

## The Prophecy of Angels

***“The angel said unto them, 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***

**FOR MANY YEARS IN** Palestine, and since Israel became a nation in 1948, there have been wars and terrorist attacks by Arabs trying to drive Israelis out of the land. Israel has desired peace and would be happy if assured that the terrorist attacks that killed scores of Israelis in the mid 1990's would cease.

They were glad to attend peace talks arranged by President Clinton at Camp David in July of this year. Two thousand years after the angels brought their message and prophecy concerning the birth of Jesus and the promise of peace on earth, the news media tells us that peace is as elusive as ever.

### ISRAELI-PLO PEACE TALKS

In this land, where the angels brought their message, peace talks held in the year 2000 between the land's occupants, the nation of Israel and the PLO representatives reached an impasse in late July and the talks were broken off.

The impasse concerned control of the city of Jerusalem. Israel wants to retain all of the city as an eternal and undivided capital of the nations. The Palestinians want the city's eastern districts for a future Palestinian state that would be set up as a consequence of these negotiations.

When Israel and the PLO reached an interim agreement in September 1999, the two sides set September 13, 2000 as the date for finishing a peace treaty. Although negotiations failed and a peace treaty was not in sight for September 13, Arafat said that he had the right to declare an

independent Palestinian State after that date. Israeli Prime Minister Barak warned that a unilateral declaration would provoke Israeli countermeasures and violence.

These countermeasures were not specified by Barak, but other Israeli officials have mentioned annexing parts of the West Bank, blocking entry of Palestinian workers, and stopping trade, effectively choking the Palestinian economy.

England in 1948 recognized that the British mandate granted to it for controlling the Palestinian territory by the League of Nations was not working any longer and they gave the task to the newly formed United Nations. The UN permitted the territory to be divided into Israeli and Palestinian states. There were nearly twice as many Muslims living in Palestine at that time compared to Israelis. Israel immediately declared and organized an independent state, which was recognized by the United States and the USSR. The Arabs had the opportunity to set up a Palestinian state, but did not do so. Instead they said that they would push Israel into the Mediterranean Sea and take all the land as their own. Encouraged by the Arab League, many Palestinians left Israeli territory to encamp on its borders as war broke out between the Arab League and the newly formed Israeli state.

These wars which raged off and on into the 1970's resulted in phenomenal victories by the Israelis and loss of territory by states of the Arab League. Parts of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria became Israeli territory, and Jerusalem, whose eastern districts were occupied by the Palestinians, was completely gained by Israel. Now they do not want to give any of it back even though concessions have been made to relinquish land gained in the wars with the Arab League. No dove of peace resides over this land.

## PEACE IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD

Peace is elusive in other parts of the world, as well. Warfare has raged off and on in Northern Ireland for decades. Civil wars erupted in Yugoslavia as that country's ethnic and religious groups declared independence, the country splitting into Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The civil wars took the form of minority Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina enlisting the aid of Eastern Orthodox Christian Serbs for genocide of Muslim Bosnians. Roman Catholic Christian

Croatians also fought both Bosnians and Serbs. Peacekeeping troops of the UN have forced a shutdown of hostilities for the present, though some eruptions continue in Kosovo.

Chechnya, an autonomous republic in the USSR, attempted independence from Russia, but Russian resistance has devastated that country. Resistance to Russian rule continues as the guerrillas have moved into the mountains with their arms. Although the Russians withdrew from Afghanistan some years ago after a costly devastating attempt at subduing that country, civil strife continues in Afghanistan in spite of the Taliban getting control of that country's government. India and Pakistan continue to war over Kashmiri secessionism, and in Sri Lanka, the Tamil separatists have not given up in taking that country over by force of arms.

Iraq and Iran fought a costly war spanning eight years with much loss of lives. Though Iraq, as the aggressor, has been subdued in this and other ventures, rumors are that Iran may attack Iraq, and is preparing to do so. The Vietnam War is still a painful memory for the United States, and reminders of the unrest in that part of the world continue as the strife in Cambodia has now moved into Thailand. The lack of freedom in Myanmar (Burma) continues in the news about a woman prodemocracy leader and Nobel Prize laureate's restricted movement in that country. Indonesia recently quelled a revolt in Timor.

## REVOLT AND REBELLION

Revolt and rebellion are everywhere, many with arms and warfare. The Shining Path guerrilla warfare continues in Peru. Drug warlords continue to tear Colombia apart. The Kurds in Turkey and Iraq seek independence. Civil eruptions have devastated Sierra Leone and Liberia in Africa. This continent has some of the worst outbreaks of civil unrest, which border on anarchy. Angola warfare has subsided, though all is not peaceful. The Sudan also has quieted, although Eritrea, Somaliland, and Ethiopia have warfare raging even though severe drought has caused famines in that area.

The worst sector is in Central Africa. Rwanda had a terrible civil war because of the rule by the Tutsi minority over the Hutu tribes who were the majority. A peace deal was signed in Tanzania in 1993 by the warring factions, and the Hutu took control of the government. The authority of

the Hutu president dwindled, and Hutu militias formed starting a genocide against the Tutsi minority in 1994, killing at least 500,000 people. An uneasy rest presides over that country.

Rwanda's neighboring country, Burundi, where Hutus and Tutsis have taken turns massacring each other by the thousands for the last forty years, has had a civil war for seven years. A serious attempt is being made by both Mandela of South Africa, and President Clinton of the USA, to end this civil war. In Burundi the minority Tutsis are ruling and these oppose a peace accord. Because of what happened in Rwanda, the peace accord has many stipulations which may not be acceptable to all. Meanwhile, a prolonged war of over five years in Congo is a direct target for sending peacekeeping forces from the UN. Problems of accepting the UN peacekeeping forces by the Congo government, and the conflict drawing five other countries into the fray, have complicated negotiations.

## ARMS SALES

There can be no peace as long as weapons of war continue to be manufactured. The Congressional Research Service, an arm of the Library of Congress, compiles a report on international arms sales, releasing the information around August of each year. The report for the sales of the year 1999 showed that arms sales surged to nearly 30.3 billion dollars, the highest since 1996. The United States, whose goal is to make peace, paradoxically sold 11.8 billion, more than one third of the world's total. Also significantly, Russia, who has had economic problems, more than doubled its business and was second to the U.S. with 4.8 billion. Not until nations learn war no more, and "beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks," will permanent peace come.—Isa. 2:4

## WILL NOT RETURN VOID

But the promises of God will not fail of fulfillment. The Lord himself assures us of this, saying, "As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."—Isa. 55:10,11

Over and over again, God has declared that it is his purpose, by means of the kingdom of Christ, to establish peace—universal and everlasting peace—on earth. One of the outstanding promises of God assuring us of this reads, “He shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it.”—Mic. 4:3,4

‘For the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it.’ Herein we may rest our hopes for a better world, a peaceful world, a world in which ‘none shall make them afraid.’ Because the Lord has decreed it, no longer will the whole world be filled with fear of the destruction which may almost any time be wrought by human foolishness and selfishness.

