

Heirs and Joint-heirs

*“The Spirit itself
beareth witness
with our spirit,
that we are the
children of God:
And if children,
then heirs; heirs of
God, and joint-
heirs with Christ;
if so be that we
suffer with him,
that we may be
also glorified
together.”*
—Romans 8:16,17

ONE OF THE IMPORTANT features of the Creator’s plan for restoring the fallen race to life, and to reconciliation with himself, is that a limited number of mankind are invited to participate with Jesus, the Redeemer and Savior, on a partnership basis, sharing his glory and participating in the great work of extending blessings of life to all mankind. In our text these are referred to as “children of

God,” who with Christ receive a special heavenly inheritance. In verse 22 we read that “all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” (*New Living Translation*) We are also told in the same context that the creation “waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.” (vs. 19) It will be through the manifestation of these children of God that the promised blessings

of life and happiness will reach the remainder of the “groaning” creation.

Although many of the Old Testament promises of God pertaining to the future deliverance of the human race from sin and death do not make mention that the great Deliverer and Messiah would have others associated with him in this work, some do reveal this fact. The prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 53, is one of these instances. It is in this prophecy that the suffering and death of Jesus are foretold, with the explanation that his soul would be made an “offering for sin.” (vs. 10) Then Jesus’ high reward is described by God through the prophet. He says, “Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great.” (vs. 12) Here the Creator is referring to himself as the “great,” and saying that Jesus would be exalted to share his greatness.

The New Testament confirms that this promise was fulfilled. Paul speaks of the “exceeding greatness” of God’s power, “which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.” (Eph. 1:19,20) In Hebrews 12:2 we read that Jesus is now “set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Peter also writes concerning Christ, saying that he is “gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.”—I Pet. 3:22

Truly, Jesus was given a portion with the “great” God of the universe. In his Father’s promise of this we find this further statement, “He shall divide the spoil with the strong.” (Isa. 53:12) The word “spoil” suggests the reward of a victorious struggle or battle. The Apostle Paul in writing to Timothy

urges him to “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” (II Tim. 2:3) Using a similar figure of speech, Paul again writes, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”—Eph. 6:10,11

In his letter to the church at Corinth, the apostle explains that the “weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God,” enabling the Christian to bring “into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” (II Cor. 10:4,5) It is these who are “strong in the Lord,” and who successfully battle against the selfish spirit of the world, against their own fallen flesh, and against the efforts of the devil to lure them away from obedience to the Lord, with whom the highly exalted Jesus will “divide the spoil.”

Jesus said to his disciples, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) Because he was an overcomer, he received the reward of an overcomer, and in Revelation 3:21, the resurrected Lord says, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” In making this promise to his followers, Jesus perhaps had in mind his Father’s promise to give him a “portion with the great,” and “divide the spoil” with the strong. The Father had fulfilled his promise to him, and he was now highly exalted to his right hand. Now the glorified Jesus would share his reward with other overcomers, those who are “strong” because of trusting in the power of God to help them overcome.

ON MOUNT ZION

As the Redeemer of the world, Jesus was led as a “lamb to the slaughter.” (Isa. 53:7) He is the “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) This title remained with Jesus after his exaltation to heavenly glory, and is used with respect to him in Revelation 14:1, which reads, “I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads.” Mount Zion in Jerusalem was the seat of governmental authority in ancient Israel and is used in the prophecies of the Bible to symbolize the kingdom of Christ, that promised “government” which will be “upon his shoulder.” (Isa. 9:6) Thus we learn that in this kingdom government, symbolically pictured by mount Zion, there will be a hundred and forty-four thousand associated with the “Lamb.”

These are the strong with whom Christ Jesus divides the spoil of victory. They are said to have “his Father’s name written in their foreheads.” This identifies them as members of the divine family, the children of God of our opening text, who are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” They are shown with the Lamb because they will be associated with him in the kingdom work of extending salvation to the world. In the last verse of the prophecy of Obadiah we read, “Saviours shall come up on mount Zion, ... and the kingdom shall be the LORD’S.” Jesus is, of course, the Savior of the world, but in this prophecy those with whom he shares his reward of exaltation and glory are also said to be “saviors,” because they participate in the kingdom work of restoring the dead world to life.

JEWS AND GENTILES

In the Bible, a city is sometimes used to symbolize a government. We are told that Abraham “looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” (Heb. 11:10) So far as the record shows, God did not use the word “city” in his promises to Abraham. All he promised him was that he would make of him a great nation, and that his seed would bless all the families of the earth. (Gen. 12:2,3; 22:18) Evidently Abraham took these promises to mean that one of his descendants, a seed, would become the head of a government under the jurisdiction of which all the nations of the earth would receive a blessing.

