

God to Be Served with One Consent

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to the people a
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—*Zephaniah 3:9*

WITH THE FALL OF OUR

first parents in Eden, man soon became fearful of his loving Creator. This spirit of fear, fostered by Satan, the Devil, has been fertile soil in which he has sown seeds of confusion regarding religious worship, moral as well as social stan-

dards, and ideologies among nations and governments. Through the ages these seeds have germinated and matured into myriads of false and distorted beliefs. Today, despite the enlightenment of the world along many lines, the people are more confused and divided than ever before in their concepts of religious, political and social scruples.

God is fully aware of man's past and present condition, however, and has a plan for unifying mankind's understanding of divine principles along all lines. The word translated “pure” in our opening text means, according to *Strong's* Hebrew definitions, to “clarify” or “brighten.” Indeed, it is God's plan to enlighten the entire world as to his standards of righteousness,

while at the same time doing away with the false and confusing concepts which have plagued mankind with division for thousands of years. Only such a plan can bring about the Creator's desired result of having the entire human race serve him with "one consent."

THE "TRUE LIGHT"

God's only begotten Son, Jesus, is that "true light," the "light of the world," which will eventually enlighten every individual who has lived upon the earth. (John 1:9; 8:12) During his earthly ministry, Jesus commissioned his followers also to be lights in this present world of darkness. (Matt. 5:14) The divine purpose through these light-bearers has not been to convert the whole world to Christ during the present age, but to serve as a witness, and to assist in God's current purpose of calling from the world a "people for his name."—Acts 15:14-17

As this work has progressed during the past two thousand years, Satan has continued to foster and promote false religions, theories, and practices among the people. When some of these seem outdated, he causes new versions of darkness to arise and flourish to keep pace with societal changes. As a result, many have been turned aside from God's ways, and like the Israelites of the past, they have brought into their midst various viewpoints, standards and practices that are out of harmony with righteousness. Today, people throughout the world, regardless of religious profession, are divided into many groups, and there is no "consent" as to what is right or wrong, moral or immoral, truth or lies.

Toward the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus raised the question of whether or not he would "find faith

on the earth” when he returned. (Luke 18:8) We note that he did not question whether there would be religious fervor, or the spirit of religious devotion. The “faith” to which he referred was the faith pertaining to the true Gospel, which was “preached before ... unto Abraham.” It was the glad tidings that God, in his own due time and way, through the promised seed of Abraham, would bless “all the kindreds of the earth.”—Gal. 3:8; Gen. 22:18; Acts 3:25

THE “UNKNOWN GOD”

A general review of religious, political as well as social convictions and practices through the ages, together with conditions as we see them in the world today, helps one to understand Paul’s feelings when he stood on Mars Hill and talked with the Athenian philosophers. He said, “Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.”—Acts 17:22,23

We might suppose to commend the Athenians for the open manner in which they confessed their belief in a god whom they did not know. It is interesting, too, that they gave thought to higher powers which, in accordance with their worship of many gods, were ostensibly there to guide them in all matters of life. Yet, they did not serve a single deity with “one consent.” Such a God was, indeed, “unknown” to them.

Among the wooden, stone, and metal idols throughout the world today, there may be none ascribed to the “unknown god” as was the case in ancient Athens. However, we can be safe in saying that in the hearts

of millions there is an image of a god whom the people would like to believe exists who is loving and kind. Such a vision is of a supreme being able and willing to take hold of this present confused world and bring order out of chaos, peace out of turmoil and war, understanding and cooperation out of the bitter strife of words and conflict of ideologies.

It is this unknown god which the people are thinking about when they raise the oft repeated question, “Where is God in the troubled world of today?” Very few offer any explanation, and those who do often give most shallow words, such as, “God is punishing the world,” or “This is what mankind deserves.” However, there is that God who, throughout the ages, has been unknown to the people, and who has promised, as recorded in our text, that the time is coming when he will turn to the people “a pure language,” which will enable them all to serve him with “one consent.”

The time identification contained in this wonderful promise is immediately after the symbolic “earth” has been “devoured with the fire” of God’s jealousy, as prophesied in the preceding verse. It reads, “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

THE VISION

God-reverencing people throughout the ages have been encouraged to wait on the Lord. Likewise, in every generation there have been those who wondered why God continued to permit evil. To Habakkuk the

Lord said, "The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." (Hab. 2:3) Paul quotes from this prophecy and applies it to the Second Advent of Christ.— Heb. 10:37

There is, therefore, no mistaking the time of the application of God's words to Habakkuk. It is at the time subsequent to Jesus' return, during his invisible presence in the outworking of earth's affairs. The fulfilment of many prophetic signs indicates that we are currently living in that period. The vision now "speaks," giving sincere students of the Bible an understanding of the times in which they are living. Among other things, the meaning of the great "time of trouble" now upon the world is the assurance that the waiting time is about over. (Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21) The time is near at hand when the Lord will put down iniquity and exalt righteousness in the earth.

The vision has spoken also in that we now see that the nations are being gathered, that the symbolic fire of God's jealousy is upon them, and that when this aspect of divine intervention shall have accomplished its purpose, the pure language will be turned to the people. Then the previously "unknown" God will be revealed to them, and with hearts rejoicing they will unitedly serve him with one consent, their songs of praise filling the earth with his glory.

Paul explained to the Athenians some of the characteristics of the unknown God, who "made the world and all things therein." He dwells "not in temples made with hands," Paul said. It was a polite way of telling the Athenians that the unknown God did not need such temples as they had in Athens for many

of their other gods. (Acts 17:24) Today we might add that God also does not dwell in royal palaces, halls of presidents and premiers, or mansions of dictators and fanatical rulers.

