

THE KINGDOM OF THE MESSIAH

“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to other people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end and it shall stand forever.” (Daniel 2:44.)

A study of the eternal purpose of God as manifested in the Kingdom of His dear Son.

W. Carl Ketcherside

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Foreword

For a number of years it has been my wish to set forth my humble sentiments regarding the Kingdom of the Messiah. Other subjects of pressing importance have arisen to defer the work until the present, and now that I have written the book, I find that the research attendant upon its preparation has filled my heart with so many related matters, that I could write several more volumes and not incorporate all of the material. The reader will understand, then, that the subject under consideration has not been exhausted in its possibilities, but the suggestions made will, it is hoped, encourage other and better minds to present those ideas and interpretations which will enable us to “grow in grace and knowledge of the truth.”

I have found my heart warmed repeatedly as I wrote, and the hours I have spent on the manuscript have been real “seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.” One of my purposes will be achieved, if in your reading of the book, there is aroused within you a greater sense of appreciation for the eternal purpose of God as manifested in His Son, and if you are made to feel the importance of the individual in the plan of the ages.

I am indebted to many sources for the impressions received, which have been woven into the warp and woof of this material, and memory cannot recall all of those to whom I have been brought under tribute. Students of the restoration movement will recognize that I have been greatly influenced by the reasoning of Alexander Campbell and David King. The first of these reformers was born in Ireland, and did most of his teaching in our own land, to which he emigrated; the other carried the restoration banner in Great Britain. Both were profound thinkers, and I commend their writings to all eager searchers after truth. I have felt no servile obligation to them, nor to any other uninspired writer, but have sought to read objectively, and to form my convictions upon the basis of God’s revelation, rather than what men have written about it.

One thing I would seek to impress upon the reader is that my presentation is not intended to be dogmatic or arbitrary. It does not contain the last word upon the themes considered. Especially in those parts of the book which deal with unfulfilled prophecy would I tread lightly and with becoming caution. If the great Jewish teachers so far misunderstood the prophecies of God as to be disappointed in Jesus of Nazareth when he first came, he may just as effectively disappoint the commentators with his second coming. However, since we do entertain certain definite views as to the future destiny of the kingdom, it would hardly be fair to the reader to refuse to state them. Rather, by having them published and exposed to criticism I may be able to ascertain any errors in my reasoning and make proper correction in my thinking.

The views advanced must certainly cut across those of many other sincere students of the sacred scriptures. So varied and divergent are the ideas of modern scholars, relative to our subject, that it would be impossible to write in such a manner as to avoid conflict. For that reason, I have sought to abstain from writing to refute opposition, and have rather tried to make the work a positive presentation. How well I have succeeded must be left to the reader to determine.

It will be observed that I have not limited my quotations of holy writ to any particular version of the Bible. I have used various translations, according as I felt that the purity of the original was

best served. Many of the quotations are from the *Revised Standard Version*, and these are used by special permission of the copyright owners, The National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

It is our hope that those who read will be sufficiently interested in the magnitude of the subject that, despite its humble portrayal, they will make the book available to their relatives and friends, sharing its contents with others, that more men and women will be motivated to live for the Messiah, and to acknowledge His sovereignty over their lives. If some weary soul is thus led to discover that peace which passeth all human reason, we will consider that our efforts have been sufficiently rewarded.

W. Carl Ketcherside

Chapter 1

The Reign of God

The kingdom of heaven! This is the theme which engrossed the prophets of old, and formed the basis of the revelation of our Lord and his holy apostles. The rule of God's anointed was the hope of the former, "and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days" (Acts 3:24). The inauguration of that reign constituted the foundation of the proclamation of the latter. As soon as our Lord had been immersed in the Jordan, and had grappled with the tempter in the wilderness, he launched into his mission. "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). When he sent forth his twelve envoys, he commissioned them as follows: "And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 10:7).

It is not too much to say that this challenging subject has occupied the attention of all the intelligent beings of the celestial and infernal realms in all ages, and should form the chief topic of meditation and consideration of all accountable beings who inhabit this terrestrial globe. Our heavenly Father is concerned in the matter as the source of all power or authority (Rom. 13:1), and the Son is equally concerned as the present King, "For he (God) hath put all things under his feet" and he must reign "until the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and authority and power" (1 Cor. 15:24, 27). The holy angels are involved as they shall share with the Son in his glory, when he shall sit upon the throne of his glory (Matt. 25:31), and they are the reapers whom he will send forth to gather out of his kingdom all things that offend and them which do iniquity (Matt. 13:41).

In the apocalyptic vision, John was permitted to view a conflict in heaven, wherein Michael and his angels fought against Satan and his angels. When the latter forces were routed, and flung over the ramparts of heaven, the aged apostle, "heard a loud voice saying in heaven. Now is come salvation, and strength, *and the kingdom of our God*, and the power of his Christ." It should be noted that the same voice expressed a woe for the inhabitants of earth, "for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time" (Rev. 12:7-12).

How startling it is then to contemplate the indifference of mankind toward this momentous subject. When we are aware that the residents of heaven above and hell beneath are continuously motivated by it, how tragic it is to realize that those who are so vitally involved on earth, are oblivious to the import of a question which will spell out their final destiny. It is with a sincere desire to stimulate thought in the spiritual realm that we present the facts found in this book, and trace with you the kingdom of God as portrayed in the divine revelation.

Scope of the Term

Before we can apprehend the teaching of the Holy Spirit upon any subject we must first understand the meaning of the terms employed. The communication of the divine will in order to constitute a revelation to man was by necessity given in that medium of expression common to man, that is, in human language. In such language, words are used as symbols of ideas. But the

same words are often used to express different concepts. Words have acquired and extended significations as well as radical and limited meanings. We cannot assume that because the same expression, or a kindred one, is used, that the connotation is always identical.

The language of revelation must be submitted to the same laws of interpretation which govern the documents written by men in the same language, to the same persons, in the same age. It is essential that we observe the variety of bearings of any given term, and seek to determine from the context, either adjacent or remote, what is implied in any specific place. Leaving the special New Testament sense of the expressions “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven” to demand our attention later, let us now note a few general facts about them.

The term “kingdom” has to do with government, or the exercise of control, power, dominion or restraint. As applied to God, it signifies a rule or reign manifested in a certain realm or domain by the Eternal One. But inasmuch as God governs in providential and moral aspects, as well as in an evangelical domain, the term “kingdom of God” has a varied content, dependent upon that phase of government under discussion at a given time or place. The radical idea of rule or government is always present, but the subjects and circumstances determine the nature and extent of that rule.

1. Universal

The writers of the old covenant scriptures recognized and affirmed the sovereignty of God over the entire universe, embracing both heaven and earth, and things animate and inanimate. The psalmist David expressed the idea thus: “The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all” (Psa. 103:19). In his public benediction, David said, “Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all” (1 Chron. 29:11).

The thought is reiterated in Psalm 47:2, “For the Lord most high is terrible; he is a great king over all the earth.” That the nations other than Israel were conceived to be under this moral jurisdiction is evidenced in verse 8: “God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness.” Again, “For the Lord is a great God, and a great king above all gods. In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also” (Psalm 95:3, 4).

It was upon this basis that the prophets asserted the supremacy of God over the various governments of the earth, and declared that he ruled in the kingdoms of men. When Daniel was summoned before Nebuchadnezzar to interpret the dream of the Babylonian king relating to the vision of the great tree which was chopped down until only the stump remained, the haughty monarch related the words he had heard, “This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men” (Dan. 4:17). The prophet confirmed the truth of the declaration by asserting that the dream was a revelation from God to the effect that the king would be humbled by dethronement and debasement for seven years until he learned “that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will” (verse 25, 32). At the end of his period of punishment, Nebuchadnezzar issued a decree of praise and honor to God, “whose domain is

an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom from generation to generation, and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (verses 34, 35).

This further explains the statement of God in Proverbs 8:15, 16: "By me kings reign and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth." As Daniel phrases it, "He changeth the times and seasons: he removeth kings and setteth up kings" (Dan. 2:21). We shall subsequently learn that the nation of Babylon was the first of four great universal monarchies with which God's elect came in special contact either through enslavement or otherwise, and it is significant that to the mighty ruler of the first of these, was given the great lesson of God's supreme sovereignty in the kingdoms of men.

God has not abdicated from this throne, nor has he been deposed by a superior force or greater intelligence, seeing that he is the fountain of both power and wisdom. The universe is his by right of creation. Of him who is the invisible God it is affirmed that all things were not only created by him, but for him, and they are maintained by him (Col. 1:16, 17). He made all things by the power of his word (John 1:3); he upholds all things by the word of his power (Heb. 1:3). He is not inactive in the rulership of the universe, for "the laws of nature" cannot uncrown him who decreed the laws. Laws without an enforcing or regulating agent are inconceivable. His government extends over every product of his creation and is both natural and moral, as it affects that which is material and immaterial, unaccountable and responsible.

Kingdom of God and Israel

The concept of an eternal and general rule of heaven, in the minds of the ancient seers, did not conflict with the view of a specialized and restricted reign, limited to a chosen nation. When God brought the former bondmen from Egypt to the foot of Sinai which was to be his awe-inspiring rostrum from which to announce their constitution, he proclaimed, "If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure to me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Exo. 19:5, 6). While all of the earth belongs unto God and was therefore subject unto him, he now proposed to set up a special kingdom or nation, composed of those who occupied a distinctive *covenant relationship*, which would exalt them to a position of special dignity above all other peoples.

This was later called "the kingdom of the Lord in the hand of the sons of David" (2 Chron. 13:8) because "The Lord God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt" (verse 5). It is interesting to note the terms describing the throne of Solomon, the son and successor of David. "And Solomon sitteth on the throne of the kingdom" (1 Kings 1:46). "Then sat Solomon upon the throne of David" (1 Kings 2:12). "I am risen up in the room of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel" (1 Kings 8:20). "Upon the throne of the kingdom of God over Israel" (1 Chr. 28:5). "Then Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king" (1 Chr. 29:23).

It is evident that the kingdom of God over Israel is much more limited in extent than the sovereignty of the whole universe. However to the extent of limitation it is deepened in spiritual

values and relationships. The maintenance of the relationship was contingent upon continued obedience to the terms of the covenant, which terms were accepted by the nation when initially promulgated (Exo. 24:7) and ratified by the blood sprinkled both upon the book and the people (Exo. 24:8).

That the people of Israel knowingly violated the terms of the covenant and willfully broke it is amply attested by the holy scriptures. “They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, which refused to hear my words; and they went after other gods to serve them: the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant which I made with their fathers” (Jer. 11:10). “But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me” (Hosea 6:7). In view of this God declared that he would make a new covenant, not according to the former one which was broken (Jer. 31:31, 32).

Since the special kingdom of the Lord in Israel was conditioned upon the covenant, and since a new covenant was decreed, we may expect that the “kingdom of God” in a special sense will also be altered in nature and scope to conform to the character of the new covenant. Accordingly, we are not surprised to hear Daniel say, “In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms and it shall stand for ever” (Dan. 2:44).

Thus, when John the baptizer, came, he announced upon “his showing unto Israel” (Luke 1:80) that “The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2). It would be incompatible with God’s purpose to have two diverse special kingdoms in existence simultaneously, so with the advertisement of the approach of the new reign, Jesus the Christ, informed the leaders of Israel, “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43). Thus we have introduced unto us a third usage of the term “kingdom of God” and this will form the basis of our study in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

The Kingdom in the New Covenant

The prophets of God under the Mosaic economy freely predicted a coming state of affairs in which the Messiah would reign and which they designated as “the kingdom which God would set up.” Micah affirmed that the mountain of the Lord’s house would be established in the last days, and would be the goal of heathen nations, whose citizens would invite and encourage each other to go up to it for instruction in the law of God that they might walk in his ways. Peace would be affected when such nations submitted their disputes to God for arbitration, and accepted his chastisement, so that war as a means of international discipline would no longer be requisite. In peace and quiet each man would sit in the shade of his own vine and fig tree, without fear of molestation or disturbance of his domestic tranquility. Those who had suffered affliction would no longer have to endure such an ordeal, but God having removed the trials would “reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever” (Micah 4:1-7).

It was this kingdom of which John was a harbinger, specially sent from God (John 1:6). During his earthly sojourn Jesus also heralded its approach, and sent out at one time, twelve; and at another time, seventy, messengers, all of whom were commissioned to declare the same message. During the forty days of interval between his resurrection and ascension Jesus made his topic of conversation with his chosen envoys, the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). It behooves us to study carefully the connotation of a term so important as to be the subject of divine revelation and consideration.

The word “kingdom” is found 161 times in the common version of the new covenant scriptures, and is, without exception from *basileia*. The expression “kingdom of God” occurs 72 times, while the expression “kingdom of heaven” occurs 32 times. The word *basileia* is defined as a “kingdom, realm, the region or country governed by a king; kingly power, authority, dominion, reign, royal dignity, the title and honor of a king.”

Even the casual student will instantly observe that the Greek term is much wider in scope than the English word “kingdom,” for *basileia* has at least three meanings. These may be expressed by realm, reign and rank. The first has to do with the territory or place over which the sovereignty extends, the second has to do with the duration or time of such sovereignty, and the last with the honor accruing to the regnant monarch.

The term “kingdom” is too limited in significance to express all of these phases, and for that reason it is not a proper rendering in some places. When the nature of the statement or the context shows that it is the beginning of a period of sovereignty, or the duration of such an epoch that is being considered, “kingdom” is not an appropriate rendering, and may actually be incongruous. “Kingdom” has to do with the place, locality or province governed by a monarch, and does not express time or endurance. Upon such occasions the word “reign” is far superior to the other. In the new covenant scriptures, the allusion is much more frequently to the time, than to the place, yet the King James Version invariably translates by the word “kingdom” rather than “reign.”

This version was given to the English speaking world in 1611 by James I, and has been hallowed by long generations of usage. Familiarity with its language, and reverence for its phraseology, will cause the pious reader to become insensible to expressions which in other documents would be immediately discerned as inappropriate. We cite as examples the following passages. Jesus taught his disciples to pray “Thy kingdom come” (Matt. 6:10). He said to the critical Pharisees, “If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you” (Matt. 12:28). He declared that some who stood in his presence “would not die until they had seen the kingdom of God come with power” (Mark 9:1). It was said that a certain Arimathean “waited for the kingdom of God” (Mark 15:43).

In every one of these, the term “kingdom” is inappropriate. One may wait for a reign to commence but not for a place. He may come to a place, but it is surely conceded that a place cannot come unto him. We may properly pray for a rule or authority to come or start, but not for a territory or region to do so. The difference between reign and region can readily be seen. We can ascribe motion to the first as it comes, continues and is protracted, but not so with the second, for it is by nature stationary and immovable. Those who plead for “sound speech which cannot be condemned” should understand that John proclaimed, “Reform, for the reign of heaven is approaching.” This is sensible and correct.

Summarizing the rule for correct interpretation of *basileia*, it can be said quite simply, that when it indicates time it should be rendered “reign,” but when the place is signified, it should be rendered “kingdom.” In every case where the word is employed in conjunction with the word “preached” it should, without exception, be translated “reign.” For example, “From that time Jesus began to proclaim, saying, Reform, for the Reign of Heaven approaches” (Matt. 4:17). “Then Jesus went over all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the glad tidings of the Reign” (Matt. 4:23). “As you go, proclaim, saying, The Reign of Heaven approaches” (Matt. 10:7). These are here given exactly as found in the translation from the original Greek by Dr. George Campbell of Glasgow, Dr. James Macknight of Edinburgh, and Philip Doddridge of England, and published with certain additions in the United States, by Alexander Campbell, generally under the title “Living Oracles.” The words translated by our English word “preach” in their original usage by the Holy Spirit, meant something far different than the modern meaning attached to “preach.” The idea of announcing or heralding was ever present in them.

When we speak today of “the Kingdom of Great Britain” or “the Kingdom of Norway” we visualize the territory or realm over which the Queen of England or the King of Norway has jurisdiction. Our employment of the word “kingdom” followed by a place name automatically leads us to associate the monarchy with the place or territory. This cannot be true, however, in the expression, “kingdom of heaven,” for heaven is not the territory governed to the exclusion of other parts of the universe. Far from being so, the kingdom of heaven was proclaimed on earth to men, and they were told it was approaching them and would actually be among them on earth. It is obvious, then, that the expression “kingdom of heaven” would confuse and perplex the sincere student of the English language, for it is not used in the sense in which he is accustomed to use the word “kingdom.” The words “rule” or “reign” as a translation of *basileia* under such circumstances, relieve us of the difficulty.

While it is a digression from our main theme, the fact that we have instigated a critical study of *basileia* in our attempt to fathom the meaning of the holy scriptures, makes it rather imperative that we point out that there are occasional uses of the word “kingdom” where neither “reign” or “kingdom” expresses the thought. Dr. George Campbell correctly cites two of these. One is in Luke 19:12, 15. This concerns the parable of the pounds, which is not to be confused with that of the talents. This one was voiced because of the proximity of Jesus to Jerusalem and due to the prevailing idea that the coming of the kingdom of God was imminent. The narrative concerns a certain nobleman who made a journey to a remote country to secure a kingdom, and who returned after having obtained it.

This is clearly a reference to the political situation of the Jews at the time, when Judea was tributary to Rome, after having been subjugated by Pompey. In order to obtain certification of his right to govern, the local ruler had to journey to Rome and receive the authoritative approval of the reigning Caesar. This was the case with Archelaus, son of Herod the Great, who reigned in his father’s stead, a fact which caused Joseph and Mary to turn aside into Nazareth upon their return from Egypt. The Jews sent a deputation of fifty men to Rome, who joined with eight thousand Jews then living in that city, in an appeal to Caesar at the temple of Apollo, that Archelaus not be allowed to reign over them. Caesar listened to the appeal and reduced Archelaus to the status of ethnarch. The term “kingdom” in verses 12 and 15 clearly refers to regal dignity or royal authority.

In Matthew 18:23 is introduced the parable of the unjust and unscrupulous debtor. The context shows that “kingdom” here relates to a mode or form of governing, or to a type of administration. It does not refer either to the realm or reign of a monarch, but to the method of dealing with those who are under his control.

The term “kingdom of heaven” is used more frequently by Matthew than any of the other writers of the New Testament, who seem to prefer “kingdom of God.” Matthew uses both terms, and in such a manner as to show they are interchangeable. He records the words of Christ, “Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20). In the very next chapter he has “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” (Matt. 6:33). Moreover, in recording the same events, where Matthew uses “kingdom of heaven,” the other writers have “kingdom of God.” A case in point concerns John, the baptizer. Matthew has it, “He that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matt. 11:11). Luke writes “He that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he” (Luke 7:28).

Moreover, the expression “kingdom of heaven” does not occur at all in Acts of Apostles, the epistolary writings, or in Revelation. It is apparent that there was something distinctive about the purpose of Matthew, or the ones to whom he wrote, which would make him use so frequently an expression which other writers do not employ. The answer can no doubt be found in the fact that while Mark wrote especially for the Romans, and Luke wrote to a Greek and for Greeks, Matthew’s account was designed for the Jews. God always adapts his revelation to the needs and condition of those to whom it is addressed.

The Jewish world at that time was in a state of great expectancy. All were looking for a restoration of the kingdom to Israel, and the ushering in of a golden age by the Messiah of whom the prophets had spoken. Jerusalem, as the capital of the new regime, would be world famous. The Gentiles would become tributaries and would converge upon the Jewish commonwealth with gold and silver in abundance. Much of the thinking centered around a materialistic and earthly speculation. Matthew's account was addressed to the Jews to prove that the Nazarene was the Messiah. The term "kingdom of *heaven*" was employed to distract their minds from the idea of an earthly prince leading a victorious army. It was intended to point their minds upward and to recognize a higher source of origin and a different type of sovereignty. An appeal of a different nature was necessary to reach the non-Jewish hearers of that day.

A Fourth Use

God's revelation has been on a progressive basis as his divine purpose has been manifested on an ever ascending scale. Thus it is, that although we are said distinctly to be citizens of the kingdom of God at present, there is held out to us the bright prospect of entrance into another phase of the kingdom more glorious than any we can experience here. Peter cites numerous requirements of the Christian vocation essential to making our calling and election sure, and declares, "So an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:11). At the judgment when the wicked are severed from the good, Jesus will say to the latter, "Come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). Paul declares that those who walk after the flesh "shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

Summarizing our findings thus far, we have found the following implications of "the kingdom of God":

1. The kingdom universal and unlimited.
2. The kingdom before our Lord died for the sins of men.
3. The kingdom over which the Messiah now reigns.
4. The kingdom in a more glorious state in a dispensation to come.

It is essential to a correct understanding of the Bible that we keep in mind these four distinctive usages of the expression "kingdom of God." Those who do not properly distinguish them, often become guilty of perverting the scriptures to sustain a particular kingdom theory. They read a passage which speaks of the kingdom yet to come as an inheritance, and conclude that in no sense has the kingdom yet come. To sustain such an assumption they must twist or wrest those passages which refer to the kingdom in the past, or to the present rule of Christ. The true student has no recourse to such methods. He realizes that ancient Israel composed the kingdom of God, and that God took out of the way their law, priesthood and kingdom, and established another reign upon a more elevated plane, and that there is yet another more glorious and eternal kingdom to come. And prior to all of these phases, everything was ruled by God, as it still is, in a great universal sway over all creation.

If we except the first in our numerical catalog above, it is possible that the last three are co-related and are a manifestation of the unity existing in God's plan of the ages. In the reign over Israel we have introduced unto us the terminology and language by which God proposed to describe our relationship in the present kingdom. No one can apprehend to its fullest the teaching of God with reference to the present reign of heaven if he ignores God's dealings with Israel. Hardly a phase or feature of our worship, service, sacrifice or religion was without its type or shadow in the prior dispensation. Neither can be fully understood without studying the other.

And just as the language, elements and relationships of ancient Israel served to depict those of God's children under the present regime, so do those of the present look forward and explain those of the future yet to be revealed in culmination of this age. And the final phase of the kingdom is related to the first, for as earthly Jerusalem was the holy city to which all came to worship and serve, so in the last, "the great city, the holy Jerusalem" lying foursquare, with its walls of jasper and its twelve gates of pearl, will be the dwelling place of the saints, and they shall bring the glory and honor of nations into it.

Because of the close relationship of the various aspects of the kingdom, it is not surprising that the inspired writers often speak of them in the same context. One who reads the parable of the tares will note that our Lord says it is a likeness of the kingdom of heaven. But the first part deals with the events in this age, while the harvest is distinctly said to be the end of the world, or the conclusion of this state. When the angels have gathered out all seducers and iniquitous persons "then shall the righteous shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:36-43).

The past condition and present status of the reign of heaven are both dealt with in the parable of the vineyard as related by our Lord in Matthew, chapter 21. The leaders of the Jewish nation are depicted as rebellious and murderous husbandmen, who despised and stoned the prophets and others sent by the owner to secure fruits. When he sent his son, expecting them to properly respect him, they reasoned that since he was the heir, they could kill him and keep possession of his inheritance. The parable concludes with the statement, "Know, therefore, that the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation who will produce the fruits of it." That there is a connection between the administration of God over the fleshly seed of Abraham and the kingdom embracing the spiritual seed of Abraham, there can be no question. Yet we must distinguish between them as we differentiate between a man and his shadow.

Our concern in this book is chiefly with the kingdom of God as now manifested, and with its fruition in the everlasting phase awaiting all of the faithful of all ages. We shall concern ourselves with the prophecies of that kingdom and then deal at length with its nature and with our relationship as citizens thereof. To such a voyage of discovery, with the foundation thus laid, we invite all of you to go along as our guests through succeeding pages.

Chapter 3

Patriarchs and Judges

“Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning” (Rom. 15:4).

The word of God is not a compilation of unrelated passages. It contains a revelation of the divine will in a manner which was purposeful, profitable and progressive. Three dispensations of time are covered in the Bible. In each of these God ordained a system of religion adapted to the circumstances and conditions of those to whom the revelation was afforded. The three dispensations of the world’s religious history, correspond to the three ages or stages of individual life, for as each person is first an infant, then a child, and finally a mature adult, so mankind had its infancy, childhood and maturity. And just as it is difficult to appreciate a man without a knowledge of his background and development, so one cannot ignore the plan of God in its unfolding process and perceive the fullness of truth relative to the kingdom of God.

Every nation began with a single family which then developed into a clan and finally into the nation as such. In the infancy of the world, God ordained a system of religion which was apposite to the state of man at the time. Having created man and his counterpart, God sanctified the marriage institution for the good of mankind and the multiplication of progeny to populate the earth. At the head of the organized unit thus formed was placed the man as husband and father, to rule over the little society formed by his union with another. With respect to God, man as the governor of his own household, was also their prophet, priest and king.

In the first of these roles, he received the messages of heaven, either directly if occasion demanded, or later by word of mouth from his progenitors, and he conveyed them to his children, instructing them in the ways of righteousness, and warning them to continue therein. As a priest he officiated at the altar in behalf of his increasing congregation, offering in their behalf sin offerings, trespass offerings and thank offerings. Thus did Noah upon his exit from the ark of his salvation (Gen. 8:20); and so acted Abraham upon his entrance into Canaan (Gen. 12:7, 8). Job performed as a priestly officiant in behalf of his sons (Job 1:5) and at the direct instigation of God he interceded in behalf of his friends when they sacrificed at their own altars.

When men began to multiply upon earth, the tendency was to remain close to the family altar, and succeeding generations developed into tribal units over which the father, as a tribal chieftain, presided as king. Such tribes became small monarchies, although not of a constitutional nature. God was respected as the great ruler of the universe and the head of the clan was regarded as king by divine right and primacy, seeing that it was by heavenly fiat that the father was given the right to rule his own domain. The age is therefore called patriarchal, a combined form of the words for “father” and “chief.”

Egypt early had her Pharaoh, a title apparently derived from “the sun,” the hieroglyphic symbol of which was written over the name of the king. Many ancient monarchs associated their glory with that of the sun which was regarded as the ruler of the natural universe. When the Pharaoh of the time appropriated the wife of Abram for his harem at the suggestion of his princes, the Lord chastened him directly for his indiscretion (Gen. 12:14-17).

The kings of certain areas in primitive times occasionally made forays into the territories of others and brought them into subjection. For twelve years the kings in the vale of Siddim were under the dominion of Chederlaorner, king of Elam. When the five kings in Siddim Valley then rebelled, a combined army of four kings fought against them and overthrew them. One of the four was identified as a “king of nations” indicating that he was the chief of several confederated tribes. Due to their capture of Lot and the confiscation of his personal property, Abram led an attacking expedition of his own militia, consisting of more than three hundred trained servants whom he had raised from birth. After a successful combat in which he manifested a considerable degree of military strategy, Abram returned and was met in the king’s dale by the king of Sodom. There came to meet him also the patriarch of the Jebusites, Melchizedek, who combined the functions of king of Salem and priest of the most high God (Genesis 14).

All of this demonstrates quite conclusively that long before the days of Abram, a petty sovereignty existed in every part of the populated earth. Such a development was a natural result of the primacy of the father as ordained by God, when descendants became sufficiently numerous as to justify a consolidated government. And while God made a special covenant with Abraham, which was established unto Isaac, he also promised that Ishmael would beget twelve princes, and be made a great nation (Gen. 17:20) although Ishmael was not in the covenant.

As a sovereign, Abraham commanded his children and his household after him (Gen. 18:19), negotiated peace pacts with neighboring kings and their chiefs of staff (Gen. 21:22-32), arranged for purchase of territory with guarantee of title, and insurance of the same for protection to posterity (Gen. 23), and disposed of personal property on the basis of his own will (Gen. 25:5, 6).

In ordaining the patriarchal system, the Lord arranged for a successor to the ruling father, to assure that in his absence or death the divine service would not be neglected. The oldest son was given the responsibility of mediatorship in behalf of the remainder of the family. That this right of primogeniture was known even to the sons of Adam is evident in the words of the Lord to Cain, who was angry because his sacrifice was not recognized as valid, “Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted And unto thee shall be his (Abel) desire, and thou shalt rule over him” (Gen. 4:6, 7). It was his despicability of this sacred obligation which caused Esau to be branded irreligious as well as immoral, when he bartered his birthright for a mess of pottage (Heb. 12:16). As a compensation for his increased accountability the oldest son was granted a double share of the patrimony upon the death of his father.

The first dispensation continued for twenty-five hundred years before it was replaced with the introduction of a system of national religion to the posterity of Abraham. During its long tenure the foundation was laid for succeeding dispensations. Even with the giving of the constitution to Israel at Sinai the only ones affected were the children of Israel, the remainder of the nations continuing under the provisions of the original arrangement. And since the family constituted the basis of the nation of Israel, the social worship under the guidance of the father was destined to continue in each family, although all of the tribes in the aggregate formed one large family bound together by consanguinity, and with each man wearing the distinctive mark of circumcision.

The theocracy continued in the Mosaic economy, although now the Lord was recognized as the peculiar king of his chosen heritage. The national constitution was first announced orally at Sinai and then written down for future reference. The people did not elect delegates, nor pass their own laws, but the statutes and judgments were delivered from heaven, the royal city. Although human agents were used to execute and enforce the constitutional law, it still remained that the Lord was supreme director of national affairs.

In the wilderness sojourn, Moses and Aaron were the recognized custodians of the public welfare. No attempt to supplant them was tolerated, and those who conspired to do it were publicly charged with being “against Jehovah” (Num. 16:11). When Moses was apprised of his approaching death, he petitioned God to name his successor to lead the people after his decease, so they would not be as sheep without a shepherd (Num. 27:16, 17). He was instructed to see that Joshua was publicly acclaimed with a becoming ritual. “Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who prolonged their days after Joshua, and who knew all the work of the Lord which he did to Israel” (Josh. 24:31).

“And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of one hundred and ten years ... and all that generation were also gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them, who did not know the Lord or the work which he had done for Israel. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals; and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt” (Judges 2:8-12).

“So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them; and he sold them into the power of their enemies round about, so they could no longer withstand their enemies Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the power of those who plundered them. And yet they did not listen to their judges; for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed down to them” (Judges 2:14-17).

“Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them. But whenever the judge died, they turned back and behaved worse than their fathers ... they did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways” (Judges 2:18, 19).

The period of the judges is one of the most interesting, yet one of the most difficult to comprehend of all the eras in the checkered career of Israel as a nation. The problem is made more acute due to the sparsity of material in the inspired record, which introduces them in rapid succession, paints a picture of their exploits and ushers them off the stage before the observer has had a chance to study them. It is often possible to grasp significant facts about an office or function among God’s people by comparison or contrast with a similar office in contemporary nations, but in this we are at a total loss. Other nations had their elders, kings, captains of the host, secretaries, priests and tribal heads, as did Israel, but the latter stands alone in ancient history as far as the judges are concerned.

These *shopetim*, as the original Hebrew would have it, from the meaning of the term, were “rulers of the people.” Perhaps the people generally had a voice in their selection. This was true in the case of Jephthah, the outcast son of a harlot, who collected about him a group of worthless fellows as marauders and raiders. When the Ammonites declared war on Israel, the elders of Gilead went to the hide-out of Jephthah with the invitation, “Come and be our leader.” Jephthah naturally pointed out that in his distress they had driven him from his father’s house, and asked, “Why have you come to me when you are in trouble?” Upon receiving assurance of their recognition of his ability, Jephthah said, “If you bring me home again to fight with the Ammonites, and the Lord gives them over to me, I will be your head.” To this stipulation the elders agreed with Jephthah, who then accompanied them, “and the people made him head and leader over them” (Judges 11:1-11).

It should be noted that the judges recognized themselves as being mere instruments of God, and even Jephthah the raider, acknowledged the power of victory belonged to the Lord. It is interesting to recall that “Jephthah spoke all his words before the Lord at Mizpah,” which simply means that at this holy place God was called upon to witness the agreement made with the elders and to ratify it. Thus the theocratic government was not disturbed by the arrangement for these special rulers under divine sanction. This fact is emphatically emphasized in the case of Gideon. After his notable victory over the kings of Midian, the men of Israel attempted to set up a dynasty, with the words, “Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also.” But Gideon said to them, “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you” (Judges 8:22, 23). This is enhanced by the New Testament reminder of Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, “who through faith conquered kingdoms and enforced justice” (Heb. 11:32, 33).

At this juncture of our study of the unfolding of God’s plan it will be wise for us to pause for orientation of our thinking. During the patriarchal dispensation, the realm of mankind was under a theocracy (rule of God). This was effective as a restraining influence only so long as the growing nations recognized and worshipped the one true and living God. However, the worship of a plurality of gods, imaginary, natural, and artificial, became almost universal. At the time when all the nations had selected their gods, the God of heaven selected a nation, for the specific purpose of keeping alive the monotheistic concept on earth, that he might achieve his purpose in the salvation of men.

Calling an individual out from the idolatrous practices to which his father was already addicted, the Lord promised to make of him a great nation. When a sufficient posterity had accumulated under bondage in Egypt, they were led forth with no military might being manifested, and were confirmed as a constitutional theocracy before being given the territory which had long since been designated as their own.

The provisions of the constitution at Sinai were wisely designed to strengthen the theocracy. All males were required to appear before the Lord thrice annually (Exo. 23:17). After six years of cultivation the land was to lie fallow for one year during which the people all assembled at Jerusalem before the Lord at which time the entire law was read in their hearing. Twice each day a sacrifice was to be offered at the place where God said he would meet and speak to them.

He further declared, “I will dwell among the people of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God” (Exo. 29:42-45).

If a slave wanted to remain with his master, the master had to “bring him to God” and bore his ear through with an awl (Exo. 21:6). If it was alleged that something left in trust was stolen, the owner of the house was required to “come near to God” and exonerate himself from implication (Exo. 22:8). In event of any breach of trust both parties had to “come before God” and the one whom God condemned had to pay double indemnity (Exo. 22:9). In any case requiring expert decision in matters of homicide, civil rights, or aggravated assault, the parties had to repair to the place chosen by God, and submit the case to the Levitical priests, and to the judge who was currently in office, and when a decision was rendered it had to be accepted without recourse to further appeal, upon penalty of death (Cp. Deut. 17:8-12). All of this was calculated to augment the theocratic government in the eyes of the people.

Unfortunately, however, because of the indifference, unconcern, and stubborn attitude of the people, the government was not carried out to its furthest extent as intended. After the decease of Joshua there was a relapse into tribal divisions with each tribe on its own, and with no real adherence to the rules relative to a strong central government. There was no enforcing agency for the laws, and no punitive power for violation of them. Israel could not seem to grasp the concept of a King who was omniscient, omnipotent and eternal. They did not appeal their cases unto him for his divine judgment. Since they had no strong central officer and did not recognize the majesty of God’s kingship, conditions became chaotic, as indicated by the closing verses of Judges: “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

Certainly the provision for judges was better adapted to the maintenance of the theocratic system than any other. The judges were recognized as direct agents to enforce obedience to the Great King. They held office by divine appointment, receiving their commission either directly or by heavenly sanction, and thus were more dependent upon God than a monarch would be. They did not have a dynastic approach to government, nor seek to perpetuate themselves and their posterity in control, by force or political maneuvering. Their graver decisions were made with the cooperation of God through revelation, by means of the Urim and Thummim (Num. 27:21), and thus the authority of heaven was always recognized. They disclaimed royal privileges and prerogatives and constantly called Israel back to a trust in God and his word.

