

The Promise of Deliverance

“The LORD God said unto the serpent, ... I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

—*Genesis 3:14,15*

MAN, THE HIGHEST OF ALL

God’s earthly creatures and endowed with faculties reflecting the image of the Creator, failed to pass the simple test of obedience to which he was subjected. He had transgressed the law of God and now must die: “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Gen.

3:19) From then on, all of Adam’s progeny inherited his death penalty. All are born imperfect and unable to resist the ravages of disease. All ultimately die, for “the wages of sin is death.”—Rom. 6:23

However, God still loved his errant human children, and even while necessary to sentence Adam and Eve to death, he gave an indication that an opportunity of deliverance from the penalty would be provided. This promise of deliverance is clearly implied in the statement to the “serpent” that the

“seed” of the woman would bruise his head. Even this obscure assurance seemed to give our first parents a measure of hope that the Creator would remedy their plight, for when Seth was born Eve said, “God ... hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.”—Gen. 4:25

Eve, of course, did not understand that the seed spoken of by God would be the great Deliverer, the Messiah of promise and prophecy, and that it would be more than six thousand years before the “head” of the serpent would be “bruised,” or crushed, by this seed. As the Creator’s plan unfolds throughout his Word, it becomes evident that the work of deliverance implied by God’s statement to the serpent would be accomplished by no less than a powerful government, or kingdom, under the control of the seed of promise.

In the 20th chapter of Revelation, we are provided with further information concerning this kingdom and the deliverance it will bring to humanity. According to the assurance here given, even the dead are to be restored to life. First, however, comes the binding of “that old serpent.” Verses 1 and 2 read, “I saw an angel come down from heaven, ... and he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years.” In these descriptive terms, we are able to identify the serpent’s activity in Eden and connect him to man’s great adversary and deceiver. Together with the remaining verses of the chapter, we are assured that the “bruising” mentioned by the Lord implies a complete deliverance from the scourge of sin and death into which humanity was plunged when induced by Satan to

disobey God's law. To state the matter plainly, sin and death are not to continue forever.

PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

A more expanded promise of deliverance was given to Abraham. To him God said, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 22:18) In the New Testament, this promise to Abraham is called "the gospel" [Greek: to announce glad news in advance] by the Apostle Paul, who explained that Christ is the "seed" that will bless all nations. (Gal. 3:8,16) What is the blessing that God promised would come to all the families of the earth through the seed of Abraham, which is Christ?

This question is answered by the Apostle Peter in Acts 3:21-25. This passage of Scripture is part of a sermon delivered by Peter in which he drew a lesson from the miracle just performed by him and John—the healing of a man who had been lame from his birth. (vss. 1-10) He explains in his sermon that following the second coming of Christ there would be a time of general restoration, or "restitution," as it is translated in our *King James Version Bibles*, and that just as this one man was restored to health, so all are to be restored in the "restitution" period of God's plan. Then Peter concludes, "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed."—vs. 25

JACOB'S PROPHECY

The promise of deliverance which God made to Abraham was reiterated to his son Isaac and to his

grandson Jacob. Jacob had twelve sons, and toward the end of his life he gathered them around him and pronounced blessings upon them individually. These parental blessings took the form of prophecies. To his son Judah, Jacob said, “Judah is a lion’s whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.”—Gen. 49:9,10

This prophecy was uttered by Jacob while he was living in Egypt, and the reference to the couched lion reflects this. In Egypt at that time the claimed royal right of the Pharaohs to rule was symbolized by a couched lion. By thus employing this symbol Jacob was saying in his prophecy that the “sceptre,” the right to rule so far as the promises of God are concerned, belonged to his son Judah, and that in due time there would be born a descendant, or seed, of Judah whose name would be Shiloh. To him the people of the world would be gathered in due time; that is, through Shiloh all the families of the earth would be blessed.

