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century wars over the opium trade. And it ushered in a time of uncertainty concerning whether China would honor its pledge to maintain Hong Kong's way of life largely unaltered for the next 50 years.

"For many ordinary people in the streets of Hong Kong, this was a time of celebration, not necessarily over the departure of the British or the arrival of the new masters from Beijing, but for the experience of witnessing a big moment in history."

On other news broadcasts of the event, prominent Chinese people were interviewed as to their reactions. All expressed satisfaction at having this small island of former Chinese territory returned to China, but many were concerned that the new rulers would impose a government of constraint and loss of civil liberties. This indeed came quickly as the elected legislature was abolished, and a Beijing-appointed body of lawmakers took its place, rolling back a range of Hong Kong's civil liberties.

HOW HONG KONG BECAME BRITISH

What started Hong Kong on the road to prominence and worldwide attention was a black page in British history. During the years from 1839 to 1842, a conflict known as the Opium War took place between Great Britain and China. China had imposed restrictions on foreign trade which prohibited any importation of opium. Opium, as a drug, had entered China from India, where it had been brought by Muslims. The Chinese government destroyed opium in Canton belonging to British merchants, and the British responded by attacking several coastal cities. China was unable to resist modern arms, and was easily defeated. The treaty of Nanking opened several ports to British trade

and residence, and Hong Kong was ceded to Britain.

The scenario of that time would be equivalent today to one where Colombian drug lords would have enough power to force the United States to accept their trade in cocaine.

In the United States people are all too well aware of the devastation caused by the use of addictive drugs. In spite of laws passed making the importation of such drugs illegal, and the efforts of customs and drug enforcement agencies to prevent the importing of cocaine and heroin, it is a losing battle, as drug lords find ingenious ways of bringing such contraband into this country undetected. This, in effect, was the battle that China was waging against opium when their government was overwhelmed by the British.

One might ask how Great Britain, a Christian nation, could do this to a heathen nation? There were at that time some in Great Britain who were interested in bringing Christianity to China. Earlier, around 1807, Robert Morrison, representing the London Missionary Society, started this work. Obviously, the London Missionary Society had little influence on the British government during the Opium War. In 1865 the China Inland Mission was founded, with funds and personnel supplied by several Christian denominations as other nations obtained access to China. During the last half of the 19th century, nations of the western world established wide interests in China, nearly subjugating the country.

Many in China resented this intrusion of the western world in their lives, and at the end of the

19th century the dowager empress, IZ'u-hsu, encouraged an anti-foreign military organization to action. Its name, in Chinese, meant 'righteous, harmonious fists', or in English, 'the boxers'. In 1899 the Boxers began violent attacks on foreigners and Christians, and occupied the city of Peking. They besieged the foreign and Chinese Christians in that city until troops from Great Britain, France, Russia, the United States, Germany, and Japan were sent to Peking to put down the Boxer Rebellion. China had to pay huge indemnities to these countries because of this uprising. These historical records of ill treatment of China by western foreign powers have surfaced again as Hong Kong was returned to China.

AN ERA OF IMPERIALISM

The 19th century was an era of imperialism, when so-called Christian nations expanded their borders. Many of the poorer nations in the world—which today are called 'third world countries'—were exploited by imperialistic countries. This expansion was motivated by covetousness, which afflicted the nation of Israel, too, as outlined in Jeremiah, Chapter 8. The judgments pronounced against Israel are applicable to the Christian nations she represents, and the LORD gives the reason for these judgments in our theme text, 'Every one from the least even unto the greatest is given to covetousness'.

After World War I a movement began to give the lands lost in imperialism back to the original possessors. This movement was accelerated after World War II, and many new nations were formed in the world. Almost all of these have not been able to govern themselves properly, and have accumu-

lated huge amounts of indebtedness to western nations.

A PLEA TO OBSERVE THE BIBLICAL JUBILEE

As the year 1996 came to a close, the well-known opponent of apartheid in South Africa, Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu of Cape Town, made an appeal to American church leaders to help African nations and other third world countries find relief from crippling foreign debts. In making this appeal, Tutu recalled the Biblical principle of Israel's jubilee, when all property sold or leased in the previous forty-nine years reverted back to the original owner every fiftieth year. He said, "It is the Biblical thing that says everything belongs to God. You acknowledge that by returning things to people to give them a chance of starting afresh. Those burdened by debt, you set free. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank celebrated their jubilee last year, and some of us said, 'Hey, here is an opportunity for you. How about applying the jubilee principle?'"

We have not seen any response by the World Bank or IMF to Tutu's suggestion, and the reason is simple. Everyone is governed and controlled by covetousness. Of course Archbishop Tutu is correct in saying that everything belongs to God. God has said, "Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof." (Ps. 50:10-12) Likewise, he said: "All the earth is mine." (Exod. 19:5) Moses said, "Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD's thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is." (Deut. 10:14)

God said to Job, "Whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine" (Job 41:11); and David said, "The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." (Ps. 24:1) As we know so well from the Scriptures, the Adversary usurped the authority of earth, but he will soon be bound and the reign of Christ will begin. Then it will be possible to truly restore all possessions and relieve the oppressed.

ISRAEL'S LAW ON JUBILEES

When the nation of Israel was given the Law through Moses, a part of that Law included the observance of the Sabbath year and the jubilee, as recorded in Leviticus 25. The Sabbath year occurred every seven years, when the land was not sown nor the vineyards pruned. It was a year of rest unto the land. When seven Sabbath years were observed, or a period of 49 years had elapsed, then the fiftieth year was the jubilee year. In the jubilee year God said, "Ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family."—Lev. 25:10

In the buying and selling of goods, advantage was not to be taken of one another, nor were they to "wrong one another." (Lev. 25:17, *RSV*) If anyone, because of poverty, had to sell some of his land, there were several avenues open to him to redeem the land. If his poverty continued to make redemption impossible, in the jubilee it would return to him. If anyone became a slave because of poverty, then in the jubilee he and his family would be made free. If someone outside the nation of Israel, a stranger or sojourner, became the owner of an Israelite slave because of poverty, in the year of jubilee his brethren or kinsmen were to redeem him.

This portion of Israel's Law had a deeply significant meaning. It foretold the times of restitution spoken of by all God's holy prophets. (Acts 3:21) The great restoration of property and life, and the freedom from sin and Satan's influence, was typified by the jubilee arrangement when all property and people were restored, and slaves were set free.

It might appear that the restoration of lands to the third world nations by imperialistic nations was the beginning of the fulfillment of the jubilee picture. However, we do not believe this to be so. Each of these nations has had a more difficult struggle to maintain their people above the poverty level since the restoration, than when colonial rule prevailed.

