

Israel Stands Alone

*“All thy lovers have
forgotten thee.”*

—Jeremiah 30:14

BIBLE STUDENTS SEARCHING the prophecies of God’s Word have wondered what the significance might be of the devastating terrorist attack on the United States of America on September 11. It

completely destroyed the New York Trade Center twin towers, and caused extensive damage to the Pentagon building in Washington, D.C. One suggestion was that it was a step toward the fulfillment of the prophecies that speak of Israel standing alone to face her enemies.

ISRAEL’S ALLY

The United States of America has been a friend and ally of Israel from the time of the young nation’s beginning in 1948. A wealthy and influential Jewish population in this country has helped to keep it so. The loss of this country as an ally would make it difficult for Israel. As an example of this friendship, we can cite the experience of Israel in 1967, when the Arab League of nations combined to do what they had been threatening to do, and that was to launch an all-out attack against the new, young nation, and push her into the sea.

This was the time of the cold war between the two great superpowers in the world—the United States and the USSR. The United States had a naval task force in the Mediterranean Sea at that time. The USSR contacted the United States and told it not to become involved in that war. The United States responded and said that they would stay out of it as long as the USSR would stay out of it, and not support the Arab League. They both agreed to stay aloof.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMISM

Of course, the USSR expected a quick victory by the Arab League nations they supported. Much to their chagrin, Israel ended the war in six days, with a resounding victory over its invaders, and captured more Palestinian territory for their nation. Apparently, the outcome of this war played an important role in the development of Islamism, the name given

to Islamic militant political ideology. An article in the magazine called "*World Press Review*," a monthly publication of selected world press articles, in its January 2002 edition, was published with the title "*Islamism: Back on the Map*." It was taken from the German publication, "*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*," dated October 16, and it said:

"Many in the West have been tempted to see in the fanaticism and brutality of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, not just the re-emergence of an old enemy, but also the arrival of a new and mysterious phenomenon that had somehow gone undetected by both academia and the government.

"However, while Islamic extremism has not constantly remained front and center in the public imagination, academics and government officials have been studying the disturbing evolution. After the upheaval in Tehran, literature on political Islam began to flourish in both the Islam and Western worlds. Hardly anyone had considered it possible that a religion—let alone Islam, which had been largely written off as a potent social and cultural force—could undergo a political revival of such intensity and popularity. But that was exactly what happened.

"The movement was first described as Islamic fundamentalism, but later, due to religious and historical objections, was referred to as Islamism, integrism, or simply Islamic zealotry. But from the start, some observers began to worry that the spread of militancy in the Islamic world could someday pose a serious threat to the West."

Among other analyses presented in this article, the following referred to Israel's Six-Day War: "Some Arab analysts have dated the emergence of Islamism to 1967, when Israel defeated a coalition of Arab nations in the Six-Day War. The Israeli victory dealt a severe blow to Arab nationalism and to the secular ideology that had set out to combine socialism, Arab independence, and unity. Previously the predominant movement in the Arab world, Arab nationalism began to lose its appeal among the masses, and former Egyptian President Gamal Nasser's star waned."

As we look back to that war and the support given to Israel by a superpower, the United States, we can see that without that support the Soviet Union could have stepped in and given their support to the Arab League, as they wanted to do. This would have been premature for God's

plan. Instead, we now stand in history at a point where both the Western world and Israel are trying to cope with Islamism. In spite of the war launched in Afghanistan, seeking to intercept Osama bin Laden, the leader of the terrorists who were responsible for the destruction of September 11, there are predictions and expectations that terrorists will strike again. How will the American public react to further strikes of this kind?

THE US STATE DEPARTMENT'S STRATEGY

An interesting commentary appeared in the "*New York Daily News*" on October 3, 2001, shortly after the events of September 11. It was published under the caption, "*Twisting Israel's Arm Will Backfire on Bush.*" The commentary read as follows:

"New Yorkers who keep their eyes peeled may have noticed a big fat trial balloon floating over Times Square. Launched yesterday by the State Department from the roof of *The New York Times* building, it says in unmistakable letters: Put the screws to Israel.

"According to "*The Times*," the State Department, after months of post-Clinton waffling, was just about to start twisting Israel's arm to make concessions for peace when Arab terrorists declared war on America. That caused a brief interruption. But the plan is so detached from reality, it survived and is ready to roll.

"The reasoning, as chronicled by "*The Times*," goes like this: a) America is hated in the Arab world because it is 'biased' in Israel's favor. b) Drop that bias and (according to Arab leaders) 'this will show Arab populations that the United States is not "one-sided."' c) Arab states will then rally to the American coalition against terror.

"There's just one fly in the State Department's ointment. According to "*The Times*", diplomats are afraid of criticism that is bound to come from Israel and from American Jews that the United States is pandering to the Arab states by pushing for a peace settlement now.

"Aside from the highly inaccurate ethnic and religious profiling of Israel's American supporters, there are a couple of other small problems with State's scenario:

"Nothing short of Israel's destruction will satisfy the Palestinians. Israel is willing to make peace, as it demonstrated at Camp David when

it offered Yasser Arafat virtually everything he supposedly wanted, including an independent state. This week, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, not a peacenik, said that even he is prepared for such a state.

“But the Palestinians (and their Syrian, Iraqi, Iranian and Bin Ladenite allies) don’t want a state if it means accepting Israel’s right to exist.

“President Bush has issued a ringing declaration of war on evil. Countries, he said, are either with us or against us. If his next step is dumping Israel—an ally for more than 50 years and the one nation in the West that actively fights terrorism and knows how to do it—he will become a joke from Algeria to Afghanistan. If Saddam and Yasser and Osama and the ayatollahs can scare the Great Satan into acting like a frightened schoolboy, they will win the fear and respect—and of course, the support—of the entire Arab world.

“If that happens, the Arab countries sitting on the fence will laugh so hard they’ll fall off—onto the side of the jihadists.

“The minute America tries to appease its way out of the confrontation with its real enemies by going after Israel, it will convince Sharon, and the 80% or so of Israelis who support him, they are alone in the world, that it is 1942 all over again.

“During the past decade, Israel has absorbed Iraqi scud missile attacks, Katyushka barrages from Iranian-supplied Hezbollah terrorists, suicide bombings by Islamic Jihad and Hamas fanatics and armed attacks by Palestinian terrorists. It has reacted with restraint, a fact borne out by the low casualty rate on the Arab side compared with the damage Israel is capable of inflicting. Israel has been so restrained because it has an essential confidence in America’s ‘bias’ in the face of Arab aggression. Remove that confidence, as the hot air balloonists of the State Department propose, and there will indeed be a new regional situation, but not the one they imagine.

“An Israel abandoned by its chief ally and surrounded by jubilant enemies will never agree to concessions tantamount to its national suicide. Instead, it will be forced to do what it has not yet done—defend itself unilaterally, ferociously, and without inhibition.”

