

# What Can We Believe?

*“To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. ... Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?”*  
—John 18:37,38

**WE LIVE AT A TIME WHEN** virtually limitless information is available to us in the palm of our hand. To illustrate this in a very small way, the author of this article recently did a Google keyword search of the word “information.” In less than one second, the search returned 20.7 billion “hits.” To put this number in perspective, if an individual spent no more than one minute reviewing each of these hits, it would take over 39,000 years to go through them all, or about 500 average lifetimes.

It is clearly evident that none of us can scratch the surface as it pertains to processing the vast world of information at our disposal, yet we use information to make nearly every decision in life. Whether it be related to health, job, family, home, finances, political beliefs, social issues, or religious convictions, all of us make decisions every day based on various items of information.

The fact that there is such inexhaustible information available to us may raise numerous questions in our minds. What are the sources of the information we use? Are they truthful and reliable? Are our sources of information properly motivated to be of help to us? Do such sources hold themselves accountable for the information they disseminate? Given the fact that many sources of the same information are routinely in conflict with each other as to what they publish, we might conclude that much of what we see and hear is actually “misinformation.” In today’s world, it also seems evident that motivations for publishing information are often self-seeking, and when information is found to be incorrect, accountability is severely lacking.

Although the foregoing comments are particularly directed to present-day circumstances, in centuries past similar conditions confused and confounded mankind. In the days of Pontius Pilate, nearly two-thousand years ago, though the sheer volume of information was much less, questions and uncertainties were in the minds of many who desired to seek the truth. For example, when Jesus was brought before Pilate’s judgment seat, the Roman governor himself struggled with conflicting information. On one hand, the religious leaders of the Jews accused Jesus of all manner of sin, even labeling him a blasphemer of God. On the other hand, Pilate saw in Jesus a humble man who exemplified only righteous and loving qualities. What, and who, was to be believed?

## **GOD’S WORD IS TRUTH**

As our opening text recalls, Pilate asked Jesus, “What is truth?” So far as the record indicates, Jesus

made no direct reply to Pilate's question. However, the night before, when Jesus was praying in the hours just prior to his arrest, he said to his Heavenly Father on behalf of his disciples, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (John 17:17) The "word" of truth here referred to is undoubtedly the Old Testament Scriptures, as it was the only written Word of God then in existence. Today, the New Testament must be included as part of that Word in which truth is to be found.

To make a careful search of all the promises of the Old Testament with a view to discovering in them some central, consistent theme which we might properly speak of as "the truth" would be a difficult task. By studying the Old Testament alone, no one could be sure that he had made a correct analysis of the main thought which its pages contain. Here is where, however, the New Testament serves as a guiding star in our search for truth. In Acts 3:21 the Apostle Peter mentions a subject which he says "God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."

This is a definite clue as to the principal theme which God had caused all his prophets to set forth. What was this great theme song of the Heavenly Father, so important to him that he caused all his prophets to write about it? Peter describes it as "times of restitution of all things." The Greek word here rendered "restitution" is one which would be more accurately translated "restoration." Clearly, then, it is the divine purpose, set forth throughout the Old Testament and now confirmed in the New Testament, that all things shall be restored.

What are these “all things” of which Peter spoke, and when and how are they to be restored? In verse nineteen of this same narrative, Peter uses the word “therefore,” saying, “Repent ye therefore.” This indicates that the great lesson which he sets forth, culminating with his reference to the times of restitution in verse 21, is based upon something which had occurred or had been said previously. Looking back through the chapter, we find that the apostle had invoked divine power to restore a man who had been lame from the time of his birth. The Jews who witnessed this greatly marveled, wondering by what power so great a miracle had been wrought.—Acts 3:1-10

In verses 12-18, Peter explained the matter to them, saying that it had been accomplished through faith in Jesus, the Prince of life, whom they had crucified. He made clear, however, that the death of Jesus was not a miscarriage of the divine plan, but that God before had stated by the mouth of all his prophets that Christ should suffer. The people had committed a national sin and would need to repent ere the blessings provided by God through Christ could be theirs. Then the apostle continued, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”—vs. 19

