

The Desert Shall Blossom as the Rose

*“The desert shall
rejoice, and blossom
as the rose.”
—Isaiah 35:1*

AMONG THE BEST known and most beautiful prophecies in the Bible is the thirty-fifth chapter of Isaiah. It starts with the sentiments of our theme text, though encompassing more than the desert alone. It begins, “The wilderness and the solitary

place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God.”—vss. 1,2

Whenever we witness the gorgeous growth of vegetation we marvel at the great power of God that makes it possible. We know that several elements must be brought together to make such growth possible. These are sun, water, air and earth (with nutrients). These must be in perfect balance. When one alone predominates, the result is a desert, devoid of all vegetation. Such is the case (for example) when there is an abundance of sun and air, but no water or nutrients in the soil.

THE EARTH'S DESERTS

There are huge areas of such wasteland on earth. The largest of these is the Sahara desert in Africa. In Asia there are the Gobi, the Kara Kum, and Krzyl-Kum deserts. Deserts are found in northwest India, South Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Arabia. Although Europe has no desert, there are semiarid regions in the vicinity of the Black and Caspian Seas. The second largest desert in the world is in the outback of Australia, especially in the central and western areas. South America also has deserts on the coast and interior of Chili, and east of the Andes in Argentina and Patagonia. In North America, deserts are located in northern Mexico and extend through parts of the southwest and western United States. Extreme desert conditions exist in the Mojave and Death Valley areas of California.

Hot deserts comprise one-fifth of the earth's available land. Equally considered as wasteland are the cold deserts where low temperatures and a perpetual snow cover make them unavailable for plant growth. The cold desert comprises about one-sixth of the land surface. All together, over one-third of the earth's land surface is devoid of vegetation. God has promised a remarkable change to occur in these desert areas as an indication of his favor being restored to mankind. Evidences as to how he might do this have appeared in our day which is a preparatory time for his kingdom.

THE SUN WORLD FARMS

An article appeared in the *“Los Angeles Times”* on October 8, 2000, which described one of these evidences. The article discussed the work of Cadiz's Sun World Unit in the Mojave Desert in California. It said: “To airline passengers cruising over the Mojave Desert, the farms in Cadiz seem to appear from out of nowhere, an unexpected checkerboard of green painted on the dusty no-man's-land off historic Route 66.

“On the ground, these checkerboards are actually thousands of acres of farmland, row after row of citrus trees, peach trees, and trailing grape vines that produce hundreds of thousands of boxes of fruit a year when crops elsewhere are still ripening or are long gone.

“Its owner, Santa Monica-based water resources firm, Cadiz, Inc., is hoping to duplicate this agricultural marvel and turn a parched corner of the Egyptian desert into another Coachella Valley, supplying Europe with juicy citrus and jumbo Muscat grapes out of season.

“While most California growers are still struggling to get their fruit into international markets, Cadiz and its farming unit, Sun World International, have discovered a lucrative niche helping growers across the globe plant their own grapes, plums, and citrus.

“In Egypt, Sun World is being paid to design a massive drip irrigation system for one of the world's largest farms, and to plant its own patented crops. If everything goes smoothly, it will earn an ownership stake in this phase of Egypt President Hosni Mubarak's Toshka project, which at 100,000 acres is five times the size of Sun World's California farming operations.

“Between Toshka and the deals Sun World is cutting to license its fancy patented crops overseas, it is well on the way to becoming a global farmer with enough reach to insulate itself from crop price plunges due to weather or oversupply. ‘They’re smoothing out the seasonal ups and downs of the [agriculture] business,’ said Debra Coy, a water analyst with Schwab Capital Markets in Washington.

“And, analysts say, with Toshka, they are paving the way for more arid farming projects in places such as the Middle East.”

FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

The article continued, describing the business aspects of this new technology. The investment of Cadiz, Inc., in drip irrigation equipment and land has caused it to struggle to turn a profit even though it grows and ships 14 million boxes of fruit each year from the Sun World division. The company was formed in 1983 after the founder identified an aquifer (an underground source of water) in the Mojave Desert. It spent several years acquiring land around the aquifer, and has negotiated with Southern California’s Metropolitan Water District to supply water from the aquifer and to store water from the Colorado River in the aquifer when supplies are plentiful. So it is evident that the desert cannot blossom as the rose unless water is available somehow, somewhere, and can be brought to the farm area.

The successful project that Cadiz, Inc. has developed in the Mojave Desert with the farms of Sun World is not so much the fulfillment of Isaiah 35:1 as it is a preliminary demonstration of what God will do in his kingdom. He is using man to demonstrate successful farming in the desert by the combination of an available water supply and drip irrigation.

It was difficult for Cadiz, Inc. to do this. They first started as a water resources corporation. Earlier, Sun World, a fruit packer, started operations in 1976 to sell patented specialty fruit. It spent tens of millions of dollars in research and development of varieties of fruit by crossbreeding, such as seedless watermelons and seedless grapes. Their products were so much in demand that other growers rushed in to compete with their own products and these specialty fruits became commodity items in the market place. Sun World went into bankruptcy and was taken over by Cadiz, Inc.

Sun World farms in the Mojave Desert are still burdened with high interest charges, which keep them in the red. For example, their earnings were 22 million dollars on 115 million dollars of revenue. But after interest charges, taxes, depreciation, and amortization, they ended up with a 3.5 million dollar loss. Most of their expenses of development and high interest charges are behind them, and by careful selection of specialty fruits that can sell at a higher price, they hope to begin becoming profitable.

THE EGYPTIAN VENTURE

Sun World is looking at higher priced specialty fruits selling at a premium in Europe. The output from the drip irrigation project in the Egyptian desert is expected to sell easily on that continent. Water will be brought forty miles from Lake Nassar to the desert farms by an aqueduct, now under construction. Planting may start next year.

WHAT METHOD WILL GOD USE?

How is God likely to make the desert ‘blossom as the rose’? One way is to change weather patterns so that water is delivered to these desert sites as rain from heaven. Our Lord Jesus gave a demonstration of this method when, to the utter amazement of the disciples, he rebuked the winds and the sea, demonstrating complete control of the elements controlling weather.—Matt. 8:23-27; 14:23-33

The two most productive growing areas for all kinds of agricultural products in the United States are the states of Florida and California. Both have ample sun and air. Florida depends on regular rainfall for water, and has many underground aquifers. California has very little rainfall during the major growing season, but in the winter the snowfall in the Sierra Nevada mountains becomes a most remarkable storage area for water in its solid form. As the summer months come, this snow melts and runs down into the valleys, into reservoirs and lakes, to be used for irrigation.

We would expect that weather pattern changes are likely to be the major method for delivery of water to desert farms. There may be huge aquifers in these regions—one has been identified in the Sahara—which can be tapped and used for drip irrigation as in the example of Sun World farms in the Mojave Desert. Whatever the means used by God to accomplish this miracle, we know that the results will be glorious.

GLORIOUS RESULTS

Isaiah's prophecy foretells the glory of these deserts, which will be like the "glory of Lebanon." (Isa. 35:2) Lebanon is a mountain range area, which can store water in solid form as snow. This is mentioned in Jeremiah 18:14. In between the mountains is a valley, rich in agricultural products. The cedars of Lebanon appear often in the Scriptures, and this fine wood was used in building Solomon's Temple in Israel. (I Kings 5:6) Also, many beautiful plants grow in the valley. The region is known as Hermon and is mentioned in Psalm 133:3 in the phrase as the "dew of Hermon." The glory of Lebanon, therefore, includes water that makes strong trees to grow, and supplies irrigation for the crops of Hermon.

