

The Sentence Of Death

WHEN GOD CREATED man and set him in the Garden of Eden, he was perfect. “God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.” (Gen. 1:31) There were no health problems, unhealthy microbes, sickness, or diseases. When father Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden, the instructions were very simple. “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (Gen. 2:16,17)

ADAM'S DISOBEDIENCE

As it turned out, Adam disobeyed God and the sentence of death was pronounced upon him and his progeny. Furthermore, the ground was cursed as God said, “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; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Gen. 3:17-19) This has been the all too familiar cycle observed by all mankind as death comes and the body is buried to return to the ground.

The dying sentence has often been hastened by the advent of disease. In the early stages of man's history little was known about disease and how to cope with it. God afflicted Israel with plagues for wrongdoing. One such plague is recorded in Numbers 25 which was stayed (stopped) by the Lord after 24,000 had died. (Num. 25:9) Another plague killed 14,700 people in addition to those who died because of Korah's rebellion. (Num. 16:46-50) Also, 70,000 died in 3 days of pestilence when the Lord punished King David for numbering the people.—II Sam. 24:10-25

In later years of man's history some well-known plagues were experienced by the people and recorded. The Black Death plague of the fourteenth century wiped out about a fourth of Europe's population in just four years—a tidal wave of death almost unimaginable today. Its cause was unknown. As recently as 1918-19 the great global influenza

pandemic left at least 20 million dead. By comparison, World War I, fought between 1914 and 1918, claimed 8.5 million casualties.

THE BLESSING OF INCREASED KNOWLEDGE

As mankind approached the time of the end of this present evil world, the Lord permitted knowledge and learning to increase as prophesied by Daniel. (ch. 12:1-4) This has enabled man to determine the cause of many diseases and to find ways of eliminating and controlling them. The progress has been so remarkable that it has led many brethren to believe that they were observing restitution blessings. The picture is not that rosy anymore. In a recent article published in the February, 2002, issue of the *National Geographic Magazine* entitled “War on Disease,” the caption says “Just a few years ago medicine seemed to be winning the fight against disease. But now old adversaries are coming back and new infections are emerging, exposing us all to serious, sometimes unexpected, threats.” The article begins by telling how Florida’s chief epidemiologist was investigating the West Nile virus source. The article said:

A REVERSAL IN THE WAR ON DISEASE

“The recent and wholly unanticipated eruption of West Nile fever in the United States has been a sobering experience for public health officials, who estimate the virus has already infected tens of thousands of Americans, sickening more than 2,000 and killing about a dozen. Far more sobering, however, is that West Nile pales in comparison with the many more ferocious infectious diseases—including those delivered intentionally by terrorists—emerging and reemerging around the globe.

“Ebola is one familiar example, though that virus, it turns out, is too deadly for its own good; it kills its human victims so fast it has little opportunity to transfer from person to person and so is unlikely ever to grow into full-fledged pandemic. But other ailments—some famous, some obscure—pose increasing serious hazards. The mosquito-borne viruses that cause fatal Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever and its sister disease, Yellow Fever—both supposedly vanquished by the 1940s—are again resident through much of South and Central America, and Dengue has recently made inroads into the Caribbean and the southern United States. And with more people on the planet providing more places for

mosquitoes to breed, the stage is set for a public health disaster of hemispheric proportions.

“Tuberculosis has grown coldly resistant to the effects of modern antibiotics in the former Soviet Union and other regions of the world. With its ease of transmission by invisible respiratory droplets and its close association with HIV, TB is in an excellent position to wreak global havoc in the new millennium. And Malaria, which already kills an estimated 1.2 million people annually—more than half of them children—has grown similarly resistant to standard medicines.

NEW DISEASES

“The list goes on: Rift Valley Fever, Hanta-Virus, Cholera. At least 20 major maladies have reemerged in novel, more deadly, or drug-resistant forms in the past 25 years. Worldwide, scientists have discovered at least 30 previously unknown human diseases for which no cure exists, such as Marburg disease and AIDS.

“That’s a humbling reality given that just a couple of decades ago experts declared that many infectious diseases were on the brink of extinction. Improved sanitation, mosquito control, global vaccination, and modern antibiotics appeared to have won the war, and self-assuredness spawned complacency. Flushed with our early successes against them, we concluded that microbes were no competition for our big human brains. We were wrong.

“Largely unnoticed the world was changing. In developing nations, people were hacking their way into previously inaccessible areas, where a menacing menagerie of bacteria and viruses skulked about, hungry for new warm-blooded hosts. Third World metropolises grew increasingly crowded, overwhelming sewage and water systems and providing a microbial mixing bowl for the creation of new diseases. Wars in nations least able to afford them spawned immense human migrations and refugee settlements with little or no sanitation or medical care. And changing patterns of temperature and rainfall allowed disease-carrying insects to extend their range.

“‘The world definitely favors the bugs; microbes have the advantage,’ says Jim Hughes, Director of the National Center for Infectious Diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. ‘There are a lot more of them than us. Their generation time is minutes

instead of years. They evolve rapidly. And, of course, we aid and abet them in many ways—by travel, commerce in foodstuffs, transportation of animals, and our abuse and overuse of antibiotics. We’re playing right into their hands.”

THE THREAT OF TERRORISM

The article then went on to tell how disease can be used by terrorists to wreak havoc among people of the world. We quote:

“It’s bad enough that in today’s crowded and interconnected world small outbreaks can blossom inadvertently into huge epidemics. Equally worrisome, however, is the fact that terrorists can take advantage of that modern vulnerability and intentionally sow the seeds of a devastating disease.

“A bioterrorism attack, as difficult to counter as almost any act of war, combines the best of microbial lethality and human ingenuity. Billions of infectious particles can be stored in a small vial, much easier to smuggle into a country than a nuclear device. Computer models have shown that an intentional outbreak of smallpox (public health officials report that some samples of the smallpox virus, stored for research after the disease was eradicated, are now unaccounted for) could spread uncontrollably almost before officials could take action to contain it. And as the U.S. learned firsthand in October, even a noncontagious disease like anthrax can wreak enormous havoc if it finds its way into the nation’s mail system.

“To a terrorist perhaps the most attractive feature of a plague is its fantastic capacity to create social unrest and political instability. ‘Infectious agents have the potential to trigger panic and fear like no other weapon,’ says Michael Osterholm, director of the Center of Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota—and an epidemiologist with a worldwide reputation for his disease-sleuthing skills. ‘It’s horrible to be eaten from without by a lion or something, but it’s equally horrible to be eaten from the inside out by some terrible bug and to see that going on all around you. It’s a very primal fear.’

“Bioterrorism was already a matter of heightened concern when planes crashed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11. The CDC immediately warned U.S. public health agencies to be on the lookout for ‘unusual disease patterns associated with the events of

September 11,' a chilling hint of fear that the country might be under biological attack. A biowarfare unit from CDC and a military team specially trained in disease detection were rushed to New York. As part of the security crackdown that followed the hijackings, federal officials temporarily grounded the nation's fleet of 3,500 crop duster airplanes, which they feared might be used to release a cloud of deadly microbes. When anthrax attacks did materialize a few weeks later, billions of dollars in resources were quickly redirected to bioterror defense.