Nothing is more apparent than the fact that after settlement in Canaan, motivated by a fierce sense of tribal jealousy, Israel was separated into various segregated units. In time of national emergency the first thought would be for a central figure of strong personal influence, exalted as king to lead the people in war and to secure victory. To this system they would naturally gravitate through example of other nations about them, and by fear for their own survival. But it is easier to select a king than to dismiss one. And kings may continue a state of terror and emergency to perpetuate themselves in power.

Nations felt called upon through a sense of patriotic pride to maintain royalty in such splendor as to excel others about them. The sons of a king are often profligate by reason of their rearing in a state of pampered luxury. The permanency of a kingdom breeds arrogance and dictatorial

supremacy. But the judges were raised up for a special need and were temporary in their functions. Perhaps it was this relation of the special deliverers and rulers to the theocracy which makes them without counterpart in other contemporary nations. If so, it is to be regretted that the system was ever displaced by a kingly rule.

Chapter 4

Theocracy and Monarchy

The earnest student of the Bible is made constantly aware of the manner in which the Lord turns the perverseness and iniquity of men into instruments for accomplishment of his purpose. Thus the brothers of Joseph moved by envy and jealousy sold him into bondage, only to have him later tell them, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Gen. 50:20). The psalmist declared, “Surely the wrath of men shall praise thee” (Psalm 76:10). A good instance of this is found in the clamor of Israel for their first king.

When Moses rehearsed the law, he anticipated that Israel would some day cry out for a monarch. They had lived for generations in Egypt under a king, and it would be natural for them to ascribe to the king, all of the wealth, power and prestige of this advanced and enlightened nation. Too, when there is danger of attack from a foreign power, men tend to turn to a strong leader, and it is a common thing for a military hero to be given prominence when victory is won. As a safeguard for the theocratic government in such an eventuality, Moses laid down certain stipulations governing the election of a sovereign ruler. These may be found in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 and are as follows:

1. No one must be chosen as king who was not a native born Israelite. A foreigner could never be designated as king and this was a very wise arrangement, for Israel was to be segregated from other peoples to prevent amalgamation and loss of national identity. One who was an alien might not appreciate God’s purposes in this regard, and a foreigner might think more of his native land and its customs and habits than of the preservation of the ideals of the elect nation.
2. They could set as a king over them only one “whom the Lord your God will choose.” This would tend to eliminate rivalry, political maneuvering and the installation of those who would exploit the people for personal gain. The first king was chosen by lot at Mizpah when Samuel assembled all Israel for the public selection, but the acceptance was not unanimous at first, some worthless fellows deprecating Saul’s ability (Cp. 1 Sam. 10:17-27). In the case of David, the Lord ratified his choice by saying, “Arise, anoint him, for this is he” (1 Sam. 16:12). With the introduction of this family into royalty God made the throne hereditary, that the Messiah might establish his right to David’s throne.
3. The king was instructed that “he must not multiply horses for himself, or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to multiply horses, since the Lord has said to you, ‘You shall never return that way again.’” The purpose of this prohibition was dual in nature. It should be remembered that the ancients did not use the horse as a beast of burden. The ox and the ass were used for menial service. The horse was used exclusively for warfare and became a prophetic symbol of war, either literal or spiritual. Israel was permitted by divine constitution to maintain a standing army for resistance of aggression, but as the land was subdued by infantry it was to be so protected and defended. Ancient nations with highly organized cavalry units became aggressors and sought the lands of others, but God wanted his people to be satisfied within their own boundaries, where he promised them “milk and honey” to sustain them.

Another reason for this restraint was found in the fact that Egypt was the great horse mart of the world, and the Lord did not want his people to engage in traffic with the Egyptians, lest by their interchange of trade pacts, exports and imports, and general bartering back and forth, the people of Israel be persuaded to return to this land of their former degradation, and adopt the idols thereof as they did in the case of the golden calf of Aaron's construction, undoubtedly a reproduction of the Egyptian bull god Apis, with which they were so familiar.

4. The king was further forbidden to "multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away." Most of the oriental monarchs maintained harems for gratification of carnal lust. The tendency to strengthen political position by marrying foreign women of royal extraction is well known to every student of history, both sacred and profane. Such women brought with them their foreign deities, and often seduced the king to worship such, using all of the wiles of feminine flattery and appeal.

5. Again the king was not to "greatly multiply for himself silver and gold." The accumulation of wealth leads to avarice and luxury, which in turn breeds sensuality and licentiousness. The people become impoverished through the heavy burden of taxation, pampered princes are rendered incapable of ruling justly, and decadence of morals obtains at a time when the gold and silver are piled highest in the realm.

"Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey;
Where wealth accumulates and men decay."

6. It was further required that upon accession to the throne, the king had to personally copy down in a book the complete law, securing for this purpose the original which was kept in trust by the Levitical priests. This copy he had to keep with him and "read in it all the days of his life," thus constantly refreshing his memory relative to the statutes and commandments of God. This is an important factor for it is proof that the theocracy was not discontinued from the accession of an earthly monarchy, but the kings were to be recognized as mere envoys of the Lord. They could not enact laws, nor could they repeal or revoke old ones. All legislative power remained with God, and the king was not absolute in authority, but merely an executive to enforce the laws of the Lord.

7. The solemn charge was given to the king that he was not to be proud or arrogant, and his heart was not to be lifted up above his brethren. With this judicious restriction upon him, the king would recognize himself as a special servant of the brotherhood rather than a despot over slaves. Conscious ever of his own shortcomings and of the standing and position of his friends, he would not assume cruel and dictatorial attitudes. It is worthy of remark that when the first king was anointed, "Samuel told the people the rights and duties of the kingship, and he wrote them in a book and laid it up before the Lord" (1 Sam. 10:25).

The First King

The eventuality for which Moses prepared the people finally came to pass. Samuel, the first national prophet, in his old age, anointed his sons Joel and Abijah with him as judges and administrators, with headquarters in Beer-sheba. These sons were unlike their father in character, and being greedy for gain, they accepted bribes and perverted justice. Their

malfesance in office gave Israel an occasion to petition for a king. Their real reason seems to have been a national pride which demanded a king to be like the nations around them.

Samuel was greatly perturbed when all of the elders of Israel presented their demand at Ramah, but God told him to grant their request for it was he whom Israel had really rejected from being king over them. After the prophet had predicted that the choosing of a king would result in a forced military draft, excessive taxation and virtual enslavement of the populace, all of them even more vociferously demanded such a monarch. Accordingly, a Benjamite named Saul, the son of Kish, was notified at the conclusion of a private feast that he would become king. Shortly afterwards, in a great conclave at Mizpah, he was designated by divine lot, and Samuel said, "Do you see him whom the Lord hath chosen?"

Although a few dissented and despised Saul, he soon became a national hero as the result of a victory over Nahash, an Ammonite king, but refused to exercise vengeance upon those who had previously derided him. At this time Saul gave credit to the Lord, declaring that he had wrought deliverance in Israel. After this victory, Samuel summoned all of the people to Gilgal where he publicly and solemnly anointed Saul, and took advantage of the occasion to recount the deeds of God, justify his own conduct in office, and demand that even the slightest deviation from the path of rectitude as a judge be pointed out. When the multitude acknowledged the purity of his administration he censured them severely for demanding a king, but said, "If you will fear the Lord and serve him and hearken to his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well; but if you will not hearken to the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king" (1 Sam. 12). The abdication of Samuel and the transfer of duties to the new regime officially ended the period of the judges, although Samuel continued in the office of national prophet.

Mistakes of Saul

Saul had been fully informed of the nature of his rule, and it was impressed upon him by Samuel that he was merely a viceregent of the Lord. Under no circumstances was the king to be permitted to make laws, or to alter, amend and suspend them. He was to receive the word of God upon every occasion through the mouth of the prophet and act in accordance with the divine communication. But at the first real test, Saul failed. His son Jonathan, who was a lieutenant with a thousand men under his command, captured a Philistine fortress, whereupon Saul summoned the people to Gilgal for a general attack. But when the Philistines put a large force of both infantry and cavalry in the field, the Israelites crept like cravens into caves, cisterns and tombs, and scattered from Saul. The king had been told by Samuel to wait for him seven days at Gilgal, but on the seventh day when Samuel had not appeared, Saul became frantic and intruded upon the office of the priests by personally offering sacrifices. No sooner had he done so than Samuel appeared.

Saul demonstrated by his own language that he had acted in full knowledge of his sin, and Samuel said, "You have done foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God which he commanded you; for now the Lord would have established your kingdom for ever. But now your kingdom shall not continue; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart; and

the Lord has appointed him to be a prince over the people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you” (1 Sam. 13:13, 14).

It is apparent that Saul either never fully grasped his relationship to the theocratic government, or was so self-willed and obdurate as to render it impossible for him to properly function in such an arrangement. Motivated by political aspirations, influenced by fear of the people, and nervously upset by any temporary hitch in his plan, he acted impulsively and impetuously.

The character of Saul was forcibly manifested in another test of his willingness to conform to God’s arrangement. He was given a direct order from the Lord to completely destroy the Amalekites, and to eradicate both man and beast among them. However, Saul and the people retained the choicest sheep and oxen and also spared the life of Agag, the king. When Samuel came to him at the instigation of the Lord, he asked him, “Why did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you swoop on the spoil, and do what was evil in the sight of the Lord?” (1 Sam. 15:19). After an ineffectual attempt to argue the case, Saul said, “I have sinned; for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice.”

The final demonstration of headstrong disregard of divine commands, caused the Lord to repent that he had made Saul king (1 Sam. 15:11). Samuel said to the cringing and disobedient monarch, “The Lord has torn the kingdom from you this day, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you.” After this Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but he continued to grieve over Saul.

With the end of this initial dynasty approaching we should recapitulate and refresh our minds concerning the rule of God over Israel.

1. The termination of the judges and the introduction of the kingship did not affect the theocratic principle. The chief difference seems to have been that while the former received their instruction by consultation with the Urim and Thummim, the latter were apprised of the will of God by prophets.
2. The regnancy of Benjamin, the smallest tribe, through the family of Saul, could have been established over Israel during the whole Mosaic Dispensation (1 Sam. 13:13).
3. The forfeiture of this right through the stubbornness of Saul, provided an opportunity for the Lord to achieve his will in establishing the tribe of Judah in the kingship; just as the wilfulness of the whole nation in demanding a king, made possible the introduction of the system which was a prelude to the reign of the Messiah, which was to grow out of the theocracy.
4. The successor to Saul, David, was a man after God’s own heart, and better than Saul, because of his proper concept of relationship in the kingdom. As an individual, David had many private shortcomings, but in his official standing in relationship to the rule of God, he was faultless. Although guilty of great and grievous personal crimes, he was without flaw in his official concept of the theocracy.

5. David demonstrated this even prior to his coronation. Saul constantly sought to kill him and “was David’s enemy continually” (1 Sam. 18:29). Once, when David and his men were sitting in a cave, Saul entered alone to attend to the demands of nature, and David’s men urged him to slay his enemy. Instead David cut off the skirt of Saul’s robe, and then was filled with remorse, saying, “The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my ruler, the Lord’s anointed, to put forth my hand against him, seeing he is the Lord’s anointed” (1 Sam. 24:6).

6. It was David’s constant recognition as given in his own words, ‘The Lord is king for ever and ever’” (Psalm 10:16) that enabled the Lord to say to him that his son should succeed him, “But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever” (2 Sam. 7:15, 16).

We are thus ready to begin our investigation of the accession of Judah to the kingship, and of the throne of David, upon which the Messiah was to sit. And we cannot but recall the words of the aged Israel as he summoned his sons to his dying bedside. “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples” (Gen. 49:10). That this is a prediction of the reign of the Messiah to come, both Jews and Christians have generally agreed. The Jewish Targums paraphrase it: “Until the time when the King Messiah comes to whom it belongeth.” The following observations are in order.

1. With the investiture of the regal rights upon Judah there would be a guarantee that regardless of what defections might arise, there would be no absolute termination of the kingly prerogatives in the eyes of the descendants of Israel until the advent of the Messiah.

2. This would demand that regardless of the amalgamation and disruption of other tribes, the tribal identity of Judah would be maintained until the coming of the Messiah.

3. The destruction of tribal identity in such a manner as to render it impossible to trace the lineage or descent therefrom, would be positive proof that the Messiah had already come. No Jew upon earth today can designate or point out the tribe of Judah. Herein is found one of the greatest proofs that the Messiah has come.

4. The relationship of the rule of God over the fleshly descendants of Abraham to that of the Son of God over the spiritual descendants of Abraham is clearly shown. The sceptre was granted to Judah on a temporal basis only until he comes to whom it belongs.

5. No one can understand the rule of God’s anointed by ignoring the rule of God under the prior dispensation. The roots of “the kingdom of God” reach far back into the past. It is with becoming reverence that we prosecute our research further into the divine purpose as revealed.

Chapter 5

The Throne of David

It is not our purpose in this volume to investigate the private life or public affairs of David, the son of Jesse, except as his career is entwined with the subject of the kingdom of God. Upon the death of Saul, the captain of his army, Abner, conspired to have Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, inaugurated as king over the major part of Israel. Judah recognized David as king, and he reigned in Hebron more than seven years, during which time a war was carried on between his forces and those of Ish-bosheth, until the latter was assassinated while taking a mid-day siesta in his own home. Upon the death of Ish-bosheth David was made king over all Israel, and reigned thus for thirty-three years more.

David became conscience-stricken over the fact that he resided in a new house of cedar while the ark of the covenant was yet housed in a tent when in its sacred repository. So he announced his intention of erecting a suitable temple for the service of God, but was restrained from doing so by Nathan the prophet, who nevertheless gave him great comfort and assurance, by conveying the promise of God in these words, "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your son after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will be his father, and he shall be my son And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever" (2 Sam. 7:12-16).

1. This is a good example of a prediction with a two-fold meaning. It is possible for him who knows all things from the beginning to use a contiguous event to shadow a remote one, and so to phrase his message that the language can apply to either.
2. The immediate revelation concerned Solomon, whose rule was to be assured after the death of David, and the house he would build for the Lord was the temple in Jerusalem.
3. The establishment of the house and kingdom of David was a guarantee that there would be no superseding of the dynasty by another, as in the case of Saul.
4. That there is a deeper meaning to be derived from the prophecy, and that it relates to the reign of the Messiah is definitely shown by the Holy Spirit, so that it is not reckless assumption to state that the Lord, through Nathan, was giving a pre-view of his kingdom purpose.
5. The apostle Peter, upon the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus, applies the prophecy directly to him. "I may say to you confidently of the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of Christ" (Acts 2:29-31).

6. Upon the basis of the statement to David, the angel Gabriel, in the annunciation of the birth of Jesus, declared, “The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32, 33).

7. That the prophecy reaches far beyond Solomon is affirmed by the writer of Hebrews, who definitely quotes “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son” (Heb. 1:5) as directly applicable to Jesus, as the Son of God.

A summary of the points set forth in this great prefiguration will show the following:

1. The Messiah was to be in the lineage, and a direct descendant of David.
2. The Messiah was to be raised up while David was still in his sepulcher. Thus the resurrection and exaltation of the Messiah was to be a special event prior to the general resurrection in which David would participate.
3. The kingdom of the Messiah was to be established on the throne of David, that is, it would be conditioned upon his succession as a member of the tribe of Judah and his relationship as an heir of David.
4. The Messiah would build a house for God in which God would dwell through the Spirit, even as he formerly dwelt in the tabernacle and temple through the Shekinah.
5. The kingdom of the Messiah was destined to continue for ever.
6. The Lord said to David, “He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.” But he added, “Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure before me.” Thus the kingdom of the Messiah was to be directly related to that of David. Inasmuch as David was the first of Judah to wield the scepter, and he thus sat as the regal representative of the theocracy upon earth, it remains that this theocracy, as a rule of God, was to be transferred at some future date, while the body of David was in the tomb, to a descendant of his after the flesh, who would also be a Son of God. “I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son.” The theocracy vested in Judah would never be wholly supplanted “until he comes whose right it is.”

The promise and purpose of God remained inviolate amidst the vicissitudes affecting the kingdom. The promise was repeated to Solomon, conditioned upon his fidelity (1 Kings 6:12), but when he became an idolater, the Lord told him, “I will surely tear the kingdom from you However I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen” (1 Kings 11:11-13). This one tribe was to be given “that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem” (1 Kings 11:36). Even when succeeding kings became increasingly wicked, “the Lord would not destroy Judah, for the sake of David his servant, since he promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons for ever” (2 Kings 8:19).

Testimony of the Prophets

In the darkest days which the nation experienced, the prophets spoke of a brighter era to come, when God would raise up one as a witness, leader and commander for the peoples, and when he would make an everlasting covenant, which he designated “my steadfast, sure love for David” (Isa. 55:3, 4). Jeremiah predicted that the days were coming when a righteous Branch would be raised up for David. He was to reign as king, deal wisely, and execute judgment and justice. His regime was to be one of salvation and security. His name was to be called “The Lord our righteousness” (Jer. 23:5; 33:15). That this is a direct allusion to Jesus as the Messiah is proven by the two designations, “the Branch” and “the Lord.” It was because of this that Jesus dwelt in Nazareth “that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled. ‘He shall be called a Nazarene’” (Matt. 2:23). The Hebrew word for Nazareth was *Netzer*, “a branch.”

Ezekiel refers to the Messiah as David, and in his prophecy concerning the future welfare of Israel, declares, “I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them” (Ezek. 34:23, 24).

Again he quotes the word of the Lord, “My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall have one shepherd.” God was to make a covenant of peace which was to be everlasting. He was to set his sanctuary in their midst for evermore, his dwelling place would be with them, he was to be their God, and they were to be his people (Ezek. 37:24-28). Surely this is a picture of Jesus and the church of God.

No consideration of the relationship of the Messiah to David and his kingdom would be complete without reference to Isaiah, chapter 9. The prophecy of this chapter in its primary sense is related to the circumstances existing at the time of its pronouncement, and begins with chapter 7. At the time, Ahaz was king of Judah, and Rezin and Pekah were the kings of Syria and Israel to the north. Tiglath-Pileser was king of the Assyrian nation and was bent on subjugating all of western Asia. To resist his advance, Rezin and Pekah formed a coalition, and conspired to overthrow the dynasty of David and install the son of Tabeal as king in Judah, so they could have a man more favorable to their purposes.

At this time, Isaiah was instructed to meet Ahaz at the conduit of the upper field on the highway to Fuller’s Field, and encourage him to have no fear of the conspiracy. When Ahaz was requested to ask a sign from God, but refused, the prophet said a sign would be given anyway. A young woman would conceive and bear a son, and before the child reached the age of accountability, the land whose two kings were dreaded would be divested of any power to threaten. The immediate fulfillment was in the birth of Isaiah’s own son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, about whose birth, Isaiah was told to take a large tablet and write the facts, then seal up the testimony of his writing as a witness. When in dire distress, others would consult wizards and fortune-tellers, the faithful were to consult this teaching and testimony.

The introduction of chapter 9 portrays the fact that the land of Zebulun and Naphtali which lay far toward the north, adjacent to Syria, would be first overrun by Tiglath-Pileser, but in a brighter day would be restored. In a larger and spiritual sense this was applied to the personal ministry of

our Lord in Galilee. “Leaving Nazareth he went and dwelt in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
toward the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles –
the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light,
and to those who sat in the region and shadow of death
light has dawned” (Matt. 4:13-16).

To assure Ahaz of the permanency of the rule of David, and thus to offset the fear of the conspirators to unseat him in favor of the son of Tabeal, a remarkable prophecy is provided:

“For to us a child is born, to us a child is given;
and the government will be upon his shoulders,
and his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God;
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end,
upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom,
to establish it and uphold it with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and for evermore.”

Thus the reign of the Messiah in a golden future age is depicted, when justice and righteousness shall govern for ever, when the expansion of benign rule and the growth of peace will be boundless, through the ministration of him who sits upon the throne of David.

“When the oppressor is no more,
and the destruction has ceased,
and he who tramples under foot
has vanished from the land,
then a throne will be established
in steadfast love
and on it will sit in faithfulness
in the tent of David
one who judges and seeks justice
and is swift to do righteousness”
(Isa. 16:4, 5).

Despite the years of exile, spiritual destitution, and subservience to foreign powers, the hope was held aloft that regardless of the low estate into which the kingdom fell, there would be a glorious revival, and the dawning of a better and brighter day of peace, reclamation and restitution.

“In that day I will raise up
the booth of David that is fallen
and repair the breaches,
and raise up its ruins,

and rebuild it as in the days of old”
(Amos 9:11).

Because of the prophecy related to this “that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name,” the apostle James, at Jerusalem, directly applied this to the church and successfully squelched the attempt to bind circumcision upon Gentile converts to the Christ (Acts 15:16-18). The tent of David which sagged through neglect and indifference, which was breached by idolatry and ruined by sin, has been rebuilt upon a far better scale, by the one who is “a minister in the true tent which is set up not by man but by the Lord” (Heb. 8:2).

It is no wonder, in view of all that we have thus learned, that the Messiah personally refers to himself as “the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David” (Rev. 3:7). The word “key” in prophetic symbolism signifies “authority,” especially in granting or barring entrance, that is, in opening and closing. At some juncture between the time when the Lord promised David a son to sit upon his throne and the time when the apocalyptic vision revealed the Son of God with the keys, the kingdom of the Messiah became a reality, and the authority was transferred unto him “whose right it is.” He is the “Lion of the tribe of Judah,” and “the root and offspring of David” (Rev. 5:5; 22; 16).

Testimony of David

The psalms of David bear personal witness to David’s own faith in the Messiah. David is distinctly said to be a prophet (Acts 2:30), and it is affirmed that he was inspired by the Holy Spirit (Mark 12:36) and that the Holy Spirit spoke by his mouth (Acts 1:16; 4:25). To those who challenge the position that certain psalms are Messianic in content, we merely cite Luke 24:44 where Jesus declares that “everything written about me in ... the psalms must be fulfilled.”

One of the most interesting of the psalms of this nature is the second. In verses 1 and 2, kings, princes, Gentiles and the people, are pictured in conspiracy and tumultuous assembly for the specific purpose of thwarting the design of God and His Messiah. In verse 3 this motley horde of insurrectionists exclaim, “Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us.” It is as if the nations resented the restraints imposed by God, and realized that the ascension of the Son to the throne would install him as a judge over the nations. To forestall this they attempt to prevent the coronation.

In verses 4-6, Jehovah is pictured as laughing in derision at the vain attempt of men to mock him and overthrow his eternal decrees. He then speaks out of his wrath, and terrifies them with his fury, “I have set my king in Zion, my holy hill.” That the transactions here referred to are applicable to the plan of God relative to the Messiah is plainly demonstrated in the words of the Jerusalem congregation assembled for prayer. After quoting the first two verses of the psalm, they say, “For truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place” (Acts 4:27, 28).

In verses 7-9 of the psalm, the Messiah personally speaks, reciting the decree of the Lord, as spoken unto him. “You are my son, today have I begotten you. Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod

of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." The language of verse 7 is quoted in Hebrews 1:5 as evidence of the superiority of Jesus to angels; and in Hebrews 5:5 as proof of his divine appointment to the priesthood of Melchizedek. The student should observe that "the day" in which he was begotten was not the date of his advent into the world, but of his resurrection from the dead. Paul declared in the Antiochan synagogue, "We bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, 'Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee'" (Acts 13:32, 33).

The fact of the rule of iron, symbolizing firmness is attested to in Rev. 19:15, where a vision of Christ as "the Word of God" declares, "From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the winepress of the fury and the wrath of God the Almighty."

In view of this positive teaching that the Messiah was to be both the Son of God and His king, on what grounds do the Jews now reject him? Most of them seek to make the language of the psalm applicable only to David. This explanation fails upon several counts. First, there was no such general conspiracy or plot to keep David from becoming king as would warrant the language of the first two verses. Secondly, it was never the intent of God to make the nations the heritage of David, nor give him the remotest bounds of the earth for a possession. It is true that David defeated the nations adjacent to Palestine, and carried off gold and silver from Moab, Edom, the Ammonites, the Philistines, and Amalek. It is also true that "The Lord gave the victory to David wherever he went." But "David reigned over all Israel; and he administered justice and equity to all his people" (1 Chron. 18:11-14). The second psalm has reference to a greater and nobler king on the holy hill of Zion.

Psalm 16

This is another prophetic psalm with both a literal and extended meaning. In its primary sense it portrays the supreme trust of the author in God, who is declared to be his refuge, his sole delight, portion and cup. There is an interesting contrast in verses 3 and 4. The sole source of *delight* for the saints is God, but those who choose another god "multiply their *sorrows*." There are two sets of figures used. One is characterized by the words: portion, lot, lines, heritage. This is a reference to the subdivision of Canaan among the tribes and has to do with possession. God is affirmed to be the possession and dwelling-place of faithful saints. The other figure is found in the word "cup." The polytheistic heathen poured out their libations to their idols. The writer says "Their libations of blood will I pour out The Lord ... is my cup" (verses 4, 5).

In its remote sense, the psalm is a prediction of the triumphal resurrection of Christ, looking to his coronation. Peter quotes it on Pentecost to substantiate the fact that God had raised up Christ, "having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it." This is predicated upon the statement of David, "I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be moved; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will dwell in hope. For thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor let thy Holy One see corruption" (Acts 2:24-27). Peter declares that David was a prophet and "foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption" (verse 31).

Paul in his synagogue speech at Antioch, in Pisidia, quotes from both the psalms and the prophets (Psalm 2; Psalm 16; Isa. 55:3; Hab. 1:5). Speaking of Jesus, he says, “And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he spoke in this way, ‘I will give you the holy and sure mercies of David.’ Therefore he says also in another psalm, ‘Thou wilt not let thy Holy One see corruption.’ For David, after he had served the counsel of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid with his fathers, and saw corruption; but he whom God raised up saw no corruption” (Acts 13:34-36). Surely Psalm 16 is Messianic in nature.

Psalm 45

Passing over the beautiful and stirring Psalm 22, so descriptive of the agony and death of Jesus upon the cross, we notice Psalm 45, as more closely allied to the purpose of this book. The title designates it as “a love song” and the studious reader will observe that it is a song poem to celebrate the marriage of a king. The prelude is given in verse 1, where the writer declares he is “bubbling over” with a goodly theme, so that his tongue is as free with words as the pen of an accomplished scribe, when he addresses his verses to the king.

In verses 2-9, is a special ode to the bridegroom who “rides forth victoriously for the cause of truth and to defend the right.” Verses 10-12 contain an address to the bride with the admonition that if “you will forget your people, and your father’s house, the king will desire your beauty.” A description of the pageantry in the bridal procession is furnished in verses 13-15, and a final address to the king culminates the song, so filled with beautiful Oriental imagery.

The psalm is of special interest in our investigation because it affirms to the king, “Your divine throne endures for ever and ever. Your royal scepter is a scepter of equity; you love righteousness and hate wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows” (verses 6, 7). The writer of the Hebrews appropriates through the Holy Spirit, this statement to advance his argument for the supremacy of the Messiah over the angels. After setting forth the idea that the Christ was superior because he had obtained a more excellent name than theirs, because angels were commanded to worship him, and because of the nature and mission of these celestial servants, he proceeds to establish it further by showing that Christ occupies the throne and wields the scepter in the kingdom. He clinches the argument with the citation that the anointing of the Messiah was beyond that of his comrades, i.e., his angelic associates in heaven. Of course, the character of the reign is shown in the fact that the scepter is one of righteousness, and its possessor one who loved righteousness, while detesting lawlessness.

Psalm 110

We come now to consider one of the most remarkable of Psalms. Martin Luther declared it was “worthy to be set in a frame of gold and diamonds.” It is a majestic tribute to one who was destined to be what David could not be, a combination of king and priest. The psalmist seems to be listening in on a conversation between God and His Son. He hears the former give an invitation, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool” (verse 1).

In prophetic symbolism, the “right hand” signifies a place of authority and power. The invitation is for Christ to occupy that place of authority. This indicates that the rule had previously belonged to God, else he could not transfer it. The theocracy is to give way to a Christocracy, a rule of God’s anointed.

The transfer of power is to be for a specific time and a specific purpose. It is to be a rule of conquest. The enemies of God are to be conquered and subjugated. The authority is to be invested in Christ until that is accomplished. When the last foe has been rendered helpless and destroyed, the reign will cease. The term “footstool” as applied to an enemy comes from the ancient custom of a conquering chieftain forcing his vanquished foes to bow down while he placed his foot upon the prostrate forms and proclaimed his victory over them. You may read about this custom in Joshua 10:24.

It was this first verse of Psalm 110 which Jesus employed with such devastating effect against the Pharisees, after asking them, “What think you of Christ, whose son is he?” After the question and quotation “no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did any one dare to ask him any more questions” (Matt. 22:42-46; Mark 12:36).

Verse 2 says, “The Lord sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your foes.” The former verse constitutes a report of a conversation or statement of God to His Son, but in this verse the Son is directly addressed. Again in verse 1, we read of the extension, nature, power and duration of the kingdom, but in this verse we learn of the place where the power will first be manifest, and from which it will go forth in universal dominion. It is for that reason loyal citizens of the heavenly regime are said to have “come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb. 12:22). Here it is that the mighty scepter is wielded so effectively.

Verse 3 of the psalm affirms that the reign of the Messiah will not be manifested in an autocratic or despotic fashion. There will be no involuntary subjugation to the divine sway, upon the part of the subjects of the kingdom. “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power” is but an expression of voluntary submission to One who loved them and gave Himself for them. Contrary to the system under the old covenant which enrolled those who were infants and needed to be taught to know the Lord after enrollment, the arrangement under the Messiah requires that men first be taught to know the Lord, and then come to him by choice (Heb. 8:10, 11).

Verse 4 is one of great moment in the consideration of the divine purpose relating to the kingdom. It demonstrates that the Messiah was to occupy a two-fold position, being a priest as well as a king. “The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” Let us notice some of the points involved in this prediction.

1. It was so important in the divine plan that it was confirmed with a sacred oath. The Levitical priests were not inducted into office by oath, and the fact that the oath was a part of the inaugural ceremony of the Christ is urged as a proof of the superiority of his priesthood (Heb. 7:20-22).

2. The unchangeable and immutable nature of the prediction was manifest in the assertion that the Lord would not repent. This indicates an inflexible purpose, not subject to any alteration by virtue of condition or circumstance.
3. The promise here made implies a change of law. The Messiah was to be of the tribe of Judah “of which Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood” (Heb. 7:14). The Mosaic economy was to be superseded and abrogated. “For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law” (Heb. 7:12).
4. The priesthood of the Messiah would not be subject to change or be affected by law of succession. He was to be a priest “for ever.” The Levitical priesthood was altered repeatedly by the demise of its occupants. “And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death; but this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood” (Heb. 7:23, 24).
5. The priesthood of Aaron’s sons was to be supplanted by that of the order of Melchizedek, who was so great that the patriarch Abraham honored him by presentation of tithes, and was blessed by him in turn (Heb. 7:4-6). Thus the Messiah was to be both king and priest upon his throne.
6. This fact is further predicted by Zechariah in his prophecy regarding the man whose name is The Branch (the Nazarene). It was declared that “He shall build the temple of the Lord; and shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest on his throne” (Zech. 6:13). Three facts are affirmed about his throne as follows: (1) He will sit on it; (2) He will rule on it; (3) He will be a priest upon it. When we find the Messiah sitting at the right hand of God, and acting in the capacity of a priest, we shall know he is upon his throne and ruling in his kingdom. One passage alone should be sufficient proof that the Messiah is now king and that the kingdom has come. “Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Heb. 8:1).

The temple of God has been erected. The tabernacle of David has been repaired and re-built. The scepter of Judah is even now in the hand of “him whose right it is.” The reign of heaven is here. “The Branch” is sitting upon the throne of his father David. He is king and priest, mediator and intercessor, author and finisher of the faith, Alpha and Omega of our Hope. In him prophecy and history meet, and their united testimony confirms the eternal purpose.

Chapter 6

The Stone that Became a Mountain

The book of Daniel provides a rich treasury of material for the student of the kingdom of the Messiah. Daniel was carried into exile in Babylon by the army of Nebuchadnezzar, in 606 B.C., when Jehoiakim, king of Judah was delivered into the hands of the Chaldeans. He was one of those youths who were “without blemish, handsome and skilful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to serve in the king’s palace.” Because of his fidelity, God gave him understanding “in all visions and dreams.” The record bearing his name is a compilation of both prophecy and history. In it are found recorded not only the visions of Daniel, but also his interpretation of visions manifested to the heathen kings, Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar.

Our present purpose will not permit of an extended exposition of all the points in this remarkable book, and we must content ourselves with an analysis of one of the visions of Nebuchadnezzar, with occasional reference to other salient and relevant material. The reader is urged to read chapter 2 of Daniel, and to carefully note the contents.

Briefly the facts are these. Nebuchadnezzar had certain dreams which perturbed him greatly, troubled his spirit and drove sleep from his eyes. The actual dreams departed from his memory, so he summoned his court magicians and sorcerers, and demanded that they inform him of the dreams and then interpret them. Failure to do this would result in their being torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins. The enchanters were in dismay, and said, “There is not a man on earth who can meet the king’s demand.”

This enraged the king who accused them of stalling for time, and in his fierce anger he ordered all of the wise men slain. Arioch, the captain of the king’s guard, was entrusted with the mission of slaying the counsellors, which was to include Daniel, and his companions from the land of Judah. However, Daniel spoke with such prudence and discretion to Arioch, that he was permitted to go in and secure a reprieve for a stated time. Daniel returned to his house and with his friends petitioned God, who gave him the solution in a vision by night.

When Daniel was brought before the monarch, he made it clear that none of the Chaldean Magi could explain the mystery. He further declared that there was a God in heaven who revealed mysteries and had chosen this method of making known what would be in the latter days. This term, when used by the prophets, generally had reference to the age of the Messiah. That the dream and vision of the heathen king were prophetic, is evidenced by the following statement, “To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be hereafter.” We are about to study one of the most amazing revelations of the rise and fall of four great universal kingdoms, which were to be overthrown by a fifth world kingdom which would never crumble. The king to whom this was depicted was the head of the first of these, and it was appropriate that to him should be given the preview of the unfolding drama of world history.