When God first spoke to Abraham he lived in Ur of the Chaldees. (Gen. 11:28-31) There he said to him, “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing.” (Gen. 12:1,2) Here God told Abraham that he and his seed were to become the heads of a new nation. Abraham believed this, and left his home in Ur, went to the land God had promised to him, and dwelt in tents the rest of his life, waiting for the building of that “city” which he visualized in the promise God made to him.

Abraham died in faith without receiving the fulfillment of these promises, but they became the basis of a hope that continued with his descendants from generation to generation. When the Hebrew people left Egypt under the leadership of Moses, God entered into a covenant with them, and promised that if they were faithful to its terms, he would make of them

a “kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.” (Exod. 19:5,6) Here, the thought of a kingdom, or government, is associated with the natural descendants of Abraham, his seed according to the flesh.

To actually inherit this kingdom, it was required of the Israelites that they be faithful to the covenant into which they had entered with the Lord. However, they were not faithful except for short periods of time. Nevertheless, God continued to send his prophets to them as reminders of their covenant obligations, and to reiterate the promises of a coming Messiah, in association with whom their nation would rule the world. The final test of their worthiness of this exalted position was their opportunity to accept the Messiah when he did come.

As we know, however, almost all in the nation of Israel did not accept their Messiah. Under the leadership of their religious rulers, they cried out against him and demanded that he be put to death. Near the close of his ministry, when it became apparent that the nation would reject him, Jesus said, “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof,” that is, the fruits of loving devotion and obedience to God. (Matt. 21:43) Here again the “kingdom” is associated with a “nation.” Israel could have been that kingdom nation, but now, as Jesus said, that high honor was to be taken from them and given to another nation.

The Apostle Peter tells us what “nation” it is to which the kingdom is given. Writing to the footstep followers of the Master, the children of God, he says, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, ... Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God.” (I Pet. 2:9,10)

Those who in "time past" were not the people of God were evidently Gentile converts. Now they were his people, and part of that "holy nation" to which the kingdom would be given.

Actually, this new nation is made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Although Israel as a nation rejected the Messiah, there were individual Israelites who enthusiastically accepted him and became his disciples. In John 1:11,12 we read concerning these, that Jesus came especially to his own fellow Israelites, but as a whole they "received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." These, then, are the first of the new nation to whom the kingdom would be given, and the first also of the "children" who are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.

There were not enough believing Israelites, however, to make up the foreordained number of these children of God who were to reign with Christ, so the kingdom invitation was extended to the Gentiles. Thus, Gentiles who accepted the invitation became the people of God together with the believing Israelites. Together, these become "one" in Christ Jesus, and together with him constitute the faith "seed" of Abraham through which all the families of the earth are to be blessed. The Apostle Paul explains the arrangement of how God looks upon these children whom he has made his heirs. He says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."—Gal. 3:28,29

THE HOPE OF GLORY

God's arrangement that members of the fallen and dying race would be given an opportunity of being associated with the Messiah as rulers in his kingdom, and sharing his glory, was kept secret until it was brought to light by Jesus and the apostles. Paul refers to it as the "mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: 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. 1:26,27

To Christians in Rome, Paul wrote that by Christ Jesus "we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." (Rom. 5:2) The meaning of the expression, "glory of God," is beyond the ability of our finite minds to comprehend. However, various promises of the Bible give us a glimpse of what it implies. As we have seen, when Jesus was raised from the dead, he was highly exalted to the divine nature, and to the right hand of God. The Apostle John wrote, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." (I John 3:2) John realized the limitations of the human mind in understanding matters pertaining to the spirit world. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be," he concedes, but we know that "we shall be like him," our glorified Lord and Master.

Indeed, the faithful sons of God will be like Christ, to whom was given "all power ... in heaven and in earth;" who was made a "quickening spirit" that he might give life to the dead world of mankind;

and who is now the “express image” of his Father, having partaken of his glory. (Matt. 28:18; I Cor. 15:45; Heb. 1:3) These are some of the aspects of the “glory of God” to which his children are heirs. They have to do with the glory of the divine nature, and Peter writes that unto us have been given “exceeding great and precious promises” that by these we might become “partakers of the divine nature.”—II Pet. 1:4

There is also the glory of office to which the Gospel Age sons of God are heirs. As Jesus was exalted to share his Father’s throne, so we are promised, if faithful, that we shall sit with Jesus in his throne. (Rev. 3:21) Jesus is the great “King of kings,” and his joint-heirs are to be made kings, to reign with him over the earth. (Rev. 17:14; 5:10) When the disciples asked Jesus what they would receive in return for taking up their cross and following him, he said that they would sit on “thrones,” and that this would be during the time of “regeneration” when the human race will be restored to life and harmony with the Creator.—Matt. 19:28

GOD’S RULING HOUSE

Many have failed to appreciate the great truths pertaining to the kingdom of Christ because they think of it as having been established at the time of his First Advent. However, as the Scriptures point out, before his kingdom rule could begin, all who are to reign with him must be first “called, and chosen, and faithful.” (Rev. 17:14) It is this feature of God’s plan that has been in progress during the present age. If Jesus alone was the King in this kingdom it could have begun to operate immediately following

his resurrection and exaltation to God's right hand. As we have seen, however, his faithful followers are to reign with him, and these, as sons of God, together with Jesus, his beloved Son, will be the divine ruling house.