The more important part of the jubilee picture is the restoration of those who are in the prison house of death. The Apostle Paul said: "We know that the Law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. 7:14), implying by this statement that all mankind has been sold into sin, and are a race of slaves. Paul emphasizes this point very well when he says, "What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the Law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?"—Rom. 6:15,16

A RACE OF SLAVES

How did mankind get into this condition? It was father Adam who sold himself and all his progeny into sin, so that sin would be their new master. What price was paid for this transaction, and what did Adam get when he sold himself and all his

posterity to become the servants of sin? The price paid was his own life and the lives of his posterity, favor with God, and his garden home; for which he received self-gratification and a measure of joy to be with Eve.

It was by such means that Adam and his posterity became slaves of sin and fulfilled the scripture, "As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Rom. 5:12) Sin, like a great monarch, has ruled the world, enslaving the entire human family. No one can escape this bondage. Under this bondage of sin they suffer disease, sorrow, disappointment and death. "The wages of sin is death."—Rom. 6:23

All of these experiences can be likened to two that the Israelites went through. The first was when they were slaves in Egypt, and were finally set free by the slaying of the Passover Lamb which spared their firstborn. Their deliverance was complete when they crossed the Red Sea dry shod, and Pharaoh—representing Satan and his minions—were drowned in the Red Sea.

The second experience occurred when anyone became a slave in Israel's society. Their celebration of the jubilee, when all slaves were freed and enabled to return to their families foretold the deliverance of the slaves of sin. This experience is a type of the 50th millennial year, which follows the thousand-year reign of Christ. This is the time when the kingdom is turned over to the Father by Christ, and mankind has total restoration of all that was lost through father Adam's disobedience.

Adam went into slavery of his own volition. But his children—all mankind—were born in slavery and sin, under the penalty of death. Christ came to earth so that he might redeem the one who sinned by giving his life as a ransom price, a corresponding price, for the life of father Adam. “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”—I Cor. 15:22

EARTH'S GREAT JUBILEE

All these ‘slaves’ may then be set free, receiving absolute freedom. In God’s kingdom, the legal freeing of the slaves pictures the raising of the dead, as recorded in John 5:28,29, *RSV*: “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.” In reality all will have been bought with a price permitting them to be taken from the taskmaster, sin, and put under the new Master, Christ Jesus, the great King of Glory. Sin, or the principle of evil, is sometimes used as a synonym of Satan (I John 3:8, John 8:44), under whose influence those who sin have been living. In Christ’s thousand-year kingdom, Satan will be bound.—Rev. 20:1-3

All mankind, having been ransomed, will be given the opportunity of learning righteousness, so that at the conclusion of the Millennial Age they can make an intelligent choice, the majority responding to the opportunity as God advised Israel: “I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.” (Deut. 30:19) They will be led up the “highway . . . of holiness” to perfection. (Isa. 35:8-10) Which choice they make at the conclusion

of this trial period will be manifested when Satan is “loosed out of his prison” at the end of the age, prior to the 50th millennium.—Rev. 20:7-10

The mediatorial throne and reign, having served their purpose, and all corrupters of the earth having been destroyed, the Son shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father—by delivering it to mankind for whom it was originally designed. It is written in I Corinthians 15:24-26: “Then cometh the end, when he [Jesus] shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he [Jesus] shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he [Jesus] must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” We read: “Then shall the King say unto them, . . . Come, ye blessed [approved] of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”—Matt. 25:34

This brings to an end the last 7,000-year ‘epoch day’ since God began to prepare the earth for habitation. The six ‘epoch days’ that preceded it were likely of similar duration, so that 49,000 years had elapsed. Then all mankind will be made ready to enter the 50th millennium, or the antitypical Jubilee—that grand epoch 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) God’s work of Creation will then be complete for Planet Earth. ■

YE SHALL HALLOW the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family.”—*Leviticus 25:10*

INTERNATIONAL BIBLE STUDIES

LESSON FOR NOVEMBER 2

A JOYFUL CELEBRATION

KEY VERSE: *"The children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy."—Ezra 6:16*

SELECTED SCRIPTURE: *Ezra 6:14-22*

THE BOOKS OF Ezra and Nehemiah both tell the story of the restoration of the Israelites to their homeland after seventy years of bondage in Babylon. Darius, an able and effective Persian king, continued Cyrus' policy of restoring Israel. In his second year as king the Jews resumed work on the still unfinished Temple in Jerusalem.

Cyrus had decreed that "the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices" (Ezra 6:3), and "the golden and silver vessels . . . be restored, and brought again unto the

Temple which is at Jerusalem."—vs. 5

Darius ordered it to continue, and even sent a generous subsidy to help restore worship in the Temple, which was completed by the elders of the Jews in the sixth year of Darius' reign. They "finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius."—Ezra 6:14

It was smaller in size and could not compare to the great beauty and ornamentation of Solomon's Temple, which had been destroyed about ninety years earlier. Nevertheless

the dedication of God's Temple was a notable experience to both the LORD and the people returned from captivity in Babylon. This event serves to illustrate the consecration of the antitypical temple, soon to be completed with 'living stones', for the indwelling of God's Spirit in his kingdom.—I Pet. 2:5

When the typical Temple was completed, "the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy." (vs. 16) The priests were arranged in their divisions and the Levites in their courses for the service of God in Jerusalem, as written in the book of Moses. After the priests and Levites were purified, celebration of the Passover and the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread were kept with joy.

When the people had been purified, they, too, could celebrate these festivals according to the Law of Moses: "The children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and

all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel, did eat, and kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful."—vss. 21,22

God commanded Israel to remember their deliverance from bondage in Egypt. "Ye shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever."—Exod. 12:17

In this account, God demonstrates his providence and his mighty power by which he released Israel from seventy years of bondage in Babylon so they might return to Israel. Also, as a type, we have a beautiful illustration pointing to God's future deliverance of the world of mankind from the bondage of sin and death. This is the time when, through God's kingdom, all the families of the earth are blessed. ■

HARD CHOICES

KEY VERSE: *"Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives."—Ezra 10:11*

SELECTED SCRIPTURE: *Ezra 9:1-3; 10:9-14*

IN THIS LESSON we are introduced to Ezra, the priest and scribe, who led another group of exiles home from Babylon after the Temple was built and dedicated. He brought with him sacred vessels from Babylon which he deposited in the house of the LORD, and afterward the people offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel.

"When these things were done" (Ezra 9:1), Ezra received a shocking report from officials that the Israelites, including the priests and other religious leaders, did not keep themselves a holy people, separated unto God. Instead, they were abusing their law of marriage, and marrying Gentile women who became the mothers of

their children. (Ezra 9:2; Deut. 7:2-4) These foreign women brought pagan religious practices with them, which meant that something had to be done to remedy the situation. This report astonished Ezra, because God's people had already been severely punished for their faithless disobedience and idol worship. Ezra became so angry that he ripped his clothing and tore his hair from his head and beard, while many concerned people gathered around him. Finally, in grief, he raised his arms in prayer to God, asking forgiveness for his people's great sins and expressing thanks for their survival from bondage in Babylon. (vss. 5-15) The situation in which Ezra and

his contemporaries found themselves was one that required decisive action.