The Dream

Nebuchadnezzar saw a giant figure of a man, luminous and imposing, which was awe-inspiring and frightening. The image was composed of different metals, having a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet of iron mixed with clay. As the king viewed the image, a stone was quarried without use of human hands, and this stone dashed against the feet of the image with such force as to shatter them and topple the entire image in a mass of fragmentary debris which became like the chaff on a summer threshing floor, all of which was carried away by the wind until not a trace of the image remained. The stone then grew into a mountain of such proportion as to fill the whole earth.

The Components

It is essential that we list the various figurative elements which require notice in our attempt to understand the significance of this remarkable vision. They are as follows:

1. The head of gold.
2. The breast and arms of silver.
3. The belly and thighs of brass.
4. The legs of iron.
5. The feet of iron and clay.
6. The stone cut out without hands.
7. The mountain which filled the earth.

General Observations

In his interpretation, Daniel shows that the idolatrous image represents four mighty and successive world powers, of which the Chaldean (Babylonian), which then held him captive, was the first. The key to this part of the prophecy is found in the portrayal of this initial one of the four. "The God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory. Into your hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the sons of men, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air, making you rule over them all." This can be nothing less than world dominion. But this universal sway was to be transient and transferable, until a fifth kingdom was set up which would completely destroy the preceding four, and yet would itself never be destroyed. It is evident that the seed of decay which was in the first four would be wholly lacking from the fifth.

It is worthy of remark that the same four universal empires were also pictured to Daniel in a vision which is described in chapter 7. In his dream, however, they were viewed as fearsome wild beasts, rising successively from the agitated waves of the Mediterranean Sea, as it was churned and tossed by the four winds of heaven. To the proud and haughty heathen monarch, who was a worshiper of Bel and Nego, these mighty nations appeared as an impressive and awe-inspiring image; to the captive Daniel they appeared as ferocious, bloodthirsty, persecuting powers. The God of heaven adapts his revelation to the state of those to whom it is given.

The giant image represented prophecy in a systematic form. The various portions were composed of diverse elements, yet all were related to each other in such a fashion as to form one body, indicative of the idea that all were motivated and regulated by the same principle. There

was no room between the divisions, but each was immediately successive to its predecessor, so that it would appear that each one after the first, grew out of the preceding one. The nations symbolized must be consecutive in order and appearance and as there was an unbroken and unified prophecy there must be the same kind of history in fulfillment of the prophecy.

It will be observed that the component elements were on a descending scale of values from the first through the last, starting with the head of gold and ending with iron mingled with clay. This denotes a natural deterioration in the empires prefigured. In prophecy, different metals are used to indicate various degrees of worth, excellence, dignity, political strength or durability. Clay or dust indicates weakness or instability. Thus, iron mingled with clay would represent an admixture of strength and weakness produced by coalitions and alliances of various kinds.

The nations of the world were assigned their places in prophecy only as they came in contact with the chosen people of God. When they maligned, persecuted or subjugated the elect, they appeared on the screen of God's predictions, to receive advance notice of their coming fate. Thus it was with Egypt (Jeremiah 46) ; the Philistines (Jeremiah 47) ; Moab (Jeremiah 48) ; the Ammonites (Jeremiah 49:1-6) : Edom (Jeremiah 49:7-11), etc. The key to such prophecies is found in the pronouncement upon Moab: "Make him drunk, because he magnified himself against the Lord; so that Moab shall wallow in his vomit, and he too shall be held in derision. Was not Israel a derision to you? Was he found among thieves, that whenever you spoke of him, you wagged your head?" (Jeremiah 48:26, 27).

The four world empires symbolized in the giant image all held sway over the people of God in regular succession. The first, Babylon, made three expeditions against Jerusalem, finally, in 586 B.C., destroying both the city and temple. At this time, Zedekiah, king of Judah, was captured in the plains of Jordan, while attempting to escape to the Arabah. He was taken to the Babylonian king at Riblah, who slew his sons in his presence, put out his eyes, bound him in fetters and took him to Babylon. This fulfilled the statement of Ezekiel with reference to Zedekiah, who was called a profane, wicked prince. "Thus saith the Lord God: Remove the diadem, and take off the crown Perverted, perverted, perverted will I make it, and it shall be no more until he come whose right it is, and I will give it him" (Ezekiel 21:26, 27). Not another king of the lineage of David occupied the throne until he came "whose right it is."

It was in a strange land, when Judah was in exile, with no city, temple or daily sacrifice, that God reassured his people through Daniel's interpretation of the night vision of the haughty ruler who had carried them captive. In spite of sword, famine and pestilence, of slavery and bondage, God still knew his people. He had not forgotten his promise to David. Thus a calendar of history was presented in the form of a towering giant, and nation after nation would exercise universal dominion, until the fullness of time ushered in another kingdom which would smite the oppressing powers and vanquish them forever. There was destined to be a clash between the universal ambitions of the sons of men, and the benevolent rule of the Son of God, but the outcome was already determined. "The dream is certain and its interpretation sure."

The Heathen Monarchies

The four universal governments are plainly, identified in the Bible, the names of all being given. The stone smote the feet of the image, "thus indicating the time when the things it symbolized

would be abrogated and destroyed. The kingdom of God was to be set up in the days of the fourth world power.

1. *The head of gold.* This represented the kingdom of the Chaldeans, or Babylonians. The first name was derived from the country, the second from the capital city (Dan. 4:29, 30). At the time of the vision, it embodied the vast territories of Chaldea, Assyria, Arabia, Syria and Palestine. It was aptly called “the hammer of the whole earth” (Jeremiah 50:23). But the doom of Babylon was decreed, and the power to overthrow her was named. “The Lord has stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes, because his purpose concerning Babylon is to destroy it” (Jeremiah 51:11). Accordingly, “Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old” (Daniel 5:30). This was in 536 B.C.

2. *The breast and arms of silver.* This is a symbol of Medo-Persia. This great power began with Darius the Mede, uncle to the Persian, Cyrus the Great. The latter became sole governor of Medo-Persia upon the death of Darius. That this is the kingdom which Daniel predicted would succeed the Chaldean, is evident from the handwriting which appeared upon the palace of Belshazzar, a part of which was thus interpreted: “Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.” This combined kingdom is mentioned in Daniel 5:28; 6:8, 12, 15; 8:20; Esther 1:3.

3. *The belly and thighs of bronze.* This symbolizes the third universal empire, which is the Macedonian, or Grecian. It was founded by Philip of Macedon, but received its greatest extension under his son, Alexander the Great, who swept like a flaming meteor across the world’s surface. This young and daring general overthrew Darius Codomanus, at Arbela, October 2, 331 B.C., thus ending the famous Persian empire.

The appearance of brass, or bronze, in this part of the image is peculiarly appropriate. All historians of note mention the “brazen-coated Greeks.” The famous Macedonian soldiers all wore armor of burnished brass, and carried shields and weapons of the same metal. The sunlight glinting from the armor when they assembled in battle array was dazzling and luminous.

The regime of Alexander was as brief as it was startling in its accomplishments. He died in B.C. 323 leaving no suitable heir or successor. As a result his kingdom was divided between his four chief generals, Cassander, Lysimachus, Ptolemy and Seleucus. Cassander received Macedon and Greece; Lysimachus received Thrace and the countries bordering the Hellespont; Ptolemy ruled over Egypt, Lybia, Palestine and Arabia; while Babylon, Media, Persia and Assyria, fell to the lot of Seleucus. In process of time these were combined under two heads; the Lagidae in Egypt, and the Seleucidae in Syria. The kingdom of Greece is identified by name as the conqueror of Medo- Persia in Daniel 8:20, 21.

4. *The legs of iron.* This metal is a symbol of strength and crushing power. “There shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks in pieces and shatters all things.” History reveals the mighty Roman Empire as the fourth world power. Perhaps the two legs of the giant man signify the two divisions of the former empire which were combined to create the world dominion of Rome. The kingdom of the Seleucidae reached its culmination when Pompey defeated Antiochus in 65 B.C., that of the Lagidae was terminated in 30 B.C., when Octavius

Caesar captured Alexandria, after having already defeated Anthony and Cleopatra at the battle of Actium. With these conquests, Rome became the mistress of the whole world. The iron hand had crushed, shattered and broken all opposition. That the kingdom of the Caesars was a world dominion is proven by Luke 2:1. That it was the empire whose capital was Rome is determined by comparing Acts 25:10-12 with Acts 28:16. All of the four kingdoms are named in the sacred scriptures.

5. *The feet and toes of potter's clay and iron.* “And as you saw the feet and toes partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom; but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom will be partly strong and partly broken.” The ten toes of the giant image are representative of the same thing as the ten horns of the fourth beast described in Daniel 7:7. These symbolize the ten divisions composing the Roman Empire.

Iron and potter's clay are the exact opposites in texture and nature. The first is strong and crushes all things; the second is fragile and easily shattered. Thus the fourth dominion was to maintain the power and strength to batter down all opposition, but at the same time was to possess such qualities of weakness and fragility as would prove its own undoing. The empire was “partly brittle” as a result of its methods of extension and growth. By force, treaty, colonization, coalition and intermarriage, vast portions of the habitable earth were brought under the dominance of Rome, but it is one thing to encircle diverse nations, and a totally different thing to absorb and assimilate them. Herein lay the weakness of Rome. She had the strength to capture but lacked the power and time to consolidate. “As you saw the iron mixed with miry clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay.”

The Stone

In the vision, a stone appeared which was not cut out by human hand. It smote the image on the feet and shattered it. Daniel explained this as a picturization of the effect of a fifth universal dominion. It differed from the other four in the following points:

- a. Origin
- b. Effect
- c. Nature
- d. Durability

Insofar as origin was concerned, it was divine. The expression “without hands” indicates absence of all human agency. In Hebrews 9:24 it is said, “Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands,” which is the equivalent of saying he is “a minister of the true tabernacle which God pitched, and not man” (8:2). Our spiritual body is spoken of as “a house not made with hands” and this is said in the same verse to be “a building of God” (2 Corinthians 5:1). Thus, the kingdom of the stone was of divine origin.

The previous world powers were established and gained their universal dominion by human sagacity and ingenuity, by military genius and prowess, by force of arms and strategy of attack, but the kingdom set up by the God of heaven was not dependent upon any of these. Indeed its

strength lay in the fact that it proceeded not from these considerations. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 4:6).

The effect of the kingdom represented by the stone was altogether different than that of the previous powers. They merely absorbed and perpetuated the wealth, subjects, territory and spirit of their predecessors. Each preceding kingdom lived again in the acts and deeds of the one succeeding it, so that it might be said as spoken by the seer upon Patmos, “He exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him” (Revelation 13:12). The form, the seat of government, the officials and the sovereigns, these were changed with the coming of each regime, but the spirit and nature were perpetuated.

The Medes and Persians smote the Chaldeans, the Greeks smote the Persians, the Romans smote the Greeks, yet the man remained entire, the image was unbroken. Of these very kingdoms it was said, “They had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time” (Daniel 7:12). That which keeps a man alive is his spirit. The spirit of world dominion was not destroyed when Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece fell to the superior powers which were actuated by the same motives. The stone smote the image with such force that “the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces.” These became like chaff and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. The spirit which prompted such powers was to be forever crushed, and never to be resurrected while the earth remains.

This brings us to the fact that the nature of the kingdom of the stone was to be diverse from that of the universal monarchies. They exerted cruel and tyrannical pressure against the people of God. They were held together by idolatry and fear. But the kingdom of God would consist of the people of God, and would be maintained by faith and love. The world empires existed upon the principle that might makes right. This was the spirit which animated them. The kingdom of heaven is motivated by an opposite principle, that right makes might. This is the true source of power. These two could not exist side by side in God’s universe and under his moral sway. So the stone was destined to clash with the image and as a result the idolatrous empires were to be swept away.

This clash of divergent ideologies was to come during the Roman empire. The stone smote the image upon the feet. This was an auspicious time for the Messiah to be enthroned and for the test to be made. Rome had subjugated the whole world. It was an era of peace upon earth. The kingdoms of men had reached their zenith. It was a golden age of the empire. The benign influence of Grecian culture bathed the intellects of men as the enervating rays of the sun falling upon the earth. Yet it was an age of lassitude, doubt and weariness. Faith in the old gods had been undermined, the servile classes were tired, helpless and hopeless. The temples of Jupiter and Apollo were still standing, but gone was that simple trust which once was placed in these imaginary deities. The cultured world had turned to Philosophy, which led its devotees into dead-end streets of human reasoning and left them no room to turn around.

The patrician of Rome believed that his city and empire would last forever. This was “the Eternal City.” Religion consisted of absolute reverence of the emperor. The State represented the highest good. True patriotism consisted in this belief. To live and die for the state was the

whole duty of man. The state was all in all. The Roman emperor as the highest representative of the state was the chief deity. At the altar erected to him sacrifices were offered which glorified the power and majesty of his universal sovereignty. The highest virtue attainable unto man was to devote his all to the state.

It was at this time Christianity, symbolized by the stone, was launched upon the earth. It was still just a stone, small in comparison with the giant image seen in the vision of the haughty Nebuchadnezzar. It had, as the captain of its host, one who had been crucified as a common criminal. Its emissaries were not politically powerful, rich, learned or cultured. They were tradesmen, soldiers, fishermen, publicans – the despised and poor of the world. But they challenged all to open combat. With a daring born of true conviction, they hurled down the gauntlet to philosophers and commoners alike. The issue was clear-cut. To the Christian, the highest of all things was not the mighty Caesar, nor the Roman empire. He rendered unto Caesar what was his, but declared his subjection to another and greater king. He asserted that Rome herself was not the hope of the universe, but rather declared that “here we have no continuing city.” He insisted upon taking his message to all nations and of enlisting them under another standard than the golden eagle.

And Rome recognized the battle for what it was, the call to a battle which must end only when one of the militant foes was vanquished and “no trace remained.” The charge was clearly stated: “They advocate customs which it is not lawful for us Romans to accept or practice” (Acts 16:21). The Christians were branded as atheists, haters of the human race, and enemies of virtue. Rome fought with insensate fury, with the sword, rack, stake, rope of strangulation, fire and dungeon. Her life and all she held dear was threatened. She must destroy all that was Christian, or go down for ever into oblivion. Every Christian was guilty of treason in the most aggravated form, and treason could be dealt with by only one penalty – death to the traitor.

The humble followers of the Messiah did not become dismayed, for their faith recognized no odds. They were valorous in life but victorious in death, for their courage was stronger than death. To the heathen death was the one thing to be most feared; to the Christian it was gain. These men knew how to die because they had learned how to live. Because they had something worthy to live for, they had something worth dying for. And if they taught the faith in life, they proved their faith in death. They met death, not with contempt or indifference, but in a certain and sure hope of victory. How could the pagan empire win? Every world empire had been launched upon the power to threaten death to its enemies. Now a new kingdom had arisen whose citizens rejoiced in death, welcomed the freedom it brought, and went to join their King by dying. The state could persecute men, abrogate deeds, kill bodies, but it could not with sword or fire touch faith – the faith which refused to worship any earthly thing, even the Roman state. The kingdom of the stone was different!

There was a contrast in durability also. “In the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to other people ... and it shall stand for ever.” The principle of self-destruction was contained in each of the heathen monarchies. As might decreased, others arose in strength and the sovereignty passed to other people. The Assyrians were lost in the Babylonians, they in turn in the Medes, these in the Persians, the Persians in the Greeks, the Greeks in the Syrians and Egyptians, these in the

Romans, and the Romans in the Gothic hordes. This could be only because each monarchy had other rivals in the same field, and all that was essential to loss of sovereignty was the growth of a superior force. But no such rival exists, or can exist, in the field of the kingdom of God, for it is armed only with truth, and there can be no disharmony or conflict between truths.

The kingdom of the stone will continue as long as its Maker. Dying men establish dying realms; only a living God can establish an eternal kingdom. Truth is constant, unwavering, everlasting.

“Truth crushed to earth shall rise again,
The eternal years of God are hers;
While error wounded writhes in pain
And dies among her worshippers.”

The dreams of the king, and the interpretation of the prophet, came at a time when the fortunes of Israel were at a low ebb. The Chaldeans had swooped down upon the holy city and the chosen people of God had been carried into exile beyond the Euphrates. Yet it was at this very time when the power of Babylon seemed invincible, and the people of the Lord appeared to be powerless, that God revealed the coming destruction of the former, and the ultimate triumph of His purpose. Is there not in this fact a source of cheer and hope in all ages when the faithful are harassed and troubled by the forces of this world? Man's extremity truly provides God's opportunity, and His grace is made perfect in man's weakness.

To those who have fled for refuge to the mountain that grew out of the stone there is no cause for fear. No weapon formed against it can prosper. No machinations of the evil one can shake its foundation. Security and peace can be found only in the kingdom that shall never be broken in pieces. Tyranny has its day, and despotism rules but a moment. History is filled with the accounts of puny men who sought to elevate themselves to the heights, only to have their hopes dashed and destroyed by the grasping hand of death. The road to greatness is not paved with the stones of selfishness, but with those of self-denial. The stone which crushed the giant image is destined to grind into powder every vain ambition of mankind.

The Mountain

The kingdom set up by the God of heaven did not appear as a mountain at first. When it clashed with the principle of tyranny as exhibited in the mighty empire of the Caesars it did so as a stone, which appeared insignificant in contrast with the giant image it was destined to destroy. It grew into a mountain. At first it occupied but a small and isolated part of the world. The process by which it filled the whole earth was one of gradual growth.

This accords with the facts. The might of Rome was challenged by a humble group of men and women, who were mainly slaves, uneducated, poor and despised. Without literal sword, spear or shield, and by the shedding of no blood except their own they met the challenge of world tyranny and overcame it. Within a few centuries the Caesars were toppled from their throne.

There will never be another world power such as was exhibited by Babylon, Persia, Greece or Rome. The ambitions of men may prompt them to seek universal sway over the nations of the earth, but they will be doomed to disappointment, frustration and defeat. Napoleon Bonaparte,

the German Kaiser, Adolf Hitler – all these have suffered the fate which will overtake all who dare to defy the edict of prophecy. There were four universal empires of men, and no more. With the inception of the fifth, established by the God of heaven, demanding universal allegiance, there can never be another. A mountain in prophecy signifies a great kingdom, while hills signify lesser powers. “The mountain of the Lord’s house is established in the top of the mountains and exalted above the hills.”

There is one important fact which should not be overlooked in the symbolism of the giant man. The kingdom of God was pitted against four world dominions. It was not opposed to government as such. Its opposition was to four specific powers, and even then, not because they were governmental, but because of the spirit or principle which animated them. These powers were idolatrous (the giant image), and cruel (the wild beasts). The prophecy is clear. “It shall break in pieces *all these* kingdoms, and bring *them* to an end.” Not all kingdoms, but all *these* kingdoms.

The giant image did not represent civil government, as such, in opposition to the kingdom of God. It represented four world tyrannies over men which existed as enslaving forces, through abuse of the principle of government. The kingdom of God has never set itself against the principle of government. It has never even sought to change or alter the form of government in any land. It is by nature opposed to evil, and recognizes that evil men may seize the governments of men and manipulate them to their own personal interest and gain, just as the same kind of men may seize control of the churches and “make merchandise of souls.” But it does not oppose the right of civil government to exist to serve in its proper sphere because of abuses of power, any more than it opposes the right of the church to exist to serve in its proper sphere because of abuses of power.

So long as Caesar properly conducts civil affairs he acts within the sanction of God. In this respect, and in this respect only, he is a minister of God for good. If he infringes upon a field other than his own he is condemned, not because he is a civil ruler, but because he gets out of his place. The angels that sinned were not cast down to the pits of nether gloom because they were angels, but because “they did not keep their own position, but left their proper dwelling” (Jude 6). Other angels which did not over-step their boundaries, and other governments were not destroyed merely because the four great cruel pagan empires crushed out the rights of men. The great mistake of the sinning angels was rebellion against God. The grave error of the four heathen monarchies was in forgetting that they were ministers of God, and in seeking to become God.

The prince of glory, who was soon to be coronated as ruler upon the throne of heaven, announced the principle of his authority and its extent. “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” There are things within the realm of Caesar. They must be given unto him whose right they are. There are things that belong unto God. They must be given to him. They need not conflict. But emperor worship is sinful. Caesar is a servant of God. He is not God. When he seeks to become God he must be removed, not because he is Caesar, but because he thinks that he is God.

The God of heaven did not abdicate his universal moral dominion when he set up the special kingdom of David, nor has he relinquished it merely because his Son sits upon the throne of David. Civil government is merely an expression in systematic form of the united mind of society. It is a manifestation in codified form of a social consciousness, by which rights are recognized, the weak protected, the distressed relieved, the helpless provided asylum, and the properties certified and guaranteed to their owners. The ruler “is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer” (Rom. 13:4). So long as the ruler thus acts, he conforms to God’s will and purpose.

So long as the kingdom of God exists, that long will this earth be safe from another universal dominion. But that kingdom will last for ever. It cannot be captured, overthrown or destroyed. Its sovereignty cannot be left to other people. There is no room upon earth for two kingdoms, utterly opposed to each other, both of which fill the whole earth. The mountain of God fills the whole earth. No other kingdom can again do so. In order to do that it would have to dethrone Jesus from his place in the hearts of men. And imperfect though our service be, as rendered unto him, yet his sovereignty, his right to rule, is recognized by countless millions scattered over the face of the globe.

“Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her king;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing.

He rules the earth with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of his righteousness
And wonders of his love.”

Chapter 7

The Fullness of the Time

The apostle to the Gentiles wrote, “When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son” (Gal. 4:4). Mark records the initial proclamation of Jesus in these words, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” (1:15). It would no doubt overwhelm us all to know the full complement of the expression “fullness of time.” That it involved far more than a mere calendar date should be apparent to even a casual student. Certainly the God of the universe would not inaugurate a new creation without arranging every phase and feature of that universe which would in any manner affect his design.

We have already learned of the divine manipulation of history to accomplish a supreme purpose. It is but reasonable to conclude that all the earth would be readied to contribute to that great period when the heir to the kingdom would walk among men to associate with them and enunciate the fundamental and foundational principles of his reign. Of course, the marshaling of the forces of creation would not be understood by them, but as involuntary servants they would take their places in line until just at the proper moment nothing would be lacking. It would require a volume much larger than the one you hold to detail for you the essential forces working in coalition to achieve the divine purpose, but we can enumerate a few items which would materially assist the spread of the kingdom.

1. A universal empire which would grant protection and traveling rights to its citizenry, so that they might freely bear a message to every part of the earth.
2. A common tongue used especially by men in the commercial realm or the world of trade, so that writings circulated in such a language would be generally understandable.
3. Good roads which would speed the courier on his way and make it possible to hasten any news of importance.
4. Freedom of trade between nations, assuring that ships would regularly sail the seas and passenger vessels be available to the traveler.
5. An era of peace, and international tranquility, that the message go not unheeded amidst the turmoil and strife of war, with its dangers and distractions.
6. A general air of expectancy which would enhance the eagerness for the reception of the message and guarantee that it would be readily considered.
7. A state of discontent with previous forms of religion, and a weariness with reference to the old worship, its rituals, and its sacrifices.
8. A yearning for fellowship and brotherhood which would create a favorable attitude toward any organization based upon these factors, rather than one of hostility toward that which is new.

9. A people who had been taught the elements of the new relationship, dispersed among the nations of the earth, regularly carrying on a worship akin to the one to be introduced, to act as a leavening influence.

Testimony of History

The records of the first century bear witness to the fact that all of the above mentioned features were in absolute readiness. The whole world, religiously, morally, politically and intellectually was ripe for the greatest event of all ages. The guiding hand of divine providence, although unseen, surely and quietly moved the various parts of the world like chessmen on a gaming board, and the time had come for the mighty drama foretold by the ancient prophets, to be enacted.

No investigation of the reign of the Messiah can be complete which separates it from the preceding events of God's administration; none can be proper which ignores the contemporary picture. It is only when interpreted in the light of its setting that it can be evaluated with accuracy. In reviewing the aforementioned factors we are but touching the highlights of the subject, yet these may help to portray the pregnancy of the time.

1. The world of the first century was the empire of Rome. This fourth, and last, of the mighty universal political dominions, held undisputed sway over at least a hundred diverse races of men, and from the Rhine River to the bleak wastes of the Sahara Desert, one man controlled the earthly destiny of a polyglot mass of humanity. The Roman eagle was proudly held aloft as the standard of far-flung units of a vast army. In every corner of the civilized world a Roman citizen found police protection. A violation of his civil rights would be reviewed by a procurator, and appeal could be made to Caesar's court if deemed necessary. Moreover, a citizen could freely cross the boundary line of any province or territory without a passport. The mere announcement of Roman citizenship was sufficient to guarantee safe and speedy passage. At no time in our modern world has it been possible to circulate among nations as easily as in that century when Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

The importance of this can be easily seen in the selection of Saul, a Cilician Jew, as ambassador to the Gentiles for the kingdom of God. A Roman citizen by birth, he traversed the provinces of his day unchallenged and undaunted. When beaten by the magistrates of a Roman colony, composed chiefly of the retired soldiers of the army of Augustus, he demanded dignified treatment and safe conduct and his demand was granted (Acts 16:36-39). He heard the town clerk disband a mob gathered to assault him, by pointing out that court sessions were held at appointed times, and there were proconsuls to judge, and illegal assemblies would be quelled by force of Roman arms (Acts 19:38-41). Once, when a group of furious Jews attempted to kill him, a squad of Roman soldiers rescued him and carried him into their barracks. The chief captain was stricken with fright because he had bound him and was about to scourge him (Acts 22:25-29). Upon demand for a bodyguard, 470 infantrymen and cavalrymen were assigned for his personal safety, and when he finally made an appeal to the hearing of Augustus it was immediately granted and ratified.

2. It is true that Rome subjugated Greece, and the remnants of the world conquest of Alexander the Great were amalgamated under the banner of the Caesars. But while Rome conquered

Greece militarily, the conqueror fell to the conquered culturally. There was a strange fascination about Greek learning. Rude barbarians fell under its spell, foreign philosophers came in contact with it, and neither was ever the same again. Under the blue skies reflected in the Aegean waters, the inhabitants of Greece rose to new heights. Her poets, historians, philosophers and instructors were without rival elsewhere on earth.

Motivated by belief in lovely myths, she created architectural beauty, inaugurated glorious festal seasons, inspired literature, and endowed art with a new meaning. The Greek manner of life, singularly free from care, and dedicated to the enthronement of beauty and the recognition of skill permeated the whole life of the earth. And with the Greek merchants sailing their vessels to every major port of the known world, bartering, selling, trading, it is small wonder that the Greek language became an all but universal medium of communication. It was well fitted for this role, as it was expressive, thorough and comprehensible. No other language had so many keen distinctions; no other was so adapted to convey a message to all men. The *koine* (common) Greek was not only the language of the common man, it was at the time a language common to man. The law of the theocracy given to Israel was preserved in Hebrew, a language which seemed as exclusive and segregatory as the nation to whom it was given, but the new covenant was written for all men in a language which all could grasp. This was the great contribution of the Greeks to the kingdom of the Messiah – the vehicle for conveying the heavenly message to the world of mankind.

3. Rome was the greatest highway builder in the history of the world. Modern nations build more roads and better roads, but they can only build them to their territorial boundaries and trust that neighboring nations will extend them. Rome was not hampered by any such restraints. Possessed of tens of thousands of slave laborers, many of them taken captive in war, she had an abundance of cheap labor available. Her system of colonization, unique in its time, required a means of speeding proclamations and declarations. Accordingly, from the great city of two million souls, sprawled upon the banks of the Tiber, roads reached out as spokes from a hub to the “little Romes” which existed in remote parts of the empire.

Many of these were paved and maintenance crews continually kept them in repair. In some areas toll-gates were manned and a certain amount collected for each chariot, the money thus received going for upkeep. Inns and post houses were established at intervals to care for travelers. Couriers and postal carriers regularly carried dispatches and letters. One of the most famous of the roads was the *Via Ignatia*, which was paved for five hundred miles, and was marked with milestones throughout its entire length. It was on this road Paul traveled from Neapolis through Philippi, Amphipolis, Apollonia, and to Thessalonica. Another famous pavement was the *Via Appia* called “the Queen of the Roads,” the highway upon which Paul entered the city of Rome enroute from Puteoli. It was a two lane road of stones so perfectly joined together as to appear unbroken. Little did the Caesars realize when they constructed these military roads to their colonies, that over them would pass soldiers of the cross to plant “colonies of heaven” which would one day topple them from their imperial thrones.

4. The islands of the Mediterranean could only be reached by sailing vessels. This provided also the quickest route to large areas of the mainland. And during the first century commerce was at such a peak that major ports were crowded with vessels from every section. Long before, the

sea-kings of Crete had made their island a center for receiving and discharging wares. From her harbors ships sailed forth to join overland trade routes, some of them centuries old. Commercial alliances were made, money-changing was a lucrative business, and customs and banking employed many men in every thriving maritime city.

The message of a king who was to reign universally could be carried by sailors, traders, merchantmen, and sales representatives, as well as by his appointed emissaries. One notes, as he reads the Acts of Apostles, how freely Paul and his companions moved about, and how easily they could book passage and pay their fare, as did Jonah so many centuries before. These men made frequent use of the coastwise shipping lanes and any one who reads chapters 20 and 21 of Acts, cannot help but be impressed with the frequency of sailings, the accuracy of schedules, and the thoroughness of the coverage of the sea lanes.

5. Historians all marvel at the peace which settled over the earth in the reign of Augustus. Even if this period had not been favored with the birth of the Son of God, it would still be a memorable epoch, one of the crowning ages of the history of mankind. In the month of January, 27 B.C., a regular and constitutional form of government was established. Octavianus was voted the title *Augustus* by the Senate, and while the old forms, functions and offices of the Republic were maintained in deference to popular sentiment, an absolute monarchy prevailed in all but name. By wise and judicious counsel, order was established in Rome, and the people in the provinces were made content by a just and understanding rule. Augustus has been frequently designated as the greatest ruler the world has ever known. It became a proverbial description of his regime, that "He found the city of brick, and left it of marble."

In Roman mythology, Janus, the two-headed god, from whom January took its name, was the guardian of gates and of portals. When the nation was at war, the gates of the temple of Janus were always left open; in times of peace they were closed. Although the gates had stood ajar for several hundred years, the advent of the present dispensation found them closed. The civil wars which had decimated the country and spilled so much blood had ended a generation before, and almost unbroken peace had obtained. Countries previously in constant strife had turned to the peaceful pursuits of agriculture and commerce; money formerly spent to prosecute war and purchase protection was being used in full scale building projects. New subdivisions arose on the outskirts of wealthy cities, road building projects were carried forward along the caravan routes. The age pulsated with the movement of peoples who fused into such a cosmopolitan population as is usually found in huge modern cities. As one eminent writer has expressed it, "The age-long growth of the life of humanity in that ancient world had attained its flower." The Prince of Peace was introduced to the world in an age of peace, which was previously unparalleled.

6. Jesus was born at a time when the whole earth was in a state of expectancy. He was not launched into the midst of men in a wholly unexpected time or fashion. It is true that the Jews labored under the gravest misapprehension as to the nature of his mission and kingdom, but that they were looking for a Messiah at that time, and that they believed he would in some sense reign over his people, cannot be questioned. It is altogether possible that the hope of Israel varied in its character according to the nature of each individual who clung to it. In some cases the advent of the Messiah was expected to be wholly political, amounting to the overthrow of the

Roman usurper, recovery of national independence, and a restoration of the Oriental splendor which glorified the reigns of David and Solomon. Amongst the meditative and spiritual teachers, however, a moral and spiritual era was expected, but one thing was certain, all looked for a golden age to be ushered in, and for the triumph of Judaism.

“The people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not” (Luke 3:15). This will account for the fact that neither John nor Jesus bothered to define or explain “the kingdom (reign) of heaven.” They merely announced it. The Jewish world was waiting for it. The aged Simeon, just and devout, was “waiting for the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25). Joseph of Arimathea, an honorable member of the Sanhedrin “waited for the kingdom of God” (Mark 15:43). The carping Pharisees demanded that Jesus tell them “when the kingdom of God would come” (Luke 17:20). Even after the resurrection, the apostles questioned, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom unto Israel?”

It is a common error to assume that only the Jewish world looked for a deliverer. But the prophet Haggai, after using language directly applied to the kingdom of the Messiah (Heb. 12:26) quotes God as saying, “*The desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory*” (Haggai 2:7). Deprived as they were of the advantages accruing from access to the oracles of God (Rom. 3:1, 2), it is not surprising that the Gentile concept was more obscure than that of the Jews, yet they yearned for deliverance from their state, and that yearning was centered in the hope of a person. The Greek mind could conceive of a person who dedicated his life to service and virtue exalted to the highest heaven to sit down among the immortal gods. They could not conceive of a God coming down from heaven, emptying himself of glory, and dying for men. It was easy for them to believe the testimony of their own prophets that man was the offspring of God (Acts 17:28). The idea of God dying for man was beyond their ken; the idea of a virtuous man dying to become exalted among the gods they understood. Is it not remarkable how much more readily the Gentile mind responded to the testimony of a resurrected and exalted Christ than did the Jewish heart? The great Roman poet Virgil, who died about twenty years before Jesus was born, was but one of a number of pagan poets who seemed to sense a coming event of impending importance. An example is his *Fourth Eclogue*, from which the following excerpts are taken.

“The last age, decreed by Fate, has come;
 And a new frame of all things does begin,
 A holy progeny from heaven descends.
 Auspicious be his birth! which puts an end
 To the iron age! and from which shall rise
 A golden age far glorious through the earth ...
 By thee what footsteps of our sins remain,
 Are blotted out, and the whole world set free
 From her perpetual bondage and her fear ...
 Yet some remains shall still be left
 Of ancient fraud, and wars shall still go on.”

It would seem that the entire world was a readied stage for presentation of the mightiest drama of the ages.

7. Much of what has been written thus far about Rome seems good, yet there is a dark and seamy side. Peace reigned it is true, but it had been purchased at a fearful price. The great empire sprawling over a prostrate world had crushed out the ambition and hope so essential to make life worth living. The recognition of the individual, his rights, privileges and dignity, stressed by Greek philosophy, were forgotten. The wealthy, deprived of the discipline of wholesome labor, sought surcease in luxury, gluttony and immorality. When tired of feasting upon such dainties as brains of peacocks and tongues of nightingales, they retired to sumptuously furnished rooms to drink a death potion and slip into the dreamless slumber of suicide. This became almost the normal mode of death for the nobility.

The freeborn poor, forced from their farms by the encroachments of syndicates and monopolies, soon having spent their little pittance in the cities, were forced to huddle in winter over small household fires, saving a toga for burial, rather than risk wearing it to protect from the cold. These became beggars and idlers, asking only for a daily dole of bread from the government, and public entertainment at the circus or amphitheater. They were political pawns, willing to give their support to the despot who promised them the most from the public treasury. They dwelt in filthy, vermin-infested slums, creeping up the dark steps at night after a day spent lounging in idleness, climaxed by an evening in which they had yelled themselves hoarse at the brutal, bloody scenes in the arena. Below them in the social scale were the millions of slaves, bereft of family, possession, religion and rights, living an abject existence like the scavenging dogs of the street.

