jesus was born in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, one of the most important of which reads: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."—Isa. 9:6,7

Another prophecy, one which identifies Jesus' birthplace, reads, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."—Mic. 5:2

These prophecies clearly revealed that this Great One who was to be born was destined to be a king, a ruler, that he would set up a government which ultimately would be world-wide in its control over mankind. Thus John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, when announcing his presence, said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," or, more properly translated, "The Royal Majesty of the heavens has approached."—Matt. 3:2, Emphatic Diaglott

Much of Jesus' own teachings were associated with this hope of the kingdom. Many of his parables were introduced by the statement, "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto." His disciples thoroughly believed that he would establish a kingdom in Judea and that they would be associated with him in that kingdom.

When, near the close of Jesus' ministry, the disciples became disturbed over the fact that he intended to surrender to his enemies and allow them to put him to death, Jesus related a parable to them concerning a nobleman who went into a far country, to receive a kingdom and to return. This parable was designed to help the disciples understand that the kingdom they expected Jesus to establish must await his return at his second advent.

The Counterfeit

It has been truthfully said of Jesus that no other life has so profoundly influenced the course of the world. This is yet to be still more wonderfully true. Up to the present time much has been said and done in the name of Jesus which has been a discredit to him and contrary to the principles of righteousness which he taught and exemplified. It probably could be said that the life and teachings of Jesus have been more misrepresented and distorted than those of any other person.

The fact that Jesus came to be a king has been used by ambitious and misguided men to establish themselves in power in his name. This was done—and contrary to Jesus' teachings—through the church-state governments of Europe. These governments, it was claimed, were in reality the kingdom of Christ, in that he was ruling through the civil and ecclesiastical heads of these governments.

Throughout the many centuries when these corrupt systems flourished, there was almost continual strife between various factions. This has left on the pages of history a bloody record of crime, war, persecution, inquisition, and other evils which are utterly contrary to the spirit and teachings of Jesus, although they were perpetrated in his name.

In his Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, Jesus foretold this growth of evil in his name. The good seed of this parable, Jesus explained, pictured "the children of the kingdom," that is, those who were begotten with the hope of his return and with the expectation that they would then reign with him in his kingdom.

But there was to be another seed—the tares. Jesus explained that these represented “the children of the wicked one.” This does not mean that they were to be wicked, immoral people but simply that they would come under the influence of Satan’s counterfeit kingdom of Christ and lend themselves to its support.

Satan attempted to obtain Jesus’ support for a similar scheme. He told the Master that if he would fall down and worship him he would give him all the kingdoms of the world. Jesus knew that in his Heavenly Father’s due time and way all the nations of the earth would be brought under his control, and he did not propose to accept them on the Devil’s terms.

But some, losing sight of the divine plan for setting up a world government, yielded to Satan’s temptation. They joined hands with the state and called the union Christ’s kingdom—Christendom. We mention this in order that we may have clearly in mind that, while Jesus’ influence has indeed been practically worldwide and while this one marvelous life of his influenced the course of history as none other has ever done, much that has been ascribed to him has been a discredit to him and diametrically opposed to his teachings and example.

His Sympathy and Love

In contrast with the cruelties practiced in Jesus’ name during the Dark Ages, we find the Master himself a man of tender sympathy and self-sacrificing love. In Acts 10:38 we read of Jesus that he “went about doing good” and that he healed all who “were oppressed of the Devil.” His heart went out in loving sympathy to those who suffered. Standing beside the tomb of Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, and realizing that these two sisters were brokenhearted over the death of their brother, “Jesus wept.”—John 11:35

The way of life taught and exemplified by Jesus is one of kindness, of nobility, of love. In his Sermon on the Mount,

Jesus taught the real blessedness of meekness, humility, purity of heart, and mercifulness. "Blessed are the peacemakers," he said, "for they shall be called the children of God."—Matt. 5:1-12

To the extent that men and women have been influenced by these precepts, they have been ennobled. Communities and nations have been happier places in which to live when these principles have been adopted and sincerely practiced. To whatever extent the world has been influenced by them, it has been a better world.

The Divine Image

Our first parents were created in the image of God and in their original perfection must indeed have been virtuous and noble. In the noble and upright of the world even now we can see traces of the original divine likeness still remaining. But in what rich abundance they must have been exemplified in Jesus, the perfect counterpart of the "first man Adam"! Of Jesus it is written that he was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners."—Heb. 7:26

Toward the close of his ministry Jesus said to his disciples: "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."—John 14:7-9

Jesus, like Adam, was the image of God, and with him that image was unmarred, unsullied, radiant, full. Every lovely trait of character seen in Jesus was just that much of a reflection of the Heavenly Father. It was the image of God in Jesus that caused him to be the noble character that he was. His every thought, word, and act reflected the characteristics of his Father. This was so completely true that Jesus could say, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

Not only was this true with respect to Jesus' personal purity and nobility of character but it was exemplified also in

his teachings. He said, "I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak." (John 12:49) Again, "The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me."—John 14:24

Thus Jesus stands separate from and above all the other servants of God who make up "the people of the Bible." In its straightforward manner of presenting the truth, the Bible records both the virtues and the failings of its heroes. Jesus had no failings. By reason of the miraculous manner in which his life as the Logos was transferred to earth, he was born into the world untainted with the imperfections of the adamic race.

Thus Jesus stands wholeheartedly in harmony with his Father's purpose in sending him into the world. So completely was this true that he could say, "I and my Father are one." (John 10:30) He came to do the Father's will, and he permitted nothing, not even life itself, to interfere with his divine mission.

The Divine Purpose

Hebrews 2:9 reads, "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." Jesus knew that his ministry would be crowned with victory only through his faithfulness in laying down his life in sacrifice for the sins of the world. This great objective of his being "made flesh" governed his entire course of action. And even for us it serves as a background which helps to interpret much of what he said and did.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6) When saying this, however, Jesus knew that he could be the life-giver of mankind only because he would give his human life as the redemptive price for the lost world. So, on another occasion, he said, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live

forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”—John 6:51

Jesus realized, however, that there was a “due time” in his Father’s plan for him to die. Until that time he did not recklessly expose himself to danger. But finally the hour for his supreme sacrifice drew near, and we find him voluntarily putting himself in a position of danger.

The circumstances are most interesting. Jesus was in Galilee to avoid somewhat his enemies. (John 7:1) Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, became ill. This little family that lived in Bethany was much loved by Jesus. The brother’s illness was fatal, and after his death Jesus announced to his disciples that he was returning to Bethany to awaken Lazarus.

They understood the dangers involved in returning and said to Jesus: “Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again? Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if any man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.”—John 11:8-10

Jesus’ reference to there being twelve hours in the day and to stumbling in the darkness of night seems to indicate his understanding that his “day” was rapidly drawing to a close and that his “night” was coming when he could work no longer. Later, in connection with his arrest in Gethsemane, he said to the chief priests and captains of the Temple and the elders, “This is your hour, and the power of darkness.” (Luke 22:53) In that mountainous country “stumbling” in the darkness could well be a reference to the loss of life.

In any event, Jesus knew that the time was nearing for him to die, so he did not hesitate to return to a location where he was sure his enemies were lying in wait to find occasion against him and kill him. His disciples knew of this danger, and Thomas said to the others, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”—John 11:16

And Jesus was crucified only a short time after he returned to Bethany and raised Lazarus from the dead. Indeed, it was this very miracle that helped to incense his enemies into a bitterness intense enough to cause them to take murderous action against him. Jesus realized that this would happen, but he did not let it deter him from taking a course that would lead to his death; for it was for this cause that he came into the world. Only if he gave his flesh for the life of the world would the world have life.

Later, after his arrest, Jesus said or did nothing to interfere with the wicked purpose of his jealous enemies to have him hung upon a cross and killed. When asked by the high priest if he claimed to be the Son of God, Jesus replied, "Thou hast said." (Matt. 26:64) He knew that this reply would be misconstrued as blasphemy and that as a result the religious rulers of Israel would judge him worthy of death.

When brought before Pilate and accused of being a king, he affirmed the charge, saying to his Roman ruler, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." (John 18:37) When hanging upon the cross and hearing the crowd cry out, "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross," he did nothing about it. (Matt. 27:40) At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus was tempted by the Devil to prove his divine sonship by casting himself from the pinnacle of the Temple. He did not yield then to temptation, nor did he yield when the same Adversary, working through the mob, called upon him to prove his sonship by coming down from the cross.

Jesus had come into the world to die as man's Redeemer. It was on the cross that this sacrifice was consummated. He took the sinner's place so completely that for one brief awful moment the smile of his Father's approval was hidden from him, and in agony he said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46) A few moments later, he cried out, "It is finished," and committed his life to his God—"Into thy hands I commend my spirit."—John 19:30; Luke 23:46

The Resurrected Jesus

On the third day the Heavenly Father raised his beloved Son from the dead. (Luke 24:5-7; I Pet. 1:21) He had given his life as a ransom, a corresponding price for Adam and his race, and now all power was given unto him “in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18) in order that he might, in God’s due time and way, set into motion those agencies through which the life he had made available by his death might be extended to mankind.

First there was a need to establish the fact that he had been raised from the dead. Concerning this Peter later said: “Him [Jesus] God raised up the third day, and showed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.”—Acts 10:40-42

Peter’s statement concerning Jesus, “He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify,” refers to another aspect of the divine purpose which was initiated by Jesus, namely, the calling out of the world of a company of disciples who would be willing to share in his suffering and death, inspired by the hope of being raised from the dead to live and reign with him in his kingdom.

This little company the Bible refers to as the “church,” meaning “called out” ones. Jesus’ apostles were the first of these to be selected, and in future chapters we will review the lives of these in their association with Jesus, as well as their later experiences, when, in faithfulness to the commission their Master gave them, they laid down their lives testifying that it was he “which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.”

The expression “quick and dead” refers to those of the adamic race whom we speak of as being alive—even though they are still under condemnation to death and dying—and

those who are in the sleep of death. After his resurrection Jesus said, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."—Rev. 1:18

During his second visit Jesus uses these "keys" to unlock the great prison house of death and set its captives free. The church will be exalted to the divine nature to live and reign with him. The world will be placed on probation to determine worthiness or unworthiness of everlasting life on earth.

He who was the first and the last of God's direct creation, the One who throughout the age has been the Counselor and Advocate of the church, the One who from the time of his creation was the "Logos" of God, promised to "come quickly," as John wrote at the beginning of the age. (Rev. 22:20) Now, "the first and the last" has come. (Rev. 1:17) This means that the great and glorious kingdom promised by God's holy prophets is shortly to be inaugurated in power and great glory, for the blessing of all the families of the earth.

Chapter 27

Jesus and the Apostles



“Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.”—Matthew 10:1-4

WHILE we have already dealt at considerable length with Jesus, the central personality of the entire Bible, our appreciation of him increases as we study him in association with his chosen representatives, the twelve apostles. We used the expression “his chosen representatives,” and it is true that Jesus did invite these twelve to the position of apostleship; however, he looked upon them as having been given to him by his Heavenly Father. In a prayer toward the close of his ministry, Jesus referred to his apostles as “the

men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me.”—John 17:6

The word “apostle” means “one sent forth.” While every devoted, truth-enlightened follower of Jesus is commissioned by the Holy Spirit to go forth and proclaim the Gospel of the kingdom, to these twelve a special commission was given, and extraordinary powers were conferred upon them which were not given to the disciples as a whole.

The commission first given to the twelve is recorded in Matthew 10:5-8 and reads: “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.”

In this commission Jesus associates his apostles with the great theme message of the entire Bible, that is, the kingdom. The Old Testament prophets had foretold that Jehovah would send a King, the Messiah, who would set up a kingdom and through that kingdom would extend blessings of peace and health and life to all mankind. Jesus was that King. The apostles accepted him as such, and now they were commissioned to preach that the kingdom was “at hand.”

It was at hand in the sense that the King had made his first appearance. The holy prophets had said that the King would come and that “of the increase of his government and peace” there would be “no end.” Now the King had come. The Royal Majesty of the heavens was in the midst of Israel, and the responsibility was laid upon the apostles to make this known.

The foretold kingdom of the Messiah was to benefit the people of all nations, but when the apostles were first sent forth, their commission limited them to proclaim the message only to “the lost sheep . . . of Israel.” But this was only a temporary restriction, conforming to the divine arrangement to give the Israelites the first and, for a limited time, the

exclusive opportunity to share with Jesus in the rulership of the kingdom. This temporary limitation was in fulfillment of the prophecy recorded in Daniel 9:24-27. Later the commission to proclaim the Gospel was enlarged to include all nations.—Acts 1:8

Not only were the apostles sent forth to preach that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, but they were also commanded and empowered to perform works like those which the kingdom would do on behalf of humanity when it was established; that is, they were to “heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils.” As opportunity afforded they performed all these miracles, much to the joy of those who benefited from them.

A Lesson in Faith

Jesus said to his apostles, “Freely ye have received, freely give.” (Matt. 10:8) These chosen apostles were to be ambassadors of Christ. They were to represent him both in word and in deed. It was essential, therefore, that they be filled and controlled by his Spirit, which was the spirit of unselfishness, of generosity, of giving. This Spirit of Jesus was the Spirit of the Heavenly Father, whose greatest exhibition of giving was in the gift of his beloved Son to be the Redeemer and Savior of the world.

So Jesus wanted his disciples to be generous in their giving of themselves and the message of the kingdom. In order that this spirit of giving all and gaining nothing might be inculcated in them, his instructions were that they were not to provide themselves “gold” and “silver” and apparel, that is, not beyond their barest needs. In giving these instructions he quoted from the Old Testament, “The workman is worthy of his hire,” indicating that if they were faithful in the discharge of their responsibilities their physical needs would be provided.—Deut. 24:15; Luke 10:7

When the apostles returned from their first missionary tour, Jesus asked them if they had lacked anything so far as their material needs were concerned, and they said,

“Nothing.” (Luke 22:35) This restriction pertaining to the taking of supplies of money, food, and clothing was later removed. Apparently Jesus wanted his disciples to learn the lesson of trust and, by actual experience, to sense his own position in the world, concerning which he said that while the birds of the air have nests and the foxes of the field have holes, “the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” (Matt. 8:20) Jesus “freely gave” everything.

Future Probation

Hearing the Gospel of the kingdom as proclaimed by any of the Lord’s duly commissioned servants imposes a measure of responsibility upon those who hear. But Jesus did not want his apostles to feel that they were under obligation to convince and convert all to whom they witnessed, or to think that those who failed to respond would be given no further opportunity of salvation. They were faithfully to bear witness to the kingdom message but were not to coerce their hearers into accepting. When their message was not received they were to shake the dust off their feet and go elsewhere.

Jesus added to this that so far as those who rejected the message were concerned, it would be less “tolerable” for them in the day of judgment than it would be for “Sodom and Gomorrah.” (Matt. 10:14,15) An important point to be noticed in this statement is that it will be tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah and for those who rejected the message presented by the apostles, but differing in degree by the amount of knowledge available to each.

The Unfriendly World

Jesus said to his disciples: “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.” (vs. 16) What a vivid illustration! It applied to the apostles and has applied since then to all the true followers of the Master. The divine qualifications for the ministry require all of the Lord’s people to have dispositions like sheep. They are forbidden to fight

for their rights. If smitten on one cheek, they are to turn the other. They are not to render evil for evil.

The only force in the life of the true Christian is the force of love. Their only message is one of love. In proclaiming this message they are to be meek and humble and nonaggressive. How like the defenseless sheep! Yet these sheeplike ambassadors of the Master perform their work surrounded by "wolves" howling, snapping, and biting, ever threatening to attack and kill.

Oh, the wolves do not mean to act like wolves. But, controlled by selfishness and supposing that the ambassadors of Christ are a menace, they resort to the only methods they know in order to rid the world of these so-called intruders; that is, by threats, persecution, false accusations, and, as it was in the case of Jesus and many others in the Early Church, by putting them to death.

Surrounded thus by wolves, the apostles were to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. They were to use the best wisdom possible in order to avoid engendering unnecessary antagonism. They were not to compromise for the sake of peace but were to pursue a course of peace the best they could. They were to be as harmless as doves. If harm was to come to anyone as a result of their ministry, it was not to stem from them but would be due to the opposition of the wolves.

"But beware of men," Jesus said to his apostles, "for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles." (vss. 17, 18) This is an interesting statement. Obviously, the purpose of bringing the apostles before governors and kings would be to accuse and condemn them, but Jesus said that actually the testimony would be against the accusers. This is because their efforts to persecute and destroy the Lord's harmless "sheep" would reveal the deep degradation of their hearts and the blind prejudice which ruled their lives.

As for the apostles, they were not to be overly concerned about these experiences, unpleasant though they were sure to be. They were not to endeavor in advance to decide just what they would say under trying circumstances. The circumstances would help to indicate the appropriate words; and besides, Jesus promised that it would be given to them by the Holy Spirit what they were to say.
—vss. 18-20

This promise, we believe, applied more particularly to the apostles and not to all the followers of the Master, except in a limited way. The apostles were to be the inspired representatives of the Lord. While the inspirational power of the Holy Spirit was not received by them in full until Pentecost, yet even in their pre-Pentecost ministry they occupied a more favored position in the Lord's arrangements than did the other disciples. However, many of the Lord's people have testified of the wonderful manner in which the Lord has helped them in their witnessing for him under difficult circumstances. All true Christians should be ardent students of the Scriptures. They should thus be ready at all times to give a reason for the hope that is within them. Those who do live up to their privileges as students of the Word will find that they do have an answer for their opponents when needed. No doubt the Lord helps them recall the points of truth they have learned. And, because they learned them from the Lord's Word, it is the Lord who gives them utterance.

But Jesus' promise to his apostles went beyond this. In the early days of their ministry especially, and prior to Pentecost, they did not have the opportunity of becoming fully acquainted with the divine plan, as revealed in the Word; and this lack was to be made up to them by special help from the Lord when needed. During this period they were in special training for their later ministry, when Jesus would no longer be with them in the flesh; and these special manifestations of divine grace and power were essential for them.

Master and Pupils

The association of Jesus and his apostles was as Master and pupils. This was not with the thought, however, that Jesus was a dictator over his apostles but more with the idea of his being their teacher, their schoolmaster. As in every other respect, Jesus was faithful to his apostles as their teacher. When relating his parables to a mixed group, he was always ready, when asked, to explain them to his apostles.

When they reported to him that some thought he was the foretold Elijah, others that he was John the Baptist raised from the dead, and still others that he was the resurrected Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets, Jesus asked, "Whom say ye that I am?" (Matt. 16:13-20) When Peter replied, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus was pleased, and said, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven."

The apostles believed that Jesus had come as the great King and Messiah of the Old Testament prophecies, and they expected that he would establish his authority as king of the Jews very soon and that this governmental authority would spread until it embraced all nations. Jesus knew they would be greatly disappointed in this expectation, but he did all he could to prepare them for it. He related a parable of a certain nobleman who went into a far country to receive a kingdom and to return. (Luke 19:12) The introduction to this parable states that Jesus related it because his disciples thought the kingdom was to be established immediately. He wanted them to understand that he must first go away and that the kingdom would not become a reality until his return.—Luke 19:11

Learning from this parable that their Master was going away, they later asked him about it. They wanted to know what sign would indicate the time of his return. (Matt. 24:3) It was in his reply to this question that Jesus presented the many "signs" described in the 24th and 25th chapters of

Matthew. The final one of these signs mentions the time when the willing and obedient of mankind, as portrayed by the sheep in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, are said to inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. This, of course, will be at the close of the "times of restitution of all things."—Matt. 25:34; Acts 3:19-21

Holy Spirit Promised

Jesus realized that without the aid of the Holy Spirit his apostles were not able to grasp his teachings clearly, and there were some points of truth that he did not even try to make plain to them. He said, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." But he added that he would send the Holy Spirit, referring to it as the "Spirit of truth," which would guide them into all truth. He promised also that the Holy Spirit would help them to recall the many things he had said to them. (John 14:26; 16:12, 13) This promise was fulfilled at Pentecost.

In the "Upper Room"

Jesus' great love for his disciples is clearly revealed by the record of his association with them in the "upper room" the night before he was crucified. It was here that he instituted the memorial of his death, asking his apostles to eat the bread and drink the cup containing the "fruit of the vine," which, he said, represented his broken body and shed blood.—Matt. 26:26-30

It was in the upper room that Jesus washed his disciples' feet, thus teaching them a lesson in humility. (John 13:4, 5) It was also in the upper room that Jesus revealed to the eleven that Judas would betray him. (John 13:21-30) By contrast, and very sincerely, Peter avowed his willingness to lay down his life for Jesus; but Jesus foretold that Peter would deny him.—John 13:36-38

One of the remarkable things Jesus said to his apostles in the upper room was that they would be able to do the same miraculous works as they had seen him do; yes, "and greater

works than these shall ye do," he added. (John 14:12) The apostles were given the power to perform miracles, but the larger fulfillment of this prophecy will be during the thousand-year reign of Christ when, in association with Jesus, all his true followers will participate in the great work of healing all the sick and raising all the dead.

Jesus made many wonderful promises to his apostles while with them in the upper room that night. One of them was, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye ask anything in my name, I will do it." (John 14:13,14) The implication is that those who make requests in Jesus' name would be in full harmony with him and his teachings, hence their requests would be in harmony with God's will. But this was a wonderful assurance for Jesus to give to those who were soon to go out into the world as his ambassadors.

Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Enlarging upon this he said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." (John 14:15,23) This is another reassuring promise, but again with a condition attached to it—"If ye love me, keep my commandments." We cannot doubt that many times in later years the apostles rejoiced in the fulfillment of this promise. What a blessing it must have been to them when in prison or otherwise suffering for Jesus' sake!

