

# The Earth Shall Yield Her Increase

*“Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us.”*  
—*Psalm 67:6*

**OUR TEXT TELLS OF A** promise that God has made which says that the full potential of the ground of the earth will produce an adequate supply of plants for food in his kingdom. This same type of promise was made to Israel when they were about to enter Canaan, the promised land. God instructed Moses to tell the people, “The land shall yield her fruit, and ye shall eat your fill, and dwell therein in safety.” (Lev. 25:19) Later, God said to them that if they would keep his commandments, “I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely.”—Lev. 26:4,5

## ISRAEL’S BENEFITS

Also mentioned as blessings for Israel if they kept God’s commandments were peace, no war or invasion, elimination of fear and evil beasts, and conquest of enemies. The nation would become fruitful and multiply, and God would not only establish his covenant with them but would dwell with them. He would be their God and they would be his people. (Lev. 26:6-13) These promises were a foregleam of the blessings of Christ’s kingdom, when all mankind will be invited to keep God’s commandments and receive the same blessings. They will not have any evil beast—in particular, Satan—as a roaring lion stalking them, and they will be able to conquer the weaknesses of their flesh as great enemies. There will be peace, no more war, no more fear, and they will have freedom from the bondage of death.

## MECHANIZED FARMING

In today's modern world, even though God has permitted knowledge and learning to increase (Dan. 12:4), the want of sufficient food continues as a distressing problem. It is estimated that 50% of the people on earth are undernourished. Famine and starvation continue to claim millions of lives every year. The continual increase in the world's population adds to the woes stemming from this deficiency in our societies. This is in spite of the great advancement made in the last hundred years to keep pace with the need for food.

Many of these advancements have been the result of the increase of knowledge, of which mechanized farming is one example. This approach requires capital investment, which the Western world can afford, but which the farmers of Asia and Africa cannot. The inventions which made possible mechanized farming were the plow and reaper in 1837 and 1831 respectively. John Deere, the inventor of the steel plow, and Cyrus McCormick, the inventor of the reaper, both started large factories to make these basic farming implements. Other mechanized farming equipment was invented and manufactured, but it was not until the invention of the tractor and the gasoline-powered engine, that mechanized farming reduced the labor of farming. These inventions, if made available to the whole world, would increase the food supply.

## **LAND AND WATER**

Much of earth's land cannot be used for agriculture because it is desert (no rain), or frozen (Arctic and Antarctica), or is a mountainous wilderness. In recent years the world has become aware of a global warming, caused by an increase in certain gas components in the air, chiefly carbon dioxide. This warming has been of great concern to many scientists, who predict disastrous increases of desert areas and melting of the ice in the Arctic and Antarctic to cause flooding of certain coastal areas. The concerns about disaster have not materialized, but an increase in tillable land in the far north and far south has occurred. Likewise, the discovery of water aquifers in desert areas has made possible the use of such land for farming.

Water is essential to successful farming, and in regions where there is a scarcity of rain, a supply of water for irrigation solves the problem. There is an abundant supply of water in the oceans, but the salt content prevents its direct use for irrigation. Today, such water can be treated by

a process called ‘reverse osmosis,’ and the bulk of the salt separated from the water to make it useable for irrigation. Other techniques are available, but all require money for equipment, power, and transportation.

An interesting, true story illustrates how the economics interfere with the use of such systems: In an arid part of Texas, a large corporate farm decided to install a million dollar ‘reverse osmosis unit’ to treat brackish water available in the area. The company manufacturing the equipment received an urgent call from the corporation saying, “Cancel the order!” When asked why, they answered, “It’s raining here.” In God’s kingdom, rain will be made available for all such arid regions, to permit their full use for agriculture.

## **COMBATting CROP SPOILERS**

All farmers know their crops can face the hazards of insect infestation, and weeds choking the plants. Other factors may cause a poor crop yield or stunt growth. In the past one hundred years, herbicides and pesticides have been developed to help solve both the weed and insect problems. The public is wary of these control methods, being concerned about the chemical residues on plants. This has led many people to purchase organically grown crops that use neither control method as a safeguard to health, even though such products may cost more.

Recently, much research has been done on the genes of all living organisms, and has been applied mainly to plants. Plants that are disease and insect resistant have been developed by manipulating their genes. Again, the public has become wary of genetically manipulated plants, even though such research has led to better crops in the way of yields and nutrition. In order to obtain a better grasp of the situation, we are reprinting a question and answer interview of Dr. Robert Goldberg, UCLA molecular biologist, published in the *Los Angeles Times* on Sunday, September 2, 2001. The interview was published as follows:

“UCLA molecular biologist Robert B. Goldberg wants to understand in plants what stem-cell researchers want to understand in humans: How the undifferentiated molecules of a seed develop from nearly identical dabs into highly specialized plant parts. A decade ago, his pioneering process for turning off a plant’s ability to pollinate led to new, higher-yielding hybrids. Now, Goldberg’s lab, in partnership with other university researchers, is poring over plant DNA in a quest to find the

genes necessary to assemble seeds from the raw material of life. He spoke recently about why his own research—and that of human geneticists—is controversial.

**“Question:** The battle over stem-cell research lately has focused on religious and ethical notions of when life begins. Your work modifying plant life has sparked its own backlash. Why the anxiety over genetically modifying life?

**“Answer:** There’s something mystical about nature. Plants have been designed by nature, and we shouldn’t alter nature. For some, it’s God’s plan.

**“Question:** But hasn’t man altered the world inexorably from the first time somebody stuck a kernel of corn into the ground?

**“Answer:** Absolutely! Food is an easy target, because in the West, we don’t really need genetically engineered food. We can produce most of the food we need by conventional means.

“That does not mean that we don’t need an abundance of food to feed the millions of people still starving around the world today, let alone the 10 billion people who are going to be on the face of this earth in the next 50 years. That is a daunting task, and we’re going to have to do it on a shrinking amount of agricultural space unless we want to tear down every forest, ... If we want to be able to grow the best plants that are optimized for human health and for human nutrition, we have to use the absolute best technology, which includes genetic manipulation, something mankind has been doing through selection and cross-breeding for ... years.

“For affluent Westerners—who don’t have to worry about standing in line for food, who use only 10% of their disposable income on food, who can afford to pay \$4 a pound for organic tomatoes—food is not much of an issue. We’re not faced with the kinds of choices that someone in Africa or Asia, or in parts of Latin America are forced to face: 80% of their disposable income goes for food, and not having food and not producing a crop is a matter of life or death.

**“Question:** Do we suffer from tunnel vision?

**“Answer:** The opponents of genetically modified (GM) foods don’t make the scientific connection. The exact same technology that we’re

using for plants we're using for medicine. When someone takes a drug that keeps him alive, that drug—tPA, insulin, growth hormone—was probably created with the exact gene-splicing technology. People will never argue that we shouldn't make gene-spliced drugs. Yet, genetic engineering of plants could potentially save millions of lives, in parts of the world that depend on the latest technology in order to be able to live on a daily basis. Will genetically engineered plants eliminate starvation and hunger? No. But it's one tool in the toolbox that we need to be able to use.