And in such a time, the once popular religion had lost its hold and faith had died in human hearts. The temples of the gods were still standing, but gone were the childlike superstition and simplicity with which the worshipers once thronged through these edifices. The Olympic heaven was now empty, and only the wraiths of its former inhabitants conjured up in human minds until they became real, stalked through the bowers of fleecy clouds. Philosophy had thrust its cold steel rapier into the body of mythology, and the spirit had departed, to leave only a corpse. The poets still rhapsodized about the gods in their fantasies, but the very fact that the emperor was forced to brace the structure of polytheism with laws demanding its preservation shows how far it had sunken in the estimate of men in general. And while the populace regarded mythology as a composition of so many silly fables, hardly worthy of the scornful laugh of silly schoolboys, many became the dupes of wandering mystics, jugglers, interpreters, and every brand of religious crackpot and philosophical quack. The old faith had failed, the whole world was steeped in a spirit of apathy, languor and weariness. Man was tired, tired of his gods, his faith, and even of life. It was time for a new life to begin! The fullness of the time had arrived; it was now time for the fullness of God to arrive!

8. One of the curious manifestations of the time with which we are dealing, was the rise and multiplication of the numerous guilds of workmen, religious societies, and burial clubs. With the stamping out of individuality, there seemed to be kindled a craving for recognition of others. Workmen in the same craft joined together to form a guild or trade union. This constituted a fellowship or brotherhood. Each brotherhood selected a divinity which was looked upon as its head. The members met together regularly for common meals to which only those were admitted who had been initiated by proper conformity with some rite. Class distinctions were abolished and all, both free and slaves, were upon an equality. The poor members were

ministered to from a fund collected by voluntary contributions, and any member of the guild who died was given honorable burial. The idea of a community of brethren, bound to each other by solemn vows and mutual aims, was well developed in all of these societies.

9. It should never be forgotten that the dispersion of the Jews among all the nations of the earth, by reason of capture and exile, although it seemed to militate against the design of God when first viewed from a human angle, turned out to be a vital factor in the dissemination of Christianity throughout the world. During the exile in Babylon, while cut off from the temple with its service and sacrifice, the people met together for prayer and reading of the Torah. Such gatherings at first were probably informal and may have been held on the banks of rivers such as the Chebar. Soon the meetings became regular features of the Sabbath days and when Jerusalem was restored, they were augmented rather than discontinued. Thus from a spontaneous beginning, the synagogue became an outstanding part of the Jewish religious picture.

The temple with its sacerdotal caste of priests and Levites was the locale of sacrifice and ritual; the synagogue was a place of instruction, edification and prayer. There was no special ministry for the conduct of the synagogue meetings. Wherever at least ten men were willing to constitute a congregation, a synagogue could be started. A group of seniors, or elders, administered affairs and supervised the conduct of the members. Deacons, or almoners, distributed to the needs of the poor from a common fund. Discipline was regularly maintained and one who transgressed the law might be publicly censured, or even excommunicated, upon which action the individual became as "a heathen or a publican."

At the Sabbath service, any man in good standing was permitted to read the Torah or Hafterah (the law and the prophets). Any brother of the assembly was free to speak for the general edification of those present. Thus Jesus, who was regarded as the son of a mere artisan, read from the prophets, and presented an exposition of the passage in the synagogue at Nazareth. After the readings from the sacred scrolls at Antioch, in Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas were told, "Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on" (Acts 13:15).

The church of God owes a debt to the synagogue. It served to cushion the shock of passing from Judaism to Christianity. The synagogue may have been a providential factor in making possible the influence of the Christian church among the Jews. Certainly the worship service of the church, as well as her government, were patterned after that of the synagogue, and the two were so closely related that in many places all that was essential in establishing a church was to interpret the prophets to refer to the Nazarene, and convert members of the synagogue to that fact. The addition of the Lord's Supper would transform the worship into that of a synagogue of Christ. The term "synagogue" was employed to designate Christian churches for a century, and is so used in James 2:2. And the synagogues were found in every part of the world.

No survey of any period of history can be called complete. There are so many relations and interrelations of ideas as to create a complex dependency of one factor upon another, until the pursuit of all angles seems to be infinite in scope. We must recognize the imperfections in our presentation of the background for the announcement of the rule of heaven, but if we have demonstrated even partially that all things united to produce the auspicious circumstances

involved in “the fullness of the time” we shall be satisfied. And with such a background we are ready to investigate the great harbinger of the kingdom.

Chapter 8

The Voice in the Wilderness

Four centuries had passed without a revelation from God. The prophet Malachi had closed his declaration of “the burden of the word of the Lord” and the sacred canon, with the word “curse.” Yet even in this solemn threat was found a note of hope, for the full prediction was, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse” (4:6).

Because of this promise. Rabbinic tradition and Jewish legend had gone to wild extremes. It had long been taught that the miraculous events centering about Israel’s early history would be repeated with greater force in Messianic days, and in the manifestation of supernatural power, Elijah was assigned a major role. This was a favorite topic in the synagogue and a subject of frequent discussion among the lawyers and doctors. It would be irrelevant to here record the foolish and ridiculous speculations everywhere current; it will suffice for us to note that common Galilean fishermen knew that the scribes taught that Elijah must come before the Messiah could be introduced (Matt. 17:10).

The divine silence of four hundred years was finally broken. A devout, aged priest from the backwoods hill country of Judea, who belonged to the course of Abia, was chosen to officiate at the altar of incense one morning. He had never performed this service before, nor would he ever do so again, for only once in a lifetime was any priest allowed the honor of presiding at the golden altar. One wonders about the thoughts which must have flooded the mind of the venerable priest on that October morning which brought to him the signal glory to which he had never fallen heir before. Did his heart revert to his faithful wife, also of the tribe of Levi, and to the unanswered prayers they had so frequently offered at the time of the burning of incense? Was there a deep inward pang that he had no son who would maintain the hallowed traditions belonging to Israel?

His reveries were soon broken, for while he stood at the golden altar, and the great concourse of people outside were praying, Zacharias beheld an angel standing at the right side of the altar. Instantly a sense of awe and fright overwhelmed him. But the angel spoke quickly, quieting his fears, and making the simple announcement that his prayers had been heard, that Elisabeth would bear a son, and that his name would be called Jochanan (John). Let us consider some of the characteristics of the child as divulged by the heavenly messenger.

Gabriel’s Description

1. Not only would the birth of the child occasion gladness to the heart of the parents, but it would be a source of joy to many other pious souls, and the child himself would be great before the Lord.
2. John was to be a perpetual Nazirite, which would necessitate scrupulous care against ceremonial defilement. His ascetic wilderness life and refusal to engage in any social function

could be attributed to this. One who was under this vow could not cut his hair, nor eat or drink any grape product (Num. 6:1-21). While most men took the Nazirite vow for a brief period, John, like Samuel and Samson, would be amenable to it for life.

3. He was to be filled with the Holy Spirit from birth. It would appear that he was like Jeremiah, in the fact that from the womb he was singled out as a prophet of God (Jer. 1:5).

4. His work was to be that of a national reformer “turning many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God.” His appearance was at a time of spiritual and moral degradation. Crimes of lust were frequent. Disregard for the commandments was very pronounced. The language which was current on the streets, filled with sly references to vice, indicated disrespect for self and dignity. Men of wealth built synagogues for worship with money gained by deceit and oppression. The sectarian spirit was rife. The Jewish commonwealth must reform in preparation for the Reign of heaven.

5. John was to go before the King “in the spirit and power of Elijah.” This was a concept of prophecy which none of the rabbinical leaders had caught. They were looking for Elijah to return to their land in person, and by some miraculous demonstration to ready things for the introduction of the Messiah.

6. The forerunner was “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” This point we must never forget in our discussion of the harbinger of the Reign. It was to accomplish this task he was born, filled with the Spirit, and sent on his mission. If he made ready a prepared people, he finished the work that was given him to do; if he did not, regardless of his other accomplishments, his efforts were a failure. It will be the position of this writer that John successfully completed his work of preparation, and the material for the foundation of the temple of God was made ready in advance of the time when incorporated in that superstructure. How this work of preparation was accomplished is a matter for future discussion. Suffice it to say that the solemn pronouncement of Gabriel is sufficient to indicate the coming of a character unique in history. To this must be added that at the birth of John, his father, suddenly filled with the Holy Spirit, uttered a memorable prophecy, augmenting that of Gabriel, and recorded in Luke 1:67-79.

Personal Habits and Character

1. After the birth of John, we learn that “he grew and became strong in the spirit.” He did not grow up on city streets, nor amidst the luxury and vice of crowded metropolitan areas. “He was in the wilderness till the day of his manifestation to Israel” (Luke 1:80). During this time he had the instruction of parents who “were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:6). They would certainly lay up the words of the Lord in their heart, and teach them to the child, talking of them when sitting in the house, when walking by the way, when lying down, and when rising up (Deut. 11:19).

2. We cannot be certain at just what age John began to realize he was destined to begin a work of public proclamation. Indications are that he was about thirty years of age, and if so, he was motivated to begin the prophetic office at the same age as Ezekiel, who also was of the priestly tribe. This was the age at which the Levites “could enter the service” of the tabernacle (Num. 4:3, 23, 30, 35, etc.).

We do know that it was in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, during the joint high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, that “the word of the Lord came to John the Son of Zechariah in the wilderness” (Luke 3:1, 2). The public declaration was not made by John in the forums of populous cities, but rather he went into the sparsely settled region adjacent to the Jordan River. John did not go to the people, the people had to go out to John.

3. In dress, John was like the prophets of old. He was attired in “a garment of camel’s hair, and a leather girdle about his waist” (Matt. 3:4). The pious Jews, familiar with history, would immediately recall the description of Elijah, in whose spirit John came. When Ahaziah sent messengers who were intercepted by Elijah, the king said, “What kind of man was he who came to meet you and told you these things?” They answered him, “He wore a garment of haircloth, with a girdle of leather about his loins.” The king said, “It is Elijah the Tishbite” (2 Kings 1:7, 8). So distinctive was this garb as the badge of prophets, that false prophets donned a hairy garment to deceive (Zech. 13:4). If those who left the cities to see and hear John, expected to find one dressed in soft raiment, they were greatly disappointed. “Behold, those who are gorgeously appareled and live in luxury, are in king’s courts” (Luke 7:25).

4. The daily fare of John was as rude as his manner of life. His principal diet consisted of locusts and wild honey. The Israelites were permitted to eat four kinds of winged insects: locusts, bald locusts, crickets and grasshoppers (Lev. 11:22). These might be prepared by roasting in one of the outdoor ovens, or by frying in oil, as well as by other means. Honey was obtained from crevices in the rocks or from hollow trees, as well as occasionally from the sun-dried carcasses of animals (Cp. 1 Sam. 14:26; Judges 14:8).

5. John was regarded as possessing an anti-social attitude, and some of his critics inferred that his stern, unbending manner was the direct result of demon possession. He did not fraternize with the people, nor attend their feasts or wedding celebrations, which led Jesus to remark, “John came neither eating nor drinking, and you say ‘He hath a devil.’”

Divine Highway Builder

Ancient kings, when making a journey, had the services of a forerunner. Such a trusted servant was charged with the task of preparing the route over which the monarch was to travel. It was his responsibility to clear the track, removing stones and other obstructions, and to announce in advance the coming of the king, so the citizens would be prepared and not caught unawares by the sudden appearance of the regal retinue among them. To go before the king was a privilege highly esteemed among the oriental peoples, and although Elijah did not condone the sins of Ahab, he acted as his forerunner out of respect for his royal dignity (1 Kings 18:46).

Isaiah predicted the coming of one who, as a construction engineer, would go ahead of the Lord, making such alterations in the terrain as would be essential to the development of the “King’s Highway.” Here are his words. “A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low, the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain” (40:3, 4). This prediction John applied directly to himself.

His proclamation in the deserted area near the banks of the Jordan was so stirring, and the people were so aroused by it, that the Pharisees in Jerusalem sent a deputation of priests and Levites to Bethany, across the Jordan, to determine by what authority he was immersing Jews. John answered their questions by affirming he was not the Messiah. They asked if he was Elijah and again he replied in the negative. They asked if he was *that* prophet (i.e., the one of Deut. 18:15) and he denied it. They said to him then, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” He said, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said” (John 1:19-23).

The *wilderness* in the prophecy must certainly refer to the matted, overgrown thicket of human hearts, composing the Jewish world of the days of John. His work was to be upon the hearts of men, as evidenced by the words of Gabriel in his annunciation (Luke 1:17). The pride and arrogance which lifted some up in their own estimation had to be overthrown and dragged down; the valleys of shortcoming and disobedience had to be filled; the crooked, devious paths and patterns of life had to be straightened out; and the rough spots of character submitted to the grading machine of God’s truth.

Highway construction through a wilderness area is neither an easy nor a pleasant task. It often requires what may appear to be reckless, ruthless methods as bulldozers tear into huge trees and matted undergrowth, or shove boulders to one side. As construction engineer for the highway of God, John used effective but seemingly harsh methods. The roadway must be readied and the time for completion of his contract was very short. After quoting the words of Isaiah about the preparation of the road, Luke significantly remarks, “He said *therefore* to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits that befit repentance, and do not begin to say, We have Abraham as father’” (3:7, 8). The hills of ancestral pride were blasted and toppled into the valleys below.

Highway building is very practical. Once the blueprints are finished and the construction engineer takes over, every phase of it is definite and toward a positive goal. John unhesitatingly removed rocks, uprooted obstacles and cleared away debris. When the multitude asked what fruits befitted repentance, the answer was quick and sharp, “He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.” When the tax collectors asked what they must do, they were told, “Collect no more than is appointed you.” When the soldiers asked what they must do, they were told, “Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”

We should never forget the true relationship of John to the Messiah and His Reign. There is a word which you will find in your unabridged dictionary which is directly applicable to John. It is the word “pavior.” In older English usage this was a common term descriptive of one who specialized in smoothing out and paving roadways. John was a “pavior”; he was not the Savior. He announced the coming of the Reign, under which he would not personally live, for he met a violent death before the coronation ceremony of the King, for whose coming he prepared the way. It was in view of this that the Messiah declared that John was “something superior to a prophet Indeed, I say to you, among those that are born of women, there has not arisen a greater than John the Immerser. Yet the least in the Reign of heaven is greater than he” (Matt. 11:10, 11).

Mission, Message and Method

We propose a series of questions and answers relating to the work of John, son of Zacharias, by which it is hoped we may fully inform the reader of the importance of the labors of this harbinger.

1. *What was the general purpose of John?* “Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare the way before thee” (Matt. 11:10).
2. *How was this to be accomplished?* “You will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins” (Luke 1:76, 77).
3. *How ‘did he begin his work?’* “In those days came John the Immerser, proclaiming in the wilderness” (Matt. 3:1). “With many other exhortations, he proclaimed good news to the people” (Luke 3: 18).
4. *Did he command his hearers to believe in Jesus?* “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus” (Acts 19:4).
5. *Did he demand repentance?* “Repent, for the Reign of heaven is approaching” (Matt. 3:2).
6. *What confession was made?* “Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan ... confessing their sins” (Matt. 3:5, 6).
7. *In what did John immerse the penitents?* “I baptize you with water” (Matt. 3:11). “They were baptized by him in the river Jordan” (Matt. 3:6).
8. *What was the design of the immersion?* “John the Immerser appeared in the wilderness proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4).
9. *Did all of the people prepared for the Lord receive him?* “He came unto his own, and his own received him not” (John 1:11).
10. *What of those who did receive him?* “To all who received him, who believed in his name, to them he gave the privilege to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:11, 12).

The material for the temple of God, like that for the temple of Solomon, was prepared in advance, so it could be builded into the structure immediately. John proclaimed the good news that the Reign was approaching, and prepared men in anticipation for it. Many of those who later followed Jesus were first disciples of John, but left him to follow Jesus. Among these were the apostles. “The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples; and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, ‘Behold the lamb of God!’ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Jesus, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his brother Simon, and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’” (John 1:35-41).

These men were Jews, and as such they had been born of blood, of the will of the flesh and the will of man. But by their acceptance of the good news of the Reign they were born of God. However, they were children by anticipation, since the family association under the authority of the Messiah could not be set up until the coronation. Only those who received him, believing on his name, were granted the privilege of becoming children of God, and with his accession to the throne were adopted into the family upon the basis of their previous birth. Certainly they did not need to be immersed again. They were prepared stones!

In order to establish a nation in a moment, or to bring a kingdom into existence in one day, it is necessary that preliminary preparation be made to have material to incorporate in it. This was true of Zion, the kingdom of the Messiah. "Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she was delivered of a son. Who has heard such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in a moment? For as soon as Zion was in labor she brought forth her sons" (Isaiah 66:7, 8).

Normal functions require birth pangs to produce children from the uterus. But Zion produced offspring both before and after travail. Before the regular order was established she was delivered of a son; then, as soon as the regular order was established, she brought forth sons in normal procedure. No one had ever before heard or seen such things, according to the prophet, who hastens to explain that the reason for the production of offspring in advance of the regular order was to make it possible for a nation or kingdom to be established in one day, even in a moment.

Parable of the Sheepfold

A consideration of the foregoing will serve to explain the parable of Jesus in John 10:1-6. "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber; but he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens; the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and his sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

The expression relative to those who do not enter by the door but climb in by some other manner, has no application to the entrance of the sheep into the fold, but to those who pretended to be shepherds in order to steal, kill and destroy. The fold is the Jewish economy, and there were many false Messiahs who sought to establish themselves, only to lead the people into acts of violence and death. Jesus says, "All who came before me are thieves and robbers" (verse 8).

The door is that of prophecy, and it was so constructed that only one person could ever enter it, the true Messiah, the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper was John, who opened the way for entrance. When Jesus entered the Jewish fold, he called his own sheep (those who were a people made ready, prepared for the Lord) and led them out of the Jewish fold to create a new flock. "And I have other sheep (Gentiles) which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd" (verse 16).

The Baptism of John

When Jesus was teaching on the temple portico, he was accosted by the chief priests and seniors of the people, who demanded, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” He replied, “I also will ask you a question: and if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven or from men?” (Matt. 21:23-25). The reluctance of those querists to answer this question, is equalled only by the ignorance of it in these days. It will be profitable to our purpose to consider the baptism of John.

1. It was valid only to prepare men in advance of the commencement of the Reign.
2. It was performed under the theocracy and was authorized by God. “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John” (John 1:6). “He (God) ... sent me to baptize with water” (John 1:33).
3. It was not performed in the name of Jesus the Christ, for the simple reason that he did not yet have any authority. “Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name” (John 16:24).
4. When all authority in heaven and earth was bestowed upon the Christ, and God put all things in subjection under his feet, the baptism of John could no longer be performed validly. Those who had been baptized with that baptism, prior to the coronation of the King were not required to be baptized again, but from henceforth it was not valid for others, because it was not performed under the authority of the regnant monarch, the Messiah. Since his coronation, no act of a religious nature is valid, unless performed in his name, i.e., by his authority (Col. 3:17).

Unfortunately, in remote areas, some who had learned of John’s baptism, did not learn of the coronation of the Christ, so continued to proclaim the baptism of John. Of this number was Apollos, the Alexandrian Jew, who had to be brought up to date on events by Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:24-26).

When Paul arrived in Ephesus he found certain disciples who informed him they had been baptized unto John’s baptism. Pointing out to them that this baptism was valid only to those looking forward to Christ, those who heard this were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:1-5). This baptism was in the same form and the same element as that of John. The difference was that it was administered under the authority of the reigning King.

John did not fail in his heaven-sent mission. He accomplished what God sent him to do. He produced a reformation in the hearts of many, and he baptized those who confessed their sins, for the forgiveness of those sins. Thus he prepared a people made ready for the Lord, who needed only to acknowledge that Jesus was the Messiah, to be incorporated into the household of God. When the sword of the executioner in the prison fortress of Machaerus, severed the head of John from his body, the “pavior” of the Messiah could die secure in the conviction that he had finished his task on earth.

Chapter 9

Ministry of the Master

The work of preparing for the coming Reign did not cease with the murder of John. Jesus had personally begun proclaiming the same message immediately after his baptism (Matt. 4:17). He later commissioned twelve envoys who were sent out with the instruction, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And preach as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matt. 10:5-7). A short time later, he appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come. These were instructed to say “The kingdom of God has come near you” (Luke 10:9). It is evident that there was no lack of public attestation to the forthcoming Reign.

In preparation for the approaching Reign it was necessary that Jesus describe its nature, character and relationships, although his teaching was as little understood by his hearers as by many who read his words in these days. Varying phases of the subject were introduced as opportunity afforded a chance to illustrate its peculiarities, and a lack of attention to the background of the instruction has created much confusion. Illustrative of this are the conflicting views as to when the Reign began. As to this matter, it would seem that certain facts are incontestable.

1. The Reign did not begin during the lifetime of John, the forerunner, for after his decease, eighty-three persons, one of them being the Son of God himself, traveled up and down the land proclaiming that it was drawing nigh.
2. It had not yet come when Peter made his noble confession of the Messiahship and Sonship of Jesus, for it was after this that Jesus declared, “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste of death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom” (Matt. 16:28).
3. It had not come at the time of the last supper, the night before Jesus died, for he then said with reference to the fruit of the vine, “Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes” (Luke 22:18).
4. It had not come at the resurrection of Jesus, for it was subsequent to that event, when the selected envoys asked, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” which demonstrates that not only had it not arrived, but the very ambassadors did not yet comprehend its nature.
5. It could not begin until Jesus left the earth, for he had to leave his servants and go to a far country (heaven) to receive kingly power (Luke 19:12). It was when he came with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days, and was presented before him, that there was given him dominion, glory, and a kingdom (Daniel 7:13, 14).

But this leaves unresolved some difficulties created by the language of Jesus during the period when he was preparing men for the coming Reign. We must harmonize those passages with the facts above stated.

“The law and the prophets were until John; since then the kingdom of God is preached, and every one enters it violently” (Luke 16:16). “Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you’” (Matt. 21:31). It is asked how persons can enter a kingdom which is not yet existent.

It must be remembered that the kingdom of heaven is built upon certain principles. These principles were enunciated and explained prior to the introduction of the new regime and in preparation for its coming. And while the kingdom was established in one day, it was only after much indoctrination of the basic truths. Those who previously grasped the principles and comprehended the significant reformation these principles were to work in the life of each individual, were spoken of as pressing into the kingdom. Words may have both a literal and figurative meaning.

The chief priests and elders of the Jews had just questioned the authority of Jesus. In reply, Jesus said, “Truly, I say unto you, the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the harlots believed him; and even when you saw it, you did not afterward repent and believe him.” “Going into the kingdom” as used here simply meant to believe in the testimony of John that the Reign was approaching, and to make such amendment of life as was compatible with the information. Such persons as did this were entering the kingdom in prospect.

The scribes and lawyers, by their traditions and opinions, not only made void the law, but confused men and women, until the principles of truth were made obscure. Thus they “shut the kingdom of heaven against men” by their interpretations and endless wranglings, for they neither entered themselves (by acceptance of the truth concerning the Messiah) nor allowed others who would enter to go in (Matt. 23:13). The people generally had to depend for knowledge upon what their leaders taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat (Matt. 23:1). This instruction was based on the law and the prophets. Until John came, the law and the prophets were thus said to be the instructors, but when John came, he declared the approaching Reign of heaven, with such effect that men and women, fervently, excitedly, and anxiously pressed to enter the new relationship, as those who would crush violently against the gates of a city to gain admission. The announcement of a Reign in which all might participate aroused a feeling among the Jewish people such as had not been known through centuries of oppression. “When the people saw the sign which he (Jesus) had done, they said, ‘This is indeed the prophet which is to come into the world ...’ they were about to come and take him by force to make him king” (John 6: 14, 15).

When Jesus once healed a blind and dumb demoniac, the people, stricken with amazement, acclaimed him as the son of David. But the Pharisees, incensed by this public acknowledgement of him, scoffingly remarked that it was only by Beelzebul, chief prince of the demons, that he

worked such miracles. In refutation of their accusation, Jesus filed the following logical objections.

1. This would mean division in the realm of the demons, and would result in the downfall of Satan's kingdom, if Satan was engaged in the task of throwing out his own agents.
2. The superiority of Jesus over Satan would be demonstrated, for no strong man would allow another to enter in and throw out his goods, unless he first overcame, subdued and bound the owner.
3. The fact that others among their own number were exorcists, and they acknowledged their ability to rid men of demons militated against their charge that it was by the prince of demons.

On the other hand, Jesus argued that if he acted by the Spirit of God, the kingdom of God had come upon them. This simply meant that such manifestations of power were of the nature which the prophets had predicted would accompany the kingdom of heaven. Isaiah had painted a preview of the Messiah with the Spirit of the Lord God upon him, because the Lord had anointed him to proclaim liberty to the captives (Isa. 61:1). If, by the Spirit of God, the demoniac captives were freed, it would be a proof that the age of the Messianic Reign was upon them. That the Reign had not yet actually come is evident from the fact that the Pharisees later on asked when the kingdom was coming (Luke 17:20).

Some are confused by the reply given on this occasion, for Jesus answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is within you."

This did not imply that the kingdom had already come. The point of consideration in the reply of Jesus was the nature of the kingdom. The Pharisees thought they would be able to see its coming as men saw the occupation of territory by the Roman legions. But the kingdom of heaven would not be accompanied with clash of arms, fanfare of trumpets, marching troops, or political upheaval. Nor would men point to this city or that as the seat of the government or the center of authority. The realm of the authority would be the hearts of men; the overthrow accomplished would be that of the sinful dispositions of men.

The Reign of heaven was approaching men, but those who grasped the fundamental elements of that Reign, were spoken of as drawing near to it. A certain scribe, having listened to Jesus as he refuted and routed a number of taunting critics, perceiving the justness of his reply, came to him, and proposed the question as to which commandment was chief of all. Jesus answered, "The chief of all the commandments is, 'Hearken, Israel, the Lord is our God. The Lord is one,' and 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. The second resembles it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no greater commandment than these." The scribe admitted the answer was an excellent one, and declared that the commandments recited by Jesus represented more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. "Jesus, observing how pertinently he had answered said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God'" (Mark 12:28-34).

Terms of Entrance

It was essential for Jesus, during his earthly ministry, to define the terms of entrance into the kingdom and to describe the character of those who would be deemed worthy of citizenship therein. The necessity for this will be easily recognized when one remembers the mistaken ideas on the subject in the minds of his hearers. There was constantly a spirit of political ambition to combat and thwart. The disciples, laboring under the prevailing Jewish misconception as to the nature of the kingdom, and motivated by selfish impulse, disputed among themselves as to who among them would occupy the chief administrative offices in the coming regime.

Upon one such occasion Jesus took the opportunity afforded to teach a lesson relative to the nature of the kingdom. This he did by the use of an object lesson which demonstrated his ability as an instructor. Jesus believed in the use of visual aids to enforce spiritual truths. He suddenly called a little child unto him and placed the lad in the midst of the disciples. It is interesting to note that ancient tradition identifies the child as Ignatius, who became one of the most noted fathers of the early church. Regardless of identity, the child was docilely compliant with the request of Jesus and came quickly and meekly.

Jesus said, "Except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). One interesting phase of the dispute lies in the fact that this occurred after Jesus had promised the keys of the kingdom unto Peter, and the argument over primacy demonstrates conclusively that Peter did not consider it had been resolved in his favor. Now the disciples are informed that even entrance into the kingdom will demand a complete turning, a reversal of attitude. Worldly ambition is not a key to power, but a bar to the gate. The renunciation of the disposition to seek prestige and pre-eminence is essential to admission.

A little child, wholly dependent upon others, truthful, obedient, and without political ambition, represents the ideal for which citizens of the kingdom must strive. What a rebuke to pride, pomp and power. The recapture of that innocence, freedom from passion and strife, and sense of dependency, which characterized us in the first bloom of childhood should constitute our chief aim in life. We go forward by going backward! We gain by putting off; we win by divesting ourselves of that which we have accumulated. It is regrettable that many accumulate years and become *childish*, when the teaching of Jesus is that we should turn back and become child-like. "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

From the discourse familiarly called "The Sermon on the Mount" we learn several facts bearing upon the nature of the kingdom and the character of its citizenry. In a memorable passage, in which Jesus distinguishes between true Judaism and the degenerate form of it taught by the scribes and Pharisees, he shows that his task is the fulfillment of the first and the abrogation of the last. One can almost sense the questions passing back and forth among those who composed the huge gathering at the mount. How does this Nazarene propose to accomplish his task? Will he publicly denounce the prophets and declare them of no value? Will he destroy Moses and himself assume the place of the Torah? Will he inaugurate a kingdom with himself upon the throne, dispensing the wisdom of God directly to all who enquire?

Jesus was not unaware of the thoughts which perplexed his auditors. “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Matt. 5:17). Here is an intimation that the law and the prophets were to be consummated by a person superior to both. Contrary to the reasoning of the Jews, the Torah was not the end in itself, but the means to an end. It was a child-conductor to lead to Christ and could never fulfill its highest mission until it delivered those in its charge unto him.

Jesus continues: “Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law until all be fulfilled.” Instead of showing a spirit of disrespect for the Torah and the prophets, he emphasizes that the minutest portions of it are of great worth in the divine arrangement. This was a contrast with the scribes who divided the precepts into various classes, some of which were considered binding, but others of which might be disregarded. The jot was the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, the *yod*. The tittle was a small point by which similar letters were distinguished from each other. In this case they are used figuratively to indicate that the slightest principle of divine law would not fail of accomplishment in the eternal purpose.

“Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” The context shows that Jesus is talking about the commandments in the law and the prophets. It is not to be understood that these will constitute the code in the kingdom of heaven. But they were given by the authority of God, and to willfully violate one commandment constitutes a definite insult to the majesty of heaven, and to actually teach men to do this is a flagrant sin. Greatness in the kingdom is predicated upon a proper attitude toward God and his word.

“For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven.” The scribes were devoted to the work of reading and studying the law and were the recognized expounders of it. The Pharisees were punctilious in observance of the letter of the law. Both groups often overlooked the spirit of the law in their interminable arguments about the details of it. This is best illustrated by the indictment, “Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you pay tithes on mint, dill, and cumin, while you have neglected the weightier requirements of the Law – just judgment, mercy and faithful dealing You blind guides, straining out the gnat while you gulp down the camel!” (Matt. 23:23, 24. Weymouth).

When Jesus spoke of entrance into the kingdom demanding a righteousness exceeding that of the scribes and Pharisees, he was not talking of the hypocrites among them. The thought is that “Unless your concept of righteousness is of a higher nature than that attained by scribes and Pharisees, admission to the kingdom of heaven cannot be secured.” What a lesson for those who would degenerate kingdom life into an endless series of squabbles over incidentals while wholly ignoring the spirit or essence of truth.

In this same address, Jesus, speaking about the time of final separation declared, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). Assuredly this has reference to the kingdom in its final phase, but is there not here also a basis or condition of admission into the kingdom over

which the Messiah rules? Can one come into such a sacred relationship except upon the obedience to the Father's will?

Our review of the teaching of the Christ would not be complete if we ignored his statements occasioned by the query of a certain wealthy young ruler, who came running to kneel before Jesus. This young man desired to know what good thing he might do in order to secure eternal life. He was informed that if he would enter into life, he must keep the commandments. This no doubt was disappointing, for it was probable that he expected a new formula or panacea for the ills of the world, and as a key to the mysteries of life. To be pointed to the commandments which he had memorized and observed from his youth was altogether too commonplace. He no doubt had a sense of emptiness and futility, a hunger which was not satisfied. In order to fill his heart with assurance he seeks for that secret which will bring him hope. "What lack I yet?"

Mark records that Jesus looked at him and loved him. There could now be no compromise, a soul was in the balance, and the test must be faced. Jesus said, "One thing is lacking in you: go, sell all you possess and give the proceeds to the poor, and you shall have riches in heaven; and come and be a follower of mine." This may seem a harsh requirement and a hard demand. Yet, in a sense, it is made of all of us. We do not hesitate to make a general application of the words "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth ... but rather lay up treasures in heaven ... for where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also." The only difference in the two statements is that one proposes a test for him who is in the process of laying up treasure, while this has to do with one who already has it accumulated. The faith required to divest one's self of amassed wealth to have treasure in heaven, is equal to that required to keep from amassing wealth for the same reason. Neither will succeed if there is a tendency to trust in wealth as an evidence of security.

It required this to bring the young man face to face with himself. It was revealed that money in the bank meant more than treasure in heaven, that before he would sell what he already possessed, he would forfeit all hope of eternal life. This served to demonstrate how vain was his boast that he had kept the law inviolate from his youth. He would likely have violated every command in the Decalogue to have preserved his fortune, thus he had not really kept the law at all, because his heart was not right. He had kept his eye on the commandments and his heart on his bank statement. The emptiness which drove him to Jesus was lack of real spiritual motive. The end of his visit is a sad record. "At these words his brow darkened, and he went away sad; for he was possessed of great wealth."

When the young ruler departed, Jesus said to the disciples, "I solemnly tell you that it is with difficulty that a rich man will enter the Kingdom of the Heavens. I repeat it to you: it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God." (Matt. 19:23, 24. Weymouth). The apostles were dumbfounded at this and asked, "Who then can be saved?" To this Jesus replied, "With men this is impossible, but with God everything is possible." This can only be understood in the light of conditions in that day.

The disciples were generally poor, humble men, who had been accustomed to hardships and toil. They beheld the wealthy and opulent class, living in luxury, and basking in the prestige which was theirs. It appeared that they could have anything they desired. If those who had all the

privileges and conveniences of life could not attain the goal, it appeared there would be no hope for the poverty-stricken masses. But the words of Jesus demonstrated that God could accomplish what man could not dream of doing. The kingdom of heaven does not depend upon earthly wealth or power for survival. Citizenship therein is secured by turning to child-like humility, by adoption of a high standard of righteousness, and by obedience to the Father's will.

The teaching of Jesus relative to the kingdom is like a diamond of many facets, sparkling and scintillating with different flashes as the light reflects upon it. One cannot begin to grasp its fullness by consideration of one or two aspects. This is evident when we recall that sometimes the kingdom is referred to as something which can be wrested from its citizens and given to others, sometimes it is portrayed as a state or condition; again it is depicted as an inheritance. The diversity is well illustrated by the variety of parables given. "He told them many things in parables." (Matt. 13:3).