#### “THE ZEAL OF THE LORD”

It was the Word of the Lord which came to the shepherds on the night Jesus was born, announcing that through him as the world’s Savior and King there would come ‘peace on earth.’ Because it was the Lord speaking through the angels, we need have no doubt that what they proclaimed will, in God’s due time, become a reality. One of the beautiful and comforting prophecies of the birth of Jesus is Isaiah 9:6,7. In this prophecy the great objective of his birth is explained. It declares that he is to be the “Prince of Peace,” and that “of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.” But it does not leave the accomplishment of this wonderful purpose of God in human hands, for it concludes with the reassuring statement, “The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”

All the prophecies and promises of the Bible concerning peace on earth reveal that this Divine purpose will be accomplished by means of the setting up of Christ’s kingdom in the earth. Concerning this Messianic government the Prophet Daniel declares, “In the days of these kings [represented by the ten toes of the humanlike image which pictured Gentile dominion] shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom.” (Dan. 2:44) Many efforts have been made throughout the centuries, some by ambitious men, others by the well-meaning and sincere, to set up governments which would assure peace to the people. They all failed

because this was not the Lord's way for his peace plan to be carried out. It was to be done by 'the God of heaven.'

Jesus was born to be the King in the kingdom which the 'God of heaven' had promised to establish. Satan tempted him to accept and to cooperate with a different plan for ruling the world, saying of the kingdoms of this world, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me"; that is, acknowledge Satan as the supreme ruler. (Matt. 4:9) But Jesus did not yield to this temptation. Instead, he waited for God's time and way to exalt him as the ruler of earth. Meanwhile, his enemies killed him—one of their excuses being that he was a traitor to the Roman Empire because he claimed to be a king.

### **"MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD"**

When brought before Pilate, this Roman ruler asked him if the charge were true. The Master replied, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence." (John 18:36) What could be plainer than this? All the kingdoms and governments of this world have been established and maintained by the force of arms. Humanly constituted governments are still resorting to this method. It will prove just as true now as it has always been, that those who "take the sword shall perish with the sword."—Matt. 26:52

The reason we can have confidence that Christ's kingdom will bring peace to the people is that it is 'not of this world.' Christ's kingdom will not be made up of the selfish elements of what the Apostle Paul describes as "this present evil world." (Gal. 1:4) Nor will his kingdom employ the methods of this world to gain and maintain its power and authority over the people. That there could be a king whose kingdom was not of this world was difficult for Pilate to understand, so he asked Jesus further, "Art thou a king then?" How could there be such a kingdom?

Jesus replied to Pilate, saying, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." (John 18:37) Then Pilate asked, "What is truth?" (vs. 38) Jesus did not reply to this question, but as to the truth concerning God's plan to establish a kingdom in the earth and through it to give peace and life to the people, he had already answered it. That great truth was, and still is, that the 'God of heaven shall set up a kingdom.' The fulfillment of his

promises has not been left in the hands of men, nor to human methods—  
'My kingdom is not of this world.'

#### "THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD'S HOUSE"

In Isaiah 2:2 we read: "It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established." The 'last days' referred to here are not, of course, the last days of time, nor of this earth, nor of human experience, but simply the last days of the reign of sin and death in the earth, the last days of 'this present evil world.' It is in this period that the mountain of the Lord is established. By consulting Daniel 2:35,44, it will be found that this 'mountain' is in reality the kingdom of the Lord, the kingdom which the God of heaven will 'set up' or 'establish' as the prophets Isaiah and Micah state it—Mic. 4:1-4

It is said to be the mountain, or kingdom of the 'Lord's house.' This is God's way of telling us that his kingdom will be made up of a Divine ruling house, or family. The Scriptures make it abundantly clear that Jesus, God's own beloved Son, will be the ruler supreme in this 'house,' the 'King of kings, and Lord of Lords.' There are to be other sons of God associated with him. These are referred to many times in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament. Paul, speaking of a work of the Holy Spirit, wrote: "The Spirit [of God] 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."—Rom. 8:16,17

"It is a faithful saying," wrote Paul, that if we "be dead" with Christ, we shall also "live with him," and if "we suffer," we shall also "reign with him." (II Tim. 2:11,12) These Spirit begotten sons of God, who suffer and die with Jesus, are described in Acts 15:14 as "a people for his name," and the explanation is given that the Divine purpose in proclaiming the Gospel to the Gentiles was to take out of them this people to be members of the Divine family. The further explanation is given that it will be after this work of God in the earth is accomplished that both Jews and Gentiles will receive their promised blessings. All will then have an opportunity to 'seek after the Lord.'

## SELECTION OF THE RULERS

The work of God in the earth throughout the centuries since the peace prophecy of the angels was given, has not been the converting of the world. Men have tried to do this and have failed. God's work during this Gospel Age has been the selection and preparation of that small group whom he has called to be sons. Their worthiness to live and reign with Christ has been demonstrated by their faithfulness in suffering and dying with him. Each one of them has been given the assurance, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."—Rev. 2:10

But how can these reign with Christ, since they have all died? The answer to this is simple, for the Bible assures us of their resurrection. At the same time, this fact highlights the meaning of the promise that the 'God of heaven shall set up a kingdom.' Twenty centuries ago, and in the exercise of his mighty power, God raised Jesus from the dead to be the King supreme in his kingdom. At this end of the age, God again exercises his mighty power to raise the true church of Christ from the dead—those who have suffered and died with him—that they might be associated with him in his kingdom. They are said to come forth in "the first resurrection" to live and reign "with Christ a thousand years."—Rev. 20:4,6

Consideration of this helps us to grasp more fully the meaning of the statement, "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this" (Isa. 9:7), for it emphasizes that his zeal is manifested in the use of his mighty power, even to the extent of raising the dead; even to exalting Christ and his church to the Divine nature and to his own right hand of authority, in order that his ruling 'house' might be established.

## PERMANENT PEACE COMES

We can have every confidence, then, that the 'mountain of the Lord's house' will be established in the 'last days.' Conditions around us in the world are clearly in fulfillment of the prophecies which testify that already the kingdoms of this world are being removed. The old world, dominated by sin and selfishness, is to pass away, and the new is about to be manifested. And David declares, "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth [the social order] be removed." (Ps. 46:2) If we can exercise faith in God's providence, and confidence in his ways, we will not fear at this time when the hearts of so many are filled with dread.

To us the angelic message of peace on earth will take on a new and brighter luster, despite present chaos in the world, if we are able to grasp and believe the thought that its fulfillment is certain because the Lord has promised it and his ‘zeal’ will perform it. Not only will the kingdom established by the God of heaven bring peace to the people, it will also bring health and life; for Jesus was also announced to be a “Saviour.” (Luke 2:11) Paul tells us that Christ must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet, and that the “last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”—I Cor. 15:25,26

Let us rejoice in confidence that this dark night of human experience is soon to terminate in a wonderful morning of joy! While rejoicing in this knowledge ourselves, let us tell the whole world these blessed tidings. No gift could bring greater joy to hearts filled with fear than the assurance that God has a plan which is soon to reach fruition in the blessing of all the families of the earth, that the prophecy of the angels is really true!