**“Question:** What about the environmental or health risks of genetically modified foods?

**“Answer:** There's not one case, not one example, not one shred of credible scientific evidence indicating that anything that we've done in the manipulation of plant material or the making of crops has been harmful to humans. This technology is old technology. Genetically engineered plants have been around for 15 years or more. We're talking about herbicide-resistant (Monsanto's Roundup Ready) soybeans. We're talking about insect-resistant corn and cotton. They've been tested and retested. I don't think any plants on earth have been under more scrutiny than these plants. There's absolutely no question about it—as opposed to any of the supplements that you can buy at a natural foods store, which have never been tested, are completely unregulated and you have no idea what active ingredients they contain.

**“Question:** What of the worry of creating a Brave New World of super-insects and super-weeds that resist all forms of insecticide or herbicide? Doesn't the current decline of the usefulness of many antibiotics prove a proscriptive warning? In other words, technological solutions don't always provide absolute solutions.

**“Answer:** I think that antibiotics provide a good illustration. If someone had said at the time of the discovery of penicillin, 'Oh you have an antibiotic and it destroys that particular bacteria, therefore, we might get resistance in humans, so we're never going to use that to be able to cure human beings,' look at how many millions and millions of people would be dead today; and how much suffering we would have had because that antibiotic wasn't used. I think one can make a similar analogy with GM foods. It's just the first step of being able to use these

technologies to help people. As with antibiotics, you learn. You learn that it is overprescribed, and you have to learn how to manage it.

**“Question:** What lessons can we learn from stem-cell research?

**“Answer:** I think the real issue is: Do we want to be exploring the unknown? That’s what scientists do. We ask how the real world works in the biological or physical sense. To understand the process of differentiation, whether it’s how a little seed develops into an oak tree or how an egg and sperm unite and develop into an incredible human being, is a process of knowledge-seeking. We’re nowhere near understanding this process. Maybe we’ll understand it a thousand years from now. Maybe we’ll understand it a hundred years from now. But it can only be learned by studying stem cells.

**“Question:** So all the talk about cloning humans or replacement parts is what?

**“Answer:** Hype, if you’re talking about a new liver, a new heart, a new kidney. Sure, maybe 50 years from now we’ll do those things, but, right now, the research is more about how stem cells form a line that makes, for example, skin in a mammal. And that question is very similar to the questions we address in my lab. How does a plant make a leaf? How does it make a root? These are very legitimate, important, ground-breaking, frontier questions. These are the mysteries man has been investigating with primitive tools and complex tools for all of our existence. And stem-cell researchers are just trying to take our understanding of the process of development one step further.

**“Question:** Nearly everyone agrees that great strides in medicine are on the horizon, due to stem-cell research. So why all the fear?

**“Answer:** It’s the perception that human beings are different.

**“Question:** Aren’t we?

**“Answer:** In a social context, yes. In terms of intelligence, we absolutely are. But in terms of biology there’s not that much that’s special about us, other than perhaps our complex brains. In terms of developmental biology, stem cells from a human basically do the same things as stem cells from a mouse or a cow or a pig or a goat.

**“Question:** So the fear is?

**“Answer:** Of playing God. I think it’s important to respect those fears, but it’s also a slippery slope. Things that were considered unethical 30 years ago, like invitro fertilization, are now well accepted. Still, one has to separate studying stem cells to understand how they have the capacity to form different organs and tissues and cells in the human body from using those stem cells to make organs or clones. We live in the era of genomics—the sequencing of the human genome, of plant genomes—and we are trying to find the basic mechanisms of disease. For example, eventually we will learn how to make better antibiotics that really might not even be antibiotics—that might prevent bacteria that cause pneumonia from even infecting us. That, in truth, is where stem-cell research is taking us.

**“Question:** What about cloning?

**“Answer:** I think people are afraid that we’re going to have this super-human race.

**“Question:** Eugenics?

**“Answer:** Exactly. And that’s an important issue. Nevertheless, it’s important to point out that we do clone human beings. They’re called twins and triplets, and quadruplets, and sextuplets. But they’re not the same human being. They interact with their environments in very different ways, and they have their own unique potential. So, I think the kinds of fears that one thinks about in terms of building a super-race are based on non-science.

“That said, I can see certain circumstances where people might want to clone, not themselves, but maybe to have stem cells that have the same genetic constitution as themselves. What could be better than to be able to replace a liver that has given out with a new liver? What could be better than having someone who has children stay alive rather than having them suffer some premature death because of kidney failure or heart failure? I think that in 50 or 100 years—I can’t put a time framework on it—people will look back and say it was a good decision to clone.

**“Question:** Now that we’ve sequenced the human genome, what more do we have to learn about genes?

**“Answer:** There are many genes in us and in plants and in other creatures that are duplicated and tripled, and there are genes that compensate for another gene when it’s lost. What we don’t really know

is how a lot of these genes work together; that's one of the great problems many of us are exploring. How do thousands of genes work together to make a plant or make an oak tree or make a human being? Our cells work as one; all the genes in that cell work as one. There's not a single one of them that's working by itself.

**“Question:** So no gene is an island?

**“Answer:** I think all complex organisms function holistically. We can understand how single genes work. We can understand how several genes work together. But these things work together with millions of proteins and millions of other things, and we haven't even begun to grapple with the complexity of how one single cell works in its totality, let alone the trillions of cells in a human body. There will be new rules that will surprise all of us, and these things are going to come out of basic research, which is why basic research is so exciting.”

## **REMOVAL OF THE CURSE**

Getting a better understanding of the complex and intricate design of all living organisms through our knowledge of genes should make us stand in awe of God's great wisdom and power! Will genetic manipulation of plants be used by God to get better plants, better yields, more fruitage, and better nutrition in his kingdom? Only time will tell. We can expect that he who designed the complex plants in the first place, could well improve his design in the future. We cannot lose sight of the fact that when man was condemned to death, the earth was cursed. God said to Adam:

“Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field.” (Gen. 3:17,18) The removal of this curse is promised, “There shall be no more curse.” (Rev. 22:3) This will be of great aid to agriculture because much of the gene manipulation and the use of herbicides and insecticides is because of the ‘curse,’ trying to get around the interference that the curse causes in making the earth yield its increase.

We can be sure that God will use every means available to accomplish his purpose, and that the earth, indeed, will ‘yield her increase.’ This is only a part of the blessing God will have for all mankind in his kingdom. May praise be to him forevermore!