This change on the face of the earth is described as "the excellency of Carmel and Sharon." (vs. 2) Carmel is at the foot of Mt. Carmel, and one writer in describing it, said, "its surface is covered with a rich and constant verdure." Green plants grow there all the time. There are three areas called Sharon in the Bible, but many believe that it mostly refers to the level region adjacent to Lydda. It is that broad, rich tract of land which lies between the mountains of the central part of Palestine and the Mediterranean. Again, the glory consists of rich agricultural products.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The thirty-fifth chapter of Isaiah is especially known, not only for this prophecy of the desert blooming as a rose, but also the wonderful conditions that will be established for the work of God's kingdom. First, evil must be subdued. This task will be the mission of the church, and her Lord.

Will the church be able to combat the evil tendencies in the world? Yes, because Satan will be bound for a thousand years that he shall deceive the nations no more till the thousand years shall have been fulfilled. (Rev. 20:3) During those years the Savior's mission as the "Sun of Righteousness," will be to bless mankind with "healing" in his wings. (Mal. 4:2) The church is to have a share with him in the blessing of the world. This is not a new proposition God has made. This was God's plan and purpose before the foundation of the world. This is the Gospel, or good tidings, first declared to Abraham, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed"—Gen. 12:3

God intended to bless all the members of the human race—all races and kindreds and tongues—and purposed that the blessing should come to them through the seed of Abraham. The Jewish nation was merely the typical seed; the antitypical seed is the Christ—Jesus, the Head, and the church, his body. (Gal. 3:16,29) The world must wait for its blessing until the church shall have been completed, and shall have passed beyond the veil to sit with Christ in his throne.

The blessing, which will attend the work of the Christ, cannot begin until the church is complete. Then every knee shall bow and every tongue confess, and the knowledge of God shall fill the whole earth. (Phil. 2:10,11; Hab. 2:14) God has provided that as all died in Adam; so all are to be revived—brought back to the privilege of attaining everlasting life, through the merit of Christ’s sacrifice. The attainment of everlasting life will depend upon the manner in which the privilege is used. None will be coerced or compelled.

The majority of mankind today have respect for righteousness. If its rewards were sure, unquestionably they would prefer to do right. Many say that they have been almost forced to do evil. Only a very few are willing to renounce sin and to walk in the narrow way of obedience and self-sacrifice. Those who do so in this Gospel Age are to have a very special reward, and others who love righteousness and hate iniquity will, under the rule of Christ’s kingdom, have every assistance given without compulsion. They will receive cooperation in their endeavors for righteousness. The Scriptures declare that as death was the original penalty of sin in Adam’s case, so it will always be the penalty for sin. (Ezek. 18:4). Whoever, during the future age, sins willfully shall die the second death, from which there will be no resurrection, no redemption, no hope of recovery.

THE EARTH IS TO BE MAN’S FUTURE HOME

Before sin had entered into the world, the Divine provision of a perfect environment for our first parents was the Garden of Eden. The future, as described by the Word of God, will be paradise (garden) restored. The entire earth will be made beautiful, fruitful, sinless, and happy. Conditions will be ideal, “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 (of sin and death) will have passed away, and all things will have been made new!—Rev. 21:4,5

The Apostle Peter speaks of these glorious “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) In God’s due time, the earth is to be brought to the perfection he primarily designed for it, as illustrated in the Garden of Eden. That time is near at hand and the promised blessings are assured. The irrigation systems with water supplied by aquifers and by aqueducts are fulfillments of the prophecies pertaining to preparation of the blessing of the earth! “In the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.”—Isa. 35:6,1

After God had created various orders of spirit beings, he made man, “a little lower than the angels.” (Ps. 8:5) The human race began with Adam and Eve, who had ability to grasp and appreciate the Divine provisions, as the animal creation cannot. The fact that sin resulted through Satan’s crafty deceit and brought Father Adam under the sentence of death did not signify that the Heavenly Father had changed his arrangement. The purpose which he had in the beginning has never changed.

We can see the reason why the entire earth was not made immediately into an Eden; namely, God intended to give man a trial, foreseeing that man would sin. He created Eden perfect, but allowed the remainder of the earth to continue in an unfinished condition. Furthermore, God said to Adam after he sinned, “Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.”—Gen. 3:17-19

EARTH’S IMPERFECTION MAN’S BLESSING

God could have made the entire earth perfect as easily as he ‘planted’ the little Garden of Eden. But he foresaw that if the earth were perfected, the death-struggle would be longer, and the degradation of man greater. The cursed earth has been a factor in preventing mankind from committing greater iniquity. The sentence, ‘In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,’ was evidently intended as a blessing, teaching man lessons of experience through battling with the earth for his living. As the

Creator said to the man regarding the curse of the earth, it was ‘for thy [man’s] sake.’ So man has learned that “The wages of sin is death.” (Rom. 6:23) The Heavenly Father has not, however changed his plan. When the kingdom is set up, the earth shall yield her increase; and God assures us, “I will make the place of my feet glorious.”—Isa. 60:13

One of the signs of the approach of God’s kingdom is that knowledge shall be increased. (Dan. 12:4) Some of this has been in horticulture. What beautiful fruits and flowers have followed as a result! It is difficult to imagine anything nearer perfection either in Eden of old, or the worldwide Eden soon to be established! In referring to the ‘times of restitution,’ the prophet declares that “Then shall the earth yield her increase.” (Ps. 67:6) We have been seeing preparations for the fulfillment of this promise. Why has the earth not been already made glorious? God is allowing man to propagate first and to learn the results of sin by experience. The angels have been learning the lesson of sin by observation.

MANKIND WILL LEARN A SECOND LESSON

God is selecting the church in the present Gospel Age. When the church is completed, mankind will have an opportunity to learn the lesson of righteousness. This uplifting time is marked out in the Scriptures as ‘times of restitution’—the restoration of that which was lost. Since that which was lost was human perfection, and Edenic bliss, mankind will receive earthly, rather than heavenly, blessings. God’s will shall be accomplished. The earth will be brought to perfection during the thousand years of Messiah’s reign. The most important piece of restitution work, however, relates to man. The hard, stony selfishness of heart, which is worldwide, is to be eliminated and Godlikeness is to be restored.

“MAN’S INHUMANITY TO MAN”

Nearly two thousand years of preaching show that the cure for man’s inhumanity to man is not now in our power. Only a few desire to seek for the Lord’s spirit of gentleness and tenderheartedness.

The great King of Glory is also the Good Physician. He alone can cure the disease of sin and its results. Through him God’s promise to Israel will be fulfilled, “I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I

will give you an heart of flesh.” (Ezek. 36:26) This work will proceed from Israel to all the families of the earth, uplifting all the willing and obedient out of sin and death to all that was lost in Eden and redeemed at Calvary. The beautiful promises of Isaiah 35 will be fulfilled. The perfected earth will abide forever for the glorious ransomed man.

THE HEADSHIP OF CHRIST

God purposed to make a New Creation and will complete that work when the glorified church is associated with her Lord in the Divine nature, far above principalities and powers and every name that is named. Thus, eventually, the Scriptures state, “Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and such as are in the sea” will be heard saying, “Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.” (Rev. 5:13) Thus the Lord will gather together all the faithful, both in heaven and in earth, under the headship of Christ, whose head is Jehovah.—Eph. 1:10

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Called to Serve and Forgive

Key Verse: “The word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.”