Jesus knew that the success of the apostles' ministry would require that they also love one another; so he said, "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you." (John 15:12) Jesus' love for his disciples was so great that he gladly laid down his life for them, and he expected his disciples to be willing to lay down their lives for one another.

Jesus also realized that the world would not be friendly to his disciples even as it was not friendly to him. We quote Jesus on this point: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the

world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore, the world hateth you.” (John 15:18,19) On this point Jesus explained further, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”—John 16:33

Surely Jesus was lavish in his assurances to his apostles that they could depend upon him and upon his Father to be with them in their every experience. The reality of these promises depended upon the degree of faith with which they were able to lay hold upon them. If they believed fully they would have complete rest of mind and heart. Indeed, Jesus said: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”—John 14:27

Finally, in the upper room that night Jesus prayed for his apostles and, indeed, for all who would believe on him through their word. (John 17:20) It was a wonderful prayer. He said to his Father: “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine, . . . and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them.”—vss. 9,10

He continued: “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy Word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.”—vss. 15-18

Jesus further prayed, “that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me,” and further “hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.” (vss. 21,23) Jesus not only desired that his Heavenly Father’s love be shared with his apostles and those who would believe on him through their word but he also wanted them to share his heavenly home and glory; so he prayed: “Father, I will

that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.”—vs. 24

To Gethsemane and the Cross

Following this prayer Jesus and his disciples left the upper room, walking out of the city, across the brook Cedron, to the Garden of Gethsemane. As they walked Jesus said to them, “All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.” To this Peter replied, “Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.” (Matt. 26:31, 33) In the upper room Peter had said to Jesus, “Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.”—Luke 22:33

Reaching the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus left his apostles behind to rest, while he went deeper into the garden to pray. They did not fully grasp the great strain that was upon their Master at this critical time; and it being late at night, they fell asleep. While they slept Jesus prayed, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”—Luke 22:42

During this period of communion with the Father, Jesus returned to the disciples and found them sleeping. The first time he addressed Peter, asking, “Coudest not thou watch one hour?” Perhaps Jesus singled out Peter because he had made such an outspoken avowal of loyalty. Jesus returned to the sleeping disciples twice more and the last time said: “Sleep on now and take your rest: it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.”—Mark 14:37, 41

But the apostles did not continue to sleep. They accompanied Jesus to the exit from the garden, and there they met the mob which had come out from Jerusalem to

arrest their Master. It was here that Peter drew his sword in defense of Jesus and was directed to desist from this attempt to prevent the arrest. Here was one of the most important lessons that Jesus wanted his apostles to learn; namely, that he was voluntarily surrendering to his enemies to be put to death. Later they were to understand why, for they were to learn that Jesus had come to be not only the Ruler of the world but its Redeemer and Savior as well.

Jesus had very little contact with his apostles subsequent to this time. Peter followed the mob into the judgment hall, where, as foretold, he denied his Lord. Apparently John was nearby during the crucifixion, for Jesus addressed him concerning his mother, saying to him, "Behold thy mother!" (John 19:27) Jesus thus indicated that he wished John to be responsible for the physical needs of his mother.

We have but briefly noted some of the main experiences in the association of Jesus and his chosen apostles. In all of them we have seen his loving interest in his disciples and his desire that they be properly trained to be his ambassadors and that they be imbued with the proper spirit of unselfish devotion to the cause which he had come into the world to promote, which was his Heavenly Father's great plan of salvation. We will endeavor to become better acquainted with the apostles themselves and note the manner in which the life and teachings of Jesus directed their lives of devotion to the divine cause.

Chapter 28

Peter, James and John



THERE is very little in the Gospel records pertaining to several of the apostles. Of Bartholomew and “Simon the Canaanite” we know little or nothing. Thaddaeus Lebbaeus is believed to be Jude, who wrote the Epistle of Jude. Thomas is known mostly for his role of doubter in connection with the resurrection of Jesus. And Judas, of course, is the apostle who served the Twelve as treasurer and, in the end, betrayed our Lord.

Matthew is identified as a publican and collector of taxes when called to be an apostle. His great contribution to the church is his scholarly record of the life and ministry of Jesus. Aside from his Gospel, however, there is little in the Bible to reveal the extent of his ministry.

Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was with Peter, James, and John when they asked Jesus “privately” concerning the signs of his second presence. (Mark 13:3) Near the close of Jesus’ ministry, when certain Greeks desired an interview with Jesus, Andrew was one of the apostles who conveyed this information to the Master. (John 12:21,22) Andrew also expressed his misgivings when Jesus inquired concerning the amount of food they had on hand just before the feeding of the five thousand. (John 6:8) These brief glimpses are about all the Bible furnishes on Andrew’s activities as one of Jesus’ apostles.

Philip was a zealous apostle. It was he who “discovered” Nathanael and “saith unto him, We have found him, of whom

Moses in the Law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” (John 1:45) While able to discern that Jesus was the Messiah, without the revealing power of the Holy Spirit Philip was unable to grasp the deeper truths of the Master’s teachings. When Jesus said, “if ye had known me, ye should have known the Father,” Philip replied, “Lord, show us the Father.” To this Jesus answered, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?”—John 14:7-9

Of the apostles, the names Peter, James, and John are linked together in the Gospels by reason of the fact that they seemed to be closer to Jesus than some of the others. For example, when Jesus went up into the Mount of Transfiguration he took with him “Peter, James, and John.” (Matt. 17:1) When he raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead, “Peter, James, and John” were the only ones he allowed in the room. (Mark 5:37) Jesus took these three with him deeper into the Garden of Gethsemane than he did the others.—Mark 14:33

Possibly there was something in the personalities of these three apostles that drew Jesus closer to them than to the others on special occasions. However, we believe that the chief reason for this seeming favoritism is the fact that the Lord was preparing them for a wider field of service in later years than the others may have been capable of filling. How effectively, for example, Peter later used his experience on the Mount of Transfiguration! (II Pet. 1:16-18) Divine wisdom never errs.

And these three were greatly used by the Lord beginning with Pentecost, particularly Peter and John. It was Peter who acted as spokesman for the apostles on the Day of Pentecost, delivering that marvelous sermon, the central theme of which was the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. When the people heard the clear and powerful reasoning of Peter, three thousand of them were pricked in their hearts and asked, “What shall we do?”—Acts 2:37-41

Shortly after this, probably within days, Peter and John went together into the Temple. Just outside by the gate called "Beautiful" they healed a man who had been lame from birth. This led to another sermon by Peter, on the object of our Lord's return, in which he showed that its result would be "times of restitution of all things."—Acts 3

When the religious rulers noted the boldness of Peter and John, "they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" and had learned of him. (Acts 4:13) Here, perhaps, comes to light one of the reasons Jesus had for the special consideration he gave to these. He wanted them to learn his ways and to imbibe his courage, his boldness, in declaring unpopular truth.

Surely the intimate association which Peter, James, and John enjoyed with Jesus did help much in equipping them for the service that had been designed for them. But these three men were, by nature, very different, and this we will discover best by noting some of the individual characteristics of each of them.

Peter

We are first introduced to Peter at the time Jesus called him to be one of his apostles. (Matt. 4:18) He and his brother Andrew were in the fishing business, and Jesus said unto them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." This record states that he was "called" Peter. Mark 3:16 explains that it was Jesus who surnamed him Peter, his family name being Simon. In the Greek text it is **Petros**, meaning a piece of rock.

The significance of Peter's name was used by Jesus to teach an important point of truth. (Matt. 16:13-19) This was some time after Jesus began his ministry. He had become fairly well known and he inquired of his apostles as to who the people thought he was. They answered, "Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets."

This was far from being an unfavorable report, for it indicated that the people seemed agreed that Jesus was a prophet sent by God, even though they did not agree as to his exact identity. But Jesus was not satisfied, so he inquired further, "Whom say ye that I am?" It was in reply to this that Peter said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living Góð."

This was Jesus' true identity, and he was pleased; so he said to Peter, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

This observation has been misused in an attempt to exalt Peter to a position of prominence and authority among the apostles which Jesus did not actually give to him. The expression, "Upon this rock I will build my church," has been mistakenly applied to Peter as though Jesus had constituted him the foundation of the church, whereas Jesus, as the divine Christ, is in reality that foundation (see I Cor. 3:11). It was Peter's confession of this great truth to which Jesus referred as "this rock." Here the Greek word is **petra**, meaning a large rock, or boulder, unlike Peter's name, which signifies merely a piece of rock.

Nor are the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" what many have supposed them to be. Peter is not the doorkeeper of heaven. In the first place, it was the "kingdom of heaven" that Jesus mentioned, not "heaven." In Luke 16:16 we read that "the Law and the prophets were until John," and that since then "the kingdom of God is preached." The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are synonymous. See Matt. 13:31-33 and Luke 13:18-21. The purpose of this preaching has been to gather out from the world a people to be associated with Jesus in the heavenly phase of his kingdom.

Jesus said to the religious leaders of his day, "Ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in." (Matt. 23:13) To "enter" the kingdom of heaven, to live and reign with Christ, it is essential to accept Jesus as Redeemer and Lord; and the scribes and Pharisees did all they could to turn the people away from Jesus and to prejudice them against him. Thus they "shut up" the "kingdom of heaven."

But in contrast to this, Peter was given "keys" to "unlock" the kingdom of heaven. He did this by presenting the truth concerning Jesus and giving the people an opportunity to become his followers. He used one of these "keys" on the Day of Pentecost when he presented the truth concerning Jesus to a vast assembly of Jews, three thousand of whom believed. Later it was Peter whom the Lord sent to Cornelius, the first Gentile convert. Here he used another "key" and "unlocked" the kingdom of heaven to the Gentiles.

Impetuous

We get an intimate glimpse of Peter at the time Jesus walked out on the waters of Galilee, rescued his disciples, and calmed the sea. (Matt. 14:22-31) The apostles saw Jesus approaching their ship, and they were fearful. But Jesus said, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid."

Peter's nature did not allow him simply to remain in the ship and wait for his Master, so he cried out, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." Jesus invited Peter to come, but when he found himself surrounded by the wind and waves, his faith failed and he began to sink. Jesus rescued him and said, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Surely later this experience must have been a great source of strength to this intrepid apostle!

Peter was loyal to his Master. This was true even at the close of Jesus' ministry when Peter seriously disagreed with the course he was taking. Jesus announced to his apostles that he was going to Jerusalem, where he expected his

enemies to put him to death; and Peter objected, saying, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee." Responding to this Jesus said to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offense unto me."—Matt. 16:22, 23

Explaining this rebuke, Jesus said to Peter, "Thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." In other words, in trying to dissuade Jesus from surrendering to his enemies, Peter was expressing a human viewpoint. To him it was unthinkable that Jesus, who had done no wrong but instead had unselfishly served the people, should be put to death. He did not yet realize that it was necessary for Jesus to die in order to redeem the world from sin and death.

In the Upper Room, when Jesus partook of the Passover supper with his disciples for the last time, he said to Peter, "Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Peter replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee both into prison, and to death." Then Jesus prophesied, "I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me."—Luke 22:31-34

Peter meant it when he said that he would be willing to die with Jesus. Later, when his Master was about to be arrested, Peter drew his sword and demonstrated his willingness to do everything in his power to prevent Jesus from surrendering to his enemies. Jesus commanded him to put away his sword, which was another rebuke to this faithful disciple.—Matt. 26:52

But despite this thwarting of his effort to prevent Jesus' arrest, Peter followed him to the judgment hall of the high priest. The record states that he "went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end." (Matt. 26:58) In this we see a wonderful spirit of devotion. Perhaps Peter thought that by being nearby there still might be something he could do for his Master, perhaps even save him from what now seemed to be the inevitable.

Apparently Peter did not realize that he was likely to be recognized as one of Jesus' disciples and thus be placed in danger, and when he was recognized he denied that he knew him. Fear is the motive usually ascribed to this denial, although the record gives no motive. Some have suggested that Peter endeavored to conceal his identity in the hope that he still might have an opportunity to rescue his Master from the cruel hands of his enemies.

But regardless of his motive, Peter realized that his denial had been foretold by Jesus, and that it was wrong. (Matt. 26:69-75) He "wept bitterly," the record states. Remorseful for his own wrongdoing, he also now realized that he could do nothing to prevent the death of his beloved Lord; so he was overwhelmed with sorrow.

After the Resurrection

In one of Jesus' appearances to his apostles after his resurrection, he engaged in a revealing conversation with Peter. (John 21:15-19) "Lovest thou me?" Jesus inquired of Peter. Upon being asked this question the third time, Peter replied, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." Perhaps here Peter's mind went back to the "Upper Room," when Jesus had prophesied his denial, and realized that his Master was indeed able to read his heart.

Yes, Peter did love his Master despite the fact that his efforts to save him from the cross had been thwarted and that Jesus had referred to him as "Satan." Prior to his crucifixion Jesus had said to Peter that when he was "converted" he was to strengthen his brethren. And now Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." It might seem strange that Peter, who accepted Jesus as the promised Messiah, who had served with his Master in preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, who had been empowered to perform miracles, should still need to be "converted."

While Peter was convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, he did not understand that it was necessary for him to suffer and

die as the world's Redeemer. Doubtless Peter realized that if a man did wrong he should suffer for it, but his human reasoning told him that those who do only good should not suffer. This is why he endeavored to prevent Jesus' death. While his experiences in connection with this futile effort would help to prepare him for "conversion," he did not fully understand this matter until he received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Then he knew why it was necessary for Jesus to die, and he quoted a prophecy from the Old Testament relating to the death and resurrection of Jesus.—Acts 2:25-28; Ps. 16:10

Later, when Peter himself was imprisoned and threatened with death, we find him so submissive to the divine will that he slept while chained to guards within the prison. (Acts 12:4-6) This was the "converted" Peter, who now knew that in the divine plan for the recovery of man from sin and death, suffering for righteousness' sake is necessary.

And now this "converted" Peter was equipped, both by experience and by revelation, to "strengthen" his brethren in this essential aspect of the Christian life. One of his services along this line is found in his first epistle. In the opening chapter of this letter he refers to the prophetic testimony concerning the "sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." (I Pet. 1:11) In this epistle Peter explains that the followers of Jesus have the privilege of sharing in this foretold suffering.

"Ye also," Peter wrote, "as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." (ch. 2:5) Again: "This is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."—ch. 2:19-21

His Sacrificial Death

In his discussion with Peter after his resurrection, Jesus said: "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." John adds, "This spake he [Jesus], signifying by what death he [Peter] should glorify God."—John 21:18,19

This is generally understood to mean that Jesus foretold Peter's death by crucifixion, this thought being taken from the expression, "Thou shalt stretch forth thy hands." Tradition has it that Peter was crucified head down. Whether or not this be true, we know that Peter was symbolically crucified, in the sense that Paul wrote of himself, saying, "I am crucified with Christ."—Gal. 2:20

To "stretch forth" the hands could also well represent the thought of surrender to another. While Jesus surrendered to his enemies and allowed them to put him to death, this was but a reflection of his surrender to his Heavenly Father, whose will it was for him to die as the world's Redeemer. Likewise, Peter also surrendered himself to God and understood that the divine will for him, too, was that he should die a sacrificial death, a death that was contrary to the desires of his flesh.

But it was by such a death that Peter was able to glorify God, even as Jesus had foretold. Perhaps Peter had this in mind when he wrote, "What glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye take it patiently?" The implication here is that "glory" does result from suffering for righteousness' sake, that it is thus that God is glorified. Surely to follow thus the example of Jesus is to the glory of God.

James

There were two apostles named James—"James, the son of Zebedee," and "James, the son of Alphaeus." "James the son of Zebedee" was a brother of the Apostle John. To

these two Jesus gave the name Boanerges, meaning "sons of thunder." This burning, impetuous spirit twice manifested itself. (Mark 10:37; Luke 9:54) This spirited brother of John did not continue long after Pentecost, for he was put to death by Herod Agrippa I. (Acts 12:1,2) Almost nothing is known of his activities after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

James, the son of Alphaeus, is generally accredited with writing "The Epistle of James." It seems quite evident that it is this apostle who was also known as "James the Less," perhaps because he was younger, or smaller in stature, than James the son of Zebedee. This apostle was more prominent among the brethren after Pentecost than were some of the others. Jesus seems to have appeared specially to him after his resurrection. (I Cor. 15:7) It would appear that he was an elder in the Jerusalem church.

When the apostles gathered at Jerusalem to decide on some course of action with respect to Gentile converts who were coming into the church in various places, James presided over the conference. It was at this conference that he stood up and said: "Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon 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. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world."— Acts 15:13-18

The last record we have of this apostle is when Paul went to Jerusalem bearing gifts from the various churches, and James, together with the other brethren, advised him to go into the Temple for the ceremony of purification. This, the brethren reasoned, would help to clear Paul of the charge that

he was opposed to the Law of Moses. Instead of serving to avoid trouble, this resulted in rioting against Paul and his protective arrest by the Roman authorities. (Acts 21:17-40) After this we know nothing of James's activity.

John

The Apostle John, as we have seen, was the son of Zebedee and one of the "sons of thunder." We have already noted his close association with Peter, both during the earthly ministry of Jesus and after Pentecost. His Gospel account of the life and teachings of Jesus represents one of his major contributions to the spiritual upbuilding of the entire church of Christ.

While the fourth Gospel bears John's name as the author, nowhere in it does he directly identify himself as the writer. When necessary to refer to any part that he played in connection with the experiences of Jesus, he refers to himself as "that disciple which Jesus loved." Some have used this in an attempt to prove that John was not the author of the fourth Gospel, arguing that he was too humble to speak of himself as being specially loved by Jesus. But this seems like a weak argument. How much more humble is the attitude thus reflected than if he had used the pronoun "I."

John's humility is further reflected in his three epistles. In the first he makes no reference to himself at all; and in the second and third he identifies the writer simply as an "elder." In the Book of Revelation, which this apostle also wrote, he refers to himself simply as "His servant John," or just "John."—Rev. 1:1, 4

The Lord in his wisdom has chosen to emphasize various aspects of his plan through the varying personalities of those whom he has used as his inspired servants. For example, David's background as a shepherd lent itself admirably to this end. Peter's difficulty in connection with Jesus' suffering and death later served to enrich his ministry in connection

with the "sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." We find a further reflection of this in the personality of John.

While John was one of the "sons of thunder," he also evidently had a loving disposition which appreciated companionship. We see this exemplified in his closeness to Jesus on various occasions. It would be just such a personality that could the better appreciate the precious truth which Jesus taught concerning the partnership his disciples were to enjoy with him, both now and when glorified with him in the kingdom.

John picked up this thought from the Master and reveled in it. This fact is reflected in his Gospel and also in his epistles. He saw Jesus, both as the Logos and, forever, as the Son of God. He perceived that as many of the Jewish nation as believed on Jesus were given the authority to become the sons of God, members of the divine family. (John 1:11, 12) In his first epistle he wrote, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God."—I John 3:1-3

Those intimate lessons of partnership which Jesus taught to his disciples in the Upper Room the night before he was crucified were recorded only by John. "I am the vine, ye are the branches," and, "My Father is the husbandman." (John 15:1-8) "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love." (vs. 9) "I go to prepare a place for you." "I will come again, and receive you unto myself." (ch. 14:1-4) "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me."—ch. 17:24

No wonder John later wrote, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." (I John 3:2) John realized that in preparation for this glorious future association and partnership with Jesus, we need to enjoy the fellowship of one another, and of the Father and the Son, even now. He wrote, "That which we have seen and heard

declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship [Greek, partnership] with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”—I John 1:3

But let us not assume that because John was an apostle of love he could not be firm in his defense of the truth and in safeguarding the interests of his brethren. To “the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth,” John wrote, “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed: for he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds.”—II John 1:10, 11

How this beloved apostle must have rejoiced in the privilege that was given to him by the resurrected Jesus of recording those precious promises to the seven churches:

“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”—Rev. 2:7

“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”—Rev. 2:10

“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”—Rev. 2:17

“He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.”—Rev. 2:26, 27

“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”—Rev. 3:5

“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven

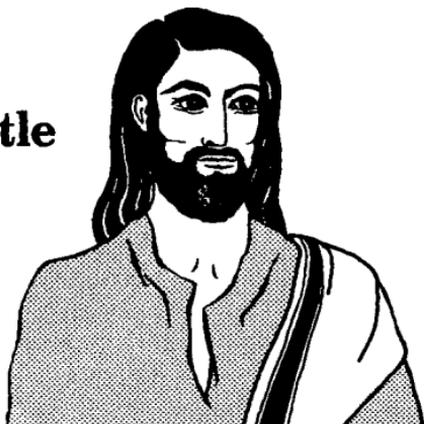
from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.”—Rev. 3:12

“To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”—Rev. 3:21

There is every good reason to believe that John lived to a very old age, continuing faithfully in the service of his Lord to the very end. The exact time of his death lies within the region of conjecture rather than of history. The dates which have been assigned to his death range from A.D. 89 to A.D. 120. But this is not important. Actually, like the other inspired writers of the Bible, his service to the Lord’s people has never ceased.

Chapter 29

Paul, the Twelfth Apostle



JUDAS, one of the original Twelve Apostles chosen by Jesus under the direction of the Holy Spirit, became a traitor and

lost his position among the Twelve. Jesus referred to him as the "son of perdition." (John 17:12) After committing the shameful crime of betraying his Lord, Judas hanged himself, and nothing more is recorded concerning him, except that he was buried in the potter's field.—Matt. 27:5-7

The word apostle simply means one who is sent forth, a messenger, a delegate. In a broad sense we might say that all the true followers of the Master, serving as his ambassadors, are sent forth by the Holy Spirit in the ministry of the Gospel and hence could properly be called apostles. In Hebrews 3:1 Jesus himself is referred to as the "Apostle and High Priest" of the Gospel Age order of priesthood. In a very direct sense Jesus was "sent forth," as are also all his true disciples. He said to his Father, "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world."—John 17:18

While the thought of being "sent forth" into the ministry is true of all Christ's disciples, the Bible also uses the word apostle in a more restricted sense as applying only to the Twelve who were given to Jesus by his Father. The term was also applied later to Paul. These are the specially inspired servants of the church referred to in Revelation 21:14 as the "twelve apostles of the Lamb."