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## A Time for Building

*Key Verse: “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee.”  
—Isaiah 60:1*

*Selected Scriptures:  
Isaiah 60:1-3;  
61:1-4*

**THE GRANDEST GIFT THAT** the Heavenly Father could have bestowed upon the human family was the giving of his own beloved Son, Jesus Christ. He was a shining light to Israel, as well as the whole human family. The full significance of his light, however, will not be manifested until he reigns in power and great glory with his faithful bride in his future kingdom of truth and righteousness.

Jesus’ presence and earthly ministry was a light which stood in marked contrast to the prevailing conditions of darkness that had befallen mankind because of disobedience to the laws of God. Isaiah describes the condition as one of darkness, but he also points forward to the hope in Jesus and his ministry of redemption and reconciliation. Continuing, he writes: “The darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.”—Isa. 60:2,3

The prophet portrays the wonderful work that Jesus was commissioned to do for the world when he writes, “The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”—Isa. 61:1-3

Many centuries later Jesus turned to this prophecy when he arrived in his hometown of Nazareth to preach. He applied it as a reference to himself, as well as the work that he was sent to accomplish. “He came to

Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias [Isaiah]. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written.” (Luke 4:16,17) He then recited the words of the prophet to his own townspeople. When he had finished reading the passage from the scroll, he rolled it up and handed it back to the attendant in charge. All eyes were on him as he proclaimed to them, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.” (Luke 4:21) Their response was one of wonderment at the inspiring words that he spoke.

Our Lord’s ministry and sacrifice was a turning point in the plan of God for the reconciliation of the sins of the human family. It was a time for rebuilding. (Isa. 61:4) The ritual of killing sacrificial animals as part of the religious ceremonies of Israel had served merely to illustrate the need for blood to be shed to satisfy Divine justice on behalf of sin. These types were now being replaced with the more meaningful sacrifice of our Lord Jesus.

The real rebuilding process, however, will be accomplished during the future kingdom of righteousness. At that time our Lord, together with his faithful followers, will share in bringing blessings to all the families of the earth. Then the true light will shine brilliantly, and end earth’s weary night of sin and darkness.

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## Seek the LORD

***Key Verse: “Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.”***

***—Isaiah 55:6***

***Selected Scripture:***

***Isaiah 55:1-3, 5-9***

**IN THE PREVIOUS LESSON** Isaiah prophesied concerning our Lord Jesus as a light who would arise and be a great blessing to his people Israel, as well as to the whole world of mankind, to be realized in due time. In this Key Verse the prophet makes a special appeal to mankind to seek the Lord and the provisions of his wondrous grace.

During the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry, and the Gospel Age following, there have been earnest Christians responding to his message. “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” (I John 5:10,11) A call has gone out to select from among these Christians a faithful little flock who would share with him in the grand work of his future kingdom. The Apostle Paul confirms this when he writes, “To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life.”—Rom. 2:7

Isaiah looks down the stream of time when our Lord will be reigning in power and great glory, with his faithful bride class. He describes symbolically the wonderful features of Christ’s kingdom of truth and righteousness, and its work of recovery to uplift and bless the whole groaning creation from the ravages of sin and death.

We are now nearing the time foretold so long ago, when the world of mankind will be blessed as Isaiah has written, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” (Isa. 55:1) Jesus had a conversation with a Samaritan woman who had come to Jacob’s well to draw water. (John 4:5-15) He told her about

‘living’ waters, and that whoever drank of those waters would never thirst. The water he spoke about was like a well springing up into everlasting life. This is the water of life offered to the world by the church in Christ’s thousand-year kingdom. “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”—Rev. 22:17

Isaiah also used the symbols of wine and milk in this prophecy of the kingdom. Milk is used to suggest nourishment and blessing, and the wine is used to represent the blood of Christ which seals the covenant. Life-giving blessings will become available under the administration of the New Covenant, and will be offered freely and without charge to those who desire and value them.

The glorified church will be the Divine channel for the outpouring of the mercies and blessings to those who seek the Lord. God promised to David, “When thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.” (II Sam. 7:12,13) These blessings are associated with the New Covenant as Isaiah prophesies, “Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.”—Isa. 55:3

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# True Worship

***Key Verse: “Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?”  
—Isaiah 58:6***

***Selected Scripture:  
Isaiah 58:3-9***

**ISAIAH LOOKED FORWARD** in the last lesson to the time when the human family would seek the Lord with desire, and that God would fulfill his promises to them by giving them a New Covenant, even the ‘sure mercies of David.’ Now he considers ‘true worship’ in the spirit of those promises.

The prophet is dealing here with a time when the sins of the children of Israel were many. They gave God lip service and made a pretense of worshipping him, but they made no effort to repent for their offences. Fasting was a religious practice among the Jews at that time and they thought that observation of it would gain them Divine favor. When this failed to work they

wondered why.

God instructed Isaiah to show the people of Israel their transgressions and sins, and their lack of understanding of his will for them. Their attitude, however, was, “Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours. Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.”—Isa. 58:3,4

The Israelites oppressed their workers, and were taking advantage of their own position of power to treat them unjustly. Their quarrels profaned the fast which inevitably led to strife and contention. Neither did they appreciate God’s care and providence toward them, nor did they understand that they, as a nation, were a typical people. They sought to obey the letter of the Law, while lacking its spirit. They failed to see that

the important thing was not the afflicting of their souls, nor the bowing of their heads like a bulrush, and neither was it the spreading of sackcloth and ashes.

The spirit of the fast of which Isaiah wrote was that the children of Israel recognize and practice the principles of love, kindness, and generosity toward all. To merely observe the outward form, or letter of the fast, was not acceptable to God. “Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out [afflicted, *Marginal Translation*] to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?”—vss. 6,7

This was the spirit in which our Lord Jesus went forth preaching during his earthly ministry. (Isa. 61:1-3) He went forth with God’s blessing together with a message of hope and encouragement to the meek and brokenhearted, as well as the promise to free mankind from its greatest enemy, death. He gave the people beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for those who mourn, and the garment of praise for the heavyhearted. This was done that God might be glorified, rather than himself.

Although this lesson was addressed to the children of Israel to learn true worship a long time ago, it nevertheless points forward to the time when all mankind must learn to worship God in spirit and in truth.

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# A New Creation

***Key Verse: “I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.”  
—Isaiah 65:17***

***Selected Scripture:  
Isaiah 65:17-24***

**THE HEAVENS AND THE** earth that Isaiah speaks about are not the literal heavens and earth because they were created for the human family and will abide forever. (Eccles. 1:4) In the Bible many symbols are used to express thoughts and emphasize certain lessons. In our Key Verse the prophet uses these to identify the social and religious order of earth’s society. The old heavens and earth would thus represent the present order, and the new ‘heavens and earth’ that are yet under the creative hand of

God represent Christ’s kingdom that will replace the old order.