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## Preparing for Christ's Ministry

***Key Verse: "As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."***  
—***Luke 3:4***

***Selected Scripture:***  
***Luke 3:1-18***

**OUR LESSON OPENS IN** the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar. Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea and Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests. It was at this time that John the son of Zacharias came into the country of Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. (Luke 3:3) John's work was in fulfillment of the Prophet Isaiah's words, "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight,

and the rough places plain: And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."—Isa. 40:3-5

The nation of Israel had been in covenant relationship with God for over 1800 years. They had been a very stubborn, disobedient people, now God was sending his messenger John to prepare them for the coming of the Messiah.

Many came to John whose hearts were totally out of harmony with righteousness, so he said to them, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Luke 3:7) John then urged them to "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham."—vs. 8

In verse nine John gave them the bad news that because of their disobedient ways, God like a logger, was taking the axe and cutting them off from their previous position of being his exclusive people. The nation

had not brought forth the fruitage that God desired, so their polity was to be destroyed. They were like trees cut down and cast into the fire.

The words of John must have hit them hard, and they cried “What shall we do?” (vs. 10) John’s answer brought to their attention a complete change in their ways of living. No longer would they be able to fall back on the traditions of the fathers. John pointed out to them the true meaning of righteousness.

Now they were to bring forth true repentance. They were to learn what love was all about: Give to the poor, be honest in all their dealings with others, treat each other in exactly the way they themselves would want to be treated, and be content with what they had.

The words of John started the people wondering if he were the Christ to come. He told them that he wasn’t Christ, that Christ was greater than he and that he was not even worthy to untie Jesus’ shoes. The Christ would do a different work of baptizing, one with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Jesus would winnow them, purge his floor and gather the wheat into his barn. Indeed a new and living way was opening.

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## Obeying God's Call

**Key Verse:** *“Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.”*  
—Luke 1:38

**Selected Scripture:**  
**Luke 1:26-38**

**THE TIME HAD COME FOR** the fulfillment of prophecy regarding the coming of Messiah. Isaiah 7:14 reads, “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

The background for our lesson is found in Luke, chapter one. Verse 5 says that in the days of Herod King of Judea, Zacharias was priest. His wife Elisabeth was one of the daughters of Aaron and was barren and well along in age. Both were

righteous in the sight of the Lord.

Being unable to bear children in those days was a sign of disfavor with God, and Zacharias, in the course of performing his duties in the Temple, took the matter to the Lord in prayer. The town people as well, had been praying about this matter. It was then that God sent his angel Gabriel to tell Zacharias that Elisabeth would bear a child and his name would be John. Zacharias was stunned at this message and did not believe it. Because of his unbelief he was to remain speechless until the child was born and circumcised.

Does prayer have its due effect? The answer is definitely yes! “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” (James 5:16) Elisabeth did conceive, but Elisabeth hid the pregnancy for five months.—Luke 1:24

The angel Gabriel then came to Mary who was espoused to Joseph of the “house ... of David,” she also being of the house of David. Prophecies regarding Messiah said that Messiah was to come from Judah, King David's line.—Genesis 49:10

Mary had not been told that Elisabeth was going to have a child and was shocked and fearful at hearing the angel tell her that she had found

favor with God and would bring forth a son. The angel went further to tell her she should call his name Jesus (Hebrew Joshua, a Savior), that he would reign over Israel and of his kingdom there would be no end.

When Mary asked, “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” (vss. 34,35) Further Mary was informed that her kinswoman Elisabeth was going to have a child in her old age and that it was already the sixth month with her. Mary may have known that Elisabeth was beyond the years of childbearing. This may have convinced her, as the angel said, “Nothing shall be impossible.”—vs.37

Mary began to understand and exclaimed to the angel, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.” (vs. 38) In obeying the call to become the mother of our Lord she proved herself of the highest esteem with God. Faith and obedience are truly the marks of a true believer in God.

Meanwhile, Joseph who was espoused to Mary learned of her pregnancy and wanted to put her away. An angel appeared to him in a dream and told him to take Mary as his wife because the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 was being fulfilled through her. Joseph obeyed.—Matt. 1:18-25

## Praising God

**Key Verses:** *“Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.”*  
—**Luke 1:46-48**  
**Selected Scripture:**  
**Luke 1:39-56**

**IT WAS AFTER MARY HAD** heard that her kinswoman Elisabeth had conceived that she hurried to her home in joy to greet her. Mary’s arrival and greeting caused the babe in the womb of Elisabeth to leap, and Elisabeth received the Holy Spirit.

God works in mysterious ways; now Elisabeth knew that Mary was to bear a child, and through the aid of the Holy Spirit she became aware of the great miracle that would soon happen. Elisabeth loudly proclaimed, “Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.” (Luke 1:42) Then asked, “Whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”—vs. 43

With Elisabeth there was no envy that a woman many years younger than she should have the honor of conceiving in her virginity, and to become the mother of the Messiah. She rejoiced in the honor granted her, although being much less. This was a lesson in true humility, because the humble always think of others before themselves. We see why the Heavenly Father bestowed such honor upon these women for as we read in Proverbs 15:33, “Before honour is humility.”

In Luke 1:45 we read, “Blessed is she that believed.” Those that believe are indeed blessed. They that believe God’s Word know that the Word will not fail them, that there shall be a fulfillment of God’s promises. With this assurance we should encourage others to exercise faith in God.

Mary said, “My soul doth magnify the Lord.” (vs. 46) That is, I recognize him as a great and mighty God. Those who think of God

highly, honorably, will at all times seek to glorify him in all their activities. We read in Matthew 5:16, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

In verse 48 Mary speaks prophetically saying, “All generations shall call me blessed.” Many Christian generations have recognized how the great God of the universe honored Mary in being the mother of Jesus. Mary’s faith, humility, and obedience will for all times stand out as a monument to her.

In verse 50 Mary says, “His mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.” The word fear in this scripture has the thought of reverence. His mercy will indeed be on all who reverence him.

In furtherance of prophecy Mary points to the future and says in verses 51-55 that God’s holy Arm (Jesus) “Hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.” Again through prophecy Mary says that God would help Israel. These prophecies will be fulfilled in the promise made to Abraham, “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.”—Gen. 22:18

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## Welcoming the Savior

***Key Verse: “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”  
—Luke 2:11***

***Selected Scripture:  
Luke 2:1-20***

**THE BEAUTIFUL STORY OF** the birth of Christ takes place in Israel at the time that Caesar Augustus decreed a tax be placed upon the people. The people had to go to their own city to register for this taxation. (Luke 2:3) It was at this time that “Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his

espoused wife, being great with child.”—vss. 4,5

We find the fulfillment of prophecy in these events. Jesus was to be called a “Nazarene,” (Matt. 2:23) since Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth, where our Lord grew up and from where he started his ministry. (Mark 1:9) But the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. (Mic. 5:2) Thus, God caused a forced movement of his guardians to Bethlehem, where he was to be born. How wonderful is our God who so accurately makes plain his great plan of the ages. How confident we can be that what God says, he will accomplish.