After Jesus was raised from the dead, his eleven remaining apostles, without waiting for instruction from him, decided to choose a successor to Judas. The record of this action is found in Acts 1:15-26. There can be no question about the sincerity of the eleven in deciding upon this course; but there is no evidence that the Lord accepted their choice, Matthias. As far as the record goes, there is nothing to indicate that Matthias was ever used to perform any sort of apostolic service.

It should be remembered that at the time the eleven selected Matthias, they had not received the Holy Spirit. They had been commanded by Jesus to tarry in Jerusalem until they were "endued with power from on high." (Luke 24:49) While they did not leave Jerusalem, they did not "tarry" in the full sense, for they took this unauthorized action of choosing Matthias.

In I Corinthians 12:18 Paul informs us that God has "set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him." As far as the "twelve apostles of the Lamb" were concerned, God acted directly through Jesus in choosing them. Jesus recognized this and referred to them as being given to him by his Heavenly Father. (John 17:6, 12) Matthias was chosen by the eleven through the casting of lots, which seems quite out of keeping with the manner in which the others were chosen.

Saul, the Lord's Choice

"Saul of Tarsus" is clearly shown to be the Lord's choice as the one to take the place of Judas. Saul was the original name of this faithful servant of the Lord. Later he took the name Paul, meaning "little." He was probably born about A.D. 1 to A.D. 4. Of his parents we know nothing except that his father was of the tribe of Benjamin. (Acts 23:6; Phil. 3:5) Although a Jew, by some unexplained manner he was "born free" as a Roman citizen. While born in Tarsus, Paul was "brought up" in Jerusalem and was educated at the feet of Gamaliel. (Acts 22:3) Paul was also educated in the Greek language as well as in his native Hebrew tongue.

These details of Paul's earlier life had a bearing on the effectiveness of his ministry later on. Naturally, they were all foreknown to God, which, together with what the Lord also foreknew concerning Paul's sterling traits of character and his love for righteousness, explains why he was "separated" from his "mother's womb" for the high position he occupied in the church.—Gal. 1:15

The first mention we find of Saul is in Acts 8:1, where we are told that he was "consenting" unto the death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Thus in this introduction Saul is presented to us as an enemy of Christ and of his followers.

Sincere

Saul was sincere in his efforts to stamp out Christianity. He later said to King Agrippa, "I verily thought [within] myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." (Acts 26:9) Sincerity, however, is not enough in one's service to God. Indeed, as was the case with Saul, a person may be wholly sincere in his efforts, but instead of rendering acceptable service to God, he may be working against him and dishonoring his name.

Speaking of Jesus' disciples, Paul also said to King Agrippa: "I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities." (Acts 26:11) Saul "verily thought" it would please God for him thus to cause Christians to suffer; and now there are those who "verily think" that they please God by attempting to bring converts to him through the threat of eternal torture. These are just as wrong as Saul of Tarsus was, and more so. Their sincerity does not sanctify their God-dishonoring activities.

We read in Acts 9:1,2 that "Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way,

whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound into Jerusalem.”

Apparently Saul was given the “letters” he requested, “and as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven. He fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.”— Acts 9:3-5

What a revelation this was to Saul! Trembling and astonished, he inquired, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” The immediate instructions were limited. He was simply bidden to go into the city, with the explanation that there it would be told him what he was to do. Saul arose, blinded by the light of the vision, and was led by the hand into Damascus.

Paul Saw Jesus

Apparently the Lord considered that one of the qualifications for apostleship was that each of the apostles should be given “infallible proofs” that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Acts 1:1-3 reveals that the eleven had been given these proofs; but what about Saul of Tarsus? He was not with the eleven when Jesus appeared to them.

Paul himself explains this in I Corinthians 15:3-9. Here he mentions different ones to whom Jesus manifested himself after his resurrection, and then adds, “Last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.” This is a reference to Paul’s experience on the Damascus road. Jesus’ appearance to him was very different from that to the other apostles. To them Jesus appeared in a body of flesh, but not so to Paul, who explains, “He was seen of me, . . . as of one born out of due time.” What did Paul mean by this?

The Apostle John wrote: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” (I John 3:1, 2) The eleven did not see

Jesus as he "is." They saw him as he "was"; that is, what they saw was a body of flesh in which Jesus had miraculously appeared.

Actually, however, when Jesus was raised from the dead he was "born of the Spirit" and, as a divine, spirit being, was invisible to human eyes. (John 3:8) His followers are promised that in the resurrection, when they also are "born of the Spirit," they will be like the resurrected Jesus. They will then see him "as he is" and, in fact, will be with him.—John 14:3; 17:24

When Paul wrote his first epistle to the brethren in Corinth, he had this glorious hope of being born of the Spirit in the resurrection and of thus being with Jesus, being like him, and seeing him "as he is." But, in telling of his experience on the Damascus road, he said that he saw Jesus as one "born out of [before] due time"; that is, he caught a brief and partial glimpse of the resurrected Jesus prior to his own birth of the Spirit, prior to the "due time" of his birth into the heavenly realm. So Paul did see Jesus after he was raised from the dead and thus had this qualification for apostleship.

A Chosen Vessel

From the Damascus road, where Paul caught that brief glimpse of the resurrected Jesus, he went into the city and lodged in the house of Judas, who lived on the "street which is called Straight." It was here that the Lord sent a messenger to Paul with definite instructions concerning the things he "must do."—Acts 9:6, 11

This messenger was Ananias, to whom the Lord appeared in a vision. The Lord said to Ananias, "Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, and hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, . . . that he might receive his sight."—Acts 9:10-12

Ananias at first questioned this arrangement, explaining, "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he

hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.” (vss. 13,14) “But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.”—vss. 15,16

Here is further proof that Paul was chosen by the Lord to be one of the “twelve apostles of the Lamb.” He is a “chosen vessel,” the Lord said. And Ananias was to explain to Paul “how great things” he would be called upon to suffer for the Lord’s “name’s sake.” In writing to the church at Corinth, Paul refers to his suffering for Christ as one of the evidences of his apostleship.—II Cor. 11:23-28

“Are they ministers of Christ?” Paul inquires, referring to some who had called his apostleship in question. Then he adds, “I am more,” more, that is, than simply a minister of Christ. All the consecrated followers of Jesus are ministers of Christ; but Paul was a chosen vessel, chosen to be a special apostle; and in this position he accepted the bitter persecution that was heaped upon him as evidence of his calling, as Ananias had explained the matter to him.

Paul was blinded by the light which shone around him on the Damascus road, but as Ananias ministered to him in the house of Judas, the “scales” fell from his eyes and he was able to see. Then “he arose, and was baptized.” (Acts 9:17-19) The “vision” on the Damascus road had opened the eyes of his understanding, and now, having received instructions from Ananias, this man of action was immediately ready to enter upon his new vocation. He who had been doing all he could to destroy Christianity was now ready to lay down his life promoting the cause of his newly found Lord.

Since Paul recognized his direct appointment by the Lord to the apostleship, he did not deem it necessary to confer with the other apostles before entering upon his ministry.

(Gal. 1:15-19) We read in Acts 9:20,21 that, after tarrying certain days with the disciples in Damascus, “straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?”

Chronologically, Paul’s early ministry in Damascus is somewhat ambiguous. In Galatians 1:17, 18 he explains: “I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.” How long Paul remained in Arabia and what he did while there the Scriptures do not reveal. Seemingly, however, he returned from Arabia to Damascus. It was probably after he returned that he preached Christ in the synagogues. It seems apparent also that he went to Jerusalem for the first time three years after his conversion, meanwhile having gone to Arabia and returned to Damascus.

Because of Paul’s faithful ministry in Damascus, persecution arose against him and his life was in danger. By the assistance of fellow disciples he escaped “by night” from the city, being let “down by the wall in a basket.” It was then that he went to Jerusalem. The brethren in Jerusalem were “all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out of Jerusalem. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him.”—Acts 9:23-29

In Galatians 1:18, 19 Paul explains that he went up to Jerusalem from Damascus to see Peter, and adds, “Other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord’s brother.” This may seem to disagree with Acts 9:27, which informs us that

Barnabas brought Paul "to the apostles." Actually, however, it does not. It is very doubtful that the "apostles" here mentioned included all eleven of them. Doubtless some of them were out of the city at the time doing missionary work. Apparently the only "apostles" in Jerusalem at the time were Peter and James, whom Paul testifies to having seen.

Paul states that he abode with Peter fifteen days, and these must have been busy days. It was apparently during this time that he "spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians." It is doubtful that he was persecuted by the Grecians. They gloried in their pastime of "disputing" and doubtless found an able contestant in Paul. Perhaps it was here that Paul became acquainted with some of their theories, as revealed by him in his sermon on Mars' Hill.—Acts 17:22-30

However, the religious rulers in Jerusalem were far from pleased with Paul's preaching and "went about to slay him." (Acts 9:29) Again, by the assistance of the brethren, Paul escaped from his would-be killers. "They brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus." (vs. 30) Saul the persecutor was now Paul the Christian. He was back in his home town, no longer himself a persecutor, and temporarily inactive in preaching Christ where the enemies of the cross were most numerous. The church had rest "throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, were multiplied."—vs. 31

Paul Again Becomes Active

The persecution of the brethren at the hands of Saul, which reached its climax in the martyrdom of Stephen, caused a scattering of the disciples, some of them traveling as far as "Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only." (Acts 11:19, 20) The Lord blessed this effort, "and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord."—vs. 21

The brethren in Jerusalem learned of this activity and its results, and, wishing to assist, "they sent forth Barnabas,

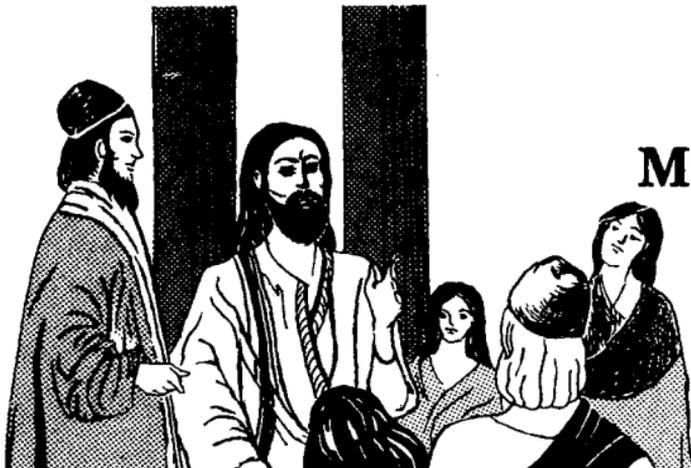
that he should go as far as Antioch.” (vs. 22) Of Barnabas it is written that “he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.” (Acts 11:24) Having become acquainted with Paul and recognizing his abilities, Barnabas, before going to Antioch, first went to Tarsus to seek out this new apostle and invite him to assist in the work at Antioch.

Paul accepted the invitation and, when they reached Antioch, “it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people.” Evidently the activity of Barnabas and Paul, together with the other disciples in Antioch, attracted public attention. It was here, the record states, that the disciples were first called “Christians.”—Acts 11:26

It does not say the disciples called themselves Christians. Evidently this name was given to them by the world. The name appears only two other times in the New Testament. One of these times is in Acts 26:28, and the other is in a text in which the Apostle Peter says, “If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.” (I Pet. 4:16) This suggests that “Christians” were then held in derision, and it is quite possible that this name was applied to the followers of Jesus by their enemies as a means of heaping ridicule upon them. Today the name Christian is generally accepted as though it had been given to the followers of Jesus by God.

Ananias had no doubt revealed to Paul that he would have the opportunity to suffer for the name of Christ, and in Damascus and Jerusalem he had already experienced bitter opposition. In both places the enemies of the cross had plotted to kill him. But now that he was back in active service, he was to learn the awful lengths to which the blinded ministers of the Adversary can go in opposing the light of the Gospel and those who bear witness to it.

Paul the Missionary



THE Apostle Paul's first major effort in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ was at Antioch. After witnessing briefly at Damascus and Jerusalem, he went to his home city of Tarsus, perhaps to await an indication of the Lord's will as to just how, where, and when he should engage more actively in the ministry. He did not have to wait long, for Barnabas sought the apostle and persuaded him to accompany him to Antioch, there to share with him and others in the work of proclaiming the Gospel.

From the first time Barnabas met Paul, he had confidence in him; and when the brethren at Jerusalem had their misgivings concerning this former persecutor of the church, Barnabas sponsored him. Concerning this we read: "When Saul was come to Jerusalem, he essayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus." —Acts 9:26, 27

The persecution of the church which resulted in the death of Stephen caused a scattering of the brethren, a number of them going to Antioch. There they began to witness to the

Grecians, and, with the Lord's blessing upon them, encouraging success accompanied their efforts. The record is that "the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord."—Acts 11:21

The good news of this flourishing interest in the truth at Antioch reached the brethren in Jerusalem, who, being alert to their privileges and responsibilities, sent Barnabas to Antioch to assist. Apparently they considered Barnabas a more seasoned disciple whose instructions and example would be a great blessing to the newly interested in Antioch.

The expectations of the brethren at Jerusalem concerning the ministry of Barnabas in Antioch were realized, for we read concerning him that when he reached Antioch "and had seen the grace of God, [he] was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord; for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord."—Acts 11:23,24

When Barnabas surveyed the situation at Antioch, he realized that there was much work to be done there in the service of the truth and the brethren and that he could use help. It was then that he thought of Paul, whom he loved in the Lord and in whom he had confidence. Knowing that Paul had gone to his home town of Tarsus, Barnabas went there, found the apostle, and persuaded him to return with him to Antioch.—Acts 11:25-30

The church at Antioch accepted both Barnabas and Saul as accredited and qualified servants of the Lord. When the need arose to send material aid to their brethren in Jerusalem, these two were chosen by the congregation to bear the gifts. In due time "Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark."—Acts 12:25

The work in Antioch continued to prosper. Not only did the ecclesia grow in numbers but among the local brethren several developed into competent servants, so that it became apparent that the services of Barnabas and Paul were no

longer so vitally needed. There were Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, in addition to Barnabas and Saul. The record is that "as they ministered unto the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus."—Acts 13:1-4

Paul's First Missionary Tour

So Paul, who by divine appointment took the place of Judas among the Twelve, was now embarked on his first missionary tour, being accompanied by Barnabas and John Mark, who is described in the Revised Version as the attendant of Paul and Barnabas. (Acts 13:5) It is interesting to note that while these two served together in Antioch they are referred to as Barnabas and Saul, but soon after they left Antioch, Paul's name is placed first—"Paul and Barnabas."—Acts 13:43, 46

The historian evidently recognized that there was now a reason for placing Paul's name first. The first recorded missionary activity of their journey was in Salamis, where "they preached the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews." (Acts 13:5) While Paul was made a special apostle to the Gentiles, he hesitated not to witness to the Jews whenever and wherever he found an opportunity.

Salamis was on the island of Cyprus, "and when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus: which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul [Saul was the apostle's Jewish name, but among the Gentiles he was called Paul, which is the name now almost universally accepted], and desired to hear the Word of God."—Acts 13:6, 7

Then the sorcerer, who in reality was a servant of the Devil, withstood Barnabas and Paul, "seeking to turn away the

deputy from the faith.” (vs. 8) Then Paul, “filled with the Holy Spirit, set his eyes upon him, and said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the Devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.”—vss. 9-11

Here was Paul’s first exercise of divine authority and power in the ministry as an apostle. The fact that the sorcerer, by Paul’s act, was made blind, was very impressive, and from that time on we find him definitely the leader of the group and in most instances the spokesman. Yes, now it was “Paul and Barnabas,” rather than Barnabas and Paul. In God’s providence this great apostle had now been elevated to his ordained position in the ministry of the truth and the brethren. Even the deputy of the country, whom the sorcerer tried to prevent from hearing the Gospel, was impressed and “believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.”—vs. 12

Paul’s Sermon in Antioch

From Paphos, on the island of Cyprus, Paul and his companions sailed north to Perga, in Pamphylia, which was one of the coast regions in the south of Asia Minor, having Cilicia on the east and Lycia on the west. No information is given us concerning their visit to Perga except that here John Mark left the party and returned to Jerusalem.

“From Perga they came to Antioch in Pisidia.” (vs. 14) The Antioch from which Paul and Barnabas had started on their missionary journey was in Syria. Reaching “Antioch in Pisidia” they “went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and sat down.” Here again we find Paul seeking out the devout Jews, to witness to them. In the Antioch synagogue Paul’s opportunity soon came. After the reading of a portion of the Law and the prophets, the rulers, seeing these

strangers in their midst, sent word to them saying, "Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on."—vs. 15

Paul did not need to be urged. He "stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience." (vs. 16) Then Paul, in his usual forthright, though diplomatic, manner, presented the Gospel of Christ to the Jews and proselyte Jews assembled in the synagogue. He first traced Israel's traditional religious background, which he affirmed as being true and which was highly treasured by every devout Israelite.

Adroitly Paul referred to John the Baptist, who apparently occupied an honored position in the minds and hearts of most Jews. He explained to them that John had announced the presence of Jesus, their Messiah, placing him in a very high position by saying that he (John) was not worthy even to unloose Jesus' shoes.

The audience knew that it was their own people in and around Jerusalem who had insisted on Jesus' being put to death. Paul explained to them that, although the Jews of Judea did not know it, actually the prophecies in which they professed to believe had foretold that this was exactly what they would do.

"But God raised him from the dead." (vs. 30) This was the keynote of Paul's message. No matter how they might try to explain the crucifixion of Jesus or insist, perhaps, that their compatriots in Jerusalem had acted wisely in putting him to death, their arguments would have no weight at all in face of the fact that God had raised him from the dead. Had Jesus been a sinner, a blasphemer, a traitor to Israel, and an enemy of the nation, God would not have raised him from the dead.

Then Paul proceeded to show that the resurrection of Jesus, as well as his death as man's Redeemer, had been foretold by God through his holy prophets. He said: "We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their

children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.”—vss. 32, 33

Then Paul (vs. 34) quoted another prophecy from the Old Testament which he indicated implied the necessity for Jesus’ being raised from the dead. It was the prophecy of Isaiah 55:3, from which the statement is taken, “I will give you the sure mercies of David.” This prophecy is related to the covenant which God made with David. It was outlined to David by the Prophet Nathan, who said to him:

“The Lord telleth thee that he will make thee an house. And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name [the immediate fulfillment of this was through David’s son Solomon], and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: but my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established forever before thee: thy throne shall be established forever.”—II Sam. 7:11-16

David sensed, in part at least, the importance of this promise and in response said: “Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant’s house for a great while to come.” (II Sam. 7:18, 19) David could not, of course, know the full extent of that “great while” which he sensed was implied by God’s wonderful promise to him; but when, as the Apostle Paul indicates, we find that the resurrection of Jesus was related to its fulfillment, it begins to take on a meaning that is truly wonderful.

Paul, of course, spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and he was also well acquainted with the prophetic

testimony concerning the "throne of David"; so in his association of these prophecies with the resurrection of Jesus, we have a lucid example of properly interpreting the Word of God. Isaiah wrote concerning Jesus, the Messiah: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this." —Isa. 9:6,7

And then Paul would also know of the angel's declaration to Mary when announcing to her that she was to be the mother of the Messiah. "Fear not, Mary," the angel said, "for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." — Luke 1:30-33

By reading the history of the successive kings in the royal line of David, from his death to the overthrow of Zedekiah in 606 B.C., one is impressed with the manner in which, through the overruling providences of God, the davidic line of kings was not permitted to be destroyed. Jesus, through his birth, belonged to that family and was the real heir to David's throne. But he had no sons, and he himself was killed by his enemies. From the human standpoint, this would mean the end of this royal line of kings.

But not actually so, for God intervened, not to save the King from death, but to raise him from the dead. Thus, as Paul indicates, the mighty power of God was utilized to make certain the "sure mercies of David," that is, to fulfill the

promise made to David, which was based upon mercy. Thus it was, in view of the circumstances, that Paul saw in the Davidic covenant a forecast of Jesus' resurrection.

Paul, proceeding with his sermon, quoted from another prophecy of Jesus' resurrection (Ps. 16:10), the one referred to by Peter in the sermon he preached on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:27)—“Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” Paul reasoned, as did Peter, that this could not refer to David himself, because David did see corruption and was still dead. He “fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.”—Acts 13:35-37

After establishing the fact that Jesus, in fulfillment of prophecy, had been raised from the dead, Paul then made the practical application of this truth to the lives of those who could believe it. He continued: “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses.” (vs. 38,39) Then Paul closed his sermon with a note of warning that they should not in a spirit of unbelief lightly dismiss what he had said.

Verse 42, Revised Version, states that “as they went out, they besought that the Word might be preached to them the next Sabbath.” The next verse explains that “many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.”

Seemingly no official invitation by the rulers of the synagogue was extended to Paul and Barnabas to return. But many who heard the message believed. These followed the missionaries after leaving the synagogue and were further indoctrinated in the truth concerning Jesus, their Redeemer and Messiah. It was a short sermon they had heard, but it touched the very center of their messianic hopes and assured them that their Messiah had come, that he had died as their

Redeemer, had been raised from the dead, and that now they had the privilege of accepting him in full heart belief and being "justified from all things."

"And the next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the Word of God." (vs. 44) Here was a spontaneous response to Paul's preaching. There had been no previous publicity by "cooperating congregations," no high pressure advertising, no importing of an audience from distant cities. One sermon had been preached by the great Apostle Paul, and the news concerning it had been circulated, with the result that the following Sabbath "almost the whole city" gathered together to hear Paul.