God has allowed imperfect men to govern themselves during the long centuries of history, a history dominated by pride and selfishness, and written in blood. Christ’s thousand-year kingdom of righteousness and blessings will replace fallen man’s rule, and will sweep away all injustice and unrighteousness. The prophet has emphasized that the former things will neither be remembered nor come into the mind once the new heavens and new earth are completed and in power.

Those who will share with our Lord Jesus in this new kingdom order are being selected during the present Gospel Age. It is a special faith class that is being called. The new spiritual ruling power will be our Lord, together with his faithful bride. They will have the power and authority to put down all evil, and hold out everlasting life freely to those who are obedient.

Isaiah continues, “Be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.” (Isa. 65:18,19) Under the administration of that blessed kingdom every person, including those who will be raised from the grave, will have full opportunity to

obey the laws of God, and never have to die. It will surely be a grand time of joy and rejoicing among the people, with no more tears, sorrows, or death. (Rev. 21:1-4) The prophet's reference to Jerusalem points to the people of Israel and symbolizes the wonderful work that will be accomplished during that kingdom reign. Israel, as God's own typical people, thus represents on a grander scale the whole world of mankind brought together at the end of the Millennial Age—God's own perfected human family.

In that day, as the prophecy continues, no one will die that has not reached maturity, nor will anyone die because of old age. The incorrigible will have a one-hundred-year trial. (Isa. 65:20) The trial for life will be fair, and exacting. Those who have been given ample probation and are proven unfaithful will be considered as mere children when compared to the obedient ones who will receive everlasting life. The sinner that is accursed will be cut off from any further blessings. The individual rights of property will be recognized, and all will receive the just benefits of their labor.

“It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” (vs. 24) Under the administration of the new heavens and new earth God will be mindful of all of his human family's interests even before they ask.

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# The Victories and Failures of Israel

**IN THE FIRST** article of this series we learned that all the subject matter of the Bible is related to its one main theme, which is the redemption and recovery of the human race from sin and death. We observed briefly the manner in which this theme is introduced early in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. It was there that God made the statement in the Garden of Eden that the “seed” of the woman would bruise the serpent’s head.—Gen. 3:15

We noticed also that the idea of Divine blessing reaching the human race through a ‘seed’ was reiterated and enlarged upon in a promise which God made to Abraham, saying to him that his seed would become the channel of blessing to all mankind. We discovered also that much of the historical data recorded in the first five books of the Bible, commonly known as the *Pentateuch*, is related to the descendants of Abraham.

In continuing this brief examination of the books of the Bible in order to get a general idea of its structural arrangement, we find that the next twelve books are largely historical, and also concerned principally with the descendants of Abraham. These twelve books are: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, I and II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

## **THE BOOK OF JOSHUA**

The Book of Joshua is so named because its narratives have to do with the period of time when Joshua was the recognized and Divinely appointed leader of the Israelites, as the descendants of Abraham were called. Joshua was the successor of Moses. Moses, it will be recalled, was used by God to lead this people out of Egypt, and to give them God’s Law.

The destination of the Israelites when leaving Egypt was the land of Canaan. This was the land which God promised to Abraham, and to his

seed after him. Moses died just before the Israelites entered into this promised land, and it was at this point that Joshua, by the command of God through Moses, became the successor of this renowned leader and lawgiver.—Deut. 31:7,8,14; 34:9

When Joshua assumed the leadership of Israel, the nation stood virtually at the border of Canaan, but in order to enter the land it was necessary to cross the Jordan River. God intervened to make this possible by holding back the upper waters of the river long enough for the riverbed below to be emptied. This enabled the people to cross over on dry ground.—Josh. 3:12-14

## **THE TWELVE TRIBES**

It was at the death of Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, that God began to deal with this people as a group, or nation. Jacob's twelve sons were the heads of what became known as the twelve tribes of Israel, Jacob's name having been changed to Israel. After the Israelites entered the promised land under the leadership of Joshua, they were confronted with the necessity of conquering the people of the land, and of dividing it equitably among the twelve tribes.

This was accomplished under the leadership of Joshua, and the manner in which this twofold task was accomplished constitutes the principal subject matter of the Book of Joshua. To appreciate these historical records as we should, however, it is essential to recognize that they are presented on a background of faith in God's promises that one day there would arise from this people the seed of promise who would lead the nation to a high pinnacle of fame and power, and in God's providence become a channel of blessing to all other nations of the earth.

The book should therefore be recognized as an inspired record, dealing with the experiences of God's people. Thus we find that God assured Joshua of his blessing, saying, "Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." (Joshua 1:9) The Lord's people today can apply this promise to themselves, and receive spiritual strength from its reassuring words.

## **THE BOOK OF JUDGES**

After the entrance into Canaan and the dividing of the land, there followed that period in Israel's history totaling 450 years which is known as the period of the judges.

The Book of Judges records the principal experiences of the nation during these centuries. The first sixteen chapters of the book are principally taken up relating the continued conquests of the promised land, for all the enemies had not been driven out prior to Joshua's death. The famous victory of Gideon over 120,000 Midianites is recorded in this book.—Judg. 8:10

The remainder of the book records various episodes of the Israelites having to do with their internal affairs—their sins, and their attempts at reformation under the leadership of one or another of the judges whom the Lord raised up to judge or deliver them from their enemies.

Apparently much of that period of time in the experience of the Israelites covered by the Book of Judges was one during which everyone did according to what seemed "right in his own eyes." (Judg. 17:6; 21:25) In other words, during that period there was no central government, and no national leader or king. The record indicates that in some cases that which seemed 'right' to the people was quite in harmony with the laws of righteousness, whereas in other cases the decisions of the people led away from God and into idolatry.

## **THE BOOK OF RUTH**

The Book of Ruth narrates an episode which properly belongs to the period of the judges. It is believed that this book was originally a part of the Book of Judges. It tells the story of an Israelite and his wife, Elimelech and Naomi, who left the land of Israel in a time of famine to dwell in the land of Moab. In Moab, Elimelech died. His two sons married Moabish women, but later they died, leaving Naomi and her daughters-in-law to take care of themselves.

Naomi decided that she would return to the land of Israel, and Ruth, although not an Israelite, embraced the God of Israel and went with her mother-in-law. Arriving in Israel, through the overruling providence of God, Ruth became the wife of an Israelite of the tribe of Judah, and it was through the lineage of this family that Jesus was born.—Luke 3:32

The story of Naomi and Ruth is one of the most touching from the standpoint of human interest that has ever been written. Its main value among the other books of the Bible is to establish a connecting link in the genealogy of Jesus. This highlights the fact we have already stated; namely, that the entire Bible is related to the theme of redemption centered in Jesus, as are even its historical records.

## **I AND II SAMUEL**

The material now contained in the two Books of Samuel was regarded as a single work in the Hebrew Canon. Probably the division was made by translators for the sake of convenience in study. Samuel was the last of the judges of Israel who served the nation during the period of the judges. His birth in answer to prayer, and his training as a servant of God under Eli are recorded; as are also his many years of faithful service.