The name “Shiloh” means tranquil, or peaceful. It is one of the Old Testament titles assigned to Christ the Messiah and suggests that this promised deliverer would be a peacemaker. Indeed, Christ will not only establish peace among the people and nations, but will also be peacemaker between God and mankind, restoring the harmony that existed before man transgressed divine law. In one of the notable prophecies of Jesus’ birth he is referred to as “The Prince of Peace,” and we are assured that

“of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.”—Isa. 9:6,7

In this same prophecy we are informed concerning the Prince of Peace that “the government shall be upon his shoulder.” This is the government over which Shiloh, the peacemaker, holds the sceptre, or the right to rule. It is the Messianic kingdom, and in Micah 4:1-4 it is presented under the symbol of a mountain—“the mountain of the house of the LORD.” We are assured that in this mountain, or kingdom, the people will learn God’s ways. As a result, they will “beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks,” and will learn war no more.

OTHER KINGDOM BLESSINGS

In Isaiah 25:6-9 the Lord presents us with another promise descriptive of the blessings which will reach the people in his “mountain,” the Messianic kingdom. One of these blessings will be the destruction of death. The Lord will “swallow up death in victory,” the promise reads, and shall “wipe away tears from off all faces.” Another blessing to reach mankind through Christ’s kingdom is described as the destroying of “the face of the covering cast over all people.” This is a “covering,” or veil of superstition and misunderstanding pertaining to God and to his loving purpose in the creation of man, and his plan for restoring him to life.

Included in this “covering” which has hidden God’s truth from the people, are all the God-dishonoring theories arising out of Satan’s lie to Eve, “Ye shall not surely die.” (Gen. 3:4) The

majority have been pleased to believe that “there is no death.” We thank God, though, that this beclouding lie, together with all the other false notions which Satan has woven into a “covering” and “cast over the people,” will be removed.

THE SOUR GRAPE OF SIN

Another very interesting and reassuring promise of deliverance from the result of original sin is found in Jeremiah 31:29,30. This passage reads, “In those days [the days of Messiah’s rule] they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children’s teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.” The lesson here is obvious. It was father Adam who ate the original “sour grape” of sin. The result has been passed on to the entire human race. All have suffered from this act of disobedience; all have died or are dying.

However, this is to change, the Lord assures us. “In those days,” when the promised seed of Abraham is ruling as “The Prince of Peace,” he will also be dispensing blessings of health and life. This will be possible because Jesus took the sinner’s place in death, and during his reign he will offer to every individual of the human race an opportunity to obey and live. No longer will people die because of Adam’s sin. If they die at all, it will be because they have individually eaten the “sour grape” of sin. During the “times of restitution of all things,” Peter explains, it will be only those with full knowledge who willfully disobey that will lose life.—Acts 3:23

CHRIST IS BORN

The birth of Jesus confirmed the truthfulness of the prophetic testimony concerning a coming deliverer and set the stage for future assurances such as noted in the foregoing words of the Apostle Peter. The angel in announcing Jesus' birth said, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. ... And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." —Luke 2:10-14

The expression, "Unto you is born this day," marks the essential difference between this angelic announcement and the promises which the Creator had previously given through the holy prophets. These promises and prophecies now began to be fulfilled. One of the prophecies identified the city in which the promised ruler would be born. It was to be Bethlehem, the ancient "city of David." (Mic. 5:2; Luke 2:4) When the angel announced the birth of Jesus, he called special attention to this, saying that the Savior was born "this day" in the city of David. All of God's promises, beginning with his statement in Eden that the serpent's head would be bruised by a seed of the woman, implied a coming deliverance from death. Now the angel confirmed this. The one who was born in Bethlehem was to be Jesus Christ, the Savior and Messiah of promise.

It was a dramatic moment for those shepherds on the Judean hills to whom the angel announced the birth of the Savior. Suddenly, we are told, a

multitude of the heavenly host joined the angel, praising and giving glory to God, proclaiming “on earth peace, good will toward men.” This heavenly host of angels had served God faithfully for the many centuries during which he was making his promises of a coming seed who would bless the people. They did not understand all the implications of those promises, but they knew that they were expressions of God’s good will toward his fallen human creatures. How joyously, therefore, they must have proclaimed the birth of Jesus, knowing it to be a manifestation of this foretold good will, and the beginning of the fulfillment of God’s promises!