ISRAEL’S OVERCONFIDENCE

Will Israel be abandoned by the United States of America? This article paints a scene whereby this could happen. Will Israel, standing alone, be able to defend itself as the commentator suggests, ‘unilaterally,’ ‘ferociously,’ and ‘without inhibition,’ successfully? The Scriptures give us a different scenario again. A prophecy in Jeremiah (chapter 30) is very specific. The prophet reminds Israel and us that the Lord (Jehovah) is responsible for bringing both Judah and Israel back from their captivity to the land that he gave to their fathers. (Jer. 30:3) We have seen this fulfilled. The prophecy continues to remind us that these days are not days of peace. (Jer. 30:5) It is called a day of “Jacob’s trouble.” (vs. 7) It is characterized by “none to plead thy cause” (vs. 13); a time when her former allies abandon her.—vs. 14

The overconfidence expressed by the commentator of the “*Daily News*” article is typical of the people in Israel. After the Six-Day War, visitors to Israel asked some of the people what they would have done if the superpower, the USSR, would have intervened in their war? The answer given was, “Bring on the Russians, we can handle them.” It is for this reason that the Lord will permit the situation in Israel to become very grim. The only way Israel and all the world around them will be able to see the hand of the Lord in their victory is when he fights for them, and miraculously shows his power and support on their behalf. This is why we have yet to see Israel placed in a hopeless and helpless situation.

JACOB’S TROUBLE

In Ezekiel 38 and 39, ‘Jacob’s Trouble’ is presented with much detail. When Gog comes against the nation of Israel, neutral nations, not allied with Gog, are standing on the sidelines asking Gog, “Art thou come to take a spoil? hast thou gathered thy company to take a prey?” (Ezek. 38:13) These do nothing to assist Israel. This is the way it has to be. Israel has to face her enemies alone. It is necessary so that all nations may know Jehovah, as he says: “Oh Gog, I will bring you against my land, so that the nations may know me when I show myself holy through you before their eyes.”—Ezek. 38:16, *New International Version*

This prophecy is one that is found in many other prophecies given to Israel. The language may be different. The circumstances and details may be different. As Ezekiel says, however, it has been recorded for many years. The prophecy says:

“This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Are you not the one I spoke of in former days by my servants the prophets of Israel? At that time they prophesied for years that I would bring you against them. This is what will happen in that day: When Gog attacks the land of Israel, my hot anger will be aroused, declares the Sovereign Lord. In my zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. The fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, every creature that moves along the ground, and all the people on the face of the earth will tremble at my presence. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble and every wall will fall to the ground. I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the Sovereign Lord. Every man’s sword will be against his brother. I will execute judgment upon him with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him. And so I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord.”—Ezek. 38:17-23, *NIV*

ISRAEL’S PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE TYPICAL

The methods used in prophecy to defeat Gog were illustrated to Israel in some of their previous experiences. When it says, ‘Every man’s sword will be against his brother’ (Ezek. 38:21), we are reminded of Gideon’s triumph over Midian. Gideon had been instructed to select 300 men to surround the camp of thousands of Midianites. (Judg. 7:7,12) The account says, “The three hundred blew the trumpets, and the Lord set every man’s sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host: and the host fled.”—vs. 22

When the prophecy says further, ‘I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones, and burning sulphur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him’ (Ezek. 38:23), we are reminded of Barak and Deborah’s victory over Sisera and the Canaanites under King Jabin of Hazor. In the victory song sung by Barak and Deborah, recorded in the fifth chapter of Judges, it is evident that torrents of rain caused the river Kishon in the valley of Megiddo to flood and sweep away the iron chariots and hosts who had come to conquer Barak and the Israelites.—Judg. 5:9-21

None of these events will take place without the assistance and supervision of God's angels. These invaluable spirit beings were also used in the other battles. In Barak and Deborah's victory song it is mentioned that "the stars fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera." (Judg. 5:20, *NIV*) Again we are reminded of the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib, King of Assyria, and his army. Hezekiah and Isaiah prayed to God who sent an angel to destroy the army of Sennacherib. (II Chron. 32:20-22) So also, what will be clearly shown to Israel and all other nations will be that the power of God alone is able to save Israel in her darkest hours.

GOD IS THE VICTOR

None should think that Israel, by her own strength, or the strength of assisting nations, shall gain the victory. The glory must unmistakably belong to God. Therefore, he says, "I will display my glory among the nations, and all the nations will see the punishment I inflict and the hand I lay upon them. From that day forward the house of Israel will know that I am the Lord their God. And the nations will know that the people of Israel went into exile for their sin, because they were unfaithful to me. So I hid my face from them and handed them over to their enemies, and they all fell by the sword. I dealt with them according to their uncleanness and their offenses, and I hid my face from them.

"Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will now bring Jacob back from captivity and will have compassion on all the people of Israel, and I will be zealous for my holy name. They will forget their shame and all the unfaithfulness they showed toward me when they lived in safety in their land with no one to make them afraid. When I have brought them back from the nations and have gathered them from the countries of their enemies, I will show myself holy through them in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind. I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the Sovereign Lord."—Ezek. 39:21-29, *NIV*

This will be an eye-opening experience for Israel and for all the nations of the world. Then it will be possible for the Lord to say, "I will make known my holy name among my people Israel. I will no longer let my

holy name be profaned, and the nations will know that I the Lord am the Holy One in Israel.”—Ezek. 39:7, *NIV*

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Getting Right with God

***Key Verses: “I am not
ashamed of the gospel
of Christ: for it is the
power of God unto
salvation to every one
that believeth; to the
Jew first, and also to
the Greek. For
therein is the
righteousness of God
revealed from faith to
faith: as it is written,
The just shall live by
faith.”***

—Romans 1:16, 17

***Selected Scripture:
Romans 1:1-13,
16, 17***

ROMANS WAS AMONG Paul’s principal epistles and in his opening salutation, he makes three points. First, he defends his apostleship. An apostle is one who is called and sent out, especially to testify of the Gospel. Paul says he was “called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God.” (Rom. 1:1) He also refers to himself as Jesus’ “servant” or slave, i.e., his life was totally devoted to doing God’s will and spreading the message of the Gospel.

In his second point, Paul states that the central theme of the Gospel is Jesus Christ. He says that Jesus was the Son of God, “which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh.” (Rom. 1:3) In becoming the seed of David, Jesus met one of the qualifications needed to be a ransom, or corresponding price, for father Adam— namely that he be a human being, made of flesh and blood.

Otherwise, he could not be a Redeemer that would ‘correspond’ to Adam, who was also of flesh and blood. The ransom required a man’s [Jesus’] life for a man’s [Adam’s] life. As the Son of God, he met another important qualification, that of perfection on the part of the one who would redeem Adam and his race. Jesus, although a human being, born of a woman, received the spark of life from God his Father, that spark being placed miraculously by God in the womb of Mary. An understanding of how Jesus met both these qualifications shows us how he was able to be perfect, separate from sinners, and still be a true corresponding price, or ransom, for Adam.