Samuel is one of the outstanding characters of the Old Testament. He was not only a judge in Israel, but one of the Lord's holy and inspired prophets. When the Apostle Peter referred to the "times of restitution of all things" which were to follow the Second Coming of Christ, and asserted that this glorious time of the future blessing of mankind had been foretold by the mouth of all God's holy prophets, he specifically mentions Samuel as one who had voiced this theme song of deliverance.—Acts 3:19-25

While Samuel was serving as judge and prophet in Israel, the people decided that they wanted to become as other nations and have a king rule over them. They presented their case to Samuel who in turn took it to the Lord in prayer. The prophet was greatly disturbed over this desire of the people, but he was comforted by God with the assurance, "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me."—I Sam. 8:7

The Lord instructed Samuel to accede to the demands of the people and to anoint a king over the nation. The Lord indicated that Saul was to be their first king, and Samuel anointed Saul. Saul ruled well for a time, then lost his humility and began following a course contrary to the will of God.

Meanwhile, the shepherd boy, David, enters into the story, and Samuel was instructed by God to anoint him king in place of Saul. Samuel did this, but David made no effort to assume the rulership of Israel until after the death of King Saul. The two Books of Samuel relate in considerable

detail the very interesting experiences of Saul and David, and fill in the history of this people from whom the seed of promise was later to be born.

## **I AND II KINGS**

These two Books of the Kings were also but one book in the Hebrew Canon. They pick up the history of the period of the kings approximately at the time of David's death, and carry it through until the kingdom of Judah was overthrown by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and the nation taken into captivity.—II Kings 25:1-7

Solomon, a son of David, was the third king of Israel. Through his wisdom and initiative the nation prospered and reached the highest pinnacle of its glory. Solomon's own glory and wisdom became renowned throughout the then known world. The Queen of Sheba heard about it and traveled all the way to Palestine to see for herself, and was so impressed she reported that the half had not been told.—I Kings 10:7

To create this wealth and glory for himself and for the government, Solomon levied heavy taxes upon the people, and after his death his successor was petitioned to relieve the people of this burden. He refused to do so, and as a result there was a rebellion of ten of the tribes which resulted in a division within the nation.

The ten tribes became known as the kingdom of Israel, while the two tribes which remained loyal to their king, Solomon's son, were known as the kingdom of Judah. The two Books of the Kings record the succession of kings up to the time when both dynasties were overthrown. The first to fall was the kingdom of Israel, which succumbed under pressure from the Assyrians, the people of Israel being taken captive to Assyria. About 134 years afterward the kingdom of Judah fell, and the people who had been loyal to this dynasty were taken captive to Babylon.

The reason for the fall of both Israel and Judah was their sin. As recorded in the books of Moses, God made a covenant with this nation in which he promised to protect them against their enemies. This protection was conditional upon their obedience to him. But the kings of Israel, and also of Judah, with few exceptions, were wicked, leading the people into the worship of false gods. After this had continued long enough to demonstrate that there was no hope for reform, God withdrew his protection, and the fall of both kingdoms soon followed.

## **THE THRONE OF THE LORD**

The Israelites rebelled against God's arrangements to govern them by means of judges which he raised up in times of need, and when they asked that they be given a king to rule over them, their demand was granted. The Lord overruled this to make a very interesting illustration for us of a much greater kingdom in which Jesus would be the king.

To make this picture, the idea was conveyed to the kingdom of Israel right from the start that the authority they exercised was merely as the representatives of God. We read concerning Solomon, for instance, that he "sat on the throne of the Lord as king instead of David his father." (I Chron. 29:23) This was true of all those kings. Zedekiah was the last. It was concerning his overthrow, and what it signified in the outworking of the Divine plan, that the Prophet Ezekiel wrote:

"Thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him."—Ezek. 21:25-27

The 'it' referred to in this prophecy, concerning which the prophet says, 'it shall be no more,' was the Divine rulership exercised through the successive kings of Israel. In the case of most of those kings this rulership existed only nominally, but God was patient, and not until he permitted Nebuchadnezzar to overthrow Zedekiah and take him captive to Babylon, did he cause the pronouncement to be made, 'It shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.'

This is another very significant reference to the promised Messiah, or the seed referred to in the promise to Abraham. We mention it here as an illustration of the fact that even in the historical books of the Bible this hope of coming deliverance for mankind is set forth, and that the events themselves are related to this main theme of the Bible.

## **I AND II CHRONICLES**

After the two Books of the Kings, come I and II Chronicles. In the Hebrew the two Books of the Chronicles are entitled, The Acts or Annals of the Days, and are a single work. These are also historical books, and are largely supplemental to I and II Kings. They are believed to have been

written by Ezra, a scribe among the Israelites, either during the time they were held captive in Babylon, or else after they were allowed to return to their own land.

The purpose of these books may have been to create and maintain a national spirit among the Israelites, and to remind them of their dependence upon God in view of the discouraging circumstances through which they were passing. God's overruling providence in the affairs of the nation is frequently emphasized throughout these books.

These are more general in scope than the two Books of the Kings in that they begin with Creation and give the historical background of the nation by genealogies all the way to David, and include the account of his reign. The record is continued to Zedekiah, the last of Judah's kings, and emphasizes that with him, as with the other wicked kings, his loss of power and prestige was because of his sin.

## **EZRA AND NEHEMIAH**

It is claimed by some that the Book of Ezra properly is a part of the Book of Chronicles, and that the Book of Nehemiah could well be called the second Book of Ezra. The last chapter of Chronicles tells of the Israelites being taken captive to Babylon, and of their release seventy years later by Cyrus, the Mede, who by then had conquered Babylon.

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah record the experiences of the Israelites in connection with their return to the land of their fathers. They tell of the faithful service of these two servants of God whose names are given to the books in leading and governing the people during those difficult years.

An Israelite named Daniel was one of the captives in Babylon, and the Lord used him mightily as one of his prophets. Through him the Lord gave a prophecy to indicate the time when the promised Messiah would present himself to Israel. This measurement was to be a period of 483 years from the time a decree would be issued authorizing the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its walls, "until Messiah the Prince." (Dan. 9:25) One of the principal purposes served by the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah is to establish the date of this decree.

In this brief summary of the contents of the various books of the Bible we will not attempt to go into detail with respect to this important time

prophecy. We mention it merely to help emphasize again that every part of the Bible is, in one way or another, related to its one great theme of redemption and restoration through Christ, the promised Messiah and Deliverer.

In these two books there is also much to encourage the Lord's people even now, for they remind us of God's ability to care for his own in times of great need, and to protect them from their enemies. When the Israelites were reestablishing themselves in Palestine after seventy years of captivity in Babylon, there were many enemies in the land who tried to prevent their homecoming. But the Lord was with his people, even as he is with those today who put their trust in him.