JESUS’ MINISTRY

Jesus entered upon his ministry at the age of thirty. (Luke 3:21-23) It was a ministry which fully harmonized with the prophetic testimony concerning him. We read that “he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God.” (Luke 8:1) These glad tidings, the angel had said at his birth, were to be “unto all people.” The Creator had sent a Savior and had made provision for the establishment of a kingdom in due time through which the blessings of salvation from sin, sickness, and death would reach the people.

It did not at once become apparent to the followers of Jesus that his kingdom would not be immediately established. Only later did they realize that it was necessary for the Savior to die for those he had come to save before they could be permanently delivered from sickness and death. Indeed, he announced to them that he would give his flesh “for the life of

the world." However, they did not understand from this statement that his humanity would go into death as a substitute, or ransom, for the forfeited life of Adam, and for the entire human race.—John 6:51; I Cor. 15:21,22,45; I Tim. 2:3-6

His twelve chosen apostles were with Jesus as he "preached and showed" the glad tidings of the kingdom. They witnessed his miracles of healing the sick, of cleansing lepers, of casting out devils, and of even raising the dead. They cannot be blamed for supposing that this was the beginning of the actual foretold work of deliverance, and that his kingdom would imminently be established with its blessings of health and life extended to "all the families of the earth" as God had promised would be done through the Messiah, the promised seed.

Jesus' disciples did not realize at the time that the marvelous miracles he performed were intended merely as illustrations of the worldwide program of deliverance and blessing they thought was then beginning. They did not yet understand that these blessings must await the accomplishment of other aspects of the Creator's grand purpose for mankind's deliverance. It is still gloriously true that in God's due time all the blind eyes will be opened; all the deaf ears unstopped; all the halt and the lame made sound of limb; and none of the people will say, "I am sick."—Isa. 35:5,6; 33:24

In that due time those who "sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake." (Dan. 12:2) The sentence of death, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return," will have been set aside by the sacrificial death of the Savior. (Gen. 3:19) That sentence will no longer be effective against the billions who have

long been locked in the great prison of death, for all will be called forth from the grave.—John 5:28,29; Acts 24:15

NO MORE CURSE

In Revelation 22, the last chapter of the Bible, we have the hope of deliverance through Jesus and the kingdom presented to us in meaningful symbolic language. First, we see a throne, “the throne of God and of the Lamb.” (vs. 1) The throne symbolizes a kingdom. It was the glad tidings concerning the establishment of this kingdom that Jesus and his disciples so faithfully preached. The Lamb is symbolic of Jesus and his sacrifice on behalf of mankind. Thus we are shown that God’s promised blessings of life will reach humanity through the agencies of a divine government, being made available through the death of “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”—John 1:29

These promised blessings are pictured by “a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal,” which flows from “the throne of God and of the Lamb.” “In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, ... and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” (Rev. 22:1,2) This language takes our minds back to Genesis, when Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden to prevent their partaking of the tree of life and living forever. (Gen. 3:23,24) In the Messianic kingdom life will again be made available, not to Adam and Eve alone, but to all mankind.

Revelation 22:3 declares, “There shall be no more curse.” A terrible curse has rested upon humanity—

the curse of sin and death. Even the ground was cursed when our first parents sinned. (Gen. 3:17) These curses have blighted the peace and happiness of mankind. No one has been free from them. All die as a result of Adam's transgression. However, God loved the race of lost and dying sinners, and provided a Savior, the seed of promise, who as the Lamb gave his life in sacrifice as the price of redemption. Now, here in this last chapter of the Bible, we are assured that from the throne of God and of the Lamb, the "water of life, clear as crystal," will flow out to all mankind. All will be invited to partake of this lifegiving water. "Come, ..." the word will go out, and "take the water of life freely." —Rev. 22:17

THE LARGER SEED

We have focused attention on Jesus as the promised seed of blessing, the one who would bruise the serpent's head. Certainly, all honor should be given to him for the place assigned to him by the Creator in the divine plan for deliverance of the human race from sin and death. However, the Scriptures point out that Jesus will have associates in his work of ruling and blessing the people. The Apostle Paul reveals this. After telling us in Galatians 3:16 that Jesus is the promised seed of Abraham through whom the people would be blessed he explains further, saying, "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."—Gal. 3:27-29

There are many texts of Scripture which corroborate this point. Paul wrote that those who suffer and die with Jesus will live and reign with him.