—Acts 6:7

***Selected Scripture:
Acts 6:1-8; 7:55; 8:1***

IN THE TIME FOLLOWING the Day of Pentecost, God richly blessed the efforts to spread the message of the Gospel to all who had a hearing ear. Many were converted, and “the number of the disciples was multiplied.” (Acts 6:1) As a result of this, there was much work thrust onto the shoulders of the apostles, only eleven in number at this time (Paul had not yet been chosen). They were so involved with the spread of the Gospel message and its success that they had less time to minister to the personal and daily needs of brethren. Murmuring even developed among some, because

“widows were neglected in the daily ministration.”—vs. 1

The apostles recognized the need to attend to the daily needs of the widows and others, yet they knew they could not leave the ministry of the Word of God. Their combined sentiment was that serving in these more ‘temporal’ daily affairs of the church was “not reason that we should leave the Word of God, and serve tables.” (Acts 6:2) They did not, however, ignore these needs. The apostles instructed the brethren to select seven consecrated brothers, “men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.” (Acts 6:3) These seven would attend to the daily ministration of the brethren, while the apostles would continue to spread the word of truth to as many as would receive it.—vs. 4

Through these events we see that God recognizes our need for both the spiritual nourishment of his Word as well as the daily, temporal provisions of life. The importance of the latter is described by the Apostle Paul in I Timothy 5:8, “If any provide not for his own [brethren as well as family], and specially for those of his own house [the household of faith], he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” It is evident

from the Key Verse that God was pleased with this new arrangement in the Early Church. Surely the Lord's hand was blessing all aspects of the work through the efforts of those engaged in various capacities.

It has always been true that whenever God's arrangements achieve success, that the great adversary Satan and his messengers are not far behind, attempting to undermine, criticize, and destroy any progress made in the way of righteousness. Stephen, one of the seven chosen 'deacons' to serve in the daily ministration described earlier, was the current target of these enemies of God. Being full of the Holy Spirit, Stephen gave a beautiful witness. Beginning with Abraham, and progressing down the stream of time to the death of Jesus, he laid before his accusers the truth of God's Word. (Acts 7:2-53) So enraged were his hearers that they immediately "cast him [Stephen] out of the city, and stoned him." (Acts 7:58) Being a faithful servant of God even unto death, Stephen's final words were those of love and forgiveness for his enemies as he uttered in his dying breath, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."—vs. 60

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Called to Witness to All People

Key Verse: “They that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.”
—Acts 8:4

Selected Scripture:
Acts 8:4-8, 26-35

AS A RESULT OF THE death of Stephen and subsequent persecution, many in the Early Church were driven away from Jerusalem. They became scattered throughout the region of Judaea and Samaria. (Acts 8:1) One might think that this turn of events would have diminished the efforts of the brethren in their witnessing to God’s Word, or that they might have become fearful or discouraged. Just the opposite was true.

They were more zealous than ever! As our Key Verse explains, they saw the scattering as an opportunity to preach the word of truth in new places, to new hearers, covering a much greater area than had been possible when they were all in Jerusalem. This was a small beginning. Nevertheless it served as a start of the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophetic words, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations.”—Matt. 24:14

One of those who took immediate advantage of the increased opportunity to preach the word was Philip. He, like Stephen, was one of the seven deacons chosen to serve with respect to the daily affairs and ministration of the brethren. Also similar to Stephen, Philip was well versed in the Scriptures and full of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 8:5-7, it is recorded that he preached Christ to those in Samaria, drove unclean spirits out of those who were possessed, and healed various kinds of disease and sickness. Many believed the things which he spoke.

God, seeing the zeal of Philip, gave him an even greater opportunity to spread the Gospel message. “The angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza.” (Acts 8:26) This was the furthest anyone had yet traveled to preach the Gospel, and Philip did not hesitate to take advantage of the opportunity. An Ethiopian eunuch (an Israeli proselyte) was on his way back from Jerusalem to his own country when the Holy

Spirit guided Philip to his chariot. To Philip's surprise, he found the eunuch reading from Isaiah, greatly desiring to learn, but not understanding what he was reading. (Acts 8:30-31) The place of the scripture which he was reading was Isaiah 53:7. "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth."—vss. 32-33

The eunuch was particularly desirous to know whether the prophet was speaking "of himself, or of some other man?" (Acts 8:34) Philip gladly pointed out that Isaiah was speaking of none other than Jesus. He was the sheep led to the slaughter, the lamb that opened not his mouth, the one that paid the ransom for Adam and all his posterity through his death on the cross, and subsequently was raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of God. Philip also must have told him about God's plan and the selection of a church class from the believers of Jesus, because when they came to water, the eunuch was baptized. What a joy it was for Philip to preach such good news! May we have the same desire, as expressed in the scripture, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up."—Ps. 69:9

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Called to Proclaim the Risen Lord

Key Verse: “As they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead?”

—Luke 24:5

Selected Scriptures:

Luke 24:1-10;

Acts 9:19-20, 26-28, 31

IN THE EARLY MORNING of the third day after the death of Jesus, the first day of the week, some of the women who had been Jesus’ disciples came to the sepulchre where his body had been laid. They brought spices and ointments, planning to pay tribute to their loving Master. When they arrived at the tomb to their amazement, they “found not the body of the Lord Jesus.” (Luke 24:3) They were perplexed, perhaps even thinking that thieves had come and stolen the body. In the midst of their confusion, “Behold, two men stood by them in shining garments.” (vs. 4)

These were angels sent from God to comfort and explain to them what had transpired. The message of the two angels was quite astounding. They said, “Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.”—Luke 24:5-7

The angels reminded the women that it had been necessary for Jesus to die. Without his death as a corresponding price for father Adam, taking his place in death, all would still be considered ‘dead’ in Adam and without any hope of release from condemnation. Jesus himself had foretold this very thing, when he said, “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom.” (Matt. 20:28) Even Jesus, however, could not bring about the restoration of mankind if confined to the condition of death. “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.” (I Cor. 15:17) The more important message of the angels was that Jesus had been raised indeed from the dead. “Now is Christ risen from the dead, ... For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in

Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”—I Cor. 15:20-22

By his resurrection from the dead, with the value (or merit) of his perfect human life in his possession, Jesus began the process by which that ransom value would be applied as a payment into the hands of God’s justice, first on behalf of his church, and later on behalf of all mankind. This payment will bring about the eventual release of all from condemnation, and an opportunity for all to be fully restored to life and favor with God. This will be accomplished, as it was with Jesus, through the raising of all mankind from the sleep of death. We echo the words of Paul, “There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.” (Acts 24:15)

What a joyous message the angels brought to the women at the sepulchre! They remembered now that Jesus had taught them these things, and they rejoiced that their Master was risen. They “returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest.” (Luke 24:9) At first the apostles and disciples did not believe the message brought by the women. Peter ran to the empty tomb and confirmed what the women had seen. Later Jesus showed himself to them causing them to say in their hearts, Hallelujah! What a Savior!

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Called to Be Inclusive

Key Verse: “Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.”
—Acts 10:34-35

Selected Scripture: Acts 10:30-39, 44-48

WHEN JESUS WAS UPON earth, he told his disciples to preach only to the Jews. He said, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, ... But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matt. 10:5-6) The reason for this instruction was that Israel had been in covenant relationship with God since the days of Moses, and they were the only nation that God dealt with directly. To Israel applied the words, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.” (Amos 3:2) Because of this, it was proper that the Jews be given the first opportunity to accept Jesus, the Messiah. Although there were many individuals who accepted him, as a nation Israel rejected Jesus,

putting him to death on the cross. “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.”—John 1:11

Three and a half years after Jesus death and resurrection, Israel’s exclusive favor of 490 years—as prophesied in Daniel 9:24-27—had come to an end, and the time had come for the Gospel to become inclusive of not just Jews, but also Gentiles. Cornelius, a Gentile centurion who was devout and who feared God, had been praying in his house, when an angel appeared to him. The angel instructed him to send for Peter. Cornelius did as the angel said, and soon Peter arrived at Caesarea, where Cornelius lived. Peter already knew what was to be done, because of a vision he had just prior to being found by Cornelius’ messengers. In that vision (see Acts 10:9-24) God showed Peter that all men, Jews and Gentiles, would have an equal opportunity to come into covenant relationship with him. This would not be through the Mosaic Law arrangement instituted many centuries before, but through the precious blood of Jesus. This blood, shed on behalf of fallen Adam, was

efficacious to all, regardless of their nationality, because all were “in Adam,” (I Cor. 15:22) and could be cleansed.