## **THE BOOK OF ESTHER**

This book is also historical in nature, although it records the details of but one episode in the experiences of the Israelites while they were in a foreign land. It might be more proper to call this a storybook. The principal characters in the story are Ahasuerus, a king in Persia; Mordecai, one of the captive Jews, but highly placed in the king's court; Esther, his cousin and ward; and a villain named Haman, who, because he was slighted by Mordecai, plotted his death and the destruction of all the Israelites in the land.

At the suggestion of Mordecai, Esther succeeded in gaining the confidence of the king, and he took her to be his wife and queen. This placed her in a position, when the proper opportunity presented itself, to lay before the king the dastardly plot of Haman, his trusted servant, to destroy her people. She did this very cleverly, with the result that Haman was hanged on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai, and the Israelites throughout the land were saved.—Esther 7:9,10

During the many centuries, and beginning with Abraham, Satan, the great enemy of God and of his people, made repeated attempts to destroy the people of God, thinking, no doubt, that thus he would thwart the Divine purpose reflected in God's promises pertaining to the seed. The incident recorded in the Book of Esther is one of these. The facts could have been stated very briefly, but the Lord favored his people by presenting them in one of the greatest human-interest stories ever written.

This is the only book in the Bible in which the name God does not appear. It is believed by some scholars that the writer purposely omitted

this sacred name in order that the Israelites, when reading it, could give free vent to their joy over such a signal victory, without appearing to be irreverent. This deliverance is commemorated to this day by the Jews in what they call the Feast of Purim. At this feast, the Book of Esther is read. When the name Haman comes up there is said to be hissing and other indications of disapproval, and at the conclusion of the reading, hilarious rejoicing.

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*Dawn Bible Students Association*

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## Need of Patience

*“Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.”*  
—*Hebrews 10:36,37*

**THE LORD’S PEOPLE IN** every age have had need of patience. One reason is that they have always been surrounded by evil influences which have warred against them in their desire to serve the Lord and to be governed by the Divine principles of righteousness. Our text declares that it is after we have done the will of God that we have need of patience in order to receive the promise. The ‘will of God’ referred to here is evidently the presentation of ourselves in consecration to serve the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul, and

strength. The making of such a consecration is only the beginning. It is in the daily carrying out of its terms that we ‘have need of patience.’

It is one thing to tell the Lord that we love him, and that we desire above all things else to serve and please him, but it is quite another thing to demonstrate, by our every day faithfulness under adverse circumstances and conditions, that we are really sincere in our determination to serve him, regardless of the cost. Not only are we surrounded with much which tends to hold us back from serving the Lord, but our own fallen flesh is out of harmony with the stand which we have taken in our heart and mind. Only from the Lord, and from his people, may we expect help and encouragement to continue on faithfully and patiently in carrying out the terms of our consecration.

### THE ELEMENT OF TIME

Added to the fact of our own imperfections, and the adverse and unholy influences with which we are surrounded, is the seemingly long time which the Lord permits us to wait for the fulfillment of his promises. It is this time element in God’s dealings with his people which the apostle seems primarily to be emphasizing in our text. ‘Ye have need of patience’

he says, ‘for yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.’

This is in part a quotation from the prophecy of Habakkuk, chapter 2, verses 2 and 3, in which the Lord tells the prophet to write down a certain vision “upon tables.” The Lord then asks the prophet to “wait” for the vision; for while it may seem long in being fulfilled, it would not actually tarry. In our text Paul applies this prophecy to the Second Coming of Christ. He uses it to assure the Hebrew brethren that it would be only a ‘little while’ before the Lord would return and they would receive the fulfillment of the exceeding great and precious promises which had been given to them.

The ‘little while’ mentioned by Paul proved to be nearly two thousand years, yet the apostle was not wrong; for compared with eternity this was indeed but a short time. It was a little while also from God’s standpoint, to whom a thousand years are but as yesterday, and as a watch in the night when it is past. (Ps. 90:4) Besides, none of the Lord’s people have ever waited longer for the fulfillment of his Messianic promises than the span of their natural life. For some, thousands of years have passed since they put their trust in the promises of God, yet most of this time they have been unconscious in the sleep of death, and have not been aware of the passing of time. From this standpoint, the time has been short for all those who have put their trust in the Lord.

## **ANCIENT WORTHIES TESTED**

The Lord has tested the patience and faith of all his people from the standpoint of time. Many long years elapsed from the time God first spoke to Abraham concerning a ‘seed’ before Isaac was born. This was a severe test of Abraham’s faith and patience. In some respects his faith failed and he made plans of his own to carry out the purpose of God. First, he adopted Eliezer, his steward, and thought to make him the promised heir. In this connection Abraham said to the Lord, “Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.”—Gen. 15:2,3

The Lord did not accept this arrangement, and he said to Abraham, “This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.” (Gen. 15:4) While this refusal of the Lord to accept Eliezer as the promised seed must have tested Abraham’s faith

and patience, he accepted the Lord's will in the matter. However, a little later, acting on the Lord's assertion that the seed must be one who would come from his own loins, he took Hagar, the Egyptian bondmaid, to wife, and Ishmael was born to him. Here, he knew, was a son that was his own flesh and blood and surely the Lord would accept him.

Again Abraham was disappointed and his faith was tested, for the Lord appeared to him and refused to accept Ishmael as the promised seed. He explained to Abraham that not only must he be the father of the seed, but that Sarah, not Hagar, must be the mother. (Gen. 17:15-19) In due course, as we know, God fulfilled his promise. The promised seed, the son of Abraham and Sarah, was born.

Even so, Abraham still had a long wait before Isaac was grown to manhood's estate, and when he was grown, God asked him to offer his beloved son, the one born as a miracle child, as a burnt offering. God's providences must surely have seemed strange to Abraham. Nevertheless he obeyed, believing that if it were necessary, God would raise Isaac from the dead. It was as a result of Abraham's faithfulness in this experience that God confirmed his promise with his oath, and it became what we refer to as the oathbound covenant.

However, Abraham continued to wait for the complete fulfillment of God's promise to bless all the families of the earth through his seed. He waited, in fact, until he died. Together with all the other Ancient Worthies, Abraham died in faith, not having received the fulfillment of the Messianic promises God made to him, yet he continued patiently, and by faith, in his course of loyalty to God.

## **MOSES TESTED**

Time was an important factor in God's dealings with Moses, the great lawgiver of Israel. Through his mother, who cared for him in the palace of Pharaoh, Moses learned that he was a member of the oppressed Israelitish people, and at the age of forty he undertook to do something to bring about their deliverance. God's providences hindered Moses' plans, and he found it necessary to flee for his life; and for forty years he remained in seclusion as keeper of his father-in-law's flocks.