THE RAVAGES OF DISEASE

“And yet the recent emphasis on bioterrorism obscures a more pedestrian but equally important truth about infectious diseases: Even without the element of intentional terror, diseases are a huge source of human suffering—and a tremendously destabilizing force. Nearly half of the world's premature deaths (defined as deaths under the age of 45) are caused by infectious diseases. Some 30 million infants in developing countries remain unprotected by the lifesaving childhood vaccines that in the rest of the world are administered routinely; a million die each year from measles alone. It may not be obvious in the healthier nations, but from a microbe's point of view the world today—even with modern antibiotics and fancy vaccines—remains a virtual smorgasbord. With the recent reemergence of some of these diseases in richer nations, there is a growing recognition that no nation is an island.”

The article went on to tell of the valiant and heroic efforts of men to control disease through development of new vaccines, better control of sanitation, and water supply, and improvements in the lives of the Third World countries. The task is immense and difficult. Man is trying hard. Apart from God, he cannot succeed. The well-known phrase, “Man's extremity is God's opportunity” is so very true.

THE REMOVAL OF THE PENALTY

The sentence of death imposed by God cannot be removed by man. Only God can remove the penalty. Soon, through the establishment of his kingdom, the way will be made clear. All men must know and receive Jesus as their ransom; and will know him as he calls them back to life from the grave. What a marvelous day that will be, when “All that are in the graves shall hear his [Jesus'] voice, And shall come forth.” (John 5:28,29) In that day the inhabitants of the land “shall not say, I am sick.”

(Isa. 33:24) The war on disease will have been won. As Isaiah's prophecy says "The Lord is our king; he will save us." (Isa. 33:22) The penalty of death will be no longer, because the people that will dwell in that land then "shall be forgiven their iniquity"—Isa. 33:24

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A Time To Decide

Key Verse: “If you return to the LORD, then your brothers and your children will be shown compassion by their captors and will come back to this land, for the LORD your God is gracious and compassionate. He will not turn his face from you if you return to him.”

***—II Chronicles 30:9,
New International
Version***

***Lesson Scripture:
II Chronicles 30:1-6,
8-12***

WHEN HEZEKIAH WAS IN his sixth year as king over Judah, the Assyrians took most of the people in the northern ten-tribe kingdom of Israel captive to Assyria. (II Kings 18:10) The harassment of Israel by Assyria started when Hezekiah began his reign in Judah. Hezekiah had instituted immediate reforms in the kingdom. We read of his reign, “Hezekiah began to reign when he was five and twenty years old. ... He in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of the Lord, and repaired them.”—II Chron. 29:1-3

King Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah, was a wicked king in Judah. He brought in the worship of Baal. A portion of his wickedness is seen as described in II Chronicles 28. “Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of the Lord, and he made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem.” (vs. 24) His son was trying to undo the wrong of his father. The ten-tribe northern kingdom was already deeply involved in worshipping Baal. The punishment of taking them captive to Assyria had begun as Hezekiah began his reforms in Judah.

The nation of Judah, much less of Israel, had not observed a national Passover for many years. Hezekiah set about to do this. First, the priests had to be sanctified, and they were not ready in the first month (on the fourteenth of Nisan) to do this. He planned to have everything ready in the second month. The precedent for keeping the Passover in the second

month is given in Numbers 9:1-11. It was important that the priests be sanctified. As the scriptures say, “So the service of the house of the Lord was set in order.” (II Chron. 29:35) Hezekiah was now ready to keep the national Passover.

Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem to keep the Passover unto the Lord God of Israel. (II Chron 30:1) Although the punishments of the Lord had started for Israel, the ten-tribe kingdom, it was Hezekiah’s hope that a sincere sign of repentance might reverse the process and those captured might return, as expressed in our key verse. This was not to be. Most of Israel when receiving the invitation “laughed them to scorn, and mocked them.” (vs. 10) Nevertheless, some came and many in Judah came “And there assembled at Jerusalem much people to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the second month, a very great congregation.” (vs. 13) The people also destroyed the altars erected to Baal. (vs. 14) It was a time of great rejoicing.

There can’t be a greater happiness for anyone who decides to worship God in a proper manner. Soon all the world of mankind will be given that opportunity and echo the sentiments of Psalm 122:1.

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Learning the Hard Way

Key Verse: “And prayed unto him: and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God.”

—II Chronicles 33:13

***Lesson Scripture:
II Chronicles 33:1-13***

KING HEZEKIAH, Manasseh’s father, was a good king in Judah, instituting many reforms and eliminating the worship of Baal. His son reversed the reforms and brought back the worship of Baal. Furthermore, he was an evil king. As the scriptures tell of him, “Manasseh ... did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. For he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down, and he reared up altars for Baalim, and made groves, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.”—II Chron. 33:1-3

He also had the audacity to set up altars for worship of Baal in the Temple and the court of the Temple and set up a carved image in the Temple. (II Chron. 33:7) “He caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom: also he observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger.” (II Chron. 33:6) His consultations with the Adversary and the demons shows how thoroughly he was a tool of the Adversary. His desecration of the Temple was abominable.

“Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel.” (vs. 9) Such evil was not to go unpunished. We read, “The Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention. So the Lord brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon.” (II Chron.

33:10,11; *New International Version*). In Manasseh's distress he turned to God and humbled himself greatly. He entreated God who restored him to his kingdom and back to Jerusalem. His repentance was genuine and he started to undo all the wicked things he had done. "He took away the strange gods, and the idol out of house of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the Lord, ... and cast them out of the city."—vs. 15

When Manasseh was restored, "Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God." (vs. 13) This would imply that his knowledge of God was lacking at the time he performed his evil deeds. This lesson shows the great mercy and benevolence of God, our Father. As Jesus testified of him, "He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil." (Luke 6:35) It is God's plan to give all mankind a knowledge of himself. As the Apostle Paul has said of him, "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." (1 Tim. 2:4) It is God's plan to have all men receive an opportunity to do righteously as prophesied by Isaiah, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."—Isa. 55:7

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Overcoming Spiritual Complacency

Key Verse: “The just LORD is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame.”
—***Zephaniah 3:5***

Lesson Scripture:
Zephaniah 1:12;
3:1-5, 11-13

IN THE DAYS THAT Zephaniah was a prophet to Judah, known as the two-tribe kingdom, the ten-tribe kingdom had been taken captive to Assyria. Josiah was now king and was instituting more reforms. He sought to bring Israel back to God and spent much effort in this direction. The people, however, were complacent. When he died, his son Jehoahaz took over but did not reign long. The king of Egypt took him captive and made his brother Jehoiakim king. Jehoiakim did evil in the sight of the Lord, and, after an eleven-year reign, he was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon.—II Kings 23:36

These punishments were prophesied by Zephaniah. However, the prophecy of Zephaniah was not merely an indictment of Judah and those nations coexisting at the time, but was an indictment of all the nations of this ‘present evil world’ and applies to the trouble at the end of the Gospel Age. It is described as the Day of the Lord (Zeph. 1:7,8,14), and as the Day of the Lord’s wrath (vs. 15). This prophecy describes a trouble such as man has never seen before, and all the wealth in the world can do nothing to assuage it. It is described as a “fire of his [God’s] jealousy.”—vs. 18

The nation of Israel, which was favored by God, represents the present Christian nations, who are as complacent in their worship of God as was Israel in Zephaniah’s day. The Lord’s patience has been tested to the full and he says through the prophet, “I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the Lord. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumbling blocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the Lord.” (Zeph. 1:2,3) The devastation of the Lord is summed up well

when the prophet later says, “Wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.” (Zeph. 3:8) This prophecy will be fulfilled.