The third point of Paul's opening words in Romans was that Jesus' life was part of God's eternal purpose. The Gospel of Christ would eventually bring salvation to all, through "obedience to the faith among all nations."—Rom. 1:5

Our Key Verses emphasize Paul's main point in our lesson, 'justification by faith.' Although not stated specifically, it is alluded to, and later becomes one of the central themes of this letter. Faith was to become an all-important principle in the lives of all those who would strive to obtain salvation through the Gospel of Christ, both Jews and Greeks. Verse 17 reveals two important truths concerning faith. First, faith is progressive, "from faith to faith." By this Paul teaches that faith has various levels of development in the lives of God's people. There is at first a more elementary faith, one that firmly believes in God and his plans. As the child of God develops, his faith is put to the test and a faith of a higher level of maturity develops which eventually can be victorious in any experience of life, regardless of its severity or difficulty.

Paul's second point in verse 17 follows his description of the progressive nature of faith. This faith progresses to the point that our entire life is one of faith, where every thought, word, and deed—every decision, action, and prayer— is a matter of total and complete confidence in God and his will. This is what is meant by the statement, "The just shall live by faith."—Rom. 1:17

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Admitting Need

Key Verses: “*All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*”
—Romans 3:23,24

Selected Scripture:
*Romans 3:1-4,
19-31*

PAUL BEGINS OUR LESSON by stating that the Jews had much in the way of advantage in comparison to other nations because “unto them were committed the oracles of God.” (Rom. 3:2) The phrase ‘oracles of God’ means the utterances or words of God. The Jews had, through both their Law and their teachers, leaders, and prophets, God’s instructions as to how their life should be lived, and to what principles their character should be conformed. The Jews, however, lacked the necessary faith to keep God’s instructions as intended by him, so Paul asks these further questions, “What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God’s faithfulness?” (Rom. 3:3, *New International Version*) Paul immediately answers, “God forbid.”—vs. 4

Paul realized the situation that the Jews suffered under, just as any nation would that God might have chosen to receive his law, words, and oracles. God’s laws are perfect and, as such, they cannot be obeyed perfectly by fallen beings, regardless of how hard they might try and how noble their intentions might be. The struggle of man against sin is present with all the fallen race, but was especially emphasized in the case of the Jews, because of their special selection by God. (Amos 3:2) Yet they were no more guilty of sin than any other nation or people. Their lack of faithfulness merely pointed out the situation that all mankind experiences. Paul points this out when he says, “We know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.”—Rom. 3:19

The question remains, however, what about the faithfulness of God? What is his plan for the fallen race, both Jew and Gentile? Can they be recovered? Or must God start over? Paul assures us that God does indeed have a plan for the recovery of man, “The righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:21-23) Paul explains that God’s plan for man’s recovery centers in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. Our Key Verse (vs. 24) further indicates that it is through God’s grace, or unmerited favor, that this redemption through Jesus is provided.

The apostle concludes his lesson by reminding us that, although redemption is given freely through the grace of God, there is a responsibility on our part to obtain the benefits provided by the Redeemer. That responsibility is faith: faith in God, the author of salvation; faith in Jesus, the instrument used to provide it; and faith, together with obedience, in the daily dealings of God in our lives as he shows us his will and guides us with his providence. Concerning faith, Paul says, “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, ... that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. ... by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith.”—Rom. 3:25-28

Following an Example of Faith

Key Verse: “What saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” —Romans 4:3

Selected Scripture: Romans 4:2, 3, 13-25

IN OUR PREVIOUS LESSON we saw that no man, Jew or Gentile, could keep God’s law perfectly. We also learned of the great importance of faith in the lives of those who would seek to be found acceptable to God. At the present time the foundation of this faith is seen in the redemptive work accomplished by Jesus. In this lesson Paul tells us that such faith has always been pleasing to the Heavenly Father, and he uses the example of Abraham and his faith to show how God has taken pleasure in those who have displayed this characteristic. The Key Verse says that because of Abraham’s faith he was counted,

or reckoned, as righteous before God. How was this possible? How could an inherently imperfect man, as Abraham was, be considered righteous simply by having this quality of faith?

The answer to this question lies in the great love and mercy of God, and in the great wisdom with which he designed his plan for mankind. In the case of Abraham, God knew well in advance that he could not be justified by the works of any law, “Because the law worketh wrath.” (Rom. 4:15) Yet he saw that Abraham had a great desire to serve him, and had a heart condition and motivation toward righteousness. God, without violating his attribute of justice, could ‘count’ or ‘reckon’ Abraham righteous through his faith. Additionally, God tested and tried Abraham’s faith in order to prove its depth and sincerity. A few of these tests were: (1) asking him to leave his own country and kindred to go to a land he knew nothing about; (2) not providing a promised seed to him until he and Sarah were both well past the normal age of childbearing; (3) asking him to slay Isaac, his long-awaited son, and offer him as a sacrifice. All of these tests of faith, as well as others, Abraham passed. As a result, wonderful promises were made to him, promises that would eventually carry down to all the families of the earth. His testing, and

ultimate promised blessing, were not the result of his keeping of any law, but through faith. “The promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.”—Rom. 4:13

We are reminded that Abraham was “the father of us all,” (vs. 16) signifying that we, too, must display the same kind of faith that he did. Additionally, our faith must be thoroughly tested, as was his, in order to prove our loyalty to God under any and all circumstances. Further, Paul states concerning Abraham, that “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he [God] had promised, he was able also to perform.” (Rom. 4:20,21) The child of God today must develop this same level of faith exemplified in Abraham.

As was the case with Abraham, we too can be counted, or reckoned, as righteous before God through this attribute of faith. As Paul says, “It was not written for his sake alone, that it [righteousness] was imputed [counted, or reckoned] to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe [have faith] on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.”—Rom. 4:23,24

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Reaping the Benefits

Key Verse: “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”
—Romans 5:1

Selected Scripture:
Romans 5:1-11,
18-31

THE KEY VERSE OF OUR lesson is addressed to those who have, through faith in Jesus, righteousness imputed to them. This is what is meant by the phrase ‘being justified by faith.’ As a result of this reckoned righteous condition, these have many potential benefits accrue to them. First, ‘we have peace with God.’ Formerly, as sinners condemned through our inheritance from Father Adam we did not have peace with God. In our undone condition we were at enmity with him, the opposite of being at peace. However, through the blood, or merit, of Jesus’ ransom sacrifice, and by our full faith in it, we have obtained peace with Almighty God, and he is able to deal with us as his children. The Prophet Isaiah speaks symbolically of how one obtains this peace by using the example of clothing that covers natural imperfections and blemishes. He says, “My soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness.”—Isa. 61:10

Another benefit obtained by those in this justified condition is that they have access to God which they did not have earlier as enemies. Now they have a tremendous hope for the future. All this causes such in this condition to rejoice and glorify God (see Romans 5:2). But this is not all by any means. Paul continues this lesson by telling us that, as one justified by faith, we will have a lifetime of experiences and these are specially designed for us by God to help us develop our faith, to test our loyalty under all circumstances. He says, “Not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”—Rom. 5:3-5, *New American Standard*

