

Beacons of Light in a World of Darkness

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”
—*Matthew 5:16*

THE SENSE OF ENCROACH-ing darkness in our modern world is growing at a steady pace. Fueled by the clamor and rivalries between religious sects, business interests, political and national bodies, and countless ideologies, conflicts

fill the headlines daily. Men’s hearts fail them for fear of what the future may bring. Darkness is falling upon mankind, and light is needed. The light the world needs is Jesus. He said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”—John 8:12, *English Standard Version*

Darkness is used in the Bible as a symbol of separation from God and a lack of knowledge concerning his plans and purposes for mankind. The Apostle John states, “God is light, and in him is no darkness

at all.” (I John 1:5) Those who know God as he reveals himself through his Word, and who are endeavoring to do his will, are represented by the apostle as walking “in the light.” All others are said to be walking “in darkness.”—vss. 6,7

This symbolic darkness settled down upon mankind as a result of sin, our first parents being the original sinners. They disobeyed God’s law, and so brought death upon themselves and upon all their progeny. Paul wrote, “By one man’s disobedience many [that is, the whole human race] were made sinners.” (Rom. 5:19) Thus “darkness” has covered the earth since the days of Eden. Indeed, the Prophet David referred to it as a nighttime experience: “Weeping may endure for a night,” and then adding the reassuring promise, “but joy cometh in the morning.”—Ps. 30:5

During this long and dreary night, when people have been mostly without either God or hope, he has had his witnesses in the earth. These, either by God’s hand upon them, or by their own faithful testimony concerning him, have been lights in a dark place. “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.” (Heb. 1:1, *ESV*) At no time have these witnesses convinced any considerable number of people of the truth pertaining to God, but they frequently served as guides to those who sought after righteousness in an earnest endeavor to find and serve him.—Acts 17:27

OLD TESTAMENT “LIGHTS”

Let us consider some powerful examples of godly ones that Jehovah has used as beacons of light to the human family. During the centuries prior to the

First Advent of Christ, God demonstrated his miraculous keeping power in the lives of his witnesses, to increase the effectiveness of their testimony. The Lord promised, “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper,” and this was ultimately true in connection with all his faithful witnesses during those ancient times.—Isa. 54:17

Going back to the time of the flood, we find that Noah was a witness for God, the Creator. The Apostle Peter informs us that Noah was a “preacher of righteousness.” (II Pet. 2:5) He did not reform the world of his day, but he was a light in that world because he bore witness concerning God and his purpose in sending the coming flood. Noah’s testimony for the Heavenly Father and for righteousness was vindicated by the outpouring of the deluge.

Joseph’s brothers sold him as a slave into Egypt. However, through the wonderful providences of God, he became the ruler of Egypt and the savior of his people. These experiences, recorded in Genesis chapters 37-50, wonderfully demonstrate the power and the glory of the Almighty! There is no record that Joseph ever preached a long sermon about God. His life of faith, and the occasional “word in season” by which he made his faith known, were more eloquent than any sermon he could have given.—Isa. 50:4

As time passed, a Pharaoh came to power in Egypt “who knew not Joseph.” The Israelites, then living in the land and greatly increased in number, were made slaves. God raised up Moses to deliver them. The name and glory of Jehovah were at stake as Moses and Aaron appeared before Pharaoh. While Moses himself was powerless to accomplish God’s design for his people, he stood loyally on the side of

the Lord, and in the name of “the God of the Hebrews” demanded deliverance for the Israelites. We know the result. Plague after plague fell upon the Egyptians, concluding with the death of their firstborn.—Exod. chapters 1-12

Pharaoh then demanded that the Hebrews leave the country, which they did. However, he soon changed his mind and sent his army to recapture them. Again, the Lord intervened, opening a passageway through the Red Sea for his people, and allowing the waters to close over Egypt’s army as they tried to follow. Then was heard the majestic song of deliverance, “I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation.”—Exod. 15:1,2

Forty years later, upon entering Canaan, the Israelites were immediately confronted with the fortified and walled city of Jericho. No progress could be made in possessing the land until this city was conquered, but they were incapable of doing this by their own wisdom and in their own strength. The account states as “Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand.” Joshua challenged him, asking, “Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?”—Josh. 5:13

The man with the drawn sword identified himself as the “captain of the host of the LORD,” God’s angelic host. (vs. 14) This messenger of God outlined to Joshua the strategy to be employed in capturing Jericho. Joshua followed these instructions, and the walls of the city crumbled before them. (Josh. 6:1-20)

“So the LORD was with Joshua; and his fame was noised throughout all the country.”—vs. 27

Another outstanding victory which brought glory to God was Gideon’s defeat of the Midianites by his little band of three hundred. (Judg. 7:1-19) Again, it was the Lord who gained the victory. Gideon’s small group of three hundred broke their earthen vessels, letting the light of their torches shine out in the darkness, and blew their trumpets and shouted, “The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.” Then “the LORD set every man’s sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host [of Midianites]: and the host fled.”—vss. 20-22

The Prophet Elijah was a beacon of light during a dark period in Israel’s history. Through the influence of Jezebel, King Ahab’s wife, Israel had been led into the idolatrous worship of Baal. In the account recorded in I Kings 18:17-40, Elijah arranged, by the Lord’s direction, for a test to be made on Mt. Carmel to demonstrate which was the true and living God, Jehovah or Baal. It was agreed that the one who would cause fire to come down from heaven and consume a sacrifice offered to him would be the true God.