We are not to assume that all these people were genuinely interested in the Gospel of Christ. Much of the excitement was, no doubt, based on curiosity. After all, Paul had said some startling things. He had declared that a certain One, even Jesus of Nazareth, had been raised from the dead. Certainly the urge to hear more about something as sensational as this would be well nigh irresistible. Millions, even today, gather once each year to commemorate, at least nominally, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

"But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy." This is characteristic, not only of Jews, but of Gentiles as well. They began to oppose Paul and Barnabas, "contradicting and blaspheming." But this did not discourage these ardent missionaries. "It was necessary," they said, "that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing you put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles."—vss. 45, 46

Paul understood the principles of the divine plan. He knew that the opportunities of the Gospel of Christ were to be offered to "the Jew first" and that then the Gentiles were also to have an opportunity. (Rom. 2:9, 10) Paul quoted a prophecy to show that God had made provision for the Gentiles in his great plan of redemption through Jesus.—vs. 47

“When the Gentiles heard this,” the record states, “they were glad, and glorified the Word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” (vs. 48) The expression “as many as were ordained to eternal life” does not mean that these were foreordained to be saved and go to heaven when they died and that the remainder of this great multitude who gathered to hear Paul had been predestinated by God to be tortured in hell-fire forever, as many theologians of the past so shamelessly taught.

According to Prof. Strong, the Greek word here translated “ordained” literally means “to arrange in an orderly manner.” We read in Acts 15:14 that “God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.” It was not the divine plan to convert all the Gentiles during the Gospel Age, but merely to select from them a small company who, through devotion and self-sacrificing, would prove worthy to reign with Christ in his thousand-year kingdom; and this work of selection has been done by God in an “orderly manner.”

Jesus said, “No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” (John 6:44) Whether it was Paul’s preaching in Antioch or in Pisidia or the humble efforts of a devoted Christian in witnessing to his next-door neighbor, it has been only as God “draws” that there has ever been a genuine response to the Gospel message. Thus it has been accomplished in an “orderly manner,” for our Heavenly Father is a God of order. His drawing has been based on heart qualities and other considerations which he knows would, if the individual proves faithful, blend with the divine plan for the later blessing of all mankind.

In the Lord’s providence, Paul and Barnabas found it necessary to move on from Antioch. They had no choice, for “the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against” them, “and expelled them out of their coasts. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium.”—vss. 50, 51

Iconium was situated in the western part of an extensive plain, on the central tableland of Asia Minor. This level district was anciently called Lycaonia, of which, according to most writers, Iconium was the capital. Here the general pattern of events for Paul and Barnabas continued about the same as they had experienced in other places. First there was the witness in the synagogue. Then the unbelieving Jews began to oppose, stirring up the spirit of riot among the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas continued their efforts in the city as long as they could, however, leaving only when they learned that there was a plot to inflict physical violence upon them.—Acts 14:1-6

From Iconium they fled to Lystra and Derbe, other cities of Lycaonia, “and unto the region that lieth round about.” Here Paul had the opportunity of healing a man who was “impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother’s womb, who never had walked. . . . And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices saying in the speech [or language] of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.”—vss. 6-12

The people prepared to offer sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas, but when the missionaries learned of the plans, “they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless, he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”—vss. 14-17

Those to whom Paul thus witnessed were Gentiles, so his approach was quite different from that which he used in a

Jewish synagogue. He called their attention to the goodness of God as manifested in the loving provisions of food he had made for all nations. If they had not heard of this true God before, the One who had created the heaven and the earth, it was because he had permitted them to go along in their own way without interference. Nevertheless, even though they did not know him and had never given him thanks for his daily blessing, he loved them. It was necessary that they understand and appreciate this basic truth before Paul could lead them further into the mysteries of the Gospel.

The record does not indicate whether or not any of these accepted Paul's message or were deeply impressed by it. Seemingly, before it had time to take root in their hearts, unbelieving Jews of Antioch and Iconium, who had followed Paul and Barnabas from those cities, appeared on the scene and stirred up the people to stone Paul. He was rendered unconscious and given up as dead. However, he revived, and the next day he and Barnabas continued their journey to Derbe.

The Return Journey

After they had preached the Gospel in Derbe and "had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium and to Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." These "disciples" whom Paul and Barnabas thus confirmed in the faith were those who had believed during their first visit to these cities.

Without doubt all these new disciples had suffered persecution; so it was explained to them that this was part of the cost of discipleship, that only by suffering with Christ could they hope to reign with him in the kingdom. Under these circumstances, it is unlikely that any continued in the way of the Gospel except those who had genuine faith, to whom the Lord had given a vision of the kingdom's

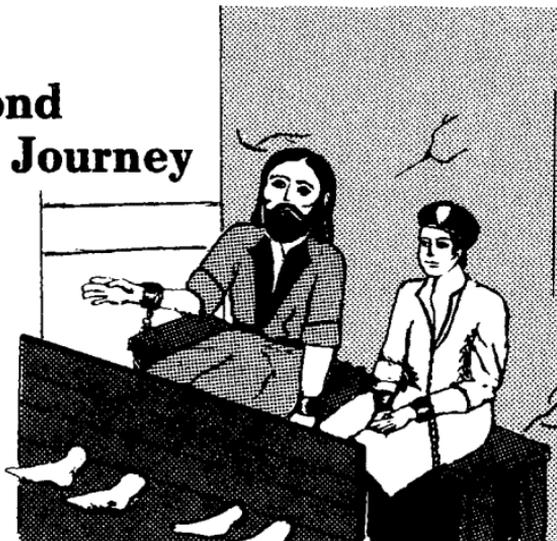
mysteries. There was no present reward except the peace and joy of knowing that the great plan of God through the Messiah was progressing to a glorious and victorious consummation.

Elders were “ordained” in these groups; that is, Paul instructed them in the importance of working together in an orderly manner and of choosing the competent among them to serve as leaders, or teachers. Thus we see that Paul was not only an evangelist but a pastor also, a genuine caretaker of the flock, instructing the disciples in all their needs.

Then, after visiting a few more places, including Perga and Attalia, the details of which are not given, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch of Syria, the Antioch, that is, from which they had started on this first missionary tour. Arriving there they gathered together the brethren who had sent them out and to whom a report was therefore proper, and “they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.” Would that all Christians would speak more of what “God had done with them” rather than what they have done for God!

Chapter 31

Paul's Second Missionary Journey



AFTER completing his first missionary tour, returning to Antioch from where he started, Paul and Barnabas his companion remained for some time with the brethren in Antioch. Then this flourishing congregation of disciples was visited by immature brethren from Judea who said, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." (Acts 15:1) Paul and Barnabas withstood their teaching, and the brethren of the Antioch church sent them to Jerusalem "unto the apostles and elders about this question."—vs. 2

On their way to Jerusalem they visited the brethren in Phenice and Samaria and brought great rejoicing to them by reporting the fact that in many places Gentiles were now accepting Christ. Reaching Jerusalem they gave a full report to the brethren of the wonderful manner in which the Lord had blessed them on their first missionary journey and in Antioch.

In Jerusalem, also, there appeared among the brethren "certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying,

That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the Law of Moses.” (vs. 5) Then a conference of the elders and apostles was called to consider the question. The record speaks of there being “much disputing” over this subject. Probably some endeavored to deny that Gentile believers were being accepted by God at all, while others insisted that in any event they should be circumcised. Doubtless other viewpoints were also pressed at this assembly.

Finally Peter, who had been sent by the Lord to Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, gave his report of that experience. (vss. 7-12) Then James asked to be heard and, in keeping with Peter’s testimony, stated that God was indeed now visiting the Gentiles, the purpose being “to take out of them a people for his name.” James explained that this was in agreement with the words of the Prophet Amos.—Acts 15:13-17; Amos 9:11, 12

After further deliberation it was decided to dispatch letters to the Gentile disciples asking them to “abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.” (Acts 15:20) It was further decided to commission two brethren—“Judas, surnamed Barsabas, and Silas”—to go to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, bearing the authorized letters of instructions to Gentile converts.

So now we find Paul and Barnabas back in Antioch, where the Lord continued to bless the general ministry of the brethren. Realizing that they were not specially needed in Antioch, where there were other capable brethren willing and ready to serve, Paul proposed to Barnabas that they start out on another journey, with the object particularly of visiting and confirming those who had become believers during their first missionary tour.—vss. 36-39

Barnabas was quite willing to do this, but he insisted that they take Mark as a helper. Paul did not agree with this. Mark had deserted them soon after they started their first

missionary tour, so Paul was unwilling for him to accompany them the second time. The contention over this was sharp between Paul and Barnabas, so that they parted company, and Paul chose Silas instead to accompany him, the latter now being in Antioch at the behest of the elders and apostles of Jerusalem.

Luke, the historian, bridges over the first part of Paul's second journey with the statement, "He went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches." (vs. 41) "Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek."—ch. 16:1

It may be assumed that Timotheus, or Timothy, became a believer either directly or indirectly as a result of Paul's first missionary tour, although we have no scriptural record of it. This young man, and believer, we are informed, was "well reported of by the brethren at Lystra and Iconium." (vs. 2) This confidence was justified, for Timothy was destined to become one of the outstanding servants in the Early Church.

He became a valuable co-worker with Paul. The apostle loved him dearly and referred to him as his son Timothy. To Timothy Paul wrote two of his epistles, the last from prison in Rome, where he expected soon to be executed.

It was on Paul's second missionary tour that he invited this spiritual son to be a fellow worker, and Timothy accepted the invitation. Paul was one who believed in giving as little cause as possible for offense among those with Jewish background and training, so he arranged to have Timothy circumcised. The Jews in "those quarters" knew that Timothy's father was a Greek and therefore had not had his son circumcised.

This detail attended to, the three—Paul, Silas, and Timothy—now went forth together. As they went from city to city establishing the brethren in the faith, they also delivered the decree given to them by the elders and apostles at Jerusalem, outlining the minimum requirements of Gentile believers as

far as the Law of Moses was concerned. (vss. 4,5) A brief summary of another part of this journey is presented in verses 6-8, with the information that they were forbidden to continue preaching the Gospel in Asia—Asia Minor, that is.

This was a temporary measure, and for a good purpose. There was another field which was, at the time, more important to serve. This was brought to Paul's attention in a dream, or vision, in which he heard the voice of a "man" saying, "Come over into Macedonia, and help us." (vs. 9) In verse 10 we read: "And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the Gospel unto them."

This vision came to Paul at Troas, and hereafter an interesting sidelight appears in the record, through the use of the pronouns "we" and "us." Luke is the historian, and it seems evident that he joined the party at Troas and thus included himself in the record.

From Troas, Luke wrote: "We came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; and from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia." (vss. 11,12) This brief statement reveals the dispatch with which Paul responded to the call of the Holy Spirit to go into Macedonia. Thus did this great apostle always respond to the leadings of the Lord. He knew not what awaited him in Macedonia—how he would fare from a material standpoint, what persecutions he might encounter, or what joys he would experience. He simply knew that the Lord wanted him to go to Macedonia to preach the Gospel of Christ and of the kingdom, so he went.

First Macedonian Convert

Arriving in Philippi, Paul and his companions remained there "certain days," apparently to survey the situation and to decide the best method of reaching those who would be likely to give a "hearing ear" to their message. They learned that there was a place outside the city by the side of the river,

“where prayer was wont to be made.” They concluded that here they would find the truly devout people of the city, especially on the Sabbath.

Their conclusions were right. They went to this place of prayer on the Sabbath and “sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.” (vs. 13) “And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshiped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.”—vs. 14

In this brief narrative there is expressed a vital truth which is often overlooked by those who proclaim the Gospel. It is contained in the statement “whose heart the Lord opened,” referring to Lydia. Jesus said that no man could come unto him unless drawn by the Heavenly Father. (John 6:44) Even when the great Apostle Paul, with all his eloquence, was the speaker, he could convince none except those drawn by the Father, or, as Luke expressed it, whose hearts are opened by the Lord.

But the fact that the Lord did open Lydia’s heart to the message would encourage Paul, for it would help him to understand why he had heard the call, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” He could see from this experience that there were those in Macedonia whose hearts the Lord had prepared to receive the Gospel. Yes, the Lord was directing his work, and how Paul must have rejoiced.

Writing further concerning Lydia, Luke explains: “When she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.” Apparently those of Lydia’s household also accepted the Gospel. This was quite a common thing in those days. Seemingly in many instances the family and servants in a home held the head of the household in high esteem and were greatly influenced thereby.

Paul and his companions accepted Lydia's hospitality, and it was in her home that the church at Philippi was founded. This was the first congregation of Christian believers in Macedonia and, in fact, in Europe. Lydia was a Gentile who had been converted to the Jewish faith, hence the reason for her being at prayer on the Sabbath day.

When Paul was first converted, the Lord said to Ananias concerning him, "I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." (Acts 9:16) Paul experienced the reality of this forecast concerning him, for in practically every place he visited, suffering of one sort or another was inflicted upon him. It was so in Philippi.

With an ecclesia established in Lydia's home, this little missionary group must have rejoiced. But they soon began to experience the "bitter" with the "sweet." Luke writes: "It came to pass as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying. The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation." —ch. 16:16, 17

This happened, Luke reports, while they were on the way to prayer. It would seem that prayer meetings were being held in Lydia's home, and daily, for in verse 18 we are told that the damsel with the spirit of divination repeated her performance "many days." It was true enough, as the damsel announced day by day, that Paul and his companions were the "servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation." With Paul's miraculous insight, however, he recognized that this was not actually the damsel speaking, but an evil spirit speaking through her.

Paul knew that no good could come from the proclamation made by an evil spirit but that, instead, some evil design had been plotted by Satan through this spirit, which was one of his "angels." (Matt. 25:41) Recognizing it to be the work of

Satan, Paul commanded that the spirit leave the damsel, "and he came out the same hour."—vs. 18

The damsel was in the employ of "masters" who were using her divinations as a source of revenue. Naturally, when her powers were taken away, their business was destroyed. So they "caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the market place [margin, court] unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans."—vss. 19-21

The customary mob was stirred up against these servants of God, and to satisfy the "popular" demand of the citizens, they were beaten and thrown into prison. The magistrates commanded the jailer to keep them "safely, who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks."—vss. 22-24

What was Paul's reaction to this treatment? Did he begin to complain and question as to whether or not the Lord had really wanted him to serve in Macedonia? No, because he realized that the Lord had already placed his seal of approval upon the Macedonian ministry; for had not Lydia and her household accepted the Gospel? Also, an ecclesia had been established in her home. This blessed fruitage of their labor in Philippi was worth all the suffering that might now be heaped upon them.

So, instead of bemoaning their dreadful plight, at midnight they "prayed, and sang praises unto God." There in the prison, with their feet locked in the stocks and not knowing what fate awaited them in the morning, Paul and Silas had their own "prayer" and "praise" service. And we can well imagine that one of the things for which they praised the Heavenly Father was the opportunity he had given them, as Paul reminded the Philippian brethren later, not only of believing on Christ, but also of suffering for his sake.—Phil. 1:29,30

We know that the Lord heard the prayers and praise of these two beloved servants, “and the prisoners heard them” also. The prisoners were helpless to do anything about it, even if they had wanted to. But the Lord’s arm was not shorted, for “suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s bands were loosed.”—vss. 25, 26

Then “the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, . . . drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.” (vs. 27) “But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.” (vs. 28) The jailer was greatly impressed, as anyone would have been under the circumstances. He fell down at the feet of Paul and Silas, and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”—vs. 30

Paul’s answer to this question was brief and to the point—“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” (vs. 31) This does not imply that the jailer’s household would be saved through his belief. No, the same conditions applied to them as applied to the jailer. They, too, must believe.

Nor was this simple statement of fact all that Paul said to the jailer and his household. Verse 32 informs us that Paul spoke the Word of the Lord both to the jailer and to his household. The Word of the Lord concerning man’s sinful state, his condemnation to death, and his redemption through the blood of Christ can be clearly set forth in a short time. This blessed theme of salvation through Jesus can be amplified and its details set forth in harmonious array at great lengths. But all the beautiful details of the divine plan do not need to be understood in order for one to believe on Christ and, through him, receive justification to life

Full belief includes surrender to the Lord and obedience to his will. This is revealed in the account of the jailer and his

household by the fact that they were all baptized, or immersed in water, as a symbol of their dedication to the Lord, the burial of their will into his will. The genuineness of the jailer's belief is further attested by the fact that he took Paul and Silas into his home, dressed their wounds, and fed them. He did all he could to make amends for his part in the suffering which had been inflicted upon these two soldiers of the cross.

Release and Departure

The next morning, the magistrates having heard what happened in the prison during the night, became fearful and sent their "sergeants" to the jailer with the message, "Let those men go." This message was relayed to Paul and Silas, and they were told to "depart, and go in peace."—vss. 35, 36

Imagine the surprise of the jailer, and more especially of the magistrates, when Paul refused to leave the prison unless escorted by those who had been responsible for his arrest. He took this stand because of being a Roman citizen. Paul knew his rights under the Roman law; so the magistrates were obligated to do as they were requested.

It was a brief but trying experience for Paul and Silas. Actually, they were in the prison only the one night. But while much physical suffering was involved, as well as humiliation, the results were glorious; for out of that experience came the conversion of the jailer and his household. The cost of every true conversion throughout the age has been high. That is one reason every saint of God is as a precious jewel to him; and we also should esteem them very highly.

The magistrates in Philippi had been placed in a very embarrassing position, which probably would have continued and perhaps have become even more humiliating had Paul and Silas remained in the city. So, while they publicly escorted these two servants of the Lord out of the prison, as demanded by the apostle, they, nevertheless, requested—for

they knew that they could not command—them to leave the city.

In this situation we again see the magnificent nobility of the great Apostle Paul. It was probably on behalf of the brethren in the new ecclesia in Philippi that he insisted on vindication for himself and Silas. Had he not done this, every believer in Christ in that territory might well have been considered an outlaw and treated as such. Now it would be different, at least for a while, for the first converts would be looked upon as the followers of a Roman citizen, even though, as doubtless many would conclude, a deluded one.

But, having accomplished his purpose in this respect, Paul did not insist on further embarrassing the magistrates, so he willingly complied with their request to leave the city. Before doing so, however, they went to the home of Lydia and enjoyed a farewell meeting with the brethren assembled there. The hymn “God Be with You till We Meet Again” had not yet been composed, but we can well imagine that this was the sentiment of their hearts as they prayed and sang praises together.

An interesting sidelight appears in connection with this farewell gathering of the brethren in Philippi. Concerning Paul and Silas, Luke wrote, “When they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.” (vs. 40) We might well suppose that, under the circumstances, Paul and Silas would be the ones who needed to be comforted, but not so. These two faithful ambassadors of Christ, who had been beaten and jailed and now were requested to leave the city, comforted the other brethren who had not suffered, except in the sense of being the “companions” of those who were so used.—Heb. 10:33

So Paul’s first visit to Philippi came suddenly to an end. Many years later, while a prisoner in Rome, he wrote a letter to this little group of faithful brethren and reminded them of this “day” of sweet fellowship and of how much it had continued to mean to him. “I thank my God upon every

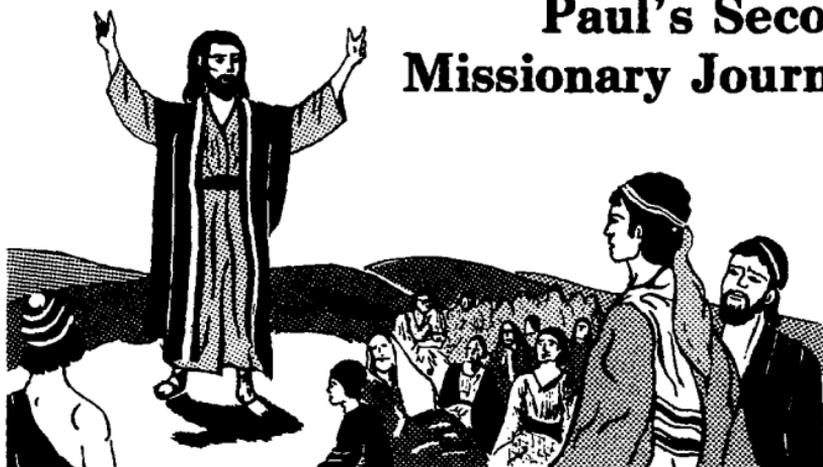
remembrance of you,” he wrote, “always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”—Phil. 1:3-6

What sweet memories Paul must have held of his experience on the river bank where Lydia heard and believed the Gospel! Just as Luke reported that the Lord had opened her heart, so now Paul wrote that it was the Lord who had begun the good work in the hearts of all the Philippian brethren. He knew that this was true of Lydia and of the others as well.

We may not know just what experiences the Lord will permit, or even direct, in order to open the hearts of those whom he calls by the Gospel. The record does not reveal how it was accomplished in the case of Lydia; but doubtless the earthquake which shook the prison in Philippi and released the prisoners that night when Paul and Silas were praying and praising the Lord had much to do with preparing the jailer to be receptive to the Gospel.

Paul realized at all times that the fruitage of his labor depended on the Lord; and this is one of the most important lessons for every ambassador of Christ to learn. Without this knowledge, success may well lead to pride and vainglory, and failure may lead to discouragement. But, fortified with the knowledge that it is God “who giveth the increase,” we can continue to sow the seeds of truth, knowing that the God of all wisdom will bless our efforts as seems good to him, which, in turn, will be the very best for us.