In reading this interesting story of Moses' life perhaps we do not consider this forty years as seriously as we should. Few of the Lord's people now spend more than a total of forty years serving him.

Perhaps many of us would lose our patience and become discouraged, if over a period of forty years we saw no special evidence of the Lord's overruling providence in our lives.

This was, however, only the beginning of Moses' testing. From the burning bush to his death there was another long and weary forty years during which, while the promised land was near, he was not permitted to enter. During this third period of forty years he had many evidences that the Lord was with him and was blessing him, yet they were difficult years. Doubtless many times during these weary years he cried out in his heart, "How long, O Lord, how long?"

## **DANIEL TESTED**

In the prophecy of Daniel there is much to indicate that he was severely tested from the standpoint of time. Like all of the Ancient Worthies, he also died without receiving the full answer to his questions as to when his people would be delivered and the Messianic kingdom be established. Finally he was told, "Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days."—Dan. 12:13

Daniel was one of the Hebrew captives taken to Babylon when King Zedekiah was overthrown. He understood that this captivity was to last for seventy years, but he was given a vision in which a period of "two thousand and three hundred days" was mentioned. (Dan. 8:13-15) While he did not understand all that this implied, he evidently sensed that it was a reference to a much longer period of time than seventy years. And he was apparently disturbed by it, wondering if the time of the captivity was to be extended.

An eloquent and earnest prayer of Daniel to the Lord asked forgiveness be extended to his people, and that Divine punishment upon them might not be continued. In response to this prayer, Daniel was given another vision in which a period of sixty-nine weeks "unto Messiah the Prince" was mentioned, and an additional week during which God's covenant would be confirmed "with many."—ch. 9:3-27

Seventy weeks doubtless seemed much shorter to Daniel than twenty-three hundred days, yet, not understanding either of these visions as we are privileged to do today, he was left with the necessity of maintaining his faith and patience while he waited for God to deliver his people and fulfill his Messianic promises. God used Daniel mightily as a prophet,

and he was firmly convinced of the sureness of God's promises, yet it was necessary for him to walk by faith, and not by sight. He knew that in God's due time "Michael" would "stand up," that "great prince" which would stand for the children of his people; but he doubtless wondered why, at the same time, there would be "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation." (Dan. 12:1) God's final word to him was that "the book" was to be "sealed" until the "time of the end."—vss. 4,9

## **JOHN THE BAPTIST TESTED**

John the Baptist was the last of the prophets. For thousands of years God had been promising to send the Messiah. Beginning with righteous Abel, and continuing throughout all the centuries, God's people had waited for the coming of the promised seed. They had all died without seeing the fulfillment of the Messianic promises. But now the Messiah had come, and it was the privilege of John the Baptist to announce his presence. In this announcement he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."—John 1:29

On another occasion John announced, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," meaning that the King whom the God of heaven had promised had appeared. (Matt. 3:2) Evidently John expected that Jesus would almost immediately set up his kingdom and begin to exercise his royal authority and power, first to deliver Israel from Roman bondage, and then to extend the sphere of his sovereign rule until all nations were brought under his control. Because this was not done, John later began to wonder whether or not Jesus really was the Messiah.

Evidently it was the Holy Spirit which guided John to refer to Jesus as the Lamb of God. Had he personally understood the implication of this title, he would have known that before Jesus should become the ruling king of Israel, and the world, he would have to die as the Redeemer of the people. He would have understood that "as a lamb" Jesus would be led "to the slaughter." (Isa. 53:7) In this respect, John made the same mistake as did Jesus' disciples, hence began to doubt.

John's faith was the more severely tested by his imprisonment. Having believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah and King, it would be very difficult for him to understand why the 'powers that be' would be permitted to continue their unrighteous rule. He would wonder why he, a faithful servant of the Lord, would be permitted to languish in prison. In

his quandary he sent two of his disciples to Jesus to inquire, “Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?”—Matt. 11:3

John the Baptist was in good standing with the Lord, and enjoyed a rich measure of his blessing. Indeed, few of the Lord’s people have ever been favored with such extraordinary demonstrations of Divine power, and such outstanding evidence concerning the Divine purpose for their times. John personally heard the voice from heaven witnessing to the fact that Jesus was the beloved Son of God in whom the Heavenly Father was well pleased. Upon the strength of this testimony John was courageous when confronted by his adversaries, outspoken in his message of repentance, and humble in his acknowledgment of the superiority of Jesus in the Divine plan.

Jesus said concerning John the Baptist that there was none greater “born of women.” (Matt. 11:11) Yet, because he did not fully understand all the details of the Divine plan, and particularly its time elements, his faith and patience were severely tested. Responding to his inquiry, Jesus instructed John’s two disciples to report what they had seen and heard—that the sick were being healed, the dead raised, and that the poor were having the Gospel preached to them. This was an affirmative answer to John’s question. From it he would be reassured that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah, yet John was allowed to die in prison without being given a further understanding of the Divine plan.

It was better thus! Had John been informed of all the details of the Divine plan—that Jesus would be crucified, and that more than nineteen centuries would elapse before the Messianic kingdom would actually become operative in the earth, it perhaps would have overwhelmed him. As it was, John suffered only a short time and was beheaded. As far as his consciousness is concerned, when he is awakened from the sleep of death to be one of the “princes in all the earth,” (Ps. 45:16) it will seem to him the next moment after the executioner’s axe ended his trial.

## **THE DISCIPLES TESTED**

Jesus’ disciples were also severely tested from the standpoint of time, and none of them ever fully grasped how far distant was the realization of their hopes.

Like John the Baptist, they believed that Jesus would establish his kingdom and begin at once to fulfill the many Messianic promises of the

Old Testament. It was because they thought “that the kingdom of God should immediately appear” that Jesus gave them the parable of “a certain nobleman” that went into a far country to receive a kingdom and to return.—Luke 19:11,12

Furnished with the information that Jesus, as the ‘nobleman’ in the parable, was going away and would return later to establish his kingdom, they went to him on the Mount of Olives and inquired as to the “sign” which would mark the time of his return and Second Presence. (Matt. 24:3) Jesus did not chide them for asking these questions. Indeed, he very patiently outlined many signs which today, now that we have reached the time of his presence, serve as infallible proofs of his presence (Greek - *parousia*). His reply must have seemed very indefinite to his disciples at that time. He told them that he did not know the time of his return, and admonished them to watch, that they might recognize the signs of his presence when it did become a reality.

After his resurrection, when Jesus appeared to his disciples for the last time before his ascension, they again raised the question of time. “Wilt thou at this time,” they asked, “restore again the kingdom to Israel?” His reply was, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.” (Acts 1:6,7) How their faith and patience must have been tested by this reply, and especially so when he departed from them, and a cloud received him out of their sight! They had accepted Jesus as the Messiah. He had told them that if they became his disciples, and faithfully followed him, they would share in the glory of his kingdom. But he was taken from them and crucified; while they had been convinced of his resurrection, they had seen little of him, and now he was gone.