The meaning of the Greek word translated “refreshing” in this verse is “revival,” as in the example of a person who has been out of breath. Peter was evidently alluding to the case of the man whom he had just restored to health, and used this miracle as an illustration of future blessings provided by God for all mankind. This promise is made

even more beautiful when we realize that the expression, “presence of the Lord,” in the Greek text, means “the face of Jehovah.” In ancient times, to show one’s face to another was a mark of favor, whereas to turn away was a sign of disfavor.

The thought of these words is similar to that contained in the blessing which God commanded Moses to pronounce upon Israel, which reads: “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.” (Num. 6:24-26) Figuratively speaking, God turned his face away from his human creation when our first parents transgressed the divine law. They were driven out of their perfect home in Eden, and began to suffer the effects of sin, which eventually resulted in death.

Peter tells us, however, that a time is coming when the Creator will again turn his face toward the people, because the ransom—a corresponding price for the first perfect man, Adam, who disobeyed—has been provided by the voluntary death of the perfect man Jesus. God will, as it were, lift up his countenance upon mankind, with the result that there will be seasons of refreshing—times of revival—as illustrated by the healing of the man who had been lame from birth.

### **“HE SHALL SEND JESUS CHRIST”**

How, and when, and under what circumstances will the promised times of refreshing come to the people? Peter answers these questions by explaining that it was God’s purpose to “send Jesus Christ.” This is evidently a reference to Jesus’ Second Advent,

or presence. When Peter spoke these words, our Lord's First Advent had already taken place. He had been raised from the dead and had ascended to heaven. Thus, speaking of Jesus in his glorified heavenly condition, Peter continues, "Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."—Acts 3:20,21

In Peter's words, we have some of the most important facts of divine revelation brought into focus for us, not by human deduction or philosophy, but by the inspired teaching of one of Jesus' own apostles. Furthermore, he tells us what it was that God caused all his prophets to write about, and he places the fulfillment of all that they promised pertaining thereto as following the second coming of Christ. Indeed, he states that it is for the accomplishment of this divine purpose that the plan of God calls for Christ to come again.

Though not spoken of in the context of Peter's words here, just prior to the "restitution of all things" is a preparatory work which includes the "shaking" of present evil institutions, culminating in their removal in a great "time of trouble." (Hag. 2:6,7; Heb. 12:26-28; Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21,22) Following this, and the completion of the church class, the promised blessings will be poured out upon all mankind.

In the verses following his declaration of the promised "restitution of all things," Peter cites some examples of what the prophets actually said on the subject. The first one he mentions is a prophecy by Moses: "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up

unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.” (Acts 3:22; Deut. 18:15) Indeed, Moses was a great prophet and leader of Israel under their original Law Covenant given at Mount Sinai. However, none gained life under that arrangement because its perfect standard of righteousness was beyond the measure of an imperfect man’s ability.

However, everlasting life will be available to the people when the prophet “like unto” Moses is raised up. That is, a full restitution, or restoration, to perfect, everlasting human life will result to all who obey that prophet. Surely no one, simply by reading the promise made by Moses, could ever reach the conclusion that it applies to Christ during his second presence. It is only because the inspired Apostle Peter tells us that this is how it will be fulfilled that we can appreciate it as one of the all-important features of God’s plan for the restoring and blessing of mankind in the coming Messianic kingdom.

After citing this prophecy of Moses, Peter goes still further back into the prophetic record of the Old Testament, even to the promise which was made to faithful Abraham—“In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.” (Acts 3:25; Gen. 12:1-3; 22:18) We rejoice that Peter thus gives us this further example of restitution promises, for it serves to assure us that these future blessings of life have been provided for Gentiles as well as for Jews. They will be made available to “all the kindreds,” families and nations of the earth.