Paul's Second Missionary Journey



AFTER bidding farewell to the newly established ecclesia in Philippi, Paul and his traveling companions, Silas and Timothy, “passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia” and went to “Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews.” (Acts 17:1) The pronouns “we” and “us” no longer appear in the record; so we assume that Luke, the historian, did not accompany the missionaries when they left Philippi.

Reaching Thessalonica, Paul went directly to the synagogue, “as his manner was,” and “for three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures.” (vs. 2) His message was the same as that which he presented to the Jews in the other places he visited—that Jesus was the Messiah and that the Scriptures had foretold his suffering, death, and resurrection. It was a full Gospel, for the death of Jesus provided redemption for the sin-cursed world, and in his resurrection he became the “firstfruits” of them that slept, implying that eventually all would be made alive in Christ. —I Cor. 15:20-22

Some of the Jews in Thessalonica believed and “consorted with Paul and Silas.” (vs. 4) The Greek word here translated

“consorted” means to “make common lot,” or to “associate.” These few Jews who accepted the Gospel were evidently wholehearted in it, and they associated with the brethren.

“Of the devout Greeks a great multitude believed,” and “of the chief women not a few.” (vs. 4) These “devout Greeks” and “chief women” may have previously accepted the Jewish faith, although the account does not so state. It is interesting to note, however, that they were “devout.” They were the serious-minded people who were seeking to know the way of the Lord more perfectly, and the Lord responded to their desire, for they found Him whom to know aright is life eternal.—John 17:3

But the same thing happened in Thessalonica that occurred in most other places visited by Paul. The unbelieving Jews, moved with jealousy, stirred up opposition. They “took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason [who it was thought was entertaining the missionaries], and sought to bring them out to the people.” (vs. 5) “And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come thither also; whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king, one Jesus.” —vss. 6, 7

Here was a charge of treason similar to one that was brought against Jesus. The people of the city were “troubled,” but apparently they accepted the “security” provided by Jason and the other brethren, and they set Paul and Silas free. Then the brethren sent them away. Here they followed the instructions of Jesus in sending his apostles into the ministry, that when they were not received in one city they should move on to another place.

The Noble Bereans

Paul’s next stop was Berea, and here also he first “went into the synagogue of the Jews.” The record indicates that he

received more consideration than he did among the Jews of Thessalonica. We read: "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so."—vss. 10, 11

There could be only one result of this searching the Scriptures with "readiness of mind," which was that "many of them believed." (vs. 12) We may assume that after they were convinced that Paul was telling them the truth they continued to search the Scriptures. This is an obligation which devolves upon every one who is sincerely seeking to know the Lord. It is a responsibility also which cannot be shirked without loss of spiritual stability by those who have found the Lord and have dedicated their lives to the doing of his will. In Berea also there were "honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few" who believed.

Word soon reached Thessalonica that Paul and Silas were preaching Christ in Berea, and the envious Jews "came thither also, and stirred up the people." (vs. 13) The brethren in Berea had apparently heard of the mob that was raised against Paul in Thessalonica and, not wishing to see him subjected to a similar ordeal in Berea, hastened to send him away. This did not mean that they were fearful or in any way unfaithful to the Lord and to the truth. It was simply a case of dealing with a difficult situation as wisely as they could under the circumstances.

In Athens

Reasonable precaution was taken to help Paul elude his persecutors. When they sent him away, it was in the direction of the sea, but actually, the brethren who were conducting the apostle turned south and went overland to Athens. Arriving at Athens safe, and for a time safe from his enemies, Paul instructed his guides, when they returned to Berea, to inform Silas and Timothy to join him in Athens as quickly as possible.

So Paul now waited in Athens until his companions joined him. But the great apostle to the Gentiles could not be idle. "His spirit was stirred within him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him."—vss. 16, 17

Then "certain philosophers," as the Greeks were known to be, "encountered" Paul, and they took him to Mars' Hill, a sort of outdoor courtroom, reputed to be the court of highest authority in Athens. He was not put under arrest but was taken to Mars' Hill and invited to set forth his "new doctrine." "Thou bringest certain strange things to our ears," they said, and "we would know therefore what these things mean."—vss. 19, 20

Some of the philosophers who had heard Paul in the market place charged that he was a "setter forth of strange gods, because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection." (vs. 18) These philosophers—even as most of the "wise" men throughout the ages—did not believe in the reality of death. To them, therefore, the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead would seem strange indeed, for how could there be a resurrection of the dead if no one were dead?

On Mars' Hill

Without question Paul welcomed this opportunity to present the truth to the intelligentsia of Athens. In doing so, he was at times diplomatic but in some instances very forthright. The King James translation of his opening remark is not clear. Paul did not say to the Athenians, "Ye are too superstitious," but rather, "I perceive that ye are very religious."—vs. 22, RSV

This was a compliment. Paul himself was very religious. He was so wholeheartedly devoted to the furthering of the Christian religion that he had given up every other interest in life. In his religious fervor he worshiped but the one God and

one Lord Jesus Christ, who had given his life for the sins of the world. In Paul's mind there was nothing wrong with being very religious. His mission in life was to preach the true religion—the truth concerning the true and living God.

The error of the Athenians was in worshipping a multiplicity of gods, none of them real. Paul was vividly reminded of this as he stood on Mars' Hill. Facing the area where the audience sat, Paul could see just below him to his left the great array of idols, each one ascribed to a different god. He had probably passed even nearer to these idols as he walked along the road leading to the hill.

Towering above the apostle to his right was a large and beautiful temple—remains of which are still there. Here the false gods of the Greeks were worshiped. Yes, the Athenians were "very religious." Although they knew the names of many gods and had set up idols to represent them, they thought it possible that there might be one which they did not know, so they had built and dedicated an altar to him—the "unknown god."

Paul took advantage of this situation, explaining that he was there to acquaint them with the "unknown god" whom they ignorantly worshiped. This was a wise approach, well calculated to gain the attention of his audience, at least temporarily. Then Paul began to tell them some of the truths concerning the God who was unknown to them. He was the great Creator, the apostle explained, the God who "made the world and all things therein." As he had created the whole universe, it belongs to him and is his domain; therefore he "dwelleth not in temples made with hands."—vss. 24, 25

In making this statement we can imagine Paul glancing up toward the Acropolis, the great heathen temple above him, perhaps even pointing to it, with the implication that the true and living God of the universe could not be expected to dwell in such a place. Perhaps this was not too diplomatic, but it would certainly help the sincere among the Athenians to realize that their conception of deity was very limited.

Paul continued: "Neither is [God] worshiped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things: and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us."

To a large extent the gods of the heathen are visualized as being quite demanding. They have to be continually appeased by gifts or otherwise. But Paul told these "men of Athens" that the true and living God, who by their own confession was unknown to them, was quite the opposite. He did not need anything, since he "giveth to all life, and breath, and all things."

Paul encouraged his audience to "seek the Lord," assuring them that he was not far away, for, after all, in him "we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring." (vs. 28) Agreeing with this quotation from one of the Greek poets, Paul continued, reasoning that since we are the offspring of the true God "we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device." (vs. 29) Even if they were not convinced by Paul's eloquence, the "men of Athens" could not refute this logic.

Ignorance Overlooked

Continuing his sermon, Paul referred to the past ignorance of humanity concerning the true God and said, "The times of this ignorance God winked at." The Greek word here translated "winked at" means overlooked and is so rendered in the Revised Version. Yes, God overlooks the ignorance of the people concerning him, holding them responsible only when they refuse, willfully, to be enlightened and to obey the light of truth.

Human reasoning has often reached the conclusion that those who die in ignorance of God and of Christ will not be

held accountable. It has been suggested that people will be saved in their ignorance. But this is poor logic. If it were true, then it would be a mistake to preach the Gospel at all. Instead, it would be best to allow everyone to remain ignorant of God, and thus all would be saved.

But Paul did not reach any such conclusion. He knew the plan of God. He knew that in the divine plan a future time of enlightenment had been provided. He refers to it as the judgment day. While God overlooked the past ignorance of the people, now he "commandeth all men everywhere to repent, because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised Him from the dead."—vss. 30,31

The "because" in this argument is related to two things: (1) God overlooks ignorance "because" there is a future judgment day, and (2) the command to repent is also "because" that future day of judgment has been appointed in the divine plan.

The Scriptures bear out this reasoning. The judgment day is to be a time of enlightenment. The Prophet Isaiah wrote that when the Lord's judgments are in the earth the people will "learn righteousness." (Isa. 26:9) This enlightenment of the people during the judgment day is symbolized in Revelation 20:12 as the opening of "books." The judgment day is a thousand years in length, and during that thousand years all who have died without enjoying a knowledge of the true God will be awakened from death and enlightened. Upon the basis of their obedience or disobedience to the enlightenment, they will be judged worthy or unworthy of everlasting life.

With the exception of the Jewish nation, which enjoyed God's special blessing, practically all mankind prior to Jesus' first advent were in ignorance of God. But, beginning with the Gospel Age in God's plan, a change took place. Paul said that "now [God] commandeth all men everywhere to

repent.” Jesus had explained to his disciples that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations.” (Luke 24:47) In other words, the “command” to repentance was not to be limited to the Jewish nation, as it had been in the ministry of John the Baptist, but was to be proclaimed among all nations.

However, this by no means implies that every individual in all nations has intelligently heard the command to repent. It simply implies that it had been God’s will for the Gospel to be preached everywhere throughout the earth, regardless of nationality or race. The matter of how many, as individuals, have actually heard the message, and of their degree of understanding and responsibility, are questions which can be determined only by the Lord.

The Scriptures do set forth certain principles that will help us to reach fairly accurate conclusions. For example, the Scriptures inform us that it is only through the enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit that one can really know the mind and will of the Lord to a degree that makes him wholly responsible. Hebrews 6:4-6 sets forth this thought very clearly. We conclude that only those described in this passage of Scripture are wholly responsible before the Lord and will have no future opportunity to attain salvation.

But all others, even those who have heard the Gospel preached, are not now on trial for life, although any partial degree of understanding they have obtained makes them proportionately responsible before the Lord. John the Baptist preached repentance to the Jewish nation. So did Jesus and the apostles, but very few repented. Yet, Paul wrote that “all Israel shall be saved,” referring to the future time of resurrection and judgment.

Addressing a church conference at Jerusalem, the Apostle James, speaking also of the future, when the work of this Gospel Age will be complete, asserted that “all the Gentiles” upon whom the Lord’s name has been called—those to whom the witness has been given, many of whom having made

some profession of belief—will then be given an opportunity to “seek after the Lord.”—Acts 15:14-18

How thankful we should be that all the people, of every age, who have been ignorant of God, as well as those who have been only partially enlightened, are to be wholly enlightened in the judgment day by that “true light” that in God’s due time will enlighten every person who has, or will, come into the world! No one will be saved because of ignorance, but all will receive a knowledge of the truth and, upon the basis of that knowledge, be given an opportunity to accept Christ, obey the laws of his kingdom, and live forever.—John 1:9; I Tim. 2:3-6

Paul said to the “men of Athens” that God has given assurance of this future day of enlightenment and judgment by raising Jesus Christ from the dead. This proves that divine power can raise the dead. This affords hope, because the ignorant will have to be awakened from the sleep of death before they can be enlightened concerning God. Yes, Christ became the “firstfruits of them that slept” in death.—I Cor. 15:20

“Some Mocked”

Apparently Paul held the attention of his audience fairly well as he told the Athenians about the “unknown” God, but it was different when he mentioned the resurrection of the dead. This was too much for them. We read, “When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.”—vs. 32

The resurrection is a difficult doctrine for people to believe. Satan’s lie to mother Eve, “Ye shall not surely die,” (Gen. 3:4) has led to the assumption by many that there is no death. And apparently it is easier to believe that the dead are more alive than the living than it is to accept the fact of death and believe that the Creator will restore life to those who have died.

We may not know why this is, except that it is a further delusion which has been foisted upon mankind by the Devil.

But this unwillingness to believe in the reality of the resurrection is just as prevalent in the world now as it was when Paul preached to the Athenians. Try to tell anyone today about the "times of restitution of all things," and the usual response, spoken directly or implied, is one of doubt.

However, not all who heard Paul's sermon on Mars' Hill were doubters, for we read that "certain men clave unto him, and believed." (vs. 34) Among the believers was "Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them." An "Areopagite" was a member of the court which held its sessions on Mars' Hill. It was known as the "court of the Areopagites." "Areopagus" was another name for Mars' Hill. It is interesting to realize that one of the members of this court became a believer. This must have encouraged Paul, despite the fact that others in the audience mocked him. The Lord always gives his people the encouragement they need when they continue faithful in his service.

On to Corinth

Seemingly Paul did not remain in Athens until Silas and Timothy joined him. Instead, after preaching his sermon on Mars' Hill, he went on to Corinth. Arriving in Corinth, he "found a certain Jew named Aquila," and "his wife Priscilla." This couple had been forced to leave Rome because of a command by Claudius that all Jews should leave the city. Aquila and Priscilla were tentmakers by trade. Since Paul also had learned this trade and at times worked at it to supply his material needs, he found it to his advantage to work together with them.

It is not certain just when this couple became Christians. It could well have been during Paul's stay with them. In any case, they became very active in the service of the truth and the brethren. Later the way must have opened for them to return to Rome, for in his letter to the church at Rome he sent his special greetings to these, referring to them as "helpers in Christ Jesus: who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the

churches of the Gentiles.” “Likewise,” Paul also wrote, “greet the church that is in their house.” (Rom. 16:3-5) From this it is evident that Aquila and Priscilla had made their home in Rome available as a meeting place for the brethren. Surely Paul’s first contact with this faithful brother and sister when he met them in Corinth bore much fruit to the glory of God.

Silas and Timothy rejoined Paul in Corinth, and that gave him needed courage, and he “testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.” Even before this he had “reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.” (Acts 18:4,5) Most of those to whom he testified rejected the message, even as in other places; so Paul “shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.”—vs. 6

But Paul remained for the time in Corinth. In fact, he took lodgings in the house of one named Justus, who lived next door to the synagogue. We read that Justus “worshiped God,” and it is generally assumed that he was, or became, a Christian. The Revised Version translation gives his name as Titus Justus, and some scholars believe that he was the Titus to whom Paul later addressed one of his pastoral epistles.

It was probably ordained of the Lord for Paul to be lodged next door to the synagogue, for “Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.” Apparently Paul had not planned to remain in Corinth for an extended visit, for the Lord appeared to him in a vision, revealing to the apostle that he should remain, giving the explanation, “I have much people in this city.” In obedience to this revelation, Paul continued in Corinth for “a year and six months, teaching the Word of God among them.”—vss. 8-11

Meanwhile, the unbelieving Jews of the territory endeavored to make trouble for Paul. They appealed to

Gallio, who was “the deputy of Achaia,” and had Paul brought before his judgment seat. Discovering that the Jews had nothing against Paul except that which pertained to their different religious viewpoints, Gallio refused to hear the charges further and dismissed Paul. Then the Greek citizens retaliated by seizing the chief ruler of the synagogue, Sosthenes, who evidently had replaced Crispus, who had become a Christian, “and beat him before the judgment seat.”—vss. 12-17

Paul remained in Corinth for “a good while” after this but finally sailed to Syria. He was now on his way back to Antioch, from whence he started on this missionary journey. Little information is given concerning his further activities on this journey except that he stopped in Ephesus.

From Ephesus Paul went to Caesarea. He was requested to remain longer in Ephesus, but he declined, explaining that he would return again, “if God will.” (vs. 21) Verse 22 reads, “When he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch.” The expression, “gone up,” seems to refer to his “going up” into the city proper, for it was there he “saluted the church.”

While the record does not so state, we may assume that he reported to the Antioch church the many blessings the Lord had showered upon him on the journey. The record does state that Paul spent some time in Antioch before embarking on his next and third missionary journey, a journey which did not bring him back to Antioch.

Paul's Third Missionary Journey



PAUL'S third missionary journey, like the first two, began at Antioch, in Syria. However, unlike the other two, it did not end at Antioch but in Jerusalem, where he was received by the brethren of the Jerusalem church. How long Paul remained in Antioch before embarking on his third tour we do not know. The record simply states that "after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples."—Acts 18:23

From this we gather that during the first part of this journey Paul concerned himself more with ministering to the brethren than with evangelistic work, although—knowing Paul as he is revealed to us in the Book of Acts and through his epistles—we are confident that, even while primarily ministering to the brethren, he did not overlook any opportunities to proclaim the glad tidings to those who had never heard the kingdom message.

Verses 24 to 28 are in the nature of an introduction to Paul's experiences when, after passing "through the upper coasts, [he] came to Ephesus." (ch. 19:1) These verses tell of a brilliant convert to Christianity named Apollos. Verse 24 informs us that Apollos was "an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures" and that he visited Ephesus. This was before Paul had arrived.

Apollos preached the Gospel to the Jews in the synagogue at Ephesus. He was "fervent in the spirit" and "taught diligently." And although the record states that he "was instructed in the way of the Lord," it is apparent that he was not fully instructed. Aquila and Priscilla had accompanied Paul from Corinth to Ephesus on his previous tour, and he had left them there. They were well instructed in the truths of the Gospel; and when they heard Apollos preach to the Jews in the synagogue and they compared his knowledge with what they had learned from Paul, they recognized that he had much to learn.

So when a favorable opportunity presented itself, Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos aside, perhaps into their home, "and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." (vs. 26) Soon after this, seemingly, Apollos decided to "pass into Achaia." Learning this, the brethren in Ephesus wrote letters exhorting those whom Apollos would visit "to receive him." And we are told that "he helped them much which had believed through grace: for he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ."—vss. 27, 28

Here we have a revealing incident of the generosity of spirit usually manifested by the Lord's people toward their brethren. They recognized in Apollos an able exponent of some of the simple truths concerning Jesus' being the promised Messiah; they realized that Apollos was more than able to "hold his own" with the unbelieving Jews. On the strength of this they did not hesitate to recommend him to other brethren. While he had been immature in knowledge and experience, Aquila and Priscilla, rather than condemn this ardent servant, helped him to a better understanding. Certainly when he left Ephesus he understood the truth much more clearly because of the interest taken in him by these two friends of Paul.

Paul at Ephesus

After Apollos left Ephesus, Paul arrived, "and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, Have ye received the

Holy Spirit since ye believed?" Their reply was, "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Spirit." (ch. 19:1, 2) Without doubt these "certain disciples" had received the Gospel and believed as a result of the ministry of Apollos, and in their own lack of understanding we see evidence of their teacher's immaturity in the truth.

As Aquila and Priscilla had endeavored to help Apollos, so Paul directed his attention to those whom Apollos had converted. He learned that they had been baptized with "John's baptism," which was a baptism of repentance, symbolizing the washing away of sin. Paul explained to them that while John's baptism was proper for the time and was in harmony with John's work of preparing the way for Christ, there was now a higher baptism, a baptism into Christ, of which immersion in water was a symbol.

There were twelve of these "certain disciples," and apparently they were glad to receive the better understanding of the truth which Paul was able to give to them; so they were baptized again. They then received the Holy Spirit, Paul laying his hands upon them, thus transmitting the power of the Spirit to speak "with tongues" and to prophesy.

Meanwhile, Apollos was mingling with the brethren in Corinth of Achaia. While Paul was still in Ephesus, possibly three years later than this, he wrote his first epistle to the Corinthian brethren. In this epistle it is revealed that in the Corinthian church there was spiritual immaturity. While Paul had been used by the Lord to establish the church at Corinth, now the brethren were divided, some standing with Apollos, some with Paul, and others with Cephas. Other influences had also entered the congregation, leading to additional sectarian "cliques."—I Cor. 1:11, 12

In passing, it may be well to observe that much of the unchristian conditions which have existed among the Lord's people throughout the age have been due either to lack of understanding or to instability. It is a trait of fallen human nature to lean too heavily and too trustingly upon human

leaders. How noble is the example set by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthian brethren in explaining that it was wrong for any of them to be saying, "I am of Paul."

We have a similar example in Paul's letter to the brethren at Philippi. He had also been used by God to establish the church at Philippi; but in his epistle to these brethren he reminds them that it was God who had begun the good work in them and that God would be able to complete this work, even though they did not see Paul again in the flesh. (Phil. 1:3-6) May we realize ever more clearly that our loyalty should be first to the Lord and then to brethren only to the extent that, in their teachings and spirit, they reflect the will of the Lord.

In the Ephesus Synagogue

After helping the twelve brethren who had begun the Christian way under the tutelage of Apollos to a clearer understanding of the truth, Paul then, as his custom was, sought opportunity to witness to the Jews in the synagogue. He concluded, apparently, that Apollos, even with his eloquence, had not exhausted the possibilities among his own people, the Jews. For three months he continued this effort, "disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God."—Acts 19:8

Finally the usual thing happened. The Jews of the synagogue who did not accept the message became "hardened" and "spake evil of that way before the multitude." (vs. 9) Then Paul "departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus." For two years Paul continued his work in this school. It is not clear just what connection he had with the school or whether or not Tyrannus was a believer. It is likely, however, that Paul merely used the schoolroom at times when it was not used by Tyrannus to conduct his own classes.—vs. 10

Paul's work in the school of Tyrannus was by no means limited to the brethren, for we read that in the two years he

labored there "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." (vs. 10) It is not necessary to conclude from this that every individual in Asia Minor personally visited the school of Tyrannus and heard Paul preach. The thought is, evidently, that all heard about Paul and his message that Jesus was the foretold Messiah of the Jews. Of course, many did visit the school to learn more about the Gospel of Christ.

Certainly Paul's reputation spread throughout the country during those years, for through him "God wrought special miracles, . . . so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them." (vss. 11,12) With miracles like this supporting his spoken word, it is no wonder that the people of the whole country knew about Paul and the message he was declaring. Without doubt, in connection with these miracles of healing, Paul took occasion to emphasize that with the return of the Messiah and the establishment of his kingdom there would be a worldwide healing of the sick, when all blind eyes would be opened and all deaf ears unstopped.

