

Given for a Covenant

*“I the LORD have
called thee in
righteousness, and
will hold thine
hand, and will
keep thee, and give
thee for a covenant
of the people, for a
light of the
Gentiles.”*

—Isaiah 42:6

THERE ARE MANY TEXTS

in the Old Testament that the Heavenly Father caused to be recorded for the specific purpose of giving instructions and encouragement to his beloved Son during his First Advent. Until the proper time, these scriptures lay dormant in God’s storehouse of wisdom, the Bible. One of these is Psalm chapter 110, in which is prophesied the responsibilities of kingship, priesthood, and judgment, to be given to Christ Jesus as the result of his faithfulness in providing for man’s redemption. Another such passage is Leviticus 23:4-21, where various typical features of Israel’s Law Covenant point forward to the death and resurrection of Jesus and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Isaiah chapter 42 is another wonderful passage of Scripture which was meant to inform and encourage Jesus. The opening words of this chapter

are beautiful, and must have been of great comfort to the Lord: “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.”

In this verse, there are several statements that were very meaningful to Jesus. There is the promise that the Father would uphold him, giving him strength and help in every time of need. Then there is God’s testimony that Jesus was his elect, or chosen servant; that he had great delight in his Son because of his faithfulness, and would give him of his spirit and understanding in order that he might carry out his Father’s plans and purposes.

In verse 2, the prophet states, “He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.” The thought here is a recognition of our Lord’s humility and proper conduct. The word “cry” carries the thought of striving or contention, and the idea that his voice would not be heard in the street would seem to indicate that Jesus would not be boisterous or ostentatious in carrying out the work that the Heavenly Father had given him to do.

“BRUISED REED” AND “SMOKING FLAX”

The prophet next uses a beautiful metaphor in describing the tender nature of the work to be done by Jesus, “A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.” (vs. 3) A bruised reed is a very fragile thing. Even though it may be standing, a touch will cause it to fall and lie broken on the ground. How beautifully this pictures fallen man. It was not the purpose of God to destroy men but

rather to save them. We are reminded of this by the reassuring words of Jesus: “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”—John 3:17

The smoking flax—or dimly burning wick, as is the meaning of the Hebrew text—aptly pictures the manifestation of God’s spirit by his covenanted people, the nation of Israel. The prophet illustrates the nation of Israel at the time of the Lord’s First Advent by a lamp that is almost out. However, God’s purpose for his Son, as indicated by the prophet, is not to quench the small flame, but bring about changes and corrections that will cause it to burn brightly once again.

Although Jesus, during his First Advent, reignited the dimly lit faith of some in Israel, the primary fulfillment of this part of Isaiah’s prophecy would not be until a future time. The *New English Bible* translates the last part of Isaiah 42:3, “He will make justice shine on every race.” This points forward to the time of God’s kingdom, when Christ’s equitable rule will be universal throughout the earth. Concerning this time, the prophet states in another place, “When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.”—Isa. 26:9

JUDGMENT TO BE ESTABLISHED

In the next verse of our lesson, Isaiah, as the mouthpiece of God, gives further assurance to Jesus with reference to the success of his mission: “He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.” (Isa. 42:4) The word “fail” in the text means

“to go out, as a lamp,” and “discouraged” has the meaning of being “broken in pieces, bruised, or crushed.” The thought seems to be that Jesus would not be bruised or crushed until righteous judgment was established in the earth.

The Law Covenant as given to the nation of Israel was an expression of God’s perfect standard. None of the Israelites, though, could keep its precepts because of their fallen condition. However, when Jesus came at his First Advent he stated, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” (Matt. 5:17,18) By fulfilling God’s law given to Israel, Jesus established its righteousness and proved that it was just.

