

*The Book  
of Books*



# *The Book of Books*

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## FOREWARD

Many thousands of pages would be required to present a complete commentary on the Bible. *The Book of Books*, with its ten comparatively short chapters, attempts a brief review of the sixty-six books of the Bible with the object of calling attention to its main teachings and prophecies as introduced in the Book of Genesis where they reach their climax in the Book of Revelation. We trust that it will be an aid to many in finding the connecting chains of divine truth which run throughout the precious Word.

*The Book of Books* is not a discussion of Christian doctrines as such, but a brief review of the Bible's format, including the manner in which its theme of redemption and recovery for the sin-cursed and dying race is set forth in its various books, and emphasizing the wonderful harmony of the divine plan of salvation.

The questions found at the conclusion of each chapter are designed to help the reader focus attention upon the main points presented. We suggest a careful reading of these questions with the view of insuring the main points of each chapter are grasped before proceeding to the next.

Through a proper use of the questions it will be found that *The Book of Books* is in reality a Bible study course, through the use of which a general working knowledge of the Bible itself can be obtained. It is by no means an exhaustive study of the Bible, and the reader will doubtless desire to learn more about the truths which are briefly presented. For this reason a list of Dawn Publications can be read freely on our website:

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## CHAPTER 1

# Man's Creation and Final Destiny

**N**o other book in the world has had so many enthusiastic supporters, or has been so greatly misunderstood by its friends, as the Bible. No other book has had so many and such bitter enemies, and has so successfully withstood their attacks. Many have been cruelly persecuted for possessing the Bible, and devious attempts have been made to remove it from circulation. But the Bible still lives, and more copies are now being sold each year than of any other book ever published. It has been translated into all the principal languages.

The Bible has been styled “the torch of civilization,” and undoubtedly its moral and ethical teachings have done more to influence men and women to live nobler lives than any other book that has ever been written. But the Bible is more than a book of moral and ethical precepts. It is the textbook of Christianity, revealing the Creator’s purpose in the creation of man, and the divine plan for his recovery from sin and death.

In the fear-filled world of today there are large numbers of Bible believers who are convinced

that this peer of all books contains the explanation and points out the solution of the continued world distress with which human wisdom seems to be so completely unable to cope. This solution to world problems, they believe, is not merely a theory presented by the Bible, but a plan designed by the Creator which, in his own time and way, is being carried out to its ultimate grand conclusion through the administration of a government supported by divine authority and power.

## **MAN'S CREATION AND FINAL DESTINY**

If this is true, no one can afford to be uninformed concerning such a hopeful outlook, or unacquainted with the details pertaining thereto. If such information is contained in the Bible, we will not want to let it gather dust in our bookcase, or lie unopened on the living room table, but will diligently endeavor to become familiar with the message it has for us in this time of world frustration and despair.

With many, studying the Bible seems a difficult task. These say that they try to study the Bible, but cannot understand it. It all appears to be such a mystery. They may know that such expressions as "Golden Rule," the "Sermon on the Mount," "beating swords into plowshares," and at Christmas time, "peace on earth and good will toward men" are associated with the Bible; but if asked the circumstances under which they were used, many would be at a loss to answer.

Thousands have found the Bible to be a source of comfort in time of sorrow, and of strength to face the vicissitudes of life; some turn to it daily to find a reassuring message. Certainly the Bible

is almost an inexhaustible source of inspiring and consoling thoughts such as, “The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want.” But the Bible can mean much more than this to us if we learn to know it as a whole, and to understand the Creator’s plan of the ages which it reveals. The purpose of this publication is to achieve this understanding.

## **THE BIBLE SUMMARIZED**

What is the Bible? What is its structural makeup, and what great purpose of God toward his human creation is it designed to reveal? The Bible is divided into two main sections, familiarly known as the Old Testament and the New Testament. These two main sections are subdivided into “books.” There are 66 of these, 39 of which are in the Old Testament, and 27 in the New Testament.

The principal theme of the Bible is the plan of God for the recovery of the human race from sin and death. This great design of God has as its ultimate objective the restoration of mankind to life in a global paradise in which there will be no more sickness, no more pain, no more death. Concerning this we read in the last “book” of the New Testament that God will “make all things new.”—Rev. 21:5

The need for salvation and restoration is revealed in the early chapters of Genesis, the first “book” in the Bible, where we are informed of man’s original creation in perfection; of his disobedience to divine law; and his consequent condemnation to death by his Creator. The Bible reveals that because God continued to love man, he sent his Son into the world to be a Redeemer and Savior of the human race.

In order that the Creator's plan for the recovery of the human race might be accomplished, a resurrection of the dead is necessary, so the Bible sets forth the plan for a resurrection—a hope not envisaged in any other religion in the world. The necessity for the resurrection is established by the divine penalty for sin, which penalty is death; and death, according to the clear teachings of the Bible, is not a gateway into another life, but the absence of life. God said to Adam, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."—Gen. 2:17

In setting forth the loving design of the Creator to restore the sin-cursed and dying race to life, the details of the Bible might, in a general way, be divided into four classifications—doctrinal, historical, inspirational, and prophetic. The doctrinal portions outline the details of the Creator's plan for the recovery of man from sin and death. The historical parts supply the background of human experience to which the outworking of the divine plan has been related. The inspirational aspects of the Bible are made up of the promises of God to his people throughout the ages, by which he has assured them of his guiding and sustaining power in their lives, enabling them to be acceptable servants in the doing of his will. The prophetic truths of the Bible are its forecasts of coming events related to the outworking of the divine plan, and of the futile efforts which would be made by men and nations to counterfeit or to thwart the divine designs.

The first seventeen books of the Bible are largely historical. They are: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth,

I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, I and II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. Beginning with Genesis, these books record the account of man's creation; his fall into sin and death; the experiences of some who lived in the antediluvian world; the Deluge; God's call to Abraham and the promises made to him; the slavery of Abraham's descendants in the land of Egypt; their deliverance under the leadership of Moses; the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai; the conquest of Canaan; the nation's later exile in Assyria and Babylon; and the return to Canaan.

The next five books of the Old Testament—Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon—are largely devotional and inspirational; although they also contain outstanding prophecies pertaining to developments in the plan of God. This is particularly true of the Book of Psalms.

The remaining seventeen books of the Old Testament are predominantly prophetic in nature, although, as we shall later see, they contain some history as well as precious assurances of God's love and care for his people. These prophetic books of the Old Testament are: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

## **THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The first five books of the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and The Acts—are largely historical, four of them being a record of the life and ministry of Jesus, and calling attention to many events in his life which were in direct fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies. In the Book of The Acts we are furnished with

interesting accounts of the experiences of the apostles and the early Christians as they faced an unbelieving and hostile world.

The next twenty-one books of the New Testament are a mixture of doctrinal and devotional truths. They consist of epistles, or letters, written by certain apostles to various individuals and groups, called churches. These letters are, by name: Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I and II Thesalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, I and II Peter, I, II, III John, and Jude.

Revelation, the last book of the Bible, is a prophetic book written in highly symbolic language. Its prophecies point us to the great objective of the divine plan, and in beautifully descriptive words assures us that a happy day is coming when “there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”—Rev. 21:4

While the Bible’s outline of God’s glorious plan for the redemption and recovery of the dying race from death is not set forth in sequential story form, the harmony, and at the same time, the contrast of its first three and the last three chapters is striking. The one describes the original creation of man and his fall from favor with God; the other the renewed or restored creation, with sin and its curse removed. The three opening chapters show Satan and evil entering the world to deceive and destroy, while, the closing chapters reveal Satan’s work undone, and this great deceiver and destroyer himself destroyed. Genesis shows man given a dominion over earth, and then, through sin, the loss of that dominion;

while the last three chapters of the Bible give assurance that this lost dominion is to be restored to man. The Bible refers constantly to one prominent personage, Jesus, who is set forth as the Son of God. This Son of the Bible's Author is mentioned under various names and titles which, by their united meaning, reveal that Jesus was sent into the world to be, first, the Redeemer of the human race, and later, the Ruler of those whom he ransomed by his own precious blood.

The Old Testament prophets, who wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, foretold the coming of this great One, the Messiah, while the Spirit inspired writers of the New Testament confirm the fact that he did come, and that he was crucified on Calvary's cross. They not only record the fact of his death, but explain its purpose of redemption in the divine plan, and that it was in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies.

The combined testimony of the Bible is that Jesus returns at his Second Advent to accomplish this glorious consummation of the divine plan of salvation, which will include the resurrection of the dead. The Bible testifies that first to be raised from the dead will be the followers of Jesus. These will reign with him in his kingdom. Then, according to the Bible, will be a gradual, general awakening from the sleep of death of all mankind, who will be given the privilege of living in the restored paradise forever. The prophecies of the Bible assure us that we are now living at the very threshold of that new age when Jesus, the Prince of Peace, will rule in righteousness for the purpose of restoring mankind to life.

## THE BOOK OF GENESIS

As we have noted, the first book of the Bible is called Genesis, meaning, “the origin.” The first chapter of Genesis contains an exceedingly brief account of God’s creative work as it pertained particularly to the planet earth. It is not intended to be a full and scientific revelation of all the details involved in the work of creation, nor is such a detailed record necessary to the purpose of the Bible. That purpose being to identify the origin of man, to explain why he is now a dying creature, and to assure us that God is carrying forward a glorious plan for man’s recovery from sin and death, as well as to explain the details of that plan.

However, the brief account of creation that is given us in Genesis, when properly interpreted and understood, is found to be fully in harmony with all genuine scientific facts.<sup>1</sup> Its “days” of creation, for example, are not periods of twenty-four hours, but long epochs of time, each having an obscure beginning called “evening,” and closing in a symbolic “morning” of completion.

In the “morning” stage of the sixth “day” “man” was created—“male and female.” They were commanded to multiply and fill the earth, and subdue it. They were given dominion over the earth, and over all the lower forms of creation. So far as the earthly creation was concerned, man was the Creator’s crowning work. The record states that he was created in the image of God, and, in the divine command to multiply and fill the earth, we have a brief statement of God’s purpose in the creation

<sup>1</sup> See the booklet, *Creation*, for confirmation of this statement, and a detailed examination of the first chapter of Genesis. Free upon request to Dawn Publications, PO Box 521167, Longwood, FL 32752-1167

of this first human pair; namely, his design that the earth should be filled with human beings whose delight it would be to worship and serve him.

The record of the general work of creation contained in this first chapter of Genesis is merely in the nature of background material to help highlight the essential information concerning the creation of man, the account of which closes the chapter. The next two chapters begin to present the details, not only of man's creation, but also of the divine will for him, the fact of his disobedience to the law of God, and his consequent condemnation to death.

In this detailed account of man's creation we are informed that he was made from the "dust of the ground," meaning simply what is now scientifically known to be true; that all the chemical elements which make up the human organism are native in the earth, hence the expression, "Mother Earth." We are also told that into the human organism the Creator breathed "the breath of life, and man became a living soul."—Gen. 2:7

This is the first time the word soul appears in the Bible, and it is, we believe, by divine design that we are informed as to exactly what it is, for here the Lord establishes a fundamental truth which should guide us in our study of his entire plan for the eternal destiny of man. And how simply the Lord defines: a human "soul"! As stated in the record, the soul is the combination of the organism and the breath of life. Under divine guidance, the result of this combination was that man "became a living soul."

A soul, then, is not a separate entity which dwells within the human organism, and which escapes when the body dies. There is no biblical

or other proof that such an entity exists. That erroneous theory originated in Greek mythology. Although the expression “immortal soul” is prevalent in the religious concepts of millions, it is not found in the Bible. The more than 800 uses of the word soul throughout the Bible are all in harmony with the Creator’s explanation of how the first human soul was made, and of what it consists; namely, a living, human being.

It was to this first human soul, or human being, that God addressed himself when he said, “In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (Gen. 2:17) From the moment Adam sinned, this divine penalty of death began to be carried out. As a “soul,” he began to die. From this point onward the Bible continues to elaborate and emphasize the dire results of disobedience to divine law. Not only did Adam die as a result of his disobedience, but he carried his progeny into death with him, hence the whole world is dying.

This great tragedy of sin and death is merely the background of truth set forth in the Word of God, a background, nevertheless, which highlights the necessity of the Creator’s plan for the recovery of the human race from the result of sin, and gives emphasis to his love in forming such a glorious plan of salvation. God’s loving plan for the rescue of his human creation from death is the great theme song of the Bible. If we fail to hear and to appreciate the meaning of this theme song of divine love we will have missed the real value and essential purpose of the Bible.

At the time our first parents sinned against God, and were sentenced to death and driven out of the Garden of Eden, God said that the “seed” of the “woman” would “bruise” the “serpent’s head.”

Vague though this language is, in the light of the unfolding plan of God as we find it throughout the remainder of the Bible, we recognize this as the first indication of the Creator's purpose to provide a Redeemer—a Savior to rescue man from the result of his disobedience.

Chapters four to six of Genesis reveal the downward course of the human race during the antediluvian world. This world ended with the Deluge of Noah's day. The story of the Flood is known to all. Some believe it, many do not. Archaeologists have confirmed the fact of a flood in the Mesopotamian valley. It is claimed that proofs of such a flood exist in many other parts of the earth.

Not long after the Flood, an individual who fills a very important place in the Bible story appears on the scene. He is Abraham, originally called Abram. To Abraham God made a wonderful promise, saying, "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. 12:13

This promise was, in essence, repeated to Abraham on several occasions. When he was a very old man God asked him to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering. Abraham believed that if he obeyed, God would raise his boy from the dead. He demonstrated his willingness to obey, but the Lord prevented the sacrifice, and because of Abraham's faith and obedience he again repeated the promise he had made concerning his "seed"

blessing “all families of the earth,” and confirmed the promise with his oath.—Gen. 22:15-18

This promise of the “seed” to be a channel of blessing ties in with the statement God made in the Garden of Eden regarding a “seed” that would “bruise” the “serpent’s” head. The same golden strand of promise continues throughout the remainder of the Bible. In the New Testament it leads us to Jesus as the promised “seed,” and to explanations which reveal that the followers of Jesus will be associated with him as the “seed” of promise, the channel of life-giving blessings to all mankind.

The natural descendants of Abraham—Isaac, Jacob, Jacob’s twelve sons, and finally their descendants, the nation of Israel—play important roles in the illustrating of the plan of God encompassed in his promise to Abraham. The remaining chapters of Genesis trace the experiences of these down to the time when they became a nation of slaves in Egypt, longing for deliverance.

A very revealing incident in the life of Jacob is recorded in Genesis 37. It is related to his younger son, Joseph, whom he greatly loved, and favored above his other sons. These became jealous of Joseph. First they thought to kill him, but instead sold him into slavery in Egypt. In order to hide their crime from their father, they killed a young goat and smeared its blood over Joseph’s coat which they had retained, and spread it out before their father, Jacob.

As designed by them, Jacob concluded that Joseph had been slain by wild beasts. He was heartbroken, and in his great sorrow said, “I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning.” —Gen. 37:35

The Hebrew word here translated grave is *sheol*. This same Hebrew word is also translated "hell," and is the only word in the Old Testament thus translated. Here, then, is the only "hell" mentioned in the Old Testament, and we find righteous Jacob expecting to go there when he died. Thus we learn that hell is not a place of torment, but simply the condition of death into which both the righteous and the wicked go when they die.

## **THE BOOK OF EXODUS**

This book, as its name implies, narrates the thrilling story of the deliverance of the children of Israel from their Egyptian taskmasters, and their exodus from Egypt. This involved many miraculous manifestations of God's loving care. One of these was the saving of their firstborn from death on the night before they left Egypt, the night when all the firstborn of Egypt died. As we put together the complete testimony of the Bible on this subject, we will find that the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage was an illustration of the future deliverance of all mankind from the thralldom of sin and death.

The Book of Exodus also narrates the miraculous manner in which, through Moses, God gave his Law to the Israelites. This Law is epitomized in the well-known Ten Commandments. The moral code represented in these commandments forms the basis of civilized laws in all the enlightened countries of the earth today. Certainly this attests to their intrinsic worth, and is a recognition by modern man that these laws given nearly four thousand years ago cannot be improved upon. This fact alone gives us profound

respect for the Book in which such laws were first recorded!

The Ten Commandments were written on tables of stone. When Moses brought these tables down from the mountain, where he received them, he found the Israelites practicing idolatry. To him this was a serious breach in their fidelity to God and he threw the tables of the Law to the ground and broke them as a symbol of the people's infidelity. Later, the Lord said to Moses, "Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou breakest."—Exod. 34:1

Moses followed the instructions, taking the tables of stone into the mountain. 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."—Exod. 34:5-7

Here we have in a few words a summary of the glorious characteristics of God, which, throughout all the books of the Bible are amplified by the revealment of his just and loving plan for the recovery of the lost race from death, and the restoration of all the willing and obedient to life on the earth. As we progress in our examination of the Bible, we will find that the Creator is, indeed, "merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." We will discover, also, that while he does not clear the

guilty, he has provided redemption through Christ so that the iniquity of us all may fall upon him.

## **THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS**

The name of the third book of the Bible is derived from the name Levi. Levi was the head of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. This tribe was the one selected by God to perform the religious rites and services of the nation. The Book of Leviticus presents in detail these different services, including the offering of many and varied sacrifices. As the religious servants of the nation, they, as well as the sacrifices and other services which they supervised, are referred to in the New Testament, and are shown to be typical of Jesus and his followers during this present age and of their sacrificial work and service. Thus, even the tedious and difficult reading in the Book of Leviticus is related to the unfolding of the divine purpose of redemption and restoration.

## **THE BOOK OF NUMBERS**

This, the fourth book of the Bible, probably gets its name from the opening chapter, in which the Lord gives instructions to Moses to “take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, ... with the number of their names.” The entire book is largely a record of important events which occurred during the forty years when the nation of Israel wandered in the wilderness before entering the Promised Land of Canaan. Because important lessons can be drawn from these experiences of Israel, having a vital bearing on the outworking of the divine plan of the ages as a whole, this book also is a necessary part of the “Word of God.”

While the Book of Numbers is almost entirely historical in nature, in it is to be found one of the most beautiful divine beatitudes recorded anywhere in the Bible. God instructed Moses to pronounce a benediction upon Israel in these words: "The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: the LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."—Num. 6:24-26

## **THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY**

The Book of Deuteronomy, as its name implies, consists largely of the repetition of important features of the Law given to Israel by God at the hand of Moses. This repetition appears mainly as admonitions to faithfulness given by Moses in three discourses which are recorded in the book. This book also contains the recounting of some of Israel's experiences during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

Deuteronomy also contains prophecies pertaining to the promised Deliverer of mankind from sin and death, the "seed" through which all the families of the earth will be blessed. One of these is recorded in chapter 18, verses 18 and 19, and reads: "I (the LORD) will raise them up a Prophet [the Messiah] from among their brethren, like unto thee [Moses], and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him." In the New Testament this is indicated to be a prophecy of the coming Messiah.

## **THE BOOK OF JOSHUA**

The Book of Joshua is so named because its subject matter pertains to the time during which

Joshua, the successor of Moses, was leader of Israel. In delivering the nation from Egyptian bondage, the divinely intended destination of the Israelites was the land of Canaan. But because of their lack of faith and their disobedience, they were caused to wander in the wilderness of Sinai for forty years, until the death of Moses. Then Joshua, by the Lord's appointment, led them into the Promised Land.

When Joshua assumed the leadership of Israel, the nation stood virtually at the border of Canaan, but in order to enter the land it was necessary to cross the River Jordan. God made this possible by holding back the upper waters of the river long enough for the river bed below to be emptied. This enabled the people to cross over on dry ground.

After the Israelites entered the land of Canaan, they were confronted with the necessity of conquering the people of the land, and it was Joshua's responsibility to see that this land was equitably divided among the twelve tribes which constituted the nation. The manner in which this two-fold work was accomplished forms the principal subject matter of the Book of Joshua.

To see the real value of this and other historical records of the experiences of the Israelites, it is essential to recognize that they are presented against a background of faith in God's promises that one day there would arise from this people the "seed" of promise who would lead the nation to a high pinnacle of fame and power, and in God's providence become a channel of blessing to all other nations of earth. The book is therefore another link in the inspired testimony of the Bible to strengthen conviction of the divine

purpose to bless “all families of the earth,” as promised to father Abraham.

The Israelites were God’s people. For this reason, he overshadowed them with his love and care. He assured Joshua of this, saying, “Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.” (Josh. 1:9) The Lord’s people today can apply this promise to themselves, and receive spiritual strength from its reassuring words.

## **THE BOOK OF JUDGES**

This book records the history of the nation of Israel during a period of 450 years, known generally by students of the Bible as the “period of the judges.” It was a period in their national history when the only leadership they had was in the “judges” whom God raised up from time to time, chiefly when they were threatened or oppressed by their enemies and called unto the Lord for help. Gideon was one of these “judges.” The Lord used him to deliver his people from the oppressive hands of the Midianites. The famous victory of Gideon and his three hundred soldiers over 120,000 Midianites is recorded in this book.

Apparently, during much of that period of time in the experience of the Israelites covered by the Book of Judges, everyone did what seemed “right in his own eyes.” (Judges 17:6; 21:25) They had no central government, and no national leader or king. The record indicates that in some cases that which seemed “right” to the people was quite in harmony with the laws of righteousness; whereas, at other times their decisions led them

away from God and into idolatry. Many helpful lessons for our guidance and encouragement can be found in the Book of Judges.

## **THE BOOK OF RUTH**

This book contains one of the most touching human interest stories ever written. Historically it belongs to the period of the judges. It tells of an Israelite and his wife, Elimelech and Naomi, who left the land of Israel during a time of famine to dwell in the land of Moab, thinking thus to improve their lot. In Moab, Elimelech died. His two sons married Moabitish women, but later the sons died, leaving Naomi and her daughters-in-law to take care of themselves.

Naomi decided that she would return to the land of Israel, and Ruth, one of her daughters-in-law, although not an Israelite, embraced the God of Israel and went with her mother-in-law. After arriving in Israel, and through the overruling providence of God, Ruth became the wife of an Israelite of the tribe of Judah, and it was through the lineage of this family that, hundreds of years later, Jesus was born. Aside from its sheer interest and beauty as a story, the principal value of this book among the other books of the Bible is to establish this important link in the genealogy of Jesus. Thus again we see that the entire Bible is related to the theme of redemption and restoration centered in Jesus who, as the “seed” of Abraham, came to redeem, and later to restore and bless “all families of the earth.”

## **I AND II SAMUEL**

Samuel was the last of the judges of Israel who served the nation during the period of the judges.

The two books bearing his name record the experiences of the nation during his tenure of office, beginning, in fact, with an account of his birth in response to his mother's earnest prayers, and his training under the high priest, Eli.

While Samuel was serving as judge and prophet in Israel, the people decided that they wanted to be like other nations and have a king rule over them. They presented their case to Samuel who, in turn, took it to the Lord in prayer. The Lord instructed Samuel to accede to the demands of the people and to anoint a king over the nation. Saul was Israel's first king. He ruled well for a time, then lost his humility and started on a course which was contrary to the will of God.

At this point the well-known Bible character, David, enters into the story. David was a shepherd boy whom God instructed Samuel to anoint king of Israel in place of Saul. David, however, made no effort to assume the rulership of Israel until after the death of Saul. The two books of Samuel relate in considerable detail the very interesting experiences of Saul and David, and thus fill in the history of this people from whom the "seed" of promise was to come.

## **I AND II KINGS**

The two Books of the Kings cover the period during which Israel was a kingdom nation, beginning approximately at the time of David's death, and continuing until the nation lost its independence, ten of the tribes being taken into captivity in Assyria, and the other two to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah was the last king to rule over the two-tribe kingdom. The nation has never had a king since he was overthrown.

Under Solomon, the third king to reign over the Israelites, the nation reached its highest pinnacle of fame and glory. Solomon's own glory and wisdom became famous throughout the then known world. The Queen of Sheba heard about it and traveled all the way to Palestine to see for herself, and she reported that "the half" had not been told.—I Kings 10:7

Although Israel became a kingdom nation by rebelling against God's arrangement to care for their needs through "judges," the Lord overruled this to make a very interesting illustration for us of a much greater kingdom which he would later establish over the whole earth, a kingdom in which Jesus would be the "King of kings." To make this picture, the idea was conveyed to the kings of Israel that they ruled as representatives of God.

## **I AND II CHRONICLES**

The two books of Chronicles are also historical, and are largely supplemental to I and II Kings. They are, however, more general in scope than the two Books of Kings, in that they begin with creation and give the historical background of the nation of Israel by genealogies all the way to David, and include the account of his reign. In the concluding chapter of I Chronicles a prayer by David is recorded, which was uttered when he turned over his kingdom to his son Solomon.

In this prayer 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)

Thus David acknowledges God to be king in Israel, and by so doing reminds us of the many promises of God that the time will yet come when, through Christ, he will rule over the whole earth.

## **EZRA AND NEHEMIAH**

As we have seen, with the overthrow of Zedekiah, Judah's last king, the nation was taken captive to Babylon. This captivity lasted for seventy years. The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah record the experiences of the Israelites in connection with their return to the land of their fathers, and tell of the faithful service of these two servants of God whose names are given to the books—service, that is, in leading and governing the people of God during those difficult years.

In these two books there is much to encourage the Lord's people even now, for they remind us of God's ability to care for his own in times of great need, and to protect them from their enemies. These books tell of the rebuilding of Jerusalem, its walls and the temple, under very trying circumstances. But the Lord was with his people then, even as he still is with those today who put their trust in him.

## **THE BOOK OF ESTHER**

This is the last of the predominantly historical books of the Old Testament, although it outlines the details of but one episode in the experiences of the Israelites. It might be more proper to call it a story book. It records an effort that was made to destroy all the Israelites, and the remarkable manner in which this was prevented. The principal purpose served by the book as a segment of the Word of God seems to be to call

attention to a bitter attack made against the people of God in an effort to thwart the divine purpose centered in them.

When, in the Garden of Eden, God said that there would be a “seed” which would bruise the “serpent’s” head, he also said that there would be “enmity” between this “seed” and the “seed” of the serpent. (Gen. 3:15) The “serpent,” of course, is a symbol of the great adversary of God and of men, who is Satan, the Devil. His “seed” would be all those who, wittingly or unwittingly, lend themselves to the carrying out of his wicked designs against God’s promised “seed.”

Satan has not always known just who might be a part of God’s “seed” of promise, so he has bitterly opposed, and has ever sought to destroy, those upon whom God’s favor has been manifested. He would know of God’s promise to Abraham. He would know that the descendants of Abraham were specially cared for by God. So they became objects of his envious and cruel attacks. Although in this brief study of the experiences of Israel in relation to the plan of God we have not taken time to mention the many obvious efforts of Satan to destroy the nation, such efforts were made. But God protected his people. The incident in the Book of Esther is another of these. The facts could have been stated very briefly, but the Lord favored us by presenting them in this appealing story form.

## **THE THEME OF HOPE**

Summing up our brief study of these seventeen historical books of the Old Testament, we found that God created man in his image, and designed that he should have dominion over the

earth. This, we saw, was conditional upon man's obedience to divine law. But man disobeyed God's command, was sentenced to death, driven from his garden home, and his dominion taken away. We have seen, nevertheless, that God continued to love his human creatures, and began to make promises for a coming deliverance from the result of disobedience.

We have learned that in carrying out his purpose God selected a faithful servant, Abraham, and promised that through his "seed" all nations would be blessed. The descendants of Abraham, the nation of Israel, became the people of God, and to them he continued to make promises, and through them worked out the preliminary arrangements of his plan of salvation.

We have purposely avoided a detailed examination of these historical books of the Old Testament, for these details are of value in our study of the Bible only in the light of God's plan of salvation as we will find it revealed in the succeeding books of the Old and New Testaments. As we proceed in our scrutiny of these later books, particularly those of the New Testament, we will refer to important truths to be found in these historical books, the meaning of which will then be more apparent.

As we noted in the beginning, the truths of the great plan of the ages are not set forth in the Bible in narrative form. This being true, the real value of the Bible cannot be appreciated simply by reading it through chapter by chapter, and book by book. However, the glorious theme of divine love, as revealed in God's plan to rescue mankind from sin and death is reiterated over and over again—"here a little and there a little"—as one

of the prophets declares. This is true, as we have found, even of the historical books of the Old Testament, and is increasingly so of the other books.

We will find, for example, that repeatedly, the Lord, through the prophets, points forward to the coming of the great Deliverer, the Messiah, the Christ, the "Seed," of promise. We will discover that in the accomplishment of this plan of restoration, the promised Deliverer first of all died as man's Redeemer. We will also ascertain from the prophets and from the writings of the New Testament that the actual deliverance of mankind from death will be accomplished through the agencies of a powerful government, or kingdom, established by Christ, a kingdom that will rule over the earth for a thousand years, and that at the end of that thousand years the human race will be fully restored to perfection and life. Then, stretching out before mankind, will be the opportunity of living happily and forever in a global earthly paradise.

This is God's purpose in his human creation. This is man's final destiny. And what a glorious destiny! All the evils which have afflicted mankind because of disobedience to divine law will have been destroyed. The human race will no longer be in rebellion against God and his righteous laws, but will be in wholehearted obedience to him, and basking in the sunshine of his unstinted favor and love. It was this that God meant when he made the promise to Abraham that through his "seed" all the families of the earth would be "blessed." And what a gloriously satisfying "blessing" it will be! No more sickness, no more pain, no more war, no more fear of war,

and no more death. Too good to be true? Not at all! As we continue our examination of the Bible, and note the wonderful manner in which it reveals the love of the true God of glory, we will say it is too good not to be true, for it is just what we should expect from the God of our salvation. ■

## **QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 1**

What is the main, the central theme, of the Bible? Page 3

Into what four general classifications are the details of the Bible which reveal its main theme divided? Page 4

Does the subject matter of any of the books of the Bible pertain exclusively to any one of these four classifications? Pages 4-6

What, primarily, is the nature of the subject matter in the first seventeen books of the Bible? Name these books. Pages 4,5

Name the next five books of the Bible, and the nature of their predominant subject matter? Page 5

In which classification are the last seventeen books of the Old Testament? What are the names of these books? Page 5

What are the first five books of the New Testament, and how would you classify their subject matter? Page 5

Name the next twenty-one books of the New Testament. What is the nature of these books? Page 6

What is the last book of the Bible, and how would you classify its subject matter? Page 6

Is God's plan of restoration to any extent set

forth in the Bible in sequential, story form? Explain. Pages 6,7

What prominent character in the plan of God is constantly referred to in the Bible, and how is he described? How and when is his work accomplished? Page 7

## **GENESIS**

What purpose is served by the brief account of creation found in the first chapter of Genesis? Page 8

What are the details of man's creation as set forth in the second chapter of Genesis? Page 9

How many times does the word soul appear in the Bible, and is it ever referred to as immortal? What is the divine penalty for sin, as stated to father Adam? Page 10

What did the Lord say in the Garden of Eden indicating there is hope for the recovery of man from the result of his sin? Pages 10,11

Who was Abraham, and what promise did God make to him? How is this promise related to the one made in the Garden of Eden? Pages 11,12

Who were the natural descendants of Abraham, and where are they when the Book of Genesis closes? Page 12

## **EXODUS**

What are some of the principal historical facts set forth in the Book of Exodus, and what lessons do they contain pertaining to the divine plan of salvation? Page 13

Quote the Lord's words to Moses on the occasion when he received the Law the second time. Page 14

## **LEVITICUS**

What is contained in the Book of Leviticus, and how is it related to the divine plan of redemption through the blood of Jesus? Page 15

## **NUMBERS**

What events are recorded in the Book of Numbers? Quote the benediction which the Lord asked Moses to have pronounced upon Israel. Pages 15,16

## **DEUTERONOMY**

What important prophecy of the Messiah is contained in the Book of Deuteronomy? Page 16

## **JOSHUA**

What period in Israel's history is covered by the Book of Joshua, and what important tasks were accomplished by Joshua? Page 17

What great hope inspired the faithful Israelites throughout all of their experiences? Pages 17,18

## **JUDGES**

What was the "period of the Judges," and which of the historical books of the Old Testament records the experiences of the Israelites during that time? Page 18

## **RUTH**

What is contained in the Book of Ruth, and what vital purpose does it serve in revealing the divine plan of salvation through Christ? Page 19

## **I AND II SAMUEL**

Who was Samuel, and what events are recorded in the two books which bear his name? Pages 19,20

Relate the circumstances which led to Israel's becoming a kingdom nation. How did God overrule this to portray a lesson in connection with his plan? Page 20

## **I AND II KINGS**

Who was the last king of Judah and what happened to the nation when he was overthrown? Pages 20,21

## **I AND II CHRONICLES**

What is the principal subject matter of the two Books of Chronicles, and how do they provide the historical background of Israel? Page 21

## **EZRA AND NEHEMIAH**

Who were Ezra and Nehemiah, and what experiences of Israel are related in the books which bear their names? Page 22

## **ESTHER**

What important lesson is brought to our attention in the Book of Esther? Page 23

## **SUMMARY**

Sum up the lessons learned in our study of these seventeen historical books of the Old Testament. Pages 23-26

## CHAPTER 2

# God's Assurance of Survival

**T**oday a dreadful fear haunts the minds and hearts of millions, a fear that the human race will destroy itself. The world's statesmen and diplomats seem unable to find a solution for the world's myriad problems, and the outlook from the human standpoint is not bright. But God has a plan, and in this section of our review of the "Book of Books" we will find many of his promises and prophecies assuring us that the human race will not be destroyed from the earth, as so many are now fearing.

### **THE BOOK OF JOB**

Now we come to the Book of Job. This book, in allegorical form, epitomizes the divine plan of redemption and restoration. Job was a godly patriarch who stood high in the esteem of his fellowmen, and was greatly blessed by the Lord. As the story concerning him unfolds, we find Satan accusing Job before God, insisting that this rich man's piety and his loyalty to God were based wholly upon self interest, that if his blessings were taken away he would curse God.

Satan was permitted an opportunity to try to prove his accusation by bringing calamity upon Job, whose flocks and herds were destroyed and his children killed. He was stricken with a loathsome disease, and then his wife, thinking that God had withdrawn his favor from her husband, turned against him. But in spite of all these misfortunes, Job maintained his integrity before God. He proved that it is possible to serve God without receiving material reward, and in spite of great loss and severe pain.

With Satan's accusations proved false, three "friends" of Job visited him—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. Finally a fourth appeared—Elihu. These first three are sometimes referred to as "Job's comforters," although they said little to console him, but instead endeavored to prove to him that his suffering was evidence that he had committed some gross sin for which he was being punished.

Job argued with his "comforters" that this was not true. The eloquence of Job and of those who reasoned with him has no parallel in literature for beauty, style, and the skillful use of words. While the discussion is based upon the personal experiences of Job, in reality it points up the larger question as to why any of God's intelligent creatures are permitted to suffer; or why evil of any sort is permitted.

Job refused to admit that he was guilty of any special sin. Nevertheless, neither he nor his friends succeeded in reaching a definite conclusion as to why so much evil had befallen him. Then God spoke to Job out of a storm and set the facts before him. This part of the book—chapters 38 to 41—is superb in its style. In language of

incomparable grandeur God silenced Job, making him realize that while he was able to refute the charges of his comforters, he actually was a sinner, and stood in need of divine grace.

The lesson learned, Job was restored to health, and again became a rich man. God also gave him another family, and in the end he was far better off in every way than he was before Satan asked for the privilege of testing him.

As we have suggested, many see in this wonderfully interesting narrative a beautiful illustration of the permission of evil as it relates to the experiences of the entire human race. All mankind has suffered because of sin, but in God's providence, and as a result of the loving provision he has made through the Redeemer, Christ Jesus, they are to be restored to health and life. This means that ultimately the human race, by reason of actual experience with sin, will be in a much more favorable position than our first parents were before they transgressed God's law.

After Job realized more clearly the meaning of his trials he said to God, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee." (Job 42:5) This will be true of the entire human race. Millions have heard about God, but when the lessons are learned from the experience with evil they will "see" him; that is, they will truly know and appreciate their loving Creator. This, the Bible reveals, will be at the close of the thousand-year reign of Christ and his church.

At one stage in Job's experience, although still trusting God, he began to wonder if life under such trying circumstances was really worth living, so he prayed, "O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave ... until thy wrath be past."

(Job 14:13) The Hebrew word here translated “grave” is *sheol*. As we have already noted, Jacob was the first Bible character to use this word to describe the death condition. It is the only Hebrew word in the Old Testament which is translated “hell.” This proves that the Bible hell is simply the state of death, not a place of torment, for Job was asking for release from suffering, not to have it increased.

God has provided for a resurrection from the Bible hell. Job stated his faith in the resurrection, saying, “All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.”

To read the Book of Job is to be inspired to place greater trust in God and to serve him more faithfully. At the same time, as we have seen, this wonderful book does much to reveal the loving plan of God for human salvation and survival, emphasizing, as Job does, the great hope of the resurrection. And certainly Job’s own restoration to health and riches is a beautiful illustration of God’s plan for the whole world.

## **THE BOOK OF PSALMS**

The Book of Psalms is sometimes called the songbook of the Bible. Many of the psalms are expressions of devotion, thanksgiving, and praise to God. The opening psalm in the book reads, “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.” (Ps. 1:1,2) This theme is reiterated in various ways

throughout the book, and associated with songs of praise for the marvelous manner in which God blesses those whose delight is in his law. The whole book rings with thanksgiving and glory to God, closing with the grand hallelujah crescendo:

“Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness. Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals. Let everything that hath breath praise the LORD.”—Ps 150:1-6

However, this book of praise to God also contains some of the most outstanding prophecies of the Old Testament. As we continue our review of the books of the Bible, we find that God’s great plan of restoration is associated with the idea of a kingdom, with Christ, the Messiah, as the King in that kingdom. The Book of Psalms reminds us of this in a number of its prophecies. The 2nd Psalm contains a prophecy concerning the time when Jesus begins to exercise his authority and power in his kingdom. He is shown dashing the nations to pieces “like a potter’s vessel.” Parts of this psalm are being fulfilled in the world-shaking events of our times.

The 46th Psalm is another prophecy of our times, combined with the promise of God to care for his people during this period of world chaos and distress. “God is our refuge and strength,” writes the prophet, “a very present help in trouble.

Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.” (Ps 46:1,2) The word “earth” is used here to symbolize a social order, or what is now called civilization. With this symbolic “earth” removed the Lord will say to the people living on the literal earth, “Be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen [or nations] I will be exalted in the earth.” (vs. 10) The symbolic “earth” will be destroyed, being succeeded by Christ’s kingdom, but man will survive.

The 72nd Psalm is another prophecy of Christ’s kingdom, and the rich blessings of peace and security which it will assure to all nations. Concerning Jesus, David wrote, “All kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him. For he shall deliver the needy when he ariseth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper.”—Ps. 72:11,12

The 8th Psalm refers to the original creation of man in the image of God, and of his being constituted king of earth. It prophesies a “visit” to earth by a messenger from heaven. The New Testament refers to this, identifies Jesus as the visitor, and explains that the purpose of his visit is to restore man’s original dominion over the earth.

Before mankind could be restored to life through the agencies of Christ’s kingdom, he needed to be redeemed. The 16th Psalm is a prophecy of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Redeemer. The prophet personifies Jesus and, expressing his hope in a resurrection, writes: “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see

corruption.” (Ps. 16:10) Here again the Hebrew word *sheol* is used. It is the only hell of the Old Testament. It is the state of death, and it was necessary for Jesus to “pour out his soul unto death,” that he might redeem the fallen human race from death. How wonderfully this fundamental teaching of the Bible is thus emphasized!

The 96th Psalm is one of thanksgiving to God for the establishment of righteousness and judgment in the earth through the medium of Christ’s kingdom. In this psalm we have one of the many assurances given us in the Bible that the future judgment day of the world is not to be a doomsday, but one of rejoicing and deliverance.