There are two key parts of that promise made to Abraham. One is that all the families of the earth

are to be blessed, and the other is that the blessing would come through Abraham's seed. In Galatians 3:16, an important New Testament explanatory statement is made in this regard. Paul specifically identifies Jesus as the "seed" promised to Abraham through whom mankind is to be blessed. Additionally, in verses 27-29 of the same chapter, the apostle explains that the faithful followers of Jesus, by faith, also become a part of that seed, "and heirs according to the promise."

The opportunity of participating with Jesus in the future work of blessing was first offered to the Jews. (Acts 3:26) However, when a sufficient number of them did not accept the opportunity, God "did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name." (Acts 15:14) It has required nearly two thousand years, from Jesus' First Advent until now, to select from among Jews and Gentiles those who will participate with Jesus as the promised seed in the future blessing and restoration of the people to life on the earth. This work of restitution, the Scriptures point out, will be accomplished during the thousand years of Christ's kingdom.—Rev. 20:6; I Cor. 15:25,26

"The priests, and the captain of the temple," were grieved that Peter taught the people so plainly, and "preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead." (Acts 4:1,2) In his wonderful discourse recorded in chapter 3, Peter had not used the word resurrection, but the people clearly understood that the great future work of restitution, which he declared had been spoken by God through the mouth of all his holy prophets, certainly implied a resurrection of the dead. They were correct. The



word resurrection, which means “a standing up again,” is merely another term which the Bible employs in presenting to us the prospect of the glorious blessings of health, joy and life soon to be offered to a suffering and dying world.

## **BY ALL THE PROPHETS**

Why, then, there is there so much conflicting information and so many differing opinions in the world with regard to man's present and future destiny? Where do they get their support? It may be possible to find a text of Scripture, or even several texts, to prove almost any theory we may wish. This is especially true if Scriptures are taken out of their intended setting and thus distorted as to their meaning. However, this is not the method by which we arrive at the great truth concerning the times of restitution, for here is something, Peter explains, which had been declared by all of God's holy prophets.

As we look through the writings of the prophets, we find that they do indeed point forward to a time of restoration, each one using different language and employing different illustrations to enable us to grasp their meaning more readily. Isaiah was one of the holy prophets, and in many places in his wonderful book he touches upon the glorious theme of restitution, not by using this word, but by describing the blessings to be showered upon the people during the thousand years of Christ's earthly kingdom. We note the words below from his pen.

“In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. The meek also shall

increase their joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. For the terrible one is brought to nought, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off: That make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought. Therefore thus saith the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale. But when he seeth his children, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel. They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine.”—Isa. 29:18-24

Several important and encouraging facts are brought to our attention in the foregoing promise. The blind eyes and deaf ears are to be healed. (Isa. 35:5) This undoubtedly refers to both mental and physical blindness and deafness. The “terrible one” is brought to naught, a probable reference to the binding and ultimate destruction of Satan. (Rev. 20:1-3) The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. Certainly, this denotes a wonderfully changed world from the present, when the meek and the poor are so often downtrodden and oppressed.

Jacob shall be there, the prophet says, and shall see his children. This dates the promise as applying to the time of the resurrection from the dead. Then those who formerly “erred in spirit” shall be given understanding. This is another assurance that

the blinding and deceptive influences of Satan will then be removed. Then it will not be necessary for anyone to ask, "What is truth?" All will learn and be filled with the knowledge of the Lord.—Isa. 11:9

In Isaiah 35:6,8,10, other features of the times of restitution are brought to our attention. Here the prophet tells us that the lame man shall leap as a deer. Isaiah also says that a "highway" shall be there, and that it shall be called "The way of holiness." From the time of Adam's fall into sin and death, mankind has been traveling over what Jesus described symbolically as a broad road which leads to destruction and death. (Matt. 7:13) The promised highway is the return road from death. It will be over this highway, Isaiah writes, that the "ransomed of the LORD shall return, ... with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads."

