Sowing and Reaping

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."
—II Timothy 4:2

IT WILL HAVE BEEN NO-ticed by careful readers of the New Testament that various illustrations are used to help us understand the work God has been doing during the Gospel Age. For instance, the Apostle Paul indicates that fleshly Israel can be likened to the original cultivated olive tree. Further, the root of the tree pictures the promise of God—the Abrahamic promise, that the seed of Abraham eventually should bless all the families of the earth. (Rom. 11:17,24; Jer. 11:16,17) This promise, that God would raise up from Abraham's seed a great Deliverer who would bless all nations of the earth, was without doubt a most powerful factor in holding Israel together as a nation.—Acts 26:6,7

Faithful Israelites referred to this Deliverer as the Messiah, the Anointed, the one whom God would anoint and empower to do this great work. In spite of many centuries of checkered experiences,

they were a nation constantly looking forward to the coming of their great Deliverer.

When Jesus presented himself as their Messiah, they, as a nation, were unable to receive him. They not only rejected his message, but even crucified him. In view of this, to use Paul's illustration, many of the natural branches of the olive tree were broken off "because of unbelief." (Rom. 11:20) Only a remnant were allowed to remain—that is, those who received Jesus—and these were given the opportunity to "become the sons of God."—John 1:12

However, in view of the fact that God had arranged to have a foreknown, predestinated number to constitute the church, and as only a remnant of the natural seed were ready for this great favor, the Scriptures tell us that God purposed to find a sufficient number from the Gentiles—wild olive branches—to take the place of those which had been broken off.

Therefore, during the Gospel Age, God has visited "the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name." (Acts 15:14) Those who have recognized Jesus as their Messiah and Redeemer, and have consecrated themselves to follow him, have been, on this account, grafted into the Israelites olive tree. Through the anointing of the Holy Spirit, these have been made to partake of the "root and fatness of the olive tree." (Rom. 11:17) But very few have been ready for this High Calling; a calling which is extended through the Truth.

Our Lord, in the parable of the sower of seed, tells us that the seed is "the word of the kingdom"—the great invitation to live with, and share with him in his kingdom. (Matt. 13:3,19) That all

would not be ready for this call, our Lord shows by representing the seed as falling upon various kinds of ground: stony ground, ground infested with thorns, and ground where there is not much earth. Only a small proportion of the people who have heard the message could be represented as "good ground"—that is, as possessing "honest and good heart[s]," ready to receive the seed and bear fruit accordingly.—Matt. 13:23; Luke 8:15

In keeping with the illustration of seed sowing, our Lord tells us that at the end of the age there would come a "harvest"—a gathering in of the results from the labors of the entire age. In view of Satan's endeavor throughout the Gospel Age to thwart God's work of gathering the church by bringing in among its members a wrong class whom Jesus calls "tares" and not "wheat,"—"the children of the kingdom"—this harvest period and its work would include a separating of the true from the false, the 'wheat' from the 'tares.'—Matt. 13:30,38

JEWISH HARVEST

At the end of the Jewish Age there came a harvest period and a harvest work—a gathering in of the results of the work done during the Jewish Age. In keeping with this thought, Jesus said to his disciples, "Look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." "I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour."—John 4:35,38

The sickle, that produced a separation between the true Israelites and the merely nominal Israelites, was the message preached, 'the word of the kingdom.' But this same work, as we have seen, is also pictured as a seed-sowing work—"A sower

went forth to sow"—showing how more than one illustration is used to picture the same work.—Matt. 13:3

GOSPEL AGE HARVEST

In view of the fact that a harvest also comes at the end of the Gospel Age—the time where we are now privileged to live—and the fuller light which is now shining again acting as a sickle, separating the Truth-hungry from others, it has been suggested by some that a general witness for the Truth should not be given at this time. The argument is that it would be quite wrong to attempt to sow and reap at the same time.