(II Tim. 2:11,12) This group of faithful followers of the Master is also identified in Revelation 20:4,6, and here we are told that they will live and reign with Christ a thousand years. In order that these might live and reign with Christ, they are brought forth from death in what the Scriptures describe as “the first resurrection.”

A MYSTERY

The fact that the Messiah of promise would have associates who share his Messianic name and glory had been kept secret by the Lord throughout all the ages prior to the coming of Jesus at his First Advent. Writing to the Colossian believers the Apostle Paul said, “To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” —Col. 1:27

In I Corinthians 12:12-27, Paul uses a human body to illustrate the relationship between Jesus and those associated with him in the Messianic arrangement. In this illustration Jesus is the Head, and his faithful followers are the members of his body. One of the main points of the lesson set forth in this chapter is, as Paul states it in verse 27, that “ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” As we have seen, Christ is the seed that was foretold by God in Eden when he said that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent’s head, and the Apostle Paul wrote, “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.” —Rom. 16:20

Jesus’ original disciples believed that he was the promised Messiah, and that he would establish his kingdom at his First Advent. Not until after being

enlightened by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost did they understand that before the kingdom could be established, those to be associated with Jesus as rulers in that kingdom would have to be called from the world, tested, and otherwise made ready for their exalted position with Jesus in his kingdom.

This preparation of the body members of Christ has been the work of the Lord in the earth throughout the centuries since Jesus' death and resurrection. It has been accomplished largely through the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. The Gospel itself contains the invitation to those who hear and believe to take up their cross and follow the Master into sacrificial death. (Matt. 16:24) Jesus commissioned his followers to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, and this commission has been carried out by the faithful in each generation.—Matt. 28:19,20; Acts 1:8

A SPIRITUAL HOPE

Man's deliverance from sin and death through the agencies of Christ's kingdom will see mankind restored to life as perfect humans here on the earth. This is in keeping with the Creator's original design. However, those who qualify during this present Gospel Age through obedience and sacrifice to live and reign with Christ in his kingdom will receive a spiritual, or heavenly reward. Jesus said to his disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go, ... I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."—John 14:2,3

Jesus prefaced his promise in verse 2 to "prepare a place" for his followers with the statement, "In

my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you." Jesus did not promise these existing mansions to his followers but said that he would go to prepare a place for them. As for the mansions, he simply observed that they already existed in his Father's "house." It seems reasonable to conclude that the Father's house is the entire universe. It all belongs to him and is all his domain. In this domain are various mansions, or dwelling places—planes of existence or spheres of life.

The earth is one of these spheres of life. It is the one in which God designed that his human creatures should spend eternity—the "mansion" which God created for man. Furthermore, "he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited." (Isa. 45:18) As Jesus promised his disciples, however, he went away to prepare a place for them. Much is said in the Bible concerning this place. It is vaguely foretold in the Old Testament and described in the New Testament as an "inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven." Those for whom this place is prepared are said to be "partakers of the heavenly calling." —I Pet. 1:4; Heb. 3:1

In our study of the Bible, it is essential to keep in mind that its heavenly promises are only to the footstep followers of Jesus during the present age—a "little flock." (Luke 12:32) These followers are to be associated with Jesus in the grand work of restoring all mankind to life on the earth in the coming Messianic kingdom. Keeping this distinction in mind, we will find harmony in the many wonderful promises of the sacred Word concerning the prospect of deliverance for God's human creation! ■