Many of the psalms are of an inspirational nature, expressing thanksgiving for the assurance of God’s loving care of his people. Outstanding among these is the 23rd Psalm, in which the Creator is likened to a shepherd caring for his sheep: “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.” (Ps. 23:1) Another is the 91st Psalm, which is a song of assurance that God will care for his people regardless of the cunning and strength of enemies who may plot to injure them: “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”—Ps. 91:1

## **THE BOOK OF PROVERBS**

Most of this book was written by King Solomon, the son of David. No special theme runs through the book, unless it be the wisdom of obeying God’s law. Solomon had been given great wisdom from the Lord, and much of it is displayed in this book. Perhaps the best conception of its contents and style can be had by quoting some of its sayings and admonitions:

“Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart.”—Prov. 3:3

“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”—Prov. 3:5,6

“Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith.”—Prov. 15:16

“A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold.”—Prov. 22:1

“If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink.”—Prov. 25:21

## **THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES**

This book was evidently also written by King Solomon. During the time of his reign over Israel, Solomon became very rich, and he surrounded himself with much glory and pomp. God had blessed him with great wisdom, yet he was most unwise in his personal life. He wrote much in this book to indicate that in his latter years he realized the folly of his ways, so he sought to admonish others not to follow his foolish example. The book is a reminder that despite riches, pleasure, honor, and glory, life is vain without God.—Eccles. 5:7

However, in addition to this wise counsel to follow closely the way of the Lord, the Book of Ecclesiastes furnishes valuable information concerning the nature of man and the condition of death. As we have seen, God declared to father Adam that he would be punished with death if

he partook of the forbidden fruit. But Satan said, "Ye shall not surely die." (Gen. 3:4) This was the origin of the theory that "there is no death." It was obvious from the beginning of human experience that man's body died, so Satan deceptively induced man to believe that he possessed a "soul," or "spirit," which escaped when the body died, and that this "spirit" is immortal and does not die.

Evidently this false theory was prevalent in Solomon's day, for he asked the question, "Who knoweth [who can prove] the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that [it] goeth downward to the earth?" (Eccles. 3:21) Solomon had already answered this question in the two preceding verses, which read: "That which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them ... so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again."—vss. 19,20

Chapter 12, verse 7, in a description of death and what it means, reads, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it." The word "spirit" in this text translates a Hebrew word which simply means the breath of life. Every part of man, both his body and his breath, at death returns to its original condition, which leaves one who has died exactly as before he was born, except that he is remembered by God and will be restored to life in the resurrection.

In chapter 9, verse 10, we are furnished a further description of death, and at the same time a concise definition of the Hebrew word *sheol*, which, as we have noted, is the only Hebrew word

in the Old Testament which is translated hell. In this text, however, this Hebrew word is translated “grave.” We quote: “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave [*sheol*], whither thou goest.”

Verse 4 of chapter 1 is another revealing statement of truth. Here we read that “the earth abideth for ever.” This is in full keeping with the plan of God, as revealed throughout his entire Word, to restore the human race to live on the earth forever. It refutes the traditional theory which has come down to us from the Dark Ages that the earth will be destroyed by fire at the second coming of Christ. Thus again we are assured of human survival.

Solomon concludes the book with the admonition, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” —Eccles. 12:13,14

## **THE SONG OF SOLOMON**

This book is also sometimes called “Canticles.” The entire book may be styled a drama. It seems likely that the Lord directed it to be a general picture of the love of Christ for his church, who, according to the Scriptures, ultimately becomes associated with him in his heavenly home and glory as his “bride.” In keeping with this, how beautifully stated is the adoration of the church, when she says concerning Christ that he is “the chiefest among ten thousand,” the One “altogether lovely.”—Song of Sol. 5:10,16

## THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

Isaiah was one of God's "holy prophets," and the major portion of the book which bears his name is prophetic in character. It contains some history, and some very precious assurances of God's care over his people. One of these reads, "Thou [the Lord] wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD forever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength."—Isa. 26:3,4

Some of the prophecies of the book pertain to the calamities which were to come upon the nation of Israel because of its sin. "Ah sinful nation," the prophet writes, "a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. (Isa. 1:4) In colorful and forceful language Isaiah forecast the coming desolation of the nation and of their land, saying, "Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city."—Isa. 1:7,8

The Book of Isaiah is concerned with much more than prophesying the punishments of the Lord which were shortly to come upon the nation of Israel. The fulfilment of these prophecies began when the nation was taken into captivity in Babylon. Intertwined with these are forecasts of major events in the outworking of the divine plan of redemption and restoration of all mankind,

some of which were thousands of years in the future from Isaiah's time.

## **JESUS' FORETOLD DEATH**

Fundamental to the outworking of the divine plan of salvation was the death of Jesus as man's Redeemer, and in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah this is foretold. In order that the dying race might be redeemed from death, Jesus took the sinner's place in death. Concerning the Redeemer's suffering and death, the prophet wrote:

"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; ... Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. ... He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; ... It pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed ... and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied."—Isa. 53:3-11

The "pleasure" of the Lord referred to in this passage is the divine purpose, as stated to Abraham, to bless "all the families of the earth." (Gen. 12:3; 22:18) It is through the death of Jesus as the Redeemer that these promised blessings of life will be made available to the people during the thousand years of his kingdom.

As the prophet foretold, Jesus was cut off in death, and "who shall declare his generation?" (Isa. 53:8) From the natural standpoint Jesus had no family, but, as the prophet foretold, he shall "see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." This will also be during the thousand

years of his kingdom, for then the entire human race will be awakened from the sleep of death and given an opportunity to secure everlasting life through Jesus. All who then accept this loving provision of divine grace will become Jesus' "seed," his children, for he will be their father, or lifegiver.

## **THE KINGDOM NECESSARY**

The Prophet Isaiah reveals that in order for the "pleasure" of Jehovah to prosper in the hands of Christ, a kingdom, or government, must be established in the earth to administer the blessings provided by his death. So, in a prophecy of the birth of Jesus this is brought to our attention. We quote: "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, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end. ... The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this." —Isa. 9:6,7

The government, or kingdom, of the Lord in which the Prince of Peace will be the supreme ruler is prophesied in the second chapter of the book, as follows:

"It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain [kingdom] of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the Law,

and the Word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”—Isa. 2:2-4

In this prophecy of the kingdom of Christ, more symbolic, or pictorial, language is introduced. The “mountain” of the Lord, for example, is the kingdom of the Lord. This should have been quite understandable to ancient Israel, to whom the prophecies were originally written. As we have previously noted, God ruled Israel through one after another of the nation’s kings, of whom it is said that they sat upon the throne of the Lord. The headquarters of this kingdom arrangement were in Mount Zion in Jerusalem. To the Israelites therefore the “mountain” of the Lord would plainly mean the kingdom of the Lord.

Isaiah tells us that in the “last days” this “mountain” shall be established in the “top of the mountains, and exalted above the hills.” This suggests that Christ’s kingdom will take a dominating position of control over all the nations of earth. The people will quickly recognize its authority and “all nations shall flow unto it.” Then, as the prophet shows, there will be a genuine disarmament program, for the nations shall convert their instruments of war into utensils of peace, and they will learn war no more. Thus one of the great objectives in the birth of Christ shall have been accomplished, for he will truly then be “The Prince of Peace.”

This achievement of the divine purpose is to come to pass, Isaiah wrote, in the “last days.” This

does not mean the last days of time, or of human experience, but simply the last days of the reign of sin and death. As we continue our examination of the Bible, we will find from many of its prophecies that we are even now living in the beginning of the “last days” and thus may expect that soon the kingdom of Christ will manifest itself in power and great glory, bringing peace, and health, and life to all mankind.

In chapter 25, Isaiah further depicts the blessings that will reach mankind through the administration of Christ’s kingdom. Here, again, that kingdom is pictured as a “mountain,” and the prophecy states that “in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.” Suggesting some of the things which will constitute this feast, the prophet declares that in this “mountain,” or kingdom, the Lord will “swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces. ... And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”—Isa. 25:6-9

## **NOT IN VAIN**

An assurance of the survival of the human race is presented in the 45th chapter of Isaiah’s prophecy, and the 18th verse, which reads, “Thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD and there is none else!” This is in full agreement

with the divine command to our first parents to multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. It emphasizes that despite man's fall into sin and death, God intended that his original purpose pertaining to his human creation is to be accomplished, that he did not create the earth "in vain."

Following this assurance that the human race was to continue on the earth there is an apparent reference to the vain efforts of the nations today to find a solution to their problems apart from God, or by appealing to other "gods"—whether of military might, or of gold, or heathen deities—and that even their taking "counsel together" will not save them, that their only salvation is to look unto him. We quote:

"Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye that are escaped of the nations; they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god that cannot save. Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside me; a just God, and a Savior; there is none beside me. Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God and there is none else. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear."—Isa. 45:20-23

## **EVERLASTING JOY**

The 35th chapter presents another reassurance of God's purpose to save mankind from the result of sin. As though the Lord is speaking to his people in the fear-filled world of today,

asking them to give a message of comfort to those who will hear, he declares, "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you."—Isa. 35:4

In our examination of some of the succeeding prophetic books of the Old Testament, we will learn that the period immediately preceding the establishment of Messiah's kingdom in the earth is described as one of great trouble and distress upon the nations, prophetically described as the day of God's "vengeance" against the many blighting evils which have corrupted human society. It is this that is referred to in the statement, "Behold, your God will come with vengeance." However, in order to assure us that this manifestation of God's righteous anger is merely against the sinful and evil practices and policies of the nations, and not against the people, except as they refuse to be separated from their wrongdoing, the prophet adds, "He [that is, the Lord] will come and save you."

This promised salvation will reach the people through Messiah's kingdom, established upon the ruins of the institutions of sin established upon the basis of human selfishness. Not only will this glorious kingdom save the people from fear and war, but from sickness and death as well. Continuing, the prophet declares: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing."—Isa. 35:5,6

The last verse of this reassuring chapter informs us that the dead will then return from death—

“The ransomed of the LORD shall return,” says Isaiah. Through Christ, the Redeemer, redemption is provided for the entire human race. All are therefore included in the statement, “the ransomed of the LORD.” They shall “return,” from death, that is, “with songs of everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”

## **NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH**

In chapter 65 there is another revealing prophecy of the kingdom of Christ, pointing out the great changes which it will bring about in human experience. In this chapter, Christ’s kingdom is symbolically described as “new heavens and a new earth,” and associated with this picture is another; namely, a new “Jerusalem.” Through the prophet, the Lord says, “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice forever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.”—Isa. 65:17,18

The “new heavens” and “new earth” symbolisms are used in a number of the Bible’s prophecies, being introduced in the Book of Isaiah for the first time. They are used to represent the spiritual and earthly aspects of Christ’s kingdom. Together, these two phases of the kingdom of Christ will constitute the new “Jerusalem” which will be such a joy to all who become God’s people under the administration of that new kingdom. We will find these symbols in later books of the Bible and will explain them further then. Now let us note the great changes which are to be wrought as a result of the coming into power of Christ’s

kingdom, the “new heavens and a new earth.” Continuing, the prophecy states:

“There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that has not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall make them long enjoy the work of their hands.”—Isa. 65:20-22, *marginal translation*

The “elect” of God here referred to is Jesus. Associated with him will be his faithful followers. As we progress with our study we will find that these will constitute the “new heavens”; that is, the new spiritual rulers of the earth. On the other hand, those pictured as building houses and inhabiting them, and planting vineyards and eating the fruit of them, will be the restored human race.

The “elect,” the prophecy states, will “make them long enjoy the work of their hands.” This means, simply, that through Christ and his church everlasting life will be made available to all mankind. That is why one who continues in opposition to this rule of righteousness, and who ultimately dies because of his sins, will be only as an infant. Those who then accept the provisions of God’s grace, through Christ, and obey the laws of that new kingdom, will live forever.

## **THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH**

The Book of Jeremiah is next in the Old Testament collection of inspired writings. It takes its

name from the prophet who wrote it. Jeremiah served Israel just before its government was overthrown and the people taken captive to Babylon. He forecast this tragedy as well as other calamities which were to come upon the nation. Because of the pessimistic nature of much that this prophet wrote he is sometimes referred to as the “prophet of doom.” The Lord’s commission to Jeremiah to serve as a prophet summarizes the substance of the book. It reads, in part:

“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 kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.”—Jer. 1:9,10

Jeremiah himself did not do any pulling down or destroying of the nations. Neither did he “build” nor “plant.” He was commissioned merely to proclaim the Word of the Lord concerning these events, and this he faithfully did. He forecast the pulling down of Israel as well as the other nations of earth, and he also foretold restoration, both for Israel and for all mankind.

Imminent in Jeremiah’s day was Israel’s captivity to Babylon. He forecast this, and also prophesied the return of the people to the Promised Land. Subsequently, however, the nation was again to be driven out of the land, and scattered among all nations. Jeremiah also forecast this. But the prophet gave assurance that this dispersion would also end, and the people again would be restored to the land which God gave to their fathers. (Jer. 16:12-18) These prophecies are even now being fulfilled.

In chapter 31 Jeremiah presents a more comprehensive prophecy of restoration—one which indicates a complete change in man's relationship to the laws of God. He declares that a time is coming when it shall no more be said, "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."—Jer. 31:29,30

What a drastic change this will be! In the larger vista of human experience, it was Adam who ate the "sour grape" of sin, and, as a result, the entire human race was plunged into death. But as Jeremiah points out, this is to be changed, for a time is coming in the outworking of the divine plan for human recovery from sin and death when no one will die for another's sins. That will be for the thousand years of Christ's reign with his church. Then, the only ones to die will be those who themselves wilfully transgress divine law.

As we have seen, the Prophet Isaiah reveals that the transgressions of humanity were laid upon Jesus. He died for the sins of the world, the Just for the unjust. This is why, when the Lord's due time comes, every individual member of the human family will be given an opportunity to demonstrate his own desire to obey the law of God, and those who do obey shall live forever.

Verses 31-34 of this same chapter are prophetic of a "New Covenant" which the Lord promises to make "with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah." Other prophecies reveal that eventually Gentiles will be brought into this "covenant." It is called a "new" covenant because it will take the place of the old Law Covenant,

which as we have seen, was made with Israel at mount Sinai. Concerning this New Covenant the Lord says: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts ... And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor ... Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD."

This indicates a time when the human race will be restored to the original perfection, and when the image of God will be reflected in the hearts and lives of all mankind, even as it was in Adam when he was first created and before he fell into sin and was sentenced to death. And at that time also, "all shall know the LORD from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD."

## **THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS**

Next comes the Book of Lamentations, which also was written by the Prophet Jeremiah. It contains little in the nature of prophecy, but rather, as its name implies, is largely a lamenting over the calamities which had come upon Israel in being taken captive to Babylon. The book is written by one who speaks with the vividness and intensity of an eyewitness of the misery which he bewails. The fact that Jeremiah had prophesied this tragedy did not make it less a cause for deep sorrow and weeping.

However, he does not complain against God in allowing this trouble to come upon his people, for he recognized that the nation was merely experiencing its just punishment for sins. Speaking representatively for the whole nation, Jeremiah wrote, "The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment: hear, I

pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow: my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity.”  
—Lam. 1:18

In his deep sorrow the prophet maintained his trust in the Lord, and recognized that in him was his only source of hope, so he wrote, “The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.”—Lam. 3:24-26

Thus the prophet expressed his confidence that salvation and deliverance would eventually come to Israel. His beautiful statements of trust in the Lord are also an illustration of the manner in which the personal experiences of the writers of the Bible call forth expressions of devotion to God which, throughout the ages, have been rich sources of blessing to all who have put their trust in the Lord and have sought to know and to do his will.

## **THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL**

Like the other prophetic books of the Old Testament, a considerable portion of the Book of Ezekiel had its fulfilment in the ancient past, in the experiences of Israel and of the Gentile nations with which the Israelites were surrounded. However, Ezekiel records a number of remarkable prophecies of events even now taking place, and of still others yet to occur—events associated with the establishment of the kingdom of Christ and his thousand-year reign for the blessing of all the families of the earth. All of God’s prophets were outspoken in their upbraiding of the Israelites for their sins, and Ezekiel was no exception. In the 16th chapter there is a notable

example of this, yet withal, a promise of blessing upon the people in the resurrection, despite the scarlet nature of their sins. This particular oration begins with the 44th verse, where the prophet refers to Israel as a “mother,” and to certain heathen nations, notorious for their wickedness, as “sisters,” who also had daughters.

He names Samaria and Sodom, cities which had been destroyed because of their wickedness. Then Ezekiel speaks of the time when all these will “return to their former estate,” including Israel, meaning that they will be restored to life as human beings on the earth. He thus projects the account far into the future from his day, even to the time of the resurrection of the dead. In presenting this fact of the coming resurrection of both Jew and Gentile, the prophet explains that the people of those wicked cities of the past will be brought into covenant relationship with God, together with the Israelites—into that “New Covenant” foretold by Jeremiah, a covenant which will be everlasting because it will not be broken, as was the original Law Covenant.—Jer. 31:31-34

This wonderful prophecy of the future restoration to life of the people of all nations helps to keep before the student of the Bible its great theme song of redemption and restoration. Like the other prophets, Ezekiel also reminds us of God’s great kingdom plan, and that it will be through the agencies of the kingdom of Christ that the restitution, or restoration, blessings will be made available to the people.

We have already learned that the kingdom of Israel was typical in many respects of the kingdom of Christ. But as foretold by the prophets, that kingdom was overthrown by King Nebuchadnezzar

of Babylon. Zedekiah was the last king to reign over the nation. Ezekiel addresses him saying:

“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

An interesting phrase in this prophecy is, “until he come whose right it is.” This is a reference to the coming and enthronement of Jesus as the rightful King of Israel and of the whole world. As we have seen, God ruled that one little nation of Israel through her successive kings, but Ezekiel explains that arrangement ceased with the overthrow of Zedekiah, that it was to “be no more” until the time should come for God to rule through Jesus, and this rulership will not be over Israel alone, but will embrace all nations.

True to the prophecy, Israel has never had another king. Seventy years later the people were permitted to return to Palestine, but they were always subject to other powers. There was an “overturning” of these from Babylon, to Medo-Persia, to Greece, and to Rome, but Israel remained a vassal nation to one after another of these, and finally, by the armies of Rome, were scattered among all nations.

But the Prophet Ezekiel, nevertheless, forecasts their ultimate restoration to the Promised Land. Chapters 36 through 38 are a remarkable setting forth of events related to their regathering in these “last days.” Chapter 36 tells of God’s purpose to restore this people to their land, not

because they merited such favor, but for his own name's sake. Chapter 37 describes the reviving of the national hopes of Israel, likening their former status to a valley of dry bones.

These "bones" come together, are covered with flesh, and finally receive life. A great deal of this has already been fulfilled by what has occurred in Palestine over the last century and a half. But there is still much more to be accomplished, and the prophecy will continue to be fulfilled until even the dead are restored to life.

Chapters 38 and 39 reveal, however, that before this occurs there is to be a vicious attack upon regathered Israel by aggressor forces from the "north." The closing verses of chapter 38 reveal that this attack will be repelled, and the aggressors destroyed, not by the Israeli army, but by divine intervention. This, the prophecy reveals, will open the "eyes" of both Gentiles and Jews to the fact that God is taking a hand in human affairs, and that they will thus behold his glory.

It will be from this time forward that the kingdom of Christ will take a dominant role in the affairs of the nations, beginning with Israel. That is when, as we read in the prophecy of Isaiah, "all nations" will say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain [kingdom] of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways and we will walk in his paths." The people of all nations will then learn righteousness, and there will be universal and everlasting peace. Redeemed from death the people will, by obeying the laws of Christ's kingdom, live forever; and the dead will be restored to life. This is God's assurance of human survival! ■

## **QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 2**

### **JOB**

Who was Job, and how did God permit him to be tried? Pages 30,31

Who were Job's "comforters," and of what did they endeavor to convince him? Were they able to do so? Page 31

What great lesson did Job learn when God spoke to him? Pages 31,32

In what way does the experience of Job, including his restoration, illustrate the outworking of the divine plan on behalf of all mankind? Page 32

When will all mankind "see" God, and how will they see him? Page 32

### **PSALMS**

What important theme is to be found throughout the Book of Psalms? Pages 33,34

What important feature of God's plan is set forth in Psalms 2, 46, and 72? Pages 34,35

What feature of God's plan is referred to in the 8th Psalm? And of what is the 16th Psalm a prophecy? Pages 35,36

For what does the 96th Psalm express thanks to God? Page 36

### **PROVERBS—ECCLESIASTES—SONG OF SOL.**

Who wrote the Book of Proverbs, and of what does it principally consist? Page 36

What valuable information does the Book of Ecclesiastes furnish concerning the nature of man and the state of death? Pages 37,38

What concise definition of *sheol*, the Bible hell, is furnished in the Book of Ecclesiastes? Page 38

How does this book assure us that the earth will not one day be destroyed by fire? Page 39

What is the main lesson to us in the Song of Solomon? Page 39

## **ISAIAH**

What constitutes the main portion of the Book of Isaiah, and into what two categories may the prophecies of Isaiah be divided? Page 40

Which chapter in Isaiah forecasts the suffering and death of Jesus? Page 41

What is the “pleasure” of the Lord which the prophet declares will “prosper” in the hands of Jesus, and how will it prosper? Pages 41,42

What agency has God designed to be the channel of his promised blessings to all mankind; and how is this referred to in a prophecy of Jesus’ birth? Page 42

What is the symbolic “mountain” of the Lord, and what is the historical background of this symbolism? Page 42

In what sense will the “mountain of the LORD” be established in the “top of the mountains”? Page 43

What is the meaning of the expression, “last days,” as used in Isaiah 2:2-4? Pages 43,44

What is the “feast of fat things” prophesied in Isaiah 25:6-9? Page 44

Explain the manner in which God’s promise recorded in Isaiah 45:18-23 gives assurance that the human race will not perish from the earth. Pages 44,45

What are some of the reassuring promises recorded in Isaiah, chapter 35, and what meaning do they have for the fear-filled world of today? Pages 45,46

What are the “new heavens” and “new earth” prophesied in Isaiah 65:17-22, and what changes in human experience will their creation bring about? Pages 47,48

## **JEREMIAH—LAMENTATIONS**

Quote the Lord’s commission to Jeremiah and explain how this sums up the general contents of the book which bears his name. Page 49

Explain the prophet’s forecast concerning a time when it will no longer be said, “The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” Pages 49,50

Explain the characteristics of the New Covenant which will be made with Israel and all nations during the Millennium. How does Jeremiah’s prophecy concerning it give assurance of human restitution? Pages 50,51

Who wrote the Book of Lamentations, and what is the substance of its contents? Page 51

## **EZEKIEL**

In what chapter in Ezekiel’s prophecy are we assured that the wicked dead will be resurrected, and what does the prophet say about it? Page 53

How does the Prophet Ezekiel identify the final overthrow of the typical kingdom of Israel, and what does he mean by the expression, “until he come whose right it is”? Page 54

To what does Ezekiel liken the desolated house of Israel, and how does he show the returning favor of God? Page 55

Explain the circumstances under which God will miraculously intervene on behalf of Israel and the eyes of all nations opened to behold his glory. Page 55

## CHAPTER 3

# God's Kingdom Conquers

One of the principal themes of the Bible is revealed in the many promises of God to establish a triumphant kingdom on the earth, designed and empowered to rule the people in righteousness, assuring them peace and joy and life. These kingdom blessings begin to be described in the first book of the Bible. In the Book of Exodus there is a promise of God to the nation of Israel that this people would be a “kingdom of priests.” (Exod. 19:6) Later, the kingdom of Israel was established and became a type of the future kingdom of the Messiah. In the Book of Psalms there are many promises relating to the kingdom of Christ and the blessings it will assure to humanity. The same is true of the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. The word kingdom itself is not always used in association with these promises, but all of them definitely disclose God’s purpose to intervene in the affairs of men, and through Christ, to establish control over the people. Through the conquering power of the Messianic kingdom, the Lord will quell the rebellion against divine law which occurred in the Garden of Eden.

As we continue to trace this glorious kingdom theme through the remaining books of the Bible, we find them calling attention to one detail after another of the manner in which this new government will benefit mankind. It is to conquer and destroy all selfish, humanly constituted government. Under its rulership the meek of the earth will prosper, while those who continue wilfully to oppose the Lord will be destroyed. Those who obey the Laws of his kingdom will live forever.

## **THE BOOK OF DANIEL**

The Prophet Daniel was a Hebrew captive in Babylon when the nation of Israel was conquered by King Nebuchadnezzar. He was very young at the time, but thoroughly devoted to the God of Israel. By divine providence he soon gained favor with the king, and was exalted to a very high position in the Babylonian government.

Daniel was greatly used by God as a prophet, and the first prophecy of his book is based on one of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams, which he was requested to relate and interpret. It is in the second chapter of the book that we are told about this dream and Daniel's interpretation of it.

In his dream the king saw a human-like image, with head of gold, breast and arms of silver, thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet and toes of iron and clay mixed. In this dream Nebuchadnezzar also saw a "stone" cut out of the "mountain" without hands. This stone smote the image on its feet, causing it to fall. Then the stone grew until it became a great mountain which filled the whole earth.

Daniel explained to the king that the gold, silver, brass, and iron of the image represented four

“kingdoms,” beginning with Babylon. Historically, the other three have proved to be Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. The feet and toes of the image, Daniel explained, were of iron and clay mixed. This he interpreted as representing weakening influences entering the Roman Empire, and its divisions pictured by the toes of the image. Thus the prophecy is seen to be remarkably true to historical facts. This gives us confidence that the remainder of the prophecy will also be accurately and completely fulfilled.

In Daniel’s interpretation of the dream he explained that the “stone” which was cut out of the “mountain” without hands, and smote the image on its feet, represented the kingdom of God. After the smiting, this stone became a great mountain which filled the whole earth. As with the “mountain,” the kingdom of the Lord will extend its sphere of influence until it becomes a dominating power in the affairs of all nations, being established, as the Prophet Isaiah wrote, in “the top of the mountains.”—Isa. 2:24

Thus we find that the Prophet Daniel continues the great kingdom theme of the Bible, furnishing the additional information that this kingdom will be established upon the ruins of the kingdoms of this world. Today we are beginning to see a remarkable fulfilment of this prophecy. Already the remnants of the old Roman Empire are teetering. This should give us confidence that the mediatorial kingdom, which will take its place and be the next world government, is now very near at hand.

Later, in God’s providence, Daniel became an important figure in the government of the Medes who, under the leadership of Cyrus, captured

Babylon and took over the rulership of the empire. This transfer of rulership occurred in connection with Belshazzar's feast, when he saw "the handwriting on the wall"—those famous words, "MENE, MENE, TEKEL UPHARSIN," meaning, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting." (Dan. 5:25-28) Even as these fatal words appeared on the wall in Belshazzar's banquet hall, King Cyrus of the Medes, having turned aside the water of the River Euphrates which ran under the walls of Babylon, thus leaving the river bed dry, was marching his soldiers through the drained river bed and into the unsuspecting city.

It was after Babylon was overthrown that Daniel himself had a prophetic dream in which he saw four great "beasts," which, as was explained to him, represented four kings, or kingdoms. These are undoubtedly the same kingdoms which Nebuchadnezzar saw represented in the human-like image. His was the human viewpoint, however. He saw the kingdoms of this world as glamorous—like gold, silver, brass, and iron—but Daniel saw them from God's standpoint as being like "beasts," ferocious and repelling. The prophetic interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream reaches through the ages to the establishment of the Messianic kingdom—that "mountain"—destined to fill the whole earth. The same is true of the interpretation of Daniel's dream. The fourth beast in his dream represents the Roman Empire, and the prophecy shows that when the time came for it to be set aside its place would be taken by the kingdom of God.—Dan. 2:44; 7:26,27

## **AN INCREASE OF KNOWLEDGE**

The last chapter of Daniel's prophecy also has a vital bearing on the times in which we are now living. In keeping with all devout Israelites, Daniel looked for and longed for the coming of the kingdom which God had promised. In the two prophecies we have already examined, Daniel was given assurance that the Messianic kingdom would ultimately be established, that it would "break in pieces and consume all these [worldly] kingdoms," and that "it shall stand forever." (Dan. 2:44) But in chapters 8 to 11 of the Book of Daniel many things are shown which would have to intervene, including much hardship and persecution for his people—the people of God.

He was, therefore, very anxious to be assured that there would be an end to evil and evil rulership in the world, and this assurance was given to him in the last chapter of the book, chapter 12. In verse 4 reference is made to the "time of the end" not the end of time, nor the end of human experience on the earth, but the time of the end of the evil conditions which had so distressed Daniel. This "time of the end," he was told, could be identified by the fact that then there would be a great "increase of knowledge," and much running to and fro—that is, a great deal of moving about on the earth, augmented by various means of rapid travel.

The last century has seen a remarkable fulfilment of this prophecy. There has been this foretold increase of knowledge throughout the world, in educational institutions, public schools, advancement in science, medicine, communication,

and in many other ways. This has led to inventions, including those which make rapid travel possible. Knowledge has increased, with the result that modern means of travel and communication have brought the far-flung nations of the earth close together and made them interdependent one upon the other.

While the nations have thus been made neighbors, they are far from neighborly, with the result that strife has been fomented among them, causing a national and international time of trouble such as the world has never before experienced. In verse 1 of this chapter Daniel refers to this, describing what the world has witnessed since 1914 as a “time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation.”

The prophecy explains that this time of trouble would be caused by the “standing up” of Michael. Then shall Michael “stand up,” the prophet declares. This expression denotes the act of taking control, and, as we have seen, the first result of exercising control in the affairs of men is a “time of trouble.” This harmonizes with the prophecy of the 2nd chapter, in which picturing the downfall of Gentile kingdoms is to be the result of being smitten by the “stone” kingdom of the Lord, and the explanation is given that “in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom.”—Dan. 2:34

When we realize how vividly the Bible thus describes the progress of events in our day, it makes us realize the importance of becoming better acquainted with its entire testimony pertaining to the plans and purposes of God. Daniel was told that in the “time of the end,” when knowledge would be increased, and when people would

“run to and fro,” none of the “wicked” would understand, but the “wise” would understand. For himself, he was told to close the book, which would be sealed until the “time of the end.” He was assured, nevertheless, that he would then stand in his “lot,” meaning, of course, that he would in God’s due time be raised from the dead and witness the complete fulfilment of all the wonderful things which God has promised. And Daniel will not be the only one thus to be awakened from the sleep of death. In describing the “time of trouble” with which this age will close, and the increase of knowledge, and running to and fro, the prophecy also states that then “many that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.” (Dan. 12:2) The expression, “dust of the earth,” takes our minds back to the original sentence of death passed upon father Adam—“Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Gen. 3:19) The “time of the end” is at the close of the Gospel Age, to be followed by the age during which there will be a resurrection of ALL who have gone down into death—into the “dust of the earth”—because of Adam’s sin.

## **THE BOOK OF HOSEA**

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel are known as the “major” prophets of the Old Testament, and there are twelve “minor” prophets, of whom Hosea is the first. The writings of these twelve make up the closing books of the Old Testament. Hosea’s prophecy was written before Daniel’s, for he was contemporaneous with certain kings of Judah and with Jeroboam, king of Israel; and, as we have seen, the nation was overthrown, and its kings passed from the scene,

when Daniel, together with the other Israelites, was taken captive to Babylon.

We have already noted that after the death of King Solomon a division occurred in the nation, ten tribes separating from the remaining two tribes. Hosea's prophecy is directed almost altogether against the sins of the entire nation—the ten tribes and also the two tribes—and is a warning of the severe punishments the people could expect, resulting from their worship of false gods and their disregard for the laws of Jehovah.

But Hosea's prophecy is not entirely one of doom, for it also promises the "restitution" of Israel in the "latter days." (Hos. 3:5) In this prophecy, the transgression of Israel against the covenant into which they had entered with God at Mt. Sinai is compared with Adam's transgression of God's law in the Garden of Eden. The *marginal translation* of verse 7 in chapter 6 reads, "They, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant."

Although the nation had transgressed the "covenant," and would be cast off from God's special protecting care, God promised to make a "New Covenant" with them, as we ascertained in our study of the Book of Jeremiah. Their restoration is foretold by Hosea, who, in the 5th verse of the 3rd chapter, says that "afterward [in the times of restitution] shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear [reverence] the LORD and his goodness in the latter days."

In the testimony of God's holy prophets pertaining to the great hope of restitution, we are assured that there is to be a resurrection of the dead. This means, of course, that King David himself will return from death and once more

be associated with his people. This, as Hosea indicates, will be in the “latter days.” However, there is to be a much larger fulfilment of this prophecy, for David is used in the Bible as a type of Christ, the Messiah of promise. He is the one who is to be King over Israel in the “latter days” when the New Covenant is made with the restored nation.

Thus we see that although the major portion of the Book of Hosea is a denunciation of the sins of God’s people Israel, this prophet, like all the others, was used by God to give assurance of the ultimate return of divine favor to both Jew and Gentile. The fulfilment of these promises will mean rich blessings of prosperity and life for all Israel under the rulership of the antitypical David. And, as this prophet reminds us, just as all mankind lost life through Adam’s transgression, so in the “latter days” this larger family, even the human family itself, shall also be restored and inherit a global paradise.

With this work of restoration complete, man’s greatest enemy, death, will no longer strike down its victims; for through Hosea the Lord assures us that he will plague death and destroy the grave. In chapter 13, verse 14, the Lord says, “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction.”

While this wonderful promise is recorded in the midst of warnings to Israel of the dire results of sin, this but emphasizes the fact of God’s purpose ultimately to deliver Israel as well as all mankind from death by means of a “ransom”—“I will ransom them from the power of the grave.” This is one of the Old Testament promises of God to

send a Redeemer, One who would die as a ransom for Israel and for the world. This work of redemption, as we shall later see, was accomplished by Jesus.

Jesus came to ransom the people from the “power of the grave.” The Hebrew word here translated “grave” is *sheol*, the word already noted as being the only one in the Old Testament that is translated “hell.” Had it been translated “hell” in this text, as it could have been, all would have known that it was God’s purpose to deliver the people from hell, which is the condition of death.

In this wonderful promise the Lord tells us that he will plague death. This reminds us of the time when he plagued the Egyptians to bring about the deliverance of his people from their slavery in Egypt. So death will be plagued by God, with the result that it will deliver up its prisoners. This is simply another way in which the Lord assures us of the fact that in his own due time he will restore the dead to life, and give them an opportunity to live forever.

In this promise the Lord also assures us of his intention to destroy the grave, that is, *sheol*, the Bible hell. He says, “O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave [*sheol*, hell], I will be thy destruction.” How wonderful it is to find such promises as these in the Word of God! Beginning back in the Dark Ages, when Bibles were not available for general use, the theory was developed that hell was a place of torment where those who died unconverted would be caused to suffer throughout the endless ages of eternity. But now, as we become better acquainted with the Bible, we find these wonderful promises of God assuring us that hell is to be destroyed.

As we have discovered in our review of earlier books of the Bible, this Hebrew word *sheol*, the Old Testament word for hell, is simply the condition of death, that state of sleep, or unconsciousness, into which both the righteous and the wicked go when they die. God's promise to destroy *sheol* is simply another way of saying that he will destroy death.

## THE BOOK OF JOEL

Joel was the second of the "minor" prophets. He calls attention to the sins of Israel, and to the calamitous events which were to come upon the nation as a result. One of the purposes of his message was to bring about a repentance of the nation, which in turn would lead to averting the calamities which he prophesied. But the nation did not repent, and therefore suffered the foretold judgments of God, and was finally taken into captivity.

Joel also prophesied events in the outworking of the divine plan which were many centuries in the future from his day. The opening verses of chapter 2 read: "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand; a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations."—Joel 2:1,2

It might seem strange that the "day of the LORD" should be one of "darkness and of gloominess." However, this prophecy parallels the one

in Daniel, chapter 12, verse 1, where we are told that as a result of “Michael” standing up to take control in earth’s affairs there would be a “time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation.” Clouds and darkness are used in the prophecies to symbolize trouble and distress among the people and nations of earth.

The “day of the LORD” is the period in the divine plan when the promised divine King overthrows human rulership and sets up his government, the increase of which there shall be no end. (Isa. 9:6,7) Temporary trouble and distress among the nations is the inevitable result of this change in rulership, hence the “day of the LORD” is one of “darkness,” for in it there is a “time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation.”

Another prophetic event that continues during the “day of the LORD” is the regathering of the Jewish people into the Promised Land. This is foretold in Jeremiah 16:14-17; and, as we noted, also in Ezekiel, chapters 36 through 39. It is referred to in Joel’s prophecy, and is associated with a warlike gathering of the Gentile nations as they assemble in the great “time of trouble” with which the present age ends. We quote:

“Behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land.”  
—Joel 3:1,2

Here another of the Bible’s symbolisms is introduced—the “valley of Jehoshaphat.” This name means “Jehovah has judged.” In the 14th verse of

the chapter it is defined as the "valley of decision." The thought is that in these "last days," the "day of the LORD," when all the nations of earth are assembled in global strife, a divine decision is rendered against them, resulting in their overthrow to make place for the establishment of the kingdom of Christ.

In Joel's prophecy, one of the reasons for this adverse decision against the nations is indicated to be their attitude toward the Israelites regathered in Palestine. Throughout the age the Gentile nations have almost continually been responsible for the scattering of this people, and now, at the end of the age, when God's time has come for them to repossess their own land, the Gentiles, through the United Nations, decree a division of their land. God does not wish this, hence his "controversy" with them over his "heritage Israel."

Verses 9 and 10 of the chapter describe further the gathering of the nations for their final struggle. We read, "Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles, prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up: beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong." This is just another way of saying that in the "day of the LORD" the nations would engage in a gigantic armament race in which a peacetime economy would give place to one of war and the preparation for war.

We of the present generation have witnessed this in progress, and the end is not yet. However, the prophecy has already been fulfilled to such an extent that a significant portion of all the peoples of the earth do not have sufficient food and clothing. The outlook would be most discouraging were

it not for the promises of God in which we are assured that soon the kingdom of Christ will take control of earth's affairs.

The Prophet Joel directs our attention to this silver lining of the present dark clouds of trouble saying that "the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk." (Joel 3:18) The Prophet Isaiah, in one of his symbolic descriptions of Messiah's kingdom, uses similar language, saying that "in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined."—Isa. 25:6

## **THE BOOK OF AMOS**

The prophecy of Amos is similar to most of the prophetic books of the Old Testament, in that a major portion of it contains warnings to Israel of the dire results of her sin. With the exception of very short periods of time, the course of the nation was almost continuously wicked, which eventually led to its loss of national independence.

Through Amos, God explains why Israel had to suffer so severely because of her sins. He said, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:2,3) Through Moses, who acted as mediator, God entered into a very special covenant with Israel. He promised to be their God, and they promised to be his people and to obey his laws. He had been faithful to his agreement, for he continued to be exclusively their God.

But this arrangement imposed serious obligations upon the nation. The people of other nations

might worship false gods, and disregard the laws of the true God without being so directly responsible. But it was different with Israel. This is why the nation was punished for its sins, and why prophets were sent to warn them of the result of wrongdoing. It was because the nation continued to ignore the messages of these prophets that they were finally dispersed as a people and scattered to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Nevertheless, the Lord did not leave them without hope, for intermingled with the warnings of the prophets concerning the punishments that would come upon the people because of their sins are wonderful promises of God pertaining to an ultimate restoration to his full favor. These promises refer to various phases of this work of restoration. Some emphasize the fact of a coming resurrection of the dead for both Jews and Gentiles. Some give assurance of a coming time of peace and good will among men, while others assure us that death itself will be destroyed, as we discovered, for example, in our review of the prophecy of Hosea.

The prophecy of Amos presents another aspect of God's loving plan of restoration. Through him the Lord promised, "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old." —Amos 9:11

In Isaiah, chapter 9, verse 7, we have a similar promise. Here the "tabernacle," or house of David, is referred to as the "throne of David." It is in a prophecy of the birth of Jesus, a prophecy which also explains the glorious object of his birth, saying that he was to be a mighty God, his name

called “Wonderful, Counsellor, ... The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

Then the 7th verse reads, “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.”

In our review of I and II Chronicles and I and II Kings we found that the kings of Israel reigned as representatives of God, that the symbolic “throne” upon which they sat was in reality the throne of the Lord. We learned from the Book of Ezekiel that this arrangement ceased with the overthrow of their last king, Zedekiah, that it was to be no more “until he come whose right it is.” —Ezek. 21:25-27

Now, through the prophecies of Amos and Isaiah, we learn that Jesus is the One to rebuild that which is “fallen”; that he is to sit on the “throne of David to order it, and to establish it”; that he will “build the tabernacle of David which is fallen” down. This does not mean, of course, that Jesus will rule over Israel as a human being. It is simply the Lord’s pictorial way of assuring us that, through King Jesus he will again rule in Israel, and that of the “increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.”