There was a tremendous gathering on and around Mt. Carmel that day. Elijah insisted that the priests of Baal give their demonstration first, which they did, but to no avail. All day they agonized and cried unto Baal, but he did not respond. Elijah taunted them saying, “Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awakened.”—vs. 27

The priests of Baal continued their agonizing cries to their god until the time of the evening sacrifice.

Then Elijah invited the people to draw near to watch the test he would make. He prepared an altar and placed a sacrifice upon it. Then, in order to demonstrate that no trickery was being practiced, he dug a trench around the altar and filled it with water, drenching the altar and the sacrifice.

Then Elijah prayed: "LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again."—vss. 36,37

In response to this eloquent prayer, in which Elijah asked that God vindicate his own name before his people, fire came down and consumed the burnt sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, "Jehovah, He is the God; Jehovah, He is the God!"—vs. 39, *Green's Literal Translation*

We could go on recalling more thrilling incidents in which God glorified himself in the eyes of Israel, and frequently to the surrounding nations also, by the wonderful manner in which he fought for his people and delivered his faithful servants. They were all witnesses of the great Almighty Creator, not necessarily understanding his glorious character, but by the fact that they observed his divine favor and unwavering faithfulness to his chosen people.

WITNESSES OF JESUS

Beginning with Jesus' First Advent, the light of God's glory has been manifested in quite a different

manner. Jesus declared to his disciples, “Ye are the light of the world.” (Matt. 5:14) The era during which God miraculously manifested his hand in the affairs of his people Israel, and in the punishment of their enemies, was now drawing to a close. In a few short years Israel was to hear those fateful words, “Your house is left unto you desolate.” (Matt. 23:38) It was time for the light of God to shine out through other means.

In this new arrangement Jesus was the Leader, the Captain, the Forerunner. He declared of himself, “I am the light of the world.” (John 8:12) Jesus knew that he could not personally remain in the world. The work of God entrusted to him would be continued by his apostles and those faithful Christians who would follow after. In Revelation 20:4 they are referred to as those who were “beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God.” Although this language, taken literally, describes martyrdom, the greater meaning has to do with the giving up of life—sacrificing time, talent, energy and fleshly gain—in the service of the Lord. Literal death, of course, will come in some form to all of God’s chosen people. In this, however, we are encouraged by the promise, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”—Rev. 2:10

In the beginning of the Christian era, continuing through the lifetime of the apostles, miracles were employed to demonstrate the power of God. Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead. After his death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the waiting disciples at Pentecost. They also performed miracles as a testimony to God.

Soon after the apostles fell asleep in death, however, miraculous demonstrations of divine power ceased. The Lord's people since then, throughout the age, have been called upon to walk by faith. They have been witnesses of Jesus, faithfully proclaiming the "gospel of Christ," which, as Paul asserts, is "the power of God unto salvation."—Rom. 1:16

The commission given to these by Jesus was that they should be his witnesses in all the world by preaching the Gospel. (Matt. 24:14; 28:19; Acts 1:8) In ages past, when the Lord's people were called his witnesses, it was because God revealed his glory by the miraculous manner in which he dealt with them. In the Christian era, those who testify of Jesus do so by proclaiming God's marvelous plan for human salvation which his Son was sent into the world to execute. In proclaiming this Gospel, they tell not only of the glorious truths of Jesus' death and resurrection, but also of the call to become joint heirs with him in the heavenly kingdom.

Further, we anticipate the coming miracle of the earthly resurrection. The full Gospel message declares the great future work which will bear witness to God's power—the awakening from death of all who have ever lived. "An hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth." (John 5:28,29, *New American Standard Bible*) All those who are raised from death, and choose to obey the Lord, will enjoy the blessings of life everlasting on earth.

In proclaiming the facts concerning these miracles, the witnesses of Jesus' gain strength from their knowledge of the faithful ones who preceded them. They know that the same God who sustained Noah

in his preaching, saved Joseph out of his brothers' treachery, delivered Israel from Egypt, and led them through the Red Sea and across Jordan to victory in Canaan, is abundantly able to fulfill all his good promises, including the deliverance of all mankind from sin and death.