In verses 6-7 we have shown for us the humble surroundings of this birth. Kings usually are brought forth with much pomp and circumstance. However, our Lord was to be born in an animal stall, and placed in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.

At this time “there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.” (vs. 8) God did not make known the birth of his Son to the noble, but to the lowly, as we read, “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; ... That no flesh should glory in his presence.”—I Cor. 1:27,29

“And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, 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.” (vss. 9-11) The Jews were always looking for ‘evidences’—‘signs,’ of the things to come to pass. How would they know that this was the Savior and not just some ordinary baby? “Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.” (vs. 12) God does not leave out any details essential for identification.

The shepherds went to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph and beheld the babe lying in a manger. The account reads that those who saw our Lord went and told all what they had seen and what the angel had told them. The words of the angel were explicit, ‘born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ [Messiah].’ No doubt those that heard of this event remembered the prophecy of the coming of Messiah and were amazed.

We read in verse 19, “Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.” To ponder is ‘to weigh.’ Mary weighed each circumstance of its just importance, anxiously seeking what it might indicate respecting her child. The circumstances concerning the birth of Christ increase our faith and fill our hearts with joy. Blessed be our great God!

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## Recognizing the Christ

**Key Verses:** *“Mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.”*  
—Luke 2:30-32

**Selected Scripture:**  
*Luke 2:21-40*

**LUKE 2:21-24 CONFIRMS** that according to Jewish law, all male children must be circumcised on the eighth day. (Lev. 12:3) Circumcision was symbolic of the cutting away of fleshly tendencies; that which defile. The nation of Israel had come into covenant relationship with God. As God’s people, they were to cut off all filthiness of the flesh and spirit and were to walk in the ways of righteousness. So, Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day. His mother Mary, waited 33 days until her purification was accomplished (Lev. 12:2-4), then went to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.—Luke 2:22-24

According to Jewish law a sacrifice must be made after a birth. (Lev. 12:6-8) It was necessary that these details of the Law be fully carried out. It was at the Temple that Simeon, a just man, who waited for the consolation, that is, the answer to his prayers, regarding the coming of the Messiah, saw the babe Jesus. We read that the Holy Spirit was upon him. The Spirit had indicated that he should not see death before “he had seen the Lord’s Christ.”—Luke 2:25,26

It is interesting to note that even before Jesus reached the age of thirty and before his baptism at Jordan, that he was recognized as the ‘Lord’s Christ,’ his ‘Anointed.’ Here we have the affirmation of prophecy, that our Lord was the Messiah.

Taking the babe Jesus in his arms, Simeon blessed God, and said, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.” (vss. 29-32) Now he was ready to die in full assurance of the promised coming blessings.

Hearing Simeon, Joseph and Mary marveled at the things spoken. They knew that Jesus was special, but hearing Simeon declare that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah was almost too much for them to comprehend. Simeon went on to prophecy that the child would be “set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel” and that his name would be spoken against. The life of Jesus would cause the hearts of many to be revealed. This prophecy was to have its fulfillment in his earthly ministry.—vss. 34,35

There was another who had long been serving the Lord and was a widow for 84 years, Anna a prophetess. Anna was another Israelite of faith who had been praying for the coming of Messiah. Now she gave God thanks, and spoke to all about the coming redemption.

The Luke account of the birth of Jesus does not tell of the need for the babe Jesus to be taken to Egypt to escape the murderous intent of Herod. This is recorded in Matthew 2:1-23. Luke merely notes that after Joseph and Mary had completed all things according to the Law, they returned to Galilee, saying, “The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.”—Luke 2:40

## Going on to Perfection

### CHAPTER 6

**VERSES 1,2** “Leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.”

These opening verses of Chapter Six are in reality a continuation of the lesson presented in the closing verses of Chapter Five. It is a lesson designed to encourage the Lord’s consecrated people, by study of the Word and the heart application of its principles, to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

*‘Leaving the principles.’*—This expression must be taken in connection with the explanation, ‘not laying again the foundation.’ Putting the two together the thought of ‘leaving’ the principles is simply that of building up from the foundation, not leaving them in the sense of deserting them, and never again thinking or talking about them. The illustration is clearly that of constructing a building. A building is not complete, or ‘perfect,’ while only the foundation is laid; neither would it be perfect if the superstructure were built elsewhere than on the foundation.

The word principles in this verse is the translation of a Greek word meaning ‘beginning, or chief.’ It is the Greek word *arche*, which is essentially the same as the first part of the word archangel, meaning ‘chief angel.’ It is not the same word which is used in the preceding chapter, in the expression ‘first principles.’ There, as we learned, the Greek word used signifies orderly arrangement, the thought being the orderly arrangement of the doctrines of the Bible to form the Divine plan of the ages.

The principles of the doctrine of Christ are not, therefore, the unimportant teachings of the Bible, but instead, the great foundation truths upon which all Christian belief and work must be built. How

important it is, then, that we keep in constant and vital touch with these foundation principles. It would not be necessary to build the foundation repeatedly, but since the Hebrew brethren had let these things “slip” they needed to be taught over again, in order that they might, in renewing their devotion, have a foundation upon which to build.—Heb. 2:1

*‘Repentance from dead works.’*—Because Paul was addressing Hebrew Christians, the dead works here mentioned could be particularly their efforts to gain life by keeping the Law. These were dead works not only because they did not thereby gain life, but also because by them they were brought under the additional condemnation of the Law. But repentance is the principal thought in connection with this doctrine, and repentance is essential to receiving God’s blessings regardless of one’s former position in life.

Repentance is a definite step in the life of all who become Christians. It is not something with which we are concerned but momentarily when first drawn to the Lord. As Christians we are daily transgressing against God, and daily we need to be in a repentant attitude which seeks Divine forgiveness through the merit of the shed blood. This fundamental doctrine in the plan of salvation should serve continually to keep us humble before the Lord and in constant recognition of our need of Divine grace and mercy through Christ.

*‘Faith toward God.’*—The relationship of faith to our standing before God is a vital fundamental of the Divine plan. “Without faith it is impossible to please God,” the Scriptures declare. (Heb. 11:6) We see the importance of this doctrine by noting the manner in which Paul couples it with ‘repentance from dead works.’ No one can be justified by the works of the Law, but we can be justified by faith and have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5:1) How important it is to keep this fundamental truth clearly in mind and order our lives in keeping therewith!

The *‘doctrine of baptisms.’*—Because all those of the Jewish nation had been “baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea,” it was at first necessary for Jewish converts in the Early Church to be baptized with John’s baptism unto the remission of sins, and thus to be reinstated in their standing with God under the Law Covenant, in order to be transferred into Christ. (I Cor. 10:2) But even in the case of these, the real

doctrine of baptism called for their burial into Christ, their covenant to be dead with him. Gentile converts had to symbolize this baptism in death by immersion in water. Thus ‘baptisms,’ in the plural, are involved in this basic teaching of the Truth, and all are important foundation truths upon which to build.