As Peter was speaking with Cornelius, he said, “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him... And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.”—Acts 10:34-35,42-43

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and his entire household. Those of the Jews who had traveled with Peter were astonished. They had not yet realized what Peter knew, that Jesus had died a ransom ‘for all,’ not for just the Israelites, and that all redeemed had an equal opportunity, through faith rather than through the ceremonies of the Law, to come under God’s special favor.

After receiving the Holy Spirit they publicly demonstrated their faith in the shed blood of Jesus by being baptized (immersed) in water. This was a symbol of the consecration that had already taken place in their hearts. Now they were “baptized into Jesus Christ,” (Rom. 6:3) and were of the “household of God.”—Eph. 2:19

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Reaching Out to Others

Key Verse: “As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.”

—Acts 13:2

***Selected Scripture:
Acts 11:19-30; 13:1-3***

OUR LESSON RECOUNTS the experiences of those scattered because of “the persecution that arose about Stephen.” These preached the word “unto the Jews only.” (Acts 11:19) The references to various cities in verse 19 note the movement of the church as the spreading of the Gospel continued. Antioch, one of the cities mentioned, was unusual because in that city there were many Gentiles and “a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.” (Acts 11:21) Antioch became a ‘headquarters’ for the missionary work that was soon to turn westward.

Barnabas, whose name means ‘son of consolation,’ was sent by the apostles from Jerusalem to Antioch to investigate the unusual situation existing. Upon his arrival, he saw how the grace of God had blessed these brethren. He “exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.” (Acts 11:23) Barnabas, as the meaning of his name implies, had a talent for encouragement, and did not hesitate to use it wherever he was. We, as he did, should always seek to be instruments of encouragement, uplifting others rather than tearing down. “Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another.”—I Thess. 5:11

Barnabas, however, knew that Saul (Paul) had been designated by Jesus as the apostle to the Gentiles, so he went to Tarsus to find Saul. (Acts 11:25) Upon finding him, Barnabas brought him back to Antioch, where they both met with the brethren and became elders. Both Saul and Barnabas taught in the church, building it up and instructing many people. We note that “the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”—Acts 11:26

During the time that Saul and Barnabas were in Antioch, some prophets came from Jerusalem. One of these was Agabus, who

prophesied by the Holy Spirit that a worldwide famine would occur during the reign of Claudius Caesar. Upon hearing this, the disciples organized a relief effort to the brethren in Judaea. Barnabas and Saul were the ones chosen to deliver the needed provisions to the brethren. This experience is a reminder to us that God not only requires faith, but also works, in order for us to be found worthy. “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.”—James 2:14-17

After an interlude in Acts 12, our lesson continues with the church at Antioch. Five elders are named in Acts 13:1. The Holy Spirit, God’s holy influence and power, is spoken of as guiding the church to “separate” Barnabas and Saul for a special work. (vs. 2) The brethren at Antioch financed a special missionary journey by these two elders. When God sets a person apart, he ‘sanctifies’ that person or ‘makes holy’ the person for the special work at hand. We, too, must sanctify ourselves that we might be of use to him. “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”—John 17:17

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“A New and Living Way”

THIS CHAPTER CONTINUES the discussion of chapter 9, carrying the thought forward to show still more completely how the voluntary offering of Jesus’ human life was a complete sacrifice, which not only atones for sin, but by so doing prepares the way for the sinner to be fully reconciled to God.

CHAPTER 10

VERSE 1 “The Law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.”

Here, as in chapter 8:5, is brought out the thought of a shadow cast by a substance. Typical Israel could not discern the significance of these shadows. Indeed, they did not recognize them as such, but considered them to be the reality. Nor would it be possible for us to see them as shadows but for the fact that the sunlight of the Gospel reveals them as such. Standing in the light of the Gospel, we see in the shadow of those typical ceremonies the images of the realities which we, as spiritual Israelites, are now privileged to enjoy.

VERSES 2-4 “Then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.”

Paul’s argument is simple, yet conclusive: had those typical sacrifices been effective in taking away sin, there would have been no more remembrance of sin on the part of the sinner—he would have enjoyed genuine and lasting peace. But this was not the case, hence the necessity of repeating the sacrifices ‘year by year continually,’ and even this failed to ‘make the comers thereunto perfect.’

The conclusion is, not that the typical priests failed to offer those sacrifices in the proper manner, or that those seeking atonement were not sincere, but rather that under no circumstances could the blood of bulls

and goats take away sins. God did not intend that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins. Those sacrifices were merely shadows, to be looked back upon from this age, patterns pointing forward to the blood of Christ, the real medium of atonement.

VERSE 5 “When he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me.”

The Apostle Paul in this verse, speaking of Jesus, quotes the *Septuagint Version* of Psalm 40:6 in the Old Testament. The *Logos*, in all the glory he had with the Father in his prehuman existence, could not have offered a sacrifice which would have been efficacious to take away human sin. A corresponding price was necessary, so it was necessary that the *Logos* be “made flesh,” (John 1:14) that a human body be especially ‘prepared,’ and it was his flesh that he gave for the life of the world. The Heavenly Father prepared this body by choosing a mother that was pure of heart and full of faith, and transferring a vigorous, perfect spark of life from the spiritual realm to her womb, that it might be “found in fashion as a man.”—Phil. 2:8

VERSE 6 “In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.”

This does not mean that God was not pleased with the efforts of his typical people who in sincerity brought their animal sacrifices to him in keeping with the prescribed arrangements of the Law. True, there was often a lack of genuine sincerity in their offerings, and ultimately those typical ceremonies deteriorated into mere formalism, and oftentimes hypocritical formalism. With this Jehovah was greatly displeased. But even at the best, he received ‘no pleasure’ in the sense that he realized, even though the people did not, that those animal sacrifices could not take away sins, hence could not open the way for members of the sin-cursed and dying race to return to him and enjoy his fellowship and blessing. In contrast to this we think of the prophet’s statement concerning Jesus that “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.”—Isa. 53:11

VERSE 7 “Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.”

Again Paul quotes from Psalm 40:7,8, and applies the prophecy to Jesus. It expresses the sentiments of Jesus’ heart as he presented himself in full consecration to do his Father’s will. None of the Gospel writers

indicate that Jesus ever quoted this prophecy, but it surely must have been in his mind when he presented himself to God at the time of his baptism. Luke 3:21 records that Jesus did offer prayer at the time of his baptism; and it is reasonable to conclude that it was here that he made the words of the prophecy his own, saying to his Father, “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.”

The will of the Heavenly Father for Jesus was not an indefinite matter, for it all had been minutely recorded in the ‘volume of the book,’ that is, in the Old Testament Scriptures, and Jesus agreed to be guided by its every detail. Paul’s reference to these terms of the Master’s consecration, associating them with the Tabernacle types, suggests that in addition to the written words of instruction, the types and shadows of the Tabernacle and its services were intended also to be an expression of the Father’s will for his beloved Son, to guide him in his course of sacrifice as he was led like a lamb to the slaughter.

VERSES 8,9 “Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.”

In these verses Paul expounds somewhat the meaning of the prophecy concerning Jesus which he had quoted ‘above,’ repeating a part of the prophecy for emphasis. In the type, there was a dedication of the Tabernacle and of the priesthood which were to serve under the terms of the Law Covenant. That was the ‘first’ arrangement by which the sins of the people were expiated, and sinners reconciled to God. But it was merely a typical arrangement. It did not actually take away sin. It merely called attention to the need for sin atonement and pointed forward to the real sacrifice which would make this possible, and to a New Covenant under which sinners redeemed by the blood of Christ would be restored to at-one-ment with God.