The kingdom of Christ, therefore, will not only rule over Israel, but extend its sphere of influence over all nations. This is in keeping with what we learned from the prophecy of Isaiah in which the Lord’s kingdom, symbolically described as a great mountain, was to be established “in the top of the mountains”—that is, ruling over all the nations of the earth.

## THE BOOK OF OBADIAH

Obadiah's prophecy contains but one short chapter. Unlike most of the other prophecies, it is not directed particularly against Israel, but against the Edomites—the descendants of Esau, the twin brother of Jacob. Esau, it will be remembered, sold his birthright to Jacob, and later endeavored to recover it. The value in that birthright was the wonderful promise of God to their grandfather Abraham that through his "seed" all the families of the earth would be blessed.

Esau failed to recover the right to this promise, and he and his descendants, the Edomites, became almost constant enemies of Jacob and his descendants, the nation of Israel. The Book of Obadiah reveals that on occasions the Edomites allied themselves with Gentile nations against Israel, and took advantage of their cousins in times of peril. Verse 13 reads, "Thou shouldest not have entered into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity; yea, thou shouldest not have looked on their affliction in the day of their calamity, nor have laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity."

God was displeased with the Edomites for their unfriendliness toward his people, and they suffered because of it. When God first made promise to Abraham that through his seed he would bless all the families of the earth, he said, "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee." (Gen. 12:3) One of the values of the Book of Obadiah is to emphasize the unchangeableness of God in connection with this promise to Abraham.

As we study these various prophecies carefully, we note the many warnings of God concerning

the punishments he would bring upon his people because of their sins, and also the statement that those who persecuted them would not go unpunished. However, we are impressed with the fact that these are but experiences of the present life, that they in no way indicate that God will not, in his own due time, give all these people, both Jews and Gentiles, an opportunity to be blessed with everlasting life. As the plan of God unfolds from one book of his precious Word to another, we learn that Mt. Zion of Jerusalem, the headquarters of the Israelitish government, is used to symbolize the glorious kingdom of Christ, in which he will be the King, the Ruler. Associated with him in "Mt. Zion" will be those of this present age who have followed in his footsteps of sacrifice faithfully even unto death. Yes, the "Zion" of the prophecies is the Lord's kingdom. This will become more and more apparent as we continue our study. So, in this one-chapter Book of Obadiah a reference is made to the Lord's kingdom, using this symbol of Zion. It is the last verse of the chapter, and reads, "And saviors shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD'S."

Traditional misconceptions of God's plan have represented the "judgment day" as one of calamity and gloom, but this is not the biblical viewpoint. As we have learned from the Book of Judges, when the Lord raised up judges for Israel it was for the purpose of delivering the people from their enemies. This is in keeping with Obadiah's prophecy that "saviors" shall come up on mount Zion, and "judge" the mount of Esau.

The mount of Esau, symbolic of the Edomites, will be delivered as a result of the judging work

of the “saviors” on mount Zion. God punished the Edomites because of their sin against his people, but here he promises them deliverance from their enemies, the greatest of which is the enemy Death. This great deliverance for the Edomites, and for all nations, will be wrought when “the kingdom is the LORD’s.” Thus we see that Obadiah, like the other prophets, helps to unfold this glorious and loving plan of God for the recovery of the dying race from death through the administration of the kingdom of Christ.

## **THE BOOK OF JONAH**

This book is largely a narrative. The Lord asked Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh and “cry against it,” for, as he explained, “their wickedness is come up before me.” Jonah’s prophecy was, therefore, to be one of doom against this wicked city. However, the prophet was disinclined to obey the Lord’s command, and instead of starting on the journey to Nineveh, he boarded a ship which was sailing in another direction.

A storm arose. The explanation is that “the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.” (Jon. 1:4) The sailors became very much alarmed. They were evidently superstitious, and suspected that someone aboard the ship was responsible for the storm. They cast lots in an effort to determine who it might be, and the lot fell to Jonah. He had told them previously that the purpose of his taking this journey with them was to escape from his God and to avoid obeying the command to curse Nineveh.—Jon. 1:10

The sailors quickly decided that Jonah’s God had caused the storm, which, of course, was true.

They concluded that their safety depended on casting Jonah overboard, which they did. But Jonah did not drown. Instead, God had prepared a “great fish”—not a whale as is commonly understood—to swallow Jonah. After being in the stomach of the “great fish” for three days, Jonah was cast up on the shore close to the city of Nineveh. After such an experience, in which he saw the providences of the Lord clearly manifested, he was ready to obey God’s command to curse the city.

When he did, the Ninevites repented of their sins, so the Lord did not destroy the city. Two things in this story have seemed incredible to critics of the Bible. One is that a man could be swallowed by a great fish and remain alive in its stomach for three days. Part of the objection is that a whale’s throat is not large enough to swallow a man. But, as we have already noted, the record is that God prepared a “great fish” for the purpose. After all, God’s hand was manifested in this experience of Jonah, and when this is true, miraculous things often occur. Many miracles are involved in the outworking of the divine purpose, not the least of which is the resurrection of the dead.

Some have also found it difficult to understand why the inhabitants of a large city such as Nineveh should suddenly repent of their sins simply because a lone preacher of righteousness appeared and warned them of coming destruction, especially since they did not worship the God whom this prophet served. An obvious explanation of this has been unearthed by archaeologists. In digging up the ruins of ancient Nineveh, they have found that the people were worshipers of a fish God.

The Ninevites probably knew how Jonah arrived on their shore—that a great fish had brought him there. This could have meant to them that their god had brought Jonah to warn them; or, it could have meant that Jonah thwarted the efforts of their god to destroy him and prevent his coming. Whichever view they took would certainly cause them to respect the prophet, and this would explain why they so quickly gave favorable heed to his message.

Describing his experience in the stomach of the great fish, Jonah says, “Out of the belly of hell cried I, and Thou [Jehovah] heardest my voice.” (Jon. 2:2) Here, again we have the Hebrew word *sheol* translated “hell.” It is, as we have seen, the condition of death. Symbolically speaking, Jonah was in the death state; for he was practically dead, and would have died had not the Lord delivered him. Jesus referred to Jonah’s experience as illustrative of his own death and resurrection. From this we may conclude that the Lord designed it to foreshadow the resurrection, not only of Jesus, but of all who have died; for *sheol*, the Bible hell, is to give up all its dead.

Jonah was quite disturbed because the Lord, taking compassion on the Ninevites because they repented, did not destroy them. As is so often the case, he was not as sympathetic and loving as the Lord whom he served. It is a human failing to make God’s love too narrow by false limits of our own. Answering Jonah’s complaint, the Lord said, “Should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand?”—Jon. 4:11

This is God's viewpoint concerning the countless millions of humanity who have lived and died in ignorance of him. He has been, and continues to be, sympathetic toward them. Therefore he has made provision to awaken them from the dead and give them an opportunity to know and serve him in spirit and in truth.

## **THE BOOK OF MICAH**

The Prophet Micah, like several others of the holy prophets, warned the Jewish nation of its sins; and also, like the other prophets who served prior to the nation's captivity in Babylon, prophesied that this calamity would come upon the Israelites. Micah also foretold the restoration of the nation from its Babylonian captivity. Concerning this, the Lord through the prophet said, "I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah."—Mic. 2:12

While the prophets served God in warning Israel concerning their sins, admonishing them to obedience, and foretelling the punishments which would come upon them because of their iniquity, more important to us is their united testimony concerning the larger purpose of God which was to be carried out through the promised Messiah. In this connection, it was Micah who, in promising the coming of the Messiah, identified the city in Judah in which he would be born. Chapter 5, verse 2 reads: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, 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."

The promised Messiah is again referred to in chapter 4, verse 8, where we read, “And thou, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion.” The “first dominion” referred to here is the dominion that was given to our first parents when the Lord told them that they were to be fruitful and multiply and have “dominion” over the earth.

This dominion was lost as a result of sin, and the purpose of Messiah’s coming to earth was to restore that dominion. When this is accomplished all mankind will have been restored to life as human beings and earth itself will have become one vast global paradise. In order to accomplish this grand and noble design of the Creator it was first of all necessary that Jesus die as man’s Redeemer. By his death the Redeemer purchased the lost “dominion,” and at the close of his thousand-year reign with his church, he will return the perfected kingdom to his father.

Micah also reveals that the work of restoration was to be accomplished through the agencies of Messiah’s kingdom. As we saw in our review of the Book of Isaiah, the Lord uses a “mountain” to symbolize Messiah’s kingdom. (Isa. 2:24) This beautiful symbolism appears again in the prophecy of Micah. Like the Prophet Isaiah, he also tells of the establishment of the “mountain” of the Lord in the “last days” of the reign of sin and death. He enumerates many of the blessings this “mountain” or kingdom will assure to the people, among them the end of war, and economic security. Micah describes this economic security poetically as every man sitting “under his vine and under his fig tree.” We quote this beautiful promise:

“In the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the Word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it.”—Mic. 4:1-4

This reassuring promise of the ultimate triumph of Christ’s kingdom places the time for its fulfilment as the “last days.” The fact that it was not fulfilled in the past, therefore, is no reason to suppose that the time never will come when this beautiful description of global-wide peace will be translated into reality. There is a time element in connection with the outworking of every feature of God’s loving plan for the blessing of his human creation. The “due time” for the conquering power of Christ’s kingdom to be manifested in human affairs is the “last days.”

The expression, “last days,” does not imply the end of human experience. Like “the time of the end” mentioned in the prophecy of Daniel, it refers in a general way to the last days of the reign of sin and death which began in the Garden of Eden

when our first parents transgressed God's law. For more than six thousand years the human race has been held in bondage to the unholy powers of evil, as masterminded by Satan, the devil. For individuals it has meant sickness, pain, and death; and on the national level, war and other evils. But the time comes in God's plan of salvation when Satan's empire is destroyed, and Christ becomes the new ruler of the people. Under his rulership the people will learn the arts and advantages of peace. Beating swords into plowshares will then become a reality, and not merely the expression of an ideal for which people have longed but never have been able to attain. Under the administration of that "mountain," or kingdom, of the Lord, the nations will learn war no more, with the result that there will be no more war.

This change in the experience and outlook of humanity will not take place suddenly, but through a transition period lasting many years, during which the kingdoms of this world crumble to their fall. It is this period of transition which Micah prophetically describes as the "last days" during which the "mountain" of the Lord is established in the "top of the mountains," dominating and controlling the affairs of all mankind.

With the kingdom of the Lord in full operation throughout the earth, all evil will eventually be destroyed, even sickness and death. Through the conquering power of Christ's kingdom, death will be swallowed up in victory, and all tears will be wiped away. Poetically describing the blessings of the Lord's kingdom, in which the promised Messiah will be the chief ruler, the Prophet David wrote:

"He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth. In his day

shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace as long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.”

Thus will the conquering power of Christ’s kingdom extend its promised blessings of the Lord worldwide. It was this that God promised to Abraham, and he confirmed his promise by his oath. Micah refers to this saying, “Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou has sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.”—Mic. 7:20 ■

### **QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 3**

Who was Daniel, and at what period did he serve God as one of the holy prophets? Page 60

What important prophecy is contained in the 2nd chapter of the Book of Daniel, and in what way is this prophecy related to the great kingdom theme of the Bible? Pages 60,61

Explain the circumstances associated with the “handwriting on the wall.” What bearing did these circumstances have in the life of Daniel? Page 62

Explain Daniel’s prophetic dream in which he saw four “beasts.” Page 62

In what way is the prophecy recorded in the 12th chapter of the Book of Daniel related to our day? What important assurance did this prophecy give to Daniel? Page 63

Explain the manner in which the foretold “increase of knowledge” in our day is associated with the prophetic “time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation.” Pages 63,64

What is meant in this prophecy by the standing up of “Michael,” and how is this related to the

present distress of nations? Page 64

When will Daniel understand the meaning of his prophecy, and what is meant by being awakened from the dust of the earth? Page 65

What constitutes the major portion of the prophecy of Hosea? Page 66

What comparison did Hosea make between Adam's covenant with God and the covenant with God into which the Israelites entered at Mount Sinai? Page 66

How far-reaching will be the promised returning of Israel? Page 66

Who will be king over Israel in the "latter days"? Page 67

How are both Jews and Gentiles ransomed from the power of the grave? Page 67

What is *sheol*, the Bible hell, and when will God's promise to destroy it be fulfilled? Page 68

What was one of the purposes of the Book of Joel, and was this purpose accomplished? Page 69

What is the prophetic "day of the LORD," and why is it a day of "darkness and gloominess"? Pages 69,70

Aside from the great "time of trouble," what is another prophetic event belonging to the "day of the LORD"? Page 70

What is the prophetic "valley of Jehoshaphat," and what decision has God made concerning the nations gathered therein? Pages 70,71

How does the Prophet Joel describe the worldwide armament race into which the nations have entered in these "last days"? Page 71

How does Joel paint a silver lining to the present dark clouds of trouble hovering over a distressed world? Page 72

In what particular sense is the prophecy of

Amos similar to all the prophetic books of the Old Testament? Page 72

Why did God consider that the sins of Israel required special punishment? Pages 72,73

What is meant by God's promise to "raise up the tabernacle of David which is fallen down"? Page 73

How extensive will be the rulership of Christ's kingdom? Page 74

Against whom is the prophecy of Obadiah particularly addressed? Page 75

What was the value in the birthright Esau sold to Jacob? Page 75

What warning by God was exemplified in his hostile attitude toward the Edomites? Page 75

Did God's attitude toward Gentile nations and their sins indicate that he considered them outside his loving provision to bless all the nations of the earth through the "seed" of Abraham? Page 76

Of what is Mount Zion a symbol, and who are the "saviors" which Obadiah says he saw on this mountain of the Lord? Pages 76,77

What is meant by God's promise to judge the mount of Esau? Pages 76,77

Relate briefly the story unfolded in the Book of Jonah. Pages 77,78

What objection have critics raised to the statement that Jonah was swallowed by a whale? How do the Scriptures set this objection aside? Pages 78,79

What discoveries have been made by archaeologists which may indicate why the Ninevites were so quick to heed the warning given them by Jonah? Pages 78,79

In what sense was Jonah in *sheol*, the Bible hell, and of what was his deliverance from this symbolic

hell an illustration? Page 79

How was the human inclination to be less merciful than God illustrated by the experience of Jonah? Page 79

While the Old Testament prophets warned Israel of her sins and the punishments which would result, what united testimony did they give which is more important to us? Page 80

Quote Micah's prophecy concerning the place in which the Messiah was to be born. Page 80

What is the "first dominion"? How will it come into the possession of Jesus, and when will it be restored to those who lost it? Page 81

In what way is the sacrificial work of Christ related to the restitution work to be accomplished through the agencies of his kingdom? Page 81

What are some of the blessings promised by Micah in his prophecy concerning the establishment of the "mountain of the LORD"? Pages 83,84

## CHAPTER 4

# Our Day in Prophecy

**T**he Bible alone, of all the books ever written, has proven to be accurate in its forecasts of things to come. This fact stamps it as being of divine authorship, its individual writers being directed by the Spirit, or power of God. Practically all the books of the Bible contain forecasts of future events. Many of its prophecies pertained to events which were imminent, while others were related to occurrences of the distant future. Indeed, the fulfilment of many of the Bible's prophecies is still future.

The last six books of the Old Testament which we will now consider are all predominantly prophetic. Much which was foretold in these books was fulfilled soon after they were written, and they contain many reassuring promises descriptive of the blessings yet future which will come to the people under the administration of Christ's kingdom. In addition, many of the prophecies in these six books pertain to our day, and in this review we will give particular attention to them.

The chaotic and distressing conditions through which the world has been passing beginning with 1914 came wholly unexpectedly to those who were unacquainted with the prophecies of

the Bible and exercised faith in them. Worldly wisdom could not foresee a “time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation, as foretold by the Prophet Daniel. (Dan. 12:1) The general belief was that man had reached such a high pinnacle of civilization that war on a large scale would no longer be possible, but now we know that this was a false outlook and that the Bible was correct in its forecast of the present worldwide distress.

The world has already experienced some of the prophetic “time of trouble,” but apparently there will be much more before the kingdom of Christ brings peace, security, and happiness to the people. It is comforting to realize, however, that it is the divine purpose to intervene in human affairs before selfishness is permitted to take its full course in spreading havoc and devastation throughout the earth. We will become more and more assured of this as we continue our review of the Bible’s books and their teachings.

## **THE BOOK OF NAHUM**

Most of the Old Testament’s prophetic books contain much pertaining to the little nation of Israel of which the Lord, through the Prophet Amos, said, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.” (Amos 3:2) The Book of Nahum, however, in addition to its forecasts relating to the present time, also contains a prophecy of doom against the ancient Gentile city of Nineveh. Nahum describes this prophecy as the “burden of Nineveh.” He previously had sent Jonah to warn the Ninevites of their sin. They repented and the city was saved. Now iniquity had “come to the full” and the city was to be destroyed.

Throughout the ages God has permitted sin to flourish almost entirely unchecked, but there were times in the ancient past when he did interfere by destroying whole cities of the grossly wicked. In addition to Nineveh, Sodom and Gomorrah were thus dealt with by the Lord. In destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, the explanation is given that God “took them away as he saw good”—good for them, that is.

Permitting the people of those wicked cities to continue and increase in sin would have been so debasing to character that in the time of their future trial it might be much more difficult for them to reform and walk in the paths of righteousness. Apparently the Ninevites had sunk so deeply into sin that it was a kindness to put them to sleep in death until the time of general judgment, when, as the Prophet Isaiah informs us, the inhabitants of the world will have an opportunity to “learn righteousness.”—Isa. 26:9

The city of Nineveh was founded by Nimrod. (Gen. 10:1, *margin*) He was a notoriously wicked character who lived during the age of the patriarchs. Because of his idolatry and unrighteousness, he is an apt symbol of opposition to God. The city which he founded, except for the people’s temporary repentance when Jonah preached to them, continued in Nimrod’s wicked course of idolatry and licentiousness and was finally destroyed.

The second verse of the Book of Nahum expresses God’s attitude toward sin. It reads, “God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies.” The next verse reads, “The LORD is slow

to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet."

Thus we are reminded that while God is "slow to anger," he is all-powerful and fully capable at all times to prevent the continuance of evil and evil doing. We are also reminded that God is "jealous," and will revenge wrongdoing. In this setting the word "jealous" denotes the attitude of not tolerating a rival. In the Hebrew text it is similar to the word which, throughout the Old Testament, is translated "zeal." In a wonderful prophecy pertaining to the establishment of a worldwide kingdom of righteousness by Christ, Isaiah states, "The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this."—Isa. 9:6,7

Jehovah is a God of righteousness, of justice, of love, who cannot tolerate the continuance of unrighteousness in any part of his universe. He is "slow to anger," nevertheless, and when he takes action against sin it is according to a fixed plan. Thus he has permitted sin to reign for more than six thousand years, almost wholly unchecked, not because he has been powerless to prevent it, but in order that the human race might learn the dire results of disobedience to his laws.

A few times during this long reign of sin and death the Lord has acted, one of these occasions being in the destruction of Nineveh. At this remote distance, unaware of all the circumstances, we may not know just why Nineveh was made one of the exceptions at that time, while other cities were permitted to continue. But we may be sure that he who is "too wise to err, and too loving to be unkind," knew that it was best for

the Ninevites, and best, also, for others for whom it would serve as an object lesson.

We think it is reasonable to conclude that since the Lord had one of his holy prophets record his intentions toward the Ninevites, he may have intended the matter as an illustration of his purpose ultimately to destroy all sin, and even death itself, which has resulted from sin—in other words, the entire empire of Satan, who Nimrod, the founder of Nineveh, so aptly symbolizes. Verses 5 to 9 of the first chapter seem too comprehensive to be applied merely to one heathen city.

Verse 5 reads, “The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein.” The next verse adds, “Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him.” As we have already learned, mountains symbolize kingdoms, or governments. “World” and “earth” are symbols of a social order. The prophet is telling us, then, that the whole social order of sin is to be destroyed.

Verse 9 asks, “What do ye imagine against the LORD?” This expresses the viewpoint almost universally held that sin, sickness, and death are the normal experiences of the human race; that these things always have existed, and will continue indefinitely; that there never will be any change. This viewpoint supposes that God is not interested in human welfare. If we take him at his word we will know that he has permitted evil to reign only temporarily; that Satan and his whole empire are shortly to be destroyed,

and that as Nahum tells us, “affliction shall not rise up the second time.”—Nah. 1:9

Great has been the “affliction” of the human race during the reign of sin and death; but Satan’s great citadel of sin, foreshadowed by Nineveh, is to be destroyed, never to rise again. This is the testimony of all God’s holy prophets. In the light of this testimony we can understand the divine permission of evil, and can understand also why he will exercise his “wrath” for the destruction of everything that is out of harmony with his holy will, and therefore detrimental to the best interests of his human creatures. We can be thankful also that his wrath is manifest merely in the destruction of evil and of wilful evil doers, not in their torture forever.

Verses 3 and 4 of the 2nd chapter of the Book of Nahum are believed by many to refer to planes, automobiles, and other means of rapid travel that would make their appearance in this end of the age. These verses read: “The chariots shall be with flaming torches in the day of his preparation, and the fir trees shall be terribly shaken. The chariots shall rage in the streets, they shall jostle one another in the broad ways: they shall seem like torches, they shall run like the lightnings.”

## **THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK**

The first chapter of this book foreshadows the invasion of Judea by the Chaldeans—“that bitter and hasty nation.” This inevitably meant trouble and suffering for the nation of Israel, and Habakkuk was greatly distressed over it. He realized, of course, that the Israelites had not been faithful, and deserved punishment; but it

was difficult for him to understand why the Lord would permit the wicked Chaldeans to overrun their land and destroy their cities. He prayed to the Lord about this, saying:

“Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?”—Hab. 1:13

Thus the local setting of this prophecy caused Habakkuk to ask questions that have been in the minds of all God’s people throughout the ages; that is, why the Lord permits the righteous and the innocent to suffer at the hands of the unrighteous. The Lord gave a partial answer to Habakkuk, one which, in the light of his divine plan of salvation as set forth throughout his entire Word, is most revealing and faith strengthening. Relating it the prophet wrote:

“I will stand upon my watch: and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov’d [Hebrew text reads, “argued with”]. 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.”—Hab. 2:1-4

Having inquired of the Lord as to why he permitted his people to suffer, Habakkuk indicated that he earnestly looked and waited for the answer. “And the LORD answered me,” he said. The Lord answered, but did not explain, except

to say, "The vision is yet for an appointed time," implying that it was not yet the due time in the outworking of his plan to reveal to his people the reason for the permission of evil.

But that such a time was coming, the prophet was assured. The "vision," the understanding of the divine plan, would "at the end," "speak and not lie," and would be made plain "upon tables." While this answer really explained nothing to Habakkuk, it did assure him that God had the situation in hand and that at the appointed time his people would have his plans and purposes made known to them. This was to be "at the end"—not the end of time, but at the end, or toward the close of the reign of sin and death.

As we continue our study of the Bible's prophecies, we will become more and more assured that we are even now living in the time referred to by the expression, "at the end." For this reason the "vision" of truth concerning God's great plan of human redemption and restoration can now be seen and understood by the Lord's people, being revealed by the united testimony of his holy prophets of the Old Testament; and, as we shall later see, by Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament.

"But the just shall live by his faith," the Lord told Habakkuk. It required great faith on the part of the Lord's people in ancient times to lay hold upon his promises, when practically all of their experiences seemed contrary to what those promises indicated. It still requires faith to believe the promises of God; for although today the Lord has favored his people with a clearer understanding of his plans and purposes, and we can be confident that the fruition of his glorious

plan for the overthrow of evil and the establishment of his kingdom of peace and righteousness is near, sin still is predominant in the earth, and suffering and death continue.

As Habakkuk saw it, “that bitter and hasty nation,” the Chaldeans, had an insatiable desire for conquest and loot, “a proud man, neither keepeth at home”—always aggressively sallying forth to seek new prey—“who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people.” (Hab. 2:5,6) So have the conquests by sin and death seemed to the righteous in every age.

Here again we find the Hebrew word *sheol*, translated “hell,” in the expression, “who enlargeth his desire as hell.” *Sheol*, here, as elsewhere in the Bible, describes the condition of the dead. In this passage, the Chaldeans are likened to the great enemy Death which wantonly strikes down its victims, sparing none, leaving them in the great prisonhouse of death, which, because of its very nature, can never be filled. There is no thought of torment suggested in this text, and we can rejoice that in God’s due time *sheol*, the Bible hell, will be forced to give up its dead.

Chapter 2, verse 14 reads, “The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea,” and the 20th verse reads, “The LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.” Verses 18 and 19 describe the futility and the sin of worshiping false gods, symbolized by manmade idols. Thus we are reminded that the time will come in the outworking of the divine plan when Jehovah, the Creator of the universe, will be universally worshiped,

and when all false gods, together with the evils associated with them, will be destroyed.

The Old Testament prophets wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and while they doubtless comprehended much of what they wrote concerning events immediately at hand, or soon to transpire, their writings concerning the outworking of the larger features of the divine plan were not clearly understood by them. This was true of Habakkuk. It was benevolent of God not to let them know that the glorious Golden Age which they foretold was thousands of years in the future. As it was, they continued to live by faith, and were determined to trust in the Lord, even though frequently they did not understand his providences. It is this determination that Habakkuk expresses in concluding his book:

“Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”—Hab. 3:17,18

## **THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH**

Zephaniah's prophecy was written only a short time before the nation of Israel was taken captive to Babylon. Verses 2 to 5 of the first chapter very graphically forecast the overthrow of the nation. But, as with the other Old Testament prophecies, the Lord uses the setting of events pertaining to Israel as a background upon which to prophesy future developments which would be worldwide in nature. The overthrow of Israel because of

her sins would thus be illustrative of the divine overthrow of all evil and evil institutions as it would be accomplished at the end of the present age and throughout the promised Millennium.

The time of the overthrow of "this present evil world" is described by the prophet as the "day of the LORD." It is the "day" in which the Lord would intervene in human affairs to end the reign of sin and death, and destroy all the enemies of righteousness. The Bible teaches that this day of the Lord [Jehovah] will precede the thousand-year reign of Christ and his church.

The "day of the LORD" is therefore frequently represented in the prophecies as one of trouble, of darkness, of gloom, a day in which, as the Prophet Daniel wrote, there would be "a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation." (Dan. 12:1) The Prophet Joel described it as "a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness." (Joel 2:2) Zephaniah describes it in much the same language, saying that it would be "a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess."—Zeph. 1:15

Describing the hopelessness of all human efforts to preserve manmade institutions in this "time of trouble," Zephaniah prophesied: "Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land." (Zeph. 1:18) The prophecies clearly indicate that we are even now living in this foretold "day of the LORD." It has been given to this generation to witness the disintegration of a civilization which has existed

for centuries and which was considered firmly established and impregnable to assault.

## **OUR DAY IN PROPHECY**

The first and second global wars, the great depression of the 1930s, and the head-on clashes of ideologies have been some of the hammer blows that, one after another, have left the foundation and the superstructure of the present social order reeling and in many ways crumbling. Many frantic efforts have been made to shore up the crumbling institutions of the world, among them the bolstering of various segments of civilization with “gold and silver.” But, as Zephaniah warned, “Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD’S wrath.”

Some of the aspects of this “time of trouble” as described in chapter 3, verse 6, have already occurred to a considerable extent in the areas devastated by war. “I have cut off the nations”; the Lord foretold, “I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant.” Anyone who has seen demolished cities as a result of war will know how accurate this prophecy really is.

Chapter 3, verse 8, presents another aspect of the “day of the LORD.” It is God’s answer to the heart cry of millions as to why he permits the continuance of evil, of oppression, of wars, and other plagues upon the human race which have resulted from “man’s inhumanity to man.” The text reads, “Wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine

indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured by the fire of my jealousy.”

“Wait ye upon me, saith the LORD.” It has required much faith, in the face of continued and increasing evil, to “wait” for the Lord to intervene in human affairs and establish his rule of righteousness. Even when he does, the first results, from the human standpoint, are everything but pleasant, and necessarily so, for entrenched wickedness does not willingly give up its rulership in the affairs of men.

So the Lord, in his own way, brings precipitous action. “I will gather the nations,” he says, and “assemble the kingdoms.” Never before have the nations been gathered as they are today. They have gathered together for war, and have assembled in efforts to keep the peace.

Yes, they are gathered for global action. This has been made possible through the increase of knowledge foretold by the Prophet Daniel. This increase of knowledge has come in the providence of God, and he knew, nationwide, what the result would be. While God will permit man to destroy his own world, he declares it to be by the “fire” of his “jealousy.” Here, again, the word in the Hebrew text is “zeal.” God’s zeal in this final struggle of the nations will assure that the whole social structure, the symbolic “earth” of the Bible, will be destroyed to make way for the glorious kingdom of his Messiah.

The destruction of human beings is not what is particularly forecast in this prophecy, but rather, the destruction of a social order. Millions of lives have, of course, been lost due to wars, and many cities reduced to rubble. But more important in the fulfilment of the prophecies is the fact that

basically what is happening is the ending of a world, the “end of the world” of which the Bible has so much to say.

In the next verse the Lord says, “Then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.” (Zeph. 3:9) This promise proves two things; first, that the human race will still exist after the symbolic “earth” has been “devoured” by the “fire” of God’s zeal; and second, that then, Satan’s world being destroyed, Christ’s kingdom of righteousness will take control, and through its agencies the people will learn to know and serve the true God. While this particular prophecy does not mention it, many others do reveal that then the dead will be awakened in order that they also may enjoy the blessings of the new kingdom.

## **THE BOOK OF HAGGAI**

Haggai was a prophet who served Israel after the people were released from their Babylonian captivity and had returned to Judea. King Cyrus of the Medes had issued a decree authorizing the return of the captives, and granting permission to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. A Jew named Zerubbabel had been made Governor over Judea, and he began, with some enthusiasm, the work of rebuilding the temple. But about the time the foundation was laid opposition against the project arose, and the governor apparently lost his courage and the rebuilding ceased. The prophecy of Haggai is chiefly concerned with these local circumstances, particularly the delay in rebuilding the temple, and he chides the people, especially their leaders, for building fine homes

for themselves, but neglecting the house of the Lord.

The temple of the Lord in Jerusalem is used in the Bible as a symbol of a much more glorious temple, described by a New Testament writer as one “not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” (II Cor. 5:1) The promised “Seed,” through which all the families of the earth are to be blessed, is in reality this grander “temple.” The temple of God in Jerusalem was where the people, through the ministry of their religious servants, met the Lord and received of his blessings. So the “Seed” of promise, the Messiah (Jesus and his glorified church), will be the channel of God’s blessing to all mankind. Messiah will be the Mediator between God and men, and in this role will reestablish the will of God in the hearts of all who accept of divine grace and obey the laws of the new kingdom.

Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem, which was destroyed when the nation was taken into captivity in Babylon, was a magnificent structure. But concerning the rebuilt temple Haggai wrote, “The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former.” (Hag. 2:9) This undoubtedly proved to be true; but this statement will be even more true of the antitypical, spiritual temple, the one concerning which the Lord said, “I will fill this house with glory.”—Hag. 2:7

But this will not be fulfilled until after the prophetic time of trouble with which the present age is ending. Through Haggai the Lord describes this “trouble” as a great shaking of society and nations. Verses 6 and 7 read, “Yet once [more] ... 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.” The “heavens” and the “earth” mentioned here are the spiritual and material aspects of the present social order, while the “sea” represents the restless, discontented masses of mankind. (Isa. 17:12,13) The “dry land” would seem to be symbolic of the poor, underprivileged millions of mankind. All segments of the people and of their governmental arrangements are being shaken.

This, however, is not because God is vindictive toward the human race, but rather, in order that they might be awakened to their need of him. This is shown by the text which states that because of this “shaking” the “desire of all nations shall come.” This does not mean that through the agencies of Christ’s kingdom God will satisfy every petty desire of the people. The thought is that the desire of the nations will be those proper desires in harmony with God’s righteous law. Great will be the peace and joy of the people when they thus recognize God’s right to rule in their hearts and lives.

In chapter 2, verses 21 and 22, the Lord instructs Haggai to speak to Zerubbabel and say: “I will shake the heavens and the earth. And I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen [the Gentiles]; and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother.”

This is simply explaining the manner in which the Lord will “shake” the symbolic heavens and earth. It is not a clash of physical worlds and planets, but a struggle within human society, in which its various elements and nations are

brought “down, every one by the sword of his brother.” It is thus that the Lord also overthrows the “throne of kingdoms.” This seems to be a reference to the overlordship of Satan, the great “prince of this world.” His stranglehold over the nations is broken when he can no longer maintain a semblance of peace and order among them. Thus, from still another standpoint, we see the world being prepared for the rulership of Messiah’s kingdom.

## **THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH**

The Prophet Zechariah was contemporaneous with Haggai, and his prophecy, like that of his contemporary, helped much to encourage Zerubabel to complete the job of building the temple in Jerusalem. But in addition to dealing with these circumstances of a local nature and of immediate concern, the Lord also used him to forecast events which were not due to occur until long after he had fallen asleep in death.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Zechariah prophesied the experience of Jesus when he rode into the city of Jerusalem on an ass. (Zech. 9:9) He also forecast a worldwide scattering of the nation of Israel, and their ultimate return to the Promised Land; showing that then Judea would be the capital of the world.—Zech. 8:18-23

Chapter 12, verse 10, forecasts a time when the people “will look upon him whom they have pierced, and ... mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son.” This is an obvious reference to a time when those who rejected Christ and pierced him will be raised from the dead and recognize that they killed the King of glory, and

will genuinely repent of their sin and deeply mourn over their wrongdoing.

Prior to this, however, as shown by the prophecy of Ezekiel, after the Israelites are regathered in their own land, and before they recognize Jesus as their Messiah, there will be a warlike gathering of nations against them. Zechariah shows that “then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.”—Zech. 14:13

Through the Prophet Ezekiel, the Lord describes this intervention of the Lord on behalf of regathered Israel, saying, “I will plead against him [Gog and his allied armies] with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. Thus will I magnify myself; ... and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the LORD.”—Ezek. 38:22,23

Zechariah’s prophecy describes the thousand-year “day of the LORD” as one which will not be entirely light until its close, indicating that the kingdom work of enlightening the people, and restoring them to health and life, will require the entire “day” for its accomplishment. On this point he says, “It shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: but it shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light.”—Zech. 14:6,7

Zechariah’s prophecy declares concerning the thousand-year reign of the Messiah that “the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day

there shall be one LORD, and his name one.” (Zech. 14:9) No longer will there be a multiplicity of gods and myriads of superstitious notions concerning deity, for then, as we have learned, Jehovah’s glory shall fill the earth as the waters cover the sea. Zechariah also writes:

“It shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain.” —Zech. 14:16,17

This, of course, does not refer to a literal traveling to Jerusalem to worship the Lord. The thought is, rather, that all nations will be required to recognize the authority of the Lord as it will then be established in the earth. “The law shall go forth from Zion,” wrote the Prophet Micah, “and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” (Mic. 4:2) Over and over again the Lord has promised that when his kingdom is established “all the families” and “nations” of the earth will be blessed. But in order that any may receive these promised blessings of peace and health and life, it will be essential that they recognize the authority of the divine kingdom, and all who do, and continue to obey the laws of that kingdom, will live forever.

## **THE BOOK OF MALACHI**

Malachi is the last of the minor prophets, and his prophecy is the concluding book of the Old Testament. It was written shortly after the

Jews returned from their Babylonian captivity. Much of the book is utilized in reminding the people of their halfhearted, and often hypocritical worship of God. Malachi explained to the people that because of their unfaithfulness God was withholding his blessing from them. The climax of this scathing indictment is reached in chapter 3, verses 8 to 10, where the Lord, through the prophet, says:

“Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, ... and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open to you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

Bringing “tithes” into the Lord’s storehouse is a reference to the tithing system which the Lord instituted in Israel. It was an arrangement whereby the people contributed one tenth of their income to support the religious services of the nation. None was expected to give more than this, and none could give less and be wholly pleasing to the Lord. Probably the Lord is here using the tithing arrangement to illustrate their allegiance to him in all ways.

In the text the Lord sets forth a principle which applies to his people at all times, which is that the blessings of peace and joy which they receive from the Lord are in direct proportion to their faithfulness to him in thought, word, and deed. The tithing system itself does not apply to the followers of Jesus during the present age. Christians consecrate their all to the Lord. All

that we have and are belong to him. Any holding back of our full devotion to him would be a failure to bring all our "tithes into the storehouse," and consequently a proportionate loss of the spiritual blessings which we might enjoy.

In addition to chiding Israel for her unfaithfulness in rendering full devotion to the Lord, Malachi, like all the other prophets, foretold developments in connection with the outworking of God's great plan of redemption and restoration of the human race. Other prophets had foretold the coming of Jesus to be the world's Savior, and Malachi prophesied concerning the coming of one who would prepare the way for Jesus and announce his presence among the people. The prophecy concerning this is in chapter 3, verse 1, and reads, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me." This was fulfilled, as the New Testament shows, in the person and ministry of John the Baptist.

In this first verse of the third chapter another "Messenger" is referred to—the "messenger of the covenant." This is a prophecy concerning Christ. As we have learned, the Prophet Jeremiah promised that the Lord would make a "new covenant" with the "house of Israel and with the house of Judah." (Jer. 31:31-34) We learn from Ezekiel, chapter 16, that this covenant will be extended to resurrected Gentile nations; and Malachi informs us that Christ will be the "Messenger" of that covenant, the one who will put its terms in operation and extend its blessings to both Jew and Gentile. Other texts of the Bible refer to him as the "Mediator" of that promised New Covenant.

Malachi foretold that Jesus would first come to his "temple." This is a reference to his spiritual

temple, made up of those who follow in his footsteps. Before this "temple" can become that glorious one foretold in Haggai's prophecy, every member, or "living stone," in it must be thoroughly prepared and purified. (Hag. 2:9) So, before Christ becomes the active Mediator of the New Covenant, he sits as a "refiner of silver and gold; and he shall purify the sons of Levi."

In the Jewish dispensation the tribe of Levi, after they left Egypt, was substituted for the firstborn of Israel, and served the nation in all religious matters. The church of Christ, antitypically, are now, therefore, the "sons of Levi." Thus, during the present Gospel Age, Jesus has been working with his church, getting its members ready to be the glorious spiritual temple, the future meeting place between God and man.

The temple class is purified and made ready for the future position in the kingdom while surrounded on every hand by evil and evil influences. Chapter 3, verse 15, reads: "Now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered." Immediately following this description of the present time when truth and righteousness are on the scaffold and when error and sin are on the throne, the prophet wrote: "Then [in this time of evil] they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that fear the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels."—Mal. 3:16,17

Yes, during the present time of evil, superstition, and darkness, those who know the Lord delight

in their association with one another. It is a source of strength to them as they continue to combat the evils which surround and attempt to crush them. One of the great sources of strength in their fellowship is the recalling of the promises of God concerning that time when, through the agencies of Christ's kingdom, righteousness will triumph and evil will be destroyed, and when the light of truth is diffused throughout all the earth.

This glorious climax of the divine plan is forecast in the last chapter of Malachi's prophecy. The first verse reads, "Behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven [against all sin and unrighteousness]; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." To the extent that this refers to individuals rather than to evil institutions, it must be remembered that no one will be everlastingly destroyed until he has been given a full opportunity to turn to the Lord and serve him.

The world will then be enlightened so that none will have the excuse of not knowing the way of righteousness. Verse 2 reads: "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings." (Mal. 4:2) This "Sun of righteousness" is Christ, and his coming and the work of his kingdom is likened to the rising of the sun. Just as the sun scatters the mists and darkness of the night, so Christ will dispel the ignorance and superstition of a benighted world, and the warmth of this symbolic "Sun" will heal the diseases of the people and give life everlasting to all who will yield to the influence of its healing rays.