Shechaniah, one of the leading men, looked to Ezra as the only one competent to effectively take such action, because he was invested with God's authority to enforce it. He suggested: "We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.

"Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it. Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they sware." (Ezra 10: 2-5) A commission was appointed from among the people, assisted by judges

and elders of the respective cities and after three months' investigation into every case, all traces of the abuse had been removed.

The Apostle Paul applies the principle of this lesson for our learning: "God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power. Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body."—I Cor. 6:14-18

He also said, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?" (II Cor. 6:14) Let us heed these words of wisdom. ■

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

KEY VERSE: *"Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach."*—Nehemiah 2:17

SELECTED SCRIPTURE: *Nehemiah 2:1-8; 15-18*

THE BOOKS OF Ezra and Nehemiah originally were one book and for that reason Nehemiah picks up where Ezra ended. A Jew named Nehemiah was still living in Babylonian exile as a personal servant to King Artaxerxes. He was visited by Hanani, one of his brothers from Judah, who told him that the Jews who had returned from Babylonia were in great difficulty and that their foreign neighbors held them in contempt. Furthermore, the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and the gates had been destroyed by fire. He was grievously saddened to learn that the people were demoralized and that the walls and gates of

Jerusalem were in a shambles.

Nehemiah was deeply dependent upon God and regularly, as now, sought his guidance in prayer. When he served the king's wine that day, God answered his prayer, that the king would be merciful and favorably answer his request. Nehemiah "took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence. Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, and said unto the king . . . why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of

my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?

"Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it."—Neh. 2:1-5

Continuing, we read: "So it pleased the king to send me; . . . Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me."—vss. 6-8

The king sent army officers and horsemen with Ne-

hemiah. When they arrived at the governors and gave them the king's letters, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian were grieved exceedingly that a man had come to work for the good of the people of Israel, and they were highly indignant and "laughed [them] to scorn." (Neh. 2: 19) After arriving in Jerusalem, Nehemiah went out by night and viewed the wall and the gates but he told no one where he went or what he did.

Later he said to the people, "Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work."—Neh. 2:17,18

Christians too must rely on God for help to build character with "gold," "silver," and "precious stones." —I Cor. 3:12 ■

FACING HOSTILITY

KEY VERSE: *"In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us."*—Nehemiah 4:20

SELECTED SCRIPTURE: *Nehemiah 4:6-8; 15-23*

WE SEE FROM this lesson that Jerusalem is surrounded on all sides by hostile neighbors who have joined together against God's people. Jerusalem, in ruins, posed no threat, even though the Temple had been reconstructed. However, once the wall and gates were restored, Jerusalem would again be a fortified city.

Nehemiah recounts the efforts of some of their enemies to discourage and shake their confidence in completing the wall. "When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they

restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are? Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, What are they building—if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones." —Neh. 4:1-3, *New International Version*

Nehemiah responded to these insulting questions not by shouting back at his mockers, but by praying to God while the Jewish builders kept on working. The work had to go on despite the demoralizing threats from Judah's enemies, and it did continue, for as Nehemiah notes, "the people had a mind to work." (Neh. 4:6) Finally, the wall had reached half

its full height, which made their foes very angry. Since Jerusalem was completely surrounded by the enemy they had neither friends nor means of escape in any direction. When the enraged conspirators observed the great progress made in restoring the wall they formed an alliance "to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it."—vss. 7,8

How did Nehemiah and the Judeans deal with this formidable plot against them? They took the same action that is available to each one of us: they prayed to God! No military action was necessary on the part of the Judeans, for God had brought the enemies' plot to nothing. The people rallied around the strong leadership of Nehemiah and trusted that God would care for them.

Nehemiah said, "When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to his own work. From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears,

shields, bows and armor. . . . Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword . . . , as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me . . . we are widely separated from each other along the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us."—Neh. 4:15-18,20, *NIV*

As the Apostle Paul instructs us, we must put on the whole armor of God as we fight against the world, the flesh, and the Devil, in order to be prepared for any onslaught from these enemies.—Eph. 6:13

We need to be girded with truth, and to have on the breastplate of righteousness. Our feet should be shod with the readiness of the Gospel of peace, and we must be ready to quench flaming arrows from the Evil One with the shield of faith. With the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit we will be ready to face any hostility.—Eph. 6:14-17 ■

REWARD OF THE FAITHFUL

KEY VERSE: *“Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?”—Malachi 3:7*

SELECTED SCRIPTURE: *Malachi 3:6-18*

MALACHI, WHOSE NAME means ‘my messenger’, was the last of the minor prophets. Much of the book is utilized in explaining that God was withholding his blessing from Israel because of their unfaithfulness to him.

God was sorely displeased with the innumerable sins of Israel, among which they failed to respond to Divine love, dishonored God’s name, presented blemished offerings, honored sinners, selfishly withheld tithes and reluctantly served God. The priests, by evil example, became stumbling blocks instead of spiritual leaders. Also the brethren

dealt treacherously with one another. The Jews believed that God would bless the righteous with prosperity, while the wicked would suffer. However, this caused them to question why the evildoer appeared to live a more abundant life.

The world has made the same observations stated by Malachi: “Now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.” (vs. 15) In doing so they say there is no reward for serving God, not knowing that Satan’s usurpation of authority on earth is temporary.

Through the prophet, God assured Israel: "I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." (vs. 6) Malachi continues the LORD's message in the words of our Key Verse, including another invitation for them to 'return to me, and I will return unto you'. He then promised if they would "bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." —vs. 10

The basis of all our hopes lies in the unchangeable character and enduring mercy of our God. Malachi 3:16 and 17 speak of a reward for a faithful class called out of the world in this Gospel Age, and continuing on into the thousand-year kingdom of Christ: "Then they that feared [reverenced] the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remem-

brance was written before him for them that feared 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; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

Malachi prophesied concerning this class which is now being prepared for a spiritual position to be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ for the blessing of all the families of the earth in his kingdom.

These jewels, special treasures of God, "forsake not the assembling of" themselves "together" (Heb. 10:25), enjoy the fellowship of the Spirit, and meet together to build up and encourage one another. The Apostle Paul urged: "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." (I Cor. 4:1,2) God has promised that if we are faithful unto death, he will reward us with "a crown of life."—Rev. 2:10 ■

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND DOCTRINE

The Plan of God in the Book of Genesis—Part 5

THE COVENANT AND THE LAND

CHAPTER TWELVE

GENESIS 12:1-5 “Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee:

“And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

“And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

“So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

“And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.”