When the work of judgment is over and the old order of this present evil world is removed, then will be fulfilled the second part of this prophecy. Zephaniah says, speaking for God, “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.” (vs. 9) This is the time of the establishment of God’s kingdom. People will no longer be complacent, nor will there be many different religions in the world, because all will know the Lord and will serve him ‘with one consent.’ There will be no language barrier to cooperation with each other and with the Lord.

The prophet also assures natural Israel that they will be regathered and brought back to their land. (vs. 20) Likewise, the Lord will complete his church with expressions of joy and love. —vss. 16,17

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What You Don't Know Can Hurt You

***Key Verse: "Because
thine heart was tender,
and thou didst humble
thyself before God,
when thou heardest
his words against this
place, and against the
inhabitants thereof,
and humbledst thyself
before me, and didst
rend thy clothes, and
weep before me; I
have even heard thee
also, saith the LORD."
—II Chronicles 34:27***

***Lesson Scripture:
II Chronicles
34:1-3, 21, 27, 29-33***

Amon. (II Chron. 34:2-7) This was a remarkable work done by a twenty-year-old king and it took several years to accomplish. His reforms went beyond Judah into Ephraim, Manasseh, Simeon, and Naphtali of the ten-tribe kingdom. When completed, Josiah was ready for the next task of repairing and restoring the Temple which had been desecrated and neglected. The Levites were able to get money for financing this restoration from Judah and many of the other tribes of Israel.

JOSIAH WAS A CHILD WHEN he inherited the throne of Judah. His father Amon had become king when Manasseh died, but he did evil. Amon's father before him had done much evil and had desecrated the Temple and converted Israel to the worship of Baal. However, after being punished, he humbled himself and repented, removing Baal worship. Somehow his son, Amon, did not follow his father's conversion and repentance and his servants conspired against him and slew him.—II Chron. 33:24

Josiah, on the other hand, as a lad of eight years, started to do that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and in the eighth year of his reign, as a lad of sixteen, "He began to seek after the God of David his father" and by the time he was twenty years old he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the Baal worship left undone by Manasseh and restored by

It was during this restoration work that Hilkiyah the priest found the book of the Law in the house of the Lord. He had it delivered to the king. When Shaphan the scribe had delivered and read the book to Josiah, he was so moved by its message that he rent his clothes, for he recognized Judah's and Israel's failure to keep the words of the book. He assembled the priests, scribes, and servants and said to them, "Go, inquire of the Lord for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do after all that is written in this book."—vs. 21

Josiah first sought to inquire of the Lord through the prophetess, Huldah, who confirmed that the Lord would indeed punish Judah and Israel for their sins. Josiah, however, would be spared seeing these punishments inflicted. He then gathered all the elders, the priests, Levites, and people great and small to the Temple. Josiah read the words of the book to all those assembled. He made a covenant with the Lord, "to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book."—vs. 31

What a remarkable example was this child king, who sought to walk after the ways of his ancestor, David.

Facing Consequences

Key Verse: “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, ‘We will not walk in it.’”
—*Jeremiah 6:16, New International Version*

***Lesson Scripture:
Jeremiah 6:16-21,
26-28***

JEREMIAH BECAME A Prophet to Judah when Josiah was the king. He witnessed the remarkable conversion of the people to keeping the Law again, after the book of the Law was found in the Temple and given to Josiah. Josiah had read the Law to the people, dedicated himself to following the Law, and urged the people to do likewise. The people responded by following the teachings of the Law as long as he was king. When he died, “All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah: and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day.” (II Chron. 35:24,25) Jeremiah was left alone to

keep the people from straying and tried hard to do so but lacked cooperation from succeeding kings. All were evilly disposed and led the people astray.

Our key text tells how Jeremiah told the people that they stood at the ‘crossroads.’ He advised them to take the ancient paths of following the Law as advised by Josiah. They chose not to do so. The sixth chapter of Jeremiah describes the punishment that was going to come upon them. A destructive force from the north would come, lay siege to the city of Jerusalem, capture it, destroy it, and take all those that escaped the sword captive. This was fulfilled when Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldeans took Judah captive to Babylon where they became servants for 70 years. Because Jeremiah prophesied freely about the destruction to come, he was branded a traitor and imprisoned. The people’s punishment could not be avoided. It came to pass as prophesied by Jeremiah.

Jeremiah's prophecies, however, do not merely pertain to natural Israel and her punishment for failure to walk in the right paths. They also pertain to our time, the last days of this 'present evil world,' and are an indictment against Christian nations. These were to show people the right paths in which to walk. But they have forsaken the principles of Christianity, and have led to war amongst themselves.

When Jeremiah writes, "From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace. Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all." (Jer. 6:13-15, *NIV*) It is not only applicable to natural Israel of his day, but also to the Christian nations and Western Civilization in our day.

People today desire peace, but none is to be found. Terrorism stalks our civilization like a lion stalks his prey. The handwriting is on the wall. They have been weighed in the balances and found wanting. (Daniel 5:5,27). When God removes this civilization with its corruption, he will replace it with the "desire of all nations" (Hag. 2:7), the Messianic kingdom of Christ. It is then that mankind shall learn to walk in the correct paths, following the commandments of the Lord.— Isa. 2:3

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Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians

THE “CHURCHES OF GALATIA,” like many other congregations of apostolic times, were being tried by teachers who insisted that in addition to faith in Christ, certain ordinances of the Law must also be observed in order for one to be justified before God. It was this situation which prompted Paul’s letter to the Galatian brethren. He comes to the subject very early in the epistle, saying, “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.”—ch. 1:6,7

Chapters one and two deal mostly with Paul’s personal experience in accepting Christ and being appointed to apostleship. He emphasizes that God had given him a special revelation to qualify him to serve the Gentiles, in order to give the brethren at Galatia confidence in what he was writing. He also relates the necessity of correcting the Apostle Peter in connection with this issue in the church.

In chapter three, Paul reminds the reader of God’s promise to Abraham concerning the blessing of all the families of the earth through his seed. He asserts that this was a statement of the “gospel,” that it was made before the Law was given, and that one of God’s intentions was to justify the Gentiles through faith. (ch. 3:8) In verse sixteen, he explains that the promised “seed” was Christ. To Paul, this meant that one could be justified through faith in Christ apart from the Law.

Verses seventeen through twenty-six reveal the relationship of the Law to the original covenant which God made with Abraham, that it was “added because of transgressions, till the seed should come,” (vs. 19) meaning that after the ‘seed’ came, the Law would no longer be needed. These verses also explain that the Law was designed as a “schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ,” (vs. 24) that is, to teach the need of the atoning blood of Christ.