The ‘*laying on of hands*.’—This practice was familiar to the Jews under the Law Covenant. In Jesus’ day there were occasions when the sick were healed by the laying on of hands. The servants of the Early Church were elected by the laying on of hands, or, more literally, stretching forth the hand. Timothy was cautioned by Paul not to lay hands on anyone suddenly—without due consideration. (I Tim. 5:22) As a Christian doctrine, the laying on of hands seems to indicate clearly the giving of recognition and authority.

The literal act of laying on of hands ceased with the death of the apostles, but its symbolic significance has continued with the church throughout the age, and is a vital factor in the Christian life today. Those upon whom the apostles laid their hands received the Holy Spirit. This outward sign of approval was of great value in the Early Church; but the Lord’s people still need that which the laying on of hands represented; namely, the approval and acceptance of God, which is manifested by the “witness” of the Spirit. (Rom. 8:16) The doctrine, or teaching, which has to do with our being anointed by the Holy Spirit and being thereby recognized by the Lord as members of the body of Christ and authorized to be his ambassadors, is therefore fundamentally important. Surely we do not want to lose sight of this glorious significance of the Truth!

The ‘*resurrection of the dead*.’—“If in this life only we have hope in Christ,” writes Paul, “we are of all men most miserable.” (I Cor. 15:19) Surely the doctrine of the resurrection is a very vital one. This is true whether we think of it as pertaining to the “first resurrection” in which we hope to share; the “better resurrection” of the Ancient Worthies, or the general resurrection of the world. (Rev. 20:6; Heb. 11:35; Acts 17:31) It is the very foundation of our hope. It requires keen spiritual vision, which can be enjoyed only by “those who by reason of use have their senses exercised” to plumb the real depth of this glorious doctrine of the Truth. (Heb. 5:14) In the first chapter of Ephesians Paul says that he prayed for the opening of the eyes of understanding of “the saints which

are at Ephesus,” that they might realize the mighty power being exercised on their behalf, explaining that it is the power which raised Jesus Christ from the dead and highly exalted him “far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named.”—Eph. 1:18-21

*‘Eternal judgment.’*—The reference here seems to be to the final judgment, or determination as to the individual’s worthiness or unworthiness of everlasting life. The church is on trial now, and in the case of each probationary member the time will come when the decision must be made. Let us strive earnestly that we may be found among those who will hear those welcome words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” (Matt. 25:21) It is certainly important that we keep constantly before us the fact that our lives are an open book before God, and that while he is merciful and just, our trial will end favorably only if we keep our hearts pure and render unto him the very best that we are able.

**VERSE 3** “This we will do, if God permit.”—In two ways Paul reveals his humility by this statement. He had criticized the Hebrew brethren for their lack of zeal, and had pointed out to them their great need to make better progress in the Christian way, yet he puts himself on a level with them and says this will ‘we’ do, if God permits.

He realized that every blessing enjoyed by the Christian is a manifestation of Divine grace. We could not have come into this blessed relationship at all except the Heavenly Father had drawn us. (John 6:44) We could not know the Truth unless he had given us ‘ears to hear.’ (Matt. 13:16) We cannot make progress in the Truth unless the Lord permits, for we are able to work out our salvation only because he is working in us “both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”—Phil. 2:12,13

**VERSES 4-6** “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, And have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world [Greek, age] to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.”

The Greek word here rendered ‘once’ denotes more than the single fact that at one time we were enlightened. It is a word which means finality. Provision was made to rescue the fallen race from the result of Adam’s

sin, but if we have been truly enlightened concerning this, have accepted the provision of Divine grace and have entered into covenant relationship with the Lord, and then fail, no further provision is made for us. We receive our enlightenment from the Word of truth. This is always the first step in approaching God. We may “feel after him,” but to find him we must be enlightened to know where he is and how to approach him.—Acts 17:27

The ‘*heavenly gift*.’—This heavenly gift is something which can be ‘tasted.’ What is it? It is Jesus, our Redeemer. The fact that we have tasted him implies that we have more than merely heard about him and believe that he is the Savior of the world. Jesus said, “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.” (John 6:53) This denotes a close fellowship with the Master, based upon a full consecration to follow in his footsteps. “I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.”—Song of Sol. 2:3

‘*Partakers of the Holy Spirit*.’—Those who have tasted of the heavenly gift as a result of making a full consecration to the Lord receive the begetting of the Holy Spirit. They are partakers of the Holy Spirit, suggesting a partnership in the sharing of its blessings.

‘*The powers of the world to come*.’—These are the powers of regeneration. In no other way will the power of God in the world, or age, to come be so wonderfully demonstrated as by the resurrection of the dead. Those who are partakers of the Holy Spirit now have by faith tasted of the power of the resurrection. They are, even now, in their hearts and minds, “risen with Christ,” and seated with him “in heavenly places.”—Col. 2:12;3:1-3;Eph. 2:6

If, after learning the ‘principles’ and experiencing the Christian blessings of this age, one then falls away, it would be impossible, says Paul, to renew him again to repentance. Evidently the Hebrew brethren had not progressed far enough to be exposed to this danger, although there is a warning here that they could not expect to be laying the foundation of repentance continually. To presume upon Divine grace after coming to a full knowledge of the Truth, and upon the basis of full consecration, experiencing its power in our lives would be like crucifying the Son of God afresh, and there is no provision for this in the Divine plan. “Christ dieth no more.”—Rom. 6:9

**VERSES 7,8** “The earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected and is high unto cursing: whose end is to be burned.”

The apostle is using an illustration to help us grasp more clearly what he means by ‘going on to perfection.’ God’s purpose in watering the earth, and the purpose of those who till the ground, is that it might ‘bring forth herbs’; that is, that there might be a fruitage, or harvest. In this illustration the earth pictures those to whom are given the water of Truth, while the tillers of the soil might be those who are used by the Lord to assist the brethren in connection with their understanding of the Truth. This cooperative arrangement is intended to bring forth fruit, but if nothing but thorns and briers appear, the effort is wasted. So, the object in our receiving the Truth is not merely that we may enjoy it, but that it produce a fruitage in our lives, “the peaceable fruit of righteousness.”—Heb. 12:11

**VERSES 9,10** “Beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”

Although these Hebrew Christians had not been making use of their opportunities as they should, Paul was pleased to call them ‘beloved.’ This is the spirit of Divine love, the love that will not let go its hold on an individual while there is any evidence at all that reformation is possible. The expression, ‘better things’ is in contrast with the possibility just mentioned of falling away after being fully enlightened, and thereby crucifying the Son of God afresh. Here the apostle was encouraging them to take a firmer hold upon the Truth, and to follow that course of zeal and devotion which would result in their salvation—that “great salvation” which began to be spoken by our Lord.—Heb.2:3

These Hebrew brethren evidently ‘ran well’ for a time, for the apostle speaks of their ‘work and labour of love.’ Later, in Chapter Ten, verses 32-34, he asks them to call to remembrance these “former days” when they were first illuminated, when they “took joyfully” the spoiling of their goods, etc. He wanted them to renew their original zeal and love.