The divine principle of justice was to be further illustrated by Jesus’ offering himself as a ransom sacrifice to take Adam’s place in death. By this means, Jesus “set judgment in the earth,” which would eventually provide redemption to the entire race, giving Adam and his progeny the opportunity to regain life and perfection, “that which was lost” in Eden through disobedience.—Luke 19:10

Jesus demonstrated his awareness of Isaiah’s prophecy concerning him when he quoted it in connection with an experience recorded in Matthew 12:14-21. In this instance, Jesus had healed a man on the Sabbath, and the Pharisees took counsel together to see how they might destroy him. However, he knew of the plot and withdrew himself, telling his followers that they “should not make him known: That it might be fulfilled which was

spoken by Esaias the prophet.” (Matt. 12:16,17) Then, Jesus continued by quoting the first four verses of Isaiah 42.

GOD’S MAJESTY AND POWER ASSURED

In verse 5 of Isaiah’s prophecy there is a break in the continuity of thought. It is as if the Heavenly Father desired to preface what was to follow by a description of his own majesty and power in order to fortify and assure the Son concerning the remaining portion of the prophecy. Verse 5 reads, “Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein.”

God’s overwhelming power and wisdom had been illustrated in his creation of the universe and the subsequent preparation of this earth for habitation by man, and finally by the creation of man himself. All of this grand power was now to be directed toward the personal supervision and care of Jesus, as he was to carry out the Heavenly Father’s will concerning the most crucial aspects of his plan and purpose for mankind.

GIVEN FOR A COVENANT

In our opening Scripture, Isaiah speaks prophetically of God as giving his Son “for a covenant.” The expression was meaningful to the people of Isaiah’s day. It was the practice to confirm an agreement, or covenant, between two parties by slaying an animal and sprinkling blood upon the agreement document. The word “covenant” is from the Hebrew word *beriyth*, which means “a cutting.”

It was also the custom to slay and divide an animal in two and pass between the parts to approve the covenant.

The first recorded instance of cutting an animal to confirm a covenant is given to us in Genesis chapter 15. In this account, God had assured Abram that he would have a seed, and that he would receive land, both of which had been previously promised. (vss. 5-7) Abram, however, wanted additional assurance concerning the land. “He said, Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?” (vs. 8) Then God proceeded to confirm a covenant with Abram, to give him absolute assurance that he would receive the promised land.

Abram knew that a covenant so authorized was certain and unchangeable. God instructed him to slay three animals and divide them into two groups, placing them opposite to each other. To these were added a turtledove and a young pigeon. (vss. 9,10) In verse 17, we read, “It came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.” Here God was represented as a brilliant consuming fire passing between the pieces, confirming the promise concerning the land to be given to Abram. Then the following is stated: “In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.” (vs. 18) What had previously been given by promise was now made a surety—an unchangeable covenant between God and Abram.

A NEW COVENANT TO COME

When Jesus read of himself in Isaiah's prophecy that he was to be "given for a covenant of the people," he knew that by his death a future New Covenant would be made sure, by which all people would be blessed with an opportunity to attain human perfection during his kingdom. As Jesus approached the final days and hours of his earthly life, we are certain he was aware that the focus of prophetic fulfillment was upon him at that moment. The voluntary surrender of his life would release Adam, and therefore all his progeny, from Adamic condemnation. However, more than this was needed if the ultimate objective of complete reconciliation between God and his human creation was to be attained. Since the fall of our first parents, mankind has developed a natural propensity for sin. They have gone down into the dust with these weaknesses of the flesh that will still be present even after they are awakened from the sleep of death.

