

The End of the World

ABOUT TWO YEARS ago the nation of Israel, in one of their journals, “*The Jerusalem Report*,” told how Megiddo had become of high interest to Christian groups. The article entitled, “*World’s End*,” had a subheading which read: “Millions of Christians believe mankind’s final battle will take place at the Israeli archaeological site of Megiddo. As the millennium approaches, Israel is poised to develop a tourist attraction with apocalyptic appeal.”

The article begins by saying, “In ancient days it [Megiddo] was a major city dominating one of the busiest intersections on the Via Maris, the key trade and military route linking Egypt and Mesopotamia. Today Megiddo is a partially excavated archaeological tel (mound) some thirty-five miles southeast of Haifa that overlooks the Jezreel Valley, an area of quiet, rustic beauty.

“The approach of the millennium has sparked in many fundamentalists the belief that this ultimate battle may well be imminent. It has also spurred Israel’s National Parks Authority, which administers Megiddo, and the archaeologists currently working on the site, to realize that they may have a tourist attraction with mass appeal on their hands.”

In another place in the article, the writer called attention very correctly to the single use of Armageddon in the Bible, in Revelation 16:16. This word is believed to be a corruption of the Hebrew word Har (Mount) Megiddo.

Christian interest in this location is due to the verse in Revelation 16:16: “He gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon,” as well as the many battles fought in the area recorded in the Old Testament. Two years ago Megiddo attracted 150,000 visitors per year. Since then the Parks Authority has enhanced Megiddo’s interest as a tourist attraction.

The article said: “The Parks Authority has commissioned a plan—‘Megiddo-Armageddon: A Tel of Many Tales’—aimed at turning what

archaeologists have long regarded as a historical treasure trove into a site more appealing to a wider tourist public.”

Although Israel does not view this site as a short-term tourist attraction, the questions naturally arise: “Why do fundamentalists believe that the world will come to an end? Is it Biblical? And, why in the new millennium?”

After the apostles fell asleep in death, crude notions developed concerning both the second coming of Christ, and the prophetic end of the world. These erroneous views failed to take into consideration the great basic truth of the Scriptures that the return of Christ was to usher in what the Apostle Peter described as “times of restitution of all things, which,” he declared, “hath [been] spoken by the mouth of all his [God’s] holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:19-21

GOD’S PLAN

Instead, the new philosophers in Christianity thought this literal planet upon which we live would be burned up; that faithful Christians living at the time would be taken to heaven, and the remainder of mankind consigned to an eternity of torture. Obviously, the horrors in terms of human suffering thus brought about would be innumerable times worse than man could possibly inflict upon himself through the misuse of nuclear power. Still, most professed Christian people tried to believe it.

The Bible does teach that with the return and second presence of Christ there would be a great upheaval of human society. This is variously described as “a time of trouble,” “great tribulation,” and a time when there would be “distress of nations, with perplexity.” (Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21,22; Luke 21:25,26) The Bible clearly teaches that this great ‘time of trouble’ would result in the overthrow of all selfish human institutions, political, financial, and religious; and that in the process, this would involve worldwide chaos, suffering, and loss of life.

This kind of ‘end of the world’ will be the end of man’s misrule over the earth. In the place of this selfish and sinful misrule comes the establishment of the long-promised kingdom of the Messiah, which, in its thousand-year rulership over the people will lead to the doing of God’s will on earth, even as it is now done in heaven.—Matt. 6:10

The Bible also assures us that God had created this earth to be man's eternal home, and that he intended that man would live on it forever. As Isaiah prophesied, "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."—Isa. 45:18

SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE

The word 'earth' is often used in the Bible in a symbolic or figurative sense to denote the association of people who inhabit the planet. One of the instances in which it is used in this way is Daniel 7:23. Here a great 'beast,' which many students of the Bible understand as depicting the Old Roman Empire, is said to 'devour' the whole 'earth.' Obviously this is a symbolic description since no beast—symbolic or otherwise—has ever, or ever will, devour the literal earth. The thought is that a 'beastlike,' 'unholy' kingdom appropriated to itself all the resources of the people to further its own selfish purposes.

Zephaniah 3:8 is another prophecy which uses the expression 'the earth' is 'devoured;' however, the circumstances are different. We read: "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 with the fire of my jealousy [*'zeal,'—Hebrew*]." Here the earth is shown to be 'devoured' not by a beast, but by the 'fire' of Jehovah's 'jealousy' or 'zeal.' The 'kingdoms' of this world symbolized here by the 'earth,' must be 'destroyed' by the 'fire' of God's zeal, in preparation for the establishment of Christ's Messianic kingdom." The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever."—Rev. 11:15

In Zephaniah 3:9 we are informed that when the Lord will turn to the people "a pure language," they will all call upon him, to serve him with one consent. This clearly shows that after the symbolic earth is 'devoured,' people will still be living on the *literal* earth; that they will be enlightened by the Lord; and that they will have the opportunity of serving him. It is not the *literal* earth that is 'devoured' or destroyed. This text again shows that the earth is often used symbolically in the prophecies.

THE EARTH REMOVED

In the 46th Psalm we read: “Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.” (vss. 2,3) When Jesus said that at the time of his Second Presence there would be “distress of nations, with perplexity,” he illustrated the situation by likening it to the “roaring” of the “sea” and the “waves.” (Luke 21:25) It is evident that the ‘roaring’ of the ‘sea’ and the ‘waves’ is symbolic of the restless, chaotic state of the nations and people of the earth, which increases in intensity until the symbolic earth is ‘removed’ in the great time of ‘tribulation.’

This thought is expressed in Psalm 46:6, *Revised Standard Version*, which reads: “The nations rage, the kingdom totters; he utters his voice, the earth melts.” Here, instead of ‘mountains’ being carried into the midst of the symbolic sea as in verse 2, it is the ‘kingdoms’ that are ‘moved’ or ‘removed.’ And instead of the ‘earth’ being ‘removed,’ it is ‘melted.’

But the *literal* earth is neither removed, nor melted. The conclusion of this wonderful prophecy reads: “Come, behold the works of Jehovah, what desolations he hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen [nations], I will be exalted in the earth.”—Ps. 46:8-10

The literal earth is still the scene of action, and God’s name is exalted in it. This exalting of God’s name throughout the earth will be the work of the messianic kingdom.

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament, one of the Greek words which is translated ‘world’ is *aion*. The word *aion* simply means ‘age,’ or ‘period of time.’ It is this word that is used by the apostles, as quoted in Matthew 24:3 when they asked Jesus, “What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world [*aion*, ‘age’]?” The signs which Jesus gave were not signs that the burning up of the literal earth is near, but that we have reached the end of the present Gospel Age. Outstanding among these signs is the ‘great tribulation’ which we are now witnessing in its early

stages. Already, as Jesus foretold, the human race is threatening its own destruction.

It is given to us to be living at a time when an age in the Divine plan is coming to a close. It is a transition period, during which Satan's rule over the earth will finally be replaced by the authority and rulership of the kingdom of Christ. This is why, as Christians, we should not fear because we know that the Lord's plans are being carried out. Soon the "desire of all nations shall come" (Hag. 2:7), and there will be peace, joy, and everlasting life for all who will avail themselves of these blessings.

MAN'S SOCIAL ORDER

The Greek word *kosmos* is also used in the prophecies pertaining to the end of the world. This word simply means 'order' or 'arrangement.' It has nothing to do with the literal earth on which we live. It is this word, translated 'world' in I John 2:15-17, which assures us that the world is to pass away because of its selfish, sinful nature. Jesus said concerning this same humanly constituted social order, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."—John 16:33

In II Peter 3:5,6 we are informed that a 'world' passed away at the time of the Flood. The spiritual and material aspects of that pre-Flood world are symbolized as 'heavens' and 'earth.' Much in God's material creation is used symbolically in the Bible. The sun, for example, is used to symbolize the health and life-giving powers of the Messiah during the time of his reign for the blessing of the people. We read: "The Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings." (Mal. 4:2) We read concerning Christ's true followers, the 'wheat' in the parable of the 'wheat and the tares,' that they shall "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."—Matt. 13:43

The literal heavens and earth bear a very vital relationship to each other. Life on the earth is largely subject to the influences of the heavens; that is, the sun, the moon, and the stars. The tides and seasons are thus controlled. It is because of this relationship that the Lord uses them to symbolize a social order.

Throughout all human experience, higher or spiritual powers have exerted influence over the human race. Although invisible to mankind, Satan and the fallen angels have misdirected the people away from God

through deception. This unholy influence has been exercised in large measure through false religious systems. These both—Satan and false religions—together constituted the ‘heavens’ which ceased to rule at the time of the Flood. The ‘earth’ of that time constituted the material arrangements of men whereby they lived and worked together. The Flood also brought an end to these arrangements—Noah and his family were the only exception.

The literal Earth was not destroyed by the Flood, and soon after the Flood, Satan again began to exercise his influence in the affairs of men. The historical records of the Bible, and secular history as well, reveal the many forms of false worship which have lured the people away from the true worship of God—the great and loving Creator revealed in the Bible. Another symbolic heavens came into existence which, in myriads of unholy ways, has influenced the minds of the people.

The Apostle Peter, in his symbolic description of the ending of the present social order, describes it in this way: “The heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.” (II Pet. 3:7) Verse 10 continues, “The day of the Lord 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.”

The ‘fire,’ the ‘great noise,’ and the ‘fervent heat’ of this prophecy are all symbolic. Some have suggested that since it was literal water that destroyed the first world, it is literal fire which will destroy ‘the heavens and the earth, which are now.’ However, it was symbolic clouds of water (the angelic administration) that filled the earth with violence, and was swept away by God.

GOD’S NEW WORLD

After describing the passing away of ‘the heavens and the earth, which are now,’ Peter continues: “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” (II Pet. 3:13) The reason the present world is passing away is because selfishness and evil are the predominating motives which largely influence most of its activities. But God has promised to establish a new world—a new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Peter says that it is according to God's promise that we look for these new heavens and new earth. This promise is recorded by the Prophet Isaiah, where he wrote: "Behold, I [the Lord] create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying."—Isa. 65:17-19

In this prophecy, the creating of new heavens and a new earth is associated with the creating of a new Jerusalem. The Lord said, 'Be glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.' Many centuries later, the Apostle John was given a vision of the fulfillment of this prophecy; and he also saw the new heavens and new earth associated with the new Jerusalem. John wrote, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth: ... and I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."—Rev. 21:1,2

One of the 'angels' used by the Lord to show John the wonderful symbolisms of Revelation, said to him, "Come higher, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." And then we read: "He carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God." (Rev. 21:9,10) It is clear that the new Jerusalem is 'the bride, the Lamb's wife.' The 'bride' of Christ is the church of Christ, made up of his faithful, sacrificing followers. The Lord God and the Lamb are the "temple" in this city, and the glory of the Lord and the Lamb are the "light thereof."—vss. 22,23

THE LAMB AND HIS BRIDE

The new spiritual rulership of the messianic kingdom is the Lamb and his bride, functioning by the authority of God. "The nations shall walk in the light of it, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it" (vs. 24) as mankind is restored in the image of God, morally, mentally, and as King.

The new 'earth' will consist of the resurrected Ancient Worthies, who will be "princes in all the earth." (Ps. 45:16) As the work of the new kingdom continues, eventually all mankind (except those who prove to be incorrigible) will become part of that new social order here on earth,

functioning in accord with the Divine will as it will emanate from the new ‘heaven,’ interpreted and administered by the ‘princes in all the earth.’ This new arrangement will mean that God is again favoring his human creatures. Symbolically speaking, he will ‘dwell’ with them. “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them, and be their God.”—Rev. 21:3

The Apostle John saw, in vision, the fulfillment of this promise of the new heaven and new earth. He wrote, “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. 21:4,5

This wonderful new social order of tomorrow will in reality be the kingdom of Christ. It will have both rulers and subjects. Its great objective will be to establish Divine righteousness throughout the earth, and to destroy sin and death. It is for this objective that we pray, in those wonderful words of the Master: “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”—Matt. 6:10

Before this prayer can be completely answered, the present world must come to a full end. It is even now disintegrating. Because of this we look up, and lift up our heads, knowing that our redemption [deliverance] draws nigh.—Luke 21:28

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Called to Involvement

***Key Verse: “God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.”
—Exodus 3:14***

***Selected Scriptures:
Exodus Chapter 3***

THE FIRST FORTY YEARS of Moses' life were spent in learning about the arts and sciences of the Egyptians. He was brought up in Pharaoh's Palace by Pharaoh's own daughter. When he realized that the Israelites who were in bondage to the Egyptians were his people, he tried to help them, even going as far as to kill an Egyptian overseer.—Exod. 2:11,12

When the deed became known to the authorities of Egypt, Moses fled for his life to Midian. Then the next forty years were spent in Midian with Jethro, a priest of Midian, who had seven daughters and gave one named Zipporah to Moses to be his wife.

The new circumstances in his life made Moses a shepherd. He was tending Jethro's flocks when he saw an angel appear in a burning bush in the region of Mt. Horeb. The bush was not consumed!

As he sought to investigate this phenomenon, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said that he should remove his shoes because he was standing on holy ground. When God told him that he was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses hid his face from him out of fear.

God had been listening to the cries and prayers of his people Israel, and the time had come for the deliverance of Israel from bondage to Egypt, and Moses was chosen to lead them. He wondered why he was chosen for this duty. God assured him, saying, “Certainly I will be with thee.” (Exod. 3:12) Likewise, anyone called of God should have no fear of a task he may give us because his power is behind it, and he will bring it to pass.

Moses then had to convince his own people, Israel, that God had sent him to deliver them. He asked by what authority could he present himself

to Israel. The answer that God gave him was that he should say, “I AM hath sent me unto you.” (Exod. 3:14) God described himself to Moses as “I AM THAT I AM,” stressing that he was the great supreme Creator of the universe.

The expression used is also intended to convey that God is the self-existing one, or the one who always had existed. Likewise, God’s name, which he first mentioned to Moses, has the same meaning: “I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name Jehovah was I not known to them.” (Exod. 6:3) The name itself signifies, ‘He who becometh.’ It is broader in scope than that definition, and is said to be, ‘Whatsoever I will, may, or can become.’

Heretofore, the nation of Israel knew God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. His providential leading and mighty exploits were known by them as favors from God. Now God was describing himself to Moses as the self-existing one, and one who had great power. He would use this power to set Israel free. Likewise, the fulfillment of the many promises of the Bible made by God for blessing all mankind will become realities because, “The zeal of the Lord [Jehovah] of hosts will perform this.”—Isa. 9:7

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Called to Deliverance

Key Verse: “Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever.”

—*Exodus 14:13*

*Selected Scriptures:
Exodus 13:17 – 14:31*

IN DELIVERING ISRAEL from Egyptian bondage, God exercised his great power in bringing ten plagues upon Egypt. The last plague, the death of the firstborn, finally shocked the Egyptians, and Pharaoh let them go. Israel escaped tragedy by keeping the Passover. The nation left by way of the wilderness to avoid the Philistines. This route would avoid tempting Israel to return to Egypt. God led the way as a pillar of fire at night, and a cloud by day.

They were not aware that Pharaoh had changed his mind, and wanted to recapture them. It was not until Pharaoh's hot pursuit of the Israelites made the Egyptians draw near to their encampment that they realized the seriousness of the situation. Immediately they began to grumble, and brought to Moses' attention that they would have fared better by serving the Egyptians as slaves, than to die in the wilderness.

Moses then spoke the words of the Key Text, to tell them their salvation was imminent if only they would wait on the Lord. He also promised that these Egyptians would not be seen any more.—Exod 14:13

First, it was necessary to prevent the Egyptians from advancing. The angel of the Lord changed positions from leading Israel to a rear guard position, and the pillar of the cloud came between Israel and the Egyptians. It was darkness to the Egyptians, and light to Israel. Nevertheless, Israel was trapped. The Red Sea was before them and the Egyptians were at their rear. It was then God told Moses to have Israel go forward. This led them into the sea.

He also told Moses to stretch out his hand upon the sea, and to divide it. We read: “Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.” (Exod. 14:21) Israel then passed through the Red Sea dry-shod, with a wall of water on either side. When the restraint by the angel of the Lord was removed, the Egyptians again pursued Israel and lost their chariot wheels. Then God told Moses to stretch his hand over the sea, causing the waters to return. And all the Egyptians perished.

This entire incident presents a powerful lesson in the plan of God. At the time of the Passover, Israel was to slay the Paschal Lamb, representing Jesus, the world’s Redeemer. Only the firstborn were in jeopardy of death that night. If the blood of the lamb had been placed on the doorposts and lintel of the house, they were saved from death. These represented the “Church of the firstborn” (Heb. 12:23), selected during the Gospel Age. This was the first deliverance.

The pursuit of Pharaoh and the Egyptians pictures the end of the Millennial Kingdom, when all the world of mankind are delivered from death and Satan’s power. Thus, when Pharaoh and his army perished in the sea, they pictured the destruction of Satan and his angels. The world of mankind’s deliverance will then be complete.

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Called to Covenant

Key Verse: “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine.”

—Exodus 19:5

*Selected Scriptures:
Exodus 19:1 – 20:21*

AFTER DELIVERING Israel from bondage in Egypt when the Egyptian army drowned in the Red Sea, one of the first things God did was to give Israel his Laws. Moses went up into the mount and there he was given the Law, also known in brevity as the Ten Commandments. (Exod. 20:1-17) Although the people were frightened and held in awe with all the proceedings, Moses told them, “Do not fear, for God has come to prove you, and that the fear of him may be before your eyes, that you may not sin.”—Exod. 20:20, *Revised Standard Version*

Prior to this interchange between Moses and God, the nation of Israel had traveled for three months to the Sinai Desert and camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai. There Moses went up in the mountain to commune with God. God told him that if Israel “will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.”—Exod. 19:5,6

God fulfilled his promise and made Israel ‘a peculiar treasure unto me [God] above all people.’ Later he would say through the Prophet Amos, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.” (Amos. 3:2) The special favor of God brought responsibility, and the people of Israel had agreed to make a covenant with God. When the Law was given they said, “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.” (Exod. 19:8) If they kept the Law perfectly they could receive eternal life, but this was not possible for imperfect men to do.

Jesus came to earth, as described in God's Word: "When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the Law." (Gal. 4:4) Being perfect, the man Jesus was able to keep the Law perfectly. (Heb. 7:26) He removed Israel from the Law, "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross."—Col. 2:14

The Law served the purpose of making mankind aware of sin, as it is written: "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin."—Rom. 3:20

It was possible for the people of Israel to become a kingdom of priests. When Jesus had come, God had given exclusive favor to Israel. The Christ class that God was developing could have been taken from Israel, permitting them to become "priests of God and of Christ, and reign with him a thousand years."—Rev. 20:6

Instead, the Law became a 'stumblingblock' to them (I Cor. 1:23) preventing them from attaining this high honor. God went to the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name. (Acts 15:14) The disciples of Jesus in the Early Church and these Gentiles made a covenant with God by sacrifice (Ps. 50:5) and are no longer under the Law Covenant.

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Called to Obedience

Key Verse: “*Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD.*”
—*Leviticus 26:2*

Selected Scriptures:
Exodus 40:1-33;
Leviticus 26

AMONG THE FEATURES of the Law given to Israel were instructions for building a tabernacle, or tent of meeting, for God and men. The instructions were explicit, and these were carried out carefully. Finally, all was in readiness for assembly, and duties were assigned to the Levites. The 40th chapter of Exodus tells of instructions given by God to Moses for setting up the Tabernacle; “Thus did Moses: according to all that the Lord commanded him, so did he.”—

Exod. 40:16

The Tabernacle was important to Israel. It was a type, or a physical model picturing matters concerning God’s plan. The Apostle Paul refers to the fulfillment of this picture as “the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.” (Heb. 8:2) Later Paul says that the priests serving in this tabernacle, “serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things.”—vs. 5

The important work the Tabernacle typified was that which Jesus performed when he came to the earth to be the world’s Redeemer. Jesus invited his obedient followers throughout the Gospel Age to share with him in his sacrificing, and later in his reign. The obedience required by this church class is expressed by John the Revelator: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”—Rev. 2:10

All the furniture items and structural compartments involved in the Tabernacle, as well as all the rituals performed by the priests, confirm as types other teachings of the Bible. Israel was asked to perform these obediently, and with care, so that the heavenly picture could be seen clearly. And this they did.

As God manifested his presence by the Shekinah glory—a brilliant light above the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy—

so also he will manifest his presence with mankind during Christ's glorious kingdom. We read: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God."—Rev. 21:3

In Leviticus 26, God tells Israel that if they keep his sabbaths, reverence his sanctuary, walk in his statutes and keep his commandments that he will bless them with rain in due season and the land will yield its increase. (vss. 2-4) The blessings cited for obedience are listed in Leviticus 26:1-13. However, if they were not obedient, they would suffer punishments which are listed from verses 14 to 46. God promised Israel that they would not be abandoned, but that he would bless them again for their fathers' sakes. Their current restoration to their land is a fulfillment of this promise. As the Prophet Amos wrote, "I will bring again the captivity ... of Israel ... and plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God."—Amos 9:14,15

This pictures how the resurrected world of mankind will receive an opportunity to be obedient during God's kingdom, and to be blessed forevermore with life, health, prosperity and happiness.

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Joseph Made Ruler

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

VERSES 1-8 “And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed: and, behold, he stood by the river.

“And, behold, there came up out of the river seven well favoured kine and fatfleshed; and they fed in a meadow.

“And, behold, seven other kine came up after them out of the river, ill favoured and leanfleshed; and stood by the other kine upon the brink of the river.

“And the ill favoured and leanfleshed kine did eat up the seven well favoured and fat kine. So Pharaoh awoke.

“And he slept and dreamed the second time: and, behold, seven ears of corn came up upon one stalk, rank and good.

“And, behold, seven thin ears and blasted with the east wind sprung up after them.

“And the seven thin ears devoured the seven rank and full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and, behold, it was a dream.

“And it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof: and Pharaoh told them his dream; but there was none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh.”

We are not to suppose that dreams are always revelations from the Lord of things to come to pass, particularly the dreams of those who are not in covenant relationship with the Lord. As a matter of fact, since the completion of the inspired Word of God, the Bible, the Lord has not guided even his own people by means of dreams, for it has not been necessary. We now have the inspired Scriptures which are all-sufficient for every time of need.—II Tim. 3:16,17

In ancient times, when God gave dreams to others than his own people, it was not for their benefit particularly, but in order to influence their course in life as it related to those whom he was guiding and blessing. Thus, the ‘Wise Men’ were warned by a dream not to return to Herod as

they had planned, for to do so would have endangered the life of the boy Jesus. And so with Pharaoh. God was not so much interested in preserving his life and the lives of the Egyptians in general, as he was in making a provision for the children of Israel. For this reason he caused Pharaoh to have dreams which served his purpose.

VERSES 9-13 “Then spake the chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying, I do remember my faults this day:

“Pharaoh was wroth with his servants, and put me in ward in the captain of the guard’s house, both me and the chief baker:

“And we dreamed a dream in one night, I and he; we dreamed each man according to the interpretation of his dream.

“And there was there with us a young man, an Hebrew, servant to the captain of the guard; and we told him, and he interpreted to us our dreams; to each man according to his dream he did interpret.

“And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was; me he restored unto mine office, and him he hanged.”

In the forgetfulness of the ‘chief butler’ to speak a good word for Joseph as soon as he was released from prison we can see the overruling providence of the Lord. Had he spoken immediately, perhaps Pharaoh would not have been in a receptive attitude of mind, and nothing would have been accomplished. Indeed, he might have made Joseph’s prison life even more difficult.

The Lord’s people should endeavor to view all of their experiences in the light of being the providences of God. We may be inclined to blame what seems to be the immediate cause of trial—the unfriendly attitude of those around us, perhaps—but this is a mistake. God is able to shield us from all such unfavorable circumstances, and if he does not, it is because his wisdom sees that there is a needed lesson for us to learn, or some larger purpose of his which he is working out through us. Thus Jesus did not blame his accusers and persecutors, but said, “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”—John 18:11

VERSES 14-24 “Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh.

“And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and there is none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee, that thou canst

understand a dream to interpret it.

“And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.

“And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, In my dream, behold, I stood upon the bank of the river:

“And, behold, there came up out of the river seven kine, fatfleshed and well favoured; and they fed in a meadow:

“And, behold, seven other kine came up after them, poor and very ill favoured and leanfleshed, such as I never saw in all the land of Egypt for badness:

“And the lean and the ill favoured kine did eat up the first seven fat kine:

“And when they had eaten them up, it could not be known that they had eaten them; but they were still ill favoured, as at the beginning. So I awoke.

“And I saw in my dream, and, behold, seven ears came up in one stalk, full and good:

“And, behold, seven ears, withered, thin, and blasted with the east wind, sprung up after them:

“And the thin ears devoured the seven good ears: and I told this unto the magicians; but there was none that could declare it to me.”

When Pharaoh discovered that his trusted wise men and magicians were unable to interpret his dreams for him, he was greatly distressed. The circumstances reminded the chief butler of Joseph and of the promise he had made to him. Here, then, was an ideal opportunity, not only to do a good turn for Joseph, but also to solve a problem for Pharaoh, so he related to the king the experience he had with the prisoner Joseph.

Pharaoh was impressed and had Joseph ‘brought hastily out of the dungeon.’ Although some authority had been given to Joseph over the other prisoners, apparently he still had to suffer the hardships of prison life, which at that time were often cruel. That he was in the dungeon when sent for by Pharaoh indicates that life was not made easy for him in prison.

When Pharaoh told Joseph why he had sent for him, that he had been told he was an interpreter of dreams, Joseph was quick to deny any special ability of his own; but, as on former occasions, gave the credit to the Lord. He said to the king, ‘It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an

answer of peace.’ The additional two years Joseph had languished in prison, after the chief butler had been released and had promised to speak a good word for him, had not embittered Joseph. He still trusted in the Lord and was quick to give the glory to him for any ability he might possess in the way of interpreting dreams.

VERSES 25-36 “And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh is one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what he is about to do.

“The seven good kine are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years: the dream is one.

“And the seven thin and ill favoured kine that came up after them are seven years; and the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind shall be seven years of famine.

“This is the thing which I have spoken unto Pharaoh: What God is about to do he sheweth unto Pharaoh.

“Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt:

“And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consume the land;

“And the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine following; for it shall be very grievous.

“And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

“Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt.

“Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years.

“And let them gather all the food of those good years that come, and lay up corn under the hand of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities.

“And that food shall be for store to the land against the seven years of famine, which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land perish not through the famine.”

Pharaoh related his dreams to Joseph, telling him of the seven fat kine (cows) and the seven lean kine; also the seven full ears of corn and the seven thin ears. Seemingly with the thought of impressing upon Joseph what truly difficult dreams these were to interpret, he explained that the magicians had failed to reveal what they meant.

Joseph's approach to the problem was direct, and in a single sentence he simplified his answer by explaining that both dreams meant the same thing, that they were 'one.' 'The seven good kine are seven years,' he said, 'and the seven good ears are seven years: the dream is one.' In the dreams of his fellow prisoners, the chief baker and the chief butler, the things they saw represented days, but in Pharaoh's dreams things represented years.

The dream foreshadowed a period of fourteen years—seven years of plenty—represented by the fat kine and the full ears—and seven years of famine—represented by the lean kine and the thin ears. The dream was doubled, explained Joseph, because the thing was assured by God, and he would shortly bring it to pass. This method of establishing a truth was in keeping with the Lord's arrangement that every great truth must be confirmed by the mouth of two or three witnesses. So both the kine and the ears testified concerning the seven years of plenty to be followed by seven years of famine. Thus there could be no doubt about the coming fourteen years in the land of Egypt.

Joseph not only interpreted Pharaoh's dreams for him, but added some excellent advice. This also was timely. When Pharaoh learned what was about to occur in the land over which he was king, he was no doubt greatly disturbed. Joseph, noting this, offered his well-timed and wise counsel concerning the appointment of a food administrator, one who would see to it that during the fat years surpluses were stored and preserved, that there would be a large enough provision to see the nation through the seven years of famine.

VERSES 37-45 "And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants.

"And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the spirit of God is?"

"And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art:

"Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou.

"And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt.

"And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain

about his neck;

“And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt.

“And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I am Pharaoh, and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.

“And Pharaoh called Joseph’s name Zaphnath-paaneah; and he gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On. And Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt.”

Pharaoh listened to Joseph’s advice, and was impressed. It was obvious to him that if Joseph could interpret his dreams, and then frame a plan so quickly to meet the emergency they portended, he would be the best choice to fill the position of food administrator. So Joseph was given the position, with dictatorial powers to act in accord with what he thought would be best.

Nor was this assignment of power to Joseph made privately, for Pharaoh arranged that this new ruler in the realm should be paraded before the people, and that they should be made to bow to him. This was doubtless quite an embarrassing experience for Joseph. Those with less love for the Lord, and less desirous to give glory to him, might have had their perspective of life distorted by such sudden exaltation, but it did not thus affect Joseph.

Joseph was made a virtual dictator, but it was for the good of the nation. It illustrates that the form of government is often not so important as the personnel that governs. There is no form of government which will prevent evils from being inflicted upon the people if its laws are administered by selfish and corrupt men. On the other hand, when rulers are wise, just, and benevolent, the people under them will be blessed regardless of the form of government involved. No one could move in Egypt without Joseph’s consent, yet there is no record that the people ever complained of oppression under his rulership.

VERSES 46-57 “And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt.

“And in the seven plenteous years the earth brought forth by handfuls. “And he gathered up all the food of the seven years, which were in the

land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities: the food of the field, which was round about every city, laid he up in the same.

“And Joseph gathered corn as the sand of the sea, very much, until he left numbering; for it was without number.

“And unto Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, which Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On bare unto him.

“And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father’s house

“And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.

“And the seven years of plenteousness, that was in the land of Egypt, were ended.

“And the seven years of dearth began to come, according as Joseph had said: and the dearth was in all lands; but in all the land of Egypt there was bread.

“And when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread: and Pharaoh said unto all the Egyptians, Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do.

“And the famine was over all the face of the earth: and Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold unto the Egyptians; and the famine waxed sore in the land of Egypt.

“And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn; because that the famine was so sore in all lands.”

Joseph was still a young man when he became ruler in Egypt, being only thirty years of age. At this age he embarked upon a mission that was to preserve the life, not only of his own people, but of the Egyptians as well. Jesus was thirty years of age when he entered upon his ministry, a ministry which also was destined to give life to God’s people, and to the whole world—not a temporary extension of the present life, but life everlasting.

Leaving the presence of Pharaoh, the young ruler immediately entered upon his duties. Apparently he made a personal survey of the whole land. While doing this, he probably made a record of possible storage houses and made the necessary arrangements to have the surpluses put in them. It was a gigantic undertaking for those days, and Joseph did not have much time for preparation, as the first year of plenty was already upon them.

We read that during those seven years of plenty the earth brought forth by ‘handfuls.’ Apparently this was an expression used in ancient times to denote an abundance, an overflowing supply. One of the promises of the bounteous blessings which will be provided for the people during the thousand years of Christ’s kingdom uses this expression, saying: “There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon: and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.”—Ps. 72:16

While Joseph was made dictator in Egypt, seemingly he had little choice as to the selection of his wife, Pharaoh giving him Asenath, daughter of Potipherah, priest or prince of On. ‘On’ means ‘City of the Sun’; and in Hebrew is called ‘Own,’ and ‘Bethshemesh’; and in Greek, ‘Heliopolis.’ It was the university city of Old Egypt.

During the seven years of plenty, two sons were born to Joseph—Manasseh and Ephraim. Manasseh means ‘forgetting.’ Joseph gave this name to his firstborn, for, said he, God ‘hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father’s house.’ Ephraim means ‘fruitful,’ and Joseph gave this name to his second son because, as he explained, ‘God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.’ These sidelights on Joseph’s attitude toward his experiences emphasize that with him the Lord came first in everything. Manasseh and Ephraim were later adopted by Jacob into his family and made heads of tribes in Israel. For some unexplainable reason, Jacob named Ephraim first, although actually Manasseh was Joseph’s firstborn.

When the seven years of famine came upon Egypt, the people soon began to clamor for food. Their appeal to Pharaoh was turned over to Joseph, who was prepared for the emergency. The famine affected not only Egypt, but all the surrounding countries, and before it was over, people were coming to Egypt from all those areas seeking for food.

The foreknowledge of God in the care of his people anticipated this situation. The Lord had in mind the care of the children of Israel when he permitted Joseph to be sold into Egypt. There is a wonderful lesson in this for all who put their trust in the Lord. We should not lose faith because of the difficulties which may confront us today, for in the experiences which the Lord is permitting, circumstances are being shaped for a larger, more suitable purpose. If faithful here, we will be

exalted to reign with Christ, and in his kingdom have the privilege of giving health and life to all mankind.

Dawn Bible Students Association

The Peace of Christ

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth [in stinted measure or in perishable quality], give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”
—John 14:27

WITH ABOUNDING compassion and tenderness, our Lord—on the last night of his earthly life—bestowed upon his beloved disciples a parting blessing. It was his legacy of peace, certainly the richest legacy he had to bequeath, and one of priceless value. It was the promise of that tranquillity of soul, that rest and ease of mind, which he himself possessed—the peace of God.

OUR LORD’S LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

It was the same peace which the Father has himself always enjoyed, even in the midst of all the commotion which the permission of evil has brought about. But it was not derived from the same source. In Jehovah, this peace was self-centered; he realized in himself the omnipotence of power and wisdom; while the peace of Christ was centered, not in himself, but in God, by faith in his wisdom, power, and grace. So also if we would have the peace of God, the peace of Christ—‘my peace’—it must, like his, be centered in God by faith.

The peace of Christ is a priceless legacy. Yet, when the storm clouds of trouble, which were even then growing very dark, burst in their fury upon the heads of those very disciples to whom the words were directly addressed, they failed to claim this legacy. They followed immediately the gracious bequest, and struck consternation, bewilderment, confusion to their hearts, and shook their faith.

While the Lord was speaking the words, the foul betrayer, Judas, was out on his murderous errand. Then followed the agony in Gethsemane, and the terror and dismay among the disciples as they began to realize the fate of their beloved Lord. Soon their suspense deepened into more

fearful forebodings as he stood alone before his merciless accusers and persecutors in the Hall of Pilate and the Court of Herod, while they were powerless to shield him. Then came the tragic end—the horrors of the crucifixion.

WHAT HAD BECOME OF THE PEACE?

Where was the promised peace under such circumstances—when, overcome with fear and dread, they all forsook him and fled; and when Peter, although anxious to defend him, was so filled with fear that three times he denied his Lord, and with cursing declared that he never knew him? The explanation is that the peace had not yet come; for, as the Apostle Paul tells us, “Where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament [a bequest] is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.” (Heb. 9:16,17) Soon the tragic scene was over, and the cry, “It is finished,” fell upon their ears. The darkened heavens, the quaking earth, the rending rocks, the torn veil of the temple—these were all signs of God’s displeasure at the treatment of his Son.

To the world (both Jews and Gentiles participating in the crime) the language of these events was that of Divine wrath and indignation against them. As fear fell upon the people, and the clamor and excitement of that awful day died away, they smote upon their breasts and returned to their homes with fear. The Roman centurion and they that were with him, fearing greatly, said: “Truly this was the Son of God.”—Matt. 27:54

To the disciples of the Lord, these events spoke a very different language. The cause of their blessed Master was their cause, and it was God’s cause. To them these supernatural demonstrations gave evidence that God was not regarding this matter with indifference.

Three days later, hope was revived by the news of our Lord’s resurrection, confirmed to them by his appearance in their midst. Again, forty days later, hope was strengthened by his ascension after his parting counsel, blessing, and promised return; and his instructions to tarry in Jerusalem until they received, not many days hence—at Pentecost—the promise of the Father, which was the Comforter, the Holy Spirit of adoption.

Then the peace of Christ, the Lord’s rich legacy, began to be realized. The tarrying days of prayer and expectancy were days of abiding peace—

peace which flowed as a river. When, on the Day of Pentecost, the promised Comforter came, the river of their peace found a deeper bed; and their joy knew no bounds!

“Like a river glorious is God’s perfect peace,
Over all victorious in its glad increase.
Perfect; yet it floweth fuller every day;
Perfect; yet it groweth deeper all the way.”

OUR RICH LEGACY OF PEACE

But this legacy of peace was not bequeathed to the Early Church alone. It is the blessed inheritance of the entire church, even to the end of the age. The Lord showed his thought for us all on that very day, when in his prayer he said, “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.”—John 17:20

The peace promised is not the short-lived peace of the world. This is sometimes enjoyed for a little season—while fortune smiles and friends abound, and health endures. It quickly vanishes when poverty comes in, and friends go out; when health fails and death steals away the treasures of the heart. ‘My peace,’ the peace of God—which Christ himself enjoyed, endured through loss, persecution, scorn, contempt, and even amidst the agonies of the cross. This peace is something which none of the vicissitudes of the present time can destroy, and which no enemy can wrest from us.

The peace promised is not the sort that the world recognizes and appreciates. The Lord himself had a stormy pathway, and so it must be for all the faithful until the purposes of God in the permission of evil are accomplished. We are distinctly forewarned—with the assurance that through all the storms this peace shall abide—“In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”—John 16:33

FAITH THE BASIS OF PEACE

If we would know the foundation and security of this abiding peace which is able to survive the heaviest storms of life, we have only to look to the teaching and example of the Lord and the apostles. What was it that held them so firmly, and gave them such rest of mind while they suffered? It was their faith in the love, power and wisdom of God. They

believed that what God had promised he was able also to perform; and that his righteous and benevolent plan could know no failure.

By the mouth of his prophets he had declared, “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: ... Yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.” (Isa. 46:10,11) “The Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it?” (Isa. 14:27) They rested on the assurances of God; in him their faith was anchored. While they were tossed by the tempests of life, it did not matter how fiercely the storms raged, because their anchor still held fast to the throne of God.

The language of our Lord’s faith was: “O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee.” (John 17:25) He had been with the Father from the beginning, had realized his love and goodness, had seen his power, and had marked his righteousness and his loving kindness and fatherly providence over all his works. The knowledge which he had of the Father gave to him a firm footing for faith in all God’s purposes concerning the future. Hence he could and did walk by faith. And that faith enabled him to overcome all obstacles, and to secure the victory, even over death. As it is written, “By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.”—Isa. 53:11

It is also written for our instruction: “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our [your] faith.” (I John 5:4) It is only through steady, unwavering faith that the peace of Christ will abide with his people. While the Lord was with his disciples and they saw in him the manifestation of the Father, their faith was strong and they had peace in him. As he said, “While I was with them in the world I kept them.” (John 17:12) But not until after he had left them was their faith truly anchored in God. After Pentecost they experienced the same peace that Christ had enjoyed—the blessed peace that came from a knowledge of the fact that God acknowledged them as sons and heirs, and joint-heirs with Christ, if they would continue faithfully to follow in the steps of the Redeemer.

CULTIVATION OF UNWAVERING FAITH

This is the basis of our peace. No matter how fiercely the storms of life may assail us, we must never let go our anchor and allow ourselves to drift. We are to remember that “the foundation of God standeth sure.” (II

Tim. 2:19) “His truth shall be thy shield and buckler.” (Ps. 91:4) “What he had promised he was able also to perform” (Rom. 4:21), notwithstanding our human imperfections and frailties. These are covered through the imputed righteousness of Christ, our Surety and our Advocate. Also, we must remember that “the Father himself loveth” us. (John 16:27) He knows our frame and “remembereth that we are dust” (Ps. 103:14), and so has compassion for the sons of his love and is very pitiful and of tender mercy. Indeed, “What more can he say than to you he hath said,” (*Hymns of Dawn*, #93: “*Our Firm Foundation*”) to assure our faith and to steady and strengthen our hearts to patient endurance in the midst of the trials and conflicts of the narrow way of sacrifice.

There is nothing which puts the Christian at greater disadvantage in the presence of his foes than for him to let go, even temporarily, his grip upon the anchor of faith. Let him do so even for a moment, and of necessity darkness begins to gather round him. He cannot see the brightness of his Father’s face; for “without faith it is impossible to please” God. (Heb. 11:6) While the Christian grapples again for the anchor, the powers of darkness fiercely assail him with doubts and fears. These attacks are generally based upon his human imperfections, which he should ever bear in mind are covered by the robe of Christ’s righteousness.

If we would have the peace of God reign in our hearts we must never let go our anchor, nor suffer Satan’s deadliest strife to beat our courage down. The language of our hearts must always be, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” (Job 13:15) With this faith, the peace of God bequeathed to us by our Master ever abides. Thus, “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4:7) It is written again, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee.” (Isa. 26:3) In the midst of the Christian warfare let our hearts be cheered and our minds be stayed, not only with assurances that all the Divine purposes shall be accomplished, but also, with promises of personal favor such as these:

“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.” (Ps. 103:13) “Can a woman forget her suckling child? . . . Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” (Isa. 49:15,16) “It is your Father’s good pleasure to

give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32) “Such as are upright in their way are his delight.”(Prov. 11:20) “Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart” (Ps. 37:4)—the peace of God, even in the midst of storm and tempest.

Dawn Bible Students Association

Hard Sayings

SPEAKING IN THE SYNAGOGUE at Capernaum, Jesus declared that the only ones who could have eternal life were those who ‘ate his flesh and drank his blood.’ He explained that “this is that bread which came down from heaven.” The account adds, “Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is a hard saying; who can hear it?” (John 6:53-60) In the same lesson Jesus said, “My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.”—vs. 55

Now that we understand the Divine plan of redemption as it is centered in Christ Jesus, these expressions by the Master are easily understood. It was simply his way of saying that his humanity was to be sacrificed for the sin of the world, and that it is necessary for believers to accept this great fact and humbly yield themselves in obedience to the Divine will as revealed through him, in order to have life.

But for those who heard it for the first time, and with no background knowledge of the Divine plan to help them understand what the Master meant, the idea of eating his flesh and drinking his blood was ‘hard.’ Jews were forbidden to drink blood, and certainly the suggestion that they would need to drink human blood in order to live was just too much for them to understand, and many became offended and walked no more with Jesus.

MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM

The disciples asked Jesus why he always spoke to the public in parables and dark sayings. In reply he said to them, “Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 13:11) A mystery is only such as long as it is not understood, and Jesus’ promise was that his followers would have the mysteries of the kingdom made clear to them. We believe that Jesus has fulfilled his promise on behalf of all his people as the due time has arrived for each of those mysteries to be revealed. He promised that when he returned at the end of the age he would gird himself and would serve his household with “meat in due season.” (Luke 12:37; Matt. 24:45) Many and rich are the truths which

have been thus placed upon the Lord's table in fulfillment of this promise. They are mysteries only to those to whom it has not been given to understand.

At the beginning of the age it was the due time to make known the "riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Col. 1:27) First, it was a mystery to Jewish believers that Jesus alone was not the complete Christ, but rather the Head over a 'body' of many members. But, as Paul stated it in his letter to the Ephesian brethren, a manifestation of Divine love surpassing human knowledge was seen in the acceptance of Gentile 'dogs' to be fellow heirs with Jewish believers in this 'hope of glory.'

"EYE HATH NOT SEEN"

Paul wrote to the Corinthians saying, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." (I Cor. 2:9,10) In this well-known passage, Paul quotes from Isaiah 64:4, explaining that the deep thoughts of God pertaining to his plan for the blessing of mankind—which had been hidden from the foundation of the world—were now revealed to the followers of Jesus by the Holy Spirit.

While previously it had been true that 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard' the wonderful truths concerning the Divine plan of redemption and salvation through Christ—a plan embracing the use of both Jews and Gentiles as associates with him in the work of deliverance—now it was different. Jesus indicated this when he said prospectively to his disciples, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear." (Matt. 13:16) David wrote, "O Lord, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep." (Ps. 92:5) How we rejoice today that these 'deep' thoughts of God have been revealed to his people, and that we can now understand the 'works' of his plan, and—by his grace—participate therein.

"SINCERE MILK"

To those who had purified their souls by obeying the truth "unto unfeigned love of the brethren" the Apostle Peter wrote, "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all

evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” (I Pet. 1:22; 2:1-3) The Apostle Paul wrote, “Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children.” (I Cor. 14:20) Seemingly it is this thought that Peter is expressing when, following his admonition to lay ‘aside all malice,’ he adds, ‘As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word.’

There is much in the First Epistle of Peter to indicate that those to whom he wrote were not mere ‘babes in Christ’ within the meaning usually attached to this expression. Perhaps he had Jesus’ illustration in mind, when speaking of little children he said, “of such is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 19:14) Every disciple of Christ should endeavor to be childlike in simplicity and sincerity. And all such will surely desire to feed upon the rich spiritual food of the Bible, which, in keeping with the ‘newborn babe’ illustration, Peter describes as the ‘sincere milk of the word.’

In the Greek language, the word which is translated ‘sincere’ is one which means ‘unmixed, unadulterated.’ Childlike humility of heart will manifest itself in a desire to feed only upon the unadulterated truth, and to avoid the vain imaginations of human reasonings. It seems to us that in this particular text Peter may well be referring to all the precious doctrines of the Divine plan as milk, not with the thought of minimizing the depth of the knowledge of God which they reveal, but to show that those who in childlike simplicity feed upon the truth are able properly to assimilate it, and thereby to grow strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

We are glad that all the Lord’s people, to whom he has given hearing ‘ears’ and seeing ‘eyes,’ have the ability to grasp the glorious truths of the Word. Through these truths our Heavenly Father is revealing himself to his people. There are varying degrees of understanding and appreciation of the truth among his people, but this indicates largely a natural growth from the standpoint of time. There are none of us who will ever, this side the veil, acquire a full degree of knowledge; but we can all, through study, show ourselves approved unto God, workmen who need not be ashamed, “rightly dividing the word of truth.”—II Tim. 2:15

Hebrews 5:13,14 is one of the frequently quoted texts used to give the thought that some of the precious truths of the Bible are simple—the ABC's of the plan—while certain other truths are deeper and more spiritual. In this text Paul speaks of the “milk” and of “strong meat,” and tells the Hebrew brethren that they were not prepared for strong meat, that they even had need that the ‘milk’ doctrines be taught them again.

HARD TO BE UTTERED

What deep truth does Paul refer to here as ‘strong meat?’ This is indicated in verses 10 and 11, where he speaks of the Melchisedec priesthood—that Jesus, as both king and priest, was typified by Melchisedec. “Of whom we have many things to say,” Paul writes, “and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.” He then explains to the Hebrew brethren that they were not ready for what he wanted to say to them about the Melchisedec type, that they even needed to have the first principles of the oracles of God and “doctrine of Christ” taught to them again.

The fact that Melchisedec was both a priest and a king, and was a type of this combined office as it is filled in the antitype by Christ, is to us a wonderfully simple truth. There is nothing complex or mysterious about it. To the minds of the Jewish Christians in the Early Church, however, it presented a difficulty—not because the idea was complex or hard to grasp, but because they had been so thoroughly imbued with the thought that everything pertaining to a priesthood began with Aaron. In their religious education Melchisedec had never been mentioned or considered. It was this that made it ‘strong meat,’ or as the Greek text states, “tough” meat for them to “digest.”

Paul, by contrast, mentions what he describes as the “principles of the doctrine of Christ.” (Heb. 6:1) According to the Greek text, it is really the primary, or fundamental doctrines of Christ that Paul refers to. These, he explains, are repentance, faith, baptisms, laying on of hands, the resurrection, and eternal judgment. All of these, while basically important in the Christian life, presented no difficulty of acceptance by the Jewish mind, because they were not outside of, or beyond, his usual trend of thinking. Actually, the doctrine of baptism is no simpler, or more easily understood than the Melchisedec type of Christ, as both king and

priest; but to the minds of those to whom Paul was writing, it was much easier to assimilate, even as milk is to the child.

What a privilege it is to share the joys of this wonderful knowledge with others of like precious faith! We can all help one another in our study of the Word. Regardless of how long we have been ‘in the truth,’ there are points that we can learn even from beginners, if we maintain a childlike simplicity and humility before the Lord and among our brethren. Above all, let us always look to the Lord for his help and guidance, that we may continue to grow in grace and in an ever-increasing knowledge of him.

Dawn Bible Students Association

Blessed Bible, Precious Word

THE NOBLE BEREAN CHRISTIANS of old readily received the Gospel message, and searched the Scriptures daily to see whether or not the testimony of the Apostle Paul agreed with the Old Testament records. (Acts 17:11,12) Early truth seekers like the Bereans would have rejoiced at such students' helps as we today can possess in the way of reference Bibles, concordances, histories, dictionaries; and all these are available on a computer.

Besides all these advantages, there is now the increasing light and knowledge of the approaching Millennial day. We are living in one of the greatest dispensational changes in the world's history, and the Scriptures abound with information regarding these days. It is the foretold time when all the selfish and sinful elements of an old order are being 'shaken.' Satan's 'world' is being dissolved to make way for God's glorious kingdom.—II Pet. 3:11

THE TIME OF THE END

Within these 'last days' the whole world has begun to stir itself as never before, forcing national, political, social, and religious changes everywhere. With the opening of the nineteenth century, an increase of knowledge was beginning very definitely to manifest itself through inventions and otherwise.

This resulted in rapid means of travel. Two hundred years ago the most rapid means of transportation and of communication was by horseback. Today, cities and continents are united by trains, ships, planes, cars, trucks and by telephone, radio, television, computers—so that places thousands of miles apart geographically, are only minutes or seconds apart in point of time. During merely the last one hundred years, there has been a marvelous increase of knowledge on practically every subject, including sciences such as medicine, electronics, etc.

The Bible has foretold this phenomenal increase of knowledge in our day, and that it would first of all result in a "time of trouble, such as never

was since there was a nation.” (Dan. 12:1,4) The tragic outcome of this increasing knowledge being selfishly and unwisely used is obvious.

GOD’S KINGDOM

The Prophet Nahum speaks of the “day” of the Lord’s “preparation,” and we are undoubtedly now living in that period. (Nahum 2:3) The world is being prepared for the establishment of God’s long-prayed-for kingdom. Before long, the true church will be glorified with her Lord; and together with him will constitute the “new Jerusalem” (Rev. 21:2), the fountain of joy and life to all mankind. Then shall be fulfilled that wonderful promise, “There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.”—vs. 4

The fully consecrated followers of the Master, are rejoicing as they carefully and prayerfully read and meditate upon the inspired Word. They are enjoying a special serving of the truth by their beloved Master, now present in fulfillment of Luke 12:37. Together with the progressive revelation and interpretation of Divine truth in our day, there is much freedom which permits us to read and study the Bible without interference.

During the Dark Ages of the past, this was not possible. Then, those in religious authority deliberately strove to keep the Word of God away from the people. In the name of religion, there was selfish scheming and ambition, impelled by Satanic energy, and cruelty unparalleled on the pages of history. War was made with God’s true people, the saints of the Most High, to overcome them and to wear them out.—Dan. 7:25

THE TIMES PAST

By comparison with the Dark Ages, we today live in a highly-favored period, for which we are surely sincerely grateful. It is a very favorable time for Christian growth in grace and knowledge, and also for witnessing to the truth. This situation, however, should not be expected to continue indefinitely, so we should be awake and alert to our present privileges and responsibilities. The Bible has become increasingly precious to us; “a lamp” unto our feet, and “a light” unto our path. (Ps. 119:105) It is a living Word, a power in the life; and we are enlightened by it that we may grow spiritually.

Erroneous teachings such as eternal torture for the wicked and the inherent immortality of the soul, cause the Scriptures to lack harmony. We rejoice to find that, by Divine grace, and in compliance with I Peter 3:15, we are in a position “to give an answer,” with meekness and reverence, for the hope which is within us. “The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.”—Ps. 25:9

SCRIPTURAL HELPS

In our study of the precious Word of truth, we are glad to make use of various ‘helps’ such as Hebrew and Greek concordances which indicate the true meaning of the original text. It is now a well-known fact that, in many places, the *King James’ Version* is not accurate. Besides, at the time it was translated and published (1611) there were only eight manuscripts available, and none of these dated back farther than the tenth century.

Very early manuscripts of the Bible are available today, some of which date back to the fifth century or before. These older manuscripts have escaped the errors and interpolations of the many copyists who did their work mostly during the period of the Dark Ages. Should an early copyist insert in the margin of a manuscript notes expressing his own thoughts, these notes could later be copied into the manuscript, and thus corrupt the inspired text.

Here are a few examples of interpolations as they appear in the *King James’ Version*: Mark 16:9-20—all of these verses; John 5:3—the last seven words; John 5:4—the entire verse; I John 5:7,8—all of verse 7, and ‘in earth’ in verse 8. All these were used to prove false doctrines.

In addition to the various interpolations, there are also faulty renderings of words in the *King James’ Bible*. For example, John 5:28,29 reads: “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” The Greek word *krisis*, here rendered ‘damnation,’ should be translated ‘judgment,’ and it is so rendered in the *Revised Standard Version*. Those who have done well, will be richly blessed by being raised to ‘life’—‘the resurrection of life.’ All others (the heavenly calling then having been closed) will experience the ‘resurrection of judgment.’

THE JUDGMENT OF MANKIND

This applies to the earthly phase of the kingdom. After being awakened from the tomb, mankind's obedience to God's requirements in this resurrection ['restanding,' or 'a rising up'] by judgment—will be a trial followed by a sentence. It will be a thousand-year judgment period. (Acts 17:31) When these judgments are in the earth, "the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness."—Isa. 26:9

It will be a time for the heavens to be glad, and for the earth to rejoice, "because he [the Lord] cometh to judge the earth." (I Chron. 16:31-33) Then all will have a full and fair opportunity to attain perfection and everlasting life on the human plane. After such full blessings, any who are willfully and incorrigibly wicked will be mercifully cut off in death.

This is but one example of the manner in which a proper translation of the original Greek text helps to a better, more harmonious understanding of the Bible. There are many others which are helpful in assisting those who are earnestly seeking the truth.

However, regardless of the 'helps' we may use, whether printed or oral, we should always consider the Bible to be the final arbiter of our faith. All Christians should search the Scriptures, as did the Bereans of old, to see whether the teachings set forth from other sources are in harmony with the testimony of God's Holy Word.

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