Paul reminds us lest we become conceited in our own minds, that God showed his love to us by sending his Son, Jesus, “while we were yet sinners.” (Rom. 5:8) Verse 10 says, “If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” The death of Jesus as the ransom provided the means whereby we might have peace with God, but that wasn’t sufficient. In order to obtain the full salvation which God desired, it was required that Jesus not remain in death, but be raised again to life, to apply the merit of his sacrifice to the bar of God’s justice, and hence buy back Adam’s race from the condemnation of sin and death. All this was God’s intent and plan, made possible by his mercy and unending love for his creation. Truly the apostle could say, “We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement [reconciliation].”—Rom. 5:11

This is summarized in verses 20 and 21. Paul says, in essence, that just as offences abounded because of the Law, and sin has reigned over man even unto death, how much more has God’s grace abounded and reigned “unto eternal life.” “Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.” (Rom. 5:18) By the obedience of Jesus we receive the benefit of life.

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Experiencing New Life

Key Verse: “We are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

—Romans 6:4

***Selected Scriptures:
John 20:1, 11-17;
Romans 6:3-8***

IT IS ONE THING TO RECEIVE the grace of God, but quite another to act upon that grace in a way that is pleasing to him. We cannot expect to receive his mercy and favor if we are not seeking by proper daily living a proper character building. This is the point of our Key Verse. Having freely received of God’s grace, through Jesus Christ, we are asked to bury our will into his, even unto death, and follow in the footsteps of Jesus. We are to develop a godlike character, perform service for others while suffering for righteousness sake, and demonstrate loyalty to God under all circumstances. This is what is meant by being ‘buried with him by baptism into death.’

The Key Verse also reminds us that, although Jesus died a sacrificial death, he was ‘raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father.’ The resurrection of Jesus was a most glorious event in God’s plan (see John 20:1-18). Although his own closest disciples did not at first fully understand its import, later, after receiving the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, their eyes were opened to the grand meaning of Jesus’ resurrection. It truly ushered in a new feature in God’s plan especially designed for those who would be footstep followers of the Master. Paul uses Jesus’ resurrection as a picture of the privilege his followers have of walking in his steps. As Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, ‘even so we also should walk in newness of life.’ As Jesus was the recipient of a new life upon his resurrection from the dead, so also we, having consecrated ourselves to God, burying our wills into death with Jesus, must begin to walk in a newness of life, attitude and character.

Paul identifies this newness by saying, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” (II Cor. 5:17) As New Creatures we are to walk, live our life, in newness of thought, word, and action, not serving sin as we once did, but serving righteousness to the best of our ability. Although we cannot do this perfectly, it should be our desire to do so. Because we are covered with the robe of Christ’s righteousness (see lesson for March 24), God is able to overlook the failings resulting from our inherited sinful condition. We do not ignore those blemishes and failings—but strive each day to overcome as much of the fallen condition as possible. God exercises his great mercy toward us by viewing us as New Creatures and looking at the robe covering us.

It is not only important that we strive to overcome as much as possible the sinful nature of the old flesh, but that we replace it with the traits and characteristics that should accompany such newness of life counseled in the Key Verse. Such characteristics as Paul mentions in Galatians 5:22,23 are but a few of the many positive ways we can develop this newness. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” In many ways, these characteristics of our new life in Christ begin in the mind, with our thoughts. This becomes the great battleground of life, as we strive to have our mind and its thoughts conform to those that would please our Heavenly Father.

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Prophecies of the Old Testament

FORECASTS OF COMING events are to be found in practically every book of the Bible. They are all more or less historical, which is true of the books we will discuss in this article—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, and Ezekiel. However, the major portion of these books (with the exception of Lamentations) is prophetic in nature, forecasting the overthrow of the national polity of Israel in 606 B.C.; the First and Second advents of the Messiah; and the rich blessings of peace, health, and life which will be assured to all people as a result of the establishment of the Messianic kingdom.

Isaiah prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, all of whom were kings of Judah. (Isa. 1:1) In the opening chapter he forecasts the downfall of the nation because of its sin. “Ah sinful nation,” he writes, “a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.”—vs. 4

In colorful and forceful language, Isaiah describes the coming desolation of the nation and of the land saying, “Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.”—vss. 7,8

The nation of Israel was to be overthrown and taken into captivity because of its sins, but even in forecasting this, Isaiah reveals that the mercy of the Lord would be extended to the nation if they repented and turned from their evil ways. “Wash you,” writes the prophet, “make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.”—vss.16,17

Isaiah, speaking for the Lord, then extends an invitation. “Come” and “reason together, ... though your sins be as scarlet, ... they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”—vss. 18-20

Isaiah’s prophecy is concerned with much more than the punishments of the Lord which were soon to be visited upon that one small nation in his day. Intertwined with references to the calamities soon to be experienced by his people, the prophet forecasts major events in the outworking of the Divine plan, some of which were thousands of years in the future from his day.

For example, in chapter one he tells of the punishments which were soon to come upon Israel; then, as if to give assurance that this did not mean that God’s purpose in the earth had failed, in the next chapter he prophesies the ultimate and glorious triumph of the Divine plan and of righteousness saying:

“It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain [kingdom] of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”—Isa. 2:2-4

THE KINGDOM AND RESTORATION THEME

The prophecy just quoted is a remarkable one. Its beauty and forcefulness are enhanced when we keep in mind, as we pointed out in the opening article of this series, that like all the other prophecies of the Bible it is related to the one great theme which the Lord is presenting—human redemption and restoration through the agencies of the Messianic kingdom. Seen in this light, the ‘last days’ here referred to are simply the closing days of the reign of sin and death, and the time when

the Lord intervenes in the affairs of men through the setting up of his long-promised kingdom.

In the prophecy of Isaiah, there is much said about Messiah's kingdom and the preparatory work of the Lord leading up to its full establishment. In chapter 9, verses 6 and 7, is a prophecy of the birth of the One who was to be the king in that kingdom. It reads, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end. ... The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."

Describing further the glorious qualifications of this coming judge and king of earth, Isaiah 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 of the Lord; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear 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."—Isa. 11:2-4

Depicting the life-giving blessings of Messiah's kingdom, Isaiah writes:

"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, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. ... And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."—Isa. 35:5,6,10

THE DEATH OF JESUS

Isaiah foretold the death of Jesus as well as his birth and the glories of his kingdom. Jesus' death was a necessary part of the Divine plan in order that the dying human race might be redeemed from death. Jesus took the sinner's place in death. This is the burden of Isaiah's prophecy as recorded in chapter 53, from which we quote:

“He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: ... Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. ... He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; ... It pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, ... and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.”—vss. 3-11

The ‘pleasure’ of the Lord referred to in this passage is the Divine purpose, as stated to Abraham, “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” (Gen. 22:18) It is through the death of Jesus as the Redeemer that these promised blessings of life will be made available to the people, and that time will be during the thousand years of his kingdom.