Paul explains that Jesus "gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." (I Tim. 2:5,6) All, therefore, are included in the statement, "the ransomed of the LORD," and it will be when they return from death that the great truth concerning the atoning blood of Christ will be testified, or made known, to them. All those who accept this provision of divine grace and who come into heart harmony with the righteous laws and principles which will be taught to all people at that time, will continue to live, everlastingly.

We find the following additional testimony of Isaiah concerning this glorious time: "The Lord [Jehovah] hath made bare his holy arm [Christ Jesus] in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God." "They shall build houses, and inhabit them;

and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them.” “And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.”—Isa. 52:10; 65:21,24

### **“FROM THE LAND OF THE ENEMY”**

Jeremiah was another of God’s holy prophets who foretold the times of restitution. In giving comfort to mothers who lost their children in death, he wrote, “A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the LORD; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the LORD, that thy children shall come again to their own border.”—Jer. 31:15-17

Paul identifies death as a great enemy which is to be destroyed during the reign of Christ. (I Cor. 15:25,26) The “land of the enemy” is therefore the condition of death, and the promise that children shall come again from this land surely means that they shall be raised from the dead. Returning to their own border simply means that they will be restored to life on the earth. What a glorious prospect is provided by Jeremiah’s testimony!

### **THE GENTILES ALSO**

The promises of God pertaining to restitution are not limited to the Jewish people. This is indicated clearly by the Prophet Ezekiel. He wrote concerning the restoration of the Sodomites and the other wicked people of the past, stating: “When thy sisters,

Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate, ... then thou [the Israelites] and thy daughters shall return to your former estate.”—Ezek. 16:55

The former estate of the Sodomites was here on the earth as human beings. This was true also of the Israelites. Ezekiel’s prophecy reveals that they are all to return. Thus, again, is the hope for all of restoration, or restitution, brought clearly to our attention.

It is evident that Jesus was well acquainted with this prophecy and understood what it meant. In speaking of the future kingdom judgment day he said it would then be “more tolerable” for Sodom and Gomorrah than for those Jews who in his day had rejected his message. (Matt. 10:15) This certainly assures us that the ignorantly wicked people of the past are to be awakened from the sleep of death and given an opportunity to accept Christ and live. The Scriptures point out that the judgment day is in reality a day of trial, of testing, and that those who then hear and obey shall live.—John 5:25

## **REDEMPTION PROMISED**

In one of the Old Testament promises of a coming Redeemer, the Lord said, “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.” (Hos. 13:14) How glad we are for the Heavenly Father’s assurance that he will not “repent,” or change his mind, concerning his purpose to deliver the people from death and to destroy the grave, the death condition!

The Prophet Habakkuk wrote, “The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD,

as the waters cover the sea.” (Hab. 2:14) Through the Prophet Zephaniah, God declared, “Then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.” (Zeph. 3:9) Haggai testified also on behalf of the Lord, saying, “The desire of all nations shall come.” (Hag. 2:7) Zechariah wrote, “The LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day there shall be one LORD, and his name one.”—Zech. 14:9

How thankful we are that the record of the Scriptures provides consistent, harmonious and reliable information from Genesis to Revelation concerning God’s great plan for his human creation. Only in the Bible’s testimony can we find the real answer to the question, What is truth? Indeed, God’s Word is the source of all truth, and provides in its pages the basis for a glorious future hope which all can truly believe! ■

*“The instructions of the LORD are perfect, reviving  
the soul. The decrees of the LORD are trustworthy,  
making wise the simple.*

*The commandments of the LORD are right,  
bringing joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD  
are clear, giving insight for living.*

*Reverence for the LORD is pure, lasting forever. The  
laws of the LORD are true; each one is fair.  
They are more desirable than gold, even the finest gold.*

*They are sweeter than honey,  
even honey dripping from the comb.*

*They are a warning to your servant, a great reward  
for those who obey them.”*

*Psalms 19:7-11, New Living Translation*