Verses twenty-seven through twenty-nine explain that those who, through faith in Christ, become members of his mystical body by being baptized into his death, thereby become a part of the “seed” of Abraham, and “heirs according to the promise.” Verse twenty-eight shows that being either a Jew or a Greek (Gentile) is not what qualifies one to be a part of the promised ‘seed,’ for these, as well as “male nor female,” “bond nor free,” are all one in Christ Jesus. It is those who, individually, and through faith “put on Christ,” that qualify.

In chapter four Paul presents what he calls an “allegory,” in which he uses Sarah and Hagar, the two wives of Abraham, to represent first, the original covenant made with Abraham concerning the development of a seed, and second, the Law Covenant which was later ‘added’—Sarah representing one, and Hagar the other.—ch. 4:24-31

Isaac was the seed of Sarah, and, as Paul explains, represents Christ and the church—“We, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.” (ch. 4:28) Ishmael, the seed of Hagar, represents, as Paul explains, the Jewish nation under bondage to the Law. Just as Ishmael persecuted Isaac, so, Paul explains, the Jews were persecuting the ‘faith seed’ of Abraham represented by Isaac.

Thus did Paul endeavor to make plain to those whom he calls “foolish Galatians” the seriousness of giving heed to teachers who had already to some extent “bewitched” them with their Judaizing teachings. (ch. 3:1) His conclusion on this point was, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”—ch. 5:1

Chapter six of the epistle contains helpful admonitions to unselfishness, such as, “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ”; and again, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” (vss. 2,10) But even in this final chapter of the epistle, Paul reverts to the subject of circumcision, saying, “In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.”—vss. 15,16

TO THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS

Paul was a prisoner in Rome when he wrote his letter to “the saints” who were “at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.” Evidently the majority of these saints were Gentiles, and one of the purposes of the epistle seems to have been to assure them that they had indeed been made fellow heirs of the royal promises made originally to Israel. He wrote, “Remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us.”—ch. 2:11-14

In the letter, Paul also calls attention to the exceeding grandeur of the inheritance which believing Gentiles are invited to share with believing Jews. He speaks of being blessed “with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ,” (ch. 1:3) and then reveals the high position now occupied by Jesus in these ‘heavenly places,’ being raised to this high station in his resurrection.

He speaks of the time when God “raised him [Christ] from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”—ch. 1:20-23

In chapter three Paul explains that the Lord had especially made known to him this “mystery” concerning the Gentiles being made “fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.” (vss. 3,6) All the promises of the Old Testament concerning participation with the Messiah in his kingdom work were addressed exclusively to Israel, and it was in the Lord’s providence that Gentile believers were given this and other reassuring statements to the effect that those promises also now apply to them.

Paul points out in this letter that believing Jews and Gentiles were made one in Christ Jesus, so in chapter four he admonishes them to maintain this “unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (vs. 3) Then he adds, “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”—vss. 4-6

In this fourth chapter, Paul mentions the various servants in the church provided by the Lord to nurture the ‘body’ so that all its members develop into mature Christians, and actually attain that unity of the faith mentioned in the verses just quoted. These servants are the apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists. And all are admonished to speak the Truth in love in order that those who hear may “grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.”—vs. 15

Throughout this letter, Paul speaks of the ministry of the Holy Spirit as it reaches believers through the Word of Truth. In chapter two, verse eighteen, speaking of Jews and Gentiles, he says that through Christ “we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” In chapter four, verse three, he admonishes believers to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Then, in chapter five, verse nine, he speaks of the “fruit” of the Spirit, saying that it is “in all goodness and righteousness and truth.”

In verse eighteen of chapter five, we are admonished to be “filled with the Spirit,” with the next verse suggesting one of the means to this end; that is, “speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”

A familiar lesson to many Christians concerning the “whole armour of God” is found in the closing chapter of this epistle. (ch. 6:13) Paul urges Christians to put on this armor. We quote, “Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”—ch. 6:13-17

THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

Paul's letter to the brethren in Philippi was also written while a prisoner in Rome. He expresses a strong hope that he would be released and be free to visit them again, yet he is not sure, and some aspects of the letter are written as though it were a farewell message to those for whom he expresses great love. He wrote, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."—ch. 1:6

"I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more..." he wrote, "That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God."—ch. 1:9-11

Paul was somewhat uncertain as to whether he would rather be released from prison and continue his service in the flesh, or be executed and remain asleep in death until the return of Christ. "I am in a strait betwixt [these] two," he wrote. But there was something which, he said, "is far better," that is, a third consideration. The *King James* translation obscures the meaning of what Paul wrote on this point, translating it as a departing "to be with Christ." However, the Greek word here translated 'depart' really means 'return,' and what the apostle refers to is the returning of Christ when all the sleeping saints would be raised from the dead to be with him. This was his great desire, the thing which to him would be far better than either of the two possibilities he mentions.—ch. 1:21-24

Chapter two opens with a touching lesson on the importance of mutual sympathy and love among the brethren, merging into an admonition to humility in which Christ is used as an example. Beginning with the fourth verse we read, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery [more correctly translated: "thought not by robbery"] to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus

every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”—vss. 4-11

In the third chapter, Paul relates his former standing as a Pharisee and how little that meant to him, now that he had learned that Jesus was indeed the Christ. His suffering as a Christian, and even now his imprisonment in Rome, he considered as assets if they would help him ‘win Christ.’ We quote, “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.”—ch. 3:7-11

In the opening verse of the last chapter he admonishes, “Stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.” In the eighth verse he writes, “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

This letter was written partly as an expression of Paul’s appreciation of the spirit of love represented in a gift which the Philippian brethren sent to him at Rome. One of the brethren at Philippi, Epaphroditus, was the messenger to deliver the package, and he did so at great personal sacrifice. “He nearly died for the work of Christ,” Paul wrote, “risking his life to complete your service to me.”—ch. 2:30, *Revised Standard Version*

In the closing chapter, Paul refers to this again and speaks of his rejoicing in the evidence of their love toward him. He mentions the fact that he had learned both “to abound” and to “suffer need.” (vs. 12) At the time, he was able to write, “I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.”—vs. 18

COLOSSIANS

Paul's letter "to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse" (ch. 1:2) was also written while he was a prisoner in Rome, although his only reference to this fact is in the last verse of the epistle, where he says, "Remember my bonds." (ch. 4:18) Paul did not lament the fact that he had the privilege of suffering with, and for, Christ.

We do not know with certainty that Paul had personally met the brethren in Colosse. He speaks of having heard of their "faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love" which they had "to all the saints," and "For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel."—ch. 1:4,5

Paul possessed a consuming love for all his brethren in Christ, his great desire for them all being that they might be faithful to the Lord. To those at Colosse, having been informed of their "love in the Spirit," he wrote, "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."—ch. 1:8-12

It is in this epistle that Paul identifies Jesus as being "the firstborn of every creature." (ch. 1:15) And, in full agreement with the Apostle John's record in the first chapter of his Gospel, Paul affirms that Jesus was the active agent of the Father in the creation of all things. See chapter one, verses sixteen through nineteen.

In verse twenty-four of this chapter, Paul speaks of filling up "that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ." Many Christians may not realize that the sufferings of Christ were not completed on Calvary. Paul's reference, of course, is to the Christ company, the "body" of Christ. (I Cor. 12) It is the privilege of all these to suffer and die with Christ, encouraged and strengthened by the promise that if they are faithful in this even unto death, they will live and reign with Christ.