Jesus was “cut off out of the land of the living,” and “who shall declare his generation?” writes the prophet. (Isa. 53:8) Nevertheless ‘he shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied.’ (vs. 11) This will be during the thousand years of his reign, for then the entire human race will be awakened from the sleep of death and given an opportunity to secure everlasting life through Jesus. All who accept will be his ‘seed,’ his children, for he will be their father, or life-giver.

In addition to its many prophecies and promises pertaining to the Divine arrangements for the ultimate restoration of the human race to harmony with God and to life, the Book of Isaiah also contains comforting assurances of God’s protecting care over his servants at the present time. One of these reads, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: ... Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.”—Isa. 26:3,4

THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

The Book of Jeremiah is the next in the Old Testament collection of inspired writings. It takes its name from the prophet who wrote it. All the prophets were used by the Lord in addressing messages directly to the nation of Israel, reprimanding the people for their sins, and forecasting punishments if they did not repent and reform. There is much in the Book of Jeremiah along this line.

This prophet served Israel just before its government was overthrown and the people taken captive to Babylon. He forecast this tragedy as well as other calamities which were to come upon the nation. Because of the pessimistic nature of much that he wrote, Jeremiah is sometimes referred to as the ‘prophet of doom.’ The name Jeremiah signifies ‘one appointed by the Lord,’ and the Lord’s commission to him is recorded in the first chapter of the book, a portion of which reads:

“The Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.”—vss. 9,10

Jeremiah himself did not do any pulling down or destroying of the nations. Neither did he ‘build’ or ‘plant.’ The reference is to his commission to proclaim the word of the Lord concerning these events, and this he faithfully did. As the commission given to him indicates, his prophecies are not entirely those of doom, for he also foretold restoration, both for Israel and for all mankind.

The nation of Israel was to be taken into captivity to Babylon, and later restored to Palestine. Jeremiah prophesied that subsequent to this the nation would go into a much worse captivity, that the people would be scattered among all nations. But this dispersion would also end, the prophet points out, and the people gathered from among all nations and restored to the promised land. (Jer. 16:12-18) The restoration feature of this prophecy is now being fulfilled.

In chapter 31, Jeremiah presents a more comprehensive prophecy of restoration; one which indicates a complete change in human experience in relation to the laws of God. He declares that a time is coming when it shall no more be said, “The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children’s teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.”—vss. 29,30

What a drastic change this will mean! In the larger vista of human experience it was Adam who ate the ‘sour grape’ of sin, and as a result the entire human race was plunged into death. But, as Jeremiah points

out, this is to be changed. A time is coming when no one will die except for his own willful transgression of Divine law.

As we have seen, the Prophet Isaiah points out to us that the transgressions of the human race were laid upon Jesus. He died for the sins of the world. This is why, when the Lord's due time comes, every individual member of the human family will be given an opportunity to demonstrate his own desire to obey the law of God, and those who do obey shall live.

Jeremiah mentions a prophecy concerning a "new covenant" which the Lord promises to make "with the house of Judah." (vs. 31) Other prophecies reveal that eventually Gentiles will also be brought into this 'covenant.' It is called a 'new' covenant because it will take the place of the old Law Covenant which was made with Israel at Mt. Sinai.

Concerning this New Covenant the Lord says, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; ... And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord."—vss. 33,34

LAMENTATIONS

Next comes the Book of Lamentations. This also was written by the Prophet Jeremiah. The book as a whole is what its name implies; that is, a lamenting. The background of the deep sorrow which the writer so feelingly describes was the overthrow of the Jewish kingdom and the fact that the nation had been taken into captivity in Babylon. The book is written by one who speaks with the vividness and intensity of an eyewitness of the misery which he bewails.

Jeremiah was not only a patriot weeping over the ruin of the country; he was also a prophet who had seen all this coming, and had foretold it as inevitable unless the people repented of their sin and turned to the Lord to serve him with their whole heart. While most of the book is an expression of unrestrained grief, the writer does not complain against God, but gives recognition to the fact that the nation was merely experiencing its just punishment for sins.

Speaking representatively for the whole nation, Jeremiah says, "The Lord is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment:

hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow: my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity.”—Lam. 1:18

Smarting under the crushing blows of just retribution which had come upon the people, Jeremiah nevertheless could see evidences of the Lord’s mercy, so he wrote, “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.” (Lam. 3:22,23) Jeremiah understood from his own prophecy that the nation was not to perish completely in Babylon; that there was to be a returning to their own land.

In his deep sorrow, the prophet maintained his trust in the Lord, and recognized that in him was his only source of hope, so he wrote, “The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.”—vss. 24-26

This is an expression of Jeremiah’s own confidence in the Lord, that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. His words are also an illustration of the manner in which the personal experiences of the writers of the Bible call forth beautiful expressions of devotion which, through the ages, have been rich sources of blessing to all who have put their trust in the Lord and have sought to know and to do his will.

THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

The Prophet Ezekiel, like Isaiah and Jeremiah, was one of the so-called major prophets, and wrote the book which bears his name. Chapters 1 to 24 are concerned with the destruction of Jerusalem. Chapters 25 to 32 are prophetic of the destruction of eight foreign nations—Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyrus, Sidon, Assyria, and Egypt. The remainder of the book—chapters 33 to 48—is somewhat more comforting in nature, especially in that these chapters forecast the final deliverance of Israel from her enemies and the restoration of the people to covenant relationship with God.

While a great portion of the prophecies of the book had their fulfillment in the ancient past in the experiences of Israel and the Gentile nations with which they were surrounded, Ezekiel records a number of remarkable prophecies of events yet to occur—events associated with the

establishment of the kingdom of Christ and his thousand-year reign for the blessing of all the families of the earth.

All of God's holy prophets were outspoken in their upbraiding of Israel for her sins, and Ezekiel was no exception. In chapter 16 there is a notable example of this, yet withal, a promise of blessings in the resurrection despite the scarlet nature of the people's sins. This particular oration begins with verse 44.

Here the prophet refers to Israel as a "mother," having "daughters," and to certain heathen nations notorious for their wickedness as her "sisters," who also had daughters. He names Samaria and Sodom, cities which had been destroyed because of their wickedness. Then Ezekiel speaks of the time when all these will return to their "former estate," including Israel.—vss. 44-55

He thus projects the account far into the future from his day, even to the time of the resurrection of the dead, for it is this that is referred to as a returning to their 'former estate.' When that takes place, the prophet points out, the Israelites whom he was addressing—and the whole nation, as a matter of fact—will be ashamed, even more ashamed than the people of those wicked Gentile cities who were so notoriously corrupt.—vss. 54-59

Ezekiel prophesies that the Israelites will then be brought into covenant relationship with the Lord, and that the people of Sodom and Samaria will be brought into that same covenant—that these 'sisters' will then be given unto them for 'daughters.' (vss. 60-63) It was this and other promises of the Old Testament that gave Jesus the authority for saying that it would be "more tolerable" for Sodom in the day of judgment than for the Israelites who rejected him and his message.—Matt. 10:15

This wonderful prophecy of the future restitution of the Sodomites is only an incidental part of the Book of Ezekiel, used by the prophet to emphasize the great sin of Israel, but it helps to keep before the student this hope-inspiring theme of redemption and restoration which pervades the Bible from beginning to end. To lose sight of this great theme would leave the Bible not much more than a grouping of unrelated writings of ancient poets and religious philosophers.

