"There Shall Be No More Death"

Is This an Impossible Dream?

"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. And 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." —Revelation 21:3,4

AFTER JESUS' DEATH AND resurrection, shortly after the Day of Pentecost, we read of the healing of a man lame from birth, by Peter and John, as recorded in Acts 3:1-8. After this miracle, the account says concerning the people who were witnessing this that "they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering." (Acts 3:10-11) Although the people wondered

at the miracle, Peter was glad to explain how it had come about. In verses 13-18, he states that it was none other than the power of God that had accomplished this, the same power that had raised Jesus from the dead, even though they [Israel] as a nation had denied the "Holy One" (verse 14), and delivered him to be crucified. Peter explained that none of this was by chance, that it was not a miscarriage of God's plan. In verses 15 and 18, he says concerning Jesus, "whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. . . . those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled." This was all part of God's master plan.

Peter continues in this scriptural account and speaks of the time when Jesus would return. "He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:20-21) What Peter says here concerned a future time of restitution, or restoration, and had just been illustrated by the miracle of healing the lame man. Indeed, one of the Old Testament promises of these 'times of restitution,' to be brought about by Christ's return and the subsequent establishment of his kingdom, is Isaiah 35:5,6, which states, "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart." Continuing, Peter says, "Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and

of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed." (Acts 3:24,25) Here we see repeated once again the same Biblical theme of a 'seed' through whom all would be blessed. The essence of Peter's message in Acts 3 is this: the Gospel that was preached to Abraham is centered in Jesus—his death, resurrection, and the promise of a future restitution of all things, illustrated by this miracle of healing. This is the Gospel that was preached to Abraham!

THE PROMISED SEED

Jesus was the promised seed spoken of to Abraham, and to which Peter referred. The Apostle Paul in Galatians 3:16 states, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." Later, in this same chapter, verse 29, Paul adds, "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." In other words, if you belong to Christ—the seed—if you are true Christians, then you are also counted as additional members of 'Abraham's seed' and inheritors of the same promise, 'In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'

Why did Paul in Galatians 3:16 say there was but one seed, Christ, but in verse 29 state that all true Christians are part of Abraham's seed? Paul in another place uses the illustration of a human body to help answer this question. "As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so

also is Christ." (I Cor. 12:12) Here Christ is likened to the human body, with Jesus as its head, and the church, all true Christians, as the other body members. The one body—head and other members—constitutes the 'Christ.' This Christ class, head and body together, is the one seed which Paul speaks of and which the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, states will eventually bless all people. These facts help to explain why the blessings of restitution could not start immediately after Jesus' death and resurrection, and why his kingdom could not then be established. The intervening work of this present Gospel Age has been to select and develop the body—the seed class, the members of the Christ—as they are to be the ones to share in the future work of blessing mankind with their head, Jesus. Those prospective members of this special class must be proven; they must take up their cross; they must be baptized into Jesus' death. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" (Rom. 6:3) These must be beheaded, figuratively speaking, having only Jesus as their head, and must follow the Lamb, whithersoever he goeth. Truly, as Paul said, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him."—II Tim. 2:12

THE REWARD OF THE CHURCH—IMMORTALITY

Jesus, the night before his crucifixion, made a wonderful promise to his disciples, those who would be true Christians. "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive

you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:2,3) There are many spheres of life which exist in God's universe—the lower animals, humans, angels, principalities, powers, many different planes of life—many 'mansions.' However, Jesus here is saying that none of these mansions will be the dwelling place of his church, his bride. Notice, he says, 'I go to prepare a place for you,' a new place that never existed before. Apostle John states further, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." (I John 3:2) Jesus, when he was resurrected, was highly exalted. "God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name." (Phil. 2:9) The church—his body members—will also receive a similar glorious resurrection, and be with him. They are spoken of by the Apostle Paul as those who "seek for glory and honour and immortality."—Rom. 2:7

Recalling the verse quoted in Part One of this lesson, that Jesus brought "life and immortality to light through the gospel" (II Tim. 1:10), we now can see that the 'life' herein mentioned is the future hope of the world here on earth in the times of restitution, whereas 'immortality' is the reward of faithfulness for those who truly follow Jesus even unto death, his faithful body members. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." (Rev. 2:10, 3:21) The difference between life and immortality in the above verse is that life is dependent on

outside sustenance for its continuance, but immortality has no such requirement. Immortality was first possessed only by God. He exalted his son Jesus to this high position upon his faithfulness as man's Redeemer. The faithful church, Jesus' body members, the remainder of the seed class, will also be exalted to this same Divine, immortal nature possessed by God and Jesus. "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature."—II Pet. 1:4

The purpose of the present Gospel Age has been to search out those truly willing to follow in Jesus' footsteps, to lay down their lives in sacrifice as he did. Even among professed Christians, relatively few have been willing to live a life of complete consecration to God. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto [this immortal] life, and few there be that find it." (Matt. 7:14) "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32) Nearly twenty centuries have passed and the selection of this faithful class is not yet complete, but ere long it shall be finished. Then the blessings of life and restitution will flow to mankind, blessings to 'all the families of the earth,' through the promised kingdom of the Christ, the promised seed.