God's kingdom, with Christ and his "joint-heirs" as its appointed rulers, is symbolized in Old Testament prophecies by a mountain. In Isaiah 2:2 it is referred to as "the mountain of the LORD'S house." This simply means the kingdom of God will be in the hands of his ruling "house" of sons. This kingdom, the prophet further states, would not be set up until the "last days." This refers to the last days of the reign of sin and death, of which Satan is the author. In his prophecy, Isaiah says that this "mountain of the LORD'S house" will be above all other kingdoms and nations. It will be "established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it."—Isa. 2:2

Another prophecy pertaining to the "last days" is found in the second psalm. Here God proclaims, "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion," and then says to his Son, "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen [Hebrew: nations] for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." (Ps. 2:6,8,9) In Revelation 2:26,27 Jesus, quoting from the same psalm, makes a promise to the children of God who are joint-heirs with him, saying, "He that overcometh, and keepeth my words unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule [Greek: tend as a shepherd] them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall

they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.” Thus we have further confirmation that the honor and authority of the kingdom which God promised to Jesus will be shared by the entire ruling house of sons.

PROMISES CONDITIONAL

The kingdom promises God made to the natural descendants of Abraham were dependent upon being faithful to him and to the terms of the covenant into which they had entered. So throughout the present Gospel Age, God’s kingdom promises to members of the prospective new nation of “sons” who will make up his ruling house are also conditional upon faithfulness to him and to the doing of his will. The Apostle Peter admonishes these to add to their faith “virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity,” or love. “If ye do these things,” Peter continues, “ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”—II Pet. 1:5-11

Another condition attached to God’s promises of joint-heirship with Christ as ruling kings in his kingdom is stated by Paul in II Timothy 2:12: “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.” This same condition is set forth in our opening text, which declares that we are “joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him.” In Revelation 20:4 a similar thought is expressed. “I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were

beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, ... and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

The "beheading" referred to in this text is figurative, indicating that one has surrendered his own will and accepted the headship of Christ. It is a beheading for the "witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God." It implies, in other words, full devotion to the cause of Christ, laying down one's life in his service and in proclaiming the truths of the Bible, the "Word of God." To his disciples Jesus said, "Ye are the light of the world." However, he added, "Men loved darkness rather than light." (Matt. 5:14; John 3:19) Consequently, those who have borne witness to the truth have generally been rejected, ridiculed, and even persecuted. Thus they have borne witness of Christ, encouraged by the hope of living and reigning with him.

SETTING UP THE KINGDOM

Authority and great power are required in the setting up of any governmental administration, especially when other kings have to be conquered, and Christ's kingdom is to be exalted above all others. When the enemies of Jesus put him to death, one of the charges against him was that he claimed to be a king. They probably thought that they had permanently disposed of this pretender, but they were mistaken. It was God who had decreed that Jesus should be a reigning king, so he raised him from the dead. Never before in the annals of history had such power been utilized to make sure of the establishment of a kingdom. In view of this miracle, it would be folly to suppose that any set of circumstances could

prevent, or even delay, the fulfillment of God's kingdom promises as they centered in Jesus.

That mighty miracle was at the beginning of the Gospel Age. It was the introduction to that period in God's plan during which the joint-heirs of Christ are selected and prepared to live and reign with him. As each of these has proven faithful unto death, it has been with the hope and assurance expressed by Paul concerning himself, when he wrote, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only; but unto all them also that love his appearing." —II Tim. 4:7,8

At this end of the present Gospel Age, according to God's arrangement, comes another mighty miracle in the setting up of the kingdom. It is the resurrection from the dead of the faithful children of God, that they might be joined with Christ, share his glory, and live and reign with him. This is described as the "first resurrection," and we read in Revelation 20:6, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."

Can God's plan to set his kingdom in the hands of Christ Jesus and his "joint-heirs" fail when such power is utilized to raise them from the dead? Surely not! Likewise, the glorious work of that kingdom will not fail. It will bring peace to the people. In that day, "the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick," and death and hell—the grave—will deliver up the dead which are in them.—Mic. 4:1-4; Isa. 33:24; Rev. 20:13 ■