In the second chapter, mention is made of the issue which, as we have seen, was almost universal in all the congregations of the Early Church;

namely, freedom from the ordinances of the Law that had been given to Israel. In this chapter, Paul also speaks of being buried with Christ in baptism, and of being “risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him [Jesus] from the dead.”—vs. 12

The Christian’s resurrection is as yet only by faith, but in proportion to our faith it becomes a reality so far as our viewpoint of life is concerned. In the opening of the third chapter Paul emphasizes this, saying, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.”—vss. 1-4

In II Corinthians 3:6-12, Paul uses the glory of the countenance of Moses as he came down from the mount to administer the Law Covenant, to illustrate “the glory that excelleth” in connection with the appearance of Christ, the antitypical Moses, when he administers the promised New Covenant. (Jer. 31:31-34) So the promise that “then shall ye also appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:4) confirms this hope of every faithful Christian to be associated with Jesus in making that New Covenant by which the world of mankind will be reconciled to God.

Thus we find, that even in these intimate letters to the brethren, the main purpose of which is to encourage them to faithfulness in their service of God, there is also reflected this background of hope for the world. Indeed, were it not for this larger theme of the entire Bible—the theme of redemption and restoration of a lost world through Christ and his church—these devotional portions would be void of the strength and beauty which we now attach to them. They are more than lessons on moral ethics, for they are pointing out the way for the followers of Christ to attain to glory with him, that they might be associated with him in the blessing of all the families of the earth.

Christian Warfare

LIFE IS A BATTLE. We see among the brute creation the constant struggle for existence, and also with humanity. The Lord's people—the good soldiers of Jesus Christ—are recruited from those who are fighting under miserable conditions, which are so prevalent in the world. But now a different warfare is theirs altogether. It is a conflict against selfishness, avarice, covetousness, and all unrighteousness—a war against unloving methods, and all sin.

Christ Jesus, the Captain of our salvation, is our Exemplar, whose methods of warfare we are to copy. Although he was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, he was a determined and uncompromising foe of sin, and laid down his life in opposing it. All who would be accepted by him must follow his example, and be faithful, even “unto death,” (Rev. 2:10) if they would gain the great prize, the “crown of life.” These soldiers of the cross should very highly esteem the great prize for which they are called to fight the “good fight of faith”—the prize of “eternal life.”—I Tim. 6:12

In becoming a soldier of the Lord, we realize that the term of enlistment is not for a period of time, but for life. We are called not merely to participate in a few battles, but to fight the good fight, faithfully and continuously, until death.

It is necessary at the onset for each one to make a full consecration to the Lord, a full enlistment of every power and talent of mind and of body. Struggles with the human will then cease—the decision having been definitely made to serve the Lord.

OUR ARMOR

Throughout our earthly conflict it is a vital necessity that each soldier of the cross have on “the whole armour of God.” Details of this armor are given in Ephesians 6:11-18, as follows:

A girdle—symbolizing servitude. Since it is a girdle of Truth, this means we are to be faithful and zealous servants of the Truth, shining as lights in the world, holding forth the word of light and life.

A breastplate—This covers the vital organs of the body, particularly the heart. It is a breastplate of righteousness, hence we keep a pure heart, for “out of it are the issues of life.”—Prov. 4:23

The sandals of peace—Our feet are shod with readiness of the glad tidings of peace. We should be ever ready to witness, and to “follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”—Heb. 12:14

The shield of faith—We are kept, or guarded, by the power of God through faith. This is “the victory that overcometh the world.” (I John 5:4) With this shield of faith we are able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the wicked.

A helmet—It is a helmet of salvation, which represents the intellectual understanding and appreciation of the Holy Scriptures, which makes “wise unto salvation.”—II Tim. 3:15

The sword of the Spirit—This is the Word of God. It is Divinely powerful for the demolition of fortresses; demolishing reasonings; and every height rearing itself up against the knowledge of God. The Truth is used in repelling all adversaries.

USE OF THE ARMOR

The faithful, good soldiers of Jesus Christ are well-practiced in the use of this ‘whole armour,’ which God has supplied. They also watch and pray—“Praying at every season, with all prayer and supplication in Spirit, and keeping watch for this with all perseverance and entreaty for all saints.” (Eph. 6:18, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) The armory from which these articles can be obtained is the Word of God, which is so well stocked that “the man of God may be complete, thoroughly fitted for every good work.”—II Tim. 3:17, *WED*

The soldier of Jesus who rushes into the fight without waiting to hear the Captain’s command, and neglecting to put on the whole armor provided, is risking defeat and disaster. Many soldiers, lacking a knowledge of the proper use of the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,” (Eph. 6:17) spring recklessly into the fight to the injury of their neighbors, their friends, and their fellow soldiers in the Lord’s army. This is a great mistake.

Those around us who uphold error, and those who despitefully use us and persecute us because we are on the Lord's side, are blinded by ignorance; and it is not the Lord's intention that we should fight against them. Rather, we should fight for them, to lift them out of their ignorance, blindness, and superstition.

Our real opponents are the Adversary and other fallen angels, the demons. Our poor, fallen fellow human creatures who oppose us, and who oppose righteousness, do so because they are under the power of Satan, more or less blinded by his deceptions. "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not."—II Cor. 4:4

Our good fight of faith, as the apostle explains, consists to a considerable extent in our defense of the Word of God which includes also our defense of the character of God. "Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." (Jude, verse 3) This will mean our willingness to stand for the Truth at any cost, and against any number of assailants—against the creeds and theories of men, which would misrepresent the good tidings of great joy which the Lord and the apostles have announced, and which shall yet "be to all people."—Luke 2:10

SECRET BATTLINGS

While there are the outward battlings of the Lord's soldiers, there are also the more secret drillings and fightings which come to each individual soldier, to test his loyalty, and to develop his character. Having regard to the fact that the 'soldier' is the 'New Creature' and not the flesh, the enlistment does indeed involve a full surrender of the fleshly will, and the acceptance of the headship of the Redeemer.

From the moment of complete surrender to the Captain—being enlisted under his orders, in the service of righteousness—the New Creature experiences a conflict with his mortal body and its weaknesses, passions, and tendencies for sin. The new will cannot free itself from the fleshly body, and although the reward promised in God's Word is a new spiritual body, nevertheless the new will is required first to demonstrate its loyalty to the Captain, and to righteousness, by its faithful combat against the selfish propensities of the flesh.

Here is a great battle! There are fightings without and within. No saint is without experiences of this kind. It must be a fight to the finish, or the

great prize for which we strive will not be gained. We all need to follow the Apostle Paul's course as expressed in his words, "I severely discipline my body, and make it subservient; lest possibly, having proclaimed to others, I myself should become one unapproved." (I Cor. 9:27, *WED*) And in Galatians 5:24, *Marginal Translation*, we read, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the passions and lusts."

THE GOOD FIGHT

These battles of the new nature against the flesh are a "good fight" in the sense that they are fightings against sin and weaknesses that belong to the fallen nature. They are a fight of "faith" because the entire course of the New Creature is a course of faith. (I Tim. 6:12) "For we walk by faith, not by sight." (II Cor. 5:7) It is a fight of 'faith' also in the sense that no one could keep up this battle against his own flesh, its natural tendencies and desires, and come off victorious, except as he can exercise faith in the exceeding great and precious promises, and in the Lord as his helper.