Purpose of Parables

It is a common belief that Jesus spoke in parables so that his listeners could grasp the great truths he expressed. It is often said that his auditors were generally ignorant and unlearned, so that he was forced to employ illustrations in order for them to learn about heavenly things. We believe that a careful study will show the exact opposite to be the case. During the personal ministry of Jesus, it was not yet time for men to understand the great truths of the kingdom. By couching his lessons in such figurative language, the secrets of the kingdom were maintained, and yet a basis for unravelling those secrets at a later period was provided. It was for this reason that the parables spoken to the multitude were privately explained to the apostles.

After relating the parable of the sower, "The disciples proceeded to ask him what the parable meant. 'To you,' He replied, 'it is granted to know the secrets of the Kingdom of God; but all others are taught by parables, in order that they may see and yet not see, and may hear and yet not understand'" (Luke 8:9, 10. Weymouth). Matthew records the event thus, "And His disciples came and asked Him, 'Why do you speak to them in figurative language?' He replied, 'Because while to you it is granted to know the secrets of the Kingdom of the Heavens, to them it is not I speak to them in figurative language for this reason, that while looking they do not see, and while hearing, they neither hear nor understand To you then I will explain the parable of the Sower'" (13:10-18). The multitude who heard Jesus did not understand the kingdom by considering the parables; instead, we understand the parables by considering the kingdom.

There are exceptions to all rules, and while the above was generally true, there were a few notable cases which did not conform to the pattern. One of these concerned the wicked vine-dressers. The parable depicted a householder who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, hewed out a vine-vat in it, and built a strong lodge in its midst. He then left it in the hands of vine-dressers and traveled abroad. One cannot help but see the similarity between this parable and the one recounted in Isaiah 5. The vineyard represented God's people planted as choice vines in the promised land, the fence was the law which restrained them and kept out alien influences. The winepress indicated God's expectation of fruitfulness, while the watchman's tower or keeper's lodge shows the protective care manifested toward God's chosen ones.

The vine-dressers were the leaders of the people, the priests, scribes and Pharisees. As the teachers and instructors, they were to fertilize the hearts of men by proper doctrine, prune out the dead wood of indifference and neglect, and exercise a continuous watchful regard. The vineyard was leased to them and they were expected to produce fruit as payment for the stewardship intrusted to them.

Just as it is in the realm of horticulture, so it is in the history of nations. There is a time when fruit is to be expected and the cultivation and effort bestowed should pay dividends. Accordingly, “when vintage time approached, he sent his servants to the vine-dressers to receive his grapes; but the vine-dressers seized the servants, and one they cruelly beat, one they killed, one they pelted with stones.” This indicates that God expected the grapes of justice and righteousness from Israel (Isa. 5:7) long before the advent of the Messiah. The servants dispatched to collect his dues were the prophets, but the cruel and vindictive leaders of the people entreated these heavenly envoys in a shameful fashion, even putting some of them to death.

The persistence of God in attempting corrective measures, his longsuffering extended in hope of repentance, his forbearance in the face of insult, all of these are illustrated in the statement regarding the householder, “Again he sent another party of servants more numerous than the first,” but the futility of the effort is seen in the result, “And them they treated in the same manner.” The word of God through Jeremiah is appropriate at this point. “I have sent to you all my servants the prophets, sending them persistently, saying, ‘Turn now every one of you from his evil way, and amend your doings, and do not go after other gods to serve them, and then you shall dwell in the land which I gave to you and your fathers.’ But you did not incline your ear or listen to me.” (35:15)

“Later still he sent to them his son, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But the vine-dressers when they saw the son, said one to another, ‘Here comes the heir: come let us kill him and get his inheritance.’ So they seized him, dragged him out of the vineyard and killed him.” This constituted the crowning act of disrespect for the right and majesty of heaven, as evidenced by Jesus in his indictment of that generation. “You witness against your selves, that you are the sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then the measure of your fathers” (Matt. 23:31, 32). What was lacking in the completion of the persecution of servants was made up in the murder of the Son.

The first portion of this parable was history, the part we are now considering was prophecy. It is pregnant with meaning. Note that the vine-dressers, representing the leaders of Judaism, admit among themselves that the son is the heir and entitled to the patrimony. They do not plot his death because of mistaken identity, but because they recognize him. The plot to kill the son is an exact picture of what transpired. “From that day forward they planned and schemed in order to put him to death” (John 11:53). The very expressions are significant of the manner of his betrayal – *seized, dragged, killed*.

Of outstanding importance is the reason assigned by the vine-dressers for killing the son. “Let us kill him and get his inheritance.” The hierarchy of Israel determined to keep the divine bounty for physical Israel. They believed that by getting the son out of the way, they could rule over

God's people, and keep earthly control over the theocracy. By this means they could keep the favor of Rome and continue as a political power. "The high priests and Pharisees therefore held a meeting of the Sanhedrin. 'What steps are we taking,' they asked one another; 'for that man is performing a great number of miracles. If we leave him alone in this way, everybody will believe in him, and the Romans will come and blot out both our city and our nation'" (John 11:47, 48). Little did they realize that their rejection of the Son would produce the very catastrophe they sought to avert.

In the account of Matthew, the priests and Pharisees are led to pronounce their own sentence and express their own fate. The question is asked, "When the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to the vine-dressers?" The answer was, "He will put the wretches to a wretched death, and will entrust the vineyard to other vine-dressers who will render the produce to him at the vintage season." This pronouncement of the just deserts of the Jewish commonwealth by its own leaders will exonerate God from any charge of injustice to the nation. The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. by the forces of Titus was merely the execution of this self-imposed sentence. Our Lord concludes, "That, I tell you, is the reason why the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and given to a nation which will produce the fruits thereof." Spiritual Israel will accomplish that in which physical Israel failed.

The record says, "After listening to his parables, the high priest and the Pharisees perceived that he was speaking about them; but though they were eager to lay hands upon him, they were afraid of the people, for by them he was regarded as a prophet" (Matt. 21:45, 46). The fact that the leaders of Jewish thought understood that Jesus was speaking about them makes their subsequent act in killing the Son all the more heinous. The parable itself should have been a warning, but was not regarded as such. Instead, it seemed only to have increased resentment as truth often does in the hearts of those who thus prove themselves unworthy.

Our present purpose is not to present a book on the parables, even though many of these illustrate vital features about the kingdom. Space will not permit an analysis of them all. The extensive growth of the kingdom is illustrated by the mustard-seed; the intensive growth by the leaven in dough; the accidental discovery of truth by some is portrayed by the treasure hidden in a field; the discovery as a result of long and eager search is depicted in the finding of the pearl of great price. The universality of it is found in the parable of the net cast into the waters of the sea; the final purging and separation, in the story of the tares.

Thus did the heir to the throne lay the foundation of his rule by mixing and mingling with his future subjects. Like a prince who forsakes the palace to dwell in the slums, that he may understand the problems of those who compose his realm, so did Jesus live with the poor of this world that he might convince them of a sympathetic heart and an attentive ear in their times of suffering and distress. This was genuine preparation for the kingdom.

Chapter 10

From the Cross to the Crown

The earthly sojourn of our Lord was bounded by a recognition of his kingly estate. At his advent into the world, the Magi from the Eastern nations sought him out to present gold, frankincense and myrrh, traditional offerings bestowed upon monarchs. Their question upon arrival in Jerusalem, "Where is he that is born king of the Jews?" threw Herod and the entire city into a state of consternation. The cross upon which he died bore the inscription, "This is Jesus the king of the Jews." Thus he entered the world and left it with testimony from others of his regal power. But the foreign astrologers and the Roman procurator were not the only ones who attested to the fact.

Early in his personal ministry, Jesus called Philip to follow him. Philip, in turn, located Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" Nathanael asked, "How do you know me?" This seems to imply more than mere personal recognition. Nathanael sensed that Jesus could read and discern his heart, which was pure and sincere. Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." A. B. Bruce, in his *Training of the Twelve*, may be correct in the statement, "He was a man much addicted to the habits of devotion: he had been engaged in spiritual exercises under cover of a fig tree before he met with Jesus." In any event, Nathanael, being surprised at such prescience, burst out with, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus called Nathanael a true Israelite; Nathanael recognized him as the true King.

At the beginning of the week of his crucifixion, Jesus was given special honor by a large crowd. Those who had been present at the raising of Lazarus had given ample testimony of this notable feat, so that, when it was noised abroad that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, a great crowd went out to meet him. In preparation for this entrance Jesus had previously dispatched two of his disciples to an adjacent village, to secure an ass which they found tied, with her colt standing by. The ass and foal were brought and the disciples placed their garments upon the animals as a saddle. Riding upon these lowly domestic beasts, Jesus was met by a huge throng, and when they saw him, a great cry was raised, "Hosanna! Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"

The excitement of the occasion swelled and grew. Some cast their garments down, others bestrewed the road with palm branches, making a royal pathway of triumph. As Jesus rode along with the multitude pressing about him, and their cheers and salutes rending the air, the carping Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you can do nothing; look, the world has gone after him" (John 12:19). It is sad to recall that he who entered the city acclaimed as a king would be taken outside of it to be crucified in less than a week.

But the death of Jesus was essential to his kingship. This was an anomaly not appreciated by the Jewish leaders of his day. Yet a careful study of God's revelation must convince the eager student that in no other way could he become heir to the throne.

1. It is evident that the kingdom of God was invested in the Jewish economy prior to the death of Jesus. So long as the first covenant was effective it acted as a middle wall of partition, making impossible the achievement of God's ultimate purpose which was "a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:10). The covenant was not to be destroyed but fulfilled, which required that its sacrifices reach their goal in the one great sacrifice to which they pointed. "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). "Having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross" (Col. 2:14). The kingdom of the Messiah must have as a foundation promises superior to those under the first covenant. "Christ has obtained a ministry which is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since, it is enacted on better promises" (Heb. 8:6). For this reason "He abolishes the first in order to establish the second" (Heb. 10:9).

2. The kingdom of the Messiah was to be essentially one of peace. "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end" (Isa. 9:7). "And I will make with you an everlasting covenant ... for you shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace" (Isa. 55:12). "I will make your overseers peace and your taskmasters righteousness" (Isa. 60:17). Since there can be no real peace among men until they are at peace with God, the prime objective was not to pacify those who would be the subjects of the kingdom, but to restore a proper relationship of all to God. Peace on earth can only come from peace in heaven. But peace can never rule in a heart that is filled with a guilt complex. Therefore, justification is required before a guilty sinner can be, at peace.

Every sin must carry with it a penalty, and there must either be expiation or the guilty must pay the penalty. "Since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace, as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith" (Rom. 3:24, 25). "Jesus our Lord was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25) "Therefore since we are justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

The cross of Christ is the rallying point for every soul blighted by sin. As men draw near to it they draw closer to each other. Peace is destroyed by selfishness and pride. The cross is a monument to the greatest act of unselfish devotion the world has ever seen. Here the pure died for the impure, the just for the unjust, the sinless for the sinner, the godly for the ungodly. No man can exalt himself at the cross where Jesus humbled himself and became obedient unto death. Upon that tree the Shepherd died for the sheep, the King for his subjects, the Captain for his soldiers, and the Master for his slaves. No wonder that those who were once segregated by hatred extend hands of peace to each other.

"Now in Christ you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility ... and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to you who were near; for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph. 2:13-18). Hostility is ended, reconciliation is accomplished, and nearness achieved, through the cross. In Christ

there was no divided purpose; in him our own hearts merge and flow together. Mutual access to the Father means mutual success in winning peace.

3. The citizens of the kingdom were to be those who were ransomed or redeemed. The price of redemption was the blood of him whose loyal subjects they were to be. Thus their obedience would be prompted by love. “The Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mt. 20:28). “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:5, 6). “Who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:14). “You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pet. 1:18, 19).

A consideration of these factors cements together those who acknowledge the sovereignty of the Messiah. All were enslaved, all were captives of sin, all stood equally in need of redemption. In this particular no one in the kingdom has any ground for pride or arrogance. The universal recognition of helplessness and dependency, the sense, of his overwhelming and abiding love, these work together for the glory of God and our own unity as kindred spirits. Only an event of supreme importance could achieve this result. Such an event was the death of the Messiah. “For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all, therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor. 5:14, 15).

4. The great enemy of souls is “the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan” (Rev. 20:2). As the opposer of all that is good, he seeks to thwart the purpose of God with reference to the kingdom. The great struggle is described as war upon the battlements of heaven. “Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world – he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down’” (Rev. 12:7-10).

It was fitting that as a prelude to his reign, the Son of God, should grapple with the arch-fiend of the ages, and do so upon his own territory, that of death. If, after he was “crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men,” motivated by Satan, he could be kept imprisoned by the bonds of death, the purpose of God would be forever frustrated. On the other hand, if Jesus willingly submitted to death and could not be held by its bonds, the power of Satan would be broken. “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifetime bondage” (Heb. 2:14, 15).

No other man could make this test, for all were doomed to death by virtue of their own sin. In every one of them the ruler of this world had fastened the venomous sting of sin whose end is

death. Only Jesus could say, “The ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me” (John 14:30). He owed nothing to death, and thus he could voluntarily surrender his life as the supreme test of power over Satan. “I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father” (John 10:18). Death could not retain him. “But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it” (Acts 2:24).

In triumph, Jesus could say, “I am the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades” (Rev. 1:18). Thus it is affirmed that he “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10). The grapple with Satan in the realm of death, and the successful overthrow of his dominion, brings renewed hope to every soul of man, and points to final victory. Jesus was but the first-fruits of a great harvest. “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ (1 Cor. 15:20-23).

The removal of the first covenant, the establishment of peace, the ransom of souls to provide a basis of love, the conquest of Satan and the overthrow of his great enslaving force, all of these required the death of the Messiah. This is far from being a complete list of reasons assigned for this momentous event, and to enumerate the blessings accruing therefrom would be to run the entire gamut of God’s marvelous provision. But those we have mentioned are directly related to his right to rule as king and to have all authority bestowed upon him.

Jesus and Pontius Pilate

Daniel predicted the rise of four great universal empires. In the last of these, God was to set up a kingdom which would never be destroyed, but which was to break in pieces and destroy all of these kingdoms. When Jesus was arrested, after the betrayal by Judas Iscariot, he was taken before Pontius Pilate. Thus the king of the heavenly commonwealth was brought face to face with the representative of the fourth world power. Never did two more diverse personalities confront each other.

Pilate was the sixth Roman Procurator of Judea. He succeeded Valerius Gratus, and held the office, for ten years. He was a corrupt politician, devoid of high principle, and motivated by a love for power and a lust for distinction. Avaricious and greedy, he fell readily into temptation, and pursued such policies as promoted his personal ambition. In his dealings with the Jews he was tyrannical and despotic, cruel and murderous. He was a demonstration of foreign power at its worst level.

It was to this man Jesus was taken early on that day which was to be the day of his death. He had already been subjected to questioning by Annas, who then sent him bound to Joseph Caiaphas, his son-in-law and the high priest recognized by the Romans. When the Jews reached the Praetorium where the governor lived, they would not enter, fearing ceremonial defilement which would render them unclean and unable to eat the passover. Accordingly, Pilate went out to the mob, and demanded to know what legal accusation they filed against their bound prisoner. The Jews replied with some insolence that if the man had not been an evil-doer, they would not have handed him over.

Pilate, not wishing to become involved in another of the prolonged disputes which generally terminated in a wrangle, told them to take him and judge him by their own law. The Jewish leaders, showing they were already determined on his fate, reminded Pilate that under Roman jurisdiction, the right to assess the death penalty had been taken from them, and they could not lawfully carry out a sentence of capital punishment.

Pilate retired into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus to him. His first question was directly to the point, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus asked him if the question was based upon his own observation, or if it were merely a report which he had heard from others. The procurator thus had to face the issue, as to whether he had seen any seditious moves upon the part of Jesus, which would endanger the Roman authority, or tend to pose a threat against the occupational forces. If not, he ought to be careful about being influenced by malicious reports of those who were ever on the alert to create difficulty for the Roman garrisons.

This moved Pilate to ask, "Am I a Jew?" This was said to offset the idea that he might be motivated by any Jewish prejudices. Being a Roman he would not be inclined to partiality toward one group or another among the Jews, and thus he implied he was capable of deciding the matter relative to the accusation lodged against Jesus upon the merits of the case. Subsequent events demonstrate that this was not true, for political ambition and personal security caused him to allow an innocent man to be killed.

Nevertheless, Pilate pointed out to Jesus, as the two conferred in private, that his own nation with its highest religious leaders had delivered him to the Roman authority. This, upon the very face of it, implied that some serious crime was involved. The accusation presented to Pilate was, "We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ a king" (Lk. 23:2). The essence of the matter was that Jesus was attempting to overthrow the yoke of Caesar and set himself up as a king in his stead. It is remarkable to contemplate that this is exactly what the Jews wanted in a Messiah, and now that Jesus refused to meet their designs, they pose as friends of Caesar and seek to make it appear that he is an enemy of the king.

The defense of Jesus, consisted not of a denial that he was a king, but rather of an explanation of the nature of his reign. "My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world." This constituted an admission that Jesus was a king, but that his rule would not necessarily infringe upon, overthrow, or depose that of those who ruled in a different sphere. There are two kinds of kingdoms – those of this world, and that one which is not of this world. Each has its own domain and these are not by their nature in conflict. Thus, one may render unto Caesar the things that are his, while at the same time rendering unto God the things that belong unto him.

Jesus made the distinction clear, by affording Pilate a concrete example of difference. The kingdoms of this world must defend themselves with armed strength. They maintain standing armies for defense against aggression and violation of their sovereign rights. "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace" (Lk. 11:21). If the kingship of Jesus had been of this world, he would have drilled and trained his disciples as a fighting force,

and they would have engaged in combat with the Jews, to protect his person and kingly domain. Such an army might also have posed a threat to Caesar and his legions in Palestine, but as it was, no such thing had occurred.

Although Pilate may not have understood all that was involved in the reply of Jesus, the expression “My kingship” impressed the praetor, and he said, “So you are a king?” To this, Jesus replied, “You have spoken truthfully, I am a king.” The Roman governor must have considered Jesus as a fanatic, harmless and deluded, but posing no particular problem of insurrection or sedition. Leaving him in the Praetorium, he went outside and said to the waiting mob, “I find no crime in him.” He then referred to the annual custom of releasing a noted prisoner at the Passover, and asked, “Will you have me release for you the King of the Jews?” They screamed, “Not this man, but Barabbas!”

Pilate wanted to curry favor with the Jews. He returned to the inside of the building and gave orders for Jesus to be scourged, as if in preparation for the sentence of death. The soldiers who administered the beating added insult to injury. They put a crown of interwoven thorns on his head, arrayed him in a purple robe, placed a reed scepter in his hand, and slapped him as they greeted him in derision, “Hail, King of the Jews!” Again Pilate went outside and announced to the Jews, “I am bringing him out to you, that you may know I find no crime in him.” The purpose evidently was to excite sympathy for one whose calm demeanor and patient endurance witnessed to his innocence and freedom from guilt. Thus Pilate pointed to him and said, “Here is the man!”

When the chief priests and officers saw him, they again took up the shout, “Crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no crime in him.” The Jews answered, “We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God.” This was a new charge which Pilate had not previously heard. It inspired fear in his superstitious heart, and once more he took Jesus inside the Praetorium and enquired, “Where are you from?” Jesus did not reply. The governor said, “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, or power to crucify you?” Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me unless it had been given from above; therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin.”

Once more Pilate sought to release him but the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend; every one who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar.” This was a shaft in a vulnerable spot. It was a blow which could not be ignored. The political opportunist was torn between conflicting emotions. Again he brought Jesus out to the mosaic floor where the judgment seat rested. He said to the Jews, “Here is your King!” They cried out, “Away with him, crucify him! Pilate said, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests spoke up quickly, “We have no king but Caesar!” Pilate, despairing of further reasoning, washed his hands in symbolic gesture and turned Jesus over to them to be crucified.

Jesus was taken, bearing his own cross, to the place called Golgotha, where he was crucified between two lawbreakers. It was the custom to place a written notice of the charge which resulted in execution over the head of each victim. Pilate wrote the title “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” and attached it to the cross. It was written in three languages, Hebrew, Latin

and Greek, and it was read by many of the Jews, because the place was near the city. The chief priests came and applied to Pilate for an alteration of the statement to read, "This man said, 'I am King of the Jews.'" But Pilate curtly dismissed them with the words, "What I have written, I have written."

Far away, in the imperial city on the Tiber, the reigning Caesar sat, unaware that in a remote and insignificant area of his far-flung empire, a political appointee had just consented to a deed, the results of which would affect every soul born among men. Little did he realize that before the final act of this drama, the mighty Roman empire would topple and fall, and the stone cut out of the mountain without human agency would smite the great image of world conquest and forever shatter the hope of its reconstruction. The cross which was an emblem of shame and disgrace was to become a badge of honor, adopted by institutions of mercy and compassion. The banners of Rome would some day give way before the triumphant cross.

We should not overlook the fact that it was not the death of Jesus, but his resurrection which proved his divine Sonship, and thus his right to universal recognition as the Messiah. The death of Jesus by itself could not have constituted "good news." But the fact that he "was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25), establishes forever his sovereign prerogatives. He was "designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). Before he died, Jesus predicted his death and resurrection. He predicated the latter upon the fact that he was the Son of God. Since God would not raise an impostor, the resurrection of Jesus is proof that he is the Son, and thus the Messiah.

It was for this reason that "he showed himself alive with many sure proofs" (Acts 1:3). The abundance of the proofs is apparent to every reader, their undeniable nature, being also clearly manifested. He appeared unto his witnesses in closed rooms and in the open road, upon a mountain and by the seaside, at early morning, in daytime, at dusk, and at night. He was seen of both men and women, by individuals, small groups, and a multitude numbering more than five hundred. He walked, talked and ate with them. He permitted and invited close examination of his person, even urging it.

It was the resurrection which provided the theme for the early proclamation. The speech of Peter on Pentecost, reached its climax with such statements as "But God has raised him to life, having terminated the throes of death, for in fact it was not possible for him to be held fast by death," and again, "This Jesus, God has raised to life – a fact to which all of us testify." That this was the central truth emphasized, is evidenced by the anger of the priests, the commander of the temple guard, and the Sadducees, who were "highly incensed at their teaching the people and proclaiming in the case of Jesus the resurrection from among the dead" (Acts 4:1, 2).

There was an interval of forty days between the resurrection of Jesus and his ascension into heaven. During this time he gave instructions to the apostles whom he had chosen (Acts 1:2). We are limited as to our knowledge of those instructions, but we know they were related to the kingdom, for it was of this he spoke when he appeared to them at intervals during this interim period. The apostles were the ambassadors of the kingdom, and as such, were to be dispatched upon their universal mission as soon as the new monarch was coronated.

It is conceivable that these former fishermen and tax collectors would require a great deal of encouragement and assistance from him whose cause they were to represent. We do know that he confirmed what he had previously told them, and pointed out the fulfillment of all that was written in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms, concerning himself. Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said, “Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise again from among the dead; and that proclamation would be made, in his name, of repentance and forgiveness of sins to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And remember that I am about to send out my Father’s promised gift to rest upon you; but as for you, wait patiently in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:44-49).

When we consider the fierce nationalism of the Galileans, and the general tenor of the Messianic belief, we should not be too surprised that “Once when they were with him, they asked him, ‘Master, is this the time at which you are about to restore the kingdom for Israel?’” The breadth of vision which enabled the Jewish mind to grasp the transformation from the theocracy of Israel to the Christocracy of the universe had not yet come. And when it came it would be in reverse of the common anticipation, for instead of restoring the kingdom to Israel, it would require the restoring of Israel to the kingdom of God.

The reply of Jesus to the apostles is an example of kindness and brevity. “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has reserved within his own authority; and yet you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the remotest parts of the earth.” How pregnant is that statement with portent of things to come. It contains no learned or lengthy discussion of the nature of the Reign. For this the apostles were not ready. Jesus was perfectly willing to rest such matters with the Spirit, whose advent would “guide them into all truth.” The assurance that they would be witnesses, not only within the confines of Palestine, but to the remotest bounds of the earth, was sufficient just now to convey the universal nature of the Reign, and while they could not yet grasp the significance of the expression, they would later reflect upon it, and know its meaning.

According to Luke, these words represented the final message as Jesus took leave of these men. There was no maudlin sympathy, no tearful kiss or embrace. He was “as a man going into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return.” The simple dignity of the occasion strikes us with its appropriateness. “When he had said this, and while they were looking at him, he was carried up, and a cloud closing beneath him, hid him from their sight.” Nor did the men who remained indulge in paroxysms of grief. They acted, not as those who had lost a friend, but as those who had gained one. “They worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy” (Luke 24:52). Thus did they demonstrate their love, for he had said, “If you loved me you would have rejoiced because I am going to the Father” (John 14:28).

At this juncture, three topics should engage our attention. Why was it necessary for our Lord to return to heaven? What did the disciples do in the interim until his coronation? What took place at the coronation ceremony in the heavens?

Reasons for the Return

1. Jesus told the apostles, “It is to your advantage that I go away” (John 16:7). While this was difficult for them to understand, since grief filled their hearts at the time, he explained that the coming of the Advocate was contingent upon his departure. “Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (verse 8). The great mission of the apostles could not be filled without the Advocate, the Holy Spirit. He was to teach them everything, to bring to memory all that Jesus said unto them. He was to be a witness concerning Jesus, and enable them to testify fully and completely. He would guide them into all truth, and take what belonged to Jesus and make it known to the apostles. He would convict the world in respect of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.

2. The return of Jesus to heaven would enable his ambassadors to do greater things than he did while present upon the earth. “In most solemn truth I tell you that he who trusts in me – the things which I do he shall do also; and greater things than these shall he do, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12). Does this last refer to miraculous deeds as so many modern cults interpret it? If so, in what sense is the word “greater” used? It cannot refer to quantity, for the same record declares, “But there are also many other things which Jesus did – so vast a number indeed that if they were all described in detail, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would have to be written” (John 21:25). It cannot refer to the quality of physical miracles, for nothing can exceed the raising of Lazarus from the tomb, as a demonstration of power.

We believe that the proper understanding of this expression has to do with a contrast of the spiritual with the physical realm. The apostles were to do greater things because Jesus was going to the Father. There was nothing about his going to the Father which would empower them to do greater physical acts than he could accomplish while he was here. He had long since told this same group, “Cure the sick, raise the dead to life, cleanse lepers, drive out demons” (Matt. 10:8). What was to be their task which Jesus could not accomplish during his sojourn on earth, and which they could accomplish only by his return to heaven, and which constituted “greater things” than miracles attesting his divine mission?

We feel that the secret to this is revealed in the proclamation of the apostles, of which the speech of Peter in the house of Cornelius is typical. “That same Jesus God raised to life on the third day, and permitted him to appear unmistakably, not to all the people, but to witnesses – men previously chosen by God – namely, to us, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he has commanded us to preach to the people and solemnly declare that this is he who has been appointed by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness, and testify that through his name all who believe in him should receive the forgiveness of his sins” (Acts 10:39-43).

The proclamation of Jesus as judge of the living and dead, and of forgiveness of sins through his name, could only be made after he had taken the throne by appointment of the Father. Our Lord, with one exception, limited his miraculous works to the Jewish people, but the apostles were to announce liberation from sin to the believers of all nations. This is the significance of the term “all who believe” as uttered by Peter in the Gentile home. Just as the saving of souls is superior to the healing of physical ailments, so their work, under the authority of Jesus, was superior to all

that had previously been done. One secured an extension of temporal life, the other brought an offer of eternal life.

3. Another reason for the ascent of Jesus was to prepare a place for his disciples. He comforted the sorrowing apostles with the assurance that there are numerous places of abode in the house of the Father, and declared his intent to go before and make reservations for their coming. This does not imply that he was going away to build or construct some place not now in existence, but rather to arrange for an abode for the faithful. He told them that if he went away he would return and take them unto him so they might always be together.

4. The office of high priest, which Jesus now occupies, necessitated his return to heaven. It is God's design that his people constitute a royal priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices, and such a priesthood requires a notable high priest. But "if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all" (Heb. 8:4). "Moreover we needed just such a high priest as this – holy, guileless, undefiled, far removed from sinful men and exalted above the heavens" (Heb. 7:26). "Inasmuch, then, as we have in Jesus, the Son of God, a great high priest who has passed beyond the sky, let us hold firmly to our profession of faith." Under the first covenant, national atonement could not be made until the high priest entered the most holy place with the blood of the sacrifice. "But Christ appeared as a high priest of the blessings that are soon to come by means of the greater and more perfect tent of worship, a tent which has not been built with hands – that is to say does not belong to this material creation – and once for all entered the holy place, taking with him not the blood of goats and calves, but his own blood, and thus procuring eternal redemption for us" (Heb. 9:11, 12).

5. Even more appropriate to the theme of this book is the fact that it was necessary for Jesus to return to heaven in order to rule as king over a universal domain. Zechariah predicted that he would build a temple of the Lord, and bear the glory, that he should sit and rule upon his throne; and be a priest upon his throne (6:13). Since he could not be a priest until he was upon his throne, and since he could not be a priest upon earth, it was necessary for him to leave the earth in order to sit and rule upon his throne.

The ascension of Jesus bore the same relation to his glorification that his descent did to his humiliation. Only by means of return to heaven could there be a resumption of the pre-incarnate glory with the Father. "I have glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do, and now, Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made" (John 17:4, 5). Because of his humiliation the glory accorded him was increased. "And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him, and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:8-11). "He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs" (Heb. 1:3, 4).

The Scene on Earth

The Mount of Olives lies east of Jerusalem. From its steep ascent, which is two hundred feet higher than the walled city, one looks down upon “the city of the great king.” It was a fitting spot from which the Prince of David could begin his journey to the far land to receive his kingdom. The little group of men walked together with the Master over the road their feet had so often pressed. The conversation was no different than it had been upon numerous such occasions in the past. They came at last to the crown of the mount, as far as Bethany.

The fateful moment had come. He had long ago prepared them for the occasion, with the words, “The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them.” Now he lifted up his hands and blessed them and “while he blessed them, he parted from them” (Luke 24:51). One moment he was speaking, and the next they beheld him ascending into the air. As they stood transfixed, watching his receding form, straining their eyes to see him until the last, a cloud enveloped him and took him from their sight. Still they remained with upturned faces, watching as if they expected him soon to return and resume his conversation. Then they suddenly became aware of two additions to their number, men in white robes, who gently broke the spell of awe with the words, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

We do not know which of the apostles first spoke, or what was said. But the little group turned back toward Jerusalem, walking the familiar path. They were not melancholy. There was in the bosom of each a feeling of triumph. Their faith had been vindicated. By going back to the Father, Jesus had proven that he had come from the Father. “He that ascended is he also that descended.” God had not only raised him from the dead but he had now exalted him. “They returned to Jerusalem with great joy” (Luke 24:52). When they entered the city they went to the upper room which was their temporary abode. Here they could meditate upon and converse about the recent happenings in relative privacy.

The days of waiting were not spent in idleness. The apostles were Jews and scrupulously observed the requirements of Judaism. They were approaching the second great annual feast of the Jews, and their minds would be attuned to its meaning and observance. Each day they assembled twice at the temple at the time of the daily sacrifices, and with the devout Jews joined in prayer, according to their custom (Luke 24:53). In addition to this, they devoted themselves to prayer in the upper room which was the gathering place of those who had been close to Jesus during his earthly stay. Here they were joined by the women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers (Acts 1:14). This is the last mention of Mary and her name never appears in the sacred text after the congregation of saints was planted at Jerusalem. This is a silent rebuke to the apostate church which has developed dogmata and rituals about her.

One day, when the company of disciples was assembled, about one hundred and twenty being present, Peter stood up and called attention to the prophetic utterances relating to Judas who acted as a guide for those who arrested Jesus. Referring to David, it was acknowledged that he spoke under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, and the scripture had to be fulfilled with reference to the dereliction of Judas. Attention was also called to the fact that another was to take the vacated office. In view of this, Peter urged that an additional witness of the resurrection be selected from among those who had been companions of Jesus during the entire course of his personal

ministry, from his immersion in Jordan to his ascension into heaven. The company of believers thereupon put forward two men, Joseph Barsabbas and Matthias. Calling upon God to show which one he had chosen as a replacement for Judas, they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Matthias.

When nine days had gone by since the departure of Jesus, the preparation for Azereth, or Pentecost, began. All day long bands of pilgrims were streaming through the gates into the holy city. It was now early summer and Palestine lay in all her glory. Traveling conditions were less arduous at this season of year, and thousands came to the celebration of “the day of first-fruits” who could not attend other annual feasts. The bazaars and markets were teeming with a polyglot mass. Jews were present from every nation under heaven. Every group seemed to have a distinct dialect, and as one passed through the crowds, he could hear the languages of Persia, Arabia, Asia Minor, Egypt, Rome, and a score of other places. In addition to the Jews, there were numerous proselytes, many of them men of reputation and distinction in the Greek world, who had become converts to Judaism because of its high code of ethics and morality.

As dusk arrived a hush of expectancy fell over the milling throng. Suddenly the stillness was broken by a blast blown on the trumpets of the priests. There would be little sleep this night. The temple and courtyard were lighted with hundreds of lamps. The great altar of bronze had been literally as well as ceremonially cleansed. It reflected the glitter of the lamps and torches in its polished surface. As soon as the midnight hour arrived, the gatekeepers threw open the gates to the temple. Every sacrifice which the people proposed to bring to the feast had to be carefully scrutinized and examined by the priestly officials before the time for the morning sacrifice. All night long the worshipers came and went, securing the approval of the priests.

When morning dawned and the sun peeped over the rim of the eastern hills and flooded Palestine with light, the inspection came to a halt. It was time for the sacred activities of the day to commence. The choir of Levites was solemnly arranged on the steps, the children of the Levites standing in formation below them. A single flute began its piping tones and the great choir began the chant of the “Hallel.” The multitude, stretching as far as eye could see, repeated the words, or sometimes responded with the appropriate portion. It was a time of deep solemnity, of awe-inspiring pageant. The special offerings of the day consisted of two young bulls, a ram, seven male yearling lambs, and a male goat. The latter was led to the great altar first, and the hands of the priest were laid solemnly upon its horns. The priest bore down with all of his weight upon the head of the sacrifice and confession of sins was made in a loud voice. Then the animal was stretched out with neck bared to receive the keen blade of Damascus steel which severed the jugular, the spurting blood from which was caught in a silver vessel pointed at the bottom so that it could never be set down, and in which the blood could be constantly agitated to keep it from coagulating until it could be sprinkled upon the horns of the altar.

The principal part of the day’s ritual was the presentation of the two wave loaves. Each of the three great annual feasts was so timed as to constitute a harvest festival. The paschal feast came at the barley harvest; Pentecost at wheat harvest; the feast of tabernacles at the vintage-gathering. A little more than three pecks of wheat were selected from the best in the land of Palestine. The grain was brought to the temple, threshed out of the heads, pulverized and then ceremonially put through twelve sieves. An omer of flour was selected for each loaf, and mixed with lukewarm

water, then patted out long and flat, each loaf being seven hand-breaths long, four hand-breaths wide, and four fingers thick. These loaves, each of which weighed more than five pounds, were baked in the temple.