Jesus had promised to send the Holy Spirit to comfort his disciples, and to empower them to be his witnesses, which promise was soon gloriously fulfilled. For the moment, however, they were to tarry, to wait. With them, as with all the Lord’s people, the little while of uncertain waiting loomed large in their outlook as patiently, and by faith, they continued to trust the Lord where they could not trace him.

Nor did the coming of the Holy Spirit result in a full revelation of the time features of the Divine plan. Peter came to understand that the Lord’s Second Presence would not become a reality before his death. So he

endeavored to “stir up” the “pure minds” of the Early Church, “knowing,” as he wrote, “that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me.” (II Pet. 3:1,2; 1:14) It is doubtful whether Peter understood that the kingdom was about two thousand years in the future.

Paul also knew that he would not live to see the kingdom established. But he had confidence that a “crown” was laid up for him “which the Lord, the righteous judge,” would give to him at “that day.” (II Tim. 4:8) Paul wrote as though ‘that day’ was very near. “The night is far spent, the day is at hand,” he wrote. (Rom. 13:12) And in our text, he wrote, ‘Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.’

Paul may have not realized how long that little while would be. But he knew from Habakkuk’s prophecy that the Lord would return and the kingdom would be established in God’s own due time. He knew that there would be no tarrying of the vision, even though to the waiting saints of God in every age it has seemed to tarry.

## **TESTED NOW ALSO**

The Lord’s people in this end of the age are also having their patience and faith tested from the standpoint of time. To them, as to those in previous times, the ‘vision’ has seemed to tarry. This seeming tarrying is due to the fact that now, as in the past, God continues to hold the times and seasons in his own power. He still is permitting his people to understand just enough to guide them in the doing of his will, and to make it necessary for them to “hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.”—Lam. 3:24-26

In fulfillment of his own promise, our returned Lord has served the “household” with “meat in due season.” (Luke 12:42) Thousands of the Lord’s people the world over have been reached and blessed by the glorious message of present Truth. The fact of Christ’s Second Presence is more discernible today than at any other time. The Truth of the Divine plan is itself one of the best evidences of the Master’s presence; and besides, the “sure word of prophecy” reveals it in past and current world events.—II Pet. 1:19

Throughout all the upsetting experiences of two world wars, the hopes and plans of Christianity have proved utterly futile. Its leaders have no answer for those who inquire as to the meaning of these unexpected

world events. Meanwhile, these world developments have proved the reality of the Truth. The Truth has stood the test of these chaotic and distressing years which have brought the world to the brink of ruin. More than ever, the kingdom of Christ is the only solution for the world's woes.

From the standpoint of time, the future is uncertain insofar as the church as a whole is concerned. As individuals, however, the time for each one of us is short. More than ever there is but a little while with each of us in which to make our calling and election sure. In these few years it is appropriate that we bestir ourselves and zealously make use of all the provisions of Divine providence whereby we are made ready to be united with our Heavenly Bridegroom.—Rev. 19:7

### **ACTIVITY ESSENTIAL**

Solomon wrote that “hope deferred maketh the heart sick.” (Prov. 13:12) This heart sickness has tended to discourage some from patiently continuing on in the service of the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren. But now we realize that the vision of present Truth has not tarried, that it was merely our failure to understand all its details which made it seem to tarry. This being true, we should be zealously serving the Lord in every way we can, and especially by making known the glad tidings of the kingdom.

Thousands of the Lord's people are now enjoying the richness of Christian experience in the Truth and its service as they did in the “former days” when they were first “enlightened.” (Heb. 10:32, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*) It is still true that the Lord's people in the flesh are commissioned to be the “light of the world”—the only source of the Gospel light which is in the world.—Matt. 5:14

The time for the general enlightenment of the world is in the future age. The Lord wants us to bear witness to the Gospel of the kingdom. It is by so doing that we prove our obedience to the heavenly vision of present Truth with which we have been so highly and honorably favored. If we have maintained a clear vision of the Truth we will want to make it known to others—whether they hear, or whether they turn away indifferently, or perhaps speak evil of us.

We have need of patience! It is not enough that in the past we have made a consecration to lay down our lives in the service of the Lord. That was a good and proper start, but we must continue in the way of

righteousness and sacrifice. The only way to obtain “glory and honour and immortality” is by “patient continuance in well doing.” (Rom. 2:7) Doing well as Christians consists of adding to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge self-control, and to self-control patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. (II Pet. 1:4-7) Peter explains that if these things be in us and abound, we will not be idle, nor unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord. So, by continuing to grow in grace and in knowledge, and by actively serving the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren, we will be giving “diligence” to make our “calling and election sure.” If we do these things, Peter affirms, we shall “never fall,” but will have an abundant entrance “into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”—II Pet. 1:8-11

To be diligent in doing the will of God, we have need of patience. We will need patience which will enable us to be as zealous, as energetic, and as kind and loving tomorrow, as, by God’s grace, we are endeavoring to be today. It is only those who patiently endure until they have been faithful unto death who will receive the crown of life.—Rev. 2:10

Faith and patience will carry us through a whole lifetime of doing God’s will, but we live that life only one day at a time. Our ‘little while’ of waiting for our kingdom reward need only be until tomorrow, and then, if we trust in the Lord, he will renew our strength for another day. Besides, all our days of patient devotion and service will be only a little while, especially now since we know that we are approaching the end of the age. Truly, the long nighttime of sin is now far spent, and we can rejoice in the assurance that the day is at hand.

Paul wrote, ‘Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come.’ But we can be encouraged in the knowledge that now he who was to come has come, and has not tarried. The bright shining of his presence has enlightened and cheered our hearts. Through the vision of present Truth, we see our God “high and lifted up,” and the glorious attributes of his character revealed in all their beauty and harmony. (Isa. 6:1) When Isaiah was given a vision of the Lord, and he heard the question, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” he at once responded, “Here am I; send me.” (Isa. 6:8) The vision of present Truth brought us to the same point of full devotion to the Lord and we have need of patience to continue doing the Lord’s will.

Paul wrote, quoting further from Habakkuk's prophecy, "The just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." Then he adds, "But we are not of them who draw back." (Heb. 10:38,39) Can we say with Paul that we are not 'of them who draw back'? Does the Lord come first in all our thoughts? Are we seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness? Do we treasure the Truth above all other possessions, and are we allowing its sweet influences to work in us to will and to do God's good pleasure?

All these things were true of us when we "first believed." (Rom. 13:11, *NIV*) They should still be true. Patiently and by mountain-moving faith, let us continue on to the full end of the narrow way, that we might, in God's own due time, receive the complete fulfillment of all his gracious promises "to us-ward who believe."—Eph. 1:19-23

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*Dawn Bible Students Association*