He that hateth his brother is a murderer (I John 3:15), hence those who enlist as soldiers of the cross are not only to hate murder, but are to hate also the murderous spirit, and to cast it out entirely. They should have nothing but love in their hearts for all, even their enemies. The well-trained soldiers of the Lord know unmistakably that anger, malice, hatred, strife, envyings, and evil-speaking are all the works of the flesh and of the Devil.

How terrible is the thought, that any of the Lord's brethren should, at any time, speak evil of one another! To do so would be entirely contrary to the scriptural instructions to us. How awful to think that such an evildoer would lose our Captain's favor, and ultimately, if this course be pursued, would be cut off completely from all relationship with him, and with the church, which is his body.

COMBATIVENESS

Combativeness is not a bad quality. On the contrary, it is a good acquirement, and actually indispensable to the attainment of the prize set before us in the Gospel. All who are called now to be of the elect church are required to be overcomers, victors; exhorted to stem the popular tide, and fight the good fight of faith and obedience. Those who are totally

lacking in firmness, combativeness, or character, cannot possibly comply with these conditions.

If we possess the spirit of combativeness, resulting in a contentious, wrangling disposition, let us take courage, being careful to see to it that this contrary disposition is brought into accord with the spirit of love. That wrangling disposition must be subdued, and the combativeness must be turned properly in another direction. The quality of combativeness, to be of value, must be rightly directed. As soldiers of Christ we know that our fighting qualities must not be exercised against God, or by resisting his will. On the contrary, we are to make a full surrender to him of our thoughts, words, and deeds. Nor is our combativeness to be used toward the brethren; for to fight the brethren is to fight against God.

How then, and against what, shall we exercise our combativeness? It is to be turned against sin; and its first encounter must begin with one's own self. The battle with self is a great conflict. "He that ruleth his spirit" is better than "he that taketh a city."—Prov. 16:32

THE BATTLE WITH SELF

We even need to be defeated in some of our battles with self, in order to have a clear appreciation of our own inability to overcome. This will compel us to go to the throne of heavenly grace to obtain mercy, and find grace to help. We need this because, as the apostle intimates, it is when we are weak that we are truly strong. When we are strong in self-confidence and therefore negligent in going to the Lord, then we are weak, and liable to have failures in the battle, or to be overcome by the enemy.—Heb. 4:16; II Cor. 12:10

There must be victory over self. The new mind has, by the Lord's grace, put a garrison in every quarter of the conquered body to guard it from rising in insurrection, and to hold it in subjection to the King of kings and Lord of lords. Then all the remaining energies will find ample opportunity for usefulness in battling for the Lord, for the brethren, and for the Truth. We are to fight against error and all the wiles of the Devil; for, as the Apostle Paul declares, "We are not ignorant of his devices."—II Cor. 2:11

As the eyes of our understanding are opened wider, we see the great conflict that is progressing throughout the world between righteousness and sin. Many who are deceived by this world ignorantly think that they

are doing God service, and are often found fighting against the Truth, and against the true soldiers of the cross. So it was in the case of Saul of Tarsus. The Scriptures reveal how he persecuted the church, misusing his combativeness. In Saul's case, after the eyes of his understanding were opened, the combativeness which formerly made him a violent persecutor of the church, by the Lord's grace, made him one of the most valiant of the apostles in the defense of the Truth.

It was also so with the others of the apostles. Peter, for instance, full of combativeness—at first misdirected it to smite off the ear of the high priest's servant. He was very valiant subsequently in the proper use of his talents to the Lord's praise.

James and John were two others highly favored and recognized of the Lord, and specially used in the service of the Truth. They also were of combative dispositions, so much so that they were known as "The sons of thunder." (Mark 3:17) It was these two who were so incensed at the Samaritans who refused to receive our Lord into their village, and so full of love and zeal for the Master, that they inquired, "Master, dost thou wish that we command fire to come down from heaven, to consume them?" (Luke 9:51-55, *WED*) They had combativeness, courage, and zeal, but they had not yet learned how to direct these qualities.

Later, when they were anointed with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they understood better how their combativeness and zeal were to be used. Hence we find them loyal soldiers of the cross, shunning no danger. They endured hardness as good soldiers of the Lord Jesus, holding high the banner of Truth even unto death.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh."—II Cor. 4:8-11

A WARFARE

Holy and unholy influences are in conflict one with the other. The spirit of evil and malice and error triumphed against the holy influence, or Spirit, to the extent of achieving the crucifixion of our Lord. Similarly,

it has triumphed against all the faithful members of the body of Christ—misrepresenting, slandering, and evilly entreating them, variously, according to time and circumstances.

The object of these attacks of the spirit of evil and its servants upon the Spirit of holiness and its faithful, is ever the same—to undermine the influence of the Spirit of the Truth. It is to make the holy appear unholy; to cause the pure and unselfish to appear selfish and impure; to put darkness for light.

Nor do the servants of unholiness always realize what they do. Becoming imbued with the spirit of evil, the spirit of hatred, malice, envy, strife, it blinds them so that they do not realize their evil disposition and often, evidently, “think that he doeth God service.”—John 16:2

THE TRIUMPH OF THE SPIRIT

We know, however, that this apparent triumph of the evil spirit over the holy is merely a seeming defeat, and not an actual one. Actually the spirit of holiness has been triumphing, and its twofold mission during the Gospel Age is being well accomplished.

First, it (the Holy Spirit) was to be in God’s people according to the degree of their consecration and zeal toward God and his righteousness. The evil in the world about them was to prove a test of their characters, present conditions demanding that whosoever would “live godly” in this present time must suffer persecution. Sometimes “all manner of evil” would be falsely spoken against them, yet they must take it patiently, as did their Master, continuing faithful to the Lord and his cause at any cost, and counting not their earthly life dear unto themselves.—II Tim. 3:12; Matt. 5:11; I Pet. 2:23; Acts 20:24

Second, the light of the Holy Spirit in God’s people was to so shine forth upon the world that it would attract some of these not thoroughly blinded by the perverse spirit of the Adversary. It was to shine into the darkness of sin reprovingly, witnessing against all unrighteousness, thus, if possible, to awaken the conscience of even the blinded to a realization of responsibility to God and a future day of reckoning. Hence our Lord instructed his followers that after receiving the Holy Spirit they were to witness to the Truth amongst all nations. This has to be done whether the people hear, or whether they do not.

The Holy Spirit has triumphed in both the objects for which it was sent. It has selected a faithful ‘little flock’ of ‘overcomers,’ followers of the way of righteousness, and soon the last members will be fully tested and made perfect through sufferings for righteousness’ sake. It has also triumphed in respect to witnessing to the world, and today, the true Gospel of the kingdom is being beamed forth in all the world as never before.

We, as New Creatures in Christ Jesus, are very gratefully encouraged with every better understanding of our Captain’s word and will respecting us. We are full of confidence in his wisdom and in his grace—that he is willing and able to bring us off conquerors, and even more than conquerors, if we are obedient to him.