The unknown God, Paul went on to explain, “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being.” (vss. 26-28) The apostle further expounds that since we are children of God, his creation, “We should not think that the divine being is like gold, silver, or stone, or is an image carved by humans using their own imagination and skill.” (vs. 29, *International Standard Version*) How wonderfully Paul thus contrasts the one true God with all other gods.

THE JUDGMENT DAY

Paul says concerning mankind’s general lack of knowledge of the “unknown God,” that the “times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent, Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” (Acts 17:30,31) The command to repentance has gone out through the Gospel message, and while it has been proclaimed throughout all the earth, the number thus far who have heard the message in an understandable manner has been very small. Thus, as for the majority of mankind, God is still “winking”

at, or overlooking, their ignorance as he continues to prepare for their future blessing.

That blessing will be brought to them through enlightenment. Notice how Paul contrasts the “times of this ignorance” with the fact that God has appointed a future “day” of judgment. The Apostle Peter clarifies that this judgment day will not be twenty-four hours in length, but rather a period of one thousand years. (II Pet. 3:7,8) The apostles knew this to be in harmony with God’s plan, for the Prophet Isaiah had written, “When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.” (Isa. 26:9) Likewise, the psalmist wrote, “He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.” (Ps. 96:13) In the judgment day scene pictured for us in Revelation the “books” are “opened,” a symbol of revealed knowledge and understanding.—Rev. 20:12

The foregoing statement of Isaiah that the people will learn righteousness when God’s “judgments are in the earth,” is followed by the prophet’s reference to other “lords beside thee,” which he says have had “dominion over us.” These, Isaiah asserts, will all be “dead” then, “they shall not live,” and even the memory of these former gods will “perish.” (Isa. 26:13,14) This will be made possible through the enlightenment of the judgment day, as well as by the fact that Satan will be unable to deceive mankind any longer, for he will be bound. (Rev. 20:2) By these means, all people will thus be enabled to learn of, worship and serve the only “living and true God” with one consent.—I Thess. 1:9

Paul explains that this future work of enlightenment and judgment will be in the hands of Jesus,

and that God has given assurance of this to all men in that he has raised him from the dead. An outline of the qualifications of this future judge of mankind is presented to us by the Prophet Isaiah. Jesus is identified prophetically as “a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch” which was to grow out of his “roots.”—Isa. 11:1

Concerning this Branch, Isaiah further writes: “The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear [*Strong’s*: “reverence”] of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the [reverence] of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked”—those who willfully oppose earth’s new king and judge. “Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.”—vss. 2-5

The result of this righteous rulership and judgment of Christ is then symbolically described by Isaiah: “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of

the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”—Isa. 11:6-9

A PURE LANGUAGE

The earth will then be filled with the “knowledge of the Lord” because he will have provided the people with a “pure language,” or message, which will “sweep away the refuge of lies,” misrepresentations, and distortions which have confused the minds of the fallen and dying race. (Isa. 28:17) Then they will be enlightened concerning the one true God, and learn to serve him with “one consent,” that is, all in a unified way. They will not be forced to do so, but they will have learned to love their Creator, because they will have been taught concerning his character attributes of wisdom, justice, love and power. They will learn how his love was manifested and his justice satisfied through his beloved Son who “gave himself a ransom for all.” (I Tim. 2:6) They will see his power manifested in the resurrection. Finally, they will come to understand his wisdom in the permission of evil, and in his loving plan for the recovery of the fallen race.

In his words to Timothy, Paul explains that it is the desire of God that all shall be saved, and “come unto the knowledge of the truth.” This knowledge, centered in the “ransom for all,” will be “testified in due time” to all people. (vss. 4,6) The “due time” is the appointed time during which the world is to be judged by the righteous judge, Christ Jesus. Concerning that day, the Prophet Micah wrote, “The law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” (Mic. 4:2) “Zion” is here used as a symbol of the heavenly phase of Christ’s kingdom. With Christ on mount Zion will be the

“little flock” who have followed him faithfully, even unto death.—Luke 12:32; Rev. 14:1,4; 2:10

Jerusalem, as used in Micah’s prophecy, symbolizes the earthly phase of the kingdom. “Princes in all the earth” will be appointed by God as earthly representatives to carry out Christ’s instructions. (Ps. 45:16) From these will go forth the “word of the LORD”—the words of instruction, the “pure language,” which will enlighten all mankind and thus provide a full opportunity for everyone to turn to the Heavenly Father.

Of this time we are assured, “There shall be no more death.” (Rev. 21:4) The people, raised from the dead, will learn the fundamental truth which Paul stated so long ago: “The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom. 6:23) Mankind will rejoice to learn that by accepting the provision of life made for them through the redemptive work of Christ, and by obeying the laws of his kingdom, they may live forever. They will attain to life everlasting once they have taken full advantage of the opportunity to partake of the symbolic “tree of life,” and “water of life” which, in Christ’s kingdom, will flow from the “throne of God and of the Lamb.”—Rev. 22:1-3,14,17

There will indeed be one worldwide government, based on the righteous laws and loving attributes of the one true God. The laws of God will not only be learned, but written in the hearts of the people, the Bible assures us. No one will then need to say to his neighbor, “Know the Lord,” for all shall know him, from the least to the greatest. (Jer. 31:33,34) Thus will come about the joyous fulfilment of our opening text, that all will “call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.” ■