The little band of followers of the Nazarene, like all devout Jews, had looked forward to the great day with its throng of pilgrims from every land. Now that it had dawned, drawn together by previous association and by a common bond cemented by a mutual faith that Jesus was the Messiah of whom the prophets had spoken, the twelve found themselves in the same room. Suddenly there swept over them a sound from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind. The house was filled with the sound. They looked at each other in amazement, and their wonder grew as they saw tongues with the appearance of flame sitting upon the heads of all. Immediately they became aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and being filled therewith, their own tongues were loosed and they began to speak in various languages of mankind as the Spirit controlled their tongues and prompted them to give utterance to the mighty works of God. They recognized this visual and oral demonstration as a confirmation of the fact that Jesus was now on his throne (Acts 2:33). The restrictions imposed were lifted, the monarch was seated in power, and it was now time for their work as ambassadors to commence. Accordingly, they proclaimed the authority of the Sovereign and entreated men to recognize it. The Christocracy had begun.

Chapter 11

The Heavenly Scene

It was now the morning of the fortieth day since his slumber in the tomb of the Arimathean had ended and Jesus had arisen to remove the death napkin from his face, to fold it and place it carefully upon the stone bench. The stone fitted into the slot of the door had been rolled aside by the two messengers, and as he prepared to walk from the sepulcher, they entered, and after saluting him took their respective places where he had lain, one at the head, the other at the feet. Since that day he had been with his followers, showing himself alive with frequent undeniable proofs. Often he had enjoyed intimate association with just a few of them, but upon the occasion in Galilee more than five hundred had assembled to look upon him and listen to him.

Now the work he had come to do was almost finished. The sleepless nights, the weary marches, the hunger and thirst, the prick of thorns, the agony of the cross, all of these, were behind him. These things he had endured while despising the shame, for he was confident of the joy that awaited. And today that joy would be his. He would leave the earth which he entered as a babe, from the summit of favored Olivet. As they walked toward it, he gave his final instructions to the little group whom he called so many months ago. Little did they know what the future held for them, but all things work together for good to those who love the Lord.

At last they stood at the place. Before them lay Jerusalem, the inhabitants not dreaming of the drama unfolding just outside their gates. He lifted his hands in benediction, and blessed them, and as he did he felt the transformation. Slowly he began to rise from their midst and as he ascended he could see their upturned faces, with mingled emotions written upon their features. His form grew smaller to their gaze and a cloud enveloped him. As he went upward the two messengers speeding earthward passed him, and he knew they would reassure the apostles.

Of a sudden he was met with the twenty thousand chariots of heaven, and surrounded by thousands upon thousands of the messengers. He had gone forth upon the announcement of Gabriel as a helpless babe, his birth signaled by the choir of messengers to humble shepherds. Now he was returning as a conqueror, the keys of death and Hades in his grasp. Long generations ago, he whose throne would now be occupied, moved by the Holy Spirit, had sung of this occasion "With mighty chariots, twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands, the Lord came from Sinai into the holy place. Thou didst ascend the high mount, leading captives in thy train, and receiving gifts from men" (Psalm 68:17, 18).

As the triumphant processional approached the gates of the city of the Eternal One, the mighty host burst into a reverberating chant, "Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in." The thousands of messengers inside, as if in challenge to such a bold demand, responded in unison, demanding identification, "Who is the King of glory?" The host accompanying him in joyful acclaim cried out, "The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle! Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the king of glory may come in!" Once again came the challenge, "Who is this king of glory?" The response followed, "The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory!" The gates swung wide and the procession entered (Psalm 24:7-10).

“Thrones were placed and one that was ancient of days took his seat;
his raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head was like pure wool;
His throne was fiery flames, its wheels were burning fire.
A stream of fire issued and came forth from before him;
A thousand thousands served him,
and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him ...
And behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him” (Daniel 7:9-13).

The fullness of glory was manifest. In the midst of the city of the Eternal One stood the throne with the vacant place at the right hand of the Ancient of Days. Around the throne was the rainbow that looked like an emerald. There were twenty-four additional thrones, and upon these were seated the twenty-four elders, dressed in shining white, and with golden crowns on their heads. Before the throne was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. Round the throne, on each side were the four living creatures, each with six wings, and full of eyes all round and within, chanting without cessation “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” With the ascription of praise by the living creatures, the elders would prostrate themselves before the throne, and removing their crowns would cast them before the throne, while chanting,

“Worthy art thou, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power, for thou didst create all things,
and by thy will they existed and were created” (Rev. 4).

It was such a scene as greeted the Son of man when he was presented before the Ancient of Days for the coronation ceremony. The inaugural address was made by the Father in the audience “of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands.” To these waiting thousands he made his proclamation “Let all God’s angels worship him.” In this one sentence the hierarchy of celestial messengers – principalities, powers, dominions – all were made subject to the Prince of peace.

Turning to the Son, the Father said, “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness, therefore God, thy God, has anointed thee with the oil of gladness beyond thy comrades. Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool. The Lord sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your foes! The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.’ Thou, Lord, didst found the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of thy hands; they will perish, but thou remainest; they will all grow old like a garment, like a mantle thou wilt roll them up and they will be changed. But thou art the same, and thy years will never end.”

Anointed with the oil of gladness, wearing the diadem of grace, the Son sat down with the Father on his throne. The Reign of the Messiah was now a fact.

Chapter 12

The Nature of the Kingdom

The kingdom of the Messiah is one of conquest. It exists to subdue and subjugate the forces of rebellion. The words of God to the Son were, “Sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool.” This regime would never have been inaugurated if all the forces of the universe had remained faithful unto the Creator. It was made necessary by revolt in heaven and transgression on earth. When Satan was cast out of heaven and Adam was cast out of the garden of Eden, a state of rebellion against the authority of God was in evidence. Thus the duration of the Christocracy is marked by the time essential, in the divine wisdom, to bring the enemies into submission.

It is in view of these considerations that it was written, “The Lord sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your foes!” (Psalm 110:2). “Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet” (1 Cor. 15:28). So long as there is one alien force in the universe actively opposed to God, the design and order of creation for the glorification of God is not yet perfected. Before creation God was everything. During creation he was everything. But with the advent of rebellion upon the part of rational beings the picture was changed. It became necessary to inaugurate a Reign which would restore the primal purpose, and make God everything to everyone. “When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one” (1 Cor. 15:28).

There are three regions in which responsible created beings exist. These are the celestial, the terrestrial, and the infernal. They are referred to as heaven, earth, and under the earth. The first is inhabited by the orders of angels, the second by men, and the third by the orders of demons. In all of these regions there must come a recognition of the authority of God. Accordingly God has bestowed all authority upon Jesus that he might accomplish the eternal purpose. “God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9-11). Those who refused to acknowledge the God of glory must now acknowledge the authority of his heir to the glory of God.

The Reign of the Messiah, like every other creation of God, is perfectly adapted to conditions as they are and to the achievement of heaven’s design. It is for this reason that it is an absolute monarchy, and not a democracy or republic. The God of the universe was not limited to the simile of a kingdom because the people of that day were not familiar with republics. Four centuries before Jesus was born of the virgin, the philosopher Plato had written his classic “The Republic.” There are those citizens of democracies who feel that their form of government is the highest attainable, and they are troubled at the thought of God’s choice of a type of government which is deemed inferior. But the conclusions are based upon false premises.

A democracy is the best form of rule in the present state of mankind, when the constituents are filled with avarice, greed and false ambition. In such a government, unjust rulers can be more easily dispossessed and shorn of authority. The public conscience, being driven to the point of revolt, will rise up and cast out of power those who would exercise despotic inclinations. In human monarchies there may often be a perpetuation of error and misery. The ruling family passes on to its successors the same evil tendencies, and these are often defended because of tradition and ancestral worship. It is difficult to overthrow a long established and well rooted dynasty.

But a democracy is best adapted to a state of peace and tranquility. It is not suited to a state of war. As proof of this we need only to cite how republics in times of great national danger from without, seek out a leader and delegate to him special powers, exalting him as a central figure, and surrendering their rights and privileges unto him. A monarchy is best fitted to prosecute war, for if the king be judicious and skilful, and his subjects be loyal, he can direct his forces to gain the maximum benefit. The Reign of heaven was created to make war incessantly against an implacable foe. In this great conflict there can be no cessation of hostilities and no flag of truce. It would not be feasible to allow the decisions to rest with a majority of the citizens, for even a majority may be mistaken.

Republics are always the outgrowth and by-products of abuses in government. It has ever been thus. The American colonies were first ruled by a monarch, and it was never considered by the early emigrants that they would establish a commonwealth which would revolt against the king of England. But when intolerable restraints were imposed and taxation was levied without representation being granted, this was branded as tyranny, and a revolution ensued. The Declaration of Independence was a statement of protest against violations of human rights, and our present form of government is an experiment in preservation and protection of those rights. Yet, in time of national fear, special powers are bestowed upon the chief executive, which really make the fate of the nation hang upon the decisions of one man.

If the crown could repose upon the wisest head and the scepter be wielded by the most benevolent hand in the realm, a monarchical government would be the most efficient, least cumbersome, and safest. But among fallen men, the wisest in jurisprudence are not always kind and considerate; and the philanthropist does not always possess wisdom and discretion. Therefore, a government which will permit dismissal of the inefficient and unworthy is highly esteemed. But in the Reign of heaven this is not so, and the salvation of the subjects is contingent upon the continuance of one in office. "Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

Because the Reign of heaven was instituted to put down revolt against God, and to subjugate those forces which oppose the will of the ruler of the universe, the language used by the Holy Spirit to describe the present state and activities of that Reign is that which describes war and conflict. Thus Jesus is reported as saying, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). The recorder of the final book describes him as a general at the head of his armies, going forth to smite the nations. "I saw heaven opened and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in

righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed which no one knows but himself. He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses. From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed. King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev. 19:11-16).

In this great conflict of the ages all the powers of heaven, earth and hell are engaged. It is not an exaggeration to state that the revelation of God conceives of every responsible being in the whole universe as actively associated in the fight. It is a titanic struggle between all of the forces marshaled under the banner of right and those dedicated to the cause of error. The generalship is invested in supernatural beings, on one hand the Messiah of God, on the other the great opposer and slanderer, Diabolos. Angels and archangels of the celestial realm are opposed by demons of the infernal regions. The souls of men are the stakes for which the incessant conflict is waged.

The Messiah employs two means to overcome the enemies of God, reconciliation and destruction. That which cannot be reconciled unto God must be destroyed. In the end there must remain no weapon fashioned against the Eternal One; no alien voice which can dispute the absolute sovereignty of God over his universe. It would not be incorrect to say that the Reign of the Messiah is one of total destruction. He must either destroy the evil in our lives, or we must suffer destruction.

The arrangement of God is perfectly adapted to this end. It preserves inviolate the will of God and the will of his creatures. Any plan which compelled man against his will to obey God, would destroy the sovereignty of man; any plan which compelled God to accept man without willing obedience would destroy the sovereignty of God. But, in the ultimate, the will of God, which is absolute in right and truth, must prevail. Accordingly, he has revealed that will to man, and life on earth constitutes a period of probation during which man examines that will, and accepts or rejects it, with full knowledge of the consequences of either act. “For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ *as a plan for the fullness of time*, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:9, 10).

Since man is so constituted that he can learn more readily by being shown, than by merely being told, God graciously arranged for one to come as an example, so that if there was any question as to the application to life of the principles of the revealed will, we might see them worked out practically, in his personal words and deeds. “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness of life in him who is the head of all rule and authority” (Col. 2:9, 10). By his perfect submission to God he has shown men how to overcome feelings of hostility. Evil deeds are acts of rebellion against divine authority and estrange us from heaven. “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in the body of his flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, provided that you continue in the faith” (Col. 1:19-23).

It should be noted that in the passage quoted above it is affirmed that as the fullness of the Deity dwells bodily in the Messiah, so we come to fullness of life in him. This proves there is more to life than mere existence. Men exist before they are in the Christ. It is *fullness of life* which cannot be obtained out of him. Since the fullness of Deity dwells in him, then those who dwell in him, are again in contact with Deity. God and man find a common meeting place in the Messiah. Please observe that the whole quotation is “You have come to fullness of life in him *who is the head of all rule and authority.*”

Man was alienated from God by sin, which is the direct result of disrespect for God’s authority. Sin separated man from God. “Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you” (Isa. 59:2). Being cut off from God, he was cut off from the source of life. Now, by the exaltation of the Messiah to complete authority in the universe, it is possible for man to regain in him what was lost in Adam. “The first Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45). But the fullness of life cannot be enjoyed by one who does not recognize the supreme rule and authority of the Messiah. Life in its fullness begins with full surrender of life to the Lord of life.

As the Reign of heaven is adapted to the subjugation and restoration of mankind and the final triumph of truth, the message of the King is also adapted to the needs of mankind and to the present condition of the human family. As an alien, man needs first to be reconciled unto God; then, having been reconciled he needs to be trained in the course of conduct which will provide him the greatest happiness here and in the world to come. Since the Reign of the Messiah is a constitutional monarchy, man requires first to be informed as to the requirements essential to becoming a citizen; and after having been instructed into citizenship, he needs to be schooled in the duties and responsibilities of his new relationship. Thus, it can readily be seen that two diverse messages must be given by the King, one addressed to aliens for the purpose of induction; the other to citizens for the purpose of instruction.

Those who are aliens and hostile tend to look askance at any overtures of reconciliation. It was, therefore, necessary for the Messiah to perform an act of such stupendous importance, when he took his throne, that the suspicions of men would be allayed and they would become convinced of his grace. Accordingly, when his chosen envoys, empowered by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven, announced his sovereign rule and the terms of amnesty, he immediately pardoned his own murderers who accepted the terms, and made them adopted members of the heavenly family with full rights of citizenship. Thus he demonstrated to all men the possibility of salvation from past errors and the complete forgiveness of heaven.

The message proclaimed by the heralds to aliens was designated “the Good News.” Since God in all of his dealings with men never required them to do any thing except upon the basis of what he had done for them, the Good News is primarily an announcement of facts with reference to what had been done for sinful men. The facts announced are obviously such as will command the attention of men in need of salvation, and likewise furnish the power and motivation to take the necessary steps to secure such salvation.

The foundation of the Good News, and that which is called “of first importance” consists of three prime facts, viz., Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, he was buried, and he

was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3, 4). To confirm the testimony relative to these facts, credible witnesses who saw him after his resurrection, are introduced (1 Cor. 15:5-8). Related to these fundamental principles are certain additional facts which grew out of them. The Christ who was raised the third day ascended to heaven, is now seated at the right hand of the Father in regal splendor, and will come again as he went into heaven, and those who await his coming may be in his realm and be joint heirs of his glory. The Good News is really nothing more nor less than tidings of victory over sin, death and hell. It is a proclamation of “victory in Jesus!”

The Good News was designed for those who were alienated from God. It was not a course of instruction for citizens, but a proclamation to those not in the kingdom. Thus the Good News was as fully proclaimed on Pentecost as it ever was. That which is designated by the Holy Spirit as “the Good News of the Christ” was declared in its fullness on that day. It was heard, accepted and embraced in its fullness by those who joyfully received the word. Nothing was ever added to the gospel of the Messiah after that date, nor was that gospel ever proclaimed to citizens of the kingdom. It was not intended for them, and while they might be reminded of it as the basis for their hope, the proclamation of it to them was without warrant, seeing they could not have become citizens without having embraced it.

Before his ascension, the Messiah commissioned his envoys to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized shall be saved.” The gospel was to be proclaimed to make believers. Belief and baptism were not necessarily a part of the proclamation. They constituted the reaction to the proclamation of those who had good and honest hearts. They were responsibilities devolving upon the sincere hearers of the Good News. One might have heard the Good News in its fullness and yet have refused to believe it or be immersed. The proclamation of the Good News was one thing, the immersion of those who believed it was a wholly different thing, which prompted Paul to write, “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel” (1 Cor. 1:17).

It is a common error of surface students and casual thinkers to assume that the term “gospel” or Good News, used for the proclamation of the envoys, embraces the scope of the entire new covenant scriptures, and covers the message to sinner and saint alike. The absurdity of this can easily be seen upon a little reflection. If the historical account of Acts, the epistolary writings, and the apocalyptic descriptions and symbols, are all part of the gospel of the Messiah, not one of the apostles ever fully proclaimed that gospel, for each had only a part of the revelation. Further, no congregation of saints during the lifetime of the apostles had ever obeyed the gospel, for not one had a complete compilation of the new covenant scriptures. Yet Paul wrote to the Romans that he had *fully preached the gospel of Christ* from Jerusalem and as far round as unto Illyricum. Certainly the book of Romans was not part of the gospel he had already preached, for he was just then writing it. In the same book he declares, “They have not all obeyed the gospel,” but if the gospel includes the whole of the new covenant revelation none of them had obeyed it, for they did not yet have it.

The truth of the matter is that the Good News was the proclamation of the king to aliens providing the basis upon which they could enlist as citizens. In the capacity of citizens they were furnished with the apostles’ doctrine which formed a course of instruction for the perfection of

the saints. This was revealed as circumstances demanded and the need arose. In its completeness it represents the constitution of the divine monarchy. This law is applicable only to the citizens of the kingdom. Every nation which receives unto itself those who come from abroad has a law of naturalization. Once that law has been obeyed it never needs repetition, nor do those who have become citizens need again to hear a proclamation of it. But the law of the land may contain many statutes which have to be repeatedly obeyed.

Since the citizens must continue to dwell in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom they are to shine as lights in the world, provision has been made for their mutual strengthening of each other, so that they may build one another up in the most holy faith. To effect this, a memorial feast to show the Lord's death has been prescribed, and to this feast all are required to come regularly until the Lord returns. The Lord's Supper is to be eaten at his table in his kingdom (Luke 22:30). It belongs only to those who are citizens. Being a matter of joint participation, the Supper is a part of the fellowship of believers in the Messiah.

In order to achieve the divine purpose on earth, the envoys of the king gathered into communities or congregations, those in each locality who were inducted into citizenship. These citizens, with qualified seniors selected from their number and ordained as bishops, and with other qualified men ordained as deacons or servants, constituted the church of God, or body of the Christ, in each area. The Lord's table was the rallying point for such congregations of saints, and was the flag which, planted upon new territory, indicated that such territory had been taken into possession for the absent King. So long as the table remained, and loyal subjects gathered about it, that long the territory was in the name of the King.

Each community of saints throughout the universe is a golden lamp stand holding up the truth as the light of the world, and in the midst of these the Son of man is depicted as standing, shedding forth the blessing of his presence. These communities in the aggregate compose the kingdom of God on earth, with each of the citizens as a steward who is entrusted with the goods of the Master "to occupy until his return."

Chapter 13

Misunderstanding the Kingdom

The kingdom of the Messiah is the culmination of the divine plan for the ages. It has been created to conquer and subdue every alien thought and bring into captivity every stronghold of opposition. Its citizens upon earth are sanctified men and women who have been born again. They are the living representatives of the power and majesty of the monarch whom they have accepted to rule and reign over them. To the extent they are such the kingdom will be a potent force in any community; to the extent they are not, it will lose its influence over the hearts of men.

In every generation there are threats to the welfare and progress of the kingdom, created by false conceptions of those who are members of it. Just as in every nation there are citizens who do not grasp the principles of their respective constitutions, and who manifest subversive tendencies, so it has ever been in the kingdom of the Messiah. One who reads the history of the church of God as it is portrayed in the new covenant scriptures cannot help but see how much of it is devoted to detailing the errors in the thinking of those who were its constituency, and the correction of such errors.

It is difficult for the finite mind to grasp the majestic greatness of the kingdom. There is ever a tendency to believe that the kingdom of heaven is advanced by human philosophy and eloquence. The kingdoms of this world have all produced their statesmen and these have generally been individuals who could sway and bend the masses by word and gesture. Beholding the material fortunes of worldly kingdoms rise under the dominant influence of orators, those who compose the kingdom of heaven, motivated by ambition for its success, are constantly subject to the temptation to employ the same means. It is for this reason schools for special clergymen are inaugurated, and certain select members of the citizenry given special training in such theological seminaries. The kingdom of heaven is thus made dependent for its advancement upon a human auxiliary. In every such instance the best interests of the divine institution have been betrayed.

The betrayal has come not so much from the human organization, as from the spirit or philosophy which gave it birth. The idea that the kingdom of the Messiah is dependent upon the linguistic attainments of men, leads to the selection of certain fluent ones of the community who are polished and perfected and put forward as the champions of the Cause. This very act excludes the body of the citizenry from active participation, breeding in the masses who have had no access to professional training a feeling of inferiority. The whole vicious circle proceeds from a lack of recognition that the ways of God are not the ways of men, and that he has not selected the powerful to shame the weak; but has chosen the foolish to shame the wise (1 Cor. 1:27).

This very problem existed in aggravated form in one of the communities of saints planted through the efforts of Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Corinth, located upon the isthmus of Greece, was a city of wealth, luxury, and voluptuousness. Under the guise of religion, immorality was practiced in conjunction with idolatry, and the temples of the gods were virtual houses of

assignation. Yet the city was known for the beauty of its architecture, the wisdom of its philosophers, and the power of its statesmen. Into this city of mingled vice and wisdom came the humble Jew, of whom the Corinthians said, "His bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account" (2 Cor. 10:10). Refusing to prey upon them, to take advantage of them, or to put on airs among them (2 Cor. 11:20), he stood among them in weakness, fear, and much trembling. But the glory of the cross is emphasized by the weakness of the human vessel who bears it, and its power is in direct ratio to the humility of its servant. It is an axiom of God that "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in your weakness."

In this city of Grecian culture men fell captive to the sword of the Spirit and surrendered as slaves to Jesus. A colony of heaven was planted. But soon the ambitions of men began to assert themselves and rivalry with its consequent partisan spirit disrupted the fellowship of the saints. In the midst of this saddening state of affairs, word was conveyed to Paul at Ephesus, and he penned a letter to them, in which he summed up in one brief statement the difference between truth and the false concept of the factious elements. "For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power" (1 Cor. 4:20).

Since there is an unceasing conflict between these two concepts, it will be profitable for us to consider the setting in which this statement glows with such brilliance. Only thus we can learn of what the kingdom consists, and of what it does not consist. This sentence occurs at the close of Paul's condemnation of partisan factionism in the community of saints at Corinth. It is his summary of what produced that factionism. The congregation was rent and torn by schisms. These were produced by a mistaken idea as to the nature of the kingdom of God and its method of growth. Perhaps our modern factions are rooted in the same cause. It may be that if we can visualize the problems at Corinth, we can more clearly see our own problems and find a solution for them.

The nine spiritual gifts enumerated in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 were abundantly manifest in the community of saints. The grace of God was bestowed especially in the gift of speech and knowledge. It was by this means the testimony of Christ was confirmed among them, so that they were not lacking in any spiritual gift while awaiting the completed revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ, who by it would sustain them to the end and present them guiltless in the final day of accounts (1 Cor. 1:4-8).

But, as it often happens in congregations with a multiplicity of talented men, personal ambition forged to the front, and the gifted ones forgot that "to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" and they began to seek a personal following. The gift of tongues was relegated to a degree of importance in the assembly which it did not deserve, and it was coveted by those who would, through it, enhance their personal popularity.

The dissensions and quarrels resulting from party rivalry were reported to the apostle by the family of a sister in the Lord, Chloe, and he immediately composed his rebuke of the situation. He showed first that there was no place for party spirit inasmuch as Christ was not divided. Since no one now on earth had been crucified for them, and they were not baptized into the name of such an one, they owed no allegiance to, and should not become partisan followers of any man, not even of Paul himself. He stated that his commission was to proclaim the Good News

“and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.” The contrast between eloquent wisdom and the power of the cross is here brought into sharp focus. The apostle Paul would be rejected today on the “trial sermon” basis of selecting a preacher.

He next showed that the ultimate end of following human wisdom is the rejection of God. “The world by wisdom knew not God.” Accordingly, through a message which the world branded as foolishness, it pleased God to save men. And his instruments to bear that message were lowly men, not esteemed by the world. Here reference is made to the constituency of the Corinthian congregation, of whom Paul affirms, “Not many were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth” and thus, not one had any grounds for boasting in the presence of God.

But it is when he turns to his own initial service in Corinth that Paul best illustrates the method of God. He writes, “When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God *in lofty words* or wisdom.” He asserts that he was in weakness and much fear and trembling, and that his speech and message were *not in plausible words of wisdom*, and the reason was that their faith should not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. Again there is a bold contrast between “lofty words” and “plausible words” and “the power of God.” The first are employed by men who seek to gain their purposes by human means; the second by God who knows the human heart.

It is expected that those who are called by the power of God will boast of the Lord and not of the human instruments of his power. Those who are motivated by the compelling force of eloquence and lofty words of wisdom will obviously magnify the leader who is possessed of such rich talent, and since men differ in their philosophies, parties will form around them, and jealousy and strife result. But it is also true that those who were called by the power of God, may afterwards exalt men of special gifts and abilities with the same evil result. That was what happened at Corinth.

This condition prompted Paul to state that he could not address them as spiritual men, but as men in the flesh, as babes in Christ. He asked, “While there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving like ordinary men?” This points up the fact that there is a difference between spiritual men and ordinary men. The latter are characterized by jealousy and strife. These are their trademarks. But men of the spirit rise above partisanship, they are not ordinary, but extraordinary men! So long as one says he belongs to this party, and another says he belongs to that party, the congregation is composed of men devoid of real spiritual values.

Not even Paul and Apollos were saviors, but servants through whom men believed, as the Lord assigned to each. One planted, the other watered, but only God could give the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters are equal, so it is foolish to exalt either as the leader of a religious party. This necessitates a caution that no man should deceive himself. This is easily done for men are by nature hero worshipers. They either seek for prominence directly or bask in the reflected glory of one whom they have exalted.

However, the fact that God catches the wise in their craftiness and knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile, should cause one to think seriously before elevating even the wisest of men, or

boasting about such. Even the holy apostles should be regarded as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Is this not a condemnation of those who speak so glibly of a Petrine doctrine and a Pauline doctrine, as if Peter and Paul were teaching diverse doctrines and leading separate groups in the primitive congregation of God?

In the fourth chapter of 1 Corinthians, the apostle reaches the summit of his reasoning relative to the basic error of thought which produced the lines of cleavage in the body. With reference to what has preceded he says, "I have applied all this to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brethren, that you may learn by us to live according to scripture, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another." The crowning act of deflation for egotism is found in the questions, "Who sees anything different in you? What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?"

With this the apostle paints a graphic picture of the difference between the life of ease in the Corinthian congregation and the hardships and toils endured by the apostles. However, this was not written to shame and embarrass them, but rather to admonish them as his beloved children. He points out that it was his love for them which caused him to send Timothy to remind them of his ways in Christ as he taught in every community of the saints. Some of his opposers were arrogantly asserting that Paul sent Timothy because he was afraid to come personally. To demonstrate his lack of cowardice he declares that he will come soon, and when he arrives, he will find not the arrogant talk but the power of these bold asserters. It is at this juncture, the apostle sets forth the nature of the kingdom. "*The kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.*"

When Paul arrived in Corinth and confronted these arrogant talkers, two divergent philosophies came face to face to clash with each other. On one side were the polished speakers, the haughty philosophers, supercilious, impertinent and unabashed. To them the advance of the kingdom depended upon the well turned phrase, the vaunting and pretentious language of pride. On the other side was the ill-clad, buffeted and homeless apostle, his hands calloused by daily toil and his fingers blackened with the prick of awl and needle. But his mission was not to match wits nor to test words; he would test the power of the arrogant boasters.

No one can read the first four chapters of this epistle without being conscious of the difference in these two concepts. One is characterized by such phrases as "eloquent wisdom," "lofty words," and "plausible words of wisdom." The other is described as foolish, weak, low and despised in the world, but it is the power of God. It is "not a wisdom of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away."

The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power! Every attempt of men to establish organizations for the purpose of polishing a select group of clergymen is promoted by the mistaken idea that eloquent and plausible words of wisdom are essential to the perpetuity of the kingdom. If this were the case, the Son of man would have chosen the scholastics of his day to herald the truth. Instead those who listened to the apostles perceived that they were "unlearned and ignorant men." The word *idiotes* means "a private or common person, an unprofessional man or layman, an unskilled person." It is the word which is translated "ignorant" in the quotation. Meyer says the two terms are practically identical, "the double designation being

intended to express the idea very fully, destitute of all rabbinic culture, strangers to theological learning.”

The first “Christian College” was started in Alexandria, Egypt, about A.D. 180. Its two chief objectives were to provide a Christian atmosphere in which the young could be educated, and to train and prepare talented young men to preach. The learned and erudite city of Alexandria had the greatest library of ancient times, said to have contained three quarters of a million volumes, and the site of the school was thus believed to be excellent. It was thought by many that Christianity could not withstand the onslaughts and ridicule of the educated satirists and cultivated representatives of the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophic schools, and that fluent men in the church needed to be trained to meet the opposition upon its own ground.

The first president was a converted heathen philosopher, Pantaenus, and his immediate successor in A.D. 189, was Clement, another converted heathen philosopher. In A.D. 202, the renowned scholar and universalist, Origen, assumed the post which he held for thirty years, and during his regime the school was promoted to its highest peak in prosperity and popularity. Two of Origen’s students succeeded their master as president, Heracles and Dionysius in succession holding the presidency. The last teacher was Didymus in A.D. 395, and by the time he came to the position, the catechetical school had succeeded in leading the Christian world on the road to apostasy, so that Mosheim correctly branded the institution as “the grave of primitive Christianity.”

Men seem to learn but little from history. Moved with pride, swept with unreasoning fears, in every generation there are those who spend their time and money to erect the same institutions and to perpetuate their errors. There has never been a human organization started to protect the church of God that did not eventually betray it and bring disaster to it. Men have yet to learn that “the kingdom of God is not in word but in power” and that God’s power has not decreased nor degenerated.

Not Food and Drink

Another fruitful source of schism is the false conception that the Reign of heaven allows for no variation in personal conscience, and that there are no matters of indifference in which citizens may follow their own convictions. In every generation since its inception, the congregation of God has been harmed by well-meaning, but hurtful individuals who have sought to set themselves and their own personal consciences as the criterion for measurement of the behavior of all others, with the result that dissensions have been caused, fellowship disrupted, and the church itself subjected to ridicule by unbelievers.

The most serious aspect of this problem is that when one sets up his own conduct in matters of indifference as the basis of judgment and criticism of his brethren, he unconsciously dethrones Jesus, and enthrones himself as a judge. A recognition of this prompted James to write: “Do not speak evil against one another, brethren. He that speaks evil against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you that you judge your neighbor?” (James 4:11, 12).

The limited view that the kingdom of God has been inaugurated to provide an arena of disputation over personal scruples, has long aggravated the body of our Lord, and in many cases has turned the church into a battleground of fratricidal strife instead of a realm of brotherhood. To offset such a condition in his own day, the apostle wrote, "For the kingdom of God does not mean food and drink but righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). Note again the contrast. On one side is food and drink; on the other side righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The writing of dogmas relating to food and drink, the attempt to force personal views in this realm on others to the destruction of peace and joy; all of this has been a problem through the years. Inasmuch as we should not ignore the context which provides the setting for such a definitive statement, we propose to examine the teaching of Romans, chapter 14.

The chapter is introduced with the instruction, "As for the man who is weak in faith welcome him, but not for disputes over opinions." The expression "weak in faith" does not imply a weakness in belief in Jesus, but rather implies, from the context, one who entertains certain scruples and who does not seem to realize that our relationship to the Christ is maintained by faith rather than by our attitude toward matters of indifference. There is always a grave danger that those who are strong in discernment and perception will hold in contempt those whom they deem to be overly scrupulous about such things. It will be seen, however, that these are to welcome the one who is weak in faith. The term "welcome" implies more than mere toleration. It means to receive unto the fellowship and partnership which intimately welds the whole community of saints into a unit.

The motive with which one acts is always important in the spiritual realm. Thus, the strong are not to receive the weak to sit in judgment upon their thoughts or to judge their opinions. No opinion should ever be made the basis of fellowship, none should ever be made a test of fellowship. There is room inside the circle of fellowship for a variety of opinions upon matters which do not affect our salvation. It is wrong for the one who holds such an opinion to force it upon others and disrupt the peace and unity which ought to prevail; it is wrong for the one who does not hold the opinion to make it a subject of dispute or controversy. They should welcome each other since God has welcomed them both.

Two examples in which love should cover differences of opinion are cited by the apostle in the chapter under review. One is the matter of eating meats, the other that of attaching special importance to certain days. It is not to be concluded that these are the only two subjects in the category, but rather that the principles enunciated with reference to them will be equally applicable in all matters of the same nature. Wisdom must be exercised in determining what matters belong in the category.

In the primitive *ecclesia* of God, the subject of eating meats was one which occupied much attention. It was a common practice to dedicate an animal which was to be slaughtered for food to an idol. The blessing of the god or goddess was sought, and a choice portion of the meat might even be presented to the pagan priests for their consumption, while the residue was sold in the meat market to any purchaser. Of course it was easy for an informed person to reason that an idol was nothing but a product of human superstition, since there was but one true God, therefore, the sacrifice of an animal to the idol was only a ridiculous procedure which did not

affect the quality of the meat. Such a person might purchase meat anywhere without violation of conscience.

But the problem was complicated by the fact that many who had been reared in a pagan atmosphere did not possess such knowledge, and upon seeing a brother with power of perception eating at a feast where they served meat offered to idols, the weak one might conclude that service to idols was not prohibited by God, and as a result would fall into idolatrous practices. It was a consideration of such possibilities coupled with other things which caused some primitive Christians to appease their conscience by becoming vegetarians.

Thus the apostle wrote "One believes he may eat anything, while the weak man eats only vegetables." He was not particularly concerned as to what they ate, but he was concerned about their personal attitudes toward each other. There are always grave dangers to fellowship when there are such differences of opinion. The man whose belief will allow him to eat anything is always liable to sneer at the one whose scruples he regards as extreme and straight-laced. He tends to hold in contempt the over-particular and squeamish practices of the other. At the same time the man who is a vegetarian, and who considers the eating of meats dedicated to an idol as idolatry, is inclined to make it a test of fellowship. The temptation to judge a brother who differs from us, and especially one who feels he can justifiably do things we cannot do, is an ever present one. The weak are always more sensitive and quick to judge than the strong, and if everyone does not accept their particular pattern they conclude that it is because of an impure heart.