Individually, we are to strive so that, at the close of our earthly experiences, we may be able to say, in the words of the apostle, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept [guarded] the faith.” Then, by the Lord’s grace, it will be our joy beyond the veil, to receive the promised “crown of righteousness,”—“the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 3:14; II Tim. 4:7,8

Dawn Bible Students Association

A City Comes Down from Heaven

***“I John saw the
holy city, new
Jerusalem, coming
down from God out
of heaven, prepared
as a bride adorned
for her husband.”
—Revelation 21:2***

IN THE SYMBOLOGY OF the Bible a ‘city’ is often used to represent a government. That the ‘new Jerusalem’ of our text is not a literal city is apparent, from the measurements ascribed to it in verse sixteen, where we read, “He measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.” Twelve thousand furlongs is the equivalent of approximately fifteen hundred miles. A literal city fifteen hundred

miles square would be most unusual, but when we are informed that this city is also as high as it is square, it becomes obvious that it is not a literal city; for such a height would extend far beyond the outer atmosphere of the earth.

A hint as to the particular symbolism of this city is given in the description which says that it is ‘prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.’

The “bride, the Lamb’s wife,” is identified for us in Revelation 21:9,10, where we read, “There came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.” The ‘holy city,’ then, is the ‘bride, the Lamb’s wife.’

THE LAMB

Since we have one symbolism explained by the use of further pictorial language, it is necessary to identify both the ‘Lamb,’ and the ‘bride,’ the Lamb’s wife. This is not difficult, particularly with respect to the Lamb, for this symbolism is introduced early in the Bible, and clearly refers to

Jesus, to whom John the Baptist referred as “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”—John 1:29

The thought conveyed by this symbolism is first brought to our attention in the story of the offering which righteous Abel brought to the Lord, which was from the “firstlings of his flock.” (Gen. 4:4) God was pleased with this offering and accepted it, the evident reason being that it pointed forward to the sacrifice of Jesus, who would offer his own flesh and blood for the sins of the world.—Heb. 11:4

Not long before Abel made this offering to the Lord, the human race had come under condemnation to death because of sin. When pronouncing sentence upon our first parents the Lord said to “that old serpent, ... the Devil, and Satan,” that the “seed” of the woman would “bruise” its head. (Rev. 20:2; Gen. 3:15) In the light of the subsequent unfoldings of the Divine plan of salvation from sin and death, this rather vague statement is seen to imply that the reign of sin and death, in which Satan has had the power over death, would one day be overthrown, and that the results of that great tragedy in Eden would one day be set aside.

Having given this indication of his purpose, God began to illustrate the manner in which it would be accomplished. Sin had brought death, and if death was to be destroyed, provision must be made for the remission of sin; so in Abel’s offering, God began to illustrate what is clearly stated in the New Testament, that “without shedding of blood” there can be “no remission” of sin.—Heb. 9:22

THE PLAN UNFOLDS

Nearly two thousand years later God spoke to Abram, whose name was later changed to Abraham, and promised that through his “seed” all the families of the earth would be blessed. (Gen. 12:3; 22:18) Here again mention of the ‘seed’ is associated with a definite promise of blessings for all mankind. In Galatians 3:16, Christ is identified as this promised “seed,” but Abraham probably thought that his son Isaac was to be the ‘seed,’ and he was indeed a type of the real seed of promise. When Isaac became a man, God requested Abraham to offer him in sacrifice. Abraham demonstrated his willingness to obey, and raised his knife to slay his son when an angel of the Lord intervened, and a lamb was used as a substitute for Isaac.

We are reminded that before this promised blessing could reach the people a loving father must give up in sacrifice his beloved son. As the plan of God unfolds we learn that the father who actually does this is our loving Heavenly Father, and that he gave his own dear Son in sacrifice. The lamb, which was used as a substitute for Isaac, would therefore picture Jesus as the ‘Lamb of God.’

DELIVERANCE

The lamb symbolism is again brought to our attention in connection with Israel’s deliverance from the land of Egypt. It was the blood of the Passover lamb which afforded protection against death for the firstborn of Israel, and the next morning after they were passed over, all Israel was delivered from bondage. Paul speaks of Christ as “our passover” lamb (I Cor. 5:7); and also of the “church of the firstborn.” (Heb. 12:23) It is during the Gospel Age that the antitypical ‘firstborn’ class is protected under the blood of the Lamb of God; and, in the morning of the new age, will come the deliverance of all mankind from their bondage to sin and death.

“AS A LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER”

In Isaiah 53:3-6 the suffering and death of Jesus is prophesied, and here he is likened to a “lamb” which is led “to the slaughter.” (vs. 7) In verse ten we are informed that Jesus made “his soul an offering for sin,” and that “the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.” The ‘pleasure’ of the Lord is his designed blessing of all the families of the earth. It will prosper in the hands of Jesus.

John the Baptist identified Jesus as the one who had come to fulfill the prophecies and pictures of the Old Testament pertaining to the lamb. This beautiful symbolism is carried over into the Book of Revelation: “I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain.”—Rev. 5:6

Through the remainder of Revelation, the ‘Lamb’ is prominent in many of the principal events. We read, “I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads.” (Rev. 14:1) These shown with the Lamb on Mount Sion are the ones who collectively become his bride.

Old Jerusalem was the capital city of Israel, and Mount Zion was a part of that city. The Lamb and those who are with him are on symbolic Mount Zion, which suggests their exaltation to kingdom, or governmental authority. It is a picture leading up to the one in which John sees the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

“HIS FATHER’S NAME”

This ‘hundred forty and four thousand’ are identified by John as those who have the name of the Lamb’s Father written in their foreheads, and are members of the family of God. Throughout the Gospel Age they are called out of the world to be “a people for his name.” At first the majority of those called were of Jewish descent, but not enough of these responded to make up the foreordained number, so the Lord “visit[ed] the Gentiles” to find the remainder.—Acts 15:14

They partake of the family name of God from two standpoints. Through the Holy Spirit they become the sons of God, and through the ‘marriage of the Lamb’ they become his daughters. (Ps. 45:9-11) As the bride of the king’s Son they become a queen. This language conveys the thought of rulership, and indeed it is for this purpose that they become the bride, the Lamb’s wife.

The manner in which the hundred forty and four thousand attain to their exalted position with the Lamb on Mount Zion is described, “These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.”—Rev. 14:4

In the expression, ‘not defiled with women,’ the Greek word translated ‘women’ is just as properly translated in the singular, and is so translated six times in the seventeenth chapter of Revelation in references to a certain unholy woman. Verse eighteen reads, “The woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.” Concerning this same ‘woman,’ we read, “Upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the

martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.”—Rev. 17:5,6

In a further description of the unchaste characteristics of this harlot woman, verse two of this chapter declares of her, “With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.” Every reference made to this woman reveals that those who associate with her are defiled. But, as the Revelator informs us, those on Mount Sion with the Lamb are ‘not defiled’ by this woman. They maintain their virginity and follow the Lamb ‘whithersoever he goeth.’

