Spring: Season of Renewal

"Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle [turtledove] is heard in our land."
—Song of Solomon 2:11,12

ONCE AGAIN, WITH THE arrival of the spring season comes also the sense of joy and anticipation that is shared by people all over the world, the time of year depending on which hemisphere they may live in. Many hearts are thus uplifted when witnessing the renewal of life that springs forth from the cold and barren ground of a harsh winter that has just passed. Spring is the time when most flowering plants bloom, and this powerful act of nature symbolizes the revival of life.

The spring months start the season of birth as the eternal and silent cycle of life begins to warm the earth with its rapidly increasing length of daylight hours, and as the axis of the earth begins its annual tilt toward the sun. We may trust that Mother Nature will surely 'spring forth' again on time, even as it has done since the early days of

Creation, thereby giving the season its wonderfully descriptive name.

RENEWED HOPE

Most households also spring to life on various levels of endeavor when springtime arrives. It is a good time for planning new projects and ventures around the home that may include doing necessary repairs, painting, and a general sprucing up. More extensive plans may also be considered along with other major home improvement projects. Spring cleaning is an annual event when a more thorough cleaning of the home is undertaken, and also a time to dispose of accumulated items that are no longer wanted or needed.

Turning our attention to the outside yard that has lain dormant for several months may include preparing the lawn, planting flowers and gardens, and the pruning of shrubs and trees. With present day emphasis on 'green projects,' attention may also be focused on consideration of environmentally friendly projects, such as preparing compost bins and other items that are compatible with nature.

CLEANSING OUR HEARTS

Each year, during either the month of March or April, the footstep followers of our Lord are instructed to prepare for the annual commemoration and anniversary of his death. An important aspect in connection with that preparation includes the searching of our hearts in an effort to rid ourselves of all thoughts and actions of unrighteousness and sin.

When the Jews prepared to celebrate their annual Passover and to partake of the slain lamb, they were instructed to eat unleavened bread, and

they also were to search their homes for any leaven that might be hidden away. Leaven represents corruption and sin, thereby serving as a very appropriate and typical lesson for all of the Lord's people to heed. God's instructions to the people of Israel were, "Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel." (Exod. 12:15) There were serious consequences for those who were careless and disobedient to the commandments of God. We further read, "Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land."—vs. 19

In his first letter to the brethren at Corinth, the Apostle Paul spoke of the deeper and spiritual meaning of leaven, and explained that it represents sin. He also related it to Jesus' instructions to his disciples to remember his death, saying, "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."—I Cor. 5:6-8

REMEMBERING JESUS' DEATH

Jesus died during springtime and his followers are instructed to assemble together to celebrate the Memorial of his sacrificial death. He commanded

his disciples, "This do in remembrance of me." (Luke 22:19) The proper time to commemorate the event this year will be Friday evening, April 18th, after sundown. It is a very simple, but solemn, feast, and carries with it the much deeper significance of providing salvation for the human family from the sentence of death that had been passed to them because of father Adam's disobedience to the Divine law.

Jesus gave his life as the antitypical Lamb of God, and he has invited his followers to share with him in partaking of the emblems, and sharing in his death. The Apostle Paul addressed this when writing to the brethren at Corinth, saying, "The cup of blessing, for which we bless God,—is it not a participation of the blood of the anointed one? The loaf which we break,—is it not a participation of the body of the anointed one? Because there is one loaf, we, the many, are one body; for we all partake of the one loaf."—I Cor. 10:16,17, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*

The significance of participation in Jesus' 'cup' and 'loaf' points to the faithful members of his bride who will also share with him in blessing mankind during his future kingdom. Paul rejoiced over this privilege when referring to his own part in it, and explained, "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church." (Col. 1:24) As we partake of these emblems on this annual occasion let us do so with the conviction of renewed desire and determination to make our calling and election sure.

SPRING OBSERVANCES

The word Lent comes from an old English word meaning 'spring' and is associated with the Easter Sunday festival that is observed by various church denominations. The combining of the two observances—Lent and Easter—is therefore applied to the same period of time during which our Lord Jesus' death and resurrection occurred. Lent is a period of forty days of penitential preparation for Easter. The forty days relate to Jesus' temptation in the wilderness where he fasted for forty days and nights after his baptism by John. It was at that time and place that Satan tried to turn our Lord away from the earthly ministry he had come to accomplish.

When the concept of observing forty days of Lent was first instituted, it was associated with fasting. In this sense, Jesus cautioned, "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. (Matt. 6:1-4) Jesus then addressed the matter of prayer (vss. 5-15) and fasting (vss. 16-18) which are both issues of importance.

SPRING AND THE RESURRECTION

The revival of life that occurs during the months of spring coincide with the resurrection of our dear

Lord Jesus, and further illustrates the wonderful promises of God that are associated with the long-awaited resurrection of the whole human family from the grave. This will be one of the fundamental provisions of our Lord Jesus' kingdom of life, peace, and righteousness. We may put our total confidence and trust in him who said, "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment." (John 5:28,29, *New American Standard Bible*) We believe that the faithful members of the body of Christ are being called during this present Gospel Age and will be raised to a heavenly inheritance. The whole human family will share in the blessed resurrection of the dead during the soon-to-be established kingdom under the administration of our Lord Jesus and the faithful members of his body.