What could have been more encouraging to those who, perchance, had become weary in well doing than to assure them that the Heavenly Father had not forgotten their past faithfulness! While Paul does not say so, one of the evidences that God had not forgotten them was the fact that he stirred up the apostle's mind to write this epistle as a means of helping them to take a more positive stand for the Truth and for righteousness.

God's justice not only reproves and punishes where necessary, but treasures up every good deed and rewards it. Even the giving of a cup of cold water to one of his little ones will not go unrewarded. God also encourages every good trait that it might grow stronger and become more dominant in one's life. He takes delight in every evidence of progress in the path of righteousness.

**VERSES 11,12** "We desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

*'The same diligence.'*—In the beginning, their work and labor of love was very manifest. God's interest is in all his people—"every one of you"—he does not want one to fail. But victory is dependent upon 'full assurance of hope,' not for a little while, merely, but until we have been faithful even unto death. Note the connection here with his former admonitions and warning with respect to failure to enter into rest because of unbelief.—Heb. 2:3;4:1-11

Every truly faithful and zealous disciple of Christ is an encouraging example to his brethren. Those who inherit the promises do so because of their implicit faith and patient endurance—even unto death. If we follow the example of these we will not be slothful, but diligent. God's promises pertaining to the 'great salvation' are not unconditional. Those who actually inherit them must fulfill the conditions.

**VERSES 13-15** "When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise."

The apostle here does not quote the entire oathbound covenant with Abraham, for he is not discussing the covenant, but is merely citing the illustration of Abraham's faith in God's promises or patiently waiting for

their fulfillment as being essential to actually having them become a personal possession. God made a ‘promise’ to Abraham. Here the Greek word translated promise means simply an announcement. But the promise which Abraham obtained after he endured is from a Greek word meaning more than an announcement—it is, according to “*Strong’s Bible Concordance*” also a ‘pledge,’ or an ‘assurance.’ God gave Abraham this pledge, this assurance, when he ratified the original promise by his oath.

**VERSES 16-18** “Men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.”

God’s willingness to give his people a more abundant assurance of his loving purpose toward them is fully in keeping with his grace and mercy. He did not need to confirm the covenant with his oath, for no one would ever have reason to doubt his word. Later, one of the requirements of the Law was that important matters should be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses, and God was willing to conform to this principle. His word was immutable and his oath was immutable, so by these two immutable things, he has given us strong consolation who have laid hold of the hope set before us in the covenant with Abraham.

**VERSES 19-20** “Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an High Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec.”

Our anchor is fastened ‘within the veil.’ Here the apostle puts the Christian in the position of the typical high priest who alone had the privilege of entering into the Most Holy of the Tabernacle. We can hope to enter into the antitypical Most Holy, even heaven, because Jesus, our Forerunner has, first of all, entered for us to prepare the way. What a glorious hope!

## The Joy Set Before Him

***“Looking unto Jesus  
the author and  
finisher of our faith;  
who for the joy that  
was set before him  
endured the cross,  
despising the shame,  
and is set down at the  
right hand of the  
throne of God.”  
—Hebrews 12:2***

**TO BE JOYFUL IS A** legitimate goal for all of God’s intelligent creatures, for it is the normal state of those who are obedient to him. The human race has suffered and has been unhappy because of sin. It was inevitable that Jesus should suffer—not for his own sin, because he had none—but on account of the sin of others. He suffered as a sin offering, and because of the “contradiction of sinners” (Heb. 12:3) which was leveled against him.

From the time of his baptism in Jordan, when he entered into a covenant with his Heavenly Father to do all that was written of him in the “volume of the book” (Heb. 10:7), Jesus knew that he was to take the sinner’s place in death. He knew, therefore, that the way before him was a difficult one, beset by many trials, and leading eventually to death. The assurance of his Father’s guidance and strength in every time of need was a constant source of joy to the Master—a joy which he bequeathed to his disciples.

### JESUS’ PREHUMAN EXISTENCE

The question naturally arises as to when the ‘joy,’ which enabled Jesus to endure the cross, was ‘set before him.’ The Scriptures are not explicit concerning the degree of information the Heavenly Father gave to the *Logos* about the purpose of his mission.

Students of the Bible have believed that the conversation recorded in Isaiah 6:8 is not just between Isaiah and Jehovah; but because of the use of ‘us,’ as in Genesis 1:26, that it includes the *Logos*. Hence the question concerning the rebellion caused by sin, and as to who would be the emissary to assist in putting down this rebellion, the *Logos* also replies, “Here am I; send me.”

We know that Jesus' coming to earth was wholly voluntary. He had supreme love for the Heavenly Father, and was completely dedicated to the doing of his will. He had absolute confidence that his Father's will for him would be just and righteous. This would have been sufficient incentive for the *Logos* to make "himself of no reputation," and to take upon himself "the form of a servant."—Phil. 2:7

## THE RECORDED PROMISES

We cannot be sure of things which are not clearly revealed in the Scriptures, but we can know and rejoice in those which are. There are many recorded promises which the Heavenly Father made to Jesus, and which the Master undoubtedly knew about and rejoiced in after "the heavens were opened unto him" at the time of his baptism and receiving of the Holy Spirit. (Matt. 3:16) There are texts which indicate that even before this, Jesus began to sense the Divine purpose in his birth, and that he was the special object of his Father's care.

In a prophecy of the cruel suffering which was inflicted upon Jesus while he was hanging on the cross, he is foretold as saying to his Father, "Thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts." (Ps. 22:9) This indicates that, at an early age, Jesus was beginning to sense his special relationship to God.

On his visit to the Temple, when he was twelve years of age, in explanation to his parents Jesus said, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" This question indicates that even then he grasped to some extent the fact that he had a special, Divine mission to perform. (Luke 2:49) The account tells us that after this he became subject to his parents until he was thirty years old. (Luke 3:23) Apparently by his questioning the doctors of the Law he learned that he could not properly begin a priestly work for God until he was thirty.

It was after the Holy Spirit came upon the Master that he was able to grasp the full import of his mission, and it was then that he understood and appreciated the precious promises of his Father which set before him the joy which would follow his faithful sacrificial work. The Apostle Peter, in telling us about the prophetic testimony of the "sufferings of Christ," says that the prophets wrote also about "the glory that should follow."—I Pet. 1:11

## ISAIAH'S RECORD

One of the interesting promises of this nature, which must have meant much to Jesus, is recorded in Isaiah 53:10-12. The preceding nine verses of the chapter are prophetic of the 'sufferings of Christ,' while the last three pertain to the 'glory that should follow.' What a joy the information contained in these verses must have been to Jesus! While he was to be cut off from the land of the living, with none to declare his generation, Jehovah promised, "He shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand."—Isa. 53:10

Jesus no doubt understood that 'his seed' mentioned in this promise would be the restored world of mankind. This was an unselfish joy set before him, the holy pleasure of restoring the sinful and fallen race to life. To do this, it would be necessary for his days to be 'prolonged.' Thus, while he was to die as the Redeemer, and so be "cut off out of the land of the living," his death would not be permanent, for he was to live again and be privileged to give life to others. While it "pleased the Lord to bruise him," because this was an essential part of the sin offering work, 'the pleasure of the Lord,' as revealed in his plan to bless all the families of the earth, was to 'prosper in his hand.'