THE “UNHOLY” CITY

As the bride, the Lamb’s wife, is likened to a city, the ‘holy city’ which comes ‘down from God out of heaven,’ the ‘harlot’ woman of Revelation is also said to be a city, that great city ‘Babylon.’ As the holy city comes down from God to rule over the people of the earth, great Babylon for centuries maintained control over the ‘kings of the earth,’ and through them, over the people. She was not properly married. She was not the bride of kings, therefore her rulership was unauthorized and unholy.

Paul wrote, “I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” (II Cor. 11:2) All the true followers of the Lamb have gladly suffered and died with him while waiting for his return to be united with him in marriage that, together with him, they might live and reign on the earth for a thousand years.

Throughout the age there came into being a large group of professed followers of the Lamb who did not wait for his return to be united with him in his kingdom. Instead, these united themselves with the kings of the earth and set up a kingdom of their own. This was an unholy union.

THE “BEAST” AND THE “LAMB”

There is still another contrasting picture presented to us in the Book of Revelation; namely, the “beast” and the Lamb. There is, of course, a leopardlike beast, a two-horned beast, an “image” of the beast, and, in chapter seventeen, a “scarlet coloured beast.” (ch. 13:1,2,11,14; 17:3) The harlot woman is shown riding on the scarlet colored beast. Later she is destroyed by the “horns” of the beast.—ch. 17:16

Since the bride becomes a reigning queen through union with the Lamb, so the harlot woman professes to be a “queen” (Rev. 18:7) through her unholy union with the “kings of the earth.” (Rev. 17:2) In this unchaste exaltation of rulership, the professed kingdom of Christ has persecuted—frequently even unto death—those who faithfully have followed ‘the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.’ Concerning the beastly system with which the woman was associated, we read, “It was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.”—Rev. 13:7

This power to ‘make war with the saints, and to overcome them,’ was not to last indefinitely. We are informed that ultimately, when this beast and those with him “make war with the Lamb, ... the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.”—Rev. 17:14

Here, in a few words, is described the great victory scene when the Lamb, and those previously shown with him on Mount Sion, overcome the forces of unrighteousness which, throughout the age, have opposed God, and under the leadership of Satan have endeavored to destroy the ‘seed of promise.’ Following this scene of triumph the symbolic narratives in the closing chapters of Revelation show the overthrow of all institutions of unrighteousness, and the way thus cleared for the establishment of Christ’s kingdom.

Each of the three closing chapters of the book presents a different picture of the kingdom and the blessing it will shower upon the sin-cursed and dying race. Chapter twenty opens by saying that an “angel”—a powerful messenger which is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ himself, the Lamb—comes “down from heaven,” and lays hold on ‘that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan’ and binds him “a thousand years.” (vss. 1,2) Later in the chapter we learn that at the close of the thousand years Satan is destroyed.—vs. 10

Verse four portrays those who, throughout the Gospel Age, have suffered and died with Christ. These are the ones who have followed the Lamb, walking in his footsteps faithfully even unto death. They are not defiled by that woman, and it is because of this that they are shown in chapter 14:1 to be with the Lamb on Mount Sion, having the Father’s name written in their foreheads. In the twentieth chapter and fourth verse,

we are told that they did not worship the “beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”

The spurious words of verse five—“But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished”—have hindered many from seeing the beautiful sequence of the Divine plan as revealed in this chapter. Following the “first resurrection” (vs. 5) of those who live and reign with Christ, and, as the Divinely designed work of the kingdom reign, we see “the dead, small and great, stand before God;” and we see “death and hell” giving up their dead. (vss. 11-13) Finally, we see death itself destroyed in the symbolic “lake of fire.”—vs. 14

In his Word, God had promised that the seed, the Messiah, would ultimately ‘bruise’ the ‘serpent’s head.’ He also promised that death and hell (*sheol*—Hebrew translation / *hades*—Greek translation) would be destroyed. (Hos. 13:14) The twentieth chapter of Revelation assures us of the fulfillment of these promises.

The twenty-first chapter emphasizes the fulfillment of other kingdom promises. In Isaiah 65:17-25 there is a prophecy saying that God would create “new heavens and a new earth.” There would be “no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days.” This language suggests a greatly increased life span.

“I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.” (Rev. 21:1) John, in vision thus saw the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. Isaiah foretold the creation of a new Jerusalem in conjunction with his prophecy of the ‘new heavens and a new earth,’ so John sees this new Jerusalem “coming down from God out of heaven.” Rev. 21:2

Isaiah’s prophecy indicates a phenomenal lengthening of life as a result of these new kingdom arrangements, and so did John see this in his vision. Indeed, as John saw this feature of the prophecy fulfilled, he said, “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”—vs. 4

In verse three John writes, “I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be

their God.” There are so many precious promises of God scattered throughout his Word, assuring us of his love for mankind and the wonderful provisions he has made to restore the human race to his favor and give all an opportunity to live forever, that no one symbolism is adequate to depict all that is involved.

God’s Tabernacle, which he instructed Moses to build, represented his presence with the nation of Israel. Through the various services of the Tabernacle the Israelites received the blessings of God. God’s favor will be with the people, and he will dwell with them, will be their God and they will be his people.

BY THE POWER OF GOD

The ‘angel’ which binds Satan comes ‘down from heaven,’ (Rev. 20:1) and the holy city, the new Jerusalem, comes down from God out of heaven, emphasizing the fact that the glorious kingdom solution of all the problems posed by sin and selfishness is of Divine origin, and accomplished by Divine power. This language portrays the fact of Divine intervention, and nothing apart from such intervention can save mankind from ultimate complete destruction. All the various symbolisms employed in Revelation to portray the establishment of the kingdom are designed to help us understand all the rich blessings which are in store for a sin-sick and weary world. How glad we should be that the fulfillment of God’s promises does not depend upon man! Jesus said to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world.” (John 18:36) Certainly it has not been functioning throughout the present age, nor will it be the outgrowth of human efforts.

In a prophecy referring to the “increase” of Christ’s kingdom, showing that it would become all-embracing, we read, “The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” (Isa. 9:6,7) Daniel 2:44 informs us that “In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom.” All the prophecies pertaining to the kingdom assure us that its triumphant establishment and victorious reign in no way depend upon the frail arm of flesh.

THE RIVER OF LIFE

The last chapter of Revelation presents still another view of the kingdom and its blessings, but harmonizing beautifully with those shown

in the two preceding chapters. John says, “He shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” The ‘throne’ symbolizes the governmental authority and power of the Divine kingdom. The association of the ‘Lamb’ symbolism emphasizes that the blessings of the kingdom are made available through the blood of the Redeemer—the “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”—John 1:29

These foretold kingdom blessings are pictured as ‘a pure river of water of life.’ The second verse reads, “In the midst of the street of it [the river], ... was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” The next verse reads, “There shall be no more curse [the curse of sin and death]: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him.”

The seventeenth verse reads, “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.” Thus we see that the bride, the Lamb’s wife, united with the Lamb is shown to be the holy city, and will extend to ‘whosoever will’ the glorious opportunity of receiving the life-giving blessings of the kingdom, provided by the death of the Lamb.

What a glorious prospect! And what an incentive to now follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, that we might be with him on Mount Sion of the New Jerusalem, having proved worthy to be a member of the bride class, when the marriage of the Lamb takes place, and his wife hath made herself ready.

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