'Now the LORD had said unto Abram. . . .' Here we have a reference to instructions which previously had been given to Abram, and to a promise made to him, which are not recorded. It was this communication from God that caused Abram to leave Ur of the Chaldees and to start the journey toward Canaan, as recorded in the closing verses of the preceding chapter. They traveled along the river Euphrates until they reached Haran. Abram remained there until the death of his father, Terah. This was necessary, for the LORD's instructions were that he was to leave his own people and his father's house. While he did take some of his relatives to Canaan with him, he dwelt at Haran until his father died.

'I will bless thee, . . . and thou shalt be a blessing'. Here are stated in brief the two main features of the covenant God made with Abram: Abram himself was to be blessed—richly blessed. He was to become the father of a great nation. Besides this, he was to become a blessing to others—his seed was to bless 'all the families of the earth'. Later we shall see that the principal application of this latter promise is to his spiritual seed, even to Christ and to those who become Christ's body members.—Gal. 3:8,16,27-29

God's statement, 'I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee', has, throughout the ages, often worked out in a very literal way with respect to the natural descendants of Abram. Probably this principle will be still further manifested during the thousand-year reign of Christ, when there will be a general time of reckoning for both Jews and Gentiles. It is only as we take into consideration the entire plan of God that we

can understand the manner in which many of his promises will be completely fulfilled.

VERSES 6-9 “And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.

“And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

“And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD.

“And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.”

The ‘Sichem’ here referred to is Shechem, the place later referred to so many times in the Old Testament. The present name of the city is Nablus, and it is situated about thirty-four miles north of Jerusalem. The ‘plain of Moreh’, is more properly rendered the ‘oak’ or ‘oaks’ of Moreh. This location was close to the mountains of Ebal and Gerizim.—Deut. 11:29,30

When Abram entered Canaan, the LORD identified it as being the land which he had previously promised, saying to him. ‘Unto thy seed will I give this land’. (vs. 7) There is an accuracy about this promise which is striking. The account states that the Canaanites were already in the land when Abram entered, and in the patriarch’s lifetime he never did become the real owner of the land. He found it necessary to purchase a small parcel of it in order to have a place in which to bury his wife.

Sarah. (Genesis, chapter 23; Acts 7:5) Perhaps this was the reason that the LORD did not include Abram in this particular statement of the promise.

It is true that later the land was also promised to Abraham and to his seed as an everlasting possession, but the fulfillment of this promise will come only by the establishment of God's kingdom. During the time God was dealing with him and making promises to him, he was not the owner of the Promised Land, but merely a sojourner in it.

From his first stopping place, Abram journeyed south, which brought him nearer to the present site of Jerusalem. He built an altar in a mountain situated between Bethel and Hai—or Ai, as it was later called. It would appear that the town of Bethel was in existence when Abram first entered Canaan. Its original name was Luz. (Judg. 1:22,23) Ai was the second city to be captured and destroyed by the Israelites when they entered the land under the leadership of Joshua. Both Bethel and Ai have long since been laid waste; although the ruins of Bethel still exist, being located on the right-hand side of the road between Jerusalem and Nablus, or ancient Shechem.

The name Bethel means 'the house of God', and it was appropriate that Abram should build an altar near the town, and there call 'upon the name of the LORD'. This is a very brief statement of Abram's worship, but we may safely assume that, having entered the Promised Land, and the promise having been confirmed to him, the patriarch would naturally desire to show his appreciation by presenting a thank-offering to his God.

VERSES 10-20 “And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.

“And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon:

“Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive.

“Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee.

“And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair.

“The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh: and the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house.

“And he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels.

“And the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram’s wife.

“And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife?

“Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way.

“And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had.”

As we learned in a previous lesson about Noah, so again with Abram, the Scriptures do not conceal the weakness of the flesh of its heroes. There seems to have been little excuse for Abram to misrepresent Sarah's relationship to him. It was simply a misguided effort, born of fear to save his own life. The fact that it might lead to the mistreatment of his wife did not seem to occur to him. It must have been very humiliating for him to realize that the heathen Pharaoh displayed more nobility of character than did he, the servant of God.

There is another viewpoint to be considered in connection with this episode. While the account does not say so, it may be that the LORD caused it to be recorded as one of the illustrations of how, time after time, attempts were made to interfere with God's program to develop a 'seed'. Without realizing it, Abram might well have been induced by Satan to conceal the fact that she was his wife—the Adversary's motive being to thwart God's purpose concerning the promised seed. He probably knew that the seed was in some way to come through Sarah, and if he could defile or destroy her, it would be a masterstroke of cunning in his determination to oppose the outworking of the plan of God.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

VERSES 1-4 “And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south.

“And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.

“And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai;

“Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.”

When we read that Abram went up out of Egypt and ‘into the south’, the evident meaning is that he went into the south of the land which was known as Palestine, but which is now occupied by Israel, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

He did not remain there, however, but continued his journey until he got back to Bethel, where he had previously called upon the name of the LORD. Arriving at this sacred landmark, ‘the place of the altar’, again he ‘called on the name of the LORD’. By now he would have still more for which to be thankful, for the LORD had overruled his great mistake, and he was safely back from Egypt and ‘was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold’.

VERSES 5-13 “And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents.

“And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together.

“And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram’s cattle and the herdmen of Lot’s cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land.

“And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife. I pray thee. between me and thee and be-

tween my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren.

“Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.

“And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.

“Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.

“Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

“But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.”

In this narrative is revealed a noble side of Abram's character. Two points are emphasized—one, his unselfishness; the other, that his chief interest in entering Canaan was not the land, but the promise God had made concerning the seed of blessing. Abram undoubtedly thought a great deal of his nephew, Lot, and it was not an easy decision to separate from him; but when he considered all the circumstances involved, he realized it was the best thing to do. He was willing to make a real sacrifice in the interest of peace—not a sacrifice of principle, but of material wealth.

Having told his nephew that he could have first choice of the land, Abram did not hesitate to carry through with his offer, even though Lot did

choose the best of the land from the standpoint of productivity.

Lot 'pitched his tent toward Sodom', and 'the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly'. Lot, as the world would say, "got the best of the bargain" from the standpoint of rich agricultural land, but he placed himself in an environment which proved to be very detrimental to his moral well-being, and led to a grievous tragedy in his home life.

VERSES 14-18 "And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

"For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

"And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

"Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

"Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD."

Here the LORD renews his promise to Abram, and goes into greater detail than on previous occasions. The account emphasizes that this affirmation of the covenant was made after Lot and Abram had separated. This seems to indicate that Lot's association with Abram was to some extent standing in the way of Abram's receiving God's full blessing in connection with the promise.