Most inhabitants of the earth have never known God, nor been instructed in the way of righteousness. Those who have had a limited knowledge have been instructed imperfectly. A very important part of God's plan of salvation, therefore, is a period of instruction and learning—a thousand years long—that is to be conducted under the terms of the New Covenant. It will provide for the instruction of the entire world in righteousness and bring all those who render heart obedience to a condition of perfection. At the end of this time, everyone who is found worthy of life everlasting will enter into relationship with the Heavenly Father as his earthly children.—Jer. 31:28-33; Rev. 21:3-7

As Jesus further contemplated the prophecy concerning him, he would note something of the wonderful time that would be made possible through his sacrifice, which was the surety that the New Covenant would be established in due time. Its purpose would be, "To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house." (Isa. 42:7) This is a reference to the resurrection of mankind from the prison house of death. Continuing in verse 16, we read, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

We know that blindness and other physical handicaps will be healed under the kingdom arrangement. "The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing." (Isa. 35:5,6) We believe, however, that this prophecy is speaking primarily of the spiritual blindness that has affected mankind, which has been aided and abetted by ignorance, prejudice, and the influence of Satan. (II Cor. 4:4) Under the New Covenant this blindness will be lifted, and the inhabitants of the earth will see clearly the character attributes of their loving Heavenly Father. Isaiah, in other prophecies concerning this wonderful time, states, "In that day, . . . the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness." "The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together."—Isa. 29:18; 40:5

“BLOOD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT”

On the night before his death, Jesus gathered with his disciples in a quiet “upper room” in Jerusalem. (Mark 14:15-17) As they ate together, Jesus instituted a special remembrance, or Memorial, of his death, which would take place in less than twenty-four hours. “Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”—Matt. 26:26-28

The word “testament” in this passage is more properly translated “covenant.” When Jesus spoke of the cup as being his blood of the New Covenant, he indicated that he knew he was fulfilling prophecy, that it was his blood that would confirm, or make sure, the New Covenant. In advance of its establishment, however, it would be the privilege of his disciples to receive the benefits of his blood in a special way. Jesus’ instructions to them to drink of the cup was that they might show their acceptance of the value of his blood, or ransom merit, which would be available to be imputed to his consecrated followers after his death and resurrection. The application of that same merit on behalf of the world in general would not occur until after the church class is complete. Then the New Covenant arrangement with mankind on earth will begin. Thus, by connecting the “blood” to the “New Covenant,” Jesus gave a pledge that this feature of God’s plan will most assuredly come.

SPECIAL PRIVILEGE OF DISCIPLESHIP

The special privilege of Jesus' footstep followers to partake of the benefits of his ransom sacrifice in advance of the world is described by the Apostle Paul in these words: "If any man be in Christ"—that is, if any have accepted, by full consecration to God, the ransom merit of Jesus' blood—"he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (II Cor. 5:17) Being reconciled to God by the blood of Jesus, these are given "the ministry of reconciliation," and thereby they become "ambassadors for Christ." It is God's purpose that these be developed into the character likeness of Jesus during the present Gospel Age, so that they can be prepared to minister with him in dispensing the New Covenant instructions and blessings of the kingdom to the remainder of the world of mankind.—vss. 18-20

In the next chapter, the apostle continues this line of thought, saying, "We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain." (chap. 6:1) The thought is, in view of the great privilege extended to these called out ones, they should yield themselves to do the Heavenly Father's will. Otherwise, the special grace and favor afforded them of working together with God would be to no avail.

The next verse is a partial quotation from Isaiah, and is used by the apostle to give authenticity and power to his plea for action. The full prophecy reads: "Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause

to inherit the desolate heritages; That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.”—Isa. 49:8,9

CHURCH ALSO APPOINTED

What a wonderful assurance and encouragement to note the similar language and expressions used in this prophecy, which Paul relates to the footstep followers of Jesus, and the prophecy in Isaiah 42, which points to Jesus alone. Of particular interest to us in this study is the statement in both prophecies that God will give, or appoint, certain ones the responsibility of administering a covenant of the people. This appointment constitutes both Christ Jesus, as well as his faithful footstep followers—the church of the Gospel Age.