Zedekiah was the last of the Jewish kings to rule over the nation. He was overthrown and taken captive to Babylon. Ezekiel speaks of this overthrow, and identifies its meaning, saying:

“Thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, Thus saith the Lord God; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.”—Ezek. 21:25-27

An interesting phrase in this prophecy is, ‘until he come whose right it is.’ This is a reference to the coming and enthronement of Jesus as the rightful king of Israel and of the whole world. God ruled the one little nation of Israel through her successive kings, Zedekiah being the last. Ezekiel is telling us that ‘it shall be no more’; that is, God was not to rule again until the time came for him to reign through Jesus.

This has proved true. The Jewish people, after seventy years of captivity in Babylon, were permitted to return to their own country, but they did not regain their national independence—they never again had a king.

God permitted a certain succession of Gentile nations to police the world, so to speak, during this interim, beginning with Babylon.

Chapters 36 through 39 are a remarkable setting forth of events relating to the regathering of Israel in these last days. Chapter 36 tells of God’s purpose to restore his people to their land, not because they merited such favor, but for his own name’s sake. Chapter 37 describes the reviving of the national hopes of the Jews, likening their former status to a valley of dry bones.

These “bones” come together, are covered with flesh, and finally receive life. Much of this has already been fulfilled in the revival of Israel’s hopes, and their organization as a new State—flesh covering the bones. In due time they will receive life through the outpouring of God’s Spirit upon them.

Chapters 38 and 39 reveal, however, that before this occurs there is to be a vicious attack upon regathered Israel from aggressor forces out of the “north.” (Ezek. 38:15) This, as the prophecy shows, is after Israel is regathered in the land of promise.

The closing verses of chapter 38 and on into 39, reveal that this attack from the north will be repelled, and the aggressors destroyed, not by the Israeli army, but by Divine intervention. This will open the eyes of Gentile nations, as well as the eyes of the Israelites, to behold the glory of the Lord. It will be from this time forward that the kingdom of Christ will take a dominant role in the affairs of the nations, beginning with Israel.

Dawn Bible Students Association

Remembering Christ's Death

ON TUESDAY EVENING, March 26, groups of the Lord's people throughout many parts of the world will assemble to partake of the 'bread' and the 'cup' which memorialize the death of Jesus. Paul wrote, "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death." (I Cor. 11:26) Jesus died as the antitypical Passover Lamb, the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) Appropriately, his sacrifice was consummated on the anniversary of the slaying of the original Passover lamb, the night before the exodus of the Israelites from the land of Egypt. This was on the fourteenth day of the nation's first month of the year, Nisan.

According to the Jewish calendar the fourteenth day of Nisan this year begins at sundown on March 26. This corresponds to the night before Jesus died, when he ate the Passover with his disciples for the last time and asked them to partake of the bread and the cup with him, explaining that these represented his broken body and shed blood. The Lord's people believe that this yearly anniversary is the only proper time to partake of these Memorial emblems. So again this year they will follow this scriptural custom, and, as they once more 'remember him' in this special way, will renew their own vows of consecration to suffer and die with him, inspired by his promise that if they are faithful even unto death they will share with him in his kingdom glory.—Luke 22:29

It is a simple ceremony in which those participating confess their belief in the vicarious atoning work of Christ by partaking of the bread and the cup. Paul wrote that Jesus gave himself as a "ransom," or corresponding price, for all. (I Tim. 2:3-6) It was the perfect man, Adam, who sinned and brought upon himself and his offspring the penalty of death. The perfect man, Christ Jesus, gave himself in death as a substitute, thus providing a way of escape from death for all mankind. He is a "propitiation," or satisfaction, for "our" sins—that is, the sins of his followers during this age—and not for ours only, but also for the "sins of the whole world."—I John 2:2

This provision of God's grace is operative toward the Lord's people now upon the basis of faith. The sacrifice of Jesus provided an opportunity for Adam and all his children to be restored to perfection of life as human beings. During the thousand years of Christ's kingdom this opportunity will be extended to all mankind, those who have died throughout the centuries of the past. This will necessitate an awakening from the sleep of death.—John 5:28,29

During the present Gospel Age, however, the merit of Jesus' sacrifice is merely imputed, or reckoned, to his followers—they are not actually given new life. The imputation of life through Christ is to make it possible for his consecrated followers to offer themselves in acceptable sacrifice to God and thus be “planted together” in the “likeness” of his death. (Rom. 6:3-5; 12:1) We are ‘crucified’ or put to death with Christ if we accept his invitation to deny ourselves and take up the “cross” and follow him.—Matt. 16:24

When we partake of the emblems which represent the broken body and shed blood of Jesus, we testify that we not only gratefully accept the provision of life thus made through him, but also that we have entered into a covenant with the Lord “by sacrifice,” and desire to be ‘broken’ with Jesus. (Ps. 50:5) This additional, more personal, significance of the Memorial emblems, is mentioned by Paul. “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion [does it not represent our partnership] of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion [partnership] of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.”—I Cor. 10:16,17

CHRIST'S FAITHFULNESS

It is especially appropriate in partaking of the Memorial emblems, and in our preparation for this holy ‘supper,’ to recall at what great cost redemption from sin and death was provided. Think of our Heavenly Father's love in giving his only begotten Son to suffer and die! And think of what it cost Jesus in terms of mental and physical suffering to be our Redeemer, and the Redeemer of all mankind! To call to mind these examples of Divine love and compassion for the sin-cursed race should beget in us a renewed determination to be faithful in carrying out the terms of our consecration to do God's will.

Jesus knew from the beginning of his ministry that he was to die sacrificially, and had so announced to his disciples. He had said that he would give his flesh for the life of the world. (John 6:51-56) The disciples did not grasp the reality of this. Even when it became apparent to them that Jesus would be killed by his enemies, they did not understand why it was thus necessary for him to die. This meant that Jesus bore the burden of his last trying hours with little benefit of human companionship, understanding, and comfort.