The call to the patriarch was to leave his own people, and his father's house. Lot and his family were at least part of Abram's people, and not until he was willing to make a great sacrifice of material advantage in order to be separated from them, did the LORD assure him in such great detail what the fulfillment of the promise would mean.

Abram was told to look in all directions, and was assured that all the land he saw was to be his, and his descendants' forever. It is true of the LORD's people today that frequently the willingness to sacrifice earthly advantages leads to the richest of spiritual blessings. If we find ourselves spiritually poverty-stricken, it may be that we are holding on too firmly to the material things of life. ■

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CHRISTIAN THANKFULNESS

"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."

Colossians 2:6,7

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 27TH, is a national Thanksgiving Day in the United States. The observance of a day of thanksgiving each year in the United States originated with the early settlers of New England, many of whom had made the hazardous journey across the Atlantic to the shores of the new world in order to escape the bitter religious persecutions then being practiced in many parts of Europe. Not only was the journey itself undertaken at risk; the securing of necessary food, clothing, and shelter after arrival was equally uncertain, and made the more so by the hostile attitude of the Indians who felt that their domain was being invaded.

It seemed especially appropriate, under the circumstances, when the year's crops had been harvested and it was evident that sufficient provisions

had been supplied by the LORD to enable them to survive the coming winter, that they devote a day of special thanksgiving to God for taking such wonderful care of them. Many and great changes have occurred since those early settlers conceived the idea of Thanksgiving Day, but the custom continues, and with it sufficient weight of influence to cause millions, at least this once a year, to remember that there is a God in heaven to whom we owe our very existence, and who, day by day, makes provision for our needs. For this itself we can be truly thankful!

Those who have devoted their lives to the doing of God's will, and have accepted Christ as their Leader and Head, consider every day one of thanksgiving. To these, every experience of life, whether it be of joy or sorrow, is an occasion for thanksgiving, for they know that they are constantly overshadowed by the LORD's loving providences, all of which are designed by him for their highest and eternal good. They thank God not only for the sunshine and the rain, but also for the sorrow and the pain. Indeed, they have discovered that under Divine guidance the deepest shades of sorrow often yield the richest fruitage of peace and joy in the LORD.

THANKSGIVING FOR TRIALS

There is something about sorrow and trials which elicits a greater degree of thankfulness than is often true with respect to the pleasantries of life. This is especially so in the case of Christians, some of whom have been bedridden for years, and having suffered untold agonies, are often more appreciative of Divine grace than those whom the LORD permits to serve him under more normal circumstances. Perhaps their experiences have caused

them to depend more fully upon the LORD, and thus they have lived closer to him, being ever conscious of their need of his help.

Many of God's servants in the past, particularly those whom the LORD used to write the Bible, were men who endured much hardship, yet their hearts seemed always filled with thankfulness for the blessings that God daily showered upon them. This was true of the great Apostle Paul. Few followers of the Master have suffered more than did Paul, yet there is no word of complaint in all his writings. Besides, his suffering was brought about almost altogether by his faithfulness in serving the LORD. This was in keeping with the message the LORD instructed Ananias to give to Paul at the time of his conversion. Tell him, the LORD said, "I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."—Acts 9:16

Paul accepted this commission, and zealously devoted himself to a course of faithfulness in the service of the LORD which brought upon him an almost continuous impact of suffering and trial, sometimes sufficiently crushing to well nigh snuff out his life. Yet he continued unwaveringly in the narrow way of sacrifice and suffering, and with a heart filled with thankfulness in his assurance that these "light" afflictions which are but for a "moment" were working out for him "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."—II Cor. 4:17

It was Paul's faithfulness to the Divine call to suffer and die with Christ that led to his imprisonment in Rome, where the exhortation to thankfulness contained in our text was written. His whole epistle to the church at Colosse breathes the spirit of love and thankfulness to the LORD for the riches

of Divine grace which had been bestowed upon him. When writing a letter under these circumstances, one would think that Paul would make considerable mention of his trying experiences as a prisoner in Rome. But Paul lived above his circumstances. Only once, and in almost the last words of his letter, does he mention his position, and even then he simply says, "Remember my bonds."—Col. 4:18

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

Paul was more concerned over the spiritual welfare of the brethren at Colosse than with his own trials. He had never visited these brethren, and was not therefore acquainted with them personally. Nevertheless he loved them, and wrote that from the very day he had heard of their faith in Christ, and their love for all the saints, he had continued to pray for them. His desire was that they might be filled with the knowledge of the LORD's will "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."—Col. 1:9

He also desired and prayed that they "might walk worthy of the LORD unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." (vs. 10) Besides, he wanted them to be "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: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."—vss. 11-13

It is the selflessness of Paul, represented in his desires on behalf of the brethren at Colosse, that

helps to give weight to his words. His own spirit of thankfulness is reflected by the fact that he admonishes those to whom he writes that they should give thanks to God for having delivered them from the power of darkness and for shining into their hearts by the knowledge of the Gospel.

Paul knew it was his faithfulness to the Gospel of Christ that had taken him to prison in Rome. One with less faith and vision might have reasoned that however true the Gospel might be, it was not worth what it had cost. Paul, however, had such full assurance of faith, and understood so well all the implications of the truth, that he could look back over the years and recall his experiences of suffering, yet praise the way the LORD had led him.

STEADFASTNESS AND THANKFULNESS

Paul desired also that the brethren at Colosse remain steadfast in the truth. Failure properly to appreciate the truth of the Gospel is one of the major contributing causes of instability in the truth. This was true in Paul's day, and it is still true today. If we truly appreciate the truth and daily give thanks to God for it, we will not be restlessly seeking something new and fanciful to take its place.

The history of the professed followers of the Master throughout the age has been to a large extent one of apostasy, of falling away from the faith. Paul foretold that this would be so. In his letter to the Thessalonians, he warned that after his death there would come a great falling away from the faith. This occurred, and so completely that the Dark Ages were the result. Coming down to the Protestant movement, each reformer made a bold stand for truth as he understood it, but these

new concepts of truth were not steadfastly upheld by their followers.

The same test is now upon the LORD's people with respect to the harvest truth. While we all want to grow in grace and in knowledge, one of the tests upon us is to remain steadfast in what we have already learned to be the truth. Thankfulness for the LORD's goodness in revealing to us the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven is essential to steadfastness. Are we truly thankful for the truth, or has it become a commonplace thing in our lives? Have we forgotten the darkness from which we have been delivered, and the 'pit' from which we were 'dugged'?