Jesus’ consecration, as foretold in the prophecy, was the beginning of the establishment of the ‘second.’ In order to have this whole picture clearly in mind, however, it is essential to see that the consecration of the typical priesthood, and the dedication of the Tabernacle did not constitute the complete making of that old Law Covenant. These ceremonies were

merely a means to an end, and the end was the reconciliation of the nation to God under the terms of the Law Covenant.

So far as God was concerned, that typical covenant, and all the sacrifices associated with it, came to an end when Jesus began his ministry, for there the New Covenant arrangements began to be set up. First, as the Head of the great antitypical priesthood, Jesus consecrated himself to God and to his service, and this work of consecrating the priesthood has continued throughout the entire age, and is still going on. This is not the work of the New Covenant, but the preparation for it.

The establishment of the second, or New Covenant, is in two phases, even as was that of the typical covenant. First there is the consecration of the priesthood and the provision of the blood. This is the work of the Gospel Age. Then there is the reconciliation of the people made possible by the blood and through the services of the priesthood. This will be the work of the Millennial Age. Not until the close of the millennium will the work of the New Covenant be fully completed. Its establishment began with the consecration of Jesus, who dedicated himself at Jordan to be the Head of the great antitypical priesthood.

VERSE 10 “By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

‘By the which will.’—This is the same ‘will’ of God mentioned in the prophecy, “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.” In this will of God for Jesus there was a provision for him to have a church, who would be at one with him, sanctified by the Spirit of the Truth, even as he was sanctified by his obedience to the word of Truth. But our full sanctification would not be possible apart from the merit of his blood, provided through the sacrifice of the perfect human body provided for him.

But again let us emphasize that this sanctification of Christ’s body members is but a preparatory step in the establishment of the New Covenant—that covenant under the terms of which the world will have an opportunity to believe and be reconciled to God. On behalf of his body members Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth,” and then added, “For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.” Again, “The glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.”— John 17:17,19,22-23

Note the great objective of the sanctification of Christ and his church— ‘that the world may know’ that God sent Christ to be the Redeemer and Savior. The purpose of this is that the world may have an opportunity to believe, for “how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?” (Rom. 10:14) It will be under the terms of the New Covenant, during the millennium, that the world will be given this opportunity for belief and reconciliation. Then Christ and his church will be reigning as “kings and priests,” (Rev. 5:10) the members of the church having been made acceptable through the blood of Christ, shed once for all. It is the blood of the New Covenant because it is the blood which makes possible the sanctification of the priesthood of that covenant, and through the service of that priesthood the same blood will be the basis for the reconciliation to God of all who accept the invitation, “Come. . . . take the water of life freely.”—Rev. 22:17

VERSES 11-14 “Every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”

There is a seeming contrast in these verses between the typical high priest’s standing to offer sacrifice and the antitypical high priest, Jesus, being seated at the right hand of God after he had offered his perfect sacrifice once for all. In the type, the priest was obliged to continue ‘day by day’ offering sacrifices, and even then no genuine cleansing from sin was accomplished. But in the antitype, following the ‘once for all’ sacrifice, results were expected, and Jesus, exalted at the right hand of God, waits for those results.—vs. 10

The fact that the church participates with Jesus in the sacrificial work of the Gospel Age does not mean that his shed blood was not efficacious to expiate the sins of both the church and the world. The once for all feature of the atoning work refers only to the provision of the ransom. The church’s share in the work of reconciliation has to do merely with

the manner in which the merit of the ransom is made available for the reconciliation of the world. A part of that arrangement is that the blood first of all forms a basis for the sanctification of the church that she might share with Jesus in the mediatorial work of the next age as “ministers of a new covenant.”—II Cor. 3:6, *New International Version*

VERSES 15-18 “The Holy Spirit also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.”

This is a wonderful use of a proof text! Paul had just said that the sacrifice of Jesus had ‘perfected for ever them that are sanctified.’ To prove that this could be possible, he cites the promise of the New Covenant, the promise in which the Lord declares concerning those reconciled to him during the age to come, that ‘their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.’ In the case of the ineffectual typical sacrifice, which could not make the comers thereto perfect, there was a ‘remembrance’ of sins, and new sacrifices had to be made. But this is not the case with the sacrifice of Jesus. The very fact that God had promised, on behalf of the restored world, that he would remember their sins no more, is proof that the sacrifice which made possible their reconciliation was fully and forever efficacious. Since it is so on behalf of those who will be restored to actual perfection in the next age, it is also true on behalf of those who, upon the basis of the same sacrifice, are now justified by faith and thus reckoned perfect in the sight of God.

VERSES 19-22 “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.”

As is so often the case, we find that here again, beginning with verse 16, Paul sets forth the hope of both the church and the world. The hope of the world is that of being reconciled to God under the terms of the New Covenant. This is restitution hope, made sure by the blood of Christ. It is cited by the apostle to prove that the merit of the blood guarantees

absolute perfection to those who later will accept it under the terms of the New Covenant.

But now, having assured us that the blood does provide the possibility of human perfection, he tells us that upon the basis of sacrifice made acceptable by the blood—as acceptable as though we were perfect human beings like Jesus—we have ‘boldness to enter into the holiest,’ the antitypical holiest, that is, even heaven itself. No Israelite in the camp of Israel was ever offered the opportunity of entering into the typical Most Holy. Only the high priest had that privilege, and he had it only because he carried with him the blood, first of the bullock, and then of the goat, offered on the Day of Atonement.

It would be boldness akin to presumption for us to attempt to enter into the antitypical Most Holy were it not that the Scriptures make it so abundantly plain that we are invited to this High Calling. Paul’s argument literally places the consecrated followers of the Master in the position, antitypically, as foreshadowed by the typical high priest. But he tells us that we have a right to aspire to this high position because the blood of Christ gives us a reckoned standing of perfection before the Lord. Our hearts, he says, are ‘sprinkled from an evil conscience,’ and ‘our bodies washed with pure water’—the water of the Word.

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Honor, Shame, and Glory

“As they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.”
—Luke 19:11

ON APRIL 8 THE PROFESSED Christian world will observe what is known as Palm Sunday; and on April 15, the resurrection of Jesus will be commemorated. Palm Sunday is in commemoration of Jesus’ triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem, when he was hailed as King by his friends and followers, and when they “Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.” (John 12:13) It was a

moment of high honor in the life of Jesus. The Pharisees, in their selfish jealousy, were greatly wrought up over the situation, and said, “behold, the world is gone after him.”—John 12:19

The royal, or kingly, promises of God had all been made to the nation of Israel. It was to this nation that the King came in fulfillment of these promises. For this reason it was essential that Jesus should present himself formally to the nation as king. Besides, it had been foretold that he would do this, and it was essential that the prophecy be fulfilled. (Zech. 9:9) Jesus’ disciples and friends were highly elated over this experience, for it betokened to them that the Messianic kingdom was soon to make its appearance in power and great glory.