Jesus' soul did indeed 'travail' as he 'endured such contradiction of sinners'! What comfort it must have been to him to realize that it was not in vain, that wonderful results would accrue from his suffering, results with which he would be wholly 'satisfied.' What great satisfaction there will be in seeing the entire human race restored to perfection and life. What a marvelous joy was this that Jehovah set before his beloved Son in order that he might have strength to endure "the cross"!—Heb. 12:2

Jesus knew that he was that righteous servant who would "justify many" (Isa. 53:11), and that this was to be possible because, by his suffering and death, he was bearing their iniquities. How this knowledge must have strengthened him to endure the cross, "despising the shame." (Heb. 12:2) Could any temporary shame which might be heaped upon him by the 'contradiction of sinners' (vs.3) be compared with that immeasurable joy of providing an opportunity for the "dead, small and great, to stand before God"?—Rev. 20:12

## “A PORTION WITH THE GREAT”

In the last verse of this prophecy (Isa. 53) is another inspiring promise to Jesus. Here the Father says, “Therefore [because of his faithfulness] will I divide him [Jesus] a portion with the great”—that is, with me, the great Jehovah. The Scriptures seem clearly to indicate that after Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit he was able to remember his prehuman life with the Heavenly Father. This is shown in his prayer, “Glorify thou me ... with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”—John 17:5

Jesus knew what it meant to be associated with his Father, the joy of being in his presence. The promise that he would again be given ‘a portion with the great’ would mean more to him than any of us are able to appreciate. Here was a joy set before him that was indeed “unspeakable and full of glory.”—I Pet. 1:8

Psalms 22 is another prophecy of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. Verses 7 and 8 are descriptive of the ridicule and scorn which were hurled at the Master at that time—“All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.” These exact words were used by the chief priests, who mocked Jesus, saying, “He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, ... for he said, I am the Son of God.” (Matt. 27:43) As Jesus hung suffering and dying on the cross, another incident occurred which is mentioned in this Psalm: “They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.” (vs. 18) Jesus, with his perfect and clear spiritual discernment, could not help but notice these fulfillments of the prophecy.

This prophecy is not exclusively concerned with Jesus’ suffering and death, for it also set before the Lord a wonderful vision of the joy which enabled him to endure the cross. Verse 22 reads, “I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.” The Apostle Paul quotes this in Hebrews 2:12, and indicates that the ‘brethren’ referred to are the body members of the Christ. This means that as Jesus hung on the cross he was encouraged by the prospect of having these brethren associated with him in glory. Paul’s comment is, “It became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are

sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.”—Heb. 2:10-12

### “THE KINGDOM IS THE LORD’S”

In this prophecy Jesus also saw the kingdom blessings coming to mankind—“All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the Lord’s: and he is the governor among the nations.” (Ps. 22:27,28) What a joy this was to set before Jesus while hanging on the cross: the joy of seeing all mankind ‘turn unto the Lord.’ Paul tells us that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself”; and as Jesus was dying at Calvary, he realized that his death was a necessary part of this work of reconciliation.—II Cor. 5:19

Jesus also realized that the kingdom would be necessary in this work of turning the people unto the Lord. This prophecy gave him the strength to reply to the thief as he did—the thief who requested, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” “Verily,” said the Master, “Thou shalt be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:42,43), for then ‘all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord.’

Perhaps all the thief knew about the kingdom was from reading the inscription at the top of the cross, “This is Jesus the King of the Jews,” which indicated the ‘crime’ for which he was being crucified. (Matt. 27:37) But Jesus knew more than this. He knew that although he was then being killed by his enemies, the kingdom promises of his Father were sure. Jesus knew that Satan would not be the prince of the world forever; that in his Father’s due time all the ends of the world would turn unto the Lord. How Jesus must have rejoiced in such a glorious prospect!

### “IN THEE DO I PUT MY TRUST”

Psalm 16 is another prophecy which applied to Jesus during the ‘days of his flesh,’ while he was laying down his life as the Redeemer of the world. It is similar to Psalm 22 in that it forecasts both the suffering and future joy of Jesus. The larger portion of Psalm 22 describes his suffering, and only a few verses tell of the joy; whereas Psalm 16 makes only an incidental mention of the suffering, while most of the prophecy depicts

Jesus' great trust in his Father, and his sure hope of the "glory to follow."—I Pet. 1:11

"Preserve me, O God," the opening verse reads, "for in thee do I put my trust." Jesus knew that his mission as a human being was to die—"My flesh, ... I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:51)—but he was confident that this would not mean eternal death. It was in full assurance that he prayed, 'Preserve me, O God.' His confidence stemmed from his determination to be faithful to his God, and to him alone. "Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips."—vs. 4

Jesus knew that the secret of true and lasting joy was in loving devotion to his Heavenly Father—that any other course could lead only to 'sorrows.' In continuing the prayer he emphasized this, saying, "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." (vss. 5,6) Jesus realized that his 'cup' of experience was given to him by God, so in the Garden of Gethsemane he said to Peter, "Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"—John 18:11

Why should he not drink this 'cup,' Jesus reasoned, when such a glorious inheritance awaited him! This joyous prospect, and the fact that even while drinking the cup of suffering his Father was with him to sustain and help, meant to the Master that his 'lines' had really fallen 'in pleasant places'—made pleasant by the 'goodly heritage' which had been set before him.

"I have set the Lord always before me": the prayer continues, "because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope." (Ps. 16:8,9) The Hebrew word in this text which is translated 'before' means literally 'counterpart, or mate.' Jesus made the Heavenly Father his counterpart, or mate, therefore he was not alone while laying down his life—not until in those last awful moments his partner had temporarily and briefly forsaken him.

Having his Heavenly Father as his helper, Jesus was confident of victory—"Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." He freely

acknowledged to his disciples that by himself he could do nothing. His words were those which the Father gave him to speak, and the works which he performed were his Father's works. He knew that his Father was at his right hand at all times, and that he could be depended upon—"I knew that thou hearest me always." (John 11:42) This being true, Jesus felt secure, confident that he could not be moved away from this blessed position of favor with his God.

This made the Master's heart glad despite the bitter enmity of his adversaries, and as he said, 'My glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope.' It was a hope based upon the many promises by which his Father set before him this wonderful joy. He knew that he was to die for the sins of the world, but his God, who was at his right hand, had given him a sustaining hope of joy to come.

How wonderfully the Master trusted in his Heavenly Father—"Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." (vs. 10) Jesus knew that he was to give up his life, his 'soul,' in death. This was essential in order that he might take the sinner's place. But he was not to be left in 'hell,' that is *sheol*, the condition of death. This he knew, for a great joy had been set before him by his Father—the joy of dispensing kingdom blessings, and the joy of returning to his Father's actual presence and partaking of his glory.