“And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts.” (Mal. 4:3) The pronoun “ye,” as here used, refers to the promised “Seed”—they that now “fear the LORD” and speak “often one to another” concerning him. In the Book of Genesis we read that this “Seed” was to “bruise” the “serpent’s head.” The “serpent” is a symbol of Satan, the great adversary of God and man. He is the chief of sinners. Christ is the “Seed” of promise which will “bruise” Satan’s “head,” but associated with him in the putting down of evil in the earth will be his footstep followers. (Rom. 16:20) This will be done during the Millennium when the “Sun of Righteousness” is scattering its blessings of light and healing to all those who learn to love righteousness.

The last two verses of Malachi, and of the Old Testament, prophesy the coming of “Elijah,” “before the great and dreadful day of the LORD.” (Mal. 4:5) The Prophet Elijah was a reformer in Israel, and among his accomplishments were the destruction of Baal worship and inducing the nation of Israel to return to the worship of Jehovah, the true God. See I Kings, chapter 18.

Because of this background of experience and service, the name “Elijah” is prophetically associated with the reform efforts of God’s people throughout the age. Malachi’s prophecy describes this, saying, “He shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers.” Then the text adds, “Lest I [the Lord] come and smite the earth with a curse.”—Mal. 4:6

Briefly stated, this prophecy is a forecast of the reforming time coming when the symbolic

Elijah will indeed, “turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers.” The full prophetic outcome of this scripture will become clear as God’s people watch and wait for the revealment of all things in God’s due time.

## **SUMMARY**

In this brief examination of the thirty-nine books which comprise the Old Testament part of the Christian Bible, we have not undertaken to call attention to all that is said concerning God’s great plan for the redemption and restoration of the sin-cursed and dying race. We have tried, rather, to trace from book to book the golden threads of promise relating to the divine plan for the redemption and restoration of the sin-cursed and dying race, and to note the wonderful manner in which they unfold one after another of its details.

In doing this we have merely scratched the surface, so to speak. The Bible is indeed a rich storehouse of precious truth. As the poet wrote, “’Tis a mine, aye deeper, too, than can mortal ever go. Search we may for many years, still some new rich gem appears.” While we have ascertained much concerning God’s loving plan of salvation through our review of the Old Testament books, and have found how accurately their prophecies outlined history in advance, and foretold the shape of things yet to come, we will find the truth along these lines revealed more fully in the New Testament.

Beginning with the Genesis account of creation, we have learned that God created the earth to be man’s everlasting home. We have found that the

wages of sin is death, and that God provided redemption from death through his beloved Son, Christ Jesus. We have learned that it will be during the thousand years of Christ's reign that mankind will be delivered from death. Through the prophecies we have identified our own day as being a transition period leading into the kingdom age.

We will find all of these truths clearly set forth in the New Testament, and amplified to give us a firm foundation of faith in God, and a full assurance that he is abundantly able to accomplish all of his kind designs toward his human creation. Concerning his own Word, the Lord says, "It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." (Isa. 55:11) Let us, then, continue our examination of God's Word in order that we might become more and more fully acquainted with his great plan of the ages, which we know is his pleasure to accomplish! ■

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With what local situation is the prophecy of Nahum mostly concerned? Page 89

Who was the founder of the city of Nineveh, and of what is it probably a symbol? Page 90

In what sense can it be said that God is "jealous"? Page 91

What was God's purpose in destroying some of the wicked cities of the past while permitting the majority of them to remain? Page 91

How does Nahum describe the destruction of the present "evil world" of Satan? Page 92

What is meant by the promise that “affliction shall not rise up the second time”? Page 93

To what modern inventions may Nahum 2:3,4 refer? Page 93

What is the subject matter of the 1st chapter of Habakkuk? Page 93

How did the Lord reply to Habakkuk’s question as to why he continued to permit evil to flourish? Page 94

How much assurance did Habakkuk receive from the Lord’s answer to his question? Pages 94,95

What is the “vision” referred to by the Lord, and when is it made plain to his people? Page 95

Why has it been necessary in all ages for the “just to live by faith”? Page 95

How were the Chaldeans like “hell” and “death”? Page 96

When will the true God of the Bible be universally worshiped? Pages 96,97

How did Habakkuk express his abiding confidence in the Lord? Page 97

What is meant by the prophetic expression, “the day of the LORD”? Page 98

Why is the day of the Lord so frequently described as a “time of trouble”? Page 98

What literal description did Zephaniah give of certain aspects of “the day of the LORD”? Pages 98,99

How does the Lord assure us that he will not always allow evil to triumph? Pages 98,99

What is primarily destroyed by the “fire” of God’s “jealousy”? Page 98

How do we know that the human race itself will not be destroyed in the “day of the LORD”? Page 101

When did Haggai serve Israel as a prophet, and what is the principal subject matter of his book? Page 101

What is the “temple” of the Lord which, in the future, will be the meeting place between God and men? Page 102

What must occur in human experience before the Lord’s “temple” will become the channel of blessing for mankind? Pages 102,103

What are the “heavens” and “earth” which are “shaken” in the “day of the LORD”? Pages 102,103

What is the “throne of kingdoms” which is overthrown in this shaking time? Page 104

When did Zechariah serve as prophet, and what are some of the forecasts he made of future events? Page 104

What prophetic event must transpire before the restored Israelites will recognize Jesus as their Messiah? Pages 104,105

How did Zechariah describe the thousand-year day of Christ’s reign? Pages 105,106

How did Zechariah describe the necessity for all nations to recognize the sovereignty of the Lord’s kingdom when it is set up? Page 106

When was the prophecy of Malachi written, and what was its immediate purpose? Pages 106,107

Explain the tithing system of Israel, and what lessons may we derive from it for ourselves? Pages 107,108

What title did Malachi give Jesus in relation to the promised New Covenant? Page 108

When did Jesus come to his temple, and what was the purpose of his coming? Pages 108,109

Under what circumstances is the temple class prepared for its future work? Page 109

What is the “day” referred to by Malachi which shall “burn as an oven”? Page 110

What symbol did Malachi use to describe the enlightening and healing work of Christ during his kingdom reign? Page 110

How did Malachi describe the triumph of the promised “Seed” over the enemies of God and of righteousness? Page 111

## CHAPTER 5

# The Deliverer Comes

**B**eginning with the New Testament section of the Book of Books, the great plan of God for the redemption and restoration of mankind from sin and death is seen to move forward into a new phase. From the time our first parents were sentenced to death down to Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophetic writers, God continued to remind his people of his purpose to send a Deliverer, one who would be both a Redeemer and ultimately a Ruler, a King, to govern the world in righteousness. However, in all this time there was no substantial evidence that these promises would ever be fulfilled.

It is the New Testament that unfolds the story of the coming of the “seed” of promise, the one concerning whom Isaiah wrote saying the government would be upon his shoulder. (Isa. 9:6) Speaking through Jesus and the New Testament writers, the Lord continued to make promises concerning the future blessing of the people, but now, in addition, many of the wonderful promises of the Old Testament were being fulfilled.

The first four books of the New Testament record the life and teachings of Jesus, presenting him as the great Messiah of promise. These

books are known as the four “Gospels,” so named because they present the “good news” of Jesus’ birth, and through the teachings of Jesus reveal further the divine design of redemption, the call of the church, and later the recovery of the lost race from death. The writers were Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, each compiling one of these first four books of the New Testament.

In the great theme of the Bible, which began with God’s forecast that the “seed” of the woman would “bruise” the head of the “serpent,” the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are fundamentally important factors. (Gen. 3:15) In God’s providence, the vital truths pertaining thereto have been clearly set forth by the godly men who wrote the four Gospels. To some extent these four historical books are repetitious, but there is much in each of them that does not appear in the others.

Since all four of the Gospels pertain to Jesus and his ministry, we will examine their united testimony, rather than consider each book separately. This, we believe, will help us to understand better the purpose of these books, and the important part they play in the unfolding of the divine plan. Their principal purpose is, of course, to identify Jesus as the one God had sent into the world, first to redeem mankind from the original penalty of death imposed upon our first parents because of their sin, and later to establish a kingdom on earth to be the agency through which the redeemed world might return to God and live forever.

## **THE FORERUNNER OF JESUS**

We learned from the last book of the Old Testament that there would be a “messenger,” a

forerunner of Jesus, who would announce his presence. The Prophet Isaiah also foretold the coming of this one who would be as a “voice crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD.” (Isa. 40:3) Matthew, in chapter 3; Mark, in chapter 1, verses 1-11; Luke, in chapter 1, verses 5-80, identify John the Baptist as the one who fulfilled these prophecies concerning who would prepare the way of the Lord.

The Apostle John also reveals that John the Baptist was the foretold forerunner of Jesus. (John 1:15-34) In Isaiah’s prophecy of the coming of Jesus to be the Redeemer of the world, he likens him to a “lamb” who would be led to the slaughter. When introducing Jesus, John the Baptist said, “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.”—vs. 29

## **THE LOGOS MADE FLESH**

Jesus could not take away the sin of the world if he himself were a sinner. The Psalmist wrote that no one, that is, no member of the sin-cursed and dying race, could redeem his brother or “give to God a ransom for him.” (Ps. 49:7) It was necessary, therefore, that the promised Redeemer, while partaking of human nature, be not a partaker of the sin of condemned humanity. So John, in the opening chapter of his Gospel, emphasizes that Jesus had a prehuman existence, that he was the Son of God before coming to earth, and that he was “made flesh.”

Unfortunately, the translators of the *King James Version* of the Bible have failed to present the correct thought concerning Jesus’ prehuman existence. They have made it appear that the Father and the Son were the same person. But a

correct rendering of the Greek text in this first chapter of John's Gospel reveals that the "Word"—*Logos* in the Greek text—the Son of God who was made flesh, was "a" God, or mighty One, while the Heavenly Father was "the" God, the Almighty One. It was the Almighty God speaking to his Son, the Logos, in the statement, "Let us make man in our image."—Gen. 1:26

While John simply furnishes this general information that Jesus did not have an earthly father, Luke records some of the details as to the manner in which he was made flesh. It is in the Book of Luke that we are told of his mother Mary's miraculous conception, and of the birth of Jesus in the manger in Bethlehem. (Luke 1:24-35; 2:1-20) Matthew also makes mention of the miraculous conception.—Matt. 1:18-25

One of the best-known passages in the Bible is Luke's record of the angelic announcement to the shepherds of the birth of Jesus. "Fear not," the angel said, "for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."—Luke 2:10-14

## **BIRTH OF THE SAVIOR**

"Unto you," the angel said, the Savior, the Christ, is "born." Until this time, the people of God had only his promises upon which to rest their faith. Now these promises were beginning

to come true. The Promised One had appeared—born in Bethlehem, just as the Prophet Micah had foretold. Micah had explained concerning this one that “his goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” (Mic. 5:2) This language indicates the prehuman existence of Jesus, a fact as we have seen, which is emphasized by the three writers, Matthew, Luke, and John.

Matthew records an incident in the childhood life of Jesus which is significant; namely, an attempted attack on his life by King Herod, in which he endeavored to use the “wise men” who had come from the East to visit the newborn King. (Matt. 2:1-15) In the Garden of Eden, when God said that the serpent’s head would be bruised through the instrumentality of a “seed,” he also explained that he would place “enmity” between the “seed” of the “serpent” and the “seed” of the woman—the Christ. It seems obvious that since Jesus was born to be the “Seed” God had promised, Herod’s attempt to destroy the child was instigated by the “serpent,” who in reality is Satan, the Devil. It was a manifestation of the foretold “enmity.”

## **CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES**

Due to King Herod’s animosity against any possible rival to his place of authority in the nation, God warned Joseph and Mary to flee into Egypt and take the child with them for safety. This also had been foretold in the Old Testament. (Hos. 11:1) When Herod died, they returned to their home in Nazareth.

When Jesus was twelve years old, Joseph and Mary took him with them to Jerusalem where they went to participate in the “feast of the passover.”

When starting on the homeward journey, they discovered that the boy was not with them, and upon hunting they found him in the temple, “sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.”—Luke 2:46

His mother chided him gently, saying they had been looking for him, and he replied, “Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49) He referred to his Heavenly Father. His mother had related to him more than once the miraculous circumstances of his birth, and Jesus knew he was in the world on a most important mission, so was concerned with his ministry.

The brief record given by Luke of necessity omits mention of the information received by Jesus from the doctors of the Law. Through Moses, the Lord had ruled that no one was eligible to serve as priest in the Tabernacle until he was at least thirty years of age. (Num. 4:3,23,30,35,39, 43,47) Evidently Jesus knew this, for Luke tells us he returned to Nazareth and became subject to Joseph and Mary. In chapter 3, verses 2-23 we learn that it was when Jesus “began to be about thirty” that he was immersed by John the Baptist and entered upon his ministry.

The ministry of John the Baptist was designed to lead people to repent of their sins, and his baptism in water was a symbol of the remission of sin. He was therefore puzzled when Jesus came to him and asked to be baptized. He said to Jesus, “I have need to be baptized of thee.” (Matt. 3:14) Jesus replied, “Suffer [permit] it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.”—Matt. 3:15

## WHY BAPTIZED

Jesus was not a sinner. He did not need to be baptized as a symbol of being cleansed from sin. For him to be immersed in water represented the burial of his will and his complete dedication to do the will of his Heavenly Father. Matthew informs us that "Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him; and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."—Matt. 3:16,17

We are not to suppose from this that there was a parting in the literal heavens through which his Heavenly Father's voice was heard. Here is another of the Bible's beautiful symbols, the "heavens" being used to indicate spiritual enlightenment, or discernment. Jesus had here presented himself to God to do his will, and it was essential that the divine will be revealed to him in order that he might conduct his ministry in harmony with his Heavenly Father's loving designs.

In Luke 3:21 we are given additional information concerning this, being informed that it was while Jesus was praying that the "heavens" were opened to him. Luke does not indicate the nature of this prayer, but in Psalm 40:7,8 we find a prophetic prayer which applies to Jesus, and is probably the one which was in his heart and upon his lips at this time. It reads, "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God."

This is a prayer of dedication in which Jesus expresses his desire to do all that had been written

concerning him in the “volume of the book.” This is a reference to the Old Testament Scriptures, to those portions in which, through the prophets, the Heavenly Father had charted the course Jesus was to take in laying down his life for the sins of the world. Jesus dedicated himself to the doing of the things which had been written, for he knew that in these prophecies his Heavenly Father’s will had been expressed.

And it was when he thus surrendered himself to do God’s will that the “heavens” were opened to him. He learned, at the age of twelve in the temple, it was not God’s “due time” to begin his ministry. Now the time had come, and the “heavens” were opened to him.

This is shown to have been accomplished by the power of the holy Spirit that came upon Jesus. The prophets had written their messages under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but to them the Spirit did not serve to reveal the meaning of what they wrote; but it did come to Jesus as a revealing power. Thereby his mind was illuminated to understand God’s will for him, and it gave him strength in the face of the severest difficulties to faithfully perform it.

## **THE KING MUST FIRST DIE**

In the Old Testament books, there are many prophecies which foretold the suffering and death of Jesus. The sacrifice of Israel’s passover lamb pointed forward to Jesus as the “Lamb of God” which would be led to the “slaughter.” (Isa. 53:7) Many of the animal sacrifices offered in the Tabernacle services, the details of which are related in the Book of Leviticus, were also typical of the sacrificial phase of Jesus’ ministry.

When the “heavens” were opened to Jesus, he understood all this. He knew he was to sacrifice his humanity in death, or, as he stated it to his disciples, give his “flesh” for the “life of the world.” —John 6:51

This important truth served as a guiding light throughout his entire earthly ministry. He knew also that he was destined to be a great King, and that in God’s due time his kingdom would hold sway throughout the whole earth. But first he must die to redeem mankind back from death; after all, he would not reign over a dead race, but a living one.

Immediately after his baptism, Jesus was “led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil,” Matthew tells us. (Matt. 4:1) Three major temptations were presented to Jesus, all of them designed to swerve him from his determination to do his Heavenly Father’s will and to work in harmony with the divine plan for the redemption and recovery of the human race from sin and death. First Satan suggested that Jesus use his miracle-working power to turn stones into bread in order to satisfy his hunger. This at the time was a severe temptation; for Jesus had been fasting for forty days. Jesus knew that the power of the Holy Spirit, which he had received, enabled him to perform miracles; but he knew also, that he was not to use this power for his own benefit, that it was given to him solely for the benefit of others, so he refused to yield to this temptation. He replied to Satan by quoting from the Old Testament Scriptures —“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”—Matt. 4:4

Matthew reports that “then the devil taketh him [Jesus] up into the holy city, and setteth him upon a pinnacle of the temple; and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down; for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee; and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.” (Matt. 4:5,6) When Jesus was baptized, he heard the voice of his Father saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matt. 3:17) He had no need that this fact be demonstrated by his Heavenly Father’s protection when exposing himself to needless danger. We could consider this a subtle effort by Satan to destroy the “seed” of promise. But Jesus did not yield to the temptation, instead, he again answered the tempter with a quotation from the Old Testament, “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”—Matt. 4:7

Finally, “the devil taketh him [Jesus] up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.” (Matt. 4:8,9) From the prophecies and promises of the Old Testament, Jesus knew that he was destined to be a King, that eventually his dominion would be “from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.” (Ps. 2:6-12; 72:8) But Jesus also knew that before he could be the foretold “King of kings,” he must die as the Redeemer of the world; and to make any move that would lead to his exaltation as king without the necessity of his sacrifice and death would be contrary to the divine plan. So again he replied to his tempter with a quotation from the Old

Testament: “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”—Matt. 4:10

Having victoriously met this encounter with the Adversary, Jesus embarked actively upon his ministry. His service on earth was of short duration, lasting only three and one-half years. Throughout the entire Old Testament period, God continued to promise the coming of a king, and the establishment of a kingdom, a worldwide government of peace and happiness through which all the families of the earth would be blessed. Throughout his ministry Jesus emphasized that he was this foretold King, and that because the King had come, the kingdom was at hand. Matthew’s Gospel, particularly, focuses attention on Jesus as the promised King.

Jesus’ oral instructions were for the most part associated with the thought of the promised kingdom, and illustrated by parables. Many of his parables were prefaced by the statement, “The kingdom of heaven is likened unto ... .” But to understand these parables it is essential to recognize that the promised kingdom was not established in power and great glory at the time of Christ’s first visit to earth. The kingdom was then “at hand” only because the King had come to begin making preparations for it. But these preparations were to go through slow stages of development, during which there would be Satanic efforts to thwart the purpose of God.

## **THE “WHEAT” AND THE “TARES”**

Jesus’ parable of the wheat and the tares illustrates Satan’s effort to produce followers of his own who would be counterfeits of the true “children of the kingdom.” (Matt. 13:24-30,36-43)

In this parable the "Son of Man," who is Jesus, sowed the "good seed," the "wheat." The "enemy" who sowed the "tares" is the Devil. Tares are imitation or counterfeit wheat, and are used in the parable to illustrate the many who have professed to be Christians, but who have not been true followers of Jesus. The parable teaches that the "wheat" and the "tares" were to be allowed to grow together until the end of the "world," or "age," as the Greek text states. Then there was to be a "harvest," when the "tares" would first be gathered into bundles and burned, and then the "wheat" would be gathered into the "barn."

The burning of the "tares" is described as being in a great "furnace of fire." This seems to symbolize clearly what the Prophet Daniel foretold as a "time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation." (Dan. 12:1) Malachi foretold the same time, saying, "The day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch."—Mal. 4:1

This does not imply that the individuals involved in this trouble will be forever, or even temporarily, destroyed. The thought is that all false claims of Christianity will be destroyed in the end of the age, and that those who have been under the misleading influences of these erroneous systems of belief will become disassociated from them, thus "burned" as "tares," but not necessarily as individuals—although doubtless many will perish in the "great tribulation" which is even now bringing the present age to an end.

Already the “furnace” of the great “time of trouble”—the “distress of nations with perplexity” foretold by Jesus in Luke 21:25,26—is weakening the foundations of nominal churchianity; and in the European world particularly, millions of former adherents to churchianity are now unbelievers. They have learned that the claims of the former church-state governments as being the kingdom of Christ were false.

In the parable, Jesus explained that after the “tares” were “burned,” the “wheat,” the “children of the kingdom”—the true kingdom, that is—would “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” In the true kingdom of the Lord, Christ is prophetically and symbolically portrayed as the “Sun of Righteousness” who will arise “with healing in his wings.” (Mal. 4:2) The work of God in the earth during the present age has been the calling out of the world a little company of people and preparing them to be associated with Jesus in his glorious kingdom to be a part of that “Sun of Righteousness,” and in his parable of the wheat and the tares this is emphasized.

When we look back over the age since Jesus’ first visit to earth and note the bloodshed and war, the bitter persecution of one professed Christian group by another, the horrors of the so-called Holy Inquisition, and the many other unchristian practices of the professed people of God, we could easily get the impression that Christianity has been a failure. But the parable of the wheat and the tares is seen to be prophetic of the fact that there would be this imitation of the true, and that at the end of the age this imitation of Christianity would be destroyed.

Meanwhile, the “wheat” has been unrecognized by the world and worldly churches. Nevertheless, God’s work of selecting and preparing these for the kingdom has gone grandly on. Soon all the “wheat” will be gathered, and will become associated with Jesus in the true kingdom, and the blessings of that kingdom will begin to flow out to the people.

## **JESUS’ MIRACLES**

The Old Testament prophecies over and over again give assurance that when the promised kingdom is established, its blessings to all nations will include the destruction of disease and death; therefore, in proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom, Jesus performed many miracles of healing. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all record some of these miracles, which include the opening of blind eyes, the healing of lepers, causing the crippled to walk, and even raising the dead. In John’s Gospel, chapter 11, verses 1 to 46, we have the beautiful, faith strengthening account of the awakening of Lazarus from the sleep of death.

In awakening Lazarus from death, Jesus addressed the tomb, the grave, and said, “Lazarus, come forth.” John reports that “he who was dead came forth.” (John 11:43,44) In the 5th chapter, verse 28, of his Gospel, John again reports Jesus’ power to raise the dead, and he quotes him as saying, “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth.”

## **SELECTS COWORKERS**

Another aspect of Jesus’ earthly ministry was the selection of his apostles, those who were to be

the spiritual guides of his followers throughout the entire age of preparation for the kingdom. Matthew supplies the names of the apostles, and records Jesus' instructions to them when he sent them out into the ministry as his representatives. (Matt. 10:1-42) John records the circumstances under which some of them were brought into contact with Jesus. (John 1:35-44) Later Jesus selected seventy believers and sent them out into the ministry.—Luke 10:1-20

These first disciples sincerely believed that Jesus was the great King whom the prophets had foretold. In his instructions he gave them reason to believe that they would share the authority and glory of his kingdom. They took this very seriously, and on one occasion two of them made a bold request that they be permitted to sit, one on his left hand, and the other on his right hand in the kingdom. In reply to this, Jesus asked them if they were willing to drink of his “cup” and be baptized with his “baptism.”—Matt. 20:22; Mark 10:35-40

Jesus' “cup” was one of suffering, death, and the surrender of his life in sacrifice for the sins of the world. In Jesus' reply to his disciples' request, he indicated that before his kingdom was established they would have the privilege of suffering and dying with him. In this and in other ways Jesus revealed that the kingdom of promise was a long way in the future from his day; that before it would be established in power and in great glory a little company of followers was to be selected from among mankind who, upon the basis of their faithfulness in dying with him, would have the privilege of living and reigning with him. To these, Luke reports Jesus as saying,

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

Matthew records Jesus’ instructions when sending his disciples into the ministry. Jesus warned them to expect hardship and persecution. He indicated that they might even be put to death. But again he tells them not to “fear” what man might do to them. He said, “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”<sup>2</sup>—Matt. 10:28

The Greek word here translated “hell” is *Gehenna*. It is used by Jesus to symbolize the everlasting destruction of the wilfully wicked. The lesson to the disciples was that while men might put them to death, their soul, their being, their very memories would still live in God’s memory, and they would be raised from the dead to live and reign with him in his kingdom.

## **THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT**

It was for the special benefit of his apostles, and all those who would believe on him through their word, that Jesus preached his well-known “Sermon on the Mount.” This sermon is recorded by Matthew in chapters 5 through 7 of his book. There are probably millions of people today who know one or more of the “Beatitudes” which constitute the opening of this sermon.—Matt. 5:3-12

It should be emphasized that Jesus did not intend this sermon to be a guide for the world in general. Even the professed Christian world has

<sup>2</sup> For a full explanation of this and other New Testament references to hell, see *The Truth About Hell*. Free upon request. Dawn Publications, PO Box 521167, Longwood, FL 32752-1167.

never shaped its policies according to the precepts of love and mercy set forth in this sermon. The true individual followers of the Master, however—and it is for these that the sermon is intended—have been guided by its principles, many times at the cost of much misunderstanding and suffering.

Briefly, some of the principles of righteousness set forth in the sermon on the mount are: humility of spirit; purity of heart; mercy toward enemies; hatred of others is murder; sincerity in prayer; singleness of heart in serving the Lord; full trust in the Lord to supply food, shelter and clothing; and alertness against the deceptions of false teachers.

It is in this sermon that Jesus sets forth what is generally spoken of as “The Lord’s Prayer.” The first request in this prayer is, “Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” (Matt. 6:10) Thus, even in his instructions pertaining to prayer, Jesus sought to keep the minds and hearts of his disciples reminded of the great objective of the divine plan, that it was to establish a kingdom through the agencies of which the sovereign will of God, against which our first parents disobeyed, would again be established in the earth, that the human race would be restored to harmony with the Creator.

## **THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD**

In his sermon on the mount, Jesus also said to his disciples, “Ye are the light of the world,” meaning that they had been called to fulfil this mission as his ambassadors, or representatives. Primarily, of course, Jesus himself is the “Light of the world,” but throughout the age his followers have occupied this position, acting as his spokesmen.

Jesus indicated to his disciples that their shining would not enlighten the whole world during the present age, yet he said that men do not light a “candle and put it under a bushel.” We are to let our light shine, but at best it will be as the light of a candle in a dark world.

Matthew records Jesus’ parable of the wheat and the tares. (Matt. 13:24-30,36-43) This parable reveals that throughout the age counterfeit or spurious “children of the kingdom”—“tares”—would grow up among the true—the “wheat”—and that at the end of the age these tares would be destroyed as such, and that then the “righteous,” the true “children of the kingdom,” would shine forth “as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” We saw from Malachi’s prophecy that Jesus is to be the “Sun of Righteousness” who will arise for the healing and blessing of the people during the millennial age. (Mal. 4:2) Jesus’ parable of the wheat and the tares shows that his followers of this age will then “shine forth” with him.

Thus, by parables and otherwise, Jesus endeavored to show his disciples that they should not expect the glory of the Messianic kingdom to be made manifest at that time. While they were invited into the service of the kingdom, their light would be but as candles, and they would be persecuted, at times even unto death. At the beginning, however, they did not grasp these facts too clearly.

Even when Jesus told his disciples of his own coming death at the hands of his enemies, they did not fully grasp the thought. To them the idea of the promised kingdom and its glory overshadowed every other consideration. Thus when Jesus made the definite announcement that he

was going to Jerusalem where he expected to be arrested and put to death, Peter remonstrated, saying, "Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee."—Matt. 16:22

To Peter it was unthinkable that Jesus should thus surrender to his enemies and allow them to put him to death. How could a dead king set up a kingdom? But Jesus said to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan ... for thou savorest not the things which be of God, but those that be of men." This statement simply meant that Peter's advice was contrary to the will of God. In the beginning of his ministry, Satan had endeavored to induce Jesus to preserve his life by turning stones into bread; and to avoid suffering and death by accepting the rulership of the world on the Devil's terms. Now Jesus recognized that through Peter, as an unwitting agent, Satan was again tempting him to avoid the course of sacrifice, suffering, and death.

## **TO JERUSALEM AND THE CROSS**

So Jesus went to Jerusalem, where the expected happened. He was arrested, subjected to a mock trial, and crucified. But the four Gospel writers record a number of important incidents which occurred during those last few days of the Master's earthly life. One of these was his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, with his disciples and friends hailing him as King. The account of this is recorded in Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:29-40; and in John 12:12-15.

This event had been foretold by the Prophet Zechariah, chapter 9, verse 9. The Jewish nation rejected Jesus as king and thereby forfeited the opportunity of reigning with him. This is foretold

in the 10th verse of this 9th chapter of Zechariah, and the assurance is given that although Jesus would be rejected, his “dominion” would, in God’s own due time, “be from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.”

On the night before Jesus was crucified, he gathered with his apostles in the “upper room” to partake of the passover supper with them. This was a yearly commemoration of the deliverance of the Hebrew children from Egyptian bondage. The firstborn in Egypt, as we learned, had been saved from death under the protection of the blood of the passover lamb. Now Jesus was about to be slain as the antitypical passover Lamb. Through his death, deliverance was to come to both his church and all mankind—deliverance from the bondage of sin and death.

The record of this night in the “upper room” is found in Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-38; and John, chapters 13 through 17. Matthew, Mark, and Luke record Jesus’ instructions concerning the commemoration of his death by an annual partaking of the “bread” and the “cup” which represent his broken body and his shed blood. These accounts also reveal Jesus’ attitude toward Judas, his betrayer. He knew that Judas was even then plotting, yet he called him “friend.”

Jesus was also concerned over his disciples; despite all he had said to them concerning humility and patience and love, even in that “upper room,” with enemies waiting for an opportunity to seize and crucify their Master, they were disputing among themselves as to who among them would be the greatest in the kingdom. Jesus gave them a lesson in true humility and service by washing their feet.

John gives us many details of Jesus' instructions to his disciples on that last night, which the other writers omit. Once again Jesus endeavored to prepare the minds and hearts of his disciples for his death, which was so near. To compensate for their sorrow, he said, "I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."—John 14:2,3

At the conclusion of that service in the "upper room," Jesus prayed on behalf of his disciples. In this prayer he said, "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them—because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." (John 17:14) Thus is stated one of the purposes of Jesus' earthly ministry, which was to prepare his disciples to continue on with the ministry of the truth that he had begun. For this purpose he had given them the Lord's Word; and although they had not yet grasped its meaning fully, he had patiently explained to them that, as his disciples, they would be called upon to suffer and to die with him.

In this prayer Jesus also said, "I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me." (John 17:9) He did not mean that he was not interested in the world, nor that the divine plan of redemption and salvation did not include the world. He knew, however, that before the world could believe and be blessed, his church must be selected from the world and prepared to live and reign with him. He prayed for these, therefore, that the work of divine grace in their hearts might prosper and be completed, and that all his disciples might be one, as he and his Father were one. Then he added, "That the

world may believe that thou hast sent me.”—  
John 17:21

The world did not then believe that the Creator had sent Jesus to be the Savior of the sin-cursed and dying race. Comparatively few in the world since have believed it. But when his followers, the church class, the “little flock” to whom it is the Father’s good pleasure to give the kingdom, are all united with him in that kingdom, then the world will believe, and the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.

### **ARREST, TRIAL, AND CRUCIFIXION**

From the “upper room” Jesus and his little band of disciples went to the Garden of Gethsemane, where, a few hours later, a mob from Jerusalem apprehended him. He was put through the mere formality of a trial. Before Israel’s high priest, he was condemned because he acknowledged that he was the Son of God.

This was construed as blasphemy. Before Pilate, he was charged with being a king. When questioned by Pilate concerning this, he made no denial, but explained, “My kingdom is not of this world [Greek: *kosmos*, meaning order].”—Matt. 26:57-68; 27:11-31; Mark 14:53-64; Luke 22:54-71; John 18:28-37

Jesus was a King! “To this end was I born,” he said, “and for this cause came I into the world.” (John 18:37) But Christ knew that his kingdom was not to be established by military might. If that were the case, he explained, his servants would fight for him to prevent his being delivered to his enemies. Peter had attempted to do this, but Jesus bade him put up his sword. The “kingdoms of this world” are based largely upon selfishness.

The rulers expect their subjects to defend them that they might be maintained in power. But Jesus reversed this procedure and laid down his life for his subjects, that they might live forever and enjoy the peace and security to be provided by his kingdom when established in power and great glory.

Pilate sensed that Jesus' claim to be a king posed no threat to the Roman Empire at that time, and would have released him, but his enemies cried, "Crucify him, crucify him." Pilate had little choice so consented to Jesus' death. He ordered an inscription placed over the head of the cross stating the crime for which Jesus was being crucified—"Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." In the beginning of his ministry, Satan offered Jesus the opportunity of becoming a king. Now he was being crucified on the technicality that he claimed to be a king.

Satan had also tempted Jesus to establish his claim to being the Son of God by leaping from the pinnacle of the temple. Now the crowd that watched him hang on the cross cried out, "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross." (Matt. 27:40) But again Jesus made no attempt to demonstrate the truthfulness of his claim to divine sonship.

Again "the chief priests ... with the scribes and elders" shouted, "He saved others; let him save himself. (Matt. 27:41,42; Mark 15:31; Luke 23:35) How little they realized that by his refusal to save himself Jesus was providing salvation for them and for all the families of the earth, even as his Heavenly Father had promised!

Luke records a conversation between Jesus and one of the malefactors being crucified at the

same time. This criminal, noting the inscription stating that Jesus was a king, asked to be remembered when he comes into his kingdom. Jesus replied, "Verily [so be it, or surely; *Dr. Strong*] I say unto thee today, with me thou shalt be in the paradise." (Luke 23:43, *Emphatic Diaglott* "word for word" Greek text). One of the great objectives of Christ's kingdom, when established, will be the restoration of paradise conditions, worldwide. Jesus had full confidence, even though he was then being crucified, that he would be raised from the dead, and in God's due time would set up the long-promised kingdom. The misplacement of the comma in the *King James Version* of Jesus' promise to the thief has given many the idea that Jesus and the thief went to paradise the day they died. But this is not true. Paradise did not exist at that time, nor does it yet exist. Jesus' promise to the thief is yet to be fulfilled.

Hanging on the cross, and just before he died, Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34) This was a quotation from Psalm 22:1. The entire psalm is a prayer which Jesus may have offered in his mind while hanging on the cross, being too weak to express audibly more than the opening words. Jesus died to take the sinner's place in death. It was necessary, therefore, that he bear the full penalty for sin. In the end, he gave himself fully into his Father's care, saying, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit," that is, my being, my life. (Luke 23:46) Jesus said this in full confidence that his Father would raise him from the dead and that in due time he would be the foretold "King of kings, and Lord of lords."

## RESURRECTION

Jesus' faith was rewarded. On the third day, God did raise him from the dead. All four of the Gospel writers—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John record the fact of his resurrection. They also record several incidents of his appearances to his disciples after his resurrection. He appeared to Mary as a “gardener.” To two of his disciples journeying to Emmaus he was a “stranger.” Because Thomas expressed doubts of the resurrection unless he could see the nail prints in Jesus' hands resulting from the crucifixion, he appeared to Thomas and others with him displaying a body such as the doubter demanded. John explains that this was a “sign.”—John 20:30

Jesus had told his disciples that he would give his flesh for the life of the world, so the varying manner of his several appearances to them after his resurrection helped to emphasize that he was no longer a human being. To Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night, he had explained that those who are “born of the Spirit” can come and go as the wind; invisibly, that is, to human eyes, yet exerting influence and power. Jesus was now “born of the Spirit.” (See Col. 1:18) On one of his appearances to his disciples he announced, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” (Matt. 28:18) He was no longer hampered by “fetters of flesh.”

Jesus' last appearance to his disciples is recorded by Luke, not in the Gospel of Luke, but in the first chapter of “The Acts of the Apostles.” On this occasion they asked Jesus about the kingdom—“Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6) The kingdom

of Israel had been overthrown six centuries earlier and it had never been reestablished. The disciples associated their hopes of Christ's kingdom with the reestablishment of Israel as a nation, hence the question. To their question Jesus replied, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." (Acts 1:7) He then reaffirmed a promise made while he was still with them in the flesh; that he would send the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide them. He said that then they were to become his witnesses in "Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth."—Acts 1:8

## **THE ASCENSION**

"And when he had spoken these things," the record continues, "while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight." (Acts 1:9) These "two men," probably angels appearing in human form, addressed the amazed disciples, saying, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."—Acts 1:11

So Jesus, the promised Redeemer and King, had completed his first visit to earth. He had selected a little company of followers to be his witnesses, he had given his life as the world's Redeemer and had been raised from the dead. Now he had returned to heaven. The angels' promise that he would come again became the inspiration of those early disciples. They knew that until he did return his kingdom would not be established. So, inspired by the blessed hope

of his coming, they continued to be his witnesses, and to offer the prayer he taught them, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” ■

## **QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 5**

What new aspect of the divine plan is emphasized in the books of the New Testament? Page 117

Name the authors of the first four books of the New Testament, and why are these books called “Gospels”? Page 118

Who was the “forerunner” of Jesus, and which Old Testament prophets foretold his coming and work? Pages 118,119

Why was it not possible for the Redeemer to have an earthly father, yet necessary that he be a flesh and blood being? Pages 119,120

What attempt did King Herod make to destroy the child Jesus, and who may have been the instigator of this plot, and why? Page 121

John’s baptism was for the remission of sin. Why did Jesus go to him to be baptized? Page 123

From what source did Jesus learn the Heavenly Father’s will for him, and what was that will? Page 124

Why was it necessary for Jesus to die? Pages 124,125

What three temptations did Satan present to Jesus, and what were they designed to accomplish? Pages 125-127

What was the length of Jesus’ earthly ministry, and what important points of truth did he emphasize? Page 127

Why did Jesus associate so many of his

parables with the “kingdom of heaven”? In what sense was the kingdom “at hand” in Jesus’ day? Page 127

Relate the parable of the wheat and the tares, and explain the manner in which it forecast one of Satan’s efforts to thwart the preparation and establishment of Christ’s kingdom. Pages 127,128

In addition to the temporary alleviation of suffering, what was the larger purpose of Jesus’ miracles? Page 130

How many apostles did Jesus select? What were their names? How many others did Jesus send out to be his witnesses? Pages 130,131

What did Jesus mean by drinking of his “cup,” and being baptized with his “baptism”? Page 131

What did Jesus mean when he said that God could destroy both soul and body in “hell”? Page 132

Did Jesus intend his Sermon on the Mount to be a guide for the world in general? Page 132

What are some of the principles of righteousness set forth in the “Sermon on the Mount”? Page 133

What is implied in the prayer, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven”? Page 133

In what sense are the followers of Jesus the “light of the world”? How does this differ from the work of the millennial age? Pages 133,134

Why did Peter try to dissuade Jesus from surrendering to his enemies? Explain Jesus’ reply. Page 135

Relate what occurred in the “upper room” the night before Jesus was crucified. What were some of the instructions and admonitions Jesus gave to his disciples on that occasion? Page 136

Why did Jesus not pray for the world? Was it because he was not interested in the human race? Page 137

Where did Jesus and his disciples go when they left the “upper room”? Page 138

Relate the circumstances of Jesus’ arrest and trial. What were the two main charges leveled against him? Were they true? Page 138

What did Jesus mean by the statement, “My kingdom is not of this world”? Page 138

Why did Jesus refuse to save himself and leave the cross to demonstrate his divine sonship? Page 139

Explain Jesus’ statement to the malefactor, “Verily I say unto thee today, Thou shalt be with me in paradise.” Page 140

Why did Jesus say, while hanging on the cross, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” What is implied in his statement, “Into thy hands I commend my spirit”? Page 140

Explain the different ways in which Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection. What was the purpose of these various manifestations, or “signs”? Page 141

Where is the account of Jesus’ final appearance to his disciples recorded? Relate the conversation that took place between them on that occasion. Pages 141,142

What promise was made by the “two men” who appeared to the disciples after Jesus’ ascension? What bearing did this have on the outlook of the Early Church? Page 142

## CHAPTER 6

# The Church and Its Mission

**T**he first four books of the New Testament, the “Gospels,” present a portrait of Jesus, the one whom the Creator, our Heavenly Father, sent into the world in fulfilment of his promises to provide a Redeemer and Savior to rescue man from sin and death. From the teachings of Jesus contained in these books, we learned that it is the divine plan that a small company should be selected from the world of mankind to be associated with him in his kingdom, and that he personally began the selection of these.

It was to this called-out class that Jesus said, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32) The fifth book in the New Testament, called “The Acts of the Apostles,” reveals the manner in which the early members of this “little flock” of Jesus’ faithful disciples became established, and how they went about fulfilling their commission to be ambassadors of Jesus. The apostles were the ones chosen by Jesus to be the inspired leaders of his “witnesses.”