As Jesus said to two of them after his resurrection, they were “slow of heart to believe,” (Luke 24:25) for just prior to this he had related to them a parable, which, had they comprehended its meaning, would have taught them not to expect the kingdom at that time. It was the parable of the pounds. The opening words of the parable are, “A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message

after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us.”—Luke 19:12-14

This is the parable referred to in our text, the one which was given for the very purpose of alerting the disciples to the fact that the ‘citizens’ of King Jesus, the Jewish nation, would hate him and would not have him rule over them. But, for the time at least, the intended purpose of the parable was not accomplished. Later they realized, through the compelling logic of events, that their king was hated, and that he might indeed be killed. They seemed to remember vaguely that the parable had said the king would go away, and later return; for they went to Jesus on the Mount of Olives, and said, “Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming [*parousia*, ‘presence’], and of the end of the world [*aion*, ‘age’]?”—Matt. 24:3

This seems to indicate that for the moment, at least, they had grasped the idea that Jesus was going away, and that he would return. But their spiritual vision was not entirely clear, for when Jesus subsequently was put to death, they were scattered and perplexed.

Had they not been ‘slow of heart to believe’ they would have known not only that Jesus was going away, but that he would be taken away from them by death. About the time when his friends hailed him as king, and the Pharisees became concerned that the whole world had ‘gone after him,’ certain Greeks sought an audience with the Master. The disciples reported this to him, and, in refusing to see them, his answer was, “The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”—John 12:20-24

These words must have sounded strange to the disciples. Doubtless they thought that their Master had already been glorified. Had not the crowd shouted, ‘Hosanna, Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord’? But Jesus knew that this was not his real glorification. Before he could actually be glorified, he must die as the Redeemer of the world, for otherwise, like the ‘corn of wheat,’ he would remain alone. Conceivably, through the exercise of Divine power, Jesus could have established his kingdom at that time. Had he done so without dying to redeem the human race from death, he alone would have eternal life, while all his subjects would continue to die.

Again, the disciples failed to grasp the significance of the Master's words. Later he explained to them that he was going away to prepare a "place" for them, and added, "And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." Thomas replied, "We know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?" (John 14:2-5) He was right. They had not yet grasped the fact that Jesus was to die, be raised from the dead, and glorified as a Divine being. Nor did they yet know the way to glory, although they had been invited to follow him.

Only a short time before this James and John had asked to sit, one on Jesus' right hand, and the other on his left hand, in his glory. Jesus explained that to share his glory it would be necessary to drink his "cup" of suffering, and be "baptized" with him into death. (Matt. 20:22) They said they were willing to go through these experiences, but their understanding of what was implied was evidently vague, for now Thomas admitted that they did not know the 'way' to the place of glory to which Jesus was going.

"IF I BE LIFTED UP"

In another effort to prepare his disciples for the fact that he would be taken away from them in death, Jesus said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die." To this the people answered, "We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up?" (John 12:32-34) The context shows that the 'people' who asked this question were not Jesus' disciples, but rather those who did not believe on him, yet they understood from his remark that he expected to die, and that he would die on the cross.

As the people remarked, however, they understood from the Law that the Christ, the Messiah, would not die, but would continue forever. The disciples had accepted Jesus as the Messiah, so they, too, were sure that he would not die. Thus, their great faith in him as being the Messiah was one of the things which tended to obscure from them the meaning of all that he said relating to the fact of his death and the establishment of his kingdom at a later time. This was a case of being blinded by a 'dark saying,' hence not able to see and appreciate its fuller unfolding.

It is true that the Messiah will abide forever, but first it was necessary that he should die to redeem those over whom he would reign. It is true

that of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, but before he can draw all men unto him it was necessary that he be lifted up upon the cross to die, the “just for the unjust.” (I Pet. 3:18) Thus it was that although Jesus’ disciples loved him dearly, and would gladly have given their lives to save him from death, yet when he came to the end of the way, “then all the disciples forsook him.” That is, none of them did or could understand the significance of what was taking place.—Matt. 26:56

Shame and ignominy were heaped upon the Master. He was derided, blasphemed, and beaten. A crown of thorns was crushed upon his bleeding head. On the cross he was further disgraced, but one of the thieves being crucified with him, noting the inscription at the top of the cross stating that Jesus was a king, and grasping at a straw of hope, said, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.”—Luke 23:42

How clearly the Master had the whole situation in mind! In the parable he had shown that he would go into a ‘far country’ and when he would return establish his kingdom. Now, although he was dying, he possessed unbounded faith in his Father’s plan. He knew that he would receive the promised kingdom, and that its control over the affairs of men would reestablish paradise conditions worldwide. He knew that even the dead would be raised and have an opportunity to enjoy the blessings of that kingdom, and that the thief would thus have his opportunity, together with the others. So, grasping this very much ‘out of season’ opportunity to give a witness for the Truth, he replied, “Verily I say unto thee this day; with me shalt thou be in paradise.”—Luke 23:43, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*

Jesus’ final words on the cross were, “Father, into they hands I commend my spirit”—my life. (Luke 23:46) Thus died the King of glory. All nature seemed to join in the mourning. The ground shook, the sky was darkened; and so were the minds of his trusting, and now bewildered, followers. The One whom they so surely thought would live forever had died. It was a grim and confusing climax to that series of events crowded into his last few days which, paradoxically, began with their hero riding into Jerusalem as king, accompanied by the hosanna cheers of his disciples and friends. They had honored and exalted him, but his enemies had killed him.

NOW GLORIFIED

We all know what occurred after the enemies of Jesus had put him to death. Peter related this most eloquently, saying to those who had witnessed the miracle of healing a man lame from his birth, “The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.”—Acts 3:13-15

After his resurrection Jesus himself announced, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” (Matt. 28:18) But he did not then exercise that power by establishing the long-promised kingdom. Instead, and as he had foretold in the parable, after he appeared to his disciples a few times he “went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.” (Luke 19:12) He commissioned his disciples to represent him, to ‘occupy’ until he returned. They were to be his witnesses throughout the entire world, proclaiming the fact that he would return, and that through the kingdom all the families of the earth would be blessed.

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the waiting disciples to empower them properly to represent their absent Lord. By its enlightening influence, great truths stated to them by Jesus, and outlined by the prophets, became understandable. They now saw clearly what Jesus meant by ‘taking up their cross’ and following him into death. How could they, prior to this, know the meaning of dying with Jesus when they did not believe Jesus would die? Their only thought then was that they would reign with the Master, and when James and John requested special positions of honor in his kingdom, the other ten were disturbed, and complained.

Now they knew that they would have to drink of his ‘cup’ and be ‘baptized’ with his baptism in order to prove worthy of reigning with him, and they preached it to those who had ears to hear. Nor did they now have any illusions that the kingdom would be immediately set up. They knew that Jesus had gone into the ‘far country’ of the parable, even heaven itself; and as all their hopes of life and glory centered in his promise to return, they looked forward to his “glorious appearing,” (Titus

2:13) while daily they presented their bodies a living sacrifice in his service.

Soon after the apostles fell asleep in death, the church began to lose sight of the glorious hope of the Master's return. Ignoring his teachings on the subject, many tried to imagine that the kingdom of Christ was merely a holy influence in the lives of believers, and that when the whole world became believers, his kingdom would have fully come. Others ambitiously endeavored to exercise kingly authority through the arm of civil power. Between these two blinding errors, the hope of Christ's return to set up his kingdom was lost by the vast majority of his professed followers.

Jesus expected that matters would turn out this way, and related a number of parables in which he foretold this apostasy of the kingdom hope. Speaking of the time of his return, he said, "When the Son of man comes, will he find this belief [the faith] on the land?" (Luke 18:8, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*) Many still profess to believe in his teachings, but they have no hope that Divine power will actually be used to establish his kingdom. Millions this year, as every year, will go to church on April 15 as a token of their belief that Jesus was raised from the dead, oblivious of the fact that Divine power did not cease to operate for the ultimate blessing of mankind when that mighty miracle was performed.

Yet this is the real essence of the resurrection story to all who know the plan of God and have confidence in his ability to perform all his good pleasure. The fact that the King of glory was killed did not interfere with the outworking of God's plan. Nor do nineteen centuries of bloodshed among the nations, and divisions, strife, and persecution among the professed people of God, mean that *the fulfillment* of his kingdom promises has failed, or has been delayed.