The church does not share in providing the blood of the ransom. That aspect of God’s purpose could only be completed by the death of the perfect man, Jesus. It was his blood alone that ensured the eventual establishment of the New Covenant. Paul later emphasized this, saying that Jesus had “become the surety of a better covenant.”—Heb. 7:22, *Revised Version*

The church’s privilege with regard to being appointed with Christ, their head, to minister the New Covenant to the people, relates to the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of the Master during the present age. Having received, in advance of the world, the imputation of his blood, these are invited by Jesus to follow in his footsteps of service and sacrifice. His invitation is: “If any man will come

after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”—Luke 9:23

In other words, if we, Jesus’ disciples, expect to be associated with him in the great work of the next age in administering the New Covenant, it is necessary that we follow his example. Our words and conduct, walk of life, the desire to do God’s will, hunger for his Word of truth, and zeal in his service, must be patterned after that of the Master. Only such will join our Lord, to be given for a covenant of the people.

A BETTER ARRANGEMENT

The Apostle Paul, in Hebrews chapter 9, compares the typical Law Covenant sacrifices and offerings with the better arrangements provided through Christ. (vss. 1-11) He then states, “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption.” (vs. 12) In other words, Jesus’ death on Calvary’s cross supplanted the old Law Covenant sacrifices, where forgiveness was typically provided by the repetitive offering of animals, year after year. The death of Jesus was the reality, or antitype of those typical sacrifices, and provided eternal redemption, not just for Israel, but for Adam and all his progeny.

In verses 13 and 14, Paul again compares the typical arrangement under the Law Covenant with the reality being fulfilled by the blood of Christ, which sets in motion the process for the eventual establishment of the New Covenant. “If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying

of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

If, as Paul says to these Jewish Christians, the Law Covenant, with its imperfect mediator, ever-changing priesthood, and animal sacrifices, could sanctify the Israelites in a limited, typical sense, "How much more shall the blood of the anointed one . . . cleanse your conscience from works of death, for the service of the living God."—Heb. 9:14, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*

In verse 15, the Apostle Paul states that because Jesus, through his death, is able to provide eternal redemption for mankind, he is made the Mediator of a New Covenant. Then he proceeds to buttress his previous statement concerning those who now, ahead of the world, are given the opportunity to "serve the living God." These "which are called," Paul says, are given "the promise of eternal inheritance." This inheritance is to be part of the anti-typical "seed" of Abraham—the Christ, head and body. (Gal. 3:16,29) This seed will constitute the Mediator, who will administer the New Covenant to all mankind in God's kingdom.

COVENANT MADE SURE BY BLOOD

The apostle continues, "For where a covenant exists, the death of that which has ratified it is necessary to be produced; because a covenant is firm over dead victims, since it is never valid when that which ratifies it is alive." (Heb. 9:16,17, *Diaglott*) The essence of what Paul is saying is that it was necessary for Jesus to die in order to provide the

means for making sure the New Covenant. Then, in verse 18, he makes the positive statement that even the Law Covenant, which only foreshadowed the New Covenant, was confirmed by the shedding of blood, pointing to the fulfillment that was to come through Christ's death. In verse 22, Paul continues, saying, "Without shedding of blood is no remission." Here, we are reminded again of Jesus' statement when he instituted the Memorial supper that the cup represented his blood, "shed for many for the remission of sins," which made sure the New Covenant.—Matt. 26:28

The apostle concludes his comparison of the two covenants with these words: "It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these." In other words, the sacrifice of animals purified only in connection with the pattern, or the type. The "heavenly things," however—the antitype, or reality—we understand must be purified with "better sacrifices than these."—Heb. 9:23

We realize and appreciate very much that Christ has assured the establishment of the New Covenant by the shedding of his blood. We are also thankful that he has invited us to follow in his footsteps of sacrifice and service, and is preparing us to be "able ministers" of the New Covenant. (II Cor. 3:6) It is through the one efficacious offering of Jesus as a "ransom for all" that this is possible, and it is by grace that we, together with our Lord, are privileged to be counted as those given for a "covenant of the people." ■