While Jesus was still with his disciples in the flesh, he promised that after he went away he would send the Holy Spirit to comfort them, and to guide them “into all truth.” (John 15:26,27; 16:6,7,13) After his resurrection, when Jesus appeared to his disciples the last time before he returned to heaven, he renewed this promise. (Acts 1:8) It is in the 2nd chapter of the Book of Acts that Luke, the writer, records the fulfilment of these promises of Jesus to send the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit—mistranslated “Holy Ghost” in the *King James Version* of the Bible—is the invisible power of God used by him to accomplish the good purposes of his will. In Genesis 1:2 we read that “the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” Here God’s Spirit is referred to as a creative power. In the lives of the disciples this Spirit, or power, was one of revelation, of comfort, of guidance, and of strength to do his will in the face of opposition. Frequently in the Bible the pronouns “he” and “his” are used with reference to the Holy Spirit. But this also is an incorrect translation, for the Holy Spirit of God is not a person.

The Holy Spirit came upon the waiting disciples at Jerusalem in a miraculous manner and in fulfilment of Jesus’ promise that when he returned to his Father he would send this “Comforter.” They needed this experience to establish still more firmly their faith and confidence in Jesus as the Messiah. He had left them, and even though they had been convinced of his resurrection from the dead, they would have been in a difficult position to represent him in an unbelieving world without this definite evidence of his return to the heavenly courts.

This wonderful experience occurred, Luke tells us, “when the day of Pentecost was fully come.” (Acts 2:1) Pentecost was one of the special feast and assembly days of the Jews, many thousands of whom visited Jerusalem each year for the occasion. This meant that there were Israelites in the city at the time from many countries, all speaking the language of the country from which they had come.

One of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit at that time was the ability it gave the disciples to speak to their visiting countrymen in the language of their various homelands. This was called speaking with “tongues.” It was, at the time, a very practical demonstration of divine power, for it accomplished God’s design to give the natural descendants of Abraham, scattered throughout various parts of the then known world, a witness concerning the messiahship of Jesus.

Jesus forewarned his disciples that they would be hated and persecuted, even as he was, and this opposition to the Christian cause first began to manifest itself at Pentecost. The enemies of Jesus attacked his followers with bitter, untruthful words. Instead of recognizing that God’s blessing was upon the disciples, these enemies charged that they had become intoxicated. The Apostle Peter quickly and energetically refuted this charge, and in one of the most masterful sermons ever preached, explained to his hearers the true significance of the amazing manifestation.

Previously Peter had been opposed to Jesus’ giving himself up voluntarily to die. With the other disciples, he was frustrated and bewildered when the Master was crucified. They did not understand the reason for his death, and began

to wonder whether or not he truly was the Messiah. But now the Holy Spirit had come, and in addition to enabling them to speak in tongues, it enlightened their minds to the significance of what had occurred. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would guide them into “all truth,” and that it would call to their remembrance the things which he had taught them.

These promises were now fulfilled, so the once-confused Peter, addressing that pentecostal multitude, explained that Jesus had died in fulfillment of prophecy, and in keeping with the promises of God he had been raised from the dead; and as he himself had promised, had “shed forth” that which they “did now see and hear”; that is, the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:14-33) The Holy Spirit also revealed to Peter the meaning of the Old Testament prophecies, and he now quoted from the Book of Joel to show that hundreds of years before, the Lord had promised to pour out his Spirit “upon his servants and handmaids.”—Joel 2:28-32

Now Peter understood that Jesus could be confident in the face of death because he trusted in his Heavenly Father’s promises to raise him from the dead. In order to prove to his hearers that it was in the divine plan that the Messiah should die and be raised from the dead, Peter quoted Psalm 16:8-10, a prophecy depicting Jesus’ great faith in his Heavenly Father.

It reads: “I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.”

In this Old Testament prophecy, it is the Hebrew word *sheol* which is translated “hell.” As we have already seen, this is the only Hebrew word in the Old Testament which is translated hell. In quoting the prophecy, the Apostle Peter translates *sheol* by the Greek word *hades*. This proves that *hades*, so often translated “hell” in the New Testament, has the same meaning as *sheol* of the Old Testament, that meaning being death.

The fact that Jesus was in “hell” from the time he died until his resurrection simply means that he was in the condition of death. This is in keeping with another prophecy concerning him stating he would pour “out his soul unto death.” (Isa. 53:12) The soul is the being, and Jesus, as a being, died that he might take the sinner’s place in death. It was thus that he became the Redeemer of the sin-cursed and dying world of mankind.

It was the Prophet David who wrote the prophecy containing the statement, “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell,” but Peter emphasized that it could not apply to David, because he had not been raised from the dead. Concerning David, the apostle said, “He is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.” (Acts 2:29) Many might claim that David had gone to heaven, but Peter states that in his day David was still both “dead and buried.”

It was a stirring sermon that Peter preached. In addition to calling attention to the fulfilment of prophecy, he emphasized the guilt of those who had been instrumental in crucifying the Lord of glory. The account says that “when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?”—Acts 2:37

These were all Jews and, therefore, “brethren” of the apostles. But now these who were “pricked” in their heart were about to become brethren in Christ. They were instructed to “repent, and be baptized ... in the name of Jesus Christ.” (Acts 2:38) Three thousand Jews repented that day and were baptized. These “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (vss. 41,42) In verse 47 we read that the Lord “added to the church daily such as should be saved.” This is the first time the word church appears in the Book of Acts. It is a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*, meaning a “calling out.” Jesus expressed this same thought when he said to his disciples, “I have chosen you out of the world.” (John 15:19) It is important to recognize the truth which this word conveys, and it is doubtless by divine providence that it is used so early in the Book of Acts.

The apostles and other disciples of Christ were not sent out to convert the world. God’s purpose through them was to select from the world a little company who later, when exalted to glory with Jesus in his divine government, would become the channel of God’s blessings for the remainder of the world of mankind.

So, through the Book of Acts, we find that the “church” is always a humble group, small in number, having no influence in the world and not desiring such influence. No other name than Christian is given to the disciples of that time; and this title is mentioned only three times—in Acts 11:26; 26:28; and I Pet. 4:16. Believers were first called Christians at Antioch. (Acts 11:26) No denominational names were given to the

first believers. They were simply the “church,” the called-out ones. There was the church at Jerusalem, the church at Ephesus, etc., and sometimes mention is made of the church which met in one or another of the homes of the brethren.

As we have already quoted, the record states that beginning with Pentecost God daily added to the church “such as should be saved.” No one can become a member of the true church of Christ through his own volition, nor does the enrollment of one’s name in a denominational church register constitute one a member of Christ’s church. Jesus explained that no one could come to him unless his Heavenly Father drew him. It is God, through the power of the Gospel, who draws men and women to Christ, and upon the basis of their acceptance of and obedience to the Gospel, makes them members of his church—those whom he is calling out from the world and preparing for joint heirship with Christ.

Nor does the expression, “such as should be saved,” imply that the only ones to be saved through the blood of Christ are those during the present age who are made members of the true church. The salvation referred to here is the salvation offered to believers during the present age upon the basis of faith. Through faith these are released from the condemnation which is upon the world, and if they are faithful to the terms of the Gospel they will attain to immortality in the “first resurrection.”—Rev. 20:6

These, however, as we have seen, are being prepared to live and reign with Christ, that together with him they might be the channel of salvation from death for the whole world of mankind during the kingdom age. Thus the calling and

preparation of the church to be with Christ is merely the beginning of salvation opportunities. In God's own due time, as we learned from the promises of the Old Testament, the knowledge of God's glory will fill the earth, and all mankind will be given the opportunity to accept the divine provision of salvation from death through Christ, and in accepting and obeying the laws of the kingdom, will live forever.

The Book of Acts records the circumstances under which the Gentiles were first given an opportunity of becoming a part of the church of Christ. When Jesus first sent his disciples into the ministry of the Gospel he said to them, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matt. 10:5,6) There was a reason for this. In our study of the Old Testament we saw that the natural descendants of Abraham were then God's chosen people; not because he had no love for the Gentiles, or because he had no intention of blessing them, but because he had selected Abraham's seed to be his channel of blessing to the remainder of mankind.

But this was conditional upon their obedience to his Law. Our study of the Old Testament revealed that the Jewish nation was almost continuously disobedient. The final test came when Jesus, their Messiah, presented himself to them. They rejected him, and just before he died he said to that nation, "Your house is left unto you desolate." (Matt. 23:38) This was merely, however, the rejection of the nation as the ruling house of God. As individuals, the Jews have continued to have the same opportunity of believing in Christ as have the Gentiles.

God foreknew the course the Jewish nation would take, and through the Prophet Daniel indicated that he would "confirm the covenant" with them for a period of seventy weeks. (Dan. 9:23-27) These proved to be symbolic weeks, in which each day represented a year. The total period was therefore 490 years. Four hundred and eighty-three of these years, or sixty-nine "weeks," had elapsed when Jesus began his ministry, a ministry which was terminated in three and one-half years by his crucifixion.

Daniel's prophecy reveals that Messiah would be "cut off," but "not for himself"—he would die for the sins of the whole world. After Jesus' death there would therefore remain three and one-half years of exclusive favor for the Jewish nation. Then the Gentiles would have an opportunity to become followers of Jesus, and if faithful unto death, to live and reign with him in his kingdom.

It was in accordance with this divinely foretold timetable that Jesus, when he appeared to the disciples for the last time before returning to heaven, commissioned them to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. Previously he had restricted their activities to the one nation of Israel; but now, even though there were still more than three years of exclusive opportunity left for that nation, he knew that if they followed his instructions to begin their work at Jerusalem, then expand it throughout Judea, the time would expire before any Gentiles were reached.

But finally the time did come for the Gospel to go to the Gentiles. The Lord arranged the circumstances in connection with the first Gentile convert in such a way as to convince the disciples—

all of whom thus far were Jews—that a new era had begun in which Gentiles were no longer to be barred from the church. The first Gentile convert was Cornelius, and the Apostle Peter was used to present the Gospel message to him.

This was in fulfilment of a prophecy made by Jesus in which he told Peter that he would give him the “keys of the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 16:19) Peter used one of these “keys” on the day of Pentecost when, through his preaching to the Jews there assembled, he opened up to them the privilege of becoming joint-heirs with Jesus in his kingdom. He used the other key when through the Gospel he presented the same opportunity to the Gentiles, Cornelius being the first.

The circumstances of Cornelius’ conversion were unusual. He was “a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and he prayed to God alway.” (Acts 10:2) He had a vision “evidently about the ninth hour of the day.” An angel spake to him, and Cornelius asked, “What is it, Lord? And [the angel] said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter: he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.”—vss. 3-6

Toward evening of the next day, when messengers from Cornelius were proceeding to visit him, Peter went on the roof of Simon, his host, to pray. He became hungry, but the evening meal was not ready, so he fell asleep and into a “trance.” In this vision he saw a sheet, or a basket, let down from heaven “wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and

wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.”—Acts 10:9-12

Then, “there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.” Peter replied, “Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” Then the voice “spake unto him again, the second time: What God hath cleansed, call that not thou common.” (vss. 13-15) This was done again the third time. The significance of this experience was not clear to Peter until he returned with the messengers sent by Cornelius; and in response to his preaching he witnessed the repentance and conversion of this Gentile and his “kinsmen and near friends,” and saw the evidence of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them. (vss. 17-38) It was now God’s will for the “unclean” Gentiles to come into the church.

It was somewhat difficult for the Jewish believers to become adjusted to this broadened aspect of the divine call to joint heirship with Christ. A miraculous vision was essential to help Peter grasp the fact. However, the other disciples remained more or less hesitant, especially since there seemed a likelihood that these Gentiles, with their different customs and practices, might defile the church and disrupt the fellowship of the brethren.

An apostolic conference was called at Jerusalem to consider the issue, and Luke reports the proceedings of this conference in the 15th chapter of Acts, verses 6 to 20. Peter attended, and related his experience in the conversion of Cornelius. This convinced the brethren that the Gentiles were being received by God. James, apparently the chairman of the conference, summed up the matter, saying: “Men and brethren, hearken unto

me: Simeon [Peter] hath declared how God at the first [or, for the first time] 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

This is a wonderful summary of the divine plan both for the church—the “called-out” ones—and for the whole world of mankind, Jews and Gentiles. James, quoting Peter to prove his statement, explains that God first visited the Gentiles, not to convert them all, but to take out of them “a people for his name.” This is the “calling out” work of God in the present age. Then there would come the rebuilding of the “tabernacle of David,” or the house of David. The disciples had asked Jesus concerning the time for the restoration of the kingdom of Israel. Now they knew when it would be—after “a people for his name” had been called out from the Gentiles.

Then, through Christ’s kingdom—the reestablished “house of David”—the “residue of men ... and all the Gentiles,” will be given an opportunity to “seek the Lord.” (Acts 17:27) In further proof of this, James quotes from the prophecy of Amos 9:11-15. In this prophecy Amos says that following the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David “all the heathen [or Gentiles, as it is given in the Hebrew text]” will be brought under that ruling

house of the Lord, which will consist of Jesus and the church, glorified. James explains, nevertheless, that God's "first" visit to the Gentiles was merely to take out of them a "people for his name."

James concludes his summary of the divine plan for the salvation of mankind with the statement, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." From this we can be assured that there has been no miscarriage of any feature of the divine plan, no failures in the outworking of God's loving purpose to restore the human race to life in his own due time. In our review of the books of the Bible thus far, we have seen the plan of God unfold, and the marvelous manner in which many of its details have already been carried out.

The plan of God, those "works" which have been known to him from the foundation of the world, contain important time divisions. One of these comprised the "world" before the Flood. After the Flood a new world began, which continues, the Scriptures reveal, until the time for the establishment of Christ's kingdom in the earth. Then there will be another new "world," figuratively described by the Prophet Isaiah as a "new heavens and a new earth."—Isa. 65:17

The "world" which began after the Deluge is divided into ages insofar as the outworking of God's plan is concerned. From the Flood to the death of Jacob, God's dealings were exclusively with certain individuals such as Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore, this can be properly designated the "Patriarchal Age." It was during that age that God made his wonderful promises to bless all the families of the earth through the "seed" of Abraham.

At the death of Jacob God began to deal with his twelve sons as a group, which became a nation, the Jewish nation. Thus the period of time from the death of Jacob to the coming of Christ we may designate the Jewish Age, because it was during this time that God dealt with the Jewish nation. Through Moses he gave them his Law. He sent his prophets to them. He punished them when they were unfaithful to him, and when they were obedient to the Lord he prospered them and protected them from their enemies.

Thus he held them together as a nation, and prepared them to receive their Messiah and become associated with him in his future kingdom through the promised blessings which would flow out to "all the families of the earth." We have already learned of their failure to qualify for this high position, and now, through the Gospel, the invitation was being extended to individuals among the Gentiles who would accept it and would obey the terms of discipleship.

But this was not an emergency measure on God's part, as James declared to the conference in Jerusalem, "Known unto God are all his works from the foundation of the world." His plan for the world before the Flood was known and accomplished. What he designed for the Patriarchal Age came to pass. God knew that despite all his mercies toward the Jewish nation, the majority would fail when the final test came. So from the foundation of the world he planned to "visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name."

God's plan, however, does not provide for calling the Gentiles as nations, but as individuals, and upon the basis of individual acceptance of the

Gospel. The work of God in the earth from then until now has been accomplished through the drawing power of the Gospel, so we may designate this the "Gospel Age"—the age in the plan of God during which individuals from among both Jews and Gentiles who respond to the Gospel are trained and tested in preparation to live and reign with Christ in that kingdom which later will bless all the families of the earth.

## **PERSECUTION**

Jesus had forewarned his disciples that as his witnesses they would encounter much opposition from the world. He said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) As the Book of Acts reveals the activities of the apostles and other believers in connection with the establishment of the Early Church, it relates a number of incidents in which unbelieving Jews and Gentiles alike were unfriendly to Christians. By intimidation and by imprisonment, they endeavored to hinder, and if possible, to destroy the work of the disciples.

The first disciple to give his life for the cause was Stephen. He was taken before the Jewish Sanhedrin for trial, where he presented a brilliant oration in which he outlined the Messianic hopes of Israel. He showed that Jesus was the Messiah of promise and traced God's dealings with the fathers of Israel, from Abraham to Moses, their revered lawgiver. He declared that Moses had foretold the coming of the "Just One" whom they had murdered. But this testimony served only to make them more bitter against Stephen, and he was stoned to death.—Acts 7:1-60

The Lord strengthened Stephen for this difficult experience by favoring him with a vision. Describing it, Stephen said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.”—Acts 7:56

This must have given Stephen additional assurance that Jesus was the Messiah of promise and that death in his cause would ultimately lead to joint heirship in the Messianic kingdom. But it did not mean that Stephen joined his Lord the moment he died, for verse 60 explains that “he fell asleep.” Yes, he fell asleep in death to await the return of the Lord, when, through a resurrection from death, he would become associated with him in heavenly glory.

## **SAUL OF TARSUS**

With the trial and stoning of Stephen, there is introduced one who is very prominent in the New Testament Scriptures. He was Saul of Tarsus. Saul was among those who tried and condemned Stephen to death. He was a bitter enemy of the disciples and “made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and hailing men and women committed them to prison.” (Acts 8:3) Armed with letters of authority from the high priest, Saul was on his way to Damascus to continue his fight against the church, determined to stamp out the Christian heresy—as he supposed it to be—when “suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?”—Acts 9:3,4

Saul asked, “Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.” (vs. 5) Saul was convinced, and in a spirit of true humility

asked what the Lord would have him do. He was directed to go to a certain house in Damascus where he would receive his instructions. Saul was converted, and became a servant of the church instead of its enemy.

Ananias, a disciple of Damascus, was sent to Paul, the Lord having first said to him, "He [Saul] 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."—Acts 9:15,16

Saul's name was changed to Paul, and he became the great Apostle Paul, commissioned by the Lord to be, in a special way, an apostle to the Gentiles. Immediately upon his conversion he began to preach Christ in Damascus. Some of the apostles remained in Jerusalem to serve, but Paul traveled extensively in the ministry of the Gospel—throughout Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy. He was instrumental in establishing many of the first congregations of Christians.

Like the other disciples, much of the time he was under the fire of persecution, either from Jews or from Gentiles. On one of his journeys to Jerusalem, to deliver funds he had collected for the famine stricken brethren there, he was warned that "bonds and imprisonments" awaited him. (Acts 20:23) His friends advised him not to go, but his reply 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."—Acts 21:13

Paul went to Jerusalem as he had planned. Visiting the Temple there he was mobbed by his countrymen, and then taken into protective custody by the Roman police. Although a Jew, Paul

was by birth also a Roman citizen, and therefore had the right to appeal his case to Caesar, which he did. Although this meant remaining a prisoner for years, he nevertheless was taken to Rome under government protection against the assaults of his Jewish enemies. He was finally beheaded in a Roman prison.

On one of his missionary journeys Paul visited Athens. While there, he sought out the Jews in their synagogues and “daily” discussed the Gospel with devout persons, and in the market place. The record says that “then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babblers say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.”—Acts 17:17,18

That there should be a resurrection of the dead does seem strange to heathen philosophers. Of all the religions of the world, the Christian religion alone holds out the hope of a resurrection of the dead. Heathen religions, on the other hand, do not accept the reality of death. Death, they claim, is but the gateway into another form of life. Many denominational churches have come under the spell of this delusion, claiming that “there is no death.”

The Athenian philosophers decided that they would like to hear more from Paul. The account states that “they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus [Mars Hill, the highest court in Athens], saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.”—vss. 19,20

Paul accepted this invitation, knowing it was a good opportunity to present the Gospel of Christ to these Gentile philosophers. As he stood on Mars Hill, below him to the left was a valley in which had been erected many idols, each of which was ascribed to a certain god, one being labeled, "To the Unknown God." Towering above him to his right was a giant heathen temple (partially preserved ruins of this temple still exist) known as the Acropolis. His audience reclined on the slopes of the hill below him. In this setting, opening his discourse, Paul called his hearers' attention to the idol, "the Unknown God," and said, "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you."—Acts 17:23

Alluding to the massive and imposing heathen temple on the hilltop above him, Paul said, "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshiped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing that he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth."—vss. 24-26

Among all the gods of which the Athenians were so proud, there was none that could give "to all life, and breath, and all things." The God who could do this was "unknown" to them, and only a few who heard Paul's explanation of the true God were prepared to believe on him. There have been a few in every age, as Paul explained, who "seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us. For in him we live, and move, and have our being."—vss. 27,28

Having explained that the true God is a living God, and one who gives “life and breath” to all, Paul added for the further benefit of his idol-worshiping hearers, “Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device.” (Acts 17:29) Then, referring to the Athenians’ lack of knowledge of the true God, Paul continued, “The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where 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 “times of this ignorance” referred to by Paul was the entire period from Eden to the First Advent of Christ. During all that time God “winked at” the superstitions and idolatrous worship of the Gentile nations—the “heathen,” as they are called in the Bible. And while Paul said that now “God commandeth all men everywhere to repent,” this call to repentance has not been intelligently heard as yet except by the few. It began to sound forth in Paul’s day, but not until the Millennial Age will its clarion tones of truth and conviction reach all mankind. So it is still true of those who have not been reached by the call that God “winks” at their lack of knowledge of him, and holds them responsible for their wrongdoing only in proportion to the measure of their enlightenment.

What a wonderful message of hope Paul gave to the Athenians when he explained that God had appointed a “day,” a period of time, when he

would “judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained,” Jesus Christ the righteous! The word judgment includes the thought of a trial. According to Paul, therefore, “all men” are to have a future trial for life, a trial in which Jesus, who gave his life for the sin-cursed world and was raised from the dead by his loving Heavenly Father, will be the presiding Judge. This does, indeed, give “assurance” of the future happiness of mankind.

Nor did Paul present this reassuring message to the Athenians by his own authority. He spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the same Holy Spirit of God which had inspired the Prophet Isaiah to write that when the Lord’s “judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.” (Isa. 26:9) In our study of the Book of Ezekiel we learned of God’s design to awaken the Sodomites and other wicked people of the past from death. And Jesus said that it would be more “tolerable” for them in the “day of judgment” than for the Jewish cities who rejected him.—Ezek. 16:53,60-62; Matt. 10:15

Paul would also know of Jesus’ parable of the sheep and the goats, a parable designed to portray the work of the judgment day, when all would have an opportunity to manifest a sheeplike attitude before the Lord and receive his approval and blessing. To the “sheep” in this parable Jesus will say, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”—Matt. 25:34

This is the kingdom, or dominion, that was given to our first parents, but which they lost because of their disobedience to divine law.” (Gen. 1:27,28) It will be restored to mankind at the close of that

“day” which God has “appointed,” in which he will “judge the world in righteousness.” This is the great objective toward which the plan of God has been leading throughout the ages.

### **“TIMES OF RESTITUTION”**

This great objective of the divine plan is further elaborated upon in the Book of Acts by the Apostle Peter. While the chief concern of the apostles was to establish believers in their hope of participating with their returned Lord in the work of his future kingdom, they also, and logically, continued to emphasize the great purpose of Christ’s kingdom, which is the blessing of all the families of the earth. An example of this is found in Acts 3:19-21. In these verses Peter speaks of Christ’s return to earth, and explains that then there will be “times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”

This summary of one of the important teachings of the prophets is part of a sermon which Peter preached in explanation of a miracle he had just performed—the healing of a man who had been unable to walk from the time of his birth. (vss.1-9) Peter explained that the miracle had been performed through the power of the resurrected Jesus—“through faith in his name.” (vs. 16) It was a miracle of restoration and was used by Peter to illustrate the universal purpose of Christ to restore all mankind to life following his return and the establishment of his kingdom.

It is this general work of healing and restoration which Peter describes as the “restitution of all things.” He reminds us that this glorious future work of Christ had been foretold by all

God's prophets since the world began. In our study of the Old Testament books we noted many of these wonderful promises of God. As an example of this prophetic testimony concerning the "times of restitution," Peter refers to the promise made to Abraham, "In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed."—Gen. 22:18; Acts 3:25

Peter also cites a prophecy by Moses, "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me." (Deut. 18:15,19; Acts 3:22,23) Peter's reference to this prophecy indicates that it will have its fulfilment through Christ after he returns and his church is associated with him in his kingdom. Then all mankind will be given an opportunity to hear "that prophet," and those who obey will live forever. Those who refuse to obey will be "destroyed from among the people."—vs. 23

In declaring that "all" the prophets had foretold the times of restitution, Peter speaks specifically of "Samuel and those that follow after." Samuel records the statement by Hannah in which she says, "The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up." (I Sam. 2:6) It was because of original sin that the Lord condemned Adam to death, and this resulted in the death of all mankind because all were born in sin. It was thus that the Lord "killeth." But the Lord also "maketh alive." This will be in the resurrection.

The text describes this in another way saying of the Lord, "He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up." Here the word grave is a translation of the Hebrew word *sheol*, which, as we have seen, is the only word in the Old Testament

which is translated hell. In this statement, we have the definite statement that those who go to the Bible hell do not necessarily remain there, for a provision has been made for their return to live on the earth. This provision, as we have seen, is through Christ, the Redeemer, who himself went into hell, the death condition, to take the sinner's place, and thus provide for his release.

Job, another prophet of the Lord, expressed his confidence that the Lord would restore him to life, saying, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait [in death], till my change come; thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands."—Job 14:14,15

The Prophet David foretold many beautiful and wonderful things about the "times of restitution," emphasizing that these blessings would reach the people through the administration of Messiah's kingdom. Speaking of the "times of this ignorance" later referred to by Paul, and describing it as a time of darkness, David wrote, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning," the morning of the new day, the day of Christ's reign.—Ps. 30:5

David also foretold that in the "times of restitution" peace shall come to the people, and that the poor shall be delivered from their oppressors, the chief of which is Satan, the Devil. David wrote, "In his days [when Christ shall reign] shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth."—Ps. 72:7

The Prophet Isaiah had many wonderful things to say about the "times of restitution." He prophesied that the Lord would "swallow up death in victory" (Isa. 25:8); that he will open blind eyes, unstop deaf ears, and cause the "lame man to leap

as an hart”; also that “the ransomed of the LORD”—all mankind—“shall return” from death, “with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads.”—Isa. 35:5,6,10

The Prophet Jeremiah foretold the “restitution” of children. In a message of comfort to mothers, he said, “Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the LORD; and they [the children] shall come again from the land of the enemy.” (Jer. 31:16) The land of the “enemy” is the condition of death. This is one of the Old Testament prophecies promising a resurrection of the dead.

Daniel wrote that the “God of heaven shall set up a kingdom.” (Dan. 2:44) Speaking of the great “time of trouble” which is even now coming upon the nations, and also of the phenomenal increase of knowledge that has come to the present generation of mankind, Daniel wrote, “Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.” (Dan. 12:2) The expression, “dust of the earth,” reminds us of the original sentence of death passed upon our first parents, when God said to them, “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Gen. 3:19) The promise that those who sleep in the “dust of the earth shall awake” is therefore a definite assurance that God proposes to restore the dead world to life.

Through the Prophet Hosea the Lord foretold that he would “ransom” the people from the power of the grave, *sheol*; that he would redeem them from death. Then he added, “O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave [*sheol*, the Bible hell], I will be thy destruction.” (Hos. 13:14) Jesus was the one whom God sent to “ransom” the people. He took the sinner’s place in death.

So we might continue quoting the testimony of the prophets concerning the coming “times of restitution.” In our study of the Old Testament books we noted many of these promises. This coming time of blessing for all mankind is the great theme song of God, and he has guaranteed its accomplishment by sending Christ to die for the people. His shed blood ratifies all God’s promises. The fulfilment of these wonderful promises of restoration for a lost race awaits only the completion of the “church,” the ones “called out” from mankind. It is the beginning of this calling-out work that is recorded in the Book of Acts. That work, we believe, is now nearly completed, and soon the promised blessings of restitution will, through the agencies of Christ’s kingdom, begin to flow out to the people, all the people—“all the families of the earth.” ■

## **QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 6**

What in a general way, is the subject matter of the fifth book of the New Testament, “The Acts of the Apostles”? Page 146

What important promise made by Jesus was fulfilled in the experience of the waiting disciples at Pentecost? Page 147

What is the Holy Spirit of God? Page 147

The Holy Spirit enabled the first disciples of Christ to speak with “tongues.” What was the divine purpose in this? Page 148

Peter was confused when Jesus was crucified, not understanding its meaning. How was he able to give such a clear exposition of the matter at Pentecost? Pages 148,149

How does Peter’s pentecostal sermon reveal the

true meaning of the Greek word *hades*, which in the New Testament is translated “hell”? Page 150

Why did Jesus go to the Bible hell when he died? Page 150

How do we know that David did not go to heaven when he died? Page 150

What was the immediate result of Peter’s pentecostal sermon, and what instructions did he give to those who were “pricked in their heart”? Pages 150,151

What is the “church” of Christ? Did the first Christians give themselves any denominational names, or build meeting houses? Pages 151,152

Who alone can add members to the church, and are those whom God adds to the church the only ones to be saved? Pages 152,153

Why did Jesus, before his death, instruct his disciples not to go to the Gentiles, but only to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel”? When were these instructions changed, and why? Page 153

Who was the first Gentile Christian? Explain the divine providences under which he was converted. Page 155

What was the purpose of the first apostolic conference which was held at Jerusalem? Page 156

Outline the manner in which James, the chairman of the Jerusalem conference, summed up the divine plan as it pertains to both Jews and Gentiles. Pages 157,158

When will “all the Gentiles” have an opportunity to seek after the Lord? Page 158

What assurance did James give that there can be no failure in the divine plan? Page 158

Summarize the “works” of God from the standpoint of the time periods in his plan. Pages 158,159

What did Jesus say as to the treatment his disciples would receive from the world, and how was this fulfilled in the experiences of the Early Church? Page 160

Who was the first Christian martyr? Did he go to heaven when he died? Pages 160,161

Who was Saul of Tarsus. and under what circumstances was he converted to Christianity? Pages 161,162

What particular service was Saul commissioned to perform? What new name was given to him as a Christian? Page 162

How did Paul demonstrate his loyalty to Christ and to the work of the Gospel? Under what circumstances did he finally complete his service? Pages 162,163

When Paul visited Athens he spoke to the Athenians about the resurrection of the dead. Why did this seem so strange to them? Page 163

Paul was taken to Mars Hill and invited to explain his doctrines to the assembled people. Describe the setting of that experience and why in his sermon he spoke of the “unknown God” and of “temples made with hands.” Page 164

What did Paul mean by the expression, “times of this ignorance,” and in what sense did God “wink”? Page 165

Why did Paul say that God had given “assurance” of a coming judgment day? Page 166

How does the Prophet Isaiah foretell the work of judgment? Page 166

Why did Jesus say it would be more tolerable for the Sodomites in the day of judgment than for the Jews? Page 166

Who are the “sheep” in Jesus’ parable of the judgment day, and what reward will they receive?

Page 166

What dominion was given to our first parents, and when will it be restored to the human race?

Page 166

How did the Apostle Peter describe the blessings which will reach the people during the time of Christ's kingdom? Page 167

What practical circumstance did Peter use to illustrate the coming "times of restitution"? Page 167

What promises of the Old Testament did Peter quote to prove the doctrine of "restitution"? Page 168

What prophecy does Samuel record which shows that God will raise the dead? Page 168

How did Job express his confidence in "restitution"? Page 169

Quote one of the prophetic utterances of David, which picture the blessings of "restitution," and the agencies through which they will reach the people. Page 169

Quote some of the promises in the Book of Isaiah which give assurance of the coming "times of restitution of all things." Pages 169,170

What is the "land of the enemy," and who are to be delivered from there? Page 170

What did Daniel mean when he spoke of those who sleep in the "dust of the earth" being awakened? Page 170

How will the "ransom" work of the divine plan destroy the Bible hell, as indicated by the Prophet Hosea? Page 170

What feature of the divine plan must be completed before the "times of restitution" can begin? Page 171

## CHAPTER 7

# Paul Counsels the Church

**T**he Book of Acts informs us concerning the conversion of Saul of Tarsus who, in his misdirected zeal for God, so bitterly persecuted the followers of Jesus. This Saul was then commissioned by the Lord to be one of the twelve apostles to the church, taking the place of Judas who betrayed Jesus. His name was changed to Paul. Paul was just as zealous in his service of the Master as he had previously been in persecuting the disciples. In cooperation with other faithful Christians, Paul established many congregations of believers, his missionary tours taking him throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece, in addition to his service in Jerusalem and other places in Palestine.

As part of Paul's faithful service as a traveling exponent of the Gospel, he wrote letters of encouragement and instruction to the various churches of his day, and some also to individual believers. As books of the Bible, these appear next after The Acts of the Apostles. They are called "epistles," and there are fourteen of these Pauline Epistles. The groups, or "churches," to which

nine of these letters are addressed, were located in Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, and Thessalonica.

Two letters were sent to Timothy, a dear friend and coworker in the faith; one to Titus, another friend and brother in Christ; and one to Philemon, also a faithful brother in Christ whom Paul highly esteemed. Paul also wrote an epistle specially designed for the benefit of certain Hebrew Christians. This Epistle to the Hebrews we will reserve for later consideration, but the first thirteen of Paul's letters we will now consider as a group. These are commonly referred to as:

Romans	I Thessalonians
I Corinthians	II Thessalonians
II Corinthians	I Timothy
Galatians	II Timothy
Ephesians	Titus
Philippians	Philemon
Colossians	

The opening salutations in all these epistles indicate that they were written to Christians, not to the unbelieving world. This must be kept in mind if we are to have a proper understanding and appreciation of their contents. The Book of Romans, for example, is addressed "to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints." (Rom. 1:7) The word "saint," as here used, is a translation of the Greek word which means sacred—sacred, that is, because devoted to God. In verse 6 those who are called "to be saints" are said to be "called of [or by] Jesus Christ."

This "call" or invitation is to follow Christ. Jesus said, "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow

me.” (Mark 8:34) The acceptance of this invitation and a sincere effort to live up to its terms involved a full and continuous dedication of oneself to the Lord and to his sacred cause. In his second letter to the brethren in Corinth, Paul explains this divine cause to which the followers of Jesus are dedicated. He says, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself; ... and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.”—II Cor. 5:19

As a result of disobedience to divine law, the human race is alienated from God. But because God loved his human creation, he provided a way of reconciliation through Christ. Those “called to be saints” are made ambassadors of Christ in this work of restoring mankind to harmony and peace with God. In this age, the work of those who are dedicated to this sacred cause is to proclaim the “word of reconciliation”; that is, to announce to all who will hear that a way of reconciliation has been provided through the redemptive work of Christ. Such also are to prepare themselves, through obedience to the divine will, for the future work of the Messianic kingdom in which, if they are faithful now, they will share with Christ. That will be the glorious work of enlightening all mankind and restoring the willing and obedient of that time to human perfection, enabling them to live forever.

It is to these followers of Jesus, these colaborers in the divine cause, that Paul wrote his letters. In all of them he mentions directly or indirectly one or another feature of the divine plan for the future reconciliation of the human race to God, and the restoration of the obedient to everlasting life on the earth. However, the principal theme in his epistles concerns the spiritual growth and

welfare of the “church,” those “called to be saints.” The letters are a further revealment of God’s plan for the present age, and the manner in which it is being carried out through his consecrated people.

## **GOD’S PROVIDENCES**

It is without doubt that in the Lord’s providence various circumstances and issues arose among those early disciples of Christ which prompted the apostle to discuss points of truth in his epistles which have served the needs of the Lord’s people throughout the entire age—truths pertaining to the Christian life and cooperation in the ministry of the Gospel which previously had not been given the emphasis placed upon them by Paul in these letters. One of these issues concerned the relationship between Jewish converts to Christianity and Gentiles who became followers of Christ.

We learned from the Book of Acts that the acceptance of Gentile converts into the church posed a problem for Jewish Christians. For centuries the favorable standing of the Jews before God was based upon their obedience to the Law given to that nation at Mount Sinai, and to the various ordinances associated with the Law. It was difficult, therefore, for many of the Jewish Christians to realize that through faith in Christ and in his atoning work they could be entirely free from the Law. Besides, the “weak” ones in the faith were prone to insist that Gentile converts coming among them must submit to certain ordinances of the Law, such as circumcision.

As we learned, the apostles held a conference in Jerusalem to discuss this issue; but the conclusions of that conference were not heartily accepted by

all the Jewish brethren, so in many of the congregations it remained an issue. This was the case in the church at Rome, and Paul's letter to these brethren was designed to help them see the truth concerning Christ more clearly. It is with this in mind that, in the opening chapter he writes, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation."—Rom. 1:16

Today we do not have the Gentile-Jewish issue in the church, but the basic principles of truth set forth in Paul's letter to the church at Rome still reveal what it means to become, and continue to be, a Christian, a follower of Christ. The "Gospel of Christ," Paul says, "is the power of God unto salvation." In this he is simply saying that God's provision of salvation, and the power he will exercise to save, is through, and in keeping with, the Gospel of Christ, not through circumcision or other extraneous works.

In Jesus' parable of the sheepfold, he spoke of some who might try to enter the fold by some other way than through the door provided by the Shepherd. (John 10:1) "The same," he said, "is a thief and a robber." Perhaps not many today are endeavoring to enter the fold through the door of circumcision, but in these "last days" many other "doors" have been designed; prominent among these being the door of "good works."

Many today, in all parts of the professed Christian world, assume that living up to a high standard of morality makes one a Christian. Many take the position that adherents of various non-Christian religions, if they practice a high moral and ethical code, are just as pleasing to God as those who profess the Christian religion. It is in keeping with this view that Mohammed, Buddha,

Confucius, and other founders of non-Christian religions are often referred to as being in the same category, religiously, as Jesus Christ.

Because of the world's failure to understand the plan of God, this is excusable. The general thought that has come down to us from the Dark Ages is that all nonbelievers in Christ are forever "lost," and this means to suffer an eternity of torture in a hell of fire and brimstone. In view of this, the kindly disposed and sympathetic philosophers of the world are not to be blamed for attempting to widen the horizon of religious thought and outlook. Why should morally upright and sincerely religious people suffer such an eternity of despair because they never had an adequate opportunity to understand the provisions of the Creator's love through Christ?

How different is the Bible's approach to this problem! Contrary to the messages coming from the pulpits of most churches, the desire to escape an eternity of torment is not a reason to become a Christian, nor does God call anyone merely to offer personal salvation. God's call is an invitation to hear and appreciate the truth of his great plan of salvation as revealed in his word, and to become associated with Christ in the future work of his kingdom. Paul speaks of this in his second letter to the church at Corinth as being "workers together with him."—II Cor. 6:1

So, when Paul said that the "Gospel of Christ" is "the power of God unto salvation," he meant not only that those who now accept and obey the "Gospel" will obtain salvation, but also that through them the glorious opportunity of salvation will, during the thousand years of Christ's kingdom, be extended to the whole world of mankind. We

do not need, therefore, to open other “doors” to salvation in order to include the non-Christian world, for in God’s due time these will all be given their opportunity.

## **THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST**

What is the Gospel of Christ? Paul answers this question very clearly and definitely in his letter to the churches of Galatia, chapter 3, verses 8, 16, and 27-29. He says that the “gospel” was preached before unto Abraham when God said that through him [Abraham], all the nations of the earth would be blessed. From this it is evident that the Gospel, or “good news,” provides blessings for all. In verse 16 Paul explains that when God made this wonderful promise to Abraham concerning a “seed” which was to be the channel of blessing, Christ was the “Seed” he had in mind. That is why Paul used the expression, “Gospel of Christ.”

In verses 27 and 29 of the chapter, Paul presents additional information concerning the “Seed.” He says that as many as are “baptized into Christ,” and thus have “put on Christ,” are “Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Thus we are definitely informed that the church of Christ will share with him in the privilege and honor of being God’s channel of blessing to “all the families of the earth.”

But what does Paul mean by being “baptized into Christ”? The word “baptize” means to bury, and to be baptized into Christ means the burial of one’s will into the will of God through Christ. The details involved in this “baptism” cannot be clearly set forth in a few words. However, by putting together the meaning of the various

statements Paul makes on the subject, as we find them in his different epistles, these details become apparent. To begin with, one must exercise faith in God and in his Word. James explains that Abraham became the “friend” of God because of his faith. (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:11-13; James 2:23) This is understandable. Faith and confidence are the basis of all true friendships. Abraham’s faith enabled him to believe the promises of God and obey the expressed will of God in charting his life and in keeping with those promises.