Among all races there are the unprincipled; so at Ephesus, there were "vagabond Jews." The Revised Version reads, "wandering Jews." The thought is evidently of a class of Jews who were unsettled in their convictions, going from place to place, perhaps, and as opportunists, seizing upon anything that would be of profit to them along material lines. These particular ones were exorcists and, recognizing the success of Paul in casting out evil spirits in the name of the Lord Jesus, undertook to use this name themselves. "Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew," are particularly charged with this wrongdoing.—vss. 13,14

When in the name of the Lord Jesus these "vagabond Jews" commanded an evil spirit to leave one who was afflicted, the spirit answered, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?" The evil spirits had come in contact

with Jesus and had been forced to obey his command. The same was true with respect to Paul. They could truly say that they knew these two. They knew them to their own sorrow, but they challenged the right of these “vagabond Jews” to order them around.

Not only did this spirit refuse to obey but he caused the person he was controlling to attack the would-be exorcists, and he “overcame them and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.” (vss. 15, 16) Naturally the news of this incident spread and was soon known “to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.”—vs. 17

“Fear” fell on “all,” but not all believed, although “many” did; and these “came, and confessed and showed their deeds.” (vs. 18) “Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.” (vs. 19)

This was, perhaps, the original “book burning.” But how different were these circumstances from those associated with the book burnings of more recent times! With those at Ephesus it was a case of having learned the truth and, discovering that their books contained satanic error, they voluntarily burned them. In many later instances it has been the case of religious bigots burning books which in reality contained the truth, particularly the Bible, in order to prevent others from reading what they knew they could not logically refute.

Diana of the Ephesians

While Paul, on his third missionary tour, remained in Ephesus for upwards of three years and must have had many outstanding experiences—some happy and some trying, but all blessed—only a few are recorded.

One was his witnessing the uproar precipitated by Demetrius when he charged that Paul’s preaching was

ruining the business of those who manufactured idols. (Acts 19:21-41) In this episode we again see the baneful influence of human selfishness. Demetrius, the silversmith, who earned his living by manufacturing "shrines for Diana," had no valid objection to Paul's preaching. He did not attempt to show that it was wrong. His only objection to it was that it threatened to ruin his business and the business of others who were making their living in the same manner.

Nor was it difficult for him to stir up a mob of opposition against Paul and his companions. The majority of those in the mob were not silversmiths but zealous, though bigoted, worshipers of the goddess Diana. It was religious fear and prejudice that moved them to action, as has been the case over and over again throughout the ages.

We are prone to look back upon the Ephesians and thank God that we have progressed beyond fear and prejudice in our religious concepts. But let us not be too sure! Let our cherished beliefs and self-created idols be challenged or threatened, and we may find that we become as deeply stirred as did those ancient worshipers of the goddess Diana. This should not be! If our faith is firmly established in the Word of God rather than in the opinions of men, we will reason that if our creed "idols" cannot be supported by the Word of God, they should be destroyed.

Paul was not personally endangered by the demonstration of the heathen worshipers stirred up by Demetrius, but his companions were seized and taken into the theater, apparently with the thought of inflicting injury of some sort upon them. Paul, who was never fearful of danger, endeavored to join them, but the disciples restrained him. Other friends of Paul also advised him not to become involved in the riot.

And a riot it was! The record indicates that, while there was much shouting and excitement, most of the participants seemed to have no idea what it was all about. The disciple

Alexander called for the attention of the crowd and was ready to explain the situation as he saw it, but the crowd learned that he was a Jew and became more riotous than ever. For two hours they continued to repeat the shout, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians."

Finally the town clerk, displaying a great deal of wisdom, was able to restore order. He explained that if anyone had a real complaint against Paul and his companions it could be heard in an orderly manner and through the channels provided for the purpose. He also reminded Demetrius and his friends that if Diana were the true goddess whom they and the Ephesians in general believed her to be, they had nothing to fear, that she was fully capable of taking care of herself and of her temple—or words to this effect.

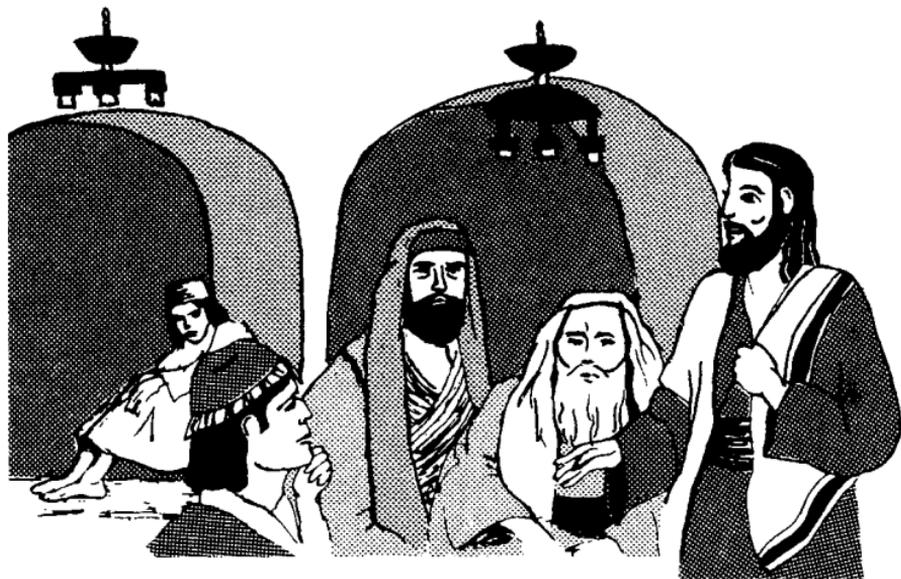
This sort of philosophy, which is true, was used by different ones as recorded in the Scriptures. Gideon's father employed it when the idols he had erected were destroyed by Gideon. (Judges 6:28-31) The Pharisee, Gamaliel, resorted to the same argument—in principle—when asking the religious rulers of Israel not to interfere with Peter and John. He explained that if the work of these two men was of God the members of the council could not overthrow it and that by trying to do so they might be fighting against God.—Acts 5:33-39

True followers of the Master will never maliciously attack those with whom they do not agree, either by word or by deed. If they are convinced, as they should be, of the rightness of the cause which they represent, they will gladly lay down their lives promoting it but will not endeavor to restrain the liberties of those who may not agree with them. Any inclination, or urge, to do so is an evidence of weakness and an admission of one's own insecurity. The town clerk of Ephesus and his compatriots were deluded and terribly wrong in supposing that their "Diana" was a true goddess, but at least he had the courage of his conviction concerning her power and did not see the necessity of persecuting men

who had done no wrong, in order to save Diana's standing in the community. He was a wise man.

On this third journey, Paul had in mind that it was the Lord's will for him to visit Jerusalem again and then go to Rome. So, even before the demonstration stirred up by Demetrius, he was making his plans to leave Ephesus, visit the brethren in Macedonia and Achaia, and then go on to Jerusalem and Rome. Now that "the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia."—Acts 19:21; 20:1

Paul's Third Missionary Journey



AFTER his approximately three years' work in Ephesus, Paul went to Macedonia. No information is given us concerning this part of his third missionary journey except that after "he had gone over these parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece." Apparently this part of his journey was devoted particularly to strengthening the brethren in Macedonia. This was always an important and vital part of Paul's ministry.

From Macedonia Paul went to Greece, where he "abode three months." Here also, no doubt, his time was used in strengthening the brethren in Corinth and in other places. All this time Paul's mind and heart were doubtless set on going to Jerusalem and from there to Rome. He had planned to go to Jerusalem by way of Syria, with the thought perhaps of briefly visiting the brethren in Antioch. But hearing that

enemy Jews had learned of his plans and were lying in wait for him, he changed his route and returned through Macedonia.

By now there were several who were traveling with Paul—“Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus. These going before tarried for us at Troas,” the historian writes. The use of the pronoun “us” indicates that again the historian Luke had joined the party and that he remained with Paul while the others went on to Troas.

Traveling to Jerusalem by way of Macedonia, Paul and Luke visited the ecclesia in Philippi, there enjoying another season of that “fellowship” which from the “first day” had been so sweet and precious to the apostle. (Phil. 1:3-5) Leaving Philippi by boat, after five days’ sail they reached Troas, where the remainder of their party was waiting for them. They remained in Troas “seven days.”

The seventh day of this visit in Troas was apparently the first day of the week, and the brethren were to meet together that evening, as was their custom, to “break bread.” This breaking of bread was not an ordinance of the church but simply a custom some of the ecclesias in the Early Church followed in commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus on the first day of the week. At Troas this simple service was held in the evening, which might well indicate that the brethren had been occupied in their usual work during the day, hence that the day was not considered to be sacred, or even a day of rest.

The ship in which Paul and his companions were to sail on to the next stop was ready to leave and did leave on the “morrow” of their visit in Troas. (ch. 20:7) But for some reason the apostle felt the importance of remaining in Troas and meeting with the ecclesia that night when the brethren came together to “break bread.” His companions sailed on ahead to Assos, Paul having arranged to travel by foot the

next day and meet them at Assos, the ship's next stop.—
ch. 20:13, 14

Just why this final meeting with the brethren at Troas seemed so important we can only conjecture. The apostle must have had a message for them which he considered vital, for it was here that he preached all night. It was here also that the young man sitting in the window fell asleep while Paul was preaching, fell to the ground three stories below, and was thought to be dead. Paul restored the young man, assured the brethren that he would be all right, and then continued with his sermon.

As we said, we can only conjecture as to what the subject of this sermon might have been. We do know that in Corinth, for example, there were some in the congregation who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. (I Cor. 15:12) It is possible, we think, that this blight of unbelief had reached some of the brethren in Troas and that Paul used this opportunity, when they were assembled to commemorate Jesus' resurrection, to help them out of their doubtings. If this be the case, we need only to read the 15th chapter of 1st Corinthians to know some of the telling points of truth the great apostle presented that night to the Troas ecclesia.

In any case, Paul considered it important to remain that night in Troas to serve the brethren, important enough to justify his walking more than twenty miles the next day over rocky, dusty roads in order to rejoin his companions at Assos. Such was the undaunted spirit of love and devotion which actuated this man of God, this great apostle to the Gentiles. Since he preached all night, he would have had no sleep; so we can imagine the apostle trudging along over those twenty long miles, weary of mind and body, yet rejoicing in heart as he recalled the blessings he enjoyed with those in Troas of like precious faith.

Meeting the Elders of Ephesus

As far as this journey was concerned, Paul's ultimate destination was Jerusalem, and he wanted to arrive there by

the day of Pentecost. (ch. 20:16) He knew that this would not be possible if he took time to visit all the ecclesias in Asia Minor, but he did want to see and fellowship once more with the elders of the Ephesus ecclesia. So sailing from Assos, where he rejoined his companions, after a few incidental stops the ship reached Miletus. This was about thirty-six miles south of Ephesus, and from here Paul sent messengers to Ephesus to invite the elders to make the day's journey to Miletus to meet him.

And they came. The fact that they made this effort to see the apostle reveals the great confidence they had in him and their fervent love for him. One reason Paul was anxious to see these brethren is revealed in his statement to them: "Behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Spirit witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me," or "wait for me," (margin).—vss. 22, 23

While Paul said that he did not know what awaited him, he seemed sure that whatever it was he would not be able to visit the brethren in Ephesus again, for he said to the elders that they would see his face no more. (vs. 25) It was in the shadow of this uncertainty so far as his human life was concerned that the apostle delivered his farewell message to the Ephesian elders. Under the circumstances, many would have been too agitated to think of anything but their forthcoming troubles, but Paul testified: "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God."—vs. 24

Paul had dedicated his life to the service of the Lord and the truth. From the time the great vision of truth had come to him on the Damascus road, he had never tried to spare his strength or save his life when the path of opportunity lay clearly before him. He knew that every time he witnessed to the Jews in their synagogues they would sooner or later rise up against him, but he did not hesitate to continue to witness.

The fact that the service of the Lord would cost Paul suffering and perhaps death was never used by him as an excuse to cease serving his Lord.

So now it was the same! A less ardent and self-sacrificing soul might well have reasoned that since it was the Holy Spirit that was bearing witness to the trouble he would encounter when reaching Jerusalem, the Lord was thereby giving warning not to go to Jerusalem. But Paul did not interpret the Holy Spirit's warning in this way. For reasons which the Scriptures do not reveal, Paul was convinced that it was the Lord's will for him to go to Jerusalem, and in the light of this conviction he interpreted the testimony of the Holy Spirit as a challenge to his faith and loyalty and his willingness to die for the Lord Jesus. So Paul went to Jerusalem.

In his farewell message to the elders of Ephesus he said that he had not shunned to declare unto them "all the counsel of God" and that he had "kept back nothing that was profitable." He had taught them "publicly" and from "house to house," or in their homes. (vss. 27, 20) Paul was not satisfied simply to tell his hearers that through belief in Christ they could be saved. It was at Ephesus, for example, that he found the twelve disciples who had not heard about the Holy Spirit and had not been taught true Christian baptism; so he instructed these brethren more perfectly in the ways of the Lord.—ch. 19:1-7; 18:26

After reminding the elders of Ephesus of his own procedure in declaring to them "all the counsel of God," Paul then admonished, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." (vs. 28) This admonition is in two parts: (1) the elders were to take heed to themselves, and (2) they were to oversee and feed the brethren through the power of the Holy Spirit which had made them overseers.

Experience has proved that professed servants in the church who do not take heed unto themselves are not

qualified to watch properly and effectively over the spiritual welfare of others. For elders in the church to take heed unto themselves means, among other things, that they will not think of themselves more highly than they ought to think. Pride of mind and heart distorts spiritual vision and makes ineffective what otherwise could be a blessed ministry of the truth.

Taking heed to one's self also implies careful and prayerful study of the truth. One cannot minister to others what he does not understand himself. Paul had seen a vivid example of this in the ministry of Apollos at Ephesus. Seemingly, Apollos had great ability as a speaker; but regardless of this, until he was more fully instructed, he was not able to impart knowledge to others which he did not himself possess. Yes, to understand the truth is important, as Paul later wrote to Timothy, saying, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."—II Tim. 2:15

Paul's discernment enabled him to foresee that when his own personal influence was no longer felt among the brethren, the ecclesia would have trouble, and he warned them that "grievous wolves" would enter in among the brethren, "not sparing the flock." To these words he added, "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."—vss. 29, 30

The church at Ephesus is one of the seven mentioned in the 2nd and 3rd chapters of Revelation. And while these seven churches are undoubtedly symbolic of the entire church in its various stages of development throughout the age, it is reasonable to assume that they were selected for this purpose because of special circumstances associated with them as local congregations. In any event, Paul's prophecy that false leaders, "wolves," would enter the church at Ephesus seems to be reflected in the Revelator's record, which reads: "I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them that are evil: and thou hast tried

them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.”—Rev. 2:2

It is apparent from this that the elders at Ephesus took Paul’s admonition to heart and watched faithfully over the flock so that the “wolves” and the false apostles were discovered and exposed. “Watch, and remember,” Paul said to them, “that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.” (vs. 31) Paul had set the elders of Ephesus a good example, and now he wanted them to follow that example, to follow him as he followed Christ.

Paul never lost sight of the fact that the direct responsibility of every true Christian is to the Lord and that all such should look to the Lord, not to any human source, for guidance and help in time of need. “I commend you to God,” he said to these elders, “and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified.” (vs. 32) This sentiment is the same as he wrote to the brethren at Philippi, saying, “Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”—Phil. 1:6

Paul was truly a sacrificing saint, and he took considerable satisfaction in the fact that he did not depend upon the brethren he served in spiritual things to care for his physical necessities. To the Ephesus elders he said, “Ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.” (vs. 34) This is remarkable, for Paul had not only provided for his own physical needs as a “tentmaker” but had cared also for those who were traveling with him.—Acts 18:3

But he was blessed by thus giving all his time and strength. He said: “I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (vs. 35) Paul had proved by his own experience that Jesus was right, and so has every disciple of Jesus who has followed faithfully in his steps.

Paul's discourse ended, they joined in a closing prayer, and the elders bade the apostle farewell. It must have been a touching moment for them all, for we read that "they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship."—vss. 37, 38

On to Jerusalem

The ship on which Paul and his companions sailed from Miletus went by the way of Coos and Rhodes, "thence unto Patara." There they changed ships, finding one that was "sailing over unto Phenicia." This ship took them to Syria, and they "landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden." (Acts 21:1-3) They found disciples at Tyre, so the party remained seven days.

Little is said about the seven days with the disciples of Tyre except that they warned Paul not to go to Jerusalem. The warning was based on information received "through the Spirit." (vs. 4) Paul did not heed the warning, but instead continued on his way, interpreting the message from the Lord as being intended merely as a test of his faithfulness. They had a farewell prayer meeting with the brethren of Tyre and then moved on.

There was a one-day stop at Ptolemais, where they "saluted the brethren," and then "Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea." At Caesarea, Luke reports, "we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him." (vs. 8; Acts 6:3-6) Philip had four daughters, apparently all consecrated disciples of the Master.

While they were still "at the house of Philip" there "came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus." Agabus bound his own hands and feet with Paul's girdle, saying: "Thus saith the Holy Spirit, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall

deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.” Concerning this, Luke reports, “And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.”—vss. 9-12

This placed Paul in a very difficult position. In place after place he had received similar information. Notwithstanding, he was still determined to go to Jerusalem. Now Philip and his household, Agabus, and even his traveling companions, all urged him to heed the information given by the Holy Spirit and thus avoid the difficulties which he would certainly experience if, as they saw it, he insisted upon going to Jerusalem. He must have known that the brethren would consider him quite obstinate if he did not heed their advice.

But he refused to reconsider. His answer was: “What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” (vs. 13) We do not know why Paul was so determined to go to Jerusalem just at this time. We cannot think of him as being a brother who would recklessly expose himself to danger; and yet, he knew that there was danger. We must assume, therefore, that in some manner not revealed in the record, the Lord had made it very plain to him that he should take the risk which, through various ones, the Holy Spirit had pointed out to him.

In taking this course Paul must have been very conscious of the fact that he was following in the footsteps of Jesus in quite a literal manner, for Jesus also was confronted with the same test. Jesus also knew that going to Jerusalem when he did would mean his arrest and death, and he so announced to his disciples. Peter endeavored to dissuade the Master from thus exposing himself to danger. Jesus replied, “Get thee behind me, Satan.”—Mark 8:30-33

And it was the Holy Spirit which testified to Jesus, through the prophets, that he was to suffer and to die. But the Holy Spirit had also revealed that it was the Heavenly Father’s will for his Son to sacrifice his life as the world’s Redeemer. And

to Paul the Holy Spirit had revealed that it was his privilege—and the privilege of all Jesus' disciples—to suffer and die with him. The fact that now the Holy Spirit had revealed that his work of sacrifice might be consummated at Jerusalem was to Paul simply a further test of the genuineness of his consecration to do God's will.

Every truly consecrated child of God has these "Jerusalem" tests. They are tests of whether or not we will actually go where the Lord wants us to go, do what he wants us to do, and be what he wants us to be. In order to test us, as he did Paul, the Lord may let us see what appears to be a less costly manner of serving him. But if we keep in mind the great fundamental truth that we have been invited to suffer and to die with Jesus, and that we have agreed to do so, we will be given strength to meet every test in a manner pleasing to the Lord and redounding to his glory.

When the brethren found that they could not dissuade Paul from carrying through with his plans to go to Jerusalem, they said, "The will of the Lord be done." (vs. 14) Their visit in the house of Philip completed, Paul and his companions continued on their way to Jerusalem. Some of the brethren of Caesarea, together with an "old disciple" of Cyprus, joined them; so it must have been quite a delegation which made the last lap of that journey with Paul to Jerusalem. It speaks well for the devotion of all these, for they must have realized that there was a certain element of danger in being with Paul in Jerusalem and being one of his close friends.

When they reached the city, the brethren of Jerusalem, as Luke reports, "received us gladly." (vs. 17) Thus ended the great apostle's third missionary tour.

Paul in Protective Custody



ARRIVING in Jerusalem at the close of his third missionary tour, Paul reported at once to the elders of the ecclesia in the home of James. They rejoiced and glorified God when they learned of the many Gentiles who had responded to the Gospel message. They realized, however, that having Paul in their midst posed a problem for them—even a threat of danger—due to the reports which had been brought to Jerusalem by enemy Jews from the territories just visited by the apostle.

Jerusalem was the center of Jewish religious life. Their Temple was there, visited periodically by Jews from all over the then known world. If heresy and heretics were to be stamped out, Jerusalem was the logical place in which to do it. Doubtless the disciples in Jerusalem found it difficult enough at any time, and to have the notorious Paul in their midst would surely increase the danger of outward violence against them.

We can therefore understand their concern and why they proposed a course for Paul to follow which, to say the least, was not obligatory upon him as a follower of the Master. See Acts 21:20-27. Whether it was right or wrong, this attempt on Paul's part to prove that he was not opposed to the Law and was not working against it failed of its intended purpose. Instead of pacifying the Jews by being in the Temple for purification, he was charged with defiling the Temple, dragged out by an angry mob of religious zealots, who would have killed him but for the interference of the Roman "captain of the band," who, hearing of the uproar, appeared on the scene with soldiers and protected the apostle.—vss. 28-32

The Holy Spirit had testified that bonds and imprisonment awaited Paul at Jerusalem, and already that prophecy was being fulfilled. He was arrested by Roman soldiers, not because the "captain of the band" knew of anything wrong the apostle had done, but largely to protect him from the Jewish mob and the riotous condition thus created.