SUMMER AND WINTER

The Father's promise of life will be offered to all who are obedient to his laws of righteousness during the future time of Christ's kingdom. Its extent will be worldwide and will include the people of all nations and languages. The psalmist wrote concerning the wonders of Creation, but spoke of only two seasons as encompassing the whole annual cycle of nature. He said, "The day is thine, the night also is thine: thou hast prepared the light and the sun. Thou hast set all the borders of the earth: thou hast made summer and winter." (Ps. 74:16,17) The Prophet Zechariah also spoke concerning the

perpetual cycle of Mother Nature and its living waters. We read, "It shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea [eastern sea, *Marginal Translation*], and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be." (Zech. 14:8) In the new day of Christ's kingdom, truth and righteousness will flow to all of the willingly obedient to provide life and blessings.

The boundless provision of blessings that will be made available for the human family during Christ's kingdom was also described by the Revelator who wrote, "He shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of 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."—Rev. 22:1,2

WINTER IS PAST

In our featured text, Solomon points forward to the time when Christ's kingdom would be established and the world be refreshed under the loving and caring hand of the Heavenly Father. His prophetic words 'the winter is past' describe the reign of sin and death as being the long winter season that has overshadowed the human family as a result of Adam's transgression and sentence of death. For over six thousand years it has truly been a barren, cold, forbidding, and dark period of earth's history. This has been a time during which the whole human family has experienced sin, death, and alienation

from God's loving face. Man has struggled with the difficulties of life for a few short years, with their hopes and dreams for a better tomorrow ending in the grave.

In Mark's gospel he speaks of the 'winter time' and the harvest period of the present Gospel Age calling of the church as culminating in a great time of trouble that will then come upon the whole world. We read, "Woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter. For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be. And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days."—Mark 13:17-20

THE RAIN IS OVER AND GONE

Rain, whether in the form of refreshing dew or as invigorating showers, points to the wonderful blessings that relate to an understanding of the Truth. The Father's promises center around this beautiful symbolism. "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass." (Deut. 32:2) The Prophet Hosea speaks concerning the former and latter rains. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." (Hos. 6:3) The 'former' and 'latter' rains are associated with the First and Second Advents of our Lord Jesus. Both of these periods of

time are marked by our Lord's ministry to his faithful followers.

Between the two advents there was a long period of time during which there was no rain. These prophetic words indicate the drought condition that the Father permitted to come upon his people. "Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." (I Kings 17:1) James reveals to us the length of this time saying, "Elias [Elijah] was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months." (James 5:17) The three years and six months represents the twelve hundred and sixty years during the Middle Ages wherein the Truth was suppressed by the apostate church's alliance with the state.

James also speaks of the refreshing rain that would be given at the time of our Lord's invisible presence with his people that marks his Second Advent. He writes, "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming [presence—Greek, *parousia*] of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming [presence—Greek, *parousia*] of the Lord draweth nigh."—vss. 7,8

FLOWERS APPEAR ON THE EARTH

In our featured text, Solomon speaks of flowers that appear on the earth and are early evidences of

the new season at hand. These are the flowering blossoms that are the first to show their beautiful faces as they appear out of the barren earth. This wonderful feature beautifully represents the springing forth of God's ultimate purpose to bless the human family. This will soon be accomplished when the harvest of the final members of the bride class will be complete, and the administration of Christ's kingdom of blessing for all mankind will be set up.

TIME OF THE SINGING OF BIRDS

Another evidence that winter is past and spring has arrived relates to the birds that have returned after the long winter and announce their presence with joyful song. Solomon speaks of this as one of the signs of spring that becomes obvious to all.

An interesting variation of Solomon's reference to the singing of birds in this phrase of our featured scripture is found in the *American Standard Bible (Edition: 1901, Marginal Reading),* which says, "the pruning of vines." This variation is also noted in the *J. B. Rotherham Translation* where we read, "the time of the spring-song hath come,"and the *Margin* reads, "The singing time (either of birds or vine-dressers); the pruning time."

THE VOICE OF THE TURTLE IS HEARD

Solomon's reference to 'the voice of the turtle' is more correctly understood when translated 'the voice of the turtledove.' The terms dove and pigeon may be used interchangeably, but reference to pigeons denotes a larger bird. They are found in any of several small wild bird varieties, and are especially noted for their mournful cooing. They are also

recognized for their peaceful and gentle habits, and are a symbol of purity.

Turtledoves and pigeons are the only birds that were permitted to be offered in Levitical sacrifice. "If the burnt sacrifice for his offering to the LORD be of fowls, then he shall bring his offering of turtledoves, or of young pigeons."—Lev. 1:14

A pair of turtledoves were offered by Mary eight days after Jesus was born. "When eight days were accomplished for the circumcision of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." (Luke 2:21-24) Mary did this in accordance with the provisions of the Law (Lev. 12:6) for her purification.

THE DESERT WILL BLOSSOM

As we continue to wait in joyful anticipation for the completion of the last faithful members of Christ's body and the setting up of his kingdom, we turn to the prophetic words of Isaiah for a brief preview of the blessed day so near at hand. "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing."" (Isa. 35:1,2) In symbolic language, we catch a glimpse of the waters of

life that will be made available for the poor groaning human family. "In the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water."—vss. 6,7

SHOWERS OF BLESSINGS SPRING FORTH

From a "Psalm and Song of David," he wrote of the confidence we share in the God of our salvation, "Which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people." (Ps. 65:7) The restless waves and tumult of mankind will be-come stilled under the mighty hand of God.

Rain, showers, and the abundant waters of life and peace are associated with the kingdom of our Lord Jesus, as the psalmist continues, "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it [after thou hadst made it to desire rain, *Marginal Translation*]: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof [thou causest rain to descend, *Marginal Translation*]: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the springing thereof."—vss. 9,10 ■