In the “upper room” (Mark 14:15), Peter professed great love for his Master and his willingness to die for him if necessary, and no doubt he was sincere in this profession of loyalty. But Peter, like the rest, when needed most by his Master, fell asleep. This was in the Garden of Gethsemane. “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me,” Jesus said to Peter, James, and John, whom he asked to accompany him into the garden. (Matt. 26:38) Then Jesus went a little farther, and in his great sorrow, prayed, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.” (Matt. 26:39) After thus praying, Jesus returned to the three disciples and found them asleep, and he said to Peter who had professed such great love, “Could ye not watch with me one hour?”—vs. 40

How much it would have meant to Jesus to know that at least one human being was entering into his feelings with some degree of understanding. Yet he was kind to his disciples. He admonished them to “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation,” and added, “the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (vs. 41) He knew that Peter and the others really did love him, and that in their hearts they were willing to do all they could to help him.

But a greater test of devotion and love for his Father, and doing of his Father’s will, was yet to come. It was difficult enough to realize that he must stand alone as far as human help was concerned; but he still had his Father to comfort and sustain him. Even in Gethsemane, while the Father did not remove the ‘cup,’ he comforted his beloved Son, and gave him strength to endure the harrowing experiences of being hailed before his accusers, condemned to death, beaten, and hung upon a cross.

Through all of this Jesus was calm and serene, humbly submitting to his Father’s will. When asked by the high priest if he was the “Son of

God,” (Matt. 26:63) he was forthright in his acknowledgment of this truth which he knew would seal his condemnation as far as the religious leaders of Israel were concerned. “Thou hast said,” was his reply. (vs. 64) Later, when asked by Pilate if he were a king, Jesus said, “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world.” (John 18:37) He knew that in view of this confession of the truth Pilate could do nothing to save his life, for his enemies would press the charge that it was treason against their Roman masters.

Even while hanging on the cross, enduring excruciating pain, Jesus was still composed, and was alert to a final opportunity to bear witness to the Gospel of the kingdom. When the thief asked, “Jesus! remember me, whensoever thou shalt come into thy kingdom,” his reply was, “Verily I say unto thee this day: With me shalt thou be in paradise.” (Luke 23:42,43, *Rotherham*) While Satan, the prince of this world, was succeeding in putting the “King of kings” (Rev. 19:16) to death, Jesus knew that the long-promised Messianic kingdom would be established, and that then “all the ends of the world” would “turn unto the Lord.” He knew, as had been foretold, that the time would come when, as the great Messiah of promise, he would be “governor among the nations.”—Ps. 22:27,28

As Jesus hung on the cross there came over him the realization not only that he had no human friends to whom he could look for sympathy and comfort, but that now his Heavenly Father had forsaken him. The knowledge of this startling fact may have reached him through the prophetic prayer of Psalm 22, in which incidents that took place while he was hanging on the cross are mentioned. “They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture,” the psalm states.—vs. 18

As he watched the Roman soldiers divide his garments among them, and cast lots for his robe, he doubtless remembered this prophetic prayer, and, as his mind turned back to its beginning, he realized its startling implications. Then it was, realizing what had occurred, the Master began to cry out to his Father in the words of the prayer, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?”—Ps. 22:1

The psalm continues to present the thoughts and petition of Jesus as he hung upon the cross, although he was evidently too weak to utter audibly

more than those opening words. In his plea to his Father, he is represented as saying, “Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.”—Ps. 22:4-8

As Jesus hung upon the cross he heard the crowd that watched him actually saying these things. “He trusted in God,” they said, “let him deliver him.” (Matt. 27:43) When Jesus heard these prophesied utterances of the people he would realize that for the moment he was abandoned by his Heavenly Father. Knowing this, he reached out in his prayer to find some basis for renewed hope—“Thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother’s breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother’s belly. Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help.”—Ps. 22:9-11

In his agony of mind and body Jesus continued to pray, “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.”—Ps. 22:14-16

The Heavenly Father did not continue to hide his face from his beloved Son. For Jesus to fully take the sinner’s place in death it was necessary that the Father temporarily withdraw his favor from him, even as he had withdrawn it from fallen man. But before the end came, Jesus again realized that his Father was sustaining him. This is indicated in the prayer, as it is continued in Psalm 22, “Ye that fear the Lord, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel. For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him [permanently]; but when he cried unto him, he heard.”—vss. 23,24

When the end came, Jesus was again seeing the smile of his Father's countenance, and in faith and confidence he could say, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit," my life, my all. (Luke 23:46) He had been led as a lamb to the slaughter, and now his sacrifice was finished. The antitypical Passover lamb had been slain, and as we again partake of the emblems which represent his broken body and shed blood we can do so with grateful appreciation of the love which provided redemption and life for us at so great a cost.

"THAT WHICH IS BEHIND"

While we can rejoice that Jesus' personal suffering was completed on Calvary nearly 2,000 years ago, the Memorial emblems will remind us that we have not yet completed our sacrifice, and that it is our privilege to fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ. (Col. 1:24) To remember him as our Exemplar in faithfulness, in suffering, should be a great incentive to continue following him. Paul wrote, "Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin."—Heb. 12:3,4

As Paul declares, we have not yet 'resisted unto blood,' which is a figurative way of saying that we have not yet fully given up our lives, not yet been faithful even "unto death," as Jesus was. (Rev. 2:10) When we compare ourselves to Jesus, we realize how little we have suffered, and are suffering. This is due in part to the changed attitude of the world toward those whose religious beliefs do not conform to those generally considered to be orthodox. There are still those, of course, who would inflict the death penalty on 'heretics,' if civil governments would cooperate.

The Memorial season is an appropriate time to reexamine our own position. Are we facing up to our privileges of sacrifice as faithfully as we intended to do when we first entered the narrow way; or are we, unwittingly, perhaps, taking an easier way? As we consider Jesus at this Memorial time, we will want to make sure that we are among those who continue voluntarily to keep our sacrifice on the altar, regardless of the cost in terms of inconvenience, weariness, misunderstanding, and even suffering; rather than to wait for circumstances to wrest from us that which we offered to the Lord at consecration.

These thoughts will naturally come to mind as we ‘consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself.’ It is only those who endure unto the end who will receive the “great salvation.” (Heb. 2:3) “Ye have need of patience,” wrote Paul, “that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.” (Heb. 10:36) James wrote, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation [testing]: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”—James 1:12

The Hebrew brethren, when they were “illuminated,” “endured a great fight of afflictions,” but this was not enough. (Heb. 10:32) Our first-love zeal for the Lord and for his service should be continued, day by day, year by year, even ‘unto death.’ “Let us not be weary in well doing,” Paul wrote, “for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” (Gal. 6:9) To consider Jesus, and the contradiction of sinners which he endured should do much to prevent our becoming weary and faint in our minds.

THE TIME IS SHORT

Those enlightened by present Truth know that we are living in the end of the age, when the Master is again present as the Chief Reaper in the harvest work. We are in the closing years of the Gospel Age! How many more years we will have the privilege of partaking of the Memorial emblems we do not know, but we are assured that the fruition of our hopes is near. The consciousness of this should give added meaning to this year’s Memorial Supper, and cause us to redouble our efforts in the weeks and months ahead to consider him and to be like him.