To us the risen Christ is a sure token that all of God's good purposes will come to pass! And now that his Second Presence has become evident to the faithful watchers, and therefore the kingdom so near, our hearts should truly burn within us as we meditate on the kingdom theme, discuss it with one another, and proclaim it to the whole world. As shown in the parable, it is after the king's return that he reckons with his servants, and it is our privilege now to prove our worthiness of reigning with him by

faithfully using the ‘pound’ which he has entrusted to us. Let’s not hide it in a ‘napkin!’

The commission Jesus gave to his disciples to preach the Gospel is just as binding upon us as it was upon them. When the women first met the risen Lord by the empty tomb, the instruction of the angel to them was, “Go your way, tell his disciples.” (Mark 16:7) So, today, our message still is, “The Lord is risen indeed.” (Luke 24:34) The greatest miracle of all time was performed. The Lord of hosts by his ‘zeal’ manifested his ability to perform all his good pleasure. Now we can witness to the fact that God’s miracle-working power will continue to operate for the establishment and manifestation of the Messianic kingdom, that the hope of the world does not rest in the frustrated plans and efforts of the institutions of men.

When the women bore the glad tidings of Jesus’ resurrection to the disciples, their message was looked upon as “idle tales.” (Luke 24:11) It is still thus with the majority of those to whom we bear witness. But some believe, and as the utter failure of human plans becomes more and more apparent, greater numbers will turn aside from their mad rush for pleasure and gold, to give ear to the tidings that the King has returned, that the Prince of peace is here, and that soon God’s good will toward all the families of the earth will be revealed by the “pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.”— Rev. 22:1

So, dear brethren, continue to ‘go your way and tell’ the glad tidings. Let us tell it in every way we can. Cooperatively, let us continue to tell it over the radio, television, internet, public meetings, and via witnessing parties. Individually, let us be on the alert to use our every opportunity to tell the glad tidings, either by word of mouth or by the printed page. Never were there such golden opportunities for making known the glad tidings!

It was difficult for the disciples in Jesus’ day to realize that the kingdom was not then ‘immediately to appear,’ but no longer is this true; for the King has returned, the kingdom is at hand. The wrath of the enemies that slew him has been overruled by God for the redemption of the world, and he has been raised from the dead and glorified. He no longer remains in the ‘far country.’ The heavens no longer retain him. He

is even now reckoning with his servants. He is serving his household with ‘meat in due season.’ The bright shining of his presence is enlightening and warming the hearts of his people, where the “Day Star” has already arisen. (II Pet. 1:19) How can any of us, then, hold back from giving all that we have and are in proving our worthiness of being glorified together with him, that we may live and reign with him a thousand years.—Rev. 20:4

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“Till He Come”

“As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.”

—I Corinthians 11:26

JESUS WAS CRUCIFIED on the fourteenth day of the Jewish month Nisan. The fourteenth day of Nisan will start approximately at six o’clock Friday evening, April 6. On that evening the Lord’s footstep followers the world over will gather in little companies to commemorate the death of Jesus. There

will be many isolated ones, unable to meet with those of like precious faith, who will also observe the ceremony which Jesus instituted in the “upper room” that night when he met with his disciples to eat the Passover for the last time before he died.—Luke 22:12

It will be a solemn occasion for the brethren, yet a joyful one. It will help us to realize a little more vividly and realistically all that the death of Jesus means to us, and will continue to mean; and also what it will yet mean in terms of life-giving blessings to be administered to the whole world of mankind. It will be a blessed occasion also because those, who will that night commemorate the death of their Redeemer as he requested them to do, will experience the joy which results from obedience to his wishes.

Only two rituals, or ceremonials, are enjoined upon Christians by the Scriptures. One of these is water baptism, a symbol of the burial of our wills into the will of God through Christ, and the other is the commemoration of the Master’s death. Among the professed followers of the Lord, various customs prevail as to the time and frequency of this simple ceremonial. Among some Protestant denominations it is observed every Sunday; with others, once a month; and with still others once each quarter. But just as we would celebrate the birthday of a friend only on the proper anniversary date, so we think it is proper to commemorate the death of Jesus only on the true anniversary date of his death.

There is a special blessing attached to remembering the Lord’s death on this proper date each year—the fourteenth day of Nisan. This was the date on which the Passover lamb was slain, and Jesus was the antitypical

Passover lamb—the “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) It was appropriate, that he be led “as a lamb to the slaughter” on the very day that the typical Passover lamb was slain. (Isa. 53:7) For him, type and antitype combined on that memorable day nearly two thousand years ago.

Upon Jesus’ instructions, his disciples had prepared the yearly Passover supper in the upper room in Jerusalem, and there he spent a considerable portion of the evening with them. Matthew, Mark, and Luke give us very brief accounts of what occurred that evening, but John fills in for us; and, from his record, we learn that Jesus spent considerable time in a heart-to-heart talk with his disciples, giving them needed instructions and comfort in view of the fact that he was so soon to be taken from them.

During their association with Jesus, the disciples had not fully grasped the spirit and purpose of his ministry. They rejoiced in what he had told them about the kingdom, and especially in those teachings which gave them reason to believe that they would be exalted to reign with him. But the thought of rulership outweighed other considerations and they disputed with one another as to which one of them would be greatest in the kingdom.—Luke 22:24

Apparently one of these disputes arose that night in the upper room, and Jesus, noting it, gave them a lesson in humility by washing his disciples’ feet. Jesus was their Master and Lord, and eventually will be Lord of the whole earth, yet he had not come into the world to be ministered unto, but to minister, and his greatest ministry was in giving his life to be a propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.—I John 2:2

It was also in the upper room that night that Jesus gave his disciples that “new commandment, ... That ye love one another; as I have loved you.” (John 13:34) The disciples at that time could not grasp the full meaning of this ‘new commandment,’ but they actually put it into practice as a guiding principle in their lives. The apostles were just as ready to lay down their lives for one another as Jesus was, and all of them actually suffered death as a result of their faithfulness to the Lord and to his cause.

The disciples had sensed from various things Jesus had said that he expected to leave them, to go away. They perhaps remembered the parable of the “certain nobleman,” who went into a “far country” (Luke 19:12) to receive a kingdom and to return, and understood that Jesus was probably the ‘nobleman’ of this parable. So Peter asked Jesus, “Whither goest thou?” Jesus answered, “Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.”—John 13:36

How true this proved to be! Peter and all the true disciples of the Master throughout the age have followed him into death, being planted together in the likeness of his death. Being a Christian is often referred to as following in Jesus’ footsteps, but do we always realize where those steps lead us as we continue walking in them? We know that they are ‘steps’ of kindness, sympathy, and mercy toward the erring. They are also steps of self-sacrifice, which, if we continue walking in them, will lead us into his death. To encourage us in this way of sacrifice we have his promise, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”—Rev. 2:10

NEEDED COMFORT

It was only natural that the disciples should be greatly concerned over the possibility that Jesus would leave them, although at this time they had not fully grasped the fact that it would be in death. Noting their anxiety he said, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”—John 14:1-3

Jesus was going away—going to prepare a place for them. According to his promise, he would return for them and take them to the place he had prepared, and then they would again be together. What a wonderful assurance this must have been to them! Perhaps Paul had this promise in mind when, in our text, he says that as often as we partake of the ‘bread’ and the ‘cup’ we do show forth the Lord’s death ‘till he come.’ There are different aspects of our Lord’s return and Second Presence. He comes to serve his people with ‘meat in due season.’ He comes as the Chief Reaper in the harvest with which the age ends. He comes with his holy angels, or messengers, to conduct the judgment of mankind. He also comes to

take his followers unto himself. Paul's thought would therefore seem to be that until we are joined with our Lord on the other side of the veil, or as long as we are in the flesh, we are to continue showing forth his death by partaking of the bread and the cup.