But God forbids the strong to despise the weak, or the weak to judge the strong. He offers two reasons. First, God has welcomed them both, and since he has done so, they are obligated to welcome each other. Both are recipients of divine grace and both are obligated to respect each other. Secondly, they do not belong to each other, but to God. It is not the business of a man to step across the fence and tell another man's servant how to plow his master's field. He is out of his place and trespasses if he does so. The apostle writes, "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Master is able to make him stand." In other words, acceptability to the Master does not depend upon what food a man eats, "for food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do" (1 Cor. 8:8).

The esteem for certain days is the second example produced. Both among Jewish and Gentile converts there was some recognition of sacred days. The Christian religion makes no provision for any holy day whatsoever. No day was counted as more sacred than any other so far as the new covenant is concerned. But some of the Jewish Christians greatly esteemed certain of their national holidays and holy days and still observed them with special regard. There is little doubt that the first disciples of the Master in Jerusalem continued to keep the Sabbath as well as to attach significance to the first day of the week, after their Pentecostal experience. They also continued to celebrate their other festal occasions. There were others who treated every day alike, making no distinction in them. The apostle says that each is to be convinced in his own mind. The emphasis is as shown.

If a Jew accepts the Messiah and he wishes, as a Jew, to esteem the Passover, Hanukkah, or other special days, it is his right to do so. He cannot bind their observance upon others, but his liberty in Jesus will allow him to esteem them as sacred, provided he does not violate the law of Christ in his observance. This privilege is his by reason of his relationship to the Lord, and must not be abridged or denied by reason of his relationship to his brethren. We do not live to ourselves, but to the Lord; we do not die to ourselves but to the Lord. Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. We do not belong to each other as we belong to the Lord. We are related to each other in the spirit, but we are related only because all of us belong to the Lord. There is a realm in which we are answerable to no man on earth. In that area, we are not subject to the judgment of men, but to the judgment of God.

In view of these facts, and since the observation of days and eating of meats are matters incidental to our Christian relationship, we should be sure to place them in the proper perspective. For this reason the inspired apostle asks, "Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or why do you despise your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God So each one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:10-12). This is not inserted to teach the universality or certainty of judgment, but its individuality. Since each is to give account of himself to God it is not necessary that he be accountable unto his brethren in advance of God's judgment.

It is at this juncture in his letter the apostle lays down great and abiding principles to protect the consciences of all and to save the congregation of God from dissension and disintegration. The disregard of these principles has been the cause of tragic schisms in the past. We will do well to enumerate and study them.

1. Instead of judging another we should rather turn our attention to judging self to determine if we are the means of causing another to fall. The apostle seems to recognize that there are those of such temperament they will judge someone, and his recommendation is that all such judge themselves and their conduct. The one who ate vegetables only for fear of defilement, should not judge the one who ate meat, because the day was coming when God would judge them both. On the contrary, the one who ate meat was not to exercise his liberty with arrogant disregard for the feelings of others. To insist upon the exercise of his right regardless of its effect would be a denial of the great law of love which is the essence of the Christian religion.

The insistence upon the right to eat what one pleased could well be the means of destroying another. This could be done by two ways. The weak brother might be driven completely from the fellowship and thus be lost, or he might be emboldened to eat meat in tribute to idols and thus be condemned for idolatry. So the apostle writes, "If your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are not walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died." When personal liberty and love for others reach a conflict or crisis, there is but one answer possible to a child of God, denial of self for the welfare of others.

2. Personal conviction with reference to a thing affects our responsibility in regard to that thing. "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for any one who thinks that it is unclean." What we think about a thing regulates what it is to us personally. This does not require that we conclude that the Lord Jesus had given Paul specific

instructions pertaining to meats and kindred matters. He knew from the tenor and nature of the kingdom of the Messiah that it was not concerned about ceremonial distinction is between various types of food. Under the Mosaic economy an animal had to possess certain arbitrary marks or habits to be considered worthy of human consumption, and a differentiation was made between the eating habits of the chosen ones and other nations. The eating of certain things was a part of the system of holiness.

Under the new covenant such distinctions have been abolished. "Nothing is unclean in itself." Christians are free to eat what they please. This does not mean that they may not have a preference for certain kinds of food, or that they are obligated to eat every kind of meat. Such a meaning would violate the very thing under discussion which is personal liberty. It would be as much of an abridgement of freedom to force one to eat something he did not want as to compel him to abstain from something he wanted to eat. "Unclean" is used in the ceremonial sense as under the Mosaic dispensation. Certain animals were unclean to the Jews because of legal declaration, not because of the nature of the animal or its flesh.

But the great lesson to be derived here lies in the fact that if one esteems a thing to be unclean it is unclean to him. It may not be unclean to others or to God, but it is unclean to the one whose heart so regards it. Conscience is not a guide but an arbiter. It is a restraining influence intended to keep us in the path which reason tells us is right. Our reasoning may be wrong, but if so, it must be altered by additional investigation of facts and data. We are not at liberty to bend our conscience and violate it against conviction. To do so will weaken it until it is useless as a safeguard. Even if a thing is right in itself, it is wrong for one to do it against his conscience. It becomes a sin to the one who so acts.

3. "So do not let what is good to you be spoken of as evil." This places an additional restraint upon the exercise of personal liberty. A thing which is harmless in itself and which appears good to one may be the means of creating confusion, strife and every evil work if persisted in without regard for the attitude of others. No Christian will insist upon doing that which is harmful, offensive or obnoxious to his brethren. His first thought is not for his personal indulgence or gratification but for the majestic cause to which he has been called. He will not deliberately and maliciously hurt that cause merely for his own satisfaction.

When one engages in a course of conduct which provokes undue criticism from others, and causes his brethren to speak out in denunciation, frequently railing and untimely controversy results. This leads to strife and factionalism with the result that the unconverted world reproaches the religion of the Messiah. How often in the past it has been said by unbelievers that "the congregation of Christians spends its energy in fighting and bickering and makes a sham out of its plea for peace." Often such conditions are the results of the stubborn insistence of some implacable person who insists upon doing what he pleases in flagrant disregard for others.

If all Christians had recognized the import and importance of this rule in the past, the pathway of religion would not be strewn with the wreckage of one time noble efforts. In reference to matters of indifference, we may be conscious of the rightness of our views, but we should be willing to surrender them for the common good and to avoid unnecessary recrimination and reproach.

4. “It is right not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother stumble.” This rendering in the Revised Standard Version is interesting indeed. It presents the matter from a positive rather than a negative standpoint. The apostle does not say “It is *not right* to eat meat or drink wine.” Instead, he says, “It is *right not* to do so.” There is nothing wrong in itself with eating meat, drinking wine, or with many other things. They are questions of privilege. But “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). It is not to the glory of God to give needless offense and by such means to cause men to be lost. “Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved” (1 Cor. 10:32, 33). We are not, for the sake of food, to destroy the work of God.

5. “Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God.” The last two verses of Romans 14 are often wrested from their place and meaning by shallow reasoners. The word “faith” in these verses has to do with one’s opinion and personal conviction in such matters of indifference as God has introduced in the chapter. It is a private opinion as to keeping of days, eating of meats, drinking wine, etc. Such opinions are to be cherished as personal and private. They are not to be brought forward and agitated among the saints to the disruption of fellowship or destruction of those who differ.

In the primitive congregations of saints one might eat meat at home and do so without harm, but to bring it to the love feast of the congregation would be to arouse strife and contention. Opinions, or beliefs, on these matters, are to be held to one’s self before God. God knows if one eats with a clear conscience. Eating meat does not commend one to God, nor does abstaining from it do so. It is a matter of indifference with God. Therefore, eating meat will not offend God. He is not concerned with the eating but with the conscience. But the weak brother is not concerned with the conscience but with the eating, so he will be offended. Therefore, one might eat when only God’s eye beholds who could not so indulge under the inspection of others.

“Happy is he who has no reason to judge himself for what he approves.” We judge ourselves by our consciences either accusing or excusing our conduct. That man is indeed happy whose conscience does not censure him for any course of action. Many there are who engage in practices which are condemned by their own consciences. They entertain honest doubts about the advisability of a certain habit or pursuit, but they persist in it regardless of consequences. They know there could be nothing wrong about abstaining from such things but they continue to do them, outraging their inner selves. Such persons are not happy here and will not be happy in the world to come. If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything (1 John 3:20).

“And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” Faith, in this instance, is the opposite of doubt. It refers to a personal conviction that a thing is right or wrong. If a man eats meat while doubting that it is right to do so, it becomes wrong to him. It is not the meat that is a sin, nor is it the act of eating meat that is a sin. If such were the case it would be a sin for any person to partake of it. But the sin is in the violation of conscience. It is not the deed, but the doer, that is condemned. It is obvious that in the category of things discussed in this chapter, a thing may be a sin for one person which would not be a sin for another. That category covers things that are not wrong in and of themselves.

There is nothing about a day, or the esteeming of certain days above others, which is wrong. There is nothing about meat which is wrong or sinful. Each man is to be fully convinced in his own mind regarding such things, and he may act according to his personal conscience.

It is further obvious that a thing may be a sin for one to do in one part of his Christian career which would be perfectly harmless and legitimate in another part of that career. A man might have a conscientious scruple against a certain thing when he first obeys the gospel, but by study and meditation, he may become convinced that it is legitimate. If he engaged in it at the time his conscience condemned him it would be a sin, but when through education he becomes more discerning, he could do it without sinning. The expression "For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" simply means that anything which one does in violation of his conscience is a sin to him.

The thing of importance to be remembered in this dissertation is the statement "For the kingdom of God does not mean food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit; he who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men." There is ever a tendency to make the kingdom of God degenerate into mere materialistic discussions. There are always those who would make it an arena of controversy over matters of indifference. The pet fads and foibles are taught and discoursed upon until the conclusion might be reached that the whole purpose of heaven was culminated by certain dietary ideas and ideals.

The congregation of God in many places is a laughingstock. The citizens of the kingdom have spent their time verbally berating each other over extreme views of one kind and another until serious men and women have become disgusted with their cavilling and bickering, and the church itself is disgraced by its fighting and quarreling. We need to catch a vision of the human dignity, magnanimity of soul, breadth of purpose, and glory of being which should characterize those who are followers of Christ. Then we can help to fulfill on earth the will of God as it is done in heaven.

Chapter 14

The Destiny of the Kingdom

The future of the kingdom of the Messiah as it relates to this earth has been the subject of debate and speculation for many centuries. Nothing seems to intrigue the mind of man more than the fate of the universe of which he is a part. Seeking to peer inside the veil of the future, he tries to determine the time and manner of the coming of the Lord, and varied theories have been constructed around certain interpretations of the words of the Holy Spirit. One should approach any such topic with humility and reverence. It is not our purpose to become dogmatic with reference to unfulfilled prophecy, yet we deem it unfair to the reader of such a treatise to conclude without expressing those views which have crystallized through study of the living oracles.

It is not our intention to examine exhaustively any of the multitude of theories. We will discuss three which we deem of special significance, the skeptical, pre-millennial and post-millennial viewpoints. Each of these can be divided into many branches, resulting from the diverse schools of thought which have advocated them. We are primarily concerned by the fact that our Lord is coming again, we are content to await that majestic event in God's own time and way. Yet we deem it not unwise to examine some of the statements which have a direct bearing on the topic.

The word of God plainly predicted that in the last days there would come blatant skeptics who would deny the coming of the Lord. The fact that there are many who do so is but one more attestation to the truthfulness of the Bible. The apostle Peter wrote, "First of all you must understand this, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions and saying, 'Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation'" (2 Peter 3:3, 4). It is interesting to note the motivation for their denial of the coming of the Lord, as well as the foundation for their false reasoning.

Those who scoff at the idea of the Lord's return are "following their own passions." The return of the Lord is to be for judgment. Jude repeats the words of the patriarch Enoch, "Behold the Lord came with his holy myriads, to execute judgment on all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness which they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him." He applies this directly to scoffers of the last time "following their own ungodly passions" (verse 18).

The apostle Paul wrote, "The Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (2 Thess. 1:7-9). With such a frightful destiny in store for them, profligates could find no pleasure in their carnal practices, so to stifle the voice of conscience they deny the coming of the Lord. Their scoffing words constitute "wishful thinking."

The basis of their contention is that there will be no disruption of the present order because there has never been one. The uniformity of the past assures the continuity of the future. Jesus cannot come, for if he did, this would upset the world, and the world has never suffered such an upheaval. "All things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation." The postulate is that since God has never called the whole world into account, we have no reason to conclude that he ever will. There are two ways to handle such false reasoning, but the easiest is to show that the affirmation is contrary to fact. If there can be recalled one deviation from the normal course of events, and if it can be shown to have affected the universe of mankind, then another such event could transpire.

This is the plan of attack followed by the inspired writer. "They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago, and an earth formed out of water and by means of water, through which the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men." The same word which created the world can destroy it, and that it has the power to do so was once demonstrated.

This devastating argument can only be met by a denial of the deluge, and some skeptics claim that the Bible account is but Jewish folklore and fable, and cannot be corroborated. These only demonstrate the truth of the scriptural accusation that "they deliberately ignore facts," for every nation of antiquity has its tradition of the flood. George Smith, of the British Museum, in 1872, discovered accounts of the flood among the clay tablets sent from the library of Assurbanipal in Nineveh. These were copied from inscriptions made shortly after the flood, and certain of these have since been found. In these Babylonian accounts which credit the deluge to the gods, it is said that sin against the gods was responsible. A ship smeared inside and out with bitumen, which contained seed of life of every kind, and which finally came to rest on a mountain, is mentioned.

So numerous are the references to the deluge, that one writer of note, says, "The mythologies and histories of the ancient nations are full of remembrance of it. It is described in the stories of the Greeks and sung in the verses of the Latins. Its memory is enshrined in the sacred books of the Parsee, the Brahmin, and the Mohammedan, and has been assigned a place in the Legend of the Scandinavian, and the mythic records of the Chinaman. Its symbols are found stamped on the coins of ancient Greece, may be traced amid the hoary hieroglyphics of Egypt, recognized in the sculptured caves of Hindostan, and detected in the pictured writings of Mexico. In Cuba and Tahiti, on the banks of the Orinoco, on the pampas of Brazil, in the mountains of Peru, and in the islands of the Pacific, the traveler has met with traces or traditions of the flood, the ark, and the rescue of the favored few."

Even more conclusive is the testimony of the man who "found the flood." This happened at Ur, about 120 miles north of Basra, near the Persian Gulf. Excavations by British and American archeologists began in earnest at this site in 1923, and opened up a real treasure trove of antiquity. Within six years, by dint of careful work, a great Sumerian city had been exposed and the explorers had opened up sepulchers of the kings with all of the wealth of objects interred with the bones of these departed monarchs. The leader of the British party was Sir Leonard Woolley, a painstaking and careful scientist. In 1929, the work was about completed, but the

British leader, fearful that something of value would be overlooked, had his native workers again lowered into the lowest tomb to begin sinking a shaft. As the shaft penetrated downward, every bucket of debris which was hauled out contained potsherds and artifacts. Then, one day, the workmen sent word that they were on ground level.

The British scientist was lowered into the shaft. It was apparent that the report was correct and they were upon solid ground. The leader began to probe and bring up samples, and to his amazement he found that he was standing upon pure clay, and such clay as could only be deposited by receding waters. A check was made and it was determined that this was above the river level so it could not have been deposited by that stream. A group of his colleagues were summoned to verify his findings, and the agreement was unanimous that it was a sedimentary deposit, but no one could account for it.

A decision was made to see if they could go through it, so the diggers were again put to work. The spades were shoved deeper and deeper and continued to bring up clay. Finally a depth of ten feet had been reached, when suddenly the clay ended, and the baskets of earth were again found filled with the rubble and debris which indicated human habitation. As the scientists sifted the fragments of pottery they sought for the smallest trace of metal, but found not one piece. The only weapon revealed was of chipped flint. The great truth broke like a beam of light.

In the distant past there had been a great inundation. It had brought the residence of man to a conclusion. When the waters receded from their turbulence, a great deposit of alluvial clay had blanketed the ruins of prior existence. When the full import of this discovery registered with the archeologists a telegraphic message flashed to Great Britain. It read simply "We have found the Flood." Sir Leonard wrote, "About sixteen feet below a brick pavement which we could with reasonable certainty date about 2700 B.C. we were among the ruins of that Ur which had existed before the flood." The spade had covered up the argument of the skeptics as it uncovered the truth of the Biblical account.

Generally speaking, the believers in the return of the Lord are divided into two classes. These are commonly designated pre-millenarian and post-millenarian. The word "millennium" is a combined form of the Latin *mille*, a thousand, plus *annus*, a year. It means a thousand years, and is specifically used with reference to the thousand years mentioned in Revelation 20. In a broad sense, the pre-millenarian argues that Jesus will return, resurrect the righteous dead, and reign a thousand years upon the earth in a period of universal happiness and freedom from sin. At the close of that period the wicked dead will be raised and destroyed. This is purportedly a literalistic view of Revelation 20, although investigation will show that it is not necessarily so. The post-millenarian contends that the return of the Christ will be after the thousand years.

These two irreconcilable views have been the means of dividing virtually the whole of modern Christendom, although the conflict has not been confined to these latter days. In ecclesiastical history the term "Chiliasm" is used to designate the pre-millenarian view. It is from the Greek *chilioi*, a thousand. Papias is generally mentioned as the first Christian writer to maintain the doctrine. He lived in the middle of the second century and was a bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia. However, there were some who preceded him who clung to the view, and we should mention one in particular.

Cerinthus, who resided at Ephesus, while the apostle John lived there, was a Jew, who was said to have studied in Alexandria. He is credited with first teaching the errors which developed into the system of Gnosticism. This heresy eventually wreaked havoc upon Christendom. It is in refutation of the teachings of the sect that John wrote his first and second letters. In conjunction with the Gnostic theory, Cerinthus taught that as a completion of God's creative work, after the world had lasted six thousand years, there would be a universal Sabbath, the millennium, in which a new order would prevail upon the earth. The righteous, raised from the dead, would enjoy unspeakable delights and indescribable pleasures in Palestine, with their victorious King, the Messiah.

It is noteworthy that Cerinthus was a Jew, and that he is sometimes classed with the Ebionites. When Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70, the last hope of retaining Christianity within the fold of Judaism was dashed. But there were still many who continued to regard the law of Moses and circumcision as of perpetual and universal obligation. The name "Nazarenes" which had been formerly applied in contempt to all believers, was now limited to the Judaizing sect and as time passed on many of these came eventually to deny the divinity of Jesus and to hate Paul, whom they regarded as an apostate.

The millenarian views of Cerinthus may have been influenced greatly by the Jewish expectations at the time that Jesus came. There is no question but that the Palestinian Jews had contrived a splendid mental picture out of the prophecies, the comments and disputes of the sages, and the infiltration of Oriental imagery. This vision included the appearance of the Messiah, the simultaneous regeneration of all things, the resurrection of the ancient worthies and saints, and the reign of the Messiah upon earth. They confidently expected a branch of Jesse to come and regain Zion, and establish it as the capital of a universal sway. He was to stand in the holy temple on Mount Moriah and summon to his side the scattered Jews of the earth to commune with the fathers, and to "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom."

The first resurrection was to be the portion of the seed of Abraham exclusively. In the golden age it ushered in, all Israelites would participate except those who denied the resurrection of the dead, and that the law came from heaven, and the Epicureans (Mischna, Tract. Sanh. c. 11, 12). The righteous dead were to be called from Paradise, the realm of the departed spirits, and in glorified bodies were to reign for a thousand years of bliss upon a recreated and renovated earth. It was the prevalence of this theory which helped influence the Palestinian Jews to reject Jesus of Nazareth. His manner of coming was so utterly in contrast with their expectation that they preferred to sacrifice him rather than to relinquish their preconceived notion. Nor did this view disappear with his ascension, for many of his Jewish followers devoutly expected his imminent return in conformity with the vision they had entertained. Even when Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus, and the temple razed, the millenarian aspect lingered on. It was revived in times of persecution and catastrophe, with those who fostered it always imagining their personal exaltation to a chosen position in an earthly regime of the Messiah. Those who regard the millennium as of strictly Christian origin are mistaken, and the Article (forty-first) of the Church of England, in the reign of Edward the Sixth, is no doubt correct in designating it as a fable "of Jewish dotage."

In the second century, in addition to Papias, there were other writers of distinction who adhered to the millenarian idea. Among them was Justin Martyr. He writes, however, that there were many who did not agree with the view he held. It was not allowed to become a source of division, and by the beginning of the third century the theory was beginning to wane. Its decline was hastened, no doubt, by the fact that it became a tenet of the Montanists. About 170 A.D. Montanus, a former priest of Cybele, who had recently been converted to Christianity, announced that he was the Paraclete (Comforter) whom Jesus had promised to send. He sought to reproduce the mysticism and raptures which were a part of the pagan worship of Cybele.

Two women, Priscilla and Maximilla, who claimed to have rapturous trances, attached themselves to Montanus and travelled with him. He regarded them as oracles. The favorite theme of their visions was the approaching end of all things. No doubt the persecutions of the day motivated them to predict the imminent coming of the millennium, and they confidently prophesied that the New Jerusalem was soon coming down at Pepuza. Priscilla claimed to have seen the Lord Jesus in the form of a woman with shining raiment, and alleged that he revealed to her his speedy return, the resurrection of his saints, and the final triumph over his enemies. The extremism of the Montanists gradually separated them from the church, and there was a strong reaction to their teachings.

The next controversy over millenarianism occurred in Egypt in the city of Alexandria. An Egyptian bishop, Nepos, published a work entitled "A Confutation of the Allegorists." In this he defended the literal interpretation of the Scriptures, and from his premises, deduced the doctrine of a millennium. After his death, this work aroused a great interest, and gained many adherents in Egypt. Coracion became the acknowledged leader of the doctrine. Dionysius, who was bishop in Alexandria, summoned a number of the clergy who were interested in the question. They convened in A.D. 262, and their discussion lasted three days. At the end of this time, Coracion acknowledged that he was convinced of his error and pledged himself to abstain from advocacy of the doctrine during his lifetime. Dionysius summed up his conclusions on the matter in two books, "Upon the Promises" and from this time on few writers of note defended the doctrine until after the rise of the Protestant sects following the Reformation.

The opinion that there will be two future personal advents of the Christ, one before and another after the thousand years in which Satan is confined, is based upon a literal interpretation of Revelation 20. That opinion holds that Jesus will come first to resurrect the righteous dead and inaugurate a universal sway of righteousness over the earth, during which the saints will reign with him in the flesh and share his triumph. Later – a thousand years later – he will come to terminate the present order in a universal judgment. To this interpretation there are some very grave and serious objections which cannot be lightly esteemed by the lover of truth.

The millenarian view must be fully set forth in this one chapter of Revelation, or it is not contained in God's revelation at all, for nowhere else is mention made of the thousand year reign, or of the first and second resurrection, as set forth here. Here are some factors of importance to consider.

1. The book of Revelation is a book of signs and symbols as all must admit. The passage relied upon is an obscure one in a book composed of highly figurative language. It is dangerous to construct a system of doctrine dependent upon such a foundation.
2. While insisting upon a literal interpretation of this passage, millenarians do not hesitate to interpret as figurative and symbolic other portions of the book, and even of the same chapter.
3. There are some things definitely lacking in the passage which are essential to the maintenance of the theory. In the first place, the second coming of Christ is not mentioned. There is nothing said about the resurrection of bodies. The writer saw “souls” and not bodies at all. There is no mention of Christ returning to earth, nor is there anything said about a reign on earth. All of these are ingredients of the millenarian view, and it cannot be constructed without them, yet not a one of them is found in the passage which is the foundation of the system.
4. In spite of the fact that many references are made to the resurrection elsewhere, and that this subject was one of primary interest to the primitive saints, the idea of two literal resurrections, one of the righteous and another of the wicked, with a thousand year interval between, is not mentioned elsewhere, and in this case occurs couched in symbolism and imagery.
5. The view that the saints will be raised physically and will reign on the earth in the flesh, is inconsistent with the uniform teaching of the sacred writings as to the nature of the resurrection body.
 - a. In reply to the questions, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” the inspired writer says, “What you sow is not the body which is to be” (1 Cor. 15:37).
 - b. It is specifically stated that “It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15:44).
 - c. “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (1 Cor. 15:50). In view of this, if the righteous dead are raised in the flesh they will be debarred from the kingdom.
 - d. “For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:53). Flesh and blood are neither imperishable nor immortal, for “all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers ...” (1 Pet. 1:24).
6. The interpretation under consideration contradicts the plain teaching elsewhere that the righteous and wicked dead will be raised and judged together at the second coming of Jesus.
 - a. Jesus said, “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28, 29). This is a universal resurrection. It includes all that are in the tombs. The “all” is made up of two classes, “those who have done good” and “those who have done evil.” They are to be raised the same hour and not a millennium apart.

b. Jesus said, “This is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40). This presents positive proof that the righteous will be raised at the final day, but if there is a thousand years following, it cannot be the last day. It will not help to say that “time” will cease to be counted when Jesus comes to begin a pre-millennial reign, for that would negate the idea of a literal thousand years. A literal year is composed of days.

c. The wicked will be judged on the same day the righteous are raised. “He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day” (John 12:48).

d. On the same day that Jesus comes to be glorified in his saints, he will inflict vengeance on the wicked. “When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints” (2 Thess. 1:7-10). Notice the expression “when he comes on that day.” This seems to indicate but one coming with a dual purpose to be accomplished “on that day” of his coming.

e. The types which Jesus uses from the old covenant scriptures to illustrate his coming indicate the salvation of the good and the punishment of the evil simultaneously.

One of these concerns Noah and the wicked antediluvians. “They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, *until the day when Noah entered the ark*, and the flood came and destroyed them all” (Luke 17:27). “In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, *on that day* all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened *On the very same day* Noah ... entered the ark” (Gen. 7:11-13).

The other type is that of Lot and the wicked dwellers of Sodom. “*On the day* when Lot went out from Sodom fire and brimstone rained from heaven and destroyed them all.” The next verse says, “So will it be *on the day* when the Son of man is revealed” (Luke 17:29, 30).

In view of all these matters we cannot agree with the premillennial theory as so widely taught in these days. However, we must face up to Revelation 20, and if the millenarian view is incorrect we should be able to show that it does not correctly explain the chapter. Moreover, we should be able to give a logical explanation thereof. This we shall attempt in our next chapter.

Chapter 15

The Thousand Year Reign

The vision of the seer of Patmos, as described in Revelation 20, logically falls into three parts: the binding of Satan, the throne scene of the martyrs, and the loosing of Satan with the resultant consequences. With reference to the first of these, John describes an angel descending from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. The angel seized him who is called the dragon, the ancient serpent, the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the pit, shut it and sealed it, so its occupant could deceive the nations no more until the expiration of the thousand years. After that he would be freed for a brief period.

In general, we can determine the meaning of this vision. The heavenly messenger held the key to the abyss. A key is a symbol of authority, particularly the authority to open and close (Rev. 3:7). A chain or fetter is a symbol of restraint, or restrictive influence. One who is bound is dispossessed of his freedom to move about as before. The seizing of the dragon is indicative of the exercise of heavenly power over him to curtail his activities. The period in which he was to be thus kept under restraint is specified as a thousand years. It is specifically stated that the purpose of chaining him was to keep him from “deceiving the nations.” This indicates that prior to this time he had worked deception over the nations of the earth, but now they would be relatively free from such deception.

With the chaining of Satan, the apostle saw the throne scene. It would appear that this was related to the binding of the deceiver of nations, and grew out of the circumstance. As Satan was deprived of his power, there were some who were elevated. They were enthroned as he was dethroned. John writes, “*Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or in their hands. They came to life again, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life again until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years.*”

This is the only place in the entire word of God where the expression “the first resurrection” occurs. If the doctrine of the millenarians is to be found anywhere, it must be found here. If it is not taught, and clearly taught, in this instance, then it is not taught at all in the revelation of God. In our approach to the problem we must determine who sat upon the thrones, for it was these who took part in the first resurrection. Here the record is plain. John saw *the souls of those* who were beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and the word of God. These were the martyrs who suffered death in behalf of Jesus.

John did not see their bodies. The bodies were decapitated. He saw their souls. We are aware that the objection is made that the word “soul” is sometimes used as equivalent to man, and meaning the whole person. “Eight souls were saved by water.” “There were added unto them

about three thousand souls.” “Joseph called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.” In each of these the word refers to persons. But while this is so, the expression, “*the souls of* those who had been beheaded” cannot refer to the entire persons, but must refer to the souls in contrast to, and out of, their bodies. While the term *soul* used alone may, and does, signify a person, the term *soul of* cannot be made to do so by any law of interpretation.

Many interpreters overlook the fact that John had previously seen many of these same souls, but under quite different circumstances. In chapter 6:9-11, he says, “I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne; they cried out with a loud voice, ‘O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?’ Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.”

In this instance the apostle saw the souls of those who had been slain for their testimony. These souls cry out for vindication of their cause and for God’s vengeance upon those who had shed their blood. They were each given a white robe as a symbol of their acceptance with God, to reassure them, and they were told to rest a little longer. Vindication or judgment would be granted to them, but first it was requisite that another period of persecution come during which their number *be made complete* by the slaying of another contingent of martyrs. It is not difficult to see that there are two eras of martyrdom.

The implication is that when the first group had died for the faith, there was a lull in persecution and a partial victory was achieved which led the martyred ones to conclude that the cause for which they had shed their blood was ready for final vindication. But they were informed that the victory was not yet complete and another series of persecutions would be required before their number could be made complete. The revelation would not be complete without depicting the final triumph of these slain martyrs. Accordingly, when we arrive at chapter 20 we see the great enemy bound, and the martyred saints upon thrones. Their number has been completed and now judgment (*krima*, the vindication of one’s right) has been granted unto them.

It remains for us to enquire if there were any circumstances in the treatment of the primitive Christians which accord with these facts. The careful student of history will immediately recognize that there are. Be it remembered that Daniel saw four wild beasts, representative of as many successive world powers which were to act as persecuting agencies against God’s people. The first three of these are described in the old covenant scriptures, but it was under the fourth that the kingdom of heaven was to be set up. Therefore, it remained for the new covenant scriptures to complete the canon of revelation and to detail the struggle of spiritual Israel under the last great world power. It was to complete this picture that John was granted the vision on Patmos.

The last of the four world powers was Rome, and it was with this nation that Christianity came to grips. The gospel of the Messiah was in direct opposition to the “emperor worship” which was the rallying ground of paganism. Rome soon recognized that she was up against an opponent such as she had never before met. She fought back with all that she had. She used the sword,

rack, stake, strangling cord and banishment. The blood of thousands of saints flowed like rivers from the days of Nero to Diocletian. But it was a losing battle, and when Diocletian abdicated the throne in 305, due to his wretched health and desire for rural retirement, and Constantius Chlorus died a year later, the latter nominated his son, Constantine, as successor, and this was ratified by the army. Constantine, being favorable to Christianity, issued an edict of toleration, and the pagan persecutions were over.

When Roman imperialism was finally ended before the onrushing Teutonic hordes, it appeared that the people of God had gained the victory over the fourth beast. At such a time the souls of the beheaded ones might be expected to cry out with a loud voice for vindication and triumph. But they did not know that the last world empire would manifest itself in two parts. "One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth followed the beast with wonder" (Rev. 13:3). "It was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all who dwell on earth shall worship it, every one whose name has not been written before the foundations of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain."

The ferocity of Pagan Rome was manifest anew and increased under the sway of Papal Rome. The infidel historian, Gibbon, estimates the number of Christians slain by Pagan Rome as less than 100,000, but the number of Protestants slain in the Netherlands in five years (1550-55) by the Roman Catholic Emperor Charles V was in excess of that figure. The sword of Pagan Rome gleamed again in the hands of Papal delegates, and once more the blood of witnesses flowed in a stream. The souls under the altar who had rested a little while were now joined by their fellow servants and brethren until the number was complete of those "who were to be killed as they themselves had been."

But the days of the universal sway of Papal Rome were also numbered. In 1324 was born John Wycliffe, the "morning star of the Reformation." He developed into a man of intense conviction who was possessed of a genial and humble spirit, and who lived a pure but austere life. He was described as "the unsparing assailant of abuses, the boldest and most indefatigable of controversialists, the first reformer who dared, when deserted and alone, to question and deny the creed of the Christendom around him, to break through the tradition of the past, and, with his last breath, to assert the freedom of religious thought against the dogmas of the papacy." Wycliffe kindled a fire which was never extinguished. His most important task was the translation of the Bible into English from the Latin Vulgate, a work which he completed in 1384, the year of his death. His enemies soon admitted that "laymen and even women know more of the Scriptures than the best educated of the clergy."

A quotation from J. J. Blunt is in order at this time. "An eager appetite for scriptural knowledge was excited among the people, which they would make any sacrifice and risk any danger to gratify. Entire copies of the Bible, when they could only be multiplied by the use of amanuenses, were too costly to be within reach of very many readers; but those who could not procure 'the volume of the book' would give a load of hay for a few favorite chapters, and many such scraps were consumed upon the persons of the martyrs at the stake. They would hide the forbidden treasure under the floors of their houses, and put their lives in peril rather than forego the book they desired; they would sit up at night, sometimes all night long, their doors being shut

for fear of surprise, reading or hearing others read the word of God; they would bury themselves in the woods, and there converse with it in solitude; they would tend their herds in the fields, and still steal an hour for drinking in the good tidings of great joy.”

The free circulation of God’s truth was the chain which bound Satan. When the Bible was chained to the pulpits, Satan was free; when the Bible was free, Satan was chained. The Reformation broke the power of Papal dominion and set the captives free from Babylon’s long enslavement. Now those who had died for the freedom of truth lived again in the exaltation and triumph over the forces that had killed them. This was not a resurrection of bodies, but of a cause, and those who died for it lived once more in the spirits of free men who were willing to die. But will this interpretation meet the demands of logic and fairness? Let us see!

The book of Revelation is presented in four divisions. The first consists of a vision of the Christ, a detailed description of his appearance, and his commission to John to write. This occupies the first chapter of the narrative. The second consists of letters addressed to the seven messengers from the congregations of Asia Minor, and these are contained in chapters 2 and 3. The third and fourth divisions each picture history from apostolic days until the culmination of world events at the final judgment. The third division depicts the fate of the Roman Empire, the last of the four great powers of the earth. It opens with a vision of the throne scene in heaven (chapter 4:1) and closes with the sound of the seventh and last trumpet, the judgment of the dead, the rewarding of the saints, and the destruction of the destroyers of the earth (11:15-18). If the book concluded at that point world history would be complete.

However, the fourth division covers the same ground, but with a different view in mind. The third division is dedicated to showing the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, last of the four great world monarchies; but the last half of the book is given over to the rise and triumph of the kingdom of the Messiah. Chapter 20 is near the close of that account. It is not an isolated record of a special purpose to set up a kingdom on earth, but is directly connected with the history of a kingdom set up in the days of John (1:6; 5:10).