When instituting the Memorial Supper, Jesus told his disciples that he would not drink the cup with them again until in the kingdom. Then, of course, it will be a cup of unmitigated joy, for all the sacrifice and suffering of the complete Christ company will be finished. Jesus himself was confident of this final outcome of joy and triumph. In another prophetic prayer Jesus is represented as saying to his Heavenly Father, “Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”—Ps. 16:11

This blessed hope of again being in the actual presence of his Father was one of the joys set before Jesus which enabled him to endure the cross and despise the shame. Paul tells us that Jesus “is [now] set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb. 12:1,2) Jesus promised,

“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. 3:21

This, then, is one of the joys set before us, and what a powerful incentive to faithfulness it should be! Now that he who was to come has come, the time is near—so very near—when we shall see his face. John wrote, “We shall see him as he is.” (I John 3:1-3) What a glorious morning of joy that will be in contrast with the present experience of suffering! When we have entered into his presence with joy, and are partaking of the cup with him in the kingdom, how light our present trials will seem as we look back upon them from that vantage point of glory!

As we contemplate the “glory that should follow” the present privileges of suffering with Christ (I Pet. 1:11), we could almost pray for the Lord to hasten the time. Yet we know that he has his own ‘due time,’ and that he knows best what experiences we need, what tests of patience and devotion are essential to prepare us to occupy the place ‘prepared’ by Jesus. So we say to our aching, longing hearts, “Be calm and sink into his will,” assured that the time appointed by Divine wisdom is best.

NOT ALONE

Jesus, as we have seen, endured those final and excruciating tests alone, so far as human understanding and sympathy were concerned; for a short time losing even the comforting smile of his Heavenly Father. But with us it is different. As little groups of the Lord’s consecrated people come together in “remembrance” of him, (Luke 22:19) each brother, each sister, will realize a sense of companionship, a fraternity of interest and sympathy which should be a great stimulus to all. Even the isolated will know that they have brethren in other places who are thinking of and praying for them.

What a great blessing this is! Jesus admonished that we should “love one another” as he loved us. (I Pet. 1:22) But, just as partaking of the Memorial emblems is merely a symbol of what the sacrifice of Christ means to us, and of our privilege of dying with him, so it is also of the blessedness of interest which exists among the brethren. May the Memorial Supper, then, be a time to renew our determination to lay down our lives for the brethren, and to appreciate more than ever the priceless

heritage of fellowship we enjoy with one another even while still tabernacling in the flesh.

The privilege of laying down our lives for the brethren does not imply spectacular demonstrations of sacrifice, but rather the faithful use of the little opportunities we have of rendering service when, and in the manner, most needed. We can all cooperate in the general effort to reach and comfort the brethren worldwide, and we should also be on the alert to speak that word of comfort, perform that little act of kindness, and breathe that word of prayer, on behalf of those whom we know to be going through special trials. It is at such times that “the fellowship of kindred minds” means so much.

REJOICING FOR THE WORLD

In the twenty-second Psalm, the opening words of which Jesus uttered audibly while hanging on the cross, he is shown as exulting over the triumph of his Father’s cause, and that as a result of his sacrifice the time would come when all the ends of the earth would turn unto the Lord. (vss. 27,28) Even under those trying circumstances Jesus’ thoughts were upon others, and when he had been brought ‘into the dust of death,’ he rejoiced in the purpose of his suffering, rejoiced that all the families of the earth were to be blessed.

May it be so with us, as again we commemorate his death! May we remember, and be glad, that the great and ultimate purpose of that which we memorialize is the reconciling of the world to God, and let us rejoice that this purpose will be accomplished. This is God’s viewpoint, for he loved the world and gave his Son to be the Redeemer. Jesus also loved the world, and gave his life that the world might live. May this same love, and the Memorial Supper this year, help to fill our hearts a little more fully with the desire to comfort all who mourn, and increase our longing for the time when we will have the glorious opportunity of association with Jesus in restoring all the willing and obedient to health and life, and of establishing global-wide peace and righteousness.

The Resurrection of Jesus

THE CRUCIFIXION OF Jesus was a shock to his disciples, but great was their joy when they became convinced that he had been raised from the dead. “The Lord is risen indeed,” was the conclusion they reached after he had talked with the two on the road to Emmaus, and had appeared to Simon. (Luke 24:34) Even so, he was very different from what he was before, never appearing to them more than once in the same manner.

Each time Jesus appeared to his disciples he revealed some further point of truth to them. This was especially true in the case of the two who were walking to Emmaus. Verse 15 says that they “communed together and reasoned.” When Jesus joined them he asked, “What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?”—vs. 17

They were noticeably sad of countenance and their ‘reasoning’ must have been on the negative side, leading them to the conclusion that Jesus was not the Messiah, else his enemies could not have put him to death. After they related the cause of their sadness, Jesus began reasoning with them from the scriptures. He asked, “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”—vss. 26,27

As he finished his discourse they reached their destination in Emmaus, and Jesus indicated that he would continue on his way, but they urged him to remain with them, and he did. It was at the evening meal, when he broke bread with them in his old familiar manner, that they recognized their guest. Then suddenly he vanished from their sight. “And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?”—vs. 32

Well might their hearts ‘burn’ with joy, because Jesus had convinced them from the Scriptures that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and die as the Redeemer of the world ere he could enter into, and display, the glory of his kingdom. Now they knew that his death was not a tragedy,

but a necessary and important step forward in the outworking of the Divine plan for the salvation of the world! It is doubtful that they grasped this great truth in all its brilliance until the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost. They did, however, come to understand that Jesus' death was necessary, and that he had now been raised from the dead.

Beginning with Pentecost, the Early Church understood further that the foretold sufferings of Christ included his body members, his church, those called out from the world to suffer and die with him. The selection of these has required the entire Gospel Age, and not until the work of this age is finished will the glory of the Messianic kingdom manifest itself for the blessing of mankind as a whole.

When the two disciples returned to Jerusalem from Emmaus they met with the others and related their experience. While together, Jesus appeared in their midst, and said unto them, "Peace be unto you." They were, for the moment, anything but peaceful. The record says that they were "terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit." (vss. 36,37) But Jesus calmed their fears, asserting that a "spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have."—vs. 39

Jesus was now a Divine being—"born of the Spirit"—and, as he had explained to Nicodemus, could now come and go unobserved, like the wind. (John 3:8) To be seen by his disciples, it was therefore necessary for him to assume a body of flesh, and the exact nature of each appearance was determined by the purpose to be accomplished. To Mary he appeared as a gardener; to the two on the road to Emmaus he was a 'stranger.' They saw no nail prints in his hands and feet, and no wound in his side. In John 20:30 we learn that this appearance was a "sign"—a miraculous manifestation. Jesus gave his flesh for the life of the world. He did not take a scarred body to heaven with him when he returned there.

On this visit, Jesus continued to open up the scriptures to his disciples, helping them to understand more clearly the real purpose of his death that had been foretold in the Law and the prophets, and in the Psalms. This was vital information for them to acquire, for they were to be witnesses that he had been raised from the dead.

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