It is true that in the literal harvest, the gathering in of the ripe wheat, and not seed sowing, monopolizes the energies of the reapers. But here we are dealing with spiritual things. Actually, sowing and reaping are merely illustrations. To press too literal an interpretation upon scriptural illustrations will often quite spoil their import, and we can confuse ourselves with them, rather than be enlightened.

Throughout our Lord's earthly ministry, the Gospel of the kingdom, including the good tidings that Messiah had come, was preached. This message needed to be sown in the hearts of that people in order to produce the harvest separation between the wheat and the chaff. Similarly at the end of the Gospel Age, the separation of the wheat from the tares by means of the sickle of present Truth is the main work the Lord is accomplishing. This same work may similarly, as at the First Advent, be illustrated by the sowing of the good seed; for the seeds of Truth need to be sown in the heart in order to

produce the separation between the true and the false.

Many who were reached were able to appreciate certain features of the Divine plan that were made clear to them. They learned that the vast majority who die outside of Christ are not eternally lost, but are merely asleep, awaiting the call of the great Deliverer, and that they are to come forth to enjoy the blessings of Messiah's earthly kingdom, and have an opportunity of being restored to that which was lost in Adam. (Acts 3:19-21) Thus, seeds of Truth were sown in the hearts of many, causing them—although not ready to forsake all to follow Jesus—to look forward to the millennial kingdom and the blessings of restitution then to be bestowed upon all the families of the earth.

So it has been throughout the present harvest period, up to this moment. The sickle of Truth has been thrust in to separate the wheat (Rev. 14:14-16); and at the same time, from another angle, a worldwide sowing work has gone forward. An illustration of this may be seen in Psalm 126:5,6. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." From this scripture, we see the figures of both reaping and sowing made use of in such a way as to indicate both works being done at the same time, depending upon the angle from which the matter is viewed.

Amos 9:13 also pictures this twofold work accomplished at the end of the Gospel Age. Amos says, "The plowman shall overtake [to come or draw nigh, *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible*]

the reaper." The time of trouble—'plowman'—came near a worldwide reaping work that had been going forward. This tribulation, incident to the First World War, made it increasingly difficult in many parts of the earth for the reaping work to be continued; but, in spite of these difficulties, a measure of reaping continued to be done.

The harvest continued; but as earlier in the harvest, features of the Divine plan were emphasized in addition to the truths pertaining to the High Calling; so formerly, it was, and still is, a sowing of the Truth, accomplishing a work of harvest.

Amos therefore continues, "The treader of grapes [shall overtake, or come nigh] him that soweth seed." The work here described as seed sowing has been clearly fulfilled by the worldwide proclamation of the good news of the kingdom "in all the world for a witness." (Matt. 24:14) This activity, appropriately referred to by the prophet as 'him that soweth seed,' is to be followed by the momentous event to overtake Christendom in the climax of Armageddon; namely, the complete dissolution of Satan's empire—'the treader of grapes' symbolizing particularly those experiences which will crush (destroy) the fruits of selfishness produced by the "vine of the earth." (Rev. 14:19) This will indeed be the dark night wherein "no man can work." (John 9:4) By this time, the harvest will be over.

We see, therefore, that the argument against public witness, that it is an endeavor to sow and reap at the same time, is an unsound application of the principles of reaping and sowing. It is but an illustration of attempting to press a literal meaning, or make a material illustration fit perfectly a

spiritual work. Our commission is to "Preach the Word" (II Tim. 4:2), and he who is "the head over all things to the church, Which is his body," will use the message either to gather the wheat, comfort all that mourn, or make known the good news of the coming kingdom 'in all the world for a witness,' as he deems best.—Eph. 1:22,23

Ere long the reaping, sowing, and grafting work of the present Gospel Age will be brought to a successful completion, and then a worldwide sowing of the good seed of the kingdom will go forward until all know the LORD from the least unto the greatest. (Jer. 31:34) The harvest of this great future seed-sowing work will be a recovery of the vast majority of the human family into harmony with God, and to that which was lost in Adam. To these, the great King will say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."—Matt. 25:34 ■