The final series of visions begins in chapter 11:19 with a view into heaven, as the preceding series began. In 12:1 John mentions seeing a woman, representative of the church. She is clothed with the sun, symbolic of the light of the gospel; standing over the moon, symbolic of the old covenant as an inferior revelation; having a crown of twelve stars, the chosen envoys or apostles. The woman is in the advanced stages of pregnancy, ready to be delivered. Before her stood a great red dragon (bloody persecuting power) ready to devour her child at birth. She brought forth a male child who was caught up unto God and his throne. The woman fled into the wilderness where she was pursued by the dragon. She was given two wings of a great eagle to enable her to escape, but the dragon ejected water from his mouth like a river in an attempt to overwhelm her. When the earth opened and engulfed the flood, the dragon was enraged against the woman and went to make war on the rest of her offspring who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus.

The dragon is identified as the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world (12:9). This is the same being that is bound with the chain in 20:1-4 that he should deceive the nations no more. It is not to be understood that Satan attacked the woman in

person. The dragon with seven heads and ten horns is symbolic of Rome, the last of the world empires. The key to the entire series is found in the expression, “The dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war with the remnant of her offspring.” The woman’s offspring are identified as those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus. Thus we have a history of war between two great opposing forces – the church and the party of the dragon. One is Christian, the other is anti-Christian. The church is represented by faithful witnesses who stand for truth through many centuries. The witnesses are not the same persons throughout the centuries, but they belong to the same institution, and form the same party, and therefore, they may be said to be cast down or lifted up, falling or rising, as the party is activated or quiescent, overthrown or in the ascendancy.

The offspring of the woman in conflict with the forces of the dragon pass through various conditions in the prolonged war. Thus we come to chapter 19, and John says, “I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who sits upon the horse and against his army” (verse 19). This is the dragon-party arrayed for a decisive struggle against the forces of the Christ. The result is that the beast and false prophet were captured and thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with brimstone. “And *the rest* were slain by the sword of him who sits upon the horse, the sword that issues from his mouth” (19:21). Notice that the effective instrument is the sword of the Spirit, that is, the word of God. With it, the forces of the dragon-party are routed and decimated.

When the word of God overcomes the rest of the dragon-party, John immediately says, “*Then* I saw an angel coming down from heaven ... and he seized the dragon ... and bound him for a thousand years ... that he should deceive the nations no more.” With the dragon under chains to keep him from deceiving the nations of earth, the truth-party was now in possession of the field, and John saw the souls of those who died for the sake of truth, on thrones. So long had truth been obscured by the darkness of error that it was actually like a resurrection from the dead for it to once more have the ascendancy. When the dragon had the nations deceived, the word of God chained to the pulpits, and the church was in the wilderness, the faithful were being slaughtered and truth was hidden. Now, with the enemy of souls imprisoned, and the word of God free, the truth-party is on thrones and victory is apparent. Those who died for the cause of the Christ live again as truth survives and triumphs upon earth in the persons of their successors. This is the first resurrection, the vindication of the cause of truth for which thousands were beheaded.

“The rest of the dead did not come to life again until the thousand years were finished.” Who are these? Please observe that “when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth.” This indicates a resurrection of the dragon-party. While truth is free, universal deception is not likely, but the day will come when Satan is loosed. The dragon-party will then be in power for a little season which will culminate in the final struggle of truth against error, called the battle of Har-Megiddo (Armageddon). The first resurrection is the triumph of the party of truth when the martyrs live again in the persons of those who espouse it; the next resurrection is the temporary triumph of the forces of error and apostasy in the persons of those who revive deception and fraud with its persecuting tendencies. It is interesting to note that the word “rest” in “the *rest* of the dead” (20:5) is the same as in “the *rest* were slain by the sword of him who sits upon the house” (19:21).

Is this idea of a figurative or symbolic resurrection a forced one in the chapter? Does it wreak havoc with the context, either remote or adjacent? On the contrary. This interpretation does no injury to the text. It coincides with the remainder of the book and is maintained by the facts of history. The idea of two literal resurrections, one of the righteous, another of the wicked a thousand years later, has to be injected to sustain a theory. It denies other plain texts of scripture. It must supply by supposition essential parts of the theory which are lacking from the revelation of God.

Is there scriptural precedent for interpretation of a rising cause as “a resurrection”? Is it logical to refer to those who have died in behalf of a principle as “living again” in the persons of those who adopt that principle after it has long been buried from sight? In other words, can there be such a thing as a metaphorical resurrection? To this we reply that the word of God abounds in such illustrations. The prophet Isaiah brought comfort to Israel with reference to their captivity by saying, “Thy dead shall live, their bodies shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy!” (26:19). When the nation was in captivity in Babylon, with Jerusalem torn down and the temple destroyed, the people of Israel declared, “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost, we are clean cut off.” But the Lord said, “Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you home again to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people” (Ezek. 37:11-15). This does not mean that God proposed to literally raise from the dead those who died in the siege of Jerusalem, or those who perished in Babylon. But a remnant returned with Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah, rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple, and restored the law. This was a resurrection of national hopes and aspirations from the graves of despondency and despair.

That there is such a thing as a figurative resurrection is plainly evidenced by the writer of the Hebrews (11:17-19): “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your descendants be named.’ He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead, hence, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.”

In Romans 11, the apostle Paul deals at length with the present state of the Jews. He shows that as branches of an olive tree they were broken off because of unbelief in order that the Gentiles might be grafted in. By their trespass salvation came to the Gentiles so as to make Israel jealous. If they do not persist in their unbelief, they will be grafted in again, for God is able to do this. The writer asks, “For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?” (verse 15). Their rejection is equivalent to death, their acceptance to life. Since they are now in a state of rejection, if they return to God’s favor it will be a resurrection from the dead.

For one to come in the same spirit and power as another is as if the original person came. Malachi wrote, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes” (4:5). The Jewish scribes accepted this literally and looked for Elijah to come personally (Matt. 17:10). But Jesus said, “I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they pleased Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist” (Matt. 17:12, 13). In what sense had Elijah come in

the person of John? The answer is found in the words of Gabriel, relative to John. “He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just” (Luke 1:17). Elijah “lived again” when one came in his same spirit and power.

In this same sense the slain martyrs lived again when others arose in their spirit and power, contending boldly for the same truth for which they gave their lives. It was not necessary for the martyrs to return to earth any more than it was necessary for Elijah to do so. Jesus said “Elijah has already come” and in just the same way the slain martyrs lived again. The scribes looked for Elijah and did not recognize him when he came. They did not see him return personally and concluded that he had not come. In the same way modern scribes look for a literal millennium and may not recognize it when it is here. Because they do not see the “bodies” of the martyrs, they conclude their “souls” are not reigning with the Christ.

The reformers who died for the faith seemed to feel what I am now expressing. We offer as an example, John Huss, who was born in Hussenitz, Bohemia, in 1380. After graduation from the university at Prague, he became a bold contender for the truth. He strongly advocated the doctrine of Wycliffe, and was cited to appear before the general council in Constance, Germany, and answer to a charge of heresy. In spite of a document granting safe conduct, issued by the emperor, the pope, on the basis that “Faith is not to be kept with heretics,” had him arrested and thrown into prison upon his arrival in Constance.

When Huss was brought before the council, approximately forty charges and indictments were launched against him. At the close of his trial a resolution was made to burn him as a heretic if he did not recant. He was cast into a filthy prison, and laden with fetters so that he could barely move. At night his hands were chained to a ring in the wall. When four bishops and two lords were sent to urge his recantation upon the basis of the wisdom of the council, Huss said, “Let them send the meanest person of that council, who can convince me by argument from the word of God, and I will submit my judgment to him.” When the chain was put about him at the stake, he said, “My Lord Jesus Christ was bound with a harder chain than this for my sake; why, then, should I be ashamed of this old rusty one?” As the wood for the fire was being piled about his feet, the duke of Bavaria again tried to get him to renounce his teaching. Huss replied, “No, I never preached any doctrine of evil tendency; and what I taught with my lips I now seal with my blood.”

While still in the prison, Huss made a very significant statement, as follows, “I maintain this for certain, that the image of Christ will never be effaced. They have wished to destroy it, but it shall be painted afresh in all hearts by much better preachers than myself. The nation that loves Christ will rejoice at this; and I awaking among the dead, and rising, so to speak, from my grave, shall leap with great joy.” A century later Martin Luther shook the structure of Papacy to its foundations in Germany where Huss was burnt. Pope Adrian, in his letter to the Diet of Nuremberg, wrote: “The heretics Huss and Jerome are *alive again* in the person of Martin Luther.” “They *came to life again*, and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (Rev. 20:4).

We view the millennium as a period of free circulation of the truth throughout the earth. It is not inaugurated by a literal resurrection of any from the grave, but by the rising of a cause which had

been buried beneath a mixture of unholy superstition and tradition. It will continue while freedom of thought and speech are allowed by nations no longer under the deception of an apostate hierarchy. It will be concluded when men no longer cherish these ideals and again allow the forces of evil to throttle them. Then will be resurrected the deceptive spirit which for “a little season” will lead the nations of the earth into captivity.

We visualize the teaching with reference to this chapter as follows:

1. *First resurrection.* The revival of the party of truth and the rescue of the church from “the wilderness” of obscurity, into which it has been driven by fierce opposition of Satan’s forces.
2. *Second resurrection.* The revival of Satan’s party consequent upon his release from the abyss and their return to power at the end of a thousand years. Following the deception of the nations during a little season, the devil will be thrown into the lake of fire, and then will occur the universal resurrection of the just and unjust at the coming of our Lord. This is the prelude for the event described in Revelation 20:11-15, when John saw “the dead, great and small standing before the throne ... and all were judged by what they had done.”

Before we conclude, this chapter we beg permission to append a dissertation which we believe will serve for clarification. We refer to the article by Alexander Campbell on “The Resurrection of the Dead and the Pre-millennial Resurrection.” We ask of our readers a careful study of the exegesis prepared by this profound student of the word of God.

That we may be understood in the contrast between the literal and figurative resurrection, we shall call the former *the resurrection of the body* and the latter *the pre-millennial resurrection*.

Nicodemus was a great literalist when he asked. How can a grown man be born again? As great literalists, perhaps, may they be found who take “*the first resurrection*” of the apocalyptic visions, to be a literal one.

We have a minute account of a figurative resurrection of the house of Israel by the Prophet Ezekiel. The Lord “opened the graves” and raised from the valley of “dry bones” a living and puissant army. That was a figurative resurrection. In baptism we are both buried and raised with Christ – planted in the similitude of his death, to be raised in the similitude of his resurrection.

The restoration of Israel in Romans 11 is by Paul called “life from the dead.” “Since you have been raised with Christ, ascend in your affections,” is a part of the beautiful imagery of Paul to the Colossians. If there were two Elijahs, one literal and one figurative, we need not wonder that there should be two resurrections – a figurative and a literal one. Now in the book of types and symbols the presumption is in favor of a metaphorical resurrection, unless something be connected with it that precludes the possibility or probability of such an appropriation.

When any cause is almost or altogether dead, whether it be good or bad, should it suddenly or unexpectedly revive, we would with Paul think of “life from the dead,” or with John call it a resurrection. Nay, it may yet appear that John has a first and second figurative resurrection – one before and one after his thousand years; for if, after a long prostrate, dispirited, and ineffectual profession of the faith, a great and unprecedented revival should take place, and a prophet should call it a resurrection, might he not, at the end of that great revival or resurrection of the good spirits of the olden time, when an opposite class began to rise into power, think of another resurrection, which in contrast he would call a second resurrection? This John virtually does by calling one of them a first resurrection; and by afterwards speaking of the “*rest of the dead*” living again. Whether I have the true secret of interpreting the Apocalypse (chapter 20) the following antithesis may in part demonstrate. We shall only add that while a literal resurrection has respect to the body dead and buried, a figurative resurrection in the Christian religion will not indicate *bodies*, but *souls* quickened, animated, and elevated by the Spirit of God. And that as in the same treatise John speaks of the death, and of “the spirit of life” re-animating and elevating to heaven the two witnesses, the presumption is that he is as figurative in the 20th as he was in the 14th chapter of his scenetic and symbolic representations.

1. *The resurrection of the body is only a resurrection of the body; whereas the pre-millennial resurrection is a resurrection of souls, and not of bodies.* “I saw the souls of the beheaded,” says John, “and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. This is the first resurrection.” Now of the body Paul says, “It is sown a natural body and raised a spiritual body – it is sown a corruptible body and raised an incorruptible.” The pre-millennial resurrection is a raising of souls.

2. *The resurrection of the body is general – the pre-millennial is special.* “All that are in the graves shall hear his voice and come forth.” “There shall be a resurrection of the just and unjust.” These with other passages of the same significance, apply to the resurrection of the dead, as all admit. But in the account of the pre-millennial resurrection only some will participate in it: for, says John, “I saw the souls of them beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and whosoever had not worshiped the beast nor his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”

3. *The resurrection of the body will be accompanied with the transformation of all the living saints – the pre-millennial will not.*

No one pretends that all the living saints will be changed when the first resurrection (as it is called) transpires; and no one can deny that Paul says both the living saints shall be changed and the dead raised, and both ascend together to meet the Lord in the air.

4. *The participants of the resurrection of the saints will live and reign for ever; while the participants of the pre-millennial resurrection are only to live and reign one thousand years.*

I need not prove that the phrase, “we shall be ever with the Lord,” applies to the subjects of the “*resurrection of the just*,” nor need I prove that the limitation of the life and triumphs of

the saints to one thousand years, precludes the idea of its being an eternal life and endless reign.

5. The resurrection of the body, its transformation and that of the earth, are almost coincident events: while the pre-millennial resurrection is neither accompanied nor succeeded by any such transformations; nay, it is to be succeeded by another resurrection of the souls of the wicked, called "the rest of the dead."

"The rest of the dead lived not again till the thousand years were expired." Now as the phrase, "they lived a thousand years," intimates that in that sense and state they lived no more than a thousand years; so the phrase, "the rest of the dead lived not again till the thousand years were expired," intimates that as soon as the thousand years were expired they lived again.

6. The resurrection of the dead immediately precedes the destruction of the last enemy; but the pre-millennial resurrection leaves not only Satan, but death in the field, to gain new triumphs, more than one thousand years after its consummation.

So far from death, the last enemy, being destroyed before the Millennium – so far from Satan being for ever crushed by the first resurrection, it is intimated that he will be loosed, and that he will deceive the nations and raise a war against the saints even after the thousand years shall have been fulfilled. Can any man reconcile this with Paul's affirmation while expatiating on the resurrection of the dead? "Death the last enemy, shall be destroyed." "Death is swallowed up for ever." "Grave, where now thy victory!"

7. It was before shown that the final conflagration and the new creation of a heaven and earth more congenial with the new bodies of the saints, will immediately accompany the resurrection of the body; while the pre-millennial resurrection indicates a residence on the present earth for a thousand years after it is burned up!

These seven specifications of antitheses between the literal and figurative resurrections, may suffice for the present. There are other points that have occurred to us besides these; but these, we presume, incontrovertibly show that the Lord cannot possibly come in person before the Millennium; and that with me, at present, is all that I wish to establish. The events that do accompany, and those that must, according to the very plainest oracles, precede his personal return, are such as forbid any one well read, or profoundly attentive to the subject, to believe or teach the personal coming of the Lord, or a literal resurrection of any portion of the saints, before the Millennium.

Acknowledgment

The author wishes to acknowledge his special indebtedness to David King, whose writings were of great worth in formulating the convictions expressed in this chapter. This saintly man was born in Clerkenwell, London, on February 28, 1819, and died at Birmingham, June 26, 1894. A part of the inscription on his monument reads: "Rejecting all human creeds, he pleaded that the teaching of Christ and His apostles is the only divinely authorized and all-sufficient way of salvation and basis of Christian union." To the brethren now living in Great Britain, and

especially to our aged brother, Walter Crosthwaite, of Ulverston, Lancashire, we express deep appreciation, for the willingness to share with us the bound copies of Christian periodicals, now out of print, which have been of great service.

Chapter 16

Maranatha

The word “maranatha” means “The Lord is coming.” It is believed by many students that it was a greeting or salutation used by the primitive disciples of the Messiah. When they met on the street, in the market, or in their homes, this was the watchword. The uninitiated pagan who heard would not know its significance, but to the followers of the Messiah it set forth the real foundation of that hope which sustained them in the midst of a heedless society. Perhaps most of the ills attendant upon modern Christendom stem from the loss of that vibrant expectation with which the saints of old comforted each other. To the true believer, the coming of the Lord is a precious promise. The Christocracy is an interim rule to be culminated with the return of the Messiah. The plan of the ages cannot be completed without this capsheaf upon the harvest of the earth.

1. We have the testimony of Jesus that he is coming again. “And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:3).
2. We have the testimony of angels. “And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:10, 11).
3. The apostle Paul wrote. “But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him to subject all things unto himself” (Phil. 3:20, 21).
4. The apostle Peter wrote, “What sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God” (2 Pet. 3:11, 12).
5. James exhorts his readers, “Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord” (5:7).
6. Jude wrote, “But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (20:21).
7. John sealed the revelation of heaven with the words, “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20).

What circumstances will attend the coming of our Lord? What will it be like on that great and notable day for which all other days have been made? Again we must proceed with caution, for the information afforded is prophetic, and it is dangerous to become dogmatic about unfulfilled prophecy. The path of history is strewn with the wrecks of theories which once gained credence

and seemed impossible of failure. But to proceed with caution does not imply refusal to proceed at all, and as we wend our way carefully amidst the truths revealed, we can be safe if we allow them to enlighten our minds and do not try to shape them by our minds. We must recognize the difference between revelation and speculation.

It would seem that a proper place to begin our survey is with the words of Peter, recorded in Acts 3:19-21. “Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old.” The King James Version has “He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you, whom the heavens 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.”

An analysis of this momentous declaration reveals four important truths: (1) The Messiah is now in heaven; (2) He must remain there until the times of the restitution of all things; (3) This includes all that was predicted as related to his work by all of the prophets; (4) As the consummating act of all things God will send him forth. The background of this announcement is important. It was included in a speech made on the portico called Solomon’s, which was a part of the temple in Jerusalem. The address was made to Israelites whose Messianic hopes led them to believe that a great work would be done on earth in the way of restoration, with Jerusalem as its capital city. They held the view that the righteous saints of other ages would be raised and that the faithful would sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in a thousand years of earthly bliss.

This interpretation of the prophecies was dashed by Peter’s words. The Reign of the Messiah would not be on earth but in heaven. The conquest was to be made while he was at the right hand of the Father. His coming from the Father was not to inaugurate but to consummate the Reign. To lend strength to this we cite the words “establishing” and “restitution” which are the English translations by two different versions of the Greek word *apokatastasis*.

This noun form occurs at no other place in the new covenant scriptures. However, there are eight occurrences of the verb from which it is derived. The primary significance of the verb is “to restore.” It has to do with the restoration of a thing to its original state, situation, or condition. In Matthew 12:13 it is used of the curing of a withered, shrunken hand. “And the man stretched it out, and it was restored whole like the other.” In Mark 8:25 it is used of the restoration of normal vision to a blind man. “Again he laid his hands upon his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and saw everything clearly.” This is the term used by the apostles in Acts 1:6 when they asked Jesus, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” Wrapped up in this query was all of the longing engendered by the teaching of the scribes relative to the Messianic Reign upon the throne of David. It remained for one of those who asked the question to announce that the restoration effected by the Messiah would be accomplished in heaven where he must remain until that time.

This affords an opportunity of pointing out the danger and folly of interpreting the words of the apostles of the Messiah by the prophets of the old covenant. This is one of the fatal errors of the

pre-millennial school of thought. The revelation in the new covenant is explained in the light of the old covenant, rather than the reverse. The envoys of the Messiah are the only safe and authorized expounders of the ancient prophecies. He opened their minds to understand the scriptures (Luke 24:45) and those things about which the prophets searched and enquired have now been announced by those who preached the good news through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven (1 Peter 1:10-12). Without access to the new covenant scriptures, the Jewish teachers fell into error in interpreting the words of their prophets and concluded the Reign would be on earth; it is a sad thing that many who have access to the new covenant scriptures fall into the same error. The Jewish scribes did so because they sought to interpret their scriptures before their fulfillment; modern scribes do so because they seek to interpret their scriptures by those previously given.

God will send forth Jesus, but not until the times of restoration of all things. He must remain in heaven until the fulfillment of all the prophets have spoken. The restoration will be accomplished in a heavenly, not an earthly locale. We believe that this is in harmony with the other scriptural references to the Reign. Previously we have referred to the inaugural address of the Father when the Son returned to heaven as a conqueror. The latter was greeted with the invitation, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool” (Psalm 110:1). He was told that his people would offer themselves freely and that he should reign in the midst of his enemies. That this is his present status is evidenced by the writer of the Hebrew epistle. “When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, then to wait until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet” (10:12, 13).

What will transpire when the final victory is won and the goal has been achieved? Paul affirms that as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. Then he adds “But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ” (1 Cor. 15:23). The context shows that he is here dealing solely with the resurrection and glorification of the righteous dead. The resurrection of the wicked is not under consideration. He affirms nothing and denies nothing with reference to them. The expression “those who belong to Christ” is not used in contrast with a group who do not belong to him. It is used as complementary to “first fruits.” The ones who belong to the Christ will be raised at his coming. What follows that coming? This is the crux of the modern controversy. All are agreed that those who belong to the Christ will be raised at his coming, but what follows? Will it be a thousand year reign on earth, followed by the resurrection of another group?

The record is specific. “Then comes the end.” But it is argued that the whole passage says, “Then comes the end when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father.” The view of some is that the end does not come when those who belong to Christ are raised, but when he delivers the kingdom to God. The contention is that a thousand years will elapse between those events, during which the Messiah will resurrect and sit upon the literal throne of David and rule over the whole earth. The word “end” is from *telos*, which signifies termination or finality. The word for “comes” is not in the original at all. For that reason Young’s Literal Translation has: “Afterwards those who are the Christ’s in his presence, then – the end ...” If there was to be a glorification and reign of the saints after their resurrection this would seem to be a logical place to introduce it. The theme of this chapter is the hope inspired by the resurrection. If the marvelous things depicted in the millenarian view were a part of the heritage of the saints this

would be the appropriate place to mention them. But what says the record? “Then, the end.” Regardless of what men may seek to read into the text, these three words seem to bar the way to the elaborate story so freely circulated.

After the resurrection of the saints at the coming of the Christ comes the end “when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one” (1 Cor. 15:24, 28). It would appear that at the time when the theorists declare that the Christ will begin to reign, the inspired writer says he will cease; at the time when they say he will become a monarch, he says that he will become a subject.

It is our conviction that a collation of all the various events which are plainly revealed as occurring at his coming will preclude any great period of time on this earth subsequent thereto. The coming of the Lord is the grand climax of the ages. It is the consummating act of the drama of the world. The divine testimony must be harmonious. Any interpretation which is in conflict with other parts of the sacred revelation must be rejected. What will transpire at the coming of our blessed Lord?

1. *The resurrection of those who belong to the Christ.* “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then *at his coming* those who belong to the Christ” (1 Cor. 15:22, 23). This will be at the last day. “This is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all he has given me, but raise it up *at the last day*” (John 6:39). Now those whom the Father has given to the Christ are those who belong to him. They are the ones who have come to him upon having heard and learned of him. It is by this method the Father draws them to him. “No one can come to me unless the Father which sent me draws him; and I will raise him up *at the last day*” (John 6:44). Those who belong to the Christ are those who believe in him. “For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40). Regardless of what may be inferred from other passages the teaching here is plain. Those who belong to the Christ will be raised at his coming and that resurrection will be upon the last day. There can be no subsequent period of years following the resurrection of the saints, else they would not be raised on the last day. We must not make our interpretation deny the plain teaching of the word of God.

2. *The transformation of the living saints.* The record informs us that there will be some of the faithful alive at the coming of the Lord. But these cannot inherit the kingdom of God in flesh and blood. The nature of the eternal or imperishable state is such that those who participate in it must be in a form adapted to it. In the case of those who are dead, the resurrected form will not be physical or perishable. “What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body.” But those who are still alive must undergo a transformation in order that they may conform to the saints who are raised. This will be instantaneous but it will also be simultaneous with the resurrection. The same trumpet sound which arouses the sleeping ones will signal the transformation of those who are alive.

“We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.” Observe that the trumpet which signals this event is *the last trumpet*. Repeatedly, the trumpet is referred to as the signal for the resurrection of the dead. But the righteous dead will be raised and the righteous living be changed at the sound of the last trumpet. If there are still some asleep after the righteous dead are raised, it is obvious that they will have to be raised without a trumpet. The signal for a resurrection will not be given to them, for no trumpet can be blown after *the last one!*

We are aware of the quibble that is sometimes made that the same trumpet can be sounded more than once, but in reply we point out that it is the sounding of the trumpet in this case which is the last trumpet. The reading is: “At the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised.” Since the Revelation letter is the choice hunting ground of the theorists, we suggest that they take note of the fact that John beheld “the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them” (8:2). As he watched he saw that “the seven angels who had the seven trumpets made ready to blow them” (8:6). The number “seven” was a symbol of completeness or perfection. Since the trumpets announced and ushered in great epochs in the divine plan of the ages, we would expect that the sounding of the seventh, or last, would culminate that plan.

Let us see if this is correct. “Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.’ And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces, and they worshiped God, saying, ‘We give thanks to thee, Lord God almighty, who art and who wast, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but thy wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear thy name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth” (Rev. 11:15-18). The seventh trumpet was the last one. It signaled the completion of the conquest of the Messiah, for the kingdom of the world had been subjugated. It also ushered in the day of God’s wrath, the time of judgment of the dead, the rewarding of the saints, and the destruction of the destroyers. This seems conclusive proof that there can be no period of a thousand years followed by another resurrection after the sounding of “the last trumpet.”

3. *The removal of those who are resurrected and those who are changed from the earth.* The congregation at Thessalonica was troubled in mind relative to those who had died. There is some indication that they contemplated the imminent return of Jesus, and they were concerned as to the fate of those who died in advance of that return. Their fear seems to have been manifested in two particulars. Would those who died before the Messiah returned be brought back to life, and if so, would this occur after the living saints had gone to meet him? In his handling of the situation, the apostle allays both fears. “But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.” That answered the first question and restored hope on behalf of the dead and dying.

“For this we declare unto you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

This language is plain. Those resurrected from the dead, and those who are changed, are not to remain on this earth. They will leave it to meet the Lord. The Lord is not coming to this earth. He will descend from heaven and those who are his will ascend from the earth. Their meeting is not on earth at all. It is in the air. But a question may be asked concerning the expression, “The dead in Christ shall rise first.” This has no reference to the dead in Christ as contrasted with the dead *out of Christ*. The latter are not under consideration by the apostle. He is comforting the saints with reference to the faithful dead. Whatever the fate or disposition of those may be who are not in Christ, that forms no part of this discussion.

The thing that troubled the Thessalonians was not whether the righteous or wicked dead would have priority in the resurrection, but whether the living righteous would be caught up before the resurrection of the righteous dead. In replying to this anxious question the apostle says that the living will not precede the dead, but rather, the dead in Christ shall rise first, that is, before the living are caught up. It is not the dead *in Christ* as contrasted with those out of Christ, but *the dead in Christ* as contrasted with the living.

4. *The destruction of the unbelieving and disobedient.* The apostle makes an argument in Romans, chapter two, which ought to be here considered. In the latter part of the first chapter he demonstrates that the philosophy of the Gentiles, by its ignoring of God, led to degradation and despair. In chapter two, he proves that the Jew who trusted in his legalism, is equally without excuse, and in the first sixteen verses he deals with the judgment of God. That judgment will rightly fall upon all who judge others while doing what they condemn, and they cannot escape it (verses 2, 3). There are two classes of persons who will face God “*on the day* when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.” “Those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury.” This would have been an excellent place for the apostle to have inserted the teaching relative to the prior glory and honor of the saints, but instead of implying that there will be a thousand year period between the beginning of the glorification of the saints and the destruction of the unbelieving, he rather asserts it will take place “*on that day* when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” (2:16).

This coincides with the amplification provided in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10. Here the subject is the persecution and affliction to which the saints are being subjected. An unparalleled opportunity was afforded to set forth the theory of the pre-millennial coming of the Lord and the reign of the righteous on earth. The apostle sought to comfort those who were distressed and persecuted because of their fidelity to God. But he wrote not one word about an earthly reign with Jesus while the wicked remained in their graves. Instead, he specifically states that the glorification of

the saints and the destruction of the wicked will transpire on the same day, and that at the coming of the Christ.

“Indeed God deems it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant rest with us to you who are afflicted, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, *when he comes on that day* to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at in all who have believed.” This clearly teaches that Jesus will grant rest to the persecuted, be glorified in his saints, and marveled at by all believers, at the same time he inflicts vengeance, destruction and exclusion upon the disobedient. This will be *when he comes!* It will all be *on that day!* In the face of such evidence it is difficult to see how such an elaborate theory as the one under review could have originated.

5. *The burning up of the earth and the passing away of the heavens.* The inspired record clearly teaches in unmistakable language that the heavens and earth which now exist have been reserved for destruction by fire, and that this will be accomplished at the coming of the Lord. The terms used are such as to indicate a dissolution and demolition of the present order of creation. “By the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7). The heavens and the earth that now exist are identified as the ones created by the word of God “long ago” (verse 5). They are doomed to depart. In affirming the imperishable character of his words, Jesus also affirmed the certainty of the passing of the material sphere. “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Mark 13:31). One might as well deny the eternal existence of the word as to affirm the eternal perpetuity of the heavens and earth created by it.

The Father said to the Son, “Thou, Lord, didst found the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of thy hands; they will perish, but thou remainest; they will all grow old like a garment, like a mantle thou wilt roll them up, and they will be changed. But thou art the same, and thy years will never end” (Heb. 1:10-12). Here the contrast is between the creator and the created. The point of difference is that while the former remains, the latter will be destroyed, or perish. The heavens and earth sustain the same relationship to the Lord, as a cloak or mantle to one who makes it for his comfort or convenience. It is understood that a garment will no longer serve its purpose when it grows old, and it is then discarded or cast aside. The heavens and earth are material in nature and have been created for man in a material state. When that state is changed, the present order of creation will be outgrown and outmoded. The heavens and earth will then be rejected as unnecessary and useless. The Lord is the same. He does not grow old and his years will never end. But the earth does grow old as God’s purpose for it nears completion, and there will be an end of its years.

The writer of Hebrews also draws a contrast between the scene which inaugurated the first covenant and that which will culminate the second. He writes, “His voice then shook the earth; but now he has promised, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.’ This phrase, ‘Yet once more,’ indicates the removal of what is shaken, as of what has been made, in order that what cannot be shaken may remain.” God has plainly declared he will shake the earth and heaven. He has said he would do it but once more. This implies the removal of what

will be shaken. Previously his voice shook but part of the created universe; the next time the whole earth will be shaken, and removed. It will not be here to be shaken again after that.

The heavens and the earth were made. They were made by the word of God. They are now stored up for fire by the same word. The term “stored up” is from *thesaurizo*, which means to treasure up or reserve for future design or use. The design in this instance is destruction by fire. The heavens and earth are being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. There is not a hint that the earth is reserved for a dwelling of the righteous, nor that it will be the abode of the Savior and the resurrected saints during a millennium. It is not being reserved as a dwelling of the good; but it is kept for destruction because of ungodly men. Surely if this earth was destined for a glorious state and was being perpetuated with that intent or design, the apostle Peter would have embraced the opportunity provided for saying so. Instead, he makes no reference to any such purpose but declares that the earth is being kept in store for destruction in the day of judgment.

“The day of the Lord will come as a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up.” The expressions “pass away,” “dissolved,” and “burned up” certainly are opposed to the idea of continuance. Any speculation which includes the perpetuity of the existing material realm after the coming of the Lord does injury to the revelation of God through the Spirit. The term “elements” is one which designates the primary and minute portions out of which complex and compound structures grow. In all ages and times, men have recognized that the world about them was made up of primary and simple elements. It is true that when Peter wrote, there was not the advanced scientific research or knowledge which enabled men to “crack the atom” but this was not essential to an understanding of his writing. Regardless of what men conceive as being the elements out of which the material universe is formed, those elements will be dissolved by universal conflagration.

Since all the material creation is made up of elements, the dissolving of these will signal the burning up of the earth and all that pertains to it. God made the earth from simple elements. Men have arranged the products of earth in various forms, shapes and structures. These constitute the works of the earth. They are of the earth, from the earth, and on the earth. That which God created and that which man has made will alike be burned with fire. There will be “a removal of the things that are made.”

Let us summarize and see just what is to take place at the coming of our Lord. If, in such recapitulating, we find no provision for an extended reign of resurrected saints on earth, or if we find that a theory of such reign would deny or disarrange what the word of God teaches, we may be relatively certain it is not a part of “the plan of the ages.” We have found that at the coming of the Christ the ones who are asleep in Jesus will be raised, those who remain on earth will be changed, both will be caught up from the earth to meet the Lord, the wicked and disobedient will be punished with everlasting destruction, the heavens will pass away with a great noise while the earth and all the works that are therein will be burned up. These are plain truths positively stated. Any idea which ignores them or denies them is a denial of the very language of the Holy Spirit.

But we are asked what we propose to do with Ecclesiastes 1:4, which states, “A generation goes, and a generation comes, but *the earth remains for ever.*” The problem is no greater for us than for those who interpret the passage to mean that the earth will not pass away, for they must then meet the positive statement of Jesus that it will do so. It should be no more difficult for us to explain how a thing can be created after another is burned up and dissolved, than for exponents of the opposing view to explain how that which is burned up and dissolved may still remain. However, the crux of the matter lies in the definition of the word “for ever.”

This is from the Hebrew *olam* which means “age lasting” or “through the age.” The duration implied in any given place is limited to the age under consideration, and this must always be determined by the contextual usage. In Ecclesiastes 1:4 the contrast is not between the perpetual existence or destruction of the earth, but between the brevity of life of a generation of men and the duration of the earth. “A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains for ever” It does not come and go with the generations of men who inhabit it. The age, then, is that during which men will be born, and the earth will continue only so long as the generations of men are born and die. There is no contradiction with the passage which declares that the earth will be burned up, for the time of final conflagration will mark the end of successive generations.

What will constitute the realm of the kingdom of God when the earth and its works are burned up? Of this we are not left in ignorance. “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13). An analysis of this passage shows there are three specific points: (1) There will be a new heavens and a new earth; (2) This is according to promise; (3) The new creation will be a dwelling place of holiness. As to the first of these, we are fully aware of the arguments made in favor of a renovation of the present order, but they are such as would not ordinarily occur to the humble student who had no prior theory to sustain. The language employed indicates an abolition of the existing order or state in all of its phases, and the creation of a wholly new order of things. To this the apocalyptic writer gives strength with his statement, “I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea” (Rev. 21:1).

There are two heavens and two earths mentioned here. One is designated as “the first,” the other as “new