So to be pleasing to God we also must have faith in God and in his revealed plan. In our study of the Bible up to this point, we have learned that God created man perfect, and in his image. We have seen that through disobedience man was condemned to death. In Romans, chapter 5, verse 18, Paul explains how this has affected every member of Adam’s race, including ourselves. He says, “By the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation.” Then he adds, “Even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.”

If we have faith in this and in similar declarations of the Bible, we will realize and acknowledge that by nature we are members of a sin-cursed and dying race, alienated from God through wicked works. The acknowledgment of this will lead to repentance and to our looking to God for a way out. Our faith will then enable us to accept the explanation of Paul and other writers of the Bible, that through Christ and the merit of his sacrificed life, we can approach God in prayer and receive his forgiveness, and the “free gift” which Paul describes as “justification of life.”

True faith is more, much more, than a mere mental assent to these revealed truths of the Bible. To be genuine, our faith must prompt us not only to repent of our sins, but also to dedicate ourselves to God and to the doing of his will. In his second letter to the church at Corinth, chapter 5, verses 14 and 15, Paul explains how one who has true faith in God's loving arrangements will react to them. He says, "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."

If we conclude that we should no longer live unto and for ourselves, but for the Lord, it means that we will present ourselves unreservedly to him and to the doing of his will. In Romans 12:1 this is explained to be the presenting of our bodies a living sacrifice. If we have the proper faith in the arrangements and promises of God, we will know that although we are still fallen and imperfect, the Lord will accept our consecrated lives, and use our imperfect bodies in his service. Paul explains the thought, saying that our offering to the Lord is "holy, acceptable" to him, and our "reasonable service."

Because the word baptism means to bury—*baptizo* in the Greek language, meaning to fully immerse, or bury—it is used in the Bible to convey the thought of full surrender of one's will to do God's will, as his will is expressed through Christ. The offering of ourselves to do the Lord's will is, therefore, our part in being "baptized into Christ." To help us grasp the full thought Paul uses the human body as an illustration. In this illustration

Jesus is the Head, and the other parts of the body represent the various members of the church. To be in this "body" means to have Christ as our Head, which means that our wills are buried in his.

In his letter to the brethren at Rome, Paul elaborates still further on what it means to be "baptized" into Christ. We read, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."—Rom. 6:3-5

Christ buried his will into the will of his Father, and it was the will of his Father that he lay down his life in sacrifice for the sins of the world. And now, Paul explains, we are buried or "planted" together with Christ—baptized into his death. Full consecration to the Lord leads to this, for all those who through the Gospel of Christ are invited to walk in the "narrow way."

In this passage Paul is not discussing the subject of water baptism, although it is important that every consecrated one be baptized in water, not as a means of attaining salvation, but as a testimony of that which has taken place in the heart, namely, a full surrender to the Lord. It was for this reason that Jesus was immersed in water. Water baptism is a beautiful symbol of the burial of one's will into the will of the Lord, and of the hope of being raised in the likeness of Christ's resurrection.

When one is lowered into the water he becomes helpless, fully dependent upon the immerser to

raise him out of the water. So it is in full consecration to the Lord. We give ourselves over fully into his hands, for him to do with us as he wishes, and his will is that we die sacrificially with Christ. We have confidence in his love and grace. We know that he will fulfil his promises to strengthen us in our every time of need. We know, as Paul states, that since we are “called according to his purpose,” the Lord will cause “all things” to “work together” for our good.—Rom. 8:28

In giving ourselves wholly to the Lord, it is with the assurance that in his dealings with us no mistakes will be made; that he is too wise to err and too loving to be unkind. So we gladly give our hearts to him, trusting in his promises that, finishing our course in death, he will raise us up together with Christ to live and reign with him. This is beautifully illustrated when the immerser lifts us out of the water.

It is this full devotion to the Lord, this being baptized into Christ's death, that Paul refers to when, in his letter to the Galatian brethren, he wrote that as many as are “baptized into Christ,” and have thereby “put on Christ,” are Abraham's seed, “and heirs according to the promise.” (Gal. 3:27-29) The provisions of the “Gospel of Christ” for them is that they die with Christ, that they might live and reign with him. The further provision of the Gospel is that through these, as the “seed of Abraham,” God's promised blessings will, in his own “due time,” flow out to all the families of the earth.

## **PEACE WITH GOD**

In his letter to the Philippian brethren, Paul speaks of the Gospel “call” as a “high calling,”

and indeed it is “high.” (Phil. 3:14) It is so high we could not in our own merit and strength attain to it. But through the merit of Christ and in the strength of the Lord, we can. Apart from Christ we could have no standing with God; but through him we are “justified,” and have “peace with God,” no longer alienated from him through wicked works. Our works are still imperfect, but we have the assurance that they are made acceptable through the blood of Christ. It is this justified standing before God that gives us “access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and [we] rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (Rom. 5:1,2) What wonderful assurances and glorious prospects are thus set before the “called-out” ones!

Paul speaks of these as also being “in Christ Jesus,” as members of his “body.” He assures us that “there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.” (Rom. 8:1) All the instructions of the Lord, which are to be found in his Word for the guidance of this class of “called-out” ones, the church, were written under the inspiration of his Holy Spirit. To “walk after the Spirit,” therefore, is obediently to do the Lord’s will as we find it outlined in his Word. To walk “after the flesh” would be to chart our lives according to our own preferences. So Paul is emphasizing that even after we have dedicated our lives to the Lord, it is essential to continue walking as he would have us walk. Jesus referred to the way in which the Christian walks as being narrow and difficult, but we must continue to walk in it if we would maintain our favorable standing before the Lord.

## NEW CREATURES

In his letters, Paul reveals that those who dedicate themselves to the will and service of God become “new creatures.” “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature,” he explains, “Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” (II Cor. 5:17) As the world sees us, we are no different than before, except that we do not participate in the things of the world. But God, who looks upon the heart, sees our new determination to please him and our struggle to bring every thought into conformity with his will. Moreover, through his promises, he has given us a new objective in life. Now our affections are set on things above, “where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” (Col. 3:1-3) Whereas previously our chief thought in life was to make a living, and to enjoy as many of the good things of life as possible, now our chief consideration, and our greatest joy, is to do the will of our God; to lay down our lives in his service. This is our vocation, while our necessary efforts to obtain food, clothing, and shelter become our avocation.

Abraham, through his faith in the promises of God, became God’s friend. We also enjoy his friendship and fellowship, but we become more than friends. We become the “sons of God,” his children. Observing this, Paul adds, “If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” (Rom. 8:17) The “mountain of the house of the LORD” foretold in Isaiah 2:2 and Micah 4:1 will consist of Jesus and his church as the ruling “sons” of God. It is to this high position that we are called, and to

which, if faithful, we will attain. Paul says that the whole “creation” is waiting for the manifestation of these “sons of God.”—Rom. 8:22,19

## **HELP AND GUIDANCE**

Paul’s letters are designed to encourage this “called-out” class to faithfulness in living their consecrated lives. He assures them of God’s help and guidance: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” he asks. After enumerating possible hardships and difficulties which might take us out of God’s care, he adds, “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor [wicked] angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”—Rom. 8:35-39

To the churches of Galatia Paul wrote, “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” (Gal. 6:9) In his letter to the saints at Ephesus, Paul likens the Christian to a soldier in battle needing armor. He wrote, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” (Eph. 6:10,11) Writing to the saints at Philippi, Paul expresses appreciation for the fellowship of these brethren and his confidence that the Lord would continue to care for them, 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

In his letter to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colosse, Paul explains that he was

praying for the brethren there that they “might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.”—Col. 1:10-12

To the brethren in Thessalonica, Paul wrote, “Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it. ... The Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.” (I Thess. 5:16,17,24; II Thess. 3:3) These are but a few of the rich gems of thought to be found here and there throughout Paul’s letters; thoughts designed to encourage the brethren to remain steadfast in their stand for the Lord, and to be faithful in service, knowing that the Lord would continue to supply them strength and guidance in their every time of need.

Additionally, however, in most of Paul’s letters there is a principal theme which he discusses. We have already noted this in connection with his letter to the brethren in Rome. He wanted these brethren to know that whether Jew or Gentile, the only way to obtain the blessing of “justification” and of enjoying “peace with God” was through faith in the atoning blood of Christ, a faith manifested in full consecration to follow in his steps—that circumcision or other ordinances of the Law availed nothing in this respect. This issue is touched upon in several of Paul’s letters, indicating that the controversy was widespread in the Early Church.

This was not the only issue at that time confronting those "called to be saints." Human reasoning and fleshly ambitions led to other points of controversy. Jesus said to his disciples, "One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven." (Matt. 23:8,9) Many of the professed followers of Christ have not been obedient to these instructions, and even in some of the congregations of the Early Church there was a tendency to exalt human leadership and to forget that "all ye are brethren."

This was particularly true in the church at Corinth, and this is one of the points discussed in Paul's first letter to these brethren. In the opening chapter he says: "Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" (I Cor. 1:12,13) In the third chapter he continues, "Ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?"—I Cor. 3:3

In verses 6 to 9 of chapter 3, Paul explains the proper relationship that should be maintained among the brethren and servants in the church. He says, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." Then he adds, "We are laborers together with God."

Paul did not mean by this, however, that there was to be no law and order in the church. In chapter 12 of this same letter he sets forth the

Lord's outline of church organization. He uses the human body as an illustration of the relationship of Jesus to the church; Jesus, of course, being the "Head" in this "body." "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular," he explains, then adds, "God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues."—I Cor. 12:27,28

The reference to "miracles," "gifts of healings," and "diversities of tongues" obviously means the brethren in the Early Church who were blessed with these "gifts." These were special gifts needed during the time the church was being established. They could be conferred only by the apostles, and when the apostles died these special, temporary arrangements soon ceased.

In Paul's letter to the brethren in Ephesus, he again outlines God's arrangements for servants in the church. He says that Christ "gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." The work of "edifying," Paul shows, was to be accomplished by the truth of the Scriptures. It is through "speaking the truth in love," that we "grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ."—Eph. 4:11,12,15

In his letter to the brethren in Corinth, Paul enlarges upon the importance of love as the motive of all Christian activity. After outlining the organization of the church, showing that all of its members have a service to render, he continues, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of

angels, and have not charity [love], I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.” (I Cor. 13:1) Throughout the remainder of this 13th chapter, the apostle presents the most eloquent treatise on the subject of Christian love that has ever been written. It is only when this divine principle of unselfishness motivates the “called-out” ones that they are able to work together harmoniously and to the glory of God.

## **INSTRUCTIONS TO TEACHERS**

Paul’s two letters to Timothy, and the one to Titus, contain much information especially appropriate to those who serve as teachers in the church. Since it is God’s will that every Christian be an ambassador for Christ, and to serve as a light in the world, it means that every Christian is, in reality, a teacher. To Timothy he wrote, “The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves.”—II Tim. 2:24,25

To Titus he wrote, “In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.”—Titus 2:7,8

Of fundamental importance to every Christian are Paul’s instructions to Timothy in his second letter, chapter 2, verse 15. We quote, “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) What is meant by “rightly dividing the word of truth”? In verse 18 of this chapter the apostle mentions one

point that he doubtless had in mind in this connection. He warns Timothy of some "who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some."

One of the most important doctrines of the Word of God is the resurrection of the dead. No one could be in error by teaching that the dead are to be raised. The mistake Paul mentions is that some were teaching that the resurrection had already occurred. He indicates to Timothy that those who were making this mistake had failed to "rightly divide the word of truth." One way to rightly divide the Word of truth is to properly observe the time elements in the plan of God, noting that there is what the apostle refers to as a "due time" for every feature of his plan of salvation.

In Paul's letter to the brethren in Ephesus, chapter 1, verse 10, he speaks of "the dispensation of the fulness of times," in which the Lord will "gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him." The fact that within the plan of God there is a "dispensation of the fulness of times" indicates that there are other dispensations, or ages, which precede the one in which time comes to the full. It is also obvious that since it is in the dispensation of the "fulness of times" that "all things" are gathered "in Christ," all things are not gathered during previous ages.

So it becomes the privilege of the Christian in seeking to know God's will and plan, to "rightly divide the word of truth" in order to apply its many promises and prophecies to the age or dispensation to which they belong. Failure

to do this leads to apparent contradictions in the Bible, and inability to see the beauty of the divine plan.

In our study of the books of the Bible thus far, we have seen that the Law of God given at Mount Sinai was only for the nation of Israel, and it was designed for the Jewish age. We have learned from Paul's letters that the followers of Jesus are not under that Law, but under grace, and that God is dealing with them upon the basis of their faith in the atoning work of Christ and the depth of their consecration to do his will.

In our study of the Book of Acts, we learned that the present age in the divine plan is the time when a "people for his name" is being called out from the world to live and reign with Christ in the age to come—that this is not the age in which God is converting the whole world. (Acts 15:13-18) In this text, the Gospel Age feature of the divine plan is explained. Following the expression, "after this," comes a description of the work of the next age, the "dispensation of the fulness of times."

We have also discovered that while there are many prophecies in the Old Testament pertaining to the coming of Christ, not all of them were fulfilled at his first coming. Those describing his suffering and death were fulfilled, but the wonderful Old Testament descriptions of the glory of the Messianic kingdom, and the blessings the people would enjoy under that kingdom, apply to the time of Christ's mediatorial reign. So it is most important in our study of the Bible to note carefully its "due times" and its various "after this" sequences.

## **TWO PARTS OF SALVATION**

In “rightly dividing the word of truth” it is also essential to keep in mind that its many promises of salvation not only apply to different ages, but often refer to different salvations. Paul indicates this when, in speaking of the completion of the plan of God in the “dispensation of the fulness of times,” he explains that some will be gathered in “heaven,” and some on “earth.”—Eph. 1:10

In our study of the Old Testament books, we observed many promises applying to that period in the divine plan referred to by Peter as the “times of restitution of all things.” We found that all those promises described earthly blessings of one kind or another—opening of blind eyes, building houses and inhabiting them, beating swords into plowshares, etc. The New Testament, on the other hand, begins to unfold spiritual, or heavenly promises, to those who faithfully follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

Jesus said to his disciples, “I go to prepare a place for you. ... I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” (John 14:2,3) In keeping with this, Paul wrote to the Colossian brethren, saying, “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. ... When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.”—Col. 3:2-4

In the 15th chapter of Paul’s first letter to the brethren in Corinth, he employs the time element in the divine plan as well as the earthly and heavenly salvations in his discussion of the resurrection of the dead. First he establishes the fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

He stresses the importance of this, saying, "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." (I Cor. 15:17,18) In verse 22 he writes, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." This is a general statement of the resurrection, emphasizing that the hope of life after death for all mankind is in the fact that they will be raised from the dead.

Then Paul introduces a distinction in time in connection with the resurrection—"Every man in his own order," he says, "Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." (vs. 23) The church of Christ—those who are members of his "body," as explained by Paul in the 12th chapter of this epistle—are included with Jesus as "Christ the firstfruits." In the order of the resurrection, these are the first to be raised from the dead.

Then comes that important word, "afterward," or "after this," "they that are Christ's at his coming." The Greek word translated "coming" in this text is *parousia*. It means "presence," and the reference is to Christ's second visit to earth, and especially to the "times of restitution of all things [the mediatorial reign of Christ and his church]." It will be during that time that the remainder of mankind will be raised from the dead.

In the next verse, Paul writes, "Then"—the time element again—"cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."

(I Cor. 15:24-26) Here again we have the completion of God's plan described, and as Paul shows, the age of completion is the kingdom age, the time when Christ and his "called-out" ones will reign as the "seed of Abraham" for the "blessing of all the families of the earth." That will be the "dispensation of the fulness of times," and before its end all mankind will have been given an opportunity to be restored to human perfection upon the earth.

Having thus explained the proper sequence of the resurrection, later in the chapter Paul touches upon the different rewards to be administered. He explains that in the resurrection some will have heavenly bodies, and some will have earthly bodies; "celestial" and "terrestrial." (vs. 40) He explains, however, that those who receive spiritual, or heavenly, bodies in the resurrection, were human beings when they died; that their heavenly bodies are given to them as a reward for faithfulness in laying down their lives with Christ.

It is to these that the hope of immortality is extended. No one is inherently immortal. The idea that human beings have "immortal souls" within them is not taught in the Bible. Paul, speaking of the resurrection of the "called-out" ones, says that "this mortal" will "put on immortality." (vs. 53) Following this, he introduces the time element again: "Then," that is after this, after the resurrection of the "firstfruits" to immortality, "shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"—vss. 54,55

The "saying" that death will be "swallowed up in victory" is quoted from Isaiah 25:8. This entire

text reads, "He [the Lord] will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it." To this the Prophet Isaiah adds, "It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."—Isa. 25:8,9

Yes, it will be in "that day" that death will be "swallowed up in victory." But "that day" will not come until the work of the present day, or age, is finished—that work being the calling out from the world of the "people for his name," and exalting them in the resurrection, to glory, honor, and immortality, to live and reign with Christ in his kingdom. That kingdom will rule over all nations during "that day" when tears are being wiped from off all faces, and when all the dead are being awakened and given an opportunity to believe and live forever.—I Tim. 2:16

How marvelously harmonious is the testimony of the Bible when we "rightly divide the word of truth"! Not only does it clearly reveal God's loving plan for the "called-out" ones of this age, and for the "restitution" class—all mankind—in the next age, but it also outlines the way in which we as Christians should now walk in order to be pleasing to God. As Paul reveals in his various letters, it is a way of sacrifice, a narrow way of full devotion to the Lord, a way in which the will of the Lord comes before every other consideration. Nevertheless, the Christian way is also one of joy; so Paul wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice."—Phil. 4:4

## **SLAVES AND MASTERS**

In his letters, Paul reveals that all classes of people are called to walk in the Christian way; that the “called-out” class is made up of rich and poor, as well as people out of all nations and races. These are “all one” in Christ Jesus.—Gal. 3:28

In the days of the Early Church slavery was widespread. Paul’s letters reveal that both slave owners, or masters, and slaves were “called” into the “way,” and to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. He admonishes the converted slaves to be obedient to their masters, and the masters to love their slaves.—Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-25; 4:1

Philemon was one slave owner of the time who accepted Christ and became a faithful Christian. One of his slaves was named Onesimus. Before accepting Christ, Onesimus ran away from his master and went to Rome. While in Rome, he came in contact with Paul. He had probably met Paul previously while the latter was visiting in the home of his master, Philemon. Through Paul’s ministry, Onesimus accepted Christ and became a devoted servant of the Lord. He realized he had disobeyed the laws of the time by running away from his master, and that now, as a Christian, his course of duty was to return and seek the forgiveness of Philemon.

Obviously, this situation presented a difficult problem for both Onesimus and Philemon. Paul sensed the situation and wrote a letter to Philemon for the former slave to deliver to his master personally when he returned to him. In this letter he asks Philemon to take back his former slave and to treat him now as a brother in Christ. This is the subject matter of “The Epistle of Paul to

Philemon.” It is a wonderful demonstration of the manner in which Christian love can be depended upon to solve the most difficult problems that may arise among the Lord’s people, those called out to be a “people for his name.”

Since this “little flock” class, to whom it is the Father’s good pleasure to give the kingdom, are being prepared to administer the laws of God for the blessing of all mankind, it is important that they become developed in love, that all selfishness be put away; for only thus will they become properly qualified to participate in the rulership of that new kingdom that has, as its great objective, the establishment of the will of God “in earth, as it is in heaven.”—Matt. 6:10

Paul himself was thoroughly devoted to this Christian way of love, and he knew that it was leading him into a sacrificial death with Christ. To him nothing else in life was important. To the brethren at Philippi he wrote, “This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”—the “high calling” to live and reign with Christ.—Phil. 3:13,14

Near the close of his faithful life of service, locked in a Roman prison awaiting execution, Paul wrote to Timothy, saying, “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.”—II Tim. 4:6-8

That Christ would return and receive his faithful followers unto himself, who then, in due time, would reign with him for the blessing of “all the families of the earth,” was the great hope of all in the Early Church. Their faith in this fruition of their hopes enabled them to continue their witness in an unfriendly world, even though it frequently meant imprisonment and death, as in the case of Paul. May their example encourage us in our service of the Lord, and may we too be among those who will receive the “crown of righteousness” because we also “love his appearing”! ■

## **QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 7**

How many letters did the Apostle Paul write, which are now books in the New Testament, and to whom did he write them? Pages 175,176

What is the general purpose of these letters? Page 177

What differences of viewpoint pertaining to the Christian life does Paul discuss in his “Epistle to the Romans”? Pages 178,179

Can one be a Christian simply by adhering to a high moral and ethical code? Page 179

What provision has God made for the non-Christian world? Pages 180,181

What is the “Gospel of Christ”? Page 181

How does being “baptized into Christ” make one a part of the “seed of Abraham”? Page 182

What basic element of character is essential in order to be pleasing to God? Page 182

What does the love of Christ constrain us to do? Page 183

What is one of the illustrations Paul uses to

convey the thought of full surrender to the will of God in Christ? Pages 183,184

What does Paul mean by being “planted together” in the likeness of Christ’s death? Page 184

What is the purpose of water baptism? How does it illustrate being “baptized into Christ”? Pages 184,185

Upon what basis are we worthy of the wonderful reward promised to those who walk faithfully in Jesus’ footsteps? Page 185

What does Paul mean by being “in Christ Jesus”? Page 186

What is meant by the expression, “Walk after the Spirit”? Page 186

How does this differ from walking “after the flesh”? Page 186

What is a “new creature,” and how is it true of these that “old things” are passed away? Page 187

In what sense are Christians “new creatures,” and what is their vocation? Page 187

What is the manifestation of the sons of God for which the whole creation is waiting? Pages 187,188

What assurances does Paul give that God will help his people in their every time of need? Page 188

Jesus is the Head of his church. What titles does the Apostle Paul give to other servants of the church? Page 190

In which of his letters does Paul outline the organization of the church? Page 191

What divine principle is of paramount importance as a motivating force among the brethren in order for them to work together harmoniously and to the glory of God? Pages 191,192

What is the principal subject matter in Paul’s

letters to Timothy and Titus? Page 192

Why is it important for a servant of God not to “strive”? Page 192

What does Paul mean by “rightly dividing the Word of truth”? Page 193

What is the “dispensation of the fulness of times”? Page 193

For what age in the plan of God was the Law given at Mount Sinai designed? Page 194

During what age does God call out from the world a “people for his name”? Page 194

What is the difference in the nature of the prophecies pertaining to Jesus’ First Advent and those which apply to his second visit? Page 194

What two aspects of salvation are promised in the Bible, and how are these described in Ephesians 1:10? Page 195

What is the “place” which Jesus promised to prepare for his disciples? Page 195

What is the general subject matter discussed by the Apostle Paul in the 15th chapter of I Corinthians? Pages 195,196

Why is the resurrection of Jesus so fundamental to the Gospel of Christ? Pages 195,196

Explain the order of the resurrection, and who are referred to by the expression, “Christ the firstfruits.” Page 196

Explain Paul’s use of the time element of God’s plan in his explanation of how and when all will be made alive in Christ. Pages 196,197

What are “celestial” and “terrestrial” bodies? Page 197

Do human beings possess “immortal souls”? Page 197

When and how will Christians receive immortality? Page 197

What great feature of the divine plan of salvation will follow the resurrection and glorification of the “called-out” ones of this age? Page 198

Is the “calling” of this age limited to any certain class or race of people? Page 199

Relate the story of Onesimus and his master, Philemon. Page 199

What great hope inspires all true followers of Christ to faithfulness in divine service? Page 201

## CHAPTER 8

# Paul's Letter to the Hebrews

U nique among the books of the New Testament is Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews. Although it is not so stated, it seems probable that this letter was written to a particular group, or congregation, of Hebrew converts to Christianity, for it indicates that those for whose benefit it was written were somewhat lacking in faith and zeal for the Christian cause, which could hardly have been true of all the Hebrew Christians in the Early Church. The purpose of the letter seems to have been to encourage the brethren to take a renewed hold on the promises of God, that they might continue faithfully in his service.

Throughout the letter there are several statements urging the brethren to hold fast, to be patient, to "take heed." Chapter 2, verse 1, reads, "We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." This is a timely exhortation to all Christians, for it is so easy to become lax, to let the precious truths of the Word of God "slip" from our minds and hearts, and to allow the things of the world to take their place.

In this letter Paul specially emphasizes that “the things which we have heard” had been communicated through God’s beloved Son, Christ Jesus. The opening verse reads, “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.”—Heb. 1:1,2

Since the epistle was written to strengthen the faith of Jewish believers, it was appropriate that Paul call attention to the fact that the same God who had spoken to their fathers through the prophets had now spoken to them through his Son. God is unchangeable, so of necessity the truths which he revealed through Jesus would be in harmony with, and a further unfolding of, the glorious divine plan concerning which the prophets had testified. This fact is emphasized over and over again throughout the letter.

Besides, in order additionally to strengthen the faith of these Hebrew Christians, in the opening chapter of his letter to them Paul shows how exalted a position Jesus occupies in the divine plan, and how greatly honored he was by their God, the God of Israel. Jehovah had appointed him “heir of all things.” It was by him also that “he [the Creator] had made the worlds.” Furthermore, after Jesus had “purged our sins” by the shedding of his blood, the God of Israel raised him from the dead and highly exalted him so that he is now “sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”—vs. 3

The Israelites knew of the existence of angels; that is, spirit beings of a higher order of creation than the human, and invisible to man. Many

references to these are made by the prophets, indicating that they were very honorably used by God to convey messages to his people, and to render other services. But Paul explains that Jesus had been made “so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.”—Heb. 1:4

Then, to emphasize still further the great honor the God of Israel had bestowed upon his beloved son, Christ Jesus, Paul says, “For unto which of the angels said he [God] at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?” (vs. 5) God had given these blessed assurances to Jesus. Through the Prophet David he had said, “Thou art my Son: this day have I begotten thee.” (Ps. 2:7) Paul also indicates that the promise of God recorded in I Chronicles 22:10 —“He shall be my Son, and I will be his father”—applies to Jesus.

Paul explains that while, according to the Prophet David, God had made “... angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire”—indicating the highly important service he had commissioned the angels to render to his son—he had said, “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity: therefore God, even thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.”—Heb. 1:7-9; Ps. 104:4; 45:6,7

In verse 13 Paul asks the Hebrew brethren, “To which of the angels said he [the God of Israel] at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?” This honor laden statement had been made to Jesus through the

Prophet David and, as Paul indicates, helps to emphasize the great height of glory to which the beloved Son of God had been exalted, and therefore the great weight of authority with which he had spoken to God's people in "these last days."

How strengthening to faith this must have been to the Hebrew Christians! They had accepted Christ, but perhaps had not realized so fully before the wonderful manner in which he had been foretold by the prophets of Israel, and the extent to which their God had exalted him, and was using him as the channel of truth to his people.

Paul opens his letter to the Hebrews with the reminder that the God of Israel, in speaking to their fathers through the prophets, had done so "at sundry times and in divers manners." How true this is! God's great plan of human redemption and restoration is not set forth in sequence by the prophets, but as one of the prophets states it, "here a little and there a little"—or as Paul says, "at sundry times, and in divers manners." (Heb. 1:1) Nevertheless, when all the various portions of truth set forth in prophecy, by promise and by illustration, are pieced together, the loving plan of God shines forth from his Word in resplendent harmony and beauty.

Until Jesus came, the testimony of the prophets was understood to assure the restoration of the human race to life on the earth. The Apostle Peter used the word "restitution" to describe this hope, and declared that the "times of restitution" had been "spoken by the mouth of all God's holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:19-21) As the "fathers" of Israel understood it, and their understanding was correct, this gigantic project of rehabilitating the human race would be

accomplished by a Messiah whom Israel's God would send, and Jesus, of course, was that Messiah.

If the Hebrew Christians were to have their faith in Christ as the "sent of God" strengthened, and their zeal for the divine cause renewed, they would need to be reassured that he had come to carry out this loving purpose of their God. To them Jesus could not be the Messiah of promise if he failed to fulfill that which God had spoken by all their prophets. The Prophet David was one who foretold the "times of restitution," and he emphasized God's interest in his human creation, an interest manifested by his promise to send a Messiah to "visit" mankind to accomplish this purpose.

In referring to the original creation of mankind, David states in his prophecy that man was made a "little lower than the angels," and was given a "dominion," that "all things were put under him." The implication of the prophecy is that the promised "visit" to earth by a representative of God would be for the purpose of restoring man's lost dominion. David's prophecy is recorded in Psalm 8:4-8, and in the second chapter of Paul's letter to the Hebrew Christians, verses 6 to 8, he quotes the prophecy, and in his comments shows it was beginning to be fulfilled by Jesus.

In quoting the prophecy Paul explains, "But now we see not yet all things put under him [man]. But 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." (Heb. 2:8,9) Thus Paul associates Jesus with David's prophecy, showing that he was the one

whom the Creator sent to “visit” the human race for the purpose of restoring the lost dominion. But, as Paul explains, the dominion has not yet been restored, although, as he says, an important step toward this end had already been taken—Jesus had been “made flesh,” made “a little lower than the angels,” as Adam was; “crowned with glory and honor” again like Adam, “that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”

It was essential that Jesus “taste death for every man” so that the original sentence of death could be set aside and the way prepared for the recovery of man from death before his lost dominion could be restored. As Paul explained, while we do not see David’s prophecy completely fulfilled, we “see” in the redemptive work of Jesus the beginning of its fulfillment.

## **OTHER SONS**

After explaining this point to the Hebrew brethren in order that they might be assured that the divine purpose expressed by their prophets was, through Jesus, progressing according to the divine plan, Paul introduces another point of truth which was also designed to help them understand the way of the Lord more clearly. It was the fact that “many sons” were to be brought to glory by the path of suffering, following in the footsteps of Jesus, the “captain of their salvation.”—Heb. 2:10

We learned from Jesus and from Paul that the Christian way is a narrow and difficult one. Jesus said, “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matt. 7:14) The “life” Jesus referred to is the “glory and honor and immortality” mentioned by Paul which, as he explained, is

obtainable only through “patient continuance in well doing.”—Rom. 2:7

The Hebrew brethren would doubtless be fairly well acquainted with the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the Messianic kingdom and the blessings it was designed to bring to the people. They believed that Christ was the Messiah, but they did not realize clearly that there would be a long waiting period before he returned to establish his kingdom. In chapter 10, verses 36 and 37, Paul wrote, “Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.”—Heb. 10:36,37

In the beginning of their Christian career, these Hebrew brethren “endured a great fight of afflictions,” Paul indicates, and “took joyfully” the “spoiling” of their “goods.” (Heb. 10:32-34) They knew that at the time the Christian cause was unpopular, but possibly thought that Christ would soon return and then they would share in the glory of his kingdom, and their suffering would be ended. So throughout the letter Paul encourages them to be patient; and to help them remain faithful he explains the purpose of Christian suffering. Just as, through suffering, our “Captain” was proved worthy of his high exaltation, so the “many sons” who are to reign with him in his kingdom must likewise prove faithful through trial.

## **A SPIRITUAL PRIESTHOOD**

Chapter 3, verse 1 reads, “Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession

[order], Christ Jesus.” We learned from Jesus, from the Book of Acts, and from the previous letters of Paul, that the followers of Jesus during this age are partakers of a “high calling,” invited to suffer and to die with Jesus that they might live and reign with him. These are encouraged by Paul to “set their affections on things above, not on things on the earth.” (Col. 3:1-3) Paul is speaking of this same “high calling” when, to the Hebrew brethren, he writes, “Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling.”—Heb. 3:1

This thought in itself is not new, but Paul does introduce an additional and vitally important truth when he explains that as brethren of Christ we should consider ourselves members of a priestly order of which Jesus is the High Priest. To most Gentiles of Paul’s day this language would have had little meaning, but the Jews knew about priests; for a priesthood, composed of a high priest and underpriests, had administered the religious affairs of their nation through the centuries, from the time of their exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. The first of Israel’s high priests was Aaron, the brother of Moses, and his sons were the underpriests. In chapter 8, verse 5, Paul explains that those priests served “unto the example and shadow of heavenly things.”—Heb. 8:5

We learn from Paul’s letter to Timothy that Christians should be “rightly dividing the word of truth.” (II Tim. 2:15) This is very important in connection with the time features in God’s plan. Various periods were set apart in which certain phases of the divine plan were to be accomplished. It is also true that some of the promises of the Bible describe a heavenly salvation, while others pertain to “restitution” blessings on the

earth. Now we find Paul introducing another aspect of truth; that is, the typical, or as he calls it, “shadows.” Through his letter to the Hebrews, Paul draws heavily on the lessons taught by God in Israel’s typical religious services, and by the Tabernacle structure erected in the wilderness, which was the center of their worship.

In chapter 3, verse 1, Paul indicates not only that Jesus was represented by Israel’s high priest, but also that his followers, in this picture, are the underpriests. Paul adheres to this general viewpoint throughout the entire letter. The work of Israel’s priesthood was largely one of offering sacrifice; so, as antitypical priests, we are to offer sacrifice, not animal sacrifices, but ourselves, following the example of Jesus, who sacrificed his life that the world might live. We see that the “brethren” of Jesus, the many sons who will share his glory, are not pictured by the nation of Israel as a whole, but by the priesthood of that nation. It is exceedingly important to keep this distinction in mind as we review the important lessons of the epistle.

## **THE MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD**

Paul goes even further back than the Aaronic priesthood to draw a lesson from God’s dealings with his ancient people—back to the days of Abraham, when there was a priest whose name was Melchizedek. Paul quotes a prophecy of the Old Testament to show that God intended Melchizedek to be a type, or a picture, of a greater priesthood to come, one in which Jesus would be the High Priest. He quotes from Psalm 110:4: “Thou [Christ] art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.”—Heb. 7:17

Much of the 7th chapter of Hebrews is devoted to proving to the Hebrew brethren that Jesus was the antitype of Melchizedek. To the Israelites the Aaronic priesthood was all important. Probably most of them did not know that long centuries before Aaron, God had authorized Melchizedek to serve as a priest, and so arranged his service to teach a lesson that was not embodied in the Aaronic priesthood type. The Aaronic priesthood foreshadowed the sacrificial work of Christ and his followers. But Paul explains that Melchizedek was a king as well as a priest, so his service was a picture of the enthroned Messianic company during the next age, the kingdom age.

Paul speaks of Melchizedek as being "Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually." (Heb. 7:3) This has been explained to mean that Melchizedek was without father or mother in the priesthood. Archaeologists have discovered that district rulers of Melchizedek's time were appointed to their positions by the pharaohs of Egypt, and in assuming office were obliged to take the following oath: "It was not my father, and it was not my mother, who established me in this place, but it was the mighty arm of the king."

Probably Melchizedek was appointed under these conditions to his kingly office, the Lord recognizing him also as a priest to accept tithes and to offer sacrifice. This would explain Paul's language indicating he had no father or mother in the priesthood, and would also make his appointment and service to be a proper representation of Christ's combined office of priest

and king. Christ did not inherit his office from another—from father or mother—but it was given to him directly by God, and he will have no successors. The rulership of Jesus as a king is during the Millennial Age. Then the “brethren” who suffer and die with him will be his associate kings. The present is the age of sacrifice, and in this one aspect of service Jesus and his church are well pictured by the Aaronic priesthood and the services they rendered during the Jewish age.

In this letter to the Hebrews, as in other epistles, Paul encourages the brethren to faithfulness as they keep before them the example of Christ and his fidelity to the divine cause. It differs only in the method of approach and the language used. To the saints at Colosse, Paul wrote, “Set your affection on things above,” where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. (Col. 3:13) To the Hebrew brethren he speaks of a hope, which “we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.”—Heb. 6:19,20

A Hebrew believer would know that the expression “within the veil” was based upon Israel’s “tabernacle in the wilderness.” When Moses was given instructions by the Lord concerning the construction of the Tabernacle and its furnishings, he said, “See ... that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount.” (Exod. 25:9,40; Heb. 8:5) Death was the penalty for not following instructions. The importance of making all things “according to the pattern” was that they were intended to be pictures, or a “shadow,” of “good things to come.”—Heb. 10:1

## THE TABERNACLE

Let us, then, note briefly some of the main features of the Tabernacle, that we may understand more clearly Paul's reference to that which is "within the veil, whither the forerunner is for us entered." (Heb. 6:20) The Tabernacle itself was rectangular in shape—45 feet long, 15 feet wide, and 15 feet high. It was covered by four huge curtains, one upon the other. The opening was covered by a curtain called the "door," and the interior was divided by a curtain called the "veil." This curtain was drawn across the interior thirty feet from the front entrance, leaving the rear compartment a fifteen foot cube, in exterior measurement. It was called the "most holy." The front compartment was called the "holy."

The Tabernacle was located in an enclosure formed by white curtains. This enclosure was called the "court." It was 150 feet long and 75 feet wide. The entrance, called the "gate," was in the east end of the court looking toward the first veil of the Tabernacle. This door to the court was covered by a linen curtain.

In the center of the court, about a third of the distance from the door to the Tabernacle, was an altar, called the "brazen altar." This was made of wood overlaid with copper. Between this altar and the Tabernacle was a sort of wash basin, called the "laver." This was made of solid copper.

In the first "holy" of the Tabernacle, there were three articles of furniture—a table, a candlestick, and a small altar. The table was to the right as one entered. It was called the table of showbread, because twelve cakes of showbread, in two piles, were always to be found on it. The candlestick, with seven branches was to the left. The altar

was in the center, and close to the second veil. It was made of wood, overlaid with gold.

The only article of furniture in the most holy was called the “ark of the covenant.” It was a rectangular box made of wood, overlaid with gold. Its cover was a solid gold slab from which were cleverly hammered two angel-like forms called “cherubim.” These were made with outstretched wings, as though ready to fly. They faced each other, looking down toward the gold cover of the ark. This cover was called the “mercy seat.” A bright, miraculous light continuously appeared just above the mercy seat.

It was to this compartment of the Tabernacle that Paul referred by the expression “within the veil,” where our forerunner has entered. He refers to it again in chapter 9, verse 24, saying, “Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”—Heb. 9:24

The court of the Tabernacle, being surrounded by white linen curtains, represented the typical purity of those who ministered within. Antitypically our bodies are made acceptable through Christ. In another letter Paul speaks of our being sanctified and cleansed with the “washing of water by the word.” (Eph. 5:26) In Hebrews 10:22 he speaks of “our bodies washed with pure water.” This is represented by the priests washing at the laver in the court.

Meanwhile, our new minds are pictured in the first holy of the Tabernacle. There we feed upon the “showbread,” the Word of God. There we are enlightened by the golden candlestick, representing the light of God’s Word as it shines

out through his people. There, also, we offer our praise and devotion to God on the golden altar on which the priests burned incense, inspired to faithfulness by the realization that Christ, our forerunner, is just beyond the veil, and that in due time, if faithful, we will join him there and so be “forever with the Lord.”

It is “within the veil” that our hope is anchored, Paul says. It is the hope he has outlined in the preceding verses. Beginning with verse 13, of chapter 6, he speaks of the promise God made to Abraham—the promise that through his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. He notes the fact that God had bound this promise with his oath, and explains that because of this, we have “two immutable things” (Heb. 6:18,19) upon which to base our hope—God’s promise, and the oath by which he bound that promise. It is the hope arising out of this oathbound promise that is anchored “within the veil.”

## **THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS**

Soon after the Hebrew children left Egypt under the leadership of Moses, God entered into a covenant with them. The law which was the basis of that covenant was epitomized by the Ten Commandments, which were written on tables of stone. Blood was used to “seal” the covenant. Paul wrote, “When Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, Saying, This is the blood of the testament [covenant] which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the Tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry.

And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.”—Heb. 9:19-22

In our study of the Old Testament, we learned that God promised to make a “new covenant” with the nation of Israel, and that this covenant will eventually be extended to include all mankind—all, that is, who under the favorable conditions of the kingdom age demonstrate their earnest desire to return to harmony with God, and to serve him with all their hearts. (Jer. 31:31-34) In his letter to the Hebrew brethren, Paul reminds them of this promised New Covenant, and shows that Jesus will serve as its mediator, even as Moses served as the mediator of the old Law Covenant.

As the original Law Covenant was sealed by blood “of calves and of goats,” so the New Covenant is to be sealed by blood—the blood of Jesus Christ. Considerable time was consumed in preparation for the actual inauguration of the old Law Covenant, so an entire age—this present Gospel Age—is employed in preparation for the inauguration of the promised New Covenant.