DEATH TO BE SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY

The Apostle Paul speaks concerning the kingdom that will be established by Christ, the seed, to bless all mankind. He says, "He [Christ] must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."

(I Cor. 15:25,26) Later, in this chapter, a sequential order is given to the entire matter. "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." (vs. 49) That is, there is to be a change of nature for the church, from the earthly to the heavenly. In verse 54, Paul continues, "When this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." This verse reminds us that humans are not immortal, because one cannot have immortality 'put on' if they already possess it. The faithful church will have immortality put on by the power of God! The phrase in this verse 'Death is swallowed up in victory' is speaking of the result of the sequence of events talked about earlier in the verse, 'when this corruptible . . . , then shall be brought to pass . . .' In other words, once the faithful church is complete and receives its reward, the sum total of all the other promises of the Bible concerning the coming earthly kingdom, restitution, and the time of the blessing of all the families of the earth, will be found to be fulfilled in the statement, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'

This statement is a quotation from Isaiah 25. In that prophecy, Christ's kingdom is pictured as a mountain, the mountain of the LORD. The Israelites could relate to this, because God ruled over them as their Almighty King. Their seat of religious authority was in the city of Jerusalem, specifically the Temple, which was located on Mount Zion, picturing God's Divine authority over them. "In this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make

unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. . . . He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; . . . And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."—Isa. 25:6,8,9

Paul says that as soon as the work of gathering the true church is complete, when they have put on immortality, it will then be time for this prophecy, and so many others like it, to be fulfilled here upon the earth.—I Cor. 15:54

CHRIST'S EARTHLY KINGDOM

Christ's kingdom will be a time of peace, not war. Notice the words of the prophets concerning this time. "I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely." (Hos. 2:18) "I will cut off the chariot . . . and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth." (Zech. 9:10) "The desire of all nations shall come. . . . And in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts." (Hag. 2:7,9) "My people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places." (Isa. 32:18) Will there always be war and unrest? No, according to the Bible. It was the psalmist who wrote, "He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot

in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth." (Ps. 46:9,10) These are staggering promises!

Many things will change in Christ's kingdom on earth. Perhaps even a new dictionary will be needed. Today we often ask others, "How are you?" The response is many times, "Oh, so-so. I've got this or that ache or pain." These are common topics of conversation in today's world. Notice, though, what the prophet says concerning the coming kingdom, "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick" (Isa. 33:24) Man will no longer need to ask 'how are you,' because all will be well—none will be sick. This is what the times of restitution will bring. Everyone who obeys the righteous laws of that kingdom will be able to live, not having their life cut off by war, disease, killing, or any other malady, for these will be things of the past. Life will not be to merely the age of 70, 80, or 150 years as the scientists predict, but forever, to all who obey the kingdom's righteous laws.

GOD'S WORD IS SURE

The Apostle John, in Revelation 20-22, gives many beautiful pictures of the coming kingdom. Among these are the words of this article's opening text, "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. And 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." (Rev. 21:3,4) If, as these verses say, there shall be no more death, it means that the people will be living forever. Truly they 'shall not say, I am sick.'

Many of the statements of Revelation were given to John through various angels, or messengers, but the message of Revelation 21:5 is so important, so awesome and colossal, that God did not even allow an angel to deliver it. He says, as it were, "Step aside, I want to tell this to John myself, it is so important!" This verse says, "He that sat upon the throne [God himself] said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me Write: for these words are true and faithful." (Rev. 21:5) What words are 'true and faithful'? Those of the previous verse—'There shall be no more death.' We have the guarantee of this by God's own sure word.

NOT AN IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

As to the armaments of war and killing, what will happen to them, and what will happen to war itself when Christ's kingdom is set up? Micah 4:3,4 says, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it." The same being spoke these words as he who spoke in Revelation 21:5, the LORD of hosts, the Creator of the universe, our loving and all-powerful God. Man shall live—there will be no more death—wars and killing shall cease—disease and sickness will end. We can truly

thank God for the promises of life and peace contained in his Word. Some may say that such a hope is too good to be true. We answer, nay, it is too good not to be true, and is just what we should expect from a loving God. There shall be no more death. This is not an impossible dream. ■