Only a handful of these who give testimony for Jesus ever actually saw him, but they believe the corroborative words of those who affirmed the fact that he was raised from the dead. (I Cor. 15:3-8) These beacons of light also believe and proclaim Paul's declaration that when Jesus was resurrected, he was highly exalted above angels, principalities, and powers, and above every name that is named, to the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Eph. 1:18-23; Heb. 1:1-3) They accept and preach the further testimony of Paul that ultimately "every knee should bow, ... and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."—Phil. 2:9-11

The witnesses of Jesus are glad to occupy this place, as his ambassadors, in the arrangements of God. They delight to obey the divine command to honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. Indeed, they realize that they cannot honor the Father at all, except as they do so through the Son. (John 5:23) They know that to revere the resurrected and glorified Jesus, and to testify of him, does not detract from the glory of God, for they realize that it was the Father's power that exalted his Son to this high position at his own right hand.

These "lights," living in a dark world, go forth with a song of praise upon their lips to God for his love in sending Jesus to be the Redeemer and Savior of mankind. They praise the divine wisdom which

designed such a loving plan of salvation, as well as God's justice which, while it could not clear the guilty, made provision to wash away their sins by the blood of the Redeemer. Finally, they praise the power of God by which every feature of his glorious purpose is implemented and made sure. As the "light of the world," they proclaim the glorious hope of "restitution" for all mankind during the thousand years of Christ's reign. (Acts 3:20,21) They are "blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom [they] shine as lights in the world."—Phil. 2:15, *ESV*

"AS THE SUN"

Through Jesus' light-bearing witnesses, the Gospel is preached until the end of the present age. The parable of the wheat and the tares pertains to the close of the Christian era. The witnesses of Jesus are called "children of the kingdom," in this parable. When the work of harvest is fully consummated these faithful followers of the Master are said to "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."—Matt. 13:24-30,36-43

This shining forth as the sun will be in association with Jesus, the foretold "Sun of righteousness." He will "arise with healing in his wings," to enlighten and bless the whole world. (Mal. 4:2) The witnesses of Jesus will, as the Church triumphant, assist the Sun of righteousness in causing the knowledge of the glory of God to fill the whole earth, "as the waters cover the sea."—Isa. 11:9; 40:5

When Jesus said to his handful of disciples in the sermon on the mount, "Ye are the light of the world,"

he meant that ultimately they would be much more than merely a light “in” the world of today. It is in the latter, limited manner that they have thus far let their light shine. This has not been due to lack of zeal or enthusiasm on their part, but because of human limitations.

Just as Jesus explained, most have “loved darkness rather than light.” (John 3:19) Therefore those who dwell in darkness usually turn away from the light when they see it. Satan is largely responsible for this. As the “god of this world,” he has blinded the minds of those who believe not, “lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”—II Cor. 4:4

However, when the Sun of righteousness arises, and the “children of the kingdom” shine forth with him, Satan will be bound, that he may “deceive the nations no more.” (Rev. 20:1-3) Thus the “power of darkness” will be prevented from interfering with the shining forth of light from the glorious “Sun.” (Col. 1:13) All the world will have a full opportunity to become acquainted with Jehovah, the one true God, and with his beloved Son who died for them that they might live. Then will be testified to all that great truth that Jesus gave himself “a ransom for all.”—I Tim. 2:4-6

A THOUSAND YEARS

The work of enlightening mankind will require the thousand years of Christ’s kingdom. (Rev. 20:6) First, the living generation will receive the “pure language” mentioned by the Prophet Zephaniah. This will be immediately after the “fire” of God’s jealousy has purified the earth in the great “time of

trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.”
—Zeph. 3:8,9; Dan. 12:1

Many who pass through that trouble will be quite ignorant of the true God. This will necessitate giving them the pure message of truth, that they might have an opportunity to know and serve God properly, “with one consent.” This will be only the beginning. Then will come the awakening of all who have died. As each one hears the voice of the “Son of man” calling them forth from the tomb, they will also need to be enlightened. For this cause, the Sun of righteousness will shine throughout the thousand years. By its light, the long night of sin and death will be fully banished from the minds of all people.

The Prophet Zechariah gives us a beautiful illustration of this. He speaks of the thousand years of Christ’s reign as a “day” during which the Sun of Righteousness will be shining. “It shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light. And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem.”—Zech. 14:7,8

These “living waters” are pictured in Revelation 22:1,2 as a “river” flowing from the “throne of God and of the Lamb.” On either side of the river are trees of life, bearing life-giving fruit. We are told that the leaves of the trees are “for the healing of the nations.” Then, “The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let the one who hears say, Come. And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.” “And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light.”—vss. 17,5, *ESV* ■