The "chief captain" demanded of Paul's persecutors that they state who this man was and what crime he had committed. There was a conflict of opinion on the part of those who had seized Paul and were beating him as to just what they held against him. Then the "captain of the band" commanded his men to carry Paul into the castle, and away from his accusers.—vss. 33-35

Paul, ever alert for opportunities to bear witness to the truth, asked the Roman officer to allow him to speak to the mob from the steps of the castle, and this permission was granted. His witness was largely in the nature of a personal testimony as to the reason he had become a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth. He reminded his hearers that at one time he felt the same way about Jesus' disciples as they and that he had been zealous in his efforts to stamp them out.

He told of the miracle on the Damascus road by which he came to realize that the One whose disciples he was

persecuting was indeed the "Just One," the Messiah. He related some of the principal events in the early days of his discipleship, including a former visit to Jerusalem and the Temple. At that time, Paul testified, he had been given a vision in the Temple, a vision in which the Lord had instructed him to leave the city because the Jews would not receive his testimony.

As Paul explained it, he apparently felt at that time that if the Jews knew how zealous he had been in persecuting Christians they would give him a more favorable hearing. He told the Jews that he had participated in the stoning of Stephen. His impression was that under such circumstances reason would certainly tell them that there must have been some very convincing cause for the complete reversal of his position.

Paul himself had been wholly sincere in his persecution of Christians. He had reasoned the matter out thoroughly and was convinced that he was acting logically and wisely. His opposition to Jesus and his disciples was not a frenzy of emotion or a mad passion. Apparently in the beginning of his walk in the narrow way he supposed this was true of all the Jews who were so opposed to Jesus and to those who followed in "this way."

But the Lord knew better than this; and as Paul now explained to his persecutors, he was again told by the Lord to "depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles." Hearing this, the mob would listen no longer and in a frenzied outcry shouted that this man was not fit to live. We wonder if Paul, when hearing this clamor for his life, did not think of Jesus and of the time when a similar mob, also in Jerusalem, cried, "Crucify him, crucify him."—ch. 22:1-23

Realizing that Paul accomplished nothing in the way of pacifying his accusers, the Roman officer ordered him taken into the castle, giving instructions that he should be scourged in an effort to force from him some sort of confession. As they proceeded to carry out these instructions, "Paul said unto the

centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?"—vss. 24, 25

The centurion reported this to the "chief captain" and said to him, "Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman." (vs. 26) The "chief captain" was skeptical; but when Paul convinced him that it was true, that he was born a Roman citizen, immediately the situation changed. The "chief captain" now knew that the only thing he could lawfully do was to find out from Paul's accusers, if he could, just what it was they had against him.

The chief priests and all their council were ordered to appear in the castle, and Paul was brought before them to plead his own cause. His first statement was, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." (ch. 23:1) With this "the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth."—vs. 2

Paul displayed, shall we say, a bit of "righteous indignation" at this sudden outburst of religious madness and said to the high priest: "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the Law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the Law?" (vs. 3) But if Paul was caught "off balance," he quickly recovered himself; for when he was reminded that he had reviled God's high priest, he said, "I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people."—vss. 4, 5; Exod. 22:28

This was a noble reply. In it Paul acknowledged his wrong in the remark he had made to the high priest and quoted a scripture to prove that he was wrong. This should have helped the council to realize that here was a man of God, one who knew God's Law and was endeavoring to live in harmony with it. But when men are blinded by intolerance and prejudice, they are unable to reason correctly.

Paul was quick to perceive that this council was made up partly of Pharisees and partly of Sadducees. The Pharisees

believed in the resurrection of the dead and in angels; the Sadducees did not. In this Paul took his stand with the Pharisees, explaining that he was a Pharisee himself and the son of a Pharisee. Then he explained that he was being called in question concerning his belief in the resurrection.

When the two groups composing the council heard the word resurrection, they began to argue among themselves. Then the "scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God." (vs. 9) There is no reason to suppose that these men were not sincere in saying this. It does not mean that they accepted Christ as the Messiah, but it was at least a reasoned position similar to that taken at an earlier time by Gamaliel in connection with Peter and John.—Acts 5:38-40

The strife between the Pharisees and Sadducees on the council that was trying Paul must have been bitter, for the "chief captain" feared that Paul would be "pulled in pieces"; so he ordered his soldiers to take him away from them by force and bring him into the castle. (vs. 10) Paul was surely going through an ordeal, but soon he was given a compensating portion; for "the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome."—vs. 11

If prior to this there was any question in Paul's mind as to the meaning of these trying experiences, it was all clear now, for he realized that the Lord wanted him to go to Rome. It is probable that long before this the great apostle had received some such indication from the Lord. It will be recalled that during his last missionary journey the thought was expressed more than once that he must go to Jerusalem and then to Rome.

We need not suppose that he knew in advance just why a visit to Jerusalem would be so vitally connected with his going to Rome. Perhaps up to this point he was simply

trusting the Lord without knowing just how the details of his will might be worked out for him. But there is little doubt that when the Lord “stood by” him in the castle that night and assured him that he would go to Rome the whole picture opened up before him.

Paul was a Roman citizen, and as a lawyer he knew his rights as a Roman citizen. He knew also that with the tide of opposition that was rising against him in essentially the whole territory through which he would have to travel in order to arrive in Rome, he would never reach there alive unless more adequate protection was afforded him than could be given by a handful of the brethren who might volunteer to make the journey with him. Even on his last trip from Greece he had to change his route to elude enemy Jews who were lying in wait for him.—Acts 20:19

It is not unreasonable to suppose that there in the castle in Jerusalem that night, when the Lord spoke to him, Paul realized just what he had to do. Already he was being held in protective custody by the Roman guard. According to the Roman law he had done no wrong, but the “chief captain” in Jerusalem did not have the authority to decide this. His duty was limited to protecting a Roman citizen against the mob violence of the Jews. And Paul knew this.

The Lord had said to Ananias that Paul was a “chosen vessel” to bear his name before the Gentiles and kings. (Acts 9:15) There is little doubt that Ananias relayed this information to Paul. Perhaps he now began to realize how this would come about, for he knew that if he pressed his rights as a Roman citizen he would be brought before rulers to be heard. And he knew also that he would use every such opportunity to testify concerning his Master, Jesus Christ. He knew that as a Roman citizen he had the right to appeal his case to Caesar and that by doing so he would be taken to Rome and protected all the way by the Romans.

A whole new vista of opportunities and experiences must have opened up to Paul that night in the castle when the Lord

“stood by” him. Nor did he have long to wait before the new action began. Paul’s nephew learned of a plot by the Jews to seize him away from his guards and kill him. The ruse was that they would ask for another hearing before the council and use this opportunity, while the guard was relaxed, to make away with him.

The young man informed Paul of what he had learned. The apostle called a centurion and asked him to take his nephew to the “chief captain” that he might report to him what he had heard. Upon receiving this information, the “chief captain” acted quickly. “He called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night. And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.”—ch. 23:12-24

Thus a small army—a total of 470 men—was provided to escort Paul out of Jerusalem and away from his accusers. Swiftly the providences of the Lord began to work, first for his deliverance from the Jews, and also to take him on the road to Rome. With such a formidable escort, it was inevitable that he should reach Caesarea and Felix, the Roman governor, in safety.

The “chief captain,” whose name was Claudius Lysias, sent a letter to Felix by the soldiers who escorted Paul, explaining in considerable detail just what had happened and why he was sending Paul to him. In this explanation the fact was made plain that Paul claimed to be a Roman and that he was, therefore, no ordinary prisoner. (vss. 26-33) Felix read the letter, and after learning from Paul what province he was from, “he commanded him to be kept in Herod’s judgment hall” until his accusers from Jerusalem put in an appearance. —vss. 34, 35

It was not a long wait, for “after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul.”

(ch. 24:1-9) This “orator” had nothing new to say, but of course the high priest and the elders hoped that his oratory would persuade Felix either to punish Paul or release him to their charge, neither of which the Roman governor was prepared to do.

Instead, Felix called upon Paul to reply to his accusers, which he gladly did. Paul denied that he had done anything to disturb the peace but at the same time acknowledged that he had a “confession” to make. And what a marvelous “confession” it was for an accused man! “I confess unto thee,” Paul said, “that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the prophets: and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.”—vss. 14, 15

Actually, Paul had not been charged with teaching the resurrection of the dead; yet he understood full well that this, in reality, was the real point at issue—not the mere fact that the prophets had foretold a resurrection of the dead, but that, as Paul preached it, the resurrection would come through Jesus of Nazareth, who, indeed, was the “firstfruits” of them that slept in death. The situation was the same as with Peter and John. With them also the religious rulers were “grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.”—Acts 4:2

Felix had a fair knowledge of Jewish viewpoints and prejudices and could see that Paul’s accusers really had no just cause for complaint against him, nothing, that is, that would justify him in punishing the apostle, especially since he was a Roman citizen. So he told the high priest and the elders that he would seek further information of the “chief captain” and, when he was prepared, would send for them again.

Felix commanded a centurion to hold Paul as a prisoner but to give him “liberty” and to “forbid none of his acquaintance” to visit him. What this meant was that Paul

was to be protected from his Jewish enemies by the Roman government. Two years passed before anything else happened. Meanwhile Felix summoned Paul to appear before him on various occasions. The apostle doubtless used these visits as further opportunities to testify concerning his faith in Christ. The record is that when Paul reasoned of “righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled.”

Luke explains further that Felix “hoped also that money should be given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.” (vs. 26) With this selfish motive in mind, it is little wonder that Felix trembled when the apostle instead of being willing to bargain with him for his release, reasoned concerning righteousness and judgment.

Paul Appeals His Case

After Paul had been under guard for two years, Felix was succeeded by Festus as governor. Before going to his headquarters in Caesarea, Festus spent some time in Jerusalem, where he was approached by Paul’s accusers and requested by them to bring the apostle to Jerusalem to appear before their council. Their plan was to kidnap him from his guards while on the way and kill him.

Probably Festus recognized this; so instead, he invited Paul’s enemies to visit Caesarea and there state their case. He explained that under the Roman law no one could be legally put to death without a hearing, that the condemned must be given a full opportunity to answer any accusations which might be made against him.—ch. 25:1-5,13-16

This led to another hearing, at which Festus sat as judge. Festus, even as Felix, discerned that Paul had committed no crime, that the charges against him were simply a matter of religious prejudice. Being perplexed as to just how to handle the case, he asked Paul if he would be willing to return to Jerusalem and stand trial there before his accusers.—ch. 25:9,10

Paul was not willing to do this! He knew full well what the result would be. He knew that he would be “judged” worthy of death. Paul was quite willing to die in his Master’s cause. He had said so when his friends tried to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem. But now he knew that the Lord wanted him to go to Rome, not to die in Jerusalem; so he did that which assured him of getting to Rome. He said, “I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews I have done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I have been an offender, or have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar.”—vss. 7-11

Festus, evidently taken somewhat by surprise, conferred with his advisers and then replied to Paul, “Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.” (vs. 12) Probably Paul had been waiting for this opportunity, and he knew how to make effective use of it when the proper moment came. Now he would be taken to Rome, and under protection all the way. Truly, “God works in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform.”

Paul in Protective Custody



PAUL proved to be a problem prisoner to each of the Roman governors before whom he appeared for a hearing. Festus offered the apostle an opportunity to return to Jerusalem to appear before his accusers; but instead of doing this, he appealed his case to Caesar. Being a lawyer, he knew that as a Roman citizen he could not be denied this appeal; and Festus, glad to be free from further responsibility with respect to Paul, replied, "Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go."—Acts 25:12

Actually, Festus had no alternative. Even so, after assuring Paul that he would be taken to Rome, he realized that he still had a problem on his hands; for, while he was planning to send Paul to Caesar, as far as the Roman law was concerned, there was no charge against him. Before there came a convenient opportunity to send Paul on his way to Rome, King Agrippa and his sister Bernice "came unto Caesarea to salute Festus."

Festus took this opportunity to tell Agrippa about his problem prisoner, and Agrippa asked to see and hear Paul. Festus gladly consented, thinking, no doubt, that this additional hearing might furnish him with some information that he could send on to Caesar that would be in the nature of a charge against him. Festus knew that Paul had committed no crime worthy of death and said so to Agrippa when presenting him to the apostle. "It seemeth to me unreasonable," said Festus, "to send a prisoner [Paul], and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him."—vs. 27

If, when the knowledge of the Lord fills the earth as the waters cover the sea, the restored world of mankind looks back through the pages of history during the reign of sin and death, they will find much that is unreasonable, particularly in the areas of human relationship where religion has been involved. When created, man was endowed with the desire and ability to worship his Creator. This was a priceless heritage, but it is an endowment which Satan has been very successful in distorting and misdirecting.

Loyalty to the Creator is essential to all who would be pleasing to him, and usually it is a very strong and determined attitude. But when it is misguided and takes the form of prejudice, intolerance, and persecution, there is nothing that makes one more unreasoning. Festus, judging solely from the legal standpoint, saw that it was most unreasonable to demand that a man die simply because he held a religious viewpoint different from that of his enemies. He believed that Caesar would feel the same way; yet the Jewish religionists who were seeking Paul's life believed that if they could kill Paul they would be serving and pleasing the God of Israel.

If we are inclined to rejoice that the days of religious persecution are past, let us not be too sure. Here is a matter in which it might be well to examine our own hearts. How tolerant are we toward those who disagree with us religiously? How do we feel about those in our own fellowship who may not use our exact phraseology to express the

doctrines of the truth? Do we try to understand them, or do we start rumors about them? Every consecrated child of God should be willing to die for the truth. But loyalty to God and to the truth does not call for intolerance and slander against those who are equally loyal but who may not use the same form of words that appeals to us.

When the opportunity came, Agrippa said to Paul, "Thou art permitted to speak for thyself." (ch. 26:1) Paul replied: "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently." —vss. 2,3

Knowing all the circumstances involved, Paul certainly must have realized that nothing he could say to Agrippa would change the status of his case; so here we find the great apostle "happy" simply because he was to have an opportunity to witness for the truth. He knew that Agrippa was well acquainted with the viewpoints and customs of the Jews. In fact, although he was not a Jew himself, Agrippa's family for several generations back were believers in the Jewish religion.

First Paul recounted his preconversion manner of life as a Pharisee. The Jews at Jerusalem, his persecutors, knew this. "If they would testify," he told Agrippa, and tell the truth, they would have to say "that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now," Paul continued, "I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews." —vss. 5-7

The Hope of the Resurrection

Paul left no question in Agrippa's mind regarding what "hope" it was to which he referred. It was the hope of the

resurrection of the dead. The Jewish sect known as the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, but the Pharisees did; and since Paul had been an ardent Pharisee, there seems little doubt that in the years prior to his conversion he had been an able protagonist of this glorious doctrine of the Scriptures. His contemporaries would know this.

How logical, then, and to the point, was his question, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" he asked Agrippa. (vs. 8) Certainly it should not have been considered "incredible" by Paul's former associates, the Pharisees. But he was not so much concerned with this now as he was in presenting an effective witness to Agrippa personally.

The doctrine of the resurrection is, of course, thought to be "a thing incredible" by practically the whole world, even to this day. Of all the religions of the earth, the Christian religion is the only one that teaches the resurrection. And even here, the satanic falsehood of inherent immortality has voided the pure truth of the resurrection in the minds of nearly all professed Christians.

Certainly the teaching of the resurrection should not be thought "a thing incredible," not when we take into consideration that it is the great Creator of all life who has promised to raise the dead. But for some reason it seems to be easier for most people to believe that a person doesn't really die at all, when he seems to die, than to accept the reality of death and believe that the great God of the universe will restore life.

Doubtless every Pharisee in Israel at the time would have loudly reaffirmed his belief in the resurrection of the dead. Not one of them would have said that it was "a thing incredible." Their animosity toward Paul was aroused by his teaching that the God of Israel had raised Jesus from the dead.

This was more than the religious rulers of Israel could tolerate. They had hated Jesus and persecuted him unto death. They professed to believe that he was an outcast from divine favor. They considered him to be a blasphemer of God. Certainly their God, the great Jehovah of Israel, would not raise a blasphemer from the dead. With them, as it often happens, it was a case of one erroneous viewpoint leading to another; and the jealousy and hatred in their hearts had led them from one degree of darkness to another until they had become completely blinded.

Yes, the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead; but, as Peter discovered, they were unwilling to accept the fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead and that through him all would be resurrected. When Peter preached his sermon on "restitution" and declared that it had been foretold by all God's holy prophets since the world began, the religious rulers and Sadducees were grieved that he "preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead."—Acts 3:15–4:2

Paul Also Had Persecuted

Paul related to Agrippa how, as a Pharisee, he had persecuted the disciples of Jesus. He said, "Being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities." (ch. 26:9-11) Here we are reminded of the possibility of being wrong, yet sincere. Just being a Pharisee did not make one insincere. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, and he sought earnestly to know the truth concerning Jesus, risking his reputation to do so.

Paul was a Pharisee according to the "most straitest sect" of the Jewish religion, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, as it were, and he was sincere. He verily thought he was serving God by persecuting the disciples of Jesus. Being a Pharisee and a student of the prophecies, he would thoroughly believe in the coming of Israel's Messiah, but he did not believe that Jesus was that Messiah.

Born in Tarsus, Paul was brought up and received his religious education in Jerusalem. While the Bible does not clearly indicate, traditionally Paul was approximately the same age as Jesus. Whether or not he was in Jerusalem during the time of Jesus' ministry we do not know. But even if he was, there is little likelihood that he ever saw the Master. Paul's father was a Pharisee, and Paul received his religious training from Gamaliel, during which time he would be kept well sequestered from outside influences.

Under these circumstances, whatever he heard about Jesus would not be good. Having confidence in his elders, he would naturally believe what he heard; so his zeal in persecuting these "heretics," as he understood them to be, is understandable. In his case it was not jealousy, but a genuine belief that this was his duty toward his God, the God of Israel.

He related to Agrippa his never-to-be-forgotten experience on the Damascus road, when he saw that blinding light and heard a voice asking, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" and learned that the One speaking to him was Jesus of Nazareth. Perhaps to Paul one of the most surprising aspects of this experience was that, having mistakenly been a persecutor of the followers of the Messiah, he should at once be commissioned to represent him. As Paul related it to Agrippa, the resurrected Jesus said to him:

"Rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me."—vss. 16-18

Paul then added, "Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." (vs. 19) Not being "disobedient," Paul had witnessed to the Gospel of Christ,

as he explained to Agrippa, in “Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.”—vs. 20

“For these causes,” Paul explained, “the Jews caught me in the Temple, and went about to kill me.” (vs. 21) Paul was absolutely guiltless of any wrongdoing. He was hated and persecuted only because he espoused the cause of Christ; and Christ had done no wrong. Jesus had spent his life doing good—preaching glad tidings and healing the sick—but he was put to death; so now Paul was threatened with the same punishment and for the same “crime.”

To make it still more apparent to Agrippa that his persecutors were moved against him by blind prejudice, Paul explained that his message of the Gospel consisted only of those truths that had been set forth by the Old Testament prophets, the very truths that his enemies professed to believe. But again Paul came to the real point of the issue, when, explaining the essence of the message of the prophets, he said it was the fact that “Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.”—vs. 23

With this, Festus, who was sitting with Agrippa, could no longer restrain himself and “said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.” (vs. 24) During the reign of sin and death fallen human nature does not improve. Often today those who have a definite belief in the Word of God and its teachings and are fearless in proclaiming their faith are considered something less than mentally normal. They are called religious fanatics, or “cranks,” who should not be listened to seriously.

“I am not mad, most noble Festus,” said Paul “but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.” (vs. 25) Paul was not a man to be carried away with emotion. He was not a religious fanatic. He had always been a zealous servant of God, but his service was based on reason and conviction. This was true

even before his conversion. His difficulty then was that he did not have all the facts upon which to base his reasoning. But now he did.

His experience on the Damascus road was a fact. The witness of the Holy Spirit in his life since then was a fact. The marvelous manner in which the Lord had directed him in his service of the truth was another fact. That he should be testifying before kings was in itself a confirmation of his position, for the Lord had foretold that this should be among his experiences. (Acts 9:15) No, Paul was not "mad." He was factual and fearless.

As if to add weight to the truthfulness of his presentation, Paul then declared that the "king," referring to Agrippa, knew of the things whereof he spoke. In the opening of his speech, Paul had complimented Agrippa on being "expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews," and apparently he had reason to believe that this knowledge included the issues in his own case and the experiences through which he had passed. "None of these things are hidden from him," Paul said, "for this thing was not done in a corner."—ch. 26:26

But Paul was not nearly so interested in vindicating himself as he was in presenting an effective witness to Agrippa. So, addressing the king directly and personally, he inquired, "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest." (vs. 27) The king's full name was Herod Agrippa. He was the great-grandson of Herod the Great. While this family was not Jewish, it held to the Jewish faith. Knowing this, Paul took full advantage of it in his effort to reach Agrippa's heart with the Gospel.

And Agrippa was impressed. He replied to Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." (vs. 28) The word "almost" is a translation of a compound of two Greek words which the Revised Version renders "with but little." In Paul's reply he used the same Greek compound, saying, "I

would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.”—vs. 29

Since Paul thus uses the expression “almost” in the sense of degree, in comparison with “altogether,” it would seem that what Agrippa replied to Paul was that to a certain extent, or in some respects, he had been persuaded to accept Christ. This was not satisfactory to Paul; hence his reply that he would like to see the king accept the Gospel, not partially, but “altogether,” and give himself unreservedly to Christ. But this was a greater step than Agrippa was prepared to take.

The fact that Paul’s presentation influenced Agrippa as much as it did suggests that the king had previously given some serious thought to the circumstances associated with the coming of Jesus into the world. Being the great-grandson of Herod the Great, he would certainly know of the decree to slaughter the infants of Judea in order to destroy Jesus, and he would know that the effort failed.