A covenant is an agreement, a token of understanding and of harmony. The world of mankind, because of sin, has been out of harmony with God, but through Christ, he has provided an opportunity for the people to return to harmony with him. It is this work of reconciling the world to God that is described in his promise to “make a new covenant” with the people.

In II Corinthians 5:18, Paul says that God has given to the followers of Jesus the “ministry of reconciliation.” In II Corinthians 3:13, he indicates that during this present age God is writing his law in the hearts of these ministers of reconciliation,

even as in the type he wrote his law on the tables of stone. Thus the “called-out” class of this age are being prepared to be associated with Jesus in the future work of making “a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah.” (Jer. 31:31) They are proving their worthiness for this high position of the future by laying down their lives now in sacrifice, even as Jesus did.

## **THE DAY OF ATONEMENT SERVICE**

One of the principal services conducted in the typical Tabernacle, the one from which Paul draws a number of lessons in his letter to the Hebrews, was the Day of Atonement service. This service was repeated yearly on the tenth day of the seventh month. In this service, atonement was made, pictorially, from year to year for Israel’s sins.

In this service there was first the slaying of a young bullock for a sacrifice. Its blood was taken into the most holy of the Tabernacle and sprinkled upon the mercy seat. The fat and life producing organs were burned on the brazen altar in the court. The carcass and waste parts of the animal were taken outside of the camp of Israel and burned.

Immediately after the bullock was thus sacrificed, and its carcass burned, a goat was similarly sacrificed, with every detail of the offering carried out in the same manner as with the bullock, including the burning of the carcass outside the camp. In connection with the sacrifice of these animals, the high priest took coals of fire from the brazen altar, placed them upon the golden altar in the holy, and sprinkled incense on these burning coals causing sweet perfume to arise and penetrate beyond the second veil into the most holy. There were, of course, other details of this service, but

these are the ones which Paul draws upon principally as illustrations in his letter to the Hebrews.

In chapter 13, verses 10 to 13 particularly, Paul indicates that the Christian life of sacrifice was pictured in Israel's Day of Atonement service. Introducing this thought he says, "We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the Tabernacle." There were other sacrifices offered by Israel's priests in connection with which they had the privilege of eating the flesh of the animals sacrificed, but this was not the case with the Day of Atonement sacrifices. No part of the animals sacrificed on that day could be eaten.

Paul, being a close student of the Old Testament, understood the divine regulations governing the offering of sacrifice. Some of those typical sacrifices were "thank offerings," some were "trespass offerings" while others were "sin offerings." The regulation governing "sin offerings" is stated in Leviticus 6:30, which reads, "No sin offering, whereof any of the blood is brought into the tabernacle of the congregation to reconcile withal in the holy place, shall be eaten: it shall be burnt in the fire."

Since this was true, Paul continues the application of the type, saying, "For [that is, because of this] the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary [most holy] by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach."—Heb. 13:10-13

As noted, two animals were sacrificed on the Day of Atonement, the bodies of both being taken outside the camp, or "without the gate," and

burned. Paul suggests that the first of the animals—the bullock—represented Jesus; and the second, the goat, represented Jesus' followers, the "called-out" ones of the present age.

Three aspects of the sacrificial work of this age were pictured in the typical Day of Atonement services. The fat and life-producing organs of the bodies burned on the brazen altar in the court pictured the worth of the sacrifice as viewed by God and his people. Jesus' own sacrifice was perfect because he was considered, "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." (Heb. 7:26) Our sacrifice is reckoned perfect through him.

The burning of incense on the golden altar pictured what Paul describes as "the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." (Heb. 13:15) The burning of the carcasses "without the gate" pictures the ignominy and the persecution of the world. The stench of the burning carcasses was doubtless very distasteful to the Israelites, and so the life of sacrifice on the part of the Lord's people often appears to the unbelieving world.

The value of this information to the Hebrew brethren is apparent. They were discouraged because of their suffering as Christians. Here Paul was pointing out to them the reason they were suffering, and the important part their sacrifices had in the plan of God for the reconciling of the world to himself. He was telling them they should feel privileged to suffer for the same reason that Jesus suffered, and that their faithfulness in laying down their lives in sacrifice was considered by God as having a very vital part in the future reconciliation of the world under the terms of the New Covenant.

## **ANOTHER CLASS**

In Hebrews chapter 9, verse 13, Paul speaks not only of the blood of bulls and goats, but also of the “ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean,” as though he was alluding to another group of God’s faithful servants who were in some way represented in the services of the Tabernacle. Looking back to the type, we find that in the sacrifice of the red heifer, its blood was not taken into the most holy and sprinkled upon the mercy seat, but merely sprinkled in the direction of, or toward, the brazen altar in the court, seeming to suggest that it represented those who were in harmony with the great atoning work of Christ typified by the altar, but not having the opportunity of following in his steps. There is such a class in God’s plan.

We have learned that the calling out from the world of those who will live and reign with Christ in the spiritual phase of his kingdom began at Pentecost. But as is very apparent in the study of the Old Testament books, there were many faithful servants of God in previous ages, beginning with righteous Abel. All God’s holy prophets would be included among these, as well as many others. John the Baptist, although he did not write a book, was in reality the last of the prophets, and Jesus said of him, “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

The faithful ones of old will not be in the spiritual phase of Christ’s kingdom as rulers, but they will be servants in that kingdom. Jesus

said that people would come from east, west, north, and south, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom—sit down with them, that is, in the sense of looking up to them as their instructors in the laws of that kingdom. (Luke 13:28,29) In Psalm 45:16 they are referred to as those who will be made “princes in all the earth.” These will not be rewarded as highly as the “called-out” ones of this age, yet they proved their fidelity to the Lord by suffering in his cause, many of them even unto death.

In order to further encourage the Hebrew brethren, Paul devotes the entire 11th chapter of his letter in calling attention to the faithfulness of this “ancient worthy” class, showing how marvelously they manifested their faith. He speaks of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Joseph, Moses, David, Samuel, and others, saying that there were many whom he did not have time to mention. He says that they “wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us [the church], that they without us should not be made perfect.”—Heb. 11:4-40

Here the apostle is again introducing the time element in God’s plan. All the faithful of God prior to Christ’s first “visit,” he tells us, must wait until the “us” class of the present age is made ready for our part in the kingdom—“that they without us should not be made perfect.” Those “ancient worthies” gladly suffered, Paul explains, “that they might obtain a better resurrection.” (Heb. 11:35) These will have a “better resurrection” in that they will be awakened from

the sleep of death essentially perfect, and thus qualified to become the human representatives of Christ and his church, who will be in the spiritual phase of the kingdom.

To note their faithfulness to the Lord under the trying circumstances through which they passed should be a strong incentive to greater faithfulness on our part. Paul realized that it should prove a great encouragement to the Hebrew brethren. In the first verse of chapter 12, he refers to the ancient worthy class as "so great a cloud of witnesses," and since their lives are bearing such a faithful testimony of the Lord's keeping power, Paul says, "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."—Heb. 12:1

Then the apostle reminds the Hebrew brethren of the greatest example of all, even Jesus. He continues, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin."—vss. 2-4

Paul states that it was the "joy" which was set before Jesus that enabled him to endure the cross—the joy of carrying out his Father's design to bless all the families of the earth; the joy of returning to the presence of his Father, and of then being "at the right hand of the throne of God." This joy was the result of his faith in the promises of his God.

Paul wanted the Hebrew brethren, and us, to realize that we also have a joy set before us; a joy of being seated together with Christ in his throne, and of sharing with him in the future work of blessing all mankind during the “times of restitution of all things.” In chapter 12, verses 18 to 28, he sums up some of the important thoughts he presented in the letter, and by so doing reminds the Hebrew brethren of the joy which was set before them by the promises of God.

Verse 18 takes us back to the time when the typical Law Covenant was inaugurated. At that time there was a miraculous demonstration of divine power, an inspiring sight, one calculated to make everyone who saw it stand in awe at the mighty power of God. In verse 21 he says, “so terrible was the sight that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.”

We are not approaching to that mountain, but “unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels. To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant.”—vss. 22-24

Here additional symbolisms are introduced—Mount Sion, and the heavenly Jerusalem. These are symbolic of the kingdom of Christ. Jerusalem was the capital city of Judea, and Mount Sion was the governmental headquarters of Jerusalem.

The Jewish believers would readily understand that Paul’s reference to a “heavenly Jerusalem” meant the kingdom of Christ in which they hoped to have a share. The *King James Version* reads, “Ye are come unto mount Sion,” but in the

Greek the thought is, “having approached,” as though they were moving toward it. The Hebrew brethren had not “come unto mount Sion,” in the sense of having entered into and become a part of the Messianic kingdom, for it had not been established at that time. Paul said also that we are approaching unto an “innumerable company of angels.” David wrote that man was created a “little lower than the angels.” The Bible clearly indicates that there are spirit beings called angels. In the first chapter of this letter Paul refers to them as “ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.” (Heb. 1:14) Jesus spoke of these same angels, and said that they “always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.”—Matt. 18:10

It is a precious thought to realize that God uses the angels as servants to watch over his people here on earth. Paul is telling us that one of our present joys may be in looking forward to the time when, having been raised to spirit life in the resurrection, we will become acquainted with this “innumerable company of angels.”

We are also approaching to a union with the “general assembly” of the church of the firstborn. The firstborn of Israel were the first to be “saved” under the blood of the passover lamb. After leaving Egypt, the tribe of Levi was substituted for the firstborn, and these became the religious servants of the people. It was from the tribe of Levi that the priests of Israel were chosen. So, again, Paul places the church, the “called-out” ones of this age, in the position of servants in the divine plan, the ones through whom God’s promised blessings will ultimately flow out to others. And what a joy it will be to meet all these “called-out”

ones—Peter, Paul, and all who have suffered and died throughout the age, following in the footsteps of Jesus.

Yes, and even more wonderful, the Hebrew brethren and all the faithful of this age will then meet “God, the Judge of all”—the “God of all grace,” the God who “so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” What a “joy” that was to set before the Hebrew brethren; and how it should encourage us to greater faithfulness!

“And to the spirits of just men made perfect.” This is a reference to the “ancient worthy” class, those who were justified to friendship with God through their abiding faith in his promises, a faith that took them through all sorts of trying experiences, because, as Paul says of Abraham, they “looked for a city [a kingdom] which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” (Heb. 11:10) These are the ones who will be “made perfect” after the “called-out” class of this age have all completed their course and are united with their Lord and Head, Christ Jesus.

Then the faithful Hebrew brethren, and all the truly consecrated of the entire age, will be joined with Jesus as the “mediator of the new covenant.” The new covenant will then begin to function, and the world of mankind, beginning with “the house of Israel and the house of Judah,” will, under its terms, become reconciled to God. Eventually it will be true that no one will need to say to his neighbor, “know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them.”—Jer. 31:31-34

## **“WHICH CANNOT BE SHAKEN”**

In the opening verses of his letter, Paul reminds the Hebrew brethren that God had spoken to them through his Son. For this reason he urges them in chapter 2, verse 1, “to give the more earnest heed” to what they had heard. This is important for all Christians. God spoke to Israel at Mount Sinai when, through Moses, the Law Covenant was inaugurated. Paul reminds the Hebrew brethren of that, and then, through prophetic vision, places himself at the present closing time of the Gospel Age and describes a more far-reaching “shaking” that would occur, one in which only those “things which cannot be shaken may remain.”—Heb. 12:25-27

In this lesson Paul quotes from the prophecy of Haggai 2:6,7. In verse 7 the Lord says, “I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come.” Other prophecies reveal that this “shaking” is in reality the prophetic “time of trouble” with which this age ends. It is a trouble upon the world that will shake to its complete downfall every evil institution, and all the proud works of man, and, on the ruins, the kingdom of Christ will be established.

So Paul concludes this part of his lesson by saying, “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” (Heb. 12:28) Again the apostle reminds us that the great objective of the Christian life is that we might, in God’s due time, participate with Christ in his kingdom, that Messianic kingdom of promise, the kingdom which will cause God’s will to be done in earth even as it is now done in heaven.

Paul wrote, "See that ye refuse not him [Jesus] that speaketh." (Heb. 12:25) Through Jesus, and through his sacrificial work on behalf of both the church and the world, every feature of the divine plan is sure to be carried out exactly on time and as God designed.

As revealed in this letter, what marvelous things there are in that plan for the followers of Jesus! They, too, are sons of God, sons whom their elder brother is not ashamed to call his "brethren." (Heb. 2:11,12) They are members of the same priesthood with Jesus. (chap. 3:1) He is our High Priest, one who was "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."—Heb. 4:15

Besides, as Paul made plain to the Hebrew brethren, we are also to share with Jesus as priests in his throne, as typified by Melchizedek, and be associated with him as ministers of reconciliation in making the New Covenant with Israel and with the whole world of mankind. By God's great favor through Christ, we are bidden to aspire to exaltation with him, and to be in the presence of our God whom we have learned to love, and whom we desire to serve with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

"Here have we no continuing city," Paul wrote. (Heb. 13:14) A "city" is used in the Bible to symbolize a government, or kingdom. So, as Paul says, we seek a continuing city to come, even the kingdom of Christ. We are seeking it by laying down our lives with Christ that we may live and reign with him in the kingdom. And we are seeking that kingdom because we know that when it is established in the earth, there will flow out from it those marvelous blessings of health

and life, and peace and joy foretold by all God's holy prophets since the world began. Truly the prospect is glorious! ■

## **QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 8**

Who were the "brethren" to whom Paul's letter to the Hebrews was written, and what apparently was the main purpose of the letter? Page 205

Why did Paul stress the fact that God had spoken to the Hebrew brethren through Christ? Page 206

What prophecies did Paul quote in order to establish in the minds of the Hebrew Christians that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah and would fulfill all the promises centered in him? Page 207

Explain Paul's use of David's prophecy concerning all things being put under man. Page 209

Why was it necessary for Jesus to be made a "little lower than the angels"? Page 209

In the divine plan who are the "many sons" who are brought to glory? Page 210

Why did Paul write in Hebrews 10:37, "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry"? Page 211

What did Paul mean by the expression, "Apostle and High Priest of our profession"? Pages 211,212

Who were the priests of Israel, and what service did they render? Pages 212,213

What are "types" and "shadows"? Page 213

Are the "called-out" ones of this age pictured by Israel as a whole, or by Israel's priesthood? Page 213

Who was Melchizedek, and in what sense did his offices represent the position of Christ and the church in the divine plan? Pages 213,214

How does the Aaronic priesthood picture the work of Christ and the church during the present age? Page 214

Describe the construction of the Tabernacle, and the “court” which surrounded the Tabernacle. Page 216

What items of furniture were in the court and the Tabernacle? Pages 216,217

What did Paul mean by the expression, “within the veil whither the forerunner is for us entered”? Page 217

In what sense are Christians now pictured in the “court,” and how in the “holy”? Page 217

Explain the manner in which our hope is “anchored” within the “veil.” Page 218

What did Paul mean by the expression, “which hope”? Page 218

What was the law covenant, and how was it “sealed”? Page 219

Where do we find one of God’s promises of the new covenant? Page 219

How will the New Covenant be sealed? Page 219

What is a covenant? In addition to Jesus, who will serve as ministers of the new covenant? Page 219

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Of what is an “altar” a symbol, and what did Paul mean when he wrote, “We have an altar whereof they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle”? Page 221

How do we go to Christ “without the gate”? Page 221

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What will be the “better resurrection” of the ancient worthies, and when will it take place? Pages 224,225

Who are the great “cloud of witnesses” mentioned by Paul? Page 225

To whom are we to look as the most outstanding example of faith and devotion? Page 225

What was the joy set before Jesus, and do we have the same joy set before us? Pages 225,226

In what sense are we approaching “mount Sion”? What is “mount Sion,” antitypically? Pages 226,227

Who are the “innumerable company of angels”? Page 227

Who will be in the “general assembly and church of the firstborn”? Why is it called the church of the “firstborn”? Page 227

What are some of the characteristics of “God, the Judge of all”? Page 228

Who are the just men whose “spirits” will be “made perfect”? Page 228

What is the great “shaking” Paul refers to in Hebrews 12, verses 25-27? Page 229

When will “the desire of all nations come,” and what will cause them to turn to the Lord? Page 229

What “kingdom” is it that the Lord’s people receive at the end of the age? Page 230

# Christian Hopes and Prospects

All the inspired writers of the Bible were enthused with the divine plan of salvation, which each, in his own way and in harmony with divine providence, helped to present. The consistent harmony of the Bible's teachings that we found displayed throughout all the Old Testament books, and in the New Testament to the end of the Book of Hebrews, continues in evidence throughout the seven books which we will now review. These books, like the writings of the Apostle Paul, are in the form of letters, or "epistles," and were written by the Apostles James, Peter, John, and Jude. These seven books are commonly known as:

James

I Peter

II Peter

I John

II John

III John

Jude

In these seven books there are admonitions to Christian faithfulness, and assurances of God's care for his people, those who are "called to be saints." There are also reminders of the Christian's glorious hope of living and reigning with Christ

in that kingdom of promise by means of which God's promise to Abraham to bless all the families of the earth will be fulfilled.

The Christian's "hope of glory," as it is expressed by the Apostle Paul, is the more wonderful because of being brightened by the prospect of the promised blessings which are yet to be enjoyed by the world of mankind. Because of this prospect of blessings for others, the Christian hope is an unselfish one. This is emphasized throughout all the books of the Bible.

The promises of God are that "all" the families of the earth are to be blessed, that of the "increase" of Christ's kingdom, and the peace it will bring to mankind, "there shall be no end." It was in keeping with this loving purpose of God, reassuringly stated over and over again by his holy prophets, that when Jesus the Messiah was born, an angel announced, "Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be unto all people." (Luke 2:10) And so, intermingled with the various expressions of Christian hope in the epistles now before us, we will also find reaffirmations of the divine purpose to use the "called-out ones" of this age to be, together with Jesus their head, the channel of blessing to all mankind when the kingdom of promise is established.

## **THE EPISTLE OF JAMES**

The full title of the Book of James is, "The General Epistle of James." It is addressed to the "twelve tribes which are scattered abroad," and to these he sends "greetings." (James 1:1) While the nation of Israel contained twelve family divisions, originating with the twelve sons of Jacob, we are

not to suppose that James intended his letter to be read generally by the entire Jewish nation, for he knew that only a small remnant of that nation had accepted Christ as their Messiah and consequently would not be interested in a Christian letter. The thought is, evidently, that he intended his epistle to be for the benefit of Jewish believers from among all the various tribes of Israel.

The letter is largely inspirational in character, consisting of exhortations to wholesome Christian thinking and activity. He knew that every follower of the Master found himself in surroundings hostile to his aims as a Christian, and needed constantly to be on guard against the encroachments of the world, the flesh, and the Devil, so he wrote, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."—James 1:24

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God," James exhorts, "... but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering." (vss. 5,6) Again, "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." (vs. 8) "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him," is a timely word of assurance and comfort. (vs. 12) "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above," writes James, "and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (vs. 17) This is a reminder of the source of all our blessings.

Verse 18 reads, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." In our study of Paul's first letter to the brethren in Corinth, 15th chapter, verse 23, we noted that in his explanation of the resurrection he said that those first to be raised from the dead would be "Christ the firstfruits." Now James is identifying this "firstfruits" class for us, explaining that it is made up of those who are begotten by "the word of truth."

These are the "new creatures" referred to by Paul in II Cor. 5:17. They are the ones who have the hope of a new, a heavenly life. Through "patient continuance in well doing" they would receive "glory and honor and immortality." (Rom. 2:7) In other words, they are the "called-out" class of the Gospel age. That they should be described as the "firstfruits of his [God's] creatures," implies that there will be after fruits, and this the Bible clearly shows to be the case. The "after fruits" class will be the whole world of mankind, restored to life during the "times of restitution of all things."—Acts 3:19-21

Continuing his exhortations, James writes, "Be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only." (James 1:22) Chapter 2 enlarges upon this thought, showing that "faith without works is dead." If we merely hear the word, and profess to believe it, yet do not conform our lives to its righteous precepts, our professions of belief are valueless. James concludes this exhortation by saying, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." James 2:26

The Greek word translated "spirit" in this text means breath. James' use of this illustration indicates that he thoroughly understood the

truth on this subject; that it requires the union of the breath of life with the body in order to have life. Probably he had many times read the statement in Genesis where we are told that God “formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” (Gen. 2:7) There is no such thing as an immortal soul!

Chapter 3 is almost wholly an exhortation to Christians to control their tongues. Too often, as James observes, “Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.” (James 2:10) He explains that the cause of this is most likely an impure condition of heart. “Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?” he asks.—vs. 11

In a further penetrating remark, James says, “If ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.” (vs. 14) “This wisdom,” he explains, “descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.” (vs. 15) Then by contrast James writes, “The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.” —vss. 17,18

In chapter 4, verse 10, James writes, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.” This is true of every faithful Christian on a far grander scale than is possible for the human mind to grasp. It was true of Jesus. In Philippians 2:5-11, the Apostle Paul exhorts us to be like Jesus. He writes: “Let this mind be in

you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who ... made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

God's promise to the followers of Jesus is that if they, like him, humble themselves in doing his will, to the full extent of actually being willing to suffer and to die with him, they will be exalted to live and reign with him. A glorious prospect, indeed!

In chapter 5 of his letter, James becomes somewhat prophetic, forecasting some of the conditions of the "last days." He speaks particularly of the heaping together of treasures for the last days. (vs. 13) This, he indicates, would come about, at least partly, because laborers, particularly in the fields or on the farms, would be defrauded of just returns for their work. Christians whose minds and hearts are attuned to the principles of divine justice and righteousness are properly pained by every evidence of injustice they see about them. At the same time, however, the Scriptures do not bid them to take such matters into their own hands.

To these, and especially in view of the distressing conditions of this "present evil world," James writes, "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the

coming of the Lord. Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.”

—Gal. 1:4; James 5:7,8

To every faithful believer in the Early Church, the return of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom would be the solution to every problem of the sin-sick and dying world. They knew it would mean the fruition of their hope—that blessed hope of living and reigning with Christ. They knew that his coming and his kingdom would be the complete fulfillment of all that the Old Testament prophets had foretold concerning the blessing of all the families of the earth during the “restitution of all things.”—Acts 3:19-21

## **THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PETER**

The Apostle Peter wrote his first epistle to the “strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.” His use of the word “strangers” evidently denotes that he had not personally met these brethren. That they were brethren, and not unbelievers of the world, is evident from the next verse in which he speaks of them as being “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”

There is an election feature of God’s plan, not a preselection of a small group to be saved regardless of their qualifications, but an election of different classes to be used in the general plan of salvation. This was indicated by James in his speech at

the Jerusalem conference when, after outlining God's plan for this age and for the next age—that now God is calling out a people for his name, and that after this, “all the Gentiles” will have an opportunity for salvation under the arrangements of the new kingdom—he said, “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.”—Acts 15:13-18

Paul spoke of this election in so far as the church is concerned, explaining that God has determined that each one in this “called-out” class must be “conformed to the image of his Son.” (Rom. 8:29) This work of transformation into the likeness of Christ is accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit, and this works in our lives through the medium of God's Word. Peter speaks of this as a work of sanctification, and explains that it is being accomplished by the Holy Spirit —“through sanctification of the Spirit.”

In the opening verses of his letter, Peter mentions several important elements of Christian hope. He says that through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead we have been “begotten again unto a lively hope [or a hope of life], and to “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.” (I Pet. 1:3,4) Then he explains we are “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”—vs. 5

The great salvation, the “inheritance” which is “incorruptible,” is “reserved in heaven,” Peter explains. It was not to be revealed, not to be entered into, until the “last time”; in other words, not until the end of the age and the return of Christ. Paul mentioned this when he said that there was laid up for him a “crown” which the

Lord, would give to him at “that day,” and not only to him, but to “all them also that love his appearing.”—II Tim. 4:6-8

In verse 9 Peter speaks of the “salvation” of “souls.” The word soul in the Bible does not refer to a living entity within the body, which continues to live after the body dies. The reference here is to beings—in this instance those “called to be saints.” Nor is the “salvation” the apostle speaks of merely an escape from the Lord’s condemnation—and certainly in no sense the erroneous idea of escaping the fires of hell, for such an idea is not taught in the Bible.

In the next verse Peter indicates that the “salvation” he refers to is one the prophets have inquired and searched diligently for, and, “who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit ... which was in them did signify when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” (I Pet. 1:10,11) Many texts of Scripture give assurance that the “called-out” class of this age will share this foretold “glory” with Christ. Surely this is a “great salvation.”—Heb. 2:3

Jesus’ disciples did not at first grasp the meaning of the prophecies pertaining to the sufferings of Christ. They saw only the forecasts of his Messianic glory. However, with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, their minds were illuminated, and now, in order to strengthen Christian faith, Peter calls attention to these prophetic utterances, which showed that Christ must suffer and die as the world’s Redeemer and Savior. And he also emphasizes the “glory that should follow.” Throughout his epistle Peter

reveals that every faithful Christian will ultimately share in that “glory that should follow.” The condition, of course, foretold by Paul in his letter to the Romans, saying, “We suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”—Rom. 8:17

The fact that in the divine plan Christian believers are privileged to share in the foretold sufferings of Christ and thus prove their worthiness to share in the glory and power of his kingdom is one of the principal themes of this epistle. In I Peter 2, verse 5, Peter writes that these “called-out” ones are “an holy priesthood, to offer up sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” The Book of Hebrews reveals that the brethren of Christ are a priesthood, authorized to offer sacrifice, even the sacrifice of themselves, and now Peter confirms this vital truth for us.

In verse 9 he speaks of our being a “royal [or kingly] priesthood.” (I Pet. 2:9) This confirms Paul’s claim that Christ and the church together were represented by Melchisedec, who was both a priest and a king. Thus, in the midst of timely exhortations to Christian faithfulness and endurance, we find these nuggets of thought, which serve to bind the promises and prophecies of God’s word together, so that it presents a gloriously harmonious testimony concerning the great plan of salvation for both the church and the world.

In the offering of sacrifice, suffering is involved, and Peter describes this as the “sufferings of Christ.” Peter writes, “Even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow in his steps.”—vss. 21-24

In the third chapter we read, "It is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the Spirit."—I Pet. 3:17,18

In the 4th chapter he writes, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." (I Pet. 4:12,13) Again he touches this viewpoint, saying, "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."—vs. 16

This suffering which faithful believers share with Christ is, as Peter indicates, a "fiery trial." It tests their fidelity to God and to Christ. The entire Gospel Age is set apart in the plan of God for this trial, this testing of the church. In verse 17 Peter refers to it as the "judgment"—from a Greek word meaning "decision"—which begins with the "house of God." God's people, the "called-out" class throughout the age, have suffered many "fiery trials." Upon the basis of their faithfulness or unfaithfulness to the Lord when thus tested, they are accounted either worthy or unworthy of living and reigning with Christ and sharing in his glory.

It has been a severe test, but the reward is correspondingly great. "If the righteous scarcely be saved ..." Peter continues, agreeing that their trial is a severe one. And it is, indeed, through much tribulation that any of the consecrated

qualify to enter into the kingdom as kings and priests to reign with Christ. Those whose hearts are right, however, can depend upon the Lord to give them strength to endure, and depending upon him, they can be sure that nothing will separate them from his love and from the love of Christ.

Peter then makes a statement which has been greatly misused, because misunderstood—"If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (vs. 18) Because of traditional misconceptions of the plan of God, many have surmised that Peter is implying that the ungodly and the sinner will "appear" in a hell of torment. But Peter does not say this, nor is it what he meant.

The Greek word here translated "appear" means literally to shine, or to "show." In view of the severe trial of the righteous in this age, a testing so severe that they "scarcely" prove faithful, Peter is apparently asking what kind of showing the ungodly and the sinner will make. If they were now on trial for life, the implication is that they would fail.

Peter is not discussing the future trial period of the world, so does not answer his own question. Had he done so, his answer would have been in harmony with Jesus' teachings, when he said, "If any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world."—John 12:47

The next verse in John continues: "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." (vs. 48) The "last day" is the time of the general resurrection. (John 11:24) It is in that day that the ungodly and the sinner—those

who have done evil—will be awakened from death and given their opportunity to hear, understand, and obey the words of Jesus, believe on him, and live. That will be their judgment day; but they will not be invited to suffer for righteousness' sake, so their trial will not be so exacting. Neither will they get the same high reward that is gained by the believers of this age, but will be restored to everlasting life as perfect humans upon the earth.

## **THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PETER**

Peter addressed his second letter to those “that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” (II Pet. 1:1) There is much more to this “precious faith” than the fact that through Jesus salvation from death may be obtained, although this is vitally important. In his first letter, Peter wrote much about the Christian’s privilege of suffering and dying with Christ, and thus proving worthy of sharing in his glory—a very “precious” feature of the Christian faith. This second letter deals more particularly with the return of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom, through which his glory will be manifested. This also is part of the Christian faith.

The second coming of Christ was a very vital teaching in the Early Church. His promised return was one of the principal inspirations to faithfulness in Christian suffering. It was this “blessed hope” that enabled the brethren to remain steadfast, and to patiently endure, even with rejoicing, the scorn and persecution heaped upon them by the unbelieving world. In Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonian brethren, he reminds them that Christ would return, and

then adds, "Comfort one another with these words."—I Thess. 4:18

So in Peter's second letter, he uses the hope of Christ's return as the basis of an admonition to faithfulness in Christian growth and the development of the Christian graces. He speaks of the "exceeding great and precious promises" whereby we are made "partakers of the divine nature," and then admonishes us to add the following characteristics to the faith engendered by these promises: virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity, or love. He says, "If ye do these things ye shall never fall, for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."—II Pet. 1:4-11

In the next verse (the 12th) Peter writes, "I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth." Peter wanted the brethren to remember the "things" which would keep them from "falling," or losing their abundant entrance into the "kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

This was to be a real kingdom, a powerful government, one that would fulfil all the predictions the prophets had made concerning it. He continues in verse 16, "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty ... when we were with him on the holy mount."

This is a reference to what is known as the "Transfiguration Vision." It occurred on a mountain in Israel, now known as the Mount of

Transfiguration. Jesus went up into this mountain, taking Peter, James, and John with him. He was transfigured before them, and appearing with him in the vision were two of the Old Testament prophets, Moses and Elijah. It was only a vision. Moses and Elijah were not actually there, for they were asleep in death, and will continue so until the resurrection.

Peter indicates that what they saw there was a manifestation of the “power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”—in other words, a vision of the kingdom glory of Christ, a glory to be shared by all his followers who prove worthy of an abundant entrance into his kingdom. The appearance, in vision, of Moses and Elijah, two of the outstanding prophets of the Old Testament, would seem to suggest that the testimony of God’s holy prophets will all be fulfilled through Christ during the time of his second visit to earth—fulfilled by him, that is, through the agencies of his kingdom.

It was an exciting experience, proving that the Christian hope in the return of Christ was not a “cunningly devised fable,” that it rested upon a sure foundation of fact gloriously illustrated by the transfiguration vision. Even so, Peter explains that the Christian has something more sure than visions. He says, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.”—II Pet. 1:19

The “sure word of prophecy” referred to by Peter is the entire prophetic testimony of the Old Testament which has to do with Christ’s second visit to earth, as well as the prophecy of Jesus—

particularly his answer to the disciples' question, "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matt. 24:3) The Greek word here translated "coming" is *parousia*, meaning "presence," and the word "world" is translated from the Greek word *aion*, meaning "age," or period of time.

The moment of Jesus' arrival at his second coming was not what the disciples were inquiring about; they wanted to know when the period of his presence would be. How were they to know when he would return and that his kingdom was therefore near? It is through the sure word of prophecy that the Lord's people obtain this information. Throughout the entire age they continued to search the prophecies, to "take heed" unto them, that when the time came for the "day" to "dawn" they would know it by the events taking place about them in the world, events outlined in the prophecies.

The expression, "day dawn," is very revealing. It is in harmony with other expressions in the Bible describing the long period of the reign of sin and death as being a "nighttime," a time when darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people. (Isa. 60:1-3) The Prophet David wrote, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." (Ps. 30:5) Sin, suffering, and death are, in the Bible, associated with darkness, while light symbolizes righteousness and health and joy.

So it is, as David foretold, "Joy cometh in the morning," and the "morning" of earth's new day is ushered in during the time of the second presence of Christ. The expression "day dawn" therefore points to the establishment of his kingdom. It

was to this the Prophet Malachi referred when, in forecasting the glory of Messiah's kingdom, he wrote, "The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings." (Mal. 4:2) Jesus, together with the "called-out" ones of this age, will be that "Sun of Righteousness."—Matt. 13:43

In the second chapter of this letter, Peter reminds the reader that false prophets and teachers would arise in the church, causing great damage to the faith in the minds of many. The Apostle Paul also prophesied the development of an apostasy. (II Thess. 2:3-12) Paul's prophecy, even as Peter's, reveals that this apostate system of counterfeit Christianity would continue until the return of the Lord, and that then it would be destroyed—destroyed because it would then be time for the establishment of Christ's kingdom.

Peter indicates that these false teachers would continue to misrepresent the Truth. In this connection he calls them "scoffers," who would be saying, "Where is the promise [Greek, "evidence"] of his coming [Greek, "presence"] for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." (II Pet. 3:4) It was Peter, who, in Acts 3:19-21, declared that all God's holy prophets had foretold "times of restitution of all things." This testimony of the prophets had been given to the "fathers" of Israel, but Peter implies that the "scoffers" would say there is no evidence because, "all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." (vs. 4) In verse 9, Peter refutes them saying, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering."

Peter's reply to the objection of the scoffers calls attention to a truth stated by Jesus in his answer to the disciples' question, "What shall be the sign of thy presence, and of the end of the age?" (Matt. 24:3) Jesus said, in describing world events at the time of his presence, "As it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man." (Luke 17:26) Peter explains that in the days of Noah the waters of the flood destroyed "the world that then was."—II Pet. 3:5,6

This is in full harmony with a number of Old Testament prophecies we have examined indicating that the dawning period of earth's new day would, to begin with, be one of darkness and trouble described by Daniel as a "time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation." (Dan. 12:1) The point established by Peter is that the early years of Christ's second presence would not be marked by blessings of "restitution" but by destructive trouble which would bring the "present evil world" to an end.

The "end of the world," of course, is not the destruction of the earth, but merely the overthrow of a selfish, sinful, social order, described by Paul as "this present evil world." (Gal. 1:4) In Isaiah 45:18 the Lord tells us that he created the earth and has established it in order that it might be inhabited by his human creation forever. The earth will be the scene of "times of restitution of all things." "The earth abideth forever."—Eccles. 1:4

Continuing, and basing his explanation upon the fact that a world was destroyed "in the days of Noah," Peter says, "The day of the Lord [Jehovah] will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great

noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.” (II Pet. 3:10) The Apostle Paul wrote the same—“The day of the Lord [Jehovah] so cometh as a thief in the night.” (I Thess. 5:1-4) But Paul explains, “Ye, brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief.”

Paul adds, “Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.” (I Thess 5:5) Agreeing with Peter, Paul also says that the “day of the Lord [Jehovah]” would be one of destruction—“sudden [unexpected] destruction,” he explains, which would follow a worldwide cry of peace and safety. (vs. 3) It is the destruction of Satan’s world.

Peter’s language might seem to indicate that the literal earth is to be destroyed. But he also speaks of the “heavens” being “on fire.” (II Pet. 3:12) If this were literal, it would imply the destruction of the entire universe. However, these terms are used symbolically to describe the spiritual and physical aspects of this “present evil world.” There is much evidence that this “world” is already coming to an end.

“Nevertheless,” Peter continues, “we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” (vs. 13) As we learned in our study of Isaiah’s prophecy, the promised “new heavens and new earth” is the kingdom of Christ. The establishment of this kingdom for the blessing of all mankind is the main objective of Christ’s return, but first Satan’s “evil world” must be dissolved to make way for the “new heavens and new earth.”

(Isa. 65:17-25; 66:22,23) That which the “scoffers” do not see will come to pass. The blessings of that new day are now near—“nearer than when we first believed.”—Rom. 13:11

## **THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN**

In addition to his “Gospel” account of Jesus’ ministry, the Apostle John wrote three epistles. The first is styled a “general” epistle because it is not addressed to any particular group or individual. “These things write we unto you,” he says, “that your joy may be full.” What are “these things”? One of them is his reaffirmation of the fact set forth in the first chapter of his Gospel that Jesus was the “Word,” or “Logos,” of God, that he had been “made flesh.”—I John 1:1-3

In verse 5 of this opening chapter John writes, “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” Light is used in the Bible as a symbol of truth and righteousness, and the joys which result from being in harmony therewith. The word “truth,” as used by John, embraces the entire divine plan for the redemption and restoration of a lost race. Every feature of this plan is prompted by love, and designed to assure all the willing and obedient of mankind an eternity of peace and joy and life.

“He that loveth his brother abideth in the light ... but he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness.” (I John 2:10,11) Love, then, is another manifestation of “light,” of “truth.” In John 3:16 we read that it was God’s love which prompted him to send his Son to rescue the world from sin and death.

John also says that love gives “boldness in the day of judgment.” (I John 4:17) This is not a reference to the world’s future day of judgment, for the footstep followers of Christ will not then be on trial—they will not pass into that “judgment.” (John 5:24) Instead, together with Jesus, they will be the judges of the people at that time. The follower’s trial, or “judgment” day, is now. He is tested along various lines, and one of them is in his willingness to confess the Truth. John wrote, “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.”—I John 4:15

For anyone in John’s day to make this “confession” required great courage, or “boldness.” We recall that one of the charges the religious leaders brought against Jesus was that he claimed to be the Son of God. Jews who later espoused his cause and confessed their belief that Jesus was the Son of God would also be hated and persecuted by their countrymen. Gentiles, already in disrepute with the Jewish people would, when making this confession, be looked down upon more than ever.

John had the proper understanding of Christian love. He saw that it is a principle of unselfish devotion to God and to the divine cause that would not permit compromise of any kind. For example, he admonishes Christians to “try the spirits”—that is, doctrines, or teachings—which are presented to them, and then adds, “Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.” (I John 4:13) This must be understood in keeping with John’s own

explanation of this great truth as set forth in the opening chapter of his Gospel. If Jesus had not come in the flesh, he could not have given his flesh for the “life of the world.” (John 6:51) If he had not given his flesh for the life of the world, then the world would not have been redeemed from sin and death, and there would be no hope that anyone will ever be raised from the dead.

Parts of verses 7 and 8 of I John chapter 5 are spurious, not being found in the oldest Greek manuscripts extant of the New Testament. They represent the effort of someone during the Dark Ages to establish a scriptural foundation for the erroneous doctrine of the trinity. These two verses are the only ones in the Bible that even remotely suggest the idea of three gods in one. That particular portion of these verses relating to the trinity is in reality no part of the Bible. These verses, with the elimination of the spurious portion, read: “For there are three that bear record, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.”

## **THE SECOND EPISTLE OF JOHN**

John’s second letter was written to “the elect lady and her children.” (II John 1) We have no certain knowledge as to who this person was. Verse 13 indicates that she had a sister, and the main purpose of the letter seems to have been to caution this sister against allowing her kindness and generosity to work injury to the cause of Christ and the Truth.

False teachers were plaguing the church, the “called-out” class of that early period. One of their heresies was their denial that Jesus Christ had

come in the flesh. This was a serious error, for it meant a denial of the very foundation of Christian faith and hope. So John wrote, "If there come any among 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 10,11

### **THE THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN**

This third and last letter of the Apostle John is very brief. It was addressed to "the well beloved Gaius, whom," John wrote, "I love in the truth." The main purpose of the letter seems to have been to request Gaius' cooperation in caring for some brethren who were moving into the territory where he lived. (III John 6-8) According to tradition, Gaius was a wealthy man, one whom the Apostle John knew to be well able to make the temporary provision he was asking.

John gave his personal recommendation of the brethren for whom he was asking asylum, and said, "Ye know that our record is true." (vs. 12) To assist these brethren in their time of need would be a manifestation of Christian love. In Hebrews 13:2, Paul wrote, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." It might well be that Gaius, in befriending the brethren recommended by John, became acquainted with some of the Lord's "angels."