David speaks of this 'pit' as being 'horrible', or, as the *Marginal Translation* states it, a pit of "noise." (Ps. 40:2) Noise is used in the Scriptures to symbolize confusion, and the confusion of our hearts and minds, and the confusion with which we were surrounded in the world before we learned the truth, was very 'horrible' indeed. In this pit also was 'miry clay'. We had no firm foundation upon which to stand. But the LORD lifted us up from this plight and set our 'feet upon a rock'. Instead of the 'miry clay' and sinking sand of human imperfection which failed to give us a proper standing before the LORD, our feet were placed upon the sure foundation of Christ and the "ransom for all."—I Tim. 2:6

The psalmist states, the LORD also "established" our "goings." (Ps. 40:2) In the pit of confusion, we had no definite objective in life, and at times there seemed no real purpose in living. We were aimlessly drifting along with the world, and as the hymn so aptly expresses it, "All that my soul has tried left but an aching void." (*Hymns of Dawn, Jesus Is Mine*, #47) But when the LORD 'inclined'

unto us, and lifted us out of our confusion, he also revealed to us a real objective, and a 'way' in which to walk in order that we might attain that objective.

The LORD established our 'goings'. We started to walk in the narrow way, and to run "for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3:14) A hope was set before us. Paul speaks of it as a "hope which is laid up . . . in heaven," based upon the "Word of the truth of the Gospel." (Col. 1:5) No longer is life confusing and uncertain. Our 'goings' are 'established', or as Paul states it in our text, we are 'stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving'.

If we are established, our thanksgiving is sure to abound. Conversely, if we cease to be thankful for the wonderful things the LORD has done in lifting us out of the 'pit of noise' and setting our feet upon a rock, there will be a danger of our falling away from the faith. David explains that when the LORD established our 'goings' he put a 'new song' in our mouths, 'even praise unto our God'. This 'new song' was given to us in order that we might show forth the praises of our God, hence the importance of continuing to sing it, that his name may be glorified.

THE NEW SONG

This 'new song' is undoubtedly the truth of the Divine plan, or 'present truth', as we often call it. It is referred to in Revelation 14:3, and the explanation given that no man could learn it except the "hundred and forty and four thousand." This is in keeping with many texts of the Bible which emphasize that the human mind is incapable, aside from Divine grace, of understanding the "mysteries of

the kingdom of God." (Luke 8:10) David declares that the LORD puts this song in our mouths. It is God-given, through the inspirational powers of the Holy Spirit. It cannot be discovered or learned by just anyone who may, for curiosity's sake, desire to pry into the secrets of the Divine plan.

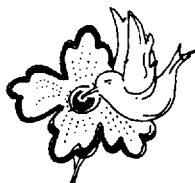
If we have learned this 'song', there is surely much cause for 'abounding with thanksgiving', for it means that the great God of the universe has taken us into his confidence and revealed to us some of the hidden things of his glorious plan of the ages. Thereby he has dispelled the darkness with which we were surrounded, and brought us out of our confusion. The many unanswered questions, which at times almost resulted in the loss of our faith in the existence of God, have been clarified. Now, through the Word, we see his glory as it is made up by his infinite wisdom, almighty power, unswerving justice, and abounding love.

Truly the LORD has put a 'new song' in our mouths. It is a song which grows more melodious as we continue to sing it to one another and, as we have opportunity, to all mankind. While it is a 'new' song, at the same time it is also "the old, old story" which, as the poet states, "seems each time I tell it, more wonderfully sweet." (*The Old, Old Story, Hymns of Dawn, #116*) Has this been our experience during the past year? Is this 'song' more precious to us today than it was a year ago? Are we more established in the truth now than in former days? If so, then we should be the most thankful people in all the world.

Our individual experiences throughout the past year have in many instances been quite different. but the same loving God has been watching

over all his people. His “ministering spirits” (Heb. 1:14), under Divine guidance, have been causing ‘all things’ to work together for our good. (Rom. 8:28) We may not always have been able to recognize the wisdom of God’s dealings with us, but have been assured that always ‘behind a frowning providence he hides a smiling face’. In the light of his countenance we will continue to rejoice.

For the brethren as a whole, the past year has been one of rich blessings through fellowship in their local meetings, at conventions, and in their united opportunities of singing the ‘new song’. ■



WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

NOVEMBER 6—“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”—Romans 12:1 (Z. '00-170 Hymn 325)

NOVEMBER 13—“Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of.”—Matthew 6:8 (Z. '04-90 Hymn 121)

NOVEMBER 20—“If ye do these things, ye shall never fall.”—II Peter 1:10 (Z. '97-148 Hymn 130)

NOVEMBER 27—“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance.”—Ephesians 6:18 (Z. '01-80 Hymn 241)

THE GREAT COMMISSION

***"Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant."
Jeremiah 1:9,10***

JEREMIAH THE PROPHET was commissioned by the LORD to speak for him to declare a message of truth pertaining to Israel as well as to other nations. The LORD gave the prophet the message he was to preach, in order that he might be properly equipped to carry out the mission to which he was appointed: 'Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth'. Jeremiah was not commissioned to proclaim his own opinions or deductions. If he were to be faithful to the LORD the only course open to him was that of being a messenger of the Word of the LORD.

This principle has held true with respect to all those who have been Divinely appointed to represent God among the people. The only true servants

of God have been those who faithfully proclaim the message he has entrusted to them; and their fidelity to the LORD's cause has called for earnestness in their endeavor to ascertain the message the LORD would have them proclaim. As Paul wrote in his letter to Timothy, they studied to show themselves approved by God, workmen who would have no need to be ashamed, because they had rightly divided the Word of truth.—II Tim. 2:15

The message Jeremiah was commissioned to proclaim was of a twofold nature. He was to call attention to the sins of Israel and the dire consequences of continued disobedience to God's Law; and he was also to announce the blessings God proposed to bestow upon the nation and upon all the world under the arrangements of the New Covenant. (Jer. 31:31-34) Included in his commission was the explanation that these blessings were to be so far-reaching as to include the resurrection of the dead. (Jer. 31:15-17) These two phases of the message are epitomized in our text, for in it Jeremiah was told that he was 'to pull down, and to destroy', and also 'to build, and to plant'.

Actually, of course, Jeremiah did not embark upon a work of destruction; and he was powerless to do anything along the line of 'planting' or 'building'. However, from the LORD's standpoint he was reckoned as having a part, both in the work of destruction and in the work of rebuilding, simply by being faithful in declaring to the people what the LORD intended to do along these lines. It is important to recognize this principle in God's dealings with his people, for it will help us to understand more clearly some of the prophecies pertaining to the position occupied by the people of the LORD in

the present transition period between the Gospel and Millennial Ages.