It was Herod Agrippa I—father of the Agrippa before whom Paul appeared—who ordered the execution of James and directed the same treatment for Peter. (Acts 12:1-10) While his father succeeded in having James put to death, Agrippa II must have known of the miraculous circumstances in connection with the deliverance of Peter from prison and from execution.

Agrippa would also know of the confident claims of the disciples that their Master had been raised from the dead, which Paul reminded him should not be thought a thing “incredible.” So, professing to believe the Jewish faith, this background of circumstances concerning Jesus and his followers had doubtless given Agrippa cause for serious reflection; and then, hearing Paul’s eloquent testimony, he became somewhat convinced.

Unlike the Jewish religious leaders, Agrippa held no hatred in his heart for the followers of Jesus and could see no reason

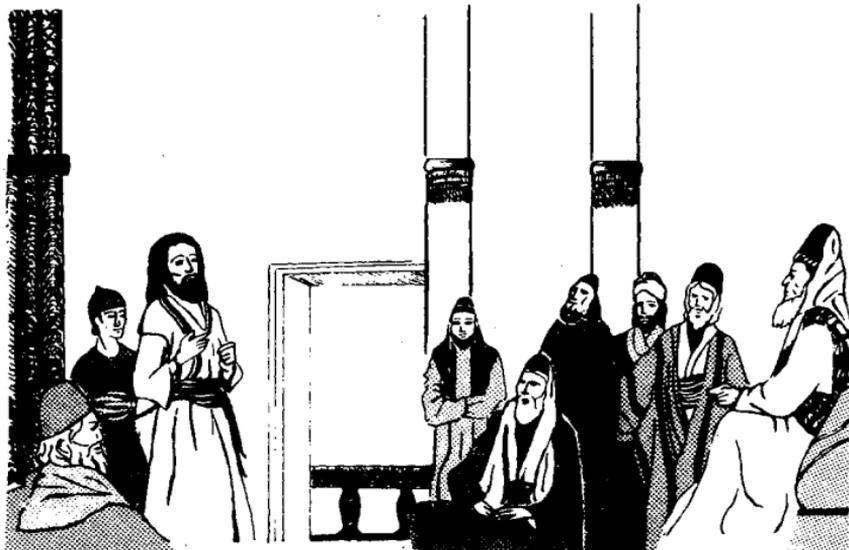
why Paul should be put to death simply because he had espoused the cause of Christ and because his conscience would not permit him to be “disobedient unto the heavenly vision.”

The hearing ended, Festus, Agrippa, and his sister Bernice went aside with the “chief captains, and principal men of the city,” who also heard Paul’s “defense.” (Acts 25:23) They held a conference and decided that Paul was not guilty. Then Agrippa, for whom the hearing had been called, said to Festus, “This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.”—ch. 26:32

There were certainly many disadvantages and hardships involved in being held a prisoner. Without doubt Paul took this into consideration before appealing to Caesar. He knew that the way to Rome as a prisoner would be a difficult one; but he also realized that if he undertook to make the journey without the protection of Roman soldiers he would probably be ambushed and killed by his enemies.

Paul knew that the Lord wanted him to go to Rome, and to Rome he would go. His consecration to the Lord was so complete that he was willing to go not only where the Lord wanted him to go but also in the way the divine will was indicated to him. Just as he was willing to die at Jerusalem, so now he was willing to continue on to Rome as a prisoner.

Paul in Protective Custody



AFTER Paul's hearing before Agrippa, it was determined that the only course open was to send him to Rome, since this was what he insisted upon; and together with other prisoners he was turned over to the custody of "one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band." "And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched [writes Luke], meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia."—Acts 27:1, 2

Luke must have been kept well-informed concerning the whereabouts of Paul during the time he was being taken from one ruler to another in an effort to make some disposition of his case. When the decision was made not to delay longer his trip to Rome and he was turned over to Julius, who was to be his guard on the journey, Luke was on hand and ready to embark for Rome on the same ship. This is evident from the reappearance of the pronoun "we" in the narrative.

It was evidently a regular passenger and cargo ship, the prisoners being only part of the passengers. Altogether, counting the soldier-guards and the prisoners, there were 276 people on the ship. (vs. 37) Luke's loyalty to Paul in this time of great need is touching. How the great apostle must have rejoiced over the realization that there was to be at least one brother in Christ who would make this long, difficult, and even dangerous voyage with him.

In verse 3 we learn that Julius had respect for his noted prisoner and granted him considerable liberty. The ship "touched" at a city called Sidon, where evidently there were brethren in Christ, and Paul was given liberty to leave the ship and visit them. No details of this visit are recorded, but we can imagine it afforded a sweet season of fellowship of kindred minds which is "like to that above."

The Rome-bound prisoners continued in this ship to Myra, a city in Lycia. "There," Luke writes, "the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein." (vs. 6) The first port of call by this ship was at a place called "The fair havens, nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea." (vs. 8) "Much time was spent" here, the report adds, so that when they continued the journey the "fast" was over. This is a reference to the yearly Jewish fast on the 10th day of the seventh month, corresponding with our month of October.—vs. 9, margin

This meant that winter was approaching, hence the likelihood of bad weather for navigation, and Paul advised Julius that it would be better not to proceed on the journey until spring. But Julius decided otherwise, having confidence in the opinion of the ship's master. "The fair havens" was not "commodious to winter in," and seemingly the opinion of the majority of those on the ship was that they should continue the journey. The ship's master hoped that they might be able to reach Phenice, on the Island of Crete, and there put up for the winter.—vss. 9-13

But this plan did not carry through. Unfavorable weather set in, and the ship, together with its crew and passengers, was in grave danger.—vss. 14-20

Apparently Paul had little to say for a while after his advice had been ignored, but finally he spoke saying, "Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss."—vs. 21

Here a very human aspect is revealed. Seemingly even the great Apostle Paul could not refrain from saying, "I told you so." But he held no malice and at once added: "I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me."—vss. 22-25

Here again we find Paul utilizing circumstances to assist him in witnessing for his God. It might have been sufficient that Paul himself had been assured that none on the ship would lose their lives. He could have kept this information to himself and rejoiced in it. He could have reasoned that no good purpose would be served by telling his fellow passengers about the assurance he had received from his God. After all, the majority of them had gone against his advice. Why should they not suffer anxiety for a while?

Paul could have been content to take Luke, his brother in Christ, into his confidence and tell him of the visit by the "angel of God." Luke would understand and appreciate this, while the others might only scoff. But this was not Paul's way of reasoning. He wanted to comfort even these worldly unbelievers; and besides, he knew that if he told them in advance of the deliverance the "angel of God" had assured, then, when they were all safe, he would be in a favorable position to tell them more about God and about Jesus, the great Messiah whom God had sent.

After being tossed by the winds and the waves for fourteen nights, the ship's seamen sensed that they were approaching land. By taking occasional soundings of the water's depth, they proved that this was so. But this presented a danger of the ship's running onto possible rocky shores and being destroyed. The story of this is told in considerable detail in verses 27 to 44.

In this crisis, when it became apparent that each individual on the ship would need to be "on his own" in order to make it in safety to land, the soldiers in charge suggested that all the prisoners should be killed, lest they escape. But Julius ruled against this, chiefly on account of Paul. The record states that he was "willing to save Paul."—vs. 43

At Melita

With all safely ashore, they discovered that the place of their landing was the island of Melita, or Malta. (ch. 27:26; 28:1) Luke writes: "The barbarous people showed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold." (ch. 28:2) This sort of reception does not seem like one that would come from "barbarous people," but the word "barbarous" in the Bible does not carry the same connotation as it does today.

Actually, a barbarian in Paul's day was simply a non-Jew or non-Greek. To the Greeks the Romans were barbarians, this distinction calling particular attention to the custom of the Romans of keeping their beards shaved off. It is from this that we now have the word barber. From the standpoint of the ancient Greeks, every man who kept his face smoothly shaved was a barbarian, or "barbarous person."

The kindness shown by the "barbarous people" of Melita must have been greatly appreciated by the 276 people forced ashore in the cold and rain. Paul, always alert to serve, set himself to work gathering sticks of wood—probably driftwood on the beach—to help keep the fire burning. As he placed an

armload of sticks on the fire "there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand."—vs. 3

One of the marvelous things about the Bible is the simple and straightforward manner in which it relates facts, and here we have an example. Picture the situation. The weather was cold, and this "viper," as is common with some of the animal world, had been made inactive by it. But the fire had brought it back to life, and it suddenly seized upon Paul's hand. If this entire account were fiction, who would have thought of a story so simple and so true to facts?

But the incident is not related without a purpose. The "barbarous people" of Melita were superstitious. They knew that the bite of this sort of "viper" meant almost certain death. They had learned that Paul was being taken to Rome as a prisoner; and when they realized what had happened, they were certain that the "gods" were seeing to it that he could not escape his just punishment. They concluded that he must be a murderer and was therefore worthy of the death which they were certain had been inflicted upon him by the "viper."

Paul shook the viper from his hand, and we can imagine the surprise of the "barbarous people" when Paul did not collapse and die. They were sincere people, and when they realized that Paul would not die as a result of the viper's sting, they "changed their minds, and said he was a god." (vs.6) There is a saying that "a wise man changes his mind, but a fool never." These "barbarous people" of Melita were wise. They recognized that their original appraisal of Paul was wrong, that he was not a murderer whom the gods would destroy, so they "changed their minds."

But, as so often happens, when these people realized they were wrong, they changed their minds too much. Now, instead of seeing Paul as a murderer, they believed him to be a god. Paul had had this experience before and had denied that he was a god. This was at Lystra (Acts 14:11-15) Luke **does not** indicate that Paul undertook at once to explain to the

“barbarous people” of Melita that he was not a god, although he doubtless disabused their minds of this idea as time went on. In the precarious situation of the moment, he may have used the advantage this viewpoint gave him for the general good of all his shipwrecked traveling companions.

The place of landing on Melita was near where Publius, the “chief man of the island,” had “possessions,” meaning, perhaps, one of his residences. Luke writes that Publius “received us, and lodged us three days courteously.” (ch. 28:7) We need not suppose that Publius entertained all who had been on the ship. The “us” of the narrative probably refers only to Paul and Luke, and possibly the ship’s officers.

On the other hand, there is little doubt that the entire company received better treatment on Melita because of Paul than otherwise would have been the case, and the great apostle was glad to have it so. The “father of Publius” was ill, and Paul healed him. The news of this spread, and others who were ill came to Paul to be healed. And these, Luke writes, “also honored us with many honors; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.”—vss.8-10

There is a common expression, “under the circumstances,” but Paul had the happy faculty of being able to keep “above” the circumstances in which he found himself and of utilizing them to further the witness of the Gospel. This he did at Melita. Together with his traveling companions on the ship, he had shared the “perils of the sea.” But when cast upon the shores of a strange island, instead of taking time to lament his hardship, he set himself to work to gather wood for the fire, and this led to a chain of circumstances which bettered the lot of all concerned and brought glory to his God.

They were marooned on Melita for three months. Their ship had been destroyed, so they boarded another one, “a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux.” (vs. 11) The vessel called at Syracuse and at Rhegium and then sailed to Puteoli. Here the prisoners

were put ashore. There were brethren in Christ at Puteoli, so Paul and Luke took the opportunity to visit them and enjoy their fellowship for seven days.

While it is true that in that ancient time travel was slow and difficult and the world did not enjoy any of our modern methods of travel and communication, yet the people seemed to have had ways and means of keeping in touch with one another. For example, Paul and Luke knew that here at Puteoli, in the northeastern area of the Bay of Naples, there were brethren in Christ. They knew their addresses and were able to make contact with them when they arrived. This incidental sidelight in connection with Paul's journey to Rome helps to reveal the extent to which the brethren in the Early Church maintained contact and communication with one another.

The town of Puteoli still stands, although now a fourth-rate Italian community. Its present name is Pozzuoli. It contains many ancient remains, which Paul and Luke doubtless saw when they visited the brethren there on the way to Rome. There are the reservoirs, the aqueduct, portions (probably) of the baths, the great amphitheatre, and the building called the Temple of Serapis. To see these, or to know that they are still there, makes the experiences of the great apostle and his companion, Luke, seem a little less remote from the standpoint of time.

Paul and Luke remained in this place of landing in Italy for seven days, fellowshipping with the brethren. "And so," writes Luke, "we went toward Rome." (vs. 14) And here again we have revealed the close contact the brethren of the then known world maintained with one another; for those in Rome knew that Paul had landed on Italian shores, and a number of them traveled to "Appii forum" and "The three taverns" to meet him.—vs. 15

Did the brethren at Puteoli dispatch a messenger to Rome to inform the brethren that Paul had landed? Evidently so. But did the brethren of all Italy know in advance that he was

on his way as a prisoner? We do not know. But we do know that the brethren in Rome displayed much love for the apostle by their zeal in traveling such a distance to meet him.

For a long time Paul had been wanting to visit the brethren in Rome. Years before, while on his third missionary journey, he wrote to the ecclesia at Rome from Corinth. In the opening chapter of this epistle he said: "God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the Gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end that ye may be established."—Rom. 1:9-11

Yes, Paul "longed to see" the brethren at Rome, so much so that he was willing to make the trip "by any means." He prayed that he might have a "prosperous journey" to Rome. The Greek text does not indicate that Paul prayed for a prosperous journey in the sense that it would be pleasant and comfortable but rather that he would be successful in reaching Rome, "by any means."

Probably when he wrote this epistle to the brethren at Rome he did not know that it would be the will of the Lord for him to journey to Rome as a prisoner of Caesar. He did not foresee the rioting against him in Jerusalem and his arrest by the Roman soldiers in order to save his life. Nor did he know in advance of various appearances before kings and governors, the long hazardous journey by sea, the shipwreck, and the three months' layover at Melita.

Paul had made the most of all these experiences, and while Luke does not directly suggest that the beloved apostle was ever discouraged, we can be sure that this longing to see the brethren at Rome continued and increased. Now Paul was in Italy, and some of the brethren of Rome had traveled many miles to meet him; so Luke writes that when Paul saw these dear ones whom he had longed to see, "he thanked God, and took courage."—ch. 28:15

From the standpoint of the flesh there was little to be thankful for, even now that they had reached Italy and would shortly be in Rome. After all, Paul was going to Rome as a prisoner. Perhaps this was one reason some of the brethren in the ecclesia journeyed to "The three taverns" to meet the apostle. How could they be sure they would have the privilege of seeing him after he arrived in Rome and was shut up behind prison walls?

Nor did Paul know just what awaited him. Caesar's government could take any action it chose. Later Paul was executed in Rome, but now he did not know just what awaited him. The Lord revealed the way before him one step at a time. That was all Paul needed to see, and he was always ready and willing to take that one step. Paul had learned that with each step of the way there were both trials and joys and that in all these the Lord was with him, standing by to give him strength for his every need.

The Lord had sent the brethren from Rome to meet the apostle. This gave him the needed courage to complete those last miles of the journey and to face whatever experiences awaited him upon arrival in Rome. Reaching Rome, the prisoners were delivered to the captain of the guard, "but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him." (vs. 16) This was a concession, which, while Paul may have hoped for it, he had no assurance of receiving.

The apostle was permitted to dwell for two years in his own hired house. (vs. 30) While this was much better than being herded with the other prisoners, he was not a free man. He was continuously chained to a soldier. However, he was given freedom of speech and could have his friends visit him; and Paul made full use of these privileges for the further spread of the Gospel and the glory of God.

Paul waited only three days before beginning his activities. (vs. 17) This time would be needed to get adjusted to his new surroundings and to rest from the tiring circumstances of his

long journey. But then he was again ready to plunge into the service of his God. First he sent for the "chief of the Jews." Here Paul could not follow his usual custom of first visiting the synagogue when arriving in new territory, so he sent for the "chief of the Jews" to visit him. To find one of their own people chained to a Roman soldier, and at the same time enjoying the privilege of living in his own hired house, called for an explanation, for they would realize that here was no ordinary Jew, and certainly an unusual prisoner.

So Paul presented the necessary explanation of the circumstances which brought him to Rome as a prisoner. (vss. 17-20) In this explanation Paul stressed that it was for "the hope of Israel" that he was bound with "this chain." The "chief of the Jews" assured Paul that they had not been warned against him, that, in fact, no information at all had been sent to them concerning him. Paul's brethren and friends in Rome had been notified concerning his experiences and informed that he was on the way to Rome as a prisoner; but his enemies had not followed through. Perhaps they were satisfied in that they had driven him from Palestine.

Not having heard anything either for or against Paul, "the chief of the Jews" expressed a desire to hear him, "for," said they, "as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against." (vs. 22) They had not heard of Paul, but they did know that there were followers of one Jesus, who it was claimed was the Messiah; and they knew that this "sect" was not at all popular.

They "appointed" a day when they would visit Paul and hear his testimony, and "there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the Law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening." (vs. 23) What a day of witnessing this was for the apostle! The results were as always—"some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not."—vs. 24

After Paul had finished, these chief Jews disputed among themselves. Then, as a final word to them, Paul quoted one of Isaiah's prophecies, which foretold the failure of the Israelites to accept the Gospel. He explained that because of this the Gospel was going to the Gentiles, to give believers from among them an opportunity to be fellow heirs of the promises.—vss. 25-29

Here Luke brings his record to a close, adding simply that Paul dwelt two years in his own hired house, "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him." (vss. 30, 31) We know from this that Paul had an active two years, but no details are available except those which we are able to glean from epistles which he wrote during this period.

From Paul's Epistles

Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians was written while he was a prisoner in Rome. In the last chapter, where, after referring to himself as an "ambassador in bonds," and asking for the prayers of the brethren in Ephesus, he writes: "That ye also may know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things: whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts." (vss. 19-22) It would be interesting to know what Tychicus reported to the brethren in Ephesus.

The Epistle to the Philippians was also written at Rome. In this we are given a glimpse into Paul's experiences in his "hired house." He wrote: "I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places." (Phil. 1:12, 13) From this it is apparent that Paul's faithful witness work was very effective, even though he was chained to a Roman soldier night and day.

This epistle to the Philippian brethren was written partly in acknowledgment of a "gift" sent to him by the hand of Epaphroditus. The journey to Rome from Philippi must have been a difficult one for Epaphroditus, for he became ill "nigh unto death." So it was at great personal cost that this "gift" was delivered to Paul, and Paul appreciated it and says so in this epistle.—ch. 2:25-30

Paul also wrote the Epistle to the brethren at Colosse while he was a prisoner in Rome. But in this, as in his letter to the Ephesians, he gives little or no information concerning his experiences, saying, "All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord."—ch. 4:7

Paul's Epistle to Philemon was likewise written while a prisoner at Rome. Philemon was a resident of Colosse and was evidently a man of means and influence. As was the custom of the well-to-do of his day, he was an owner of slaves. One of these, Onesimus, had run away to Rome and, through the ministry of Paul, had accepted Christ and become a faithful disciple. The letter was written as an effort on Paul's part to effect a reconciliation between Philemon and Onesimus.

This epistle, therefore, reveals an inspiring incident in the experiences of the great apostle while living as a prisoner in his own house in Rome. He was evidently known by Onesimus through his visits at the home of Philemon. Possibly Onesimus remembered some of the Gospel of Christ as he had heard it preached in the home of his master. Through this, or because of his confidence in Paul as a man, he evidently sought out and visited him. Paul proclaimed the Gospel to him further, and he believed and surrendered himself to the Lord. What a wonderful encouragement this must have been to Paul, to have this happen while he was a prisoner in Rome.

Paul's second letter to Timothy was also written from Rome, but there is a question as to whether it was during his

first imprisonment. Tradition has it that Paul was released from his first imprisonment and for some time served the brethren in freedom. The Bible makes no mention of this. Either Paul was released from his first imprisonment or else, after a second appearance before the Roman emperor, his situation worsened, for it is evident that when he wrote this letter to Timothy he realized that he did not have long to live.

In view of this, it is inspiring to hear him say: "I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." (ch. 1:12) Also: "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."—ch. 4:6-8

"Only Luke is with me," Paul wrote to Timothy. (ch. 4:11) Since Luke accompanied Paul to Rome at the time of his first imprisonment, this statement might indicate that Paul had not been released and that from his hired house he had been transferred to the prison. If this was a second imprisonment and Luke was still with him, it seems strange that this faithful historian has recorded nothing of Paul's experiences while at liberty to revisit the ecclesias and carry on further with the missionary work.

Paul also wrote, "Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus." (vs. 12) We know that Paul sent Tychicus to Ephesus during his original imprisonment in Rome, the purpose being to deliver his epistle to the Ephesian brethren and to report his experiences. (Eph. 6:21, 22) It would seem rather unusual if Paul was released after two years in his own hired house, was free to travel for some time, and then had both Luke and Tychicus again close to him after his reimprisonment.

It will be remembered that on his first missionary tour Barnabas accompanied Paul, and Mark went with them as a

helper but deserted and returned home long before the end of the tour. Barnabas desired to take Mark when they started out the second time, but Paul would not agree. The dispute was so heated that Paul and Barnabas parted company, and Silas went with the apostle instead.

It is a fitting close to our look into the life of this faithful servant of the Lord to see that he had forgiven Mark and again wanted him as a fellow servant. In this last letter which he wrote, Paul said to Timothy, "Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry."—II Tim. 4:11

Paul doubtless had good reasons for not wanting Mark as a fellow servant when, years before, he disputed with Barnabas concerning him. Meanwhile, he had discerned the spiritual growth in Mark and asked for his help. He held no prejudice against Mark on account of the experiences of the past. In this also we see how wonderfully the love of God triumphed in the heart and life of the great apostle. Truly, Paul was now "ready to be offered," and we know that his entire lifetime offering, as well as its consummation in Rome, was a sweet-smelling savor unto the Lord.—II Cor. 2:15,16; Eph. 5:2