### **THE EPISTLE OF JUDE**

This is another "general" letter, not being addressed to any particular congregation or individual. Jude, or Judas—not the Judas who betrayed

Jesus—was one of the twelve apostles. His purpose in writing the letter is stated in verse 3, which reads, “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”

The letters of Paul, Peter, James, and John all reveal that in those early days of Christianity the truth of God’s Word was being attacked by enemies who sought to destroy the “faith once delivered unto the saints.” Jude’s letter reveals the same thing. What was that “faith” for which Jude urges the brethren to earnestly contend? It was the fact that Jesus had come “in the flesh” to suffer and to die for both the church and the world. Also, that the work of God during the present age is to call out from the world a people willing to suffer and to die with Jesus, inspired by the promises of God that, if faithful in this, they would live and reign with Christ when he returned to establish his longpromised kingdom.

After the death of the inspired apostles, these enemies of the Truth continued their attacks, and finally the “faith which was once delivered unto the saints” was almost entirely lost to the professed followers of the Master. Instead of being inspired by the hope of Christ’s return and the establishment of his kingdom, they adopted the view that the kingdom was already established, and that the military might of civil governments should be employed to enforce their manmade decrees, which they claimed to be the laws of the kingdom.

Throughout his epistle, Jude is very outspoken against those who oppose the Truth. He spares

no words of condemnation, but at the same time tempers his remarks with the admonition that the brethren should deal with the situation in keeping with the love and mercy of God. He realized that there were some who had been ensnared by the Devil, and were not wilful opposers of truth and righteousness. So the brethren, in “contending for the faith,” were to recognize a difference, and endeavor to “save with fear” by pulling “out of the fire” those who gave the slightest evidence of wanting to do right.

In presenting his exhortation against evil and evildoers, Jude uses various Old Testament examples, one of them being the wicked people of Sodom and Gomorrah. He speaks of these as “set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.” (Jude 7) Some have endeavored to use this statement to prove the erroneous doctrine of eternal torture for the wicked. But this is poor reasoning. In the first place, the fire referred to by Jude is not “hell-fire.” Besides, the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were not tormented by it, but destroyed.

However, they were not permanently destroyed, because Jesus taught that in the day of judgment (a thousand years long) it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for the Jewish cities which rejected him. (Matt. 10:15) Sodom is mentioned by the Prophet Ezekiel, who gives assurance that her people will be restored to their “former estate” of life. (Ezek. 16:55) What Jude tells us is that the Sodomites were used by the Lord as an example of those who will have everlasting death.

We know that the Sodomites themselves were not everlastingly destroyed, because both Jesus and Ezekiel clearly teach that they will be raised

from the dead and be given an opportunity to obey the laws of Christ's kingdom then in force, and, if obedient, live forever.

In verse 6 Jude speaks of the "angels who kept not their first estate, but left their own habitations." In II Peter 2:4 we read about these angels, that God spared them not, but cast them down to "hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment." Peter indicates that this occurred at the time of the great flood. In Genesis 6:2,4 we read about "sons of God" who took unto themselves "daughters of men," and that giants were born to them.

The combined testimony of these texts is that just before the flood, certain of the angelic hosts materialized as men and illicitly united with the daughters of men. Their offspring were destroyed in the flood, and the unholy angels have since been restrained—Peter says cast down to "hell." This simply refers to a state of imprisonment. It is not the condition of death described elsewhere in the Bible by the word hell. It is possible these fallen angels, referred to as demons and devils, were cast out of afflicted persons by Jesus. They have, in a restricted way, plagued mankind throughout all the ages.

It is these fallen angels, restrained from materializing as they once did, who now misrepresent themselves as the disembodied "spirits" of the dead, and through mediums attempt to prove that the dead are really more alive than ever. In this respect they have effectively served Satan's purpose in attempting to prove that God lied when he said to Adam, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." (Gen. 2:17) To mother Eve Satan said, "Ye shall not surely die,"

and his constant effort throughout the ages has been to prove that he told the truth, that “there is no death.”\*<sup>3</sup>—Gen. 3:4

In verse 20 Jude speaks of “building up yourselves on your most holy faith.” This is the same “faith” referred to in verse 3—“the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” It is “holy” because God is its Author. It is the divine plan, through Christ for the salvation of both the church and the world; the church—those “called to be saints”—during the Gospel Age, and the world of mankind in general during the kingdom age.

Christians are built up in this faith through study of the Bible, and obedience to its precepts. In this way they keep themselves in the “love of God,” as mentioned by Jude in verse 21. The better we understand the “most holy faith” the greater should be our appreciation of the love of God; and the more blessed will be our own hope of life through Christ, and the brighter our prospects for the kingdom blessings of restitution soon to flow out to “all the families of the earth.” ■

## **QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 9**

### **JAMES**

To whom was the Epistle of James addressed, and what is its general subject matter? Page 236

Who are referred to by James as “Christ the firstfruits”? Who are the after fruits? Page 237

Explain what James meant when he said that as “the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” What is the “spirit”?

<sup>3</sup> For further details on this subject we suggest reading the booklet *Spiritualism*, offered free upon request to Dawn Bible Students, PO Box 521167, Longwood, FL 32752

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What are some of the characteristics of the wisdom which comes from God? Page 238

What did James prophesy concerning the “last days”? Page 239

How did Christians in the Early Church expect that God would solve all the problems of human selfishness? Page 240

## **I AND II PETER**

To whom did the Apostle Peter write his first letter? Page 240

In what sense are the true followers of Jesus the “elect” people of God? What did God predestinate concerning them? Page 241

What is the “lively hope” to which Christians have been begotten? When does this hope mature into reality? What is the “end” of Christian faith? Pages 241,242

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## **I, II, AND III JOHN**

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## **JUDE**

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Who are the angels who kept not their “first estate”? What was their sin, and how have they been punished? What continues to be one of their activities? Page 259

## CHAPTER 10

# The Revelation of Jesus Christ

**R**evelation, the last book in the Bible, is often called the Apocalypse, which is its title in the Greek language. Written by the Apostle John, it was based upon visions given to him while a prisoner on the isle of Patmos. In the opening sentence of the book he describes what he is about to write as “the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.”—Rev. 1:1

The Greek expression here translated “signified” literally means “told in signs,” indicating that the important lessons of this closing book of the Bible are set forth in sign language, or symbolisms. With few exceptions, however, the symbolisms employed appear in other books of the Bible; so it should not be too difficult to understand the important lessons this language is designed to convey as this closing book sums up and brings to a climax many of the important themes of the Bible which we have already traced throughout the Old and New Testaments.

None of the Bible's books present the truths of the divine plan in the exact sequence in which they occur. It is important to bear this in mind as we examine the testimony of the Apocalypse. For this reason, our present study of the book will not be from chapter to chapter. Instead, we will endeavor to note the manner in which this "Revelation of Jesus Christ" discloses the climactic fulfillment of the main prophetic themes introduced and partially developed earlier in the Word of God.

## **THE "SEED" OF PROMISE**

The opening chapters of the Bible tell of man's creation and of the Creator's design that he fill the earth with his offspring, and have dominion over it. The accomplishment of this was dependent upon obedience to divine law. Our first parents disobeyed, were sentenced to death, and driven out of the Garden of Eden to die. "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return," was the penalty which fell upon them.—Gen. 1:27,28; 2:17; 3:17,19

There was a "serpent" in Eden which beguiled mother Eve and, through her, induced Adam to disobey God's law. In Revelation 20:2 John speaks of "that old serpent, the Devil, and Satan." When pronouncing the sentence of death upon our first parents the Lord said to "that old serpent," "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."—Gen. 3:15

Here is the first intimation from God that although man had transgressed his law and must die, He did not intend to abandon him, but would provide a "seed" that would crush the Adversary, and, by implication, deliver man from the result

of the sin into which he had been led. God's statement to the "serpent" indicates, however, that there would be a great struggle in connection with the development of the promised "seed," a struggle resulting from the "enmity" that would exist between the seed of the woman and the seed of the "serpent." The whole Bible is designed to reveal the manner in which this "seed" is developed, and to record the many and various ways in which the enmity of Satan manifested itself in efforts to destroy God's "seed."

In tracing the promises of God from book to book throughout his Word we have found that the "Seed" of promise is none other than the Messiah. We have also seen that those called out from the world during the present age to follow in the footsteps of Jesus are "body" members of the Messiah, the Christ. In Genesis 12:3 and 22:17,18 we have God's promise to bless all the families of the earth through the "seed" of Abraham. Jacob prophesied the coming of this great one, referring to him as "Shiloh," saying that unto him would the gathering of the people be. (Gen. 49:9,10) The Messiah was again promised by the Lord when he said to Moses, "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee."—Deut. 13:18

It was this Messiah to whom David referred when in the 72nd Psalm he wrote. "In his day ... 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." (vss. 7,8) David again writes of the Messiah saying, "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool."—Ps. 110:1

In a prophecy of the birth of Jesus, Isaiah says that the “government,” the Messianic kingdom, will be upon his “shoulder,” and that “his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” (Isa. 9:6,7) It is concerning this same One, the “Seed,” the Messiah, that Isaiah writes, “The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.”—Isa. 11:2

The Prophet Micah refers to the Messiah as the “tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion,” and prophesies concerning him, “Unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion.” (Mic. 4:8) This same prophet also foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.—Mic. 5:2

When Jesus was born the angel announced to the shepherds, “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ [the Messiah] the Lord.” (Luke 2:10) When Jesus said to his disciples, “Whom say ye that I am?” Peter replied, “Thou art the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the living God.”—Matt. 16:15,16

Jesus promised his disciples that they would share the glory of the Messianic kingdom with him. Later, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostles developed this theme in more detail. Paul explained that those who have “put on Christ” that is, those who are true followers of Christ—are “Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Gal. 3:27-29) Paul speaks of the “church,” the “called-out” class of the present age, as being the “body” of Christ.—Eph. 1:22,23

## THE SEVEN CHURCHES

This messianic theme of deliverance is amplified in the Book of Revelation, where Jesus and his followers, the church, are presented as the rulers in that glorious kingdom, the channel of the promised blessing of all nations. In chapter 1, verses 12 to 17, Jesus, the “Son of Man,” is shown standing in the midst of “seven golden candlesticks.” The explanation is that the “seven candlesticks ... are the seven churches.”—Rev. 1:12-17,20

All symbolisms used in the Bible have a background of fact, so these seven churches in Asia Minor—Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea—were actual congregations of that day. However, it is reasonable to believe that they are intended to be symbolic of the entire church of Christ as it has existed in the earth since its beginning at Pentecost. The Lord’s promises to these are inspiring, and confirm the fact that the faithful among them will share the kingdom glory with Jesus.

In chapter 2, verse 10, we read, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” Chapter 3, verse 21, reads, “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.” Another promise is, “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

As Jesus indicates, he had received this promise from his Father, and now he makes it clear that

the church will be partners with him in his kingdom, and will, with him, have “power over the nations.” This wonderful promise is found in Psalm 2:8,9. Here the Heavenly Father says to his beloved Son, “Ask of me and I shall give thee the heathen [Hebrew text denotes Gentiles, or nations] for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

## **CHRIST’S RETURN**

Throughout the entire Bible the establishment of the Messianic kingdom is shown to follow the return of Christ. In Revelation 1:7 this is again promised, with the explanation that he will come “with clouds,” and “every eye” will see him—that is, discern the fact of his return. The “clouds” are symbolic of the trouble and distress which would be upon the nations as the initial result of his return. This is somewhat enlarged upon in chapter 11, verses 17 and 18, where we read that when the time would come for Christ to take unto himself his great power to reign the nations would be “angry,” and that divine judgment or “wrath” would be upon them.

But this is only a necessary preparation for kingdom blessings—the setting aside of the kingdoms of this world under the rulership of Satan and the dashing of them to pieces “like a potter’s vessel.” After that will come the blessings of the people, for it will be “the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give, reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which

destroy the earth.” (Rev. 11:18) In this one verse the work of the entire thousand years of Christ’s kingdom is described.

In this work of the kingdom the “called-out” ones of the Gospel Age will share. Like Jesus, they will be raised from the dead, coming forth in the “first resurrection” to live and reign with Christ. (Rev. 20:4,6) Thus, through the promised “Seed,” mankind will be blessed. In chapter 21, verses 4 and 5, this is revealed, and by faith we see mankind delivered from the result of original sin, and the earth filled with a knowledge of the glory of the Lord. Concerning this we read:

“God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.”—Rev 21:4

Thus we see that the great tragedy of disobedience which was induced by “that old serpent” in the Garden of Eden is not to have lasting evil consequences, for suffering and death are to end. We see also that this is to be accomplished through the promised “Seed,” the Messianic company composed of Christ and his faithful followers. Yes, this glorious divine victory which will result in the prevalence of righteousness and life throughout the earth is assured, yet it will not be without great cost to those who participate in it.

## **GOD’S PEOPLE PERSECUTED**

While the “Seed” of promise will eventually “bruise” the “serpent’s head,” the “serpent” and his “seed” have throughout all the ages been

inflicting painful “bruises” upon the people of God. Satan is the prince of darkness, and the Lord’s people have been bearers of light, so the conflict between the two has been continuous. The deeds of darkness are evil and are exposed by the light; so the darkness hateth the light and the prince of darkness has opposed the bearers of light, and the foretold “enmity” has continued. Satan has not known just who this promised seed might be, so throughout the ages he has directed his opposition against all those upon whom God has manifested his favor. The first evidence of this was the murder of righteous Abel.<sup>4</sup>

Without exception the servants of God from Abel to John the Baptist were persecuted. A rereading of the 11th chapter of the Book of Hebrews will help to impress this fact upon one’s mind. In all those experiences we see the “enmity” of Satan manifested toward the people of God. Through their faith in God and his promises they endured; and, through them, the “light” of truth which God wanted revealed to the people, shone out and was the contributing cause of the hatred that was so cruelly manifested toward them.

The enmity of Satan was vehemently manifested toward Jesus, resulting in his cruel death upon the cross. The tools of Satan used to persecute Jesus were the religious leaders of that day, whom Jesus himself said were of their “father the devil,” the “seed of the serpent.” (John 8:13,44) After Pentecost these same opposers of the light vented their hatred against the disciples of Jesus,

<sup>4</sup> For information on the identity of the devil and his opposition to God see the booklet, *Your Adversary the Devil*. Dawn Publications, PO Box 521167, Longwood, FL 32752

hailing them into prison and putting them to death whenever possible.

This continuous and insistent campaign of Satan to destroy the “seed of the woman” is seen also in all the deceptions and erroneous doctrines that developed among the professed followers of Jesus. Paul prophesied of a widespread apostasy which would develop in the church after the apostles fell asleep in death and, describing the system that would be based upon false doctrines as the “man of sin,” he said that its coming would be “after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.” —II Thess. 2:3-11

The truth concerning the efforts of “that old serpent” to thwart the plan of God to “bruise” his “head” also reaches its climactic revealment in the Book of Revelation. In the messages to the “seven churches,” the work of the “serpent” is manifest in Jesus’ expressions of condemnation for various wrong doctrines and practices prevalent among his professed people. In the church at Ephesus there were those who professed to be apostles, but were not, the brethren having found them to be “liars.” In the church at Smyrna, there were those who “say they are Jews [spiritual Israelites, the “called-out” ones of this age], and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.” To the Smyrna brethren Jesus also said, “the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried.”—Rev. 2:2,9,10

The church at Pergamos is said to dwell “where Satan’s seat is.” And Satan evidently had gotten his viewpoints into the minds of some of these brethren, for Jesus said, “Thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught

Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel.” Jesus said that they also had “them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.” (vss. 13-15) The error of Balaam was teaching for “reward.” (Jude 11) It is believed that the Nicolaitan spirit is one of dictatorship. This is contrary to the spirit of Christ.

The great sin that entered the church at Thyatira was permitting “that woman Jezebel” to seduce the believers—not all of them, for Jesus indicated there were those who had not thus known “the depths of Satan.” (Rev. 2:20-24) In the church of Philadelphia there were also those of “the synagogue of Satan.” (Rev. 3:9) In the Laodicean church some say, “I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing”—a boastful attitude of pride and self-sufficiency, characteristic of Satan.

## **THE UNHOLY CITY**

In these messages to the various churches, which in their composite application reveal the condition among the Lord’s professed people throughout the entire age, Satan’s cunning and unholy handiwork is clearly manifested. Later in the Book of Revelation, a great counterfeit system of Christianity is shown to arise as a result of his efforts to destroy the “seed” of promise and the plan of God which is centered in the Messiah. This unholy thing is named “Babylon the great, the mother of harlots,” and is shown as reigning over “the kings of the earth.” (Rev. 17:5) John wrote concerning Babylon, “I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.” (vs. 6) Thousands of the Lord’s people

were put to death during the Dark Ages by just such an unholy system.

While this “woman” herself was “drunken with the blood of the saints,” the Revelator informs us that the “kings of the earth” and the people of the earth were made “drunk with the wine of her fornication.” (Rev. 14:8; 17:2) Wine is used in the Bible as a symbol of doctrine or teachings. This unholy church system called “Babylon” taught and instituted the union of church and state. This was spiritual harlotry, because the followers of Jesus are espoused to him and, if faithful to their vows, wait for his return to be united with him in the kingdom which he establishes. But, through the union of church and state, the kingdom of Christ was allegedly established. This was a false claim, and the illicit union only led to wars and to bitter persecution of those who held loyally to the true teachings of the Word of God.

Under another symbol, a system of government created by this unholy alliance is represented as a leopardlike “beast.” (Rev. 13:1-2) Space will not permit a detailed discussion of all that is represented by the various characteristics of this “beast” as John describes it. We call attention to the general lesson merely to trace further the extreme lengths Satan has gone in order to thwart the purpose of God and to destroy his people. Concerning this beast we read, “It was given unto him [that is, permitted] to make war with the saints, and to overcome them.”—vs. 7

Four “beasts” are mentioned in the Book of Daniel, chapter 7. They represent four kingdoms, or empires—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. The fourth of these beasts is shown with

ten horns, and then a "little horn" is seen to grow up among the others, displacing three of them. "Horns" seem to be symbolic of ruling authority, or power, so these ten horns, and later the "little horn," would picture various aspects of Roman rulership during the many centuries of its existence, the "little horn" being the last, and in control until the beast is "given to the burning flame."—Dan. 7:11,26,27

Of this "little horn" Daniel wrote, "I beheld and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them." (Dan. 7:21) This is almost the identical language used by the Revelator to describe the persecuting activities of the leopard like beast, so both seem clearly to symbolize a beastlike system of government which through the centuries continued to "bruise" the "heel" of the Lord's elect people, those "called to be saints," and who will eventually make up that Messianic company that will rule the world in righteousness and bless "all the families of the earth."

But this "bruising" is not fatal in the sense of destroying the "Seed." It is the "heel" that is bruised, and while the persecution of the saints through the age has been painful, it has served to test the faithful and to prove them worthy to live and reign with Christ. Besides, this persecution is not to go on forever. This is emphasized in Daniel's prophecy where we read that the prevailing of the Satan-inspired "little horn" against the Lord's true people was to continue only "until the ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom."—Dan. 7:21,22

The saints do not possess the kingdom by virtue of a military victory over the “little horn,” or “beast”—the counterfeit church state system of the kingdom of Christ. Rather, they continue to be “bruised” by the “seed” of the “serpent” until every member of this foreordained company of “called-out” ones from the earth has proved his faithfulness even unto death. When the last one of these has thus proved faithful, and has passed “within the veil,” then, all being raised from the dead in the first resurrection, they will “possess the kingdom,” and will “live and reign with Christ a thousand years.”—Rev. 20:4

It will be then that the tide of battle will be turned. Instead of “that old serpent” and his “seed” continuing to “bruise” those whom the Lord is preparing to be his channel of blessing to all mankind, they, exalted to the divine nature and to glory with Jesus, will be instrumental, first in binding him for a thousand years, and then “crushing” his “head,” that is, forever and completely destroying him at the end of the thousand years, that he may no more deceive and plague the people.—Rev. 20:1-3,10

### **SATAN’S WORK DESTROYED**

The Apostle Paul speaks of Satan as the one who has the “power of death.” (Heb. 2:14) This reminds us that it was through the influence of “that old serpent, the Devil, and Satan,” that our first parents were induced to disobey God’s law and brought upon themselves the penalty of death. God had said, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (Gen. 2:17) When they did disobey, the penalty fell, “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”—Gen. 3:19

Previous to this, “that old serpent” said to mother Eve, “Ye shall not surely die.” (Gen. 3:4) We have noted that the Devil has endeavored by many and devious deceptive methods to substantiate this greatest of all lies ever told. He has induced millions to believe that death is not a reality, that “there is no death.” In the minds of many he has succeeded in implanting the idea that eternal torment, not death, is the wages of sin.

However, the testimony of the Scriptures on this point is consistent from Genesis to Revelation. Death is the penalty for sin, not torment. The torment doctrine became associated with the biblical word hell; but we found that in the Old Testament hell is a translation of the Hebrew word *sheol*, and that the first time the word *sheol* is used in the Bible is by the righteous patriarch Jacob who indicated his expectation of going to *sheol* when he died.—Gen. 42:38

Hell is simply the condition of death into which both the wicked and the righteous go when they die, there to await the resurrection of the dead. Job prayed to go to *sheol*, the Bible hell, in order to escape suffering. (Job 14:13) Solomon explained that there is no knowledge or wisdom in *sheol*—hell, the grave. (Eccles. 9:10) Through the Prophet Hosea the Lord has assured us of his intention to destroy *sheol*. (Hos. 13:14) This, the Lord reveals, was to be accomplished by means of a “ransom”—“I will ransom them from the power of the grave,” that is, *sheol*.

Jesus, the Redeemer and Messiah, is the One whom Jehovah sent into the world to ransom mankind from death, from *sheol*. To do this, he himself took the sinner’s place in death. He went

into the Bible hell when he died. But he was not left in hell. Psalm 16:10 reveals that Jesus' soul was brought back from hell, that is, restored to life. So this wonderful story of redemption and restoration is also carried over into the Book of Revelation where we are assured of the final and victorious accomplishment of divine love through the return of all who are in the Bible hell.

In Revelation 1:18 we find Jesus saying, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore ... and have the keys of hell and of death." Keys are used in the Scriptures as a symbol of authority and power to unlock. Jesus purchased these "keys" to unlock the gates of hell by himself going into hell; so he is now the "Lord both of the dead and living."—Rom. 14:9

In keeping with this we have the assurance throughout the Bible that when Christ's kingdom is established, one of the blessed things to be accomplished will be the resurrection of the dead. In Revelation 20:13 the resurrection is depicted as a returning from the Bible hell. The text reads, "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them."

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus speaks of the "gates of hell." Hell will give up its dead because Jesus will use the "keys of hell" to unlock these "gates." Thus all the prisoners of death will be set free, which is simply another way of saying that there shall be "a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust." (Acts 24:15) With the resurrection work complete, man's great enemy, death, will have been destroyed, or, as the Prophet Isaiah stated it, "swallowed up in victory."—Isa. 25:8

## THE LAMB WAS SLAIN

The reason the world of mankind will have an opportunity for life in the next age is that Jesus gave his flesh for the life of the world. (John 6:53) Throughout the Bible, this sacrificial work of the Redeemer is symbolized by a slain lamb. The first reference to it is in connection with the lamb which, by faith, Abel offered to the Lord in sacrifice. (Gen. 4:4) Man had sinned, but God had promised that there would be a "Seed" to bruise the "serpent's" head, implying that in some way this sin would be remitted. So the Lord began to illustrate how it would be accomplished, that "without shedding of blood" there would be no remission of sin.—Heb. 9:22

When Isaac, a type of the Redeemer, was stretched upon the altar ready to be slain, the Lord substituted a ram to be sacrificed instead. God had promised Abraham that through his seed all the families of the earth were to be blessed, and in this scene the fact is illustrated that before this blessing could take place, a loving father must give up his beloved son in sacrifice. As the plan of God unfolds we discover that the "Son" who actually does this is Jesus, the Heavenly Father's only begotten Son. In the picture of this, a lamb was provided as a substitute, thus reminding us that Jesus would become identified in the promises and prophecies of the Bible as God's lamb who would be "brought to the slaughter."—Isa. 53:7

The Passover lamb sacrificed by the Hebrew children in Egypt, and prominently associated with the deliverance of that people from Egyptian bondage, also pictured God's lamb, Christ Jesus. Paul

wrote, "Christ our passover [lamb] is sacrificed for us."—I Cor. 5:7

John the Baptist, the last of the prophets, had the high honor of introducing Jesus to his own disciples, and he did so by saying, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) This is as though John were saying, This is the lamb that was foreshadowed by the one sacrificed by Abel, and by the lamb that God provided as a substitute for Isaac. This is the antitypical Passover lamb. This is the lamb foretold by Isaiah, who would be brought to the slaughter. (Isa. 53:7) This is the real lamb, the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

This symbolism of the slain lamb also finds its glorious climax in the Book of Revelation. It is first introduced in chapter 5, verse 6. The fourth chapter of Revelation presents what is called "the throne scene" by many students of the Bible. In it we see the great Creator of the universe in his exalted position, with all creatures giving glory to him. In the beginning of the 5th chapter he is shown upon his throne with a "book" in his "right hand," "written within and on the back-side, sealed with seven seals." Then a proclamation goes out, "Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?"—vss. 1,2

This "book" clearly seems to be a symbol of the divine plan as contained in the Bible. It long remained a sealed book. Even those who were used by the Lord to write the Old Testament scriptures did not comprehend the full significance of what they wrote. It remained for Jesus to begin breaking the "seals" of this "book." Of him it is written that he "brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel."—II Tim. 1:10

So in response to the inquiry, "Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?"—the answer came, "The Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book." (Rev. 5:5) These two titles are both used in the prophecies concerning Jesus, the Messiah. Jacob's prophecy speaks of him as a "lion's whelp." (Gen. 49:9,10) Isaiah refers to Jesus as the "root of Jesse." (Isa. 11:10; Rom. 15:12) Jesse was the father of David, so the root of Jesse would also be the root of David.

When John heard the announcement that the "Lion of the tribe of Juda," the "root of David," had prevailed to open the "book," he looked to see who that might be, and said, "I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts [living ones, representing the wisdom, justice, love, and power of the Creator], and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain."—Rev. 5:6

The sequence of this vision is in complete harmony with the manner in which the plan of God itself actually unfolded to the Lord's people, those represented by John. When Jesus came, his disciples recognized him to be the Messiah of promise, the one who had come to be "King of kings." They saw him to be the "Lion," the strong one, the ruler, of the tribe of Judah. It was only when he was taken away from them in death, and by special enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, that they recognized him also as the "Lamb of God," the Lamb who came to give his life for the sins of the world, "a Lamb as it had been slain."

This "Lamb" symbolism is prominent throughout the remainder of the Book of Revelation. In

chapter 14, verse 1, we read, "A Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads." In verse four we read concerning the ones with the Lamb, "These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb."—Rev. 14:4

We have already noted the many ways in which the Bible reveals that Jesus will have associates in the kingdom, joint-heirs who will live and reign with him. Here these are again shown. They are with the Lamb on mount Sion, the heavenly phase of Christ's kingdom, because they followed the Lamb, that is, they did as he did, they laid down their lives in sacrifice.

Nor were they defiled with "women." Women are used in the scriptures to represent the impure churches, "women," who, as we have seen, have committed fornication with the kingdoms of the earth [the illicit union of church and state]. Individual Christians through the age who, at heart, have remained loyal to the heavenly Bridegroom, regardless of the position of the organization with which they were nominally associated, have been recognized by the Lord as those who "follow the Lamb."

In the 17th chapter of Revelation we see the coming into being of unholy influences represented as a "scarlet colored beast." The chapter indicates that this "beast" is a revival of something that had previously existed. As this prophecy is not yet wholly fulfilled, we will not speculate as to the details of its meaning. Suffice it to say

that while it is the agency used to destroy that unholy city, Babylon, it also makes war with the Lamb. But the Lamb (leader of God's people) overcomes the "beast," and it is destroyed and goes into perdition. This indicates the end of that long period when the forces of Satan represented by the "little horn" of Daniel 7:8,11,20-26, and the leopardlike beast of Revelation 13:18, "made war with the saints, and prevailed against them." God's plan moves forward toward the establishment of his kingdom.

Two chapters further on—the 19th—we again find mention of the Lamb. Verse 7 reads, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." This not only speaks of the glorious reward of the "called-out" class in being united with their Lord in heavenly glory, but serves also as a valuable key in unlocking the meaning of some of the symbolic prophecies of the Book of Revelation.

Throughout the book we have the contrasting symbols of the "Lamb" and the "beast." There is, as we have seen, a leopardlike beast; there is an "image of the beast"; and there is a "scarlet colored" beast. For the purposes of this study we may think of all these as unholy systems that seek to destroy the followers of the Lamb. Through illicit union of church and state, through the spirit of the world along all lines, and through corrupt and blasphemous doctrines, millions of professed followers of the Lamb have been enticed away from full loyalty to him.

As a composite whole, these are shown, not as a virgin waiting for her heavenly Bridegroom to be united with him in marriage, but as committing

fornication with the kings of the earth. By this unholy union they become a “city,” a governing force in the world; not a holy city, but “Babylon the great, the mother of harlots.” But in God’s due time, and by agencies which he permits to rise up in the earth for this purpose, Babylon is destroyed.

The Lord’s people, however, are called to leave Babylon, that they be not partakers of her sins, and receive not of her plagues. (Rev. 18:4) Many of the Lord’s people have been unwillingly associated with this “great city”; but in the end of the age, just prior to her destruction, they hear the call to leave in order not to be “defiled with women,” but to be prepared for marriage with the Lamb. When this work of separation is complete, and the last member of the “called-out” class has joined the Lamb on mount Zion, then comes the fulfillment of the proclamation, “The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.”

Now the unholy city Babylon is destroyed. As John saw it in vision, “The great city was divided into three parts [as it went down in destruction], and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came into remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.” (Rev. 16:19) Chapter 17:1 identifies this unholy city Babylon as sitting “upon many waters”—representing peoples and nations of the earth—and in Jeremiah 51:13 we read, “O thou that dwellest upon many waters, abundant in treasures, thine end is come.”

In the place of Babylon there appears another “city,” a “holy city, new Jerusalem.” It is not a humanly constituted city. It is not formed by the

illicit union of church and state. It is in no way a kingdom or “city” of this world. (John 18:36) Instead, it comes “down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” (Rev. 21:2) In verses 9 and 10 we read, “Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife. And he carried me away in spirit to a great and high mountain [mount Sion], and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.”

Just as unholy Babylon is not a literal city, so holy Jerusalem is not a literal city. Both, however, are governments, or kingdoms; one unholy, created and inspired by “that old serpent,” the other holy, the “new creation” of God, and designed by him to be the governing authority in the earth for a thousand years, and to be his channel through which will flow out his promised blessing of all the families of the earth.

As John saw the matter in vision, a “new heaven and a new earth” were closely associated with the “holy city.” (Rev. 21:1,2) This is in keeping with a prophecy in the Book of Isaiah, chapter 65, where we read God’s promise, “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice forever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.”—Isa. 65:17,18

In Isaiah’s prophecy, as a result of the creation of the “new heavens and a new earth” and the “rejoicing” Jerusalem, length of life is seen to increase, and the people “long enjoy the work of their hands.” (Isa. 65:22) Peter refers to this promise of a “new heavens and a new earth,” and says that therein will dwell “righteousness.”

(II Pet. 3:13) Sin and unrighteousness led to death. Righteousness will lead to life; so as shown in John's vision, as a result of the coming into power of the holy city, the "new heavens and the new earth," "there shall be no more death," for "the former things are passed away."  
—Rev. 21:4

Verse 3 of this chapter says that then "the tabernacle of God" will be with men, and that he "will dwell with them." Through Israel's Tabernacle in the wilderness God's presence was represented with that nation. This symbolism is now used to convey to our minds that through the holy city God's favor and blessing will be manifested toward the people of all nations. Just as "that old serpent, the Devil, and Satan" deceived and plagued mankind through the unholy city, "Babylon," so the Lord will enlighten and bless the people through the agencies of Christ's kingdom, the holy city.

In Revelation 22:1 this governmental arrangement is symbolized by a throne, the "throne of God and of the Lamb." Proceeding out of this "throne" is a "pure river of water of life." Continuing the description, it reads, "In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him."—vss. 2,3

Thus is described the glorious climax of God's plan of redemption and restoration as associated with the symbolisms of the slain Lamb. In this final picture we see the authority of the kingdom

represented by the “throne,” and we are reminded that the blessings it will administer to the people—symbolized by the life-giving waters of the river—are made available through the sacrificial work of the slain Lamb.

Peter wrote about the combined testimony of the prophets, saying that they foretold the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. (I Pet. 1:11,12) Here, in the picture of the slain Lamb and the throne, we have both these prophetic truths brought to our attention, revealing that as a result of the suffering and death of the Lamb, and the glory of the kingdom, the river of life is made available; also the trees of life, the leaves of the trees being for the healing of the nations—the “blessing” indeed, of all the families of the earth.

We saw the “called-out” ones with the Lamb on mount Sion. (Rev. 14:1) We have seen them portrayed as united with the Lamb in marriage. We have seen the “bride” as the “holy city,” the “new Jerusalem.” And now, as the water of life is made available for the people, we see the bride again, and she is saying, “Come, ... and ... take the water of life freely.” (Rev. 22:17) Thus is confirmed again the many promises of God that those who “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth” are to be associated with him in the future work of blessing all mankind with life and happiness.

In the 20th chapter of Revelation we have another portrayal of the glorious triumph of Christ’s kingdom, in which those “called to be saints” will share. In the Garden of Eden God said to “that old serpent” that its “head” would be “bruised” by the “seed” of the woman. In

fulfillment of this, the Revelator sees an “angel,” a messenger of God, who is Christ, lay “hold upon that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan,” and bind him “for a thousand years,” after which he is destroyed.—Rev. 20:1,2

John continues, “I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, nor in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years: this is the first resurrection.”<sup>5</sup>—Rev. 20:4,5

The purpose of the thousand-year reign of Christ, in which his church participates, is the restoration of the remainder of the dead from the sleep of death, and giving them an opportunity under the favorable circumstances of that time, to accept Christ, obey the laws of his kingdom, and live forever. That is brought to our attention in verses 11-13 in which we are told that the “dead, small and great” shall “stand before God,” when “books” will be “opened” and the people judged from the things written in the “books.”

When Adam disobeyed God’s law he was sentenced to death. His children, born imperfect, lost life with him, and with it they lost their standing with God, being cast off from his favor. But in his love God made provision through Christ for the human race to return to his favor. But they must be awakened from death in order to have an opportunity to benefit from this provision. Here we see them, the “dead, small and

5 The remainder of verse 5 is not in the older Greek manuscripts, hence is spurious.

great” as they “stand” before God. The very fact that they are awakened from death indicates God’s favor being manifested toward them.

Then the “books” are opened. This, symbolically, indicates that a knowledge of God and his laws is revealed to them. That will be the time when the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth as the waters cover the sea. (Hab. 2:14) The awakened dead will be “judged” by the things written in the books; that is, they will have an opportunity to obey the will of God as contained in the opened “books,” and upon this basis they will be judged worthy or unworthy of everlasting life.

Verse 12 declares that “another book” will be opened, which is the “book of life.” Those who prove loyal to the truths written in the opened books will have their names placed in the “book of life.” This is simply a figurative way of saying that they will be deemed worthy to live forever.

Then, to emphasize that the “dead” who are given an opportunity to receive the blessings that divine love has provided for them include all the dead, the next verse declares, “The sea gave up the dead which were in it: and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every man according to his works,” according to the manner, that is, in which their “works” conform to the “books” which will then be opened for their guidance and instruction in righteousness.

The word “hell” in this wonderful promise of the resurrection is translated from the Greek word *hades*, which, as we have seen, simply denotes the condition of death. Verse 14 declares that “death and hell” will be cast into the “lake

of fire,” which is explained to be “the second death.” Failing to understand the word of God, some have mistakenly supposed that the “lake of fire” is a place of torment, but it is simply the “second death.”

The first time God pronounced the death sentence only Adam and his descendants were involved. But the “second death” will include everything out of harmony with God’s supreme will. All sinners who willfully oppose God when full opportunity is given to them to reform will die a second time—the second death. The “devil,” and the “beast,” and the “false prophet” are cast into this symbolic “lake of fire.” Even death and hell are thus shown to be destroyed; or, as the poet has stated it, “death itself will die.”

That is why, in the 4th verse of the next chapter, we are told that “there shall be no more death,” no more “pain,” and that the “former things are passed away.” (Rev. 21:4) All the evils which were introduced by Satan in the Garden of Eden, and which have plagued the human race for over six thousand years, will then be destroyed. “And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever.”—Rev. 5:13 ■

## **QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 10**

What is meant by the word “signified” as used in Revelation 1:1? Page 264

Are the truths of the divine plan presented in the Bible in the sequence in which they occur?

Page 265

What was God's purpose in man's creation, as revealed in the opening chapters of the Bible?

Page 265

Who was the "serpent" in Eden, and what is implied in the statement God made concerning the "seed" of the "serpent" and the "seed" of the "woman"? Pages 265,266

Who is the "Seed" of promise, and what other promises concerning the "Seed" are recorded in the Book of Genesis? Page 266

Quote a promise of the "Seed" found in the Book of Psalms. Page 266

Quote Isaiah's description of the glorious qualification of the "Seed" of promise. Page 267

What did Micah forecast concerning the promised Messiah? Page 267

What are some of the texts in the Gospels which identify Jesus as the promised Deliverer? Page 267

How does the Apostle Paul reveal that the true followers of Jesus, the church, are also a part of the promised "Seed"? Page 267

How does the first chapter of Revelation reveal Jesus' association with the church? Quote Jesus' promises indicating that the church would share the glory of his kingdom. Pages 268,269

At what time in the plan of God is the Messianic kingdom established? Page 269

Why will peace and tranquility not be the first results of Christ's return? How is this shown in Revelation 1:7, and 11:17,18? Page 269

How do chapters 20 and 21 reveal the work of blessing to be accomplished by Christ and the church? Pages 269,270

What is the basic cause of the “enmity” which the Lord foretold would exist between the “seed” of the “serpent” and the messianic company? Pages 270,271

Trace Satan’s efforts throughout past ages to destroy God’s people. Pages 270,271

How was Satan’s enmity manifested toward Jesus and the Early Church? Page 271

How is the trail of the serpent revealed in Jesus’ messages to the “seven churches”? Pages 272,273

What is symbolized by the unholy city “Babylon,” and how does this indicate further attempts of Satan to destroy the “seed” of promise? Page 273

Referring to “Babylon,” Revelation 14:8 and 17:2 speak of “the wine of her fornication.” What does this mean? Page 274

What is pictured by the leopardlike beast of Revelation 13:1,2? How is Satan’s enmity shown in connection with this beast? Page 274

What is represented by the “little horn” which grew out of the head of Daniel’s fourth “beast”? How is it best identified! Page 275

How long is the “little horn” permitted to prevail against the saints? Page 275

What is the divine penalty for sin, and how did “that old serpent” misrepresent the truth on this subject? Pages 276,277

What is the Bible hell, who has its keys, and when will those in hell return? Pages 277,278

What is one of the symbolisms used in the Bible to represent the sacrificial work of Christ, and where is this first brought to our attention? Page 279

Who is the “Lamb of God, which taketh away

the sin of the world”? Page 280

Where is the “slain lamb” symbolism first used in the Book of Revelation? Explain the circumstances. Pages 280,281

What is the relationship between the “Lion of the tribe of Judah” and the slain Lamb? Page 281

Who are the “women” referred in Revelation 14:4, and how can the “called-out” ones keep from being defiled by them? Page 282

What important step of progress in the divine plan is suggested by the statement in Revelation 17:14 that the “Lamb” overcomes the “beast”? Pages 282,283

Who are those who become the bride of the Lamb? Page 283

Describe the contrast revealed by symbolic Babylon and the symbolic “holy city.” Pages 284,285

What are the “new heavens and new earth” seen by John, and where in the Bible do we find the first promise of their creation? How are they related to the “holy city”? Page 285

What is implied by the combined symbolisms of the “throne of God and of the Lamb”? What is the river of life, and what is the tree of life? Page 286

How is the glorious triumph of Christ’s kingdom shown in the 20th chapter of Revelation? Pages 287,288

What is represented in Revelation 20 by the “books” that are opened? Page 289