### "FULNESS OF JOY"

What a joy this was! Concerning it, the last verse in this wonderful psalm represents Jesus praying, "Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore." (vs. 11) 'Fulness of joy,' what a thought! Yes, a joy which comprehended all joys. Jesus knew that by being in his Father's presence, and sharing his glory, all the other wonderful things which had been promised would follow as a natural sequence of events. This position with the Father would make possible the kingdom, and the promised blessings of the kingdom—blessings provided by his sacrificial death on the cross.

It would seem that the Apostle Paul may well have had this very prophecy in mind when he wrote concerning Jesus, "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb. 12:2) Had not the

prophet, speaking for Jesus, said, ‘At thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore’? At his right hand, and in his actual presence is ‘fulness of joy.’

It was this joy, set before the Master so definitely by this and the other wonderful promises of his Father, that enabled him to endure. Paul tells us that we are to “consider him” who endured so much suffering, “lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” (Heb. 12:3) We cannot properly ‘consider him’ without recalling the provision which his Father made to give him strength to endure. And we should also realize that the same joy has been set before us, so that we also may be able to ‘endure unto the end.’

In the promise Jehovah made to Jesus: ‘I will divide him a portion with the great,’ he also said concerning us, “And he [Jesus] shall divide the spoil [the reward] with the strong.” (Isa. 53:12) We are associate heirs with him in this blessed promise.

After Jesus had been given his portion with the great, he declared, “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.” (Rev. 3:21) Jesus was given his promised place at the ‘right hand of the throne of God, where there are pleasures forevermore,’ and where there is fulness of joy. Now we can be confident that our joint inheritance with him will soon become a reality.

May this joy thus set before all the followers of the Master encourage us to greater diligence in doing his will, greater faithfulness in his service, and more joyfully to lay down our lives in sacrifice, rejoicing in the blessed privilege which is ours of suffering and dying with him. If faithful, we will share his glory and the kingdom work of blessing all the families of the earth.

## Emmanuel—God with Us

***“She shall bring  
forth a son, and thou  
shalt call his name  
JESUS: for he shall  
save his people from  
their sins.”  
—Matthew 1:21***

**DELIVERANCE FROM** Gentile domination was the chief thing the Israelites comprehended in the Messianic promises. (Matt. 1:18-25) Even after Jesus was raised from the dead, his disciples still had this in mind when they asked him, “Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?”—Acts 1:6

### DELIVERANCE FROM SIN

The Divine purpose in the coming of the Messiah was much more comprehensive than this, for it embraced also a deliverance from sin. This is brought to our attention in the name ‘Jesus,’ which Joseph was instructed to give to Mary’s Son—“Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.”

It was Israel’s sins which led to their becoming a captive nation. Had they remained obedient to God and to his laws, he would have protected them from their enemies, and they would have remained a free nation under their God. Sin had brought both Jews and Gentiles into a far more dreadful bondage; because of it, the entire human race has been brought into captivity to death. It is deliverance, or salvation, from this bondage that is primarily referred to in our text.

To bring about a deliverance from death, it was necessary that Jesus be born into the world in a manner which would assure his separateness from sin. In the Divine providence, this was accomplished by the transfer of the life of God’s beloved Son, the Logos, to the womb of Mary, and his subsequent birth as a human child without the necessity of a human father. This was no more difficult for God to accomplish than was the original design for procreation which we have come to consider a ‘natural’ process. It is all quite beyond our comprehension.

The fact that Jesus partook of flesh and blood in this manner assured that he would be “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” (Heb. 7:26) This meant that as a perfect man he could give his life as a

corresponding price for the forfeited life of father Adam, who before he transgressed the Divine law, also was perfect. Jesus said to the Jews, "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (John 6:51) Paul explained the philosophy of this, saying, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."—I Cor. 15:22

## GOD'S PLAN

The plan of God for the salvation both of Israel and the world from sin and death through Jesus was that he should die as the Redeemer at his First Advent, and rule as King and Deliverer at his Second Advent. He came to redeem the people just long enough in advance of God's time to bring about the deliverance of the human race from death; to permit the calling, selection, and proving of a 'little flock' whom the Heavenly Father designed should live and reign with Jesus during the thousand years of his kingdom. It will be during that thousand years that the "dead, small and great," will be awakened from the sleep of death, enlightened to know the will of God, and given an opportunity to obey and live forever.—Rev. 20:12

## EMMANUEL

One of the prophecies stated that the foretold Deliverer should be called "Emmanuel," which means, "God with us." (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23) While this prophecy is mentioned in Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus, this name did not come into general use during the Master's lifetime. Apparently the name most generally used with reference to him was 'Jesus,' the name which the angel Gabriel instructed Joseph to give him.

Those who believe that Jesus was God incarnate in flesh have seized upon the name 'Emmanuel' as one means of attempting to prove this erroneous theory. They fail to see, or else ignore, the absurdities resulting from the notion that Jesus was his own father, and that the Heavenly Father was his own Son. It would mean that Jesus' prayers to his Father were merely an act which he put on to impress the hearers and thereby secure their sympathy.

How beautifully simple and understandable is the fact that Jesus came to earth as an expression of God's good will toward the human race; that God's glorious character of love and wisdom and justice and power were

demonstrated in the perfect One, Christ Jesus! The Scriptures tell us that Adam was created in the ‘image’ of God. Could anyone have seen Adam before he sinned, he would have seen God manifested in human flesh. So it was with Jesus. He was a perfect human image of his Heavenly Father.

God so loved the world that he had sent his Son to redeem the people from death, and in due time to restore them to life. He did not come to carry out his own plan, but God’s plan. Every testimony which Jesus gave on the subject emphasized that the words he spoke and the works he did were not his own, but those given to him by his Father. He did not speak and work for himself, but for God. Thus Emmanuel—‘God with us’—was a very appropriate title for him.

## THE GLORY OF JESUS

So high a position does Jesus occupy in the plan of God that the Heavenly Father has instructed that his Son should be honored even as he is honored. God has given command that “all the angels” should worship his Son. (Ps. 97:7; Heb. 1:6) No wonder he is prophetically described as “The mighty God,” and as “The everlasting Father.” (Isa. 9:6,7) It is the Heavenly Father’s wish that this Son be worshiped as a mighty God, for he has exalted him to his own right hand. And he will also be the ‘Father’ who will give everlasting life to the people, hence the ‘everlasting’ Father.

This is marvelous glory but it does not indicate that the Father and the Son are one, or ever were one in person. This is clearly shown by Jesus’ own statement to his Father concerning his disciples when, in prayer on their behalf, he said, “The glory which thou gavest me I have given them.”—John 17:22

At the time Jesus uttered these words, he had received the ‘glory’ from his Father only in part, and by promise. He had given it to his disciples by promise. Later when Jesus had actually been exalted to the right hand of his Father to sit with him in his throne, he confirmed the promise made to his disciples, saying, “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.”—Rev. 3:21