Jesus knew that it was impossible for the natural man to grasp the things of the Spirit, yet he longed for the disciples to understand him better—"Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?" (John 14:9) The same was true of the others. They loved their Master. They believed that he was the Christ. On one occasion, by the help of the Father, Peter had identified Jesus as the "Son of the living God." (John 6:69) But in many ways Jesus continued to remain a stranger to his disciples.

After the Holy Spirit was given to them, they called to remembrance these wonderful things. It was then that John wrote his gospel and explained in considerable detail how Jesus came forth from the Father, was made flesh, and how they beheld his glory as "the only begotten of the Father." (John 1:14) But in the upper room that night, these precious truths were all vague to them. Even Jesus' promise to send the "Comforter," the Holy Spirit, did not convey to them the meaning it has for us now.—John 14:16

It was on this occasion that Jesus related the parable of the vine and the branches, saying "I am the vine, ye are the branches." (John 15:1-7) This reveals a very vital relationship between Jesus and his followers—a partnership, a oneness essential to the accomplishment of the Divine purpose in us. Jesus was very much concerned about this oneness, and in his closing prayer in the upper room, prayed that those whom the Father had given him, and those who believed on him through their word, might be one with him, even as he was one with the Father.

It was toward the close of his discourse that Jesus said, "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."—John 16:21,22

How well Jesus knew what faced the disciples! That night their 'travail' had begun, and it was to increase as they went with him to

Gethsemane. They witnessed his arrest, and from afar off, unable to go to his rescue, saw their beloved Master die upon the cross. As he prophesied, their ‘pain’ later was turned into joy by the assurance that he had been raised from the dead.

As Jesus continued to talk with his disciples, their minds seemed to grasp a little more clearly the import of at least some of what he said. After saying that he had come forth from the Father, and would return to the Father, “his disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, ... by this we believe that thou camest forth from God.” Then “Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe?”—John 16:29-31

Jesus knew, however, that their comprehension was not very deep, and that consequently their belief was not strong, because he said that they would all forsake him and that in his hour of trial he would be left alone. But he knew also that they would be regathered to him, that their joy would then be full, and that endued with the Holy Spirit they would be his faithful witnesses, and that despite the persecutions that would come upon them from the world, they would continue to be of good cheer, knowing that he had overcome the world and that they would be given strength to do the same.

THE “BREAD” AND THE “CUP”

It was during this same gathering in the upper room, when Jesus imparted to his disciples these wonderful and needed closing lessons in his faithful and patient ministry on their behalf, that he asked them to commemorate his death by partaking of the ‘bread’ and the ‘cup.’ This was probably toward the close of the evening, for it was after they had finished partaking of the Passover supper.

It was a simple ceremony Jesus enjoined upon his disciples. Taking some of the unleavened bread remaining from the Passover supper, he broke it, asked his Father’s blessing upon it, and, giving it to his disciples, he said, “Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you.” (I Cor. 11:24) Obviously the thought is that the bread represented, or was a symbol of his body that soon would be broken in death.

“After the same manner also he took the cup” containing the fruit of the vine, and, after he had asked his Father’s blessing upon it, Jesus gave it to his disciples, and asked them to partake of it, explaining that it was,

or represented, his shed blood—shed for many for the remission of sins. (I Cor. 11:25) We eat and drink in order to live, to remain alive, so the basic lesson in this short Memorial service is that we receive eternal life by partaking of, or appropriating to ourselves, the provision of life which was made by his sacrifice—his broken body and his shed blood.

As we partake of these emblems of the Master’s sacrifice, we can rejoice not only in the provision of life for us which they symbolize, but also in the realization that through this same sacrifice of his flesh all mankind will yet have an opportunity to be restored to life. He is a “propitiation,” a satisfaction, not only for our sins, but also for the sins of the whole world. —I John 2:2

OUR PARTNERSHIP

Paul suggests there is still another precious thought in connection with our partaking of the Memorial Supper. As he indicates, the bread pictures our “communion,” or our common participation—in the Greek text the word means ‘partnership’—in the ‘body’ and the ‘blood’ of Christ. (I Cor. 10:16) It is not merely that we receive life from Christ, but in turn, we also have the privilege of sharing in his sacrificial death, of dying with him, in order that we might live with him.

So, in partaking of the Memorial Supper we are afforded an excellent opportunity to renew our consecration to be dead with him, to walk the narrow way of sacrifice more faithfully, to fulfil more zealously our covenant with the Lord by sacrifice. More than nineteen centuries have passed since Jesus instituted this memorial of his death, but all his body members have not yet been sacrificed. We know, however, that it will be only ‘a little while, now he has come,’ when the last member will pass under the ‘veil’ and be joined with him. The realization of this will help to make our showing forth of his death on the evening of April 6 even more solemn and significant.

‘Till he come.’ We believe that he is already present, fulfilling his promise to serve the ‘household of faith’ with ‘meat in due season.’ We believe that as the Chief Reaper he is supervising the harvest work, and watching over his faithful reapers, to encourage and strengthen them in their every time of need.

Furthermore, in this day of his *parousia*, he is also fulfilling his promise made to his disciples in the upper room that he would return to

‘receive’ them unto himself. Those who, throughout the age, proved faithful and fell asleep in death to await the crown of life which was laid up for them, have already been awakened and have been received by our Lord. Those who are “alive and remain” are, as each one proves faithful even unto death, likewise being joined with him.—I Thess. 4:17

OUR PRIVILEGE NOW

For this we are waiting, rejoicing in the opportunities that are ours of continuing the work of sacrificing the flesh and its interests. He has come, but until we are received unto him beyond the veil, we will continue to show forth his death, not merely by partaking of the Memorial emblems once a year, but by daily following in his steps of sacrifice, as we depend upon the merit of his blood to cover our imperfections, and upon Divine strength to sustain us in our every time of need.

We expect the evening of April 6 will be a hallowed and blessed occasion for thousands of the Lord’s consecrated people throughout the world. Many who are isolated will partake of the emblems alone with the Lord. If we can help to put any of these in touch with others of like precious faith we will be happy to do so, May we all, through prayer and self-examination, endeavor to cleanse our hearts from the leaven of sin, that we may be able to partake of the bread and the cup in sincerity and in truth. By Divine grace, let us endeavor to make April 6 the beginning of the most wonderful and blessed year in the Lord we have ever experienced.

It will be such, if we continue to appreciate and are faithful to the principles of discipleship which Jesus discussed on that last memorable night before he was crucified. Among these are humility and patience toward those who err, obedience to Jesus’ new commandment to love one another as he loved us, a daily longing for the time when he will receive us unto himself, and a willingness as his witnesses to follow him into death.

Like the disciples, we also will need the comfort of the Holy Spirit, and its guiding and strengthening influence in our lives. With us, it is not a matter of waiting until it is ‘poured out,’ (Acts 2:17-18) as they had to wait for Pentecost, for we have already received this “unction from the Holy One.” (I John 2:20) Already it has begotten in us a new hope of life, and by it we are anointed to proclaim the glad tidings of the kingdom.

Moreover, the Holy Spirit witnesses with our spirits that we are the children of God, therefore heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. Through the precious promises of the Word, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, has ‘sealed’ us (Eph. 1:13), and we have the assurance that since God is for us, nothing can effectively be against us. (Rom. 8:31) What a blessed lot indeed is ours! Why should we not rejoice as we continue our journey in the narrow way toward Mount Zion to join the “Lamb that was slain!”—Rev. 5:12

Dawn Bible Students Association