In the experience of Jeremiah, while he was commissioned to warn Israel of the impending disaster that was to come upon the nation, the instrumentality actually used by the LORD to overthrow the nation was the king of Babylon and the Babylonian armies. The prophet was given a vision in which he saw forces out of the "north," "a seething pot" (Jer. 1:13-15), that was to come against Jerusalem. Like many other prophecies, while this doubtless had a limited fulfillment in connection with the overthrow of Israel in 606 B.C., it can have a larger fulfillment now. Also, the LORD has commissioned his people to declare this "day of vengeance."—Isa. 61:2

ANointed TO PREACH GLAD TIDINGS

In the case of the ancient prophets of Israel, each one of them was commissioned by God individually to proclaim a specific message to his people. There was, of course, an overall harmony in all these messages, for in a general way they always contained a warning against the results of disobedience, a call to repentance, and promises of blessings which ultimately would come to Israel and the whole world. These promises were later summed up by Peter as meaning "times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."—Acts 3:21

But, in the Gospel Age God does not bestow individual commissions upon his servants, except in the case of Jesus, the Head of the Christ company. At the time of his baptism he was anointed by

the Holy Spirit, and shortly thereafter he explained to a group of Jewish worshipers at a Nazarene synagogue that this anointing constituted his authority to preach glad tidings to the meek, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD. The 'proof text' which the Master used in this connection was that of Isaiah 61:1-3.

However, this foretold commission of the Holy Spirit to preach the glad tidings did not end with the Master. The apostle speaks of the anointing which we have received from him, indicating that those who by one spirit are baptized into his body, partake of the same anointing which came upon the Head. Jesus explained this matter in non-symbolic language, saying to his disciples that just as he had been sent into the world, so he was sending them. Later he told them to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, the glad tidings.

The commission we have received to represent the LORD differs from that which was given to the individual prophets in the sense that we share in the one great anointing, or authorization, which came first upon our Head, Christ Jesus, and is participated in by all the members of his body. One member of the body of Christ is not given a commission to declare a different message from another. All come under the same anointing; all are given the same truth; and all are authorized to lay down their lives in proclaiming it to others.

The message the church has been authorized to make known to the world has not been unlike that which each of the prophets in turn declared to Israel. First of all, it has been a message of repen-

tance. Paul explained to the Athenians on Mars' Hill that now God commandeth all men everywhere to repent. (Acts 17:30) This has not been done by displaying a call to repentance across the skies, but rather, through his faithful servants, the footstep followers of Jesus. The church in the flesh has been pictured by Elijah, whose efforts were directed to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers. But his efforts failed, just as the efforts of the church fail.

In his prophecy of the Elijah work, the LORD warned that if repentance was not forthcoming on the part of the world under the influence of the Gospel message, he would "smite the earth with a curse." (Mal. 4:5,6) The *Rotherham Translation* of these verses says: "smite the land with utter destruction." This is, no doubt, a reference to the great time of trouble that was to come upon this present evil world, causing its destruction and preparing the way for God's new world. We see the beginning of this trouble in our day—a trouble that could have been averted had those warned really heeded the call to repentance and endeavored to obey God's righteous laws, but they did not. Hence now, and in an ever-increasing measure, they will feel the sting of the foretold smiting work, the curse of the time of great tribulation.

Not only, however, is it the privilege of the church to announce to the world the need for repentance, and to explain the meaning of the present trouble, but we are also to assure the people—those who have hearing ears—of the wonderful time of blessing which is so near at hand. Like the prophets of old, we, too, are to speak of the 'times of restitution of all things' which are to be ushered in as a

result of the establishment of Christ's kingdom. And what a joy it is to sing this sweet theme song of God's love!

GLAD TIDINGS TO THE MEEK

In the great commission of the Holy Spirit as outlined in Isaiah 61:1-3, the thought is stressed that we are to proclaim the glad tidings only to the "meek." These, after all, are the only ones who will benefit from the message. It is quite beyond our powers, however, to seek out the meek of the earth individually so that we can direct the message exclusively to them. Rather, the method the LORD gives us is that of proclaiming the truth far and wide by every means possible, with the realization that in the LORD's providence it will reach the hearing ears of the meek. We are to sow beside all waters, for we know not which will prosper, this, or that.

Our message is to be that of glad tidings. Even when we explain the meaning of the great time of trouble, our message should be coupled with that of hope for the future—the hope that is based upon the promises of God pertaining to the blessings to be showered upon the people through the instrumentalities of the Divine kingdom. Such a message cannot do other than bind up the brokenhearted. It will also assure the earnest seekers after truth that those who are held in slavery to sin and superstition, as well as those who are bound in the great prison house of death, are to be given their liberty. It is a glorious message—one that thrills the hearts of those who know and proclaim it as well as those who hear and respond to its righteous influence.

Jesus was commissioned to proclaim the "acceptable year of the LORD" (Isa. 61:2), and that

commission has also come down to us. It will be withdrawn only by circumstances which, in the LORD's providence, will make it impossible for such a message to be proclaimed. It pertains to the opportunity of this age to follow in the footsteps of Jesus as joint sacrificers with him, with the inspiring hope that if we are faithful unto death we will live and reign with him in the spiritual phase of the kingdom.

This phase of the LORD's message includes a call to repentance, and the invitation to present one's self in full consecration to the LORD. It includes also proper emphasis upon all those features of the truth pertaining to our walk in the narrow way. Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust, we are to encourage one another to lay hold more firmly upon the exceeding great and precious promises whereby we are made partakers of the Divine nature; and to add to our faith, fortitude; and to fortitude, knowledge; and to knowledge, self control; and to self control, cheerful constancy; and to cheerful constancy, piety; and to piety, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. (II Pet. 1:4-7) We are to keep reminding ourselves and our fellow-pilgrims in the narrow way that it is only if we do these things that an abundant entrance will be administered unto us into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.—II Pet. 1:10,11

"THE DAY OF VENGEANCE"

When Jesus quoted the commission of the Holy Spirit as outlined in Isaiah 61:1-3, he stopped just before the reference to the "day of vengeance of our God." The reason is obvious, for it was not then God's due time for the 'day of vengeance' to be

upon the world. Therefore this phase of the Divine commission of service we might speak of as being dispensational, its application to the LORD's people being exclusively at this end of the Gospel Age. Now, as the prophecies so clearly indicate, we are actually living in the foretold 'day of vengeance', hence, as faithful stewards of the mysteries of God, we cannot refrain from declaring the truth concerning it.

Declaring the 'day of vengeance', however, does not imply the pronouncing of vengeance. It calls only for the explanation of the trouble that is now upon the world, and witnessing to the glorious solution to world distress which has been Divinely provided through the kingdom of Christ so soon to be manifested.

A proper witness concerning the 'day of vengeance' implies making known to the people that none of the proposed humanly devised remedies for human ills now being offered will solve the problems of a dying world; that only Christ's kingdom will do this. The position of the true Christian in the world is to proclaim boldly and lovingly the glorious fact that soon the LORD will answer the Christian's prayer, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10), and that the manifestation of this kingdom will bring "the desire of all nations."—Hag. 2:7

KINGDOM WORK

Guided by the viewpoint of the LORD as expressed by him to Jeremiah, and set forth in our text, we are warranted in concluding that faithfulness in announcing the incoming kingdom may properly be considered a participation in our work

for the LORD. Jeremiah prophesied that the Israel of his day had to be taken captive. We today proclaim that the present evil world must come to an end and be replaced by God's wonderful kingdom. Surely the saints today occupy a highly honored position in the Divine arrangements, "as a season of beauty upon the mountains, as the feet of one preaching glad tidings of peace," declares the Prophet Isaiah. Then he outlines the message of good tidings which the 'feet' members of the 'body of Christ' are now commissioned to preach, saying: "As one preaching good news: for I will publish thy salvation, saying, O Sion, thy God shall reign."—Isa. 52:7, *Septuagint Version*

We are living in a transition period, and as we review what has occurred since the end of the 'times of the Gentiles' in 1914, since the time when "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21:24), we see a continual trend toward the establishment of Christ's kingdom. Only those enlightened by present truth know the meaning of these world changes, and happy are we if we are faithful in letting the people know this meaning to the extent that they have hearing ears.

Isaiah declares that in this time when the LORD returns his watchmen would "lift up the voice . . . together." (Isa. 52:8) This denotes unity in bearing witness to the truth. It is not possible for imperfect human minds to see every detail of truth exactly alike, but it is possible for all who recognize the significance of the times in which we are living to unitedly proclaim the Gospel of the kingdom to the world. This is essentially what the watchmen are doing. Think of the measure of cooperation

represented in the ability of a small group to broadcast the truth worldwide by radio and television every week! This is a brilliant testimony concerning the determination of the LORD's consecrated people to work together letting their light shine so they might be like a city set on a hill which cannot be hid.

The proclamation of the truth today will not convert the world, nor interest a great many people to the point of making a full consecration. There will be some drawn to the LORD, for it is his method of calling the remaining members of his church.

Besides these, there are thousands who are learning something about the truth. They are discovering through the message of the kingdom that God is love, that he does not intend to torment his enemies; and that his kingdom of blessing is near. To these the message of truth means, "Seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD's anger."—Zeph. 2:3

The message which the LORD has commissioned us to preach is one which, to the extent that it is heeded, leads first to repentance, then to consecration on the part of those who have a hearing ear. It reveals the futility of all human efforts to establish peace, and points to the kingdom of Christ as the world's only hope. In the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:36-44), the faithful followers of the Master are designated "children of the kingdom."—vs. 38

Let us be loyal and zealous children, gladly laying down our lives as ambassadors of the kingdom.

We have a great commission! May we prove to be faithful stewards of the mysteries of God! ■

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PSALMS OF THANKSGIVING FROM DAVID

"I will wash my hands in innocency . . . that I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works."

"Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High."

"I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving."

"Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms."

"Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name."

—*Psalm 26:6,7; 50:14; 69:30; 95:2; 100:4*

OBITUARIES

The following brethren have recently finished their Christian course. We wish to express our sincere sympathy to the families and friends in the loss of these dear ones.

Sister Bessie Barrett, Jacksonville, FL—September 11.
Age, 92.

Brother Walter Kendra, Grand Rapids, MI—September 13.
Age, 84.

Sister Mary Vogel, Boxborough, MA—September 15. Age, 92

Brother Henry Kwolek, Metro Detroit, MI—September 17.
Age, 82.

Leo Griehs, Jackson, MI—September 23. Age, 78.

Sister Ruth Mottie, Greenfield, OH—October 7. Age, 95.

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SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS

These speakers are routed through the Pilgrim Department of The Dawn. Their visits are furnished free upon request. Write to: The Dawn Pilgrim Department, East Rutherford, NJ 07073. A visit will be arranged whenever possible:

M. Balko

Pittsburgh, PA November 23 San Diego, CA 27-30

The speakers listed below, in cooperation with the Dawn, are invited by individual classes, or their services have been arranged by their home classes:

M.J. Balko

L. Wesol

Louisville, AL November 9 St. Petersburg, FL November 9

L.B. Post

New Haven, CT November 2

RENDER THANKS TO GOD

O render thanks to God above,
The fountain of eternal love,
Whose mercy firm through ages past
Hath stood and shall forever last!

O may I worthy prove to see
Thy saints in full prosperity,
That I the joyful choir may join,
And count thy people's triumph mine!

CONVENTIONS

These conventions are listed by request of classes who sponsor them. So your convention can be placed in these columns in time, make your request in writing three months before the date of the convention to: Dawn Magazine, 199 Railroad Ave., East Rutherford, NJ 0707

NEW HAVEN, CT, Novem- Club, 85 Chase Lane,
ber 2—Italian-American West Haven. For infor-

mation contact: Mrs. Richard Suraci, 171 Johnston Road, Hamden, CT 06515

Phone: (203) 248-3793

REGINA, SASK. BIBLE STUDENTS CONVENTION, November 7,8—

Landmark Inn. Phone hotel for reservations: (306) 586-5363. Secretary: Ann Michalyca, Box 1371, Melfort, Sask. Canada S0E 1A0

Phone: (306) 752-2197

JERSEY CITY, NJ PRE-THANKSGIVING CONVENTION, November 22,23—

Masonic Temple, 1912 Morris Avenue, Union, NJ. For information, contact: Charlotte Teklinski, 84 Arthur St., Ridgefield Park, NJ 07660

Phone: (201) 440-0925

DETROIT, MI, November 23—

Redford YWCA. 25940 Grand River, Redford Twp. Contact: Frank Nemesh, 2183 Babcock, Troy, MI 48084

Phone: (248) 649-6588

SAN DIEGO BIBLE STUDENTS THANKS-

GIVING CONVENTION, November 27-30 —National University, 4007 Camino del Rio South, San Diego. Reservations until November 7th at Radisson Hotel: 1-(800) 333-3333. Mention 'Bible Students'. For information, contact Daniel Rice, 14765 Fieldview Way, Poway, CA 92064

Phone: (619) 748-1538

PHOENIX NEW YEAR'S CONVENTION, January 1,2,3,4 1998—

Quality Hotel, 3600 N. Second Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85013. Make reservations directly with hotel: (602) 248-0222. Mention Phoenix Bible Students. Contact Esther Bachorski with meal count, and for other information.

Phone: (602) 546-0430

1998 BIBLE STUDENTS GENERAL CONVENTION, July 25-30—

University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, PA.

1998 INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION, August 9-14—Miskolc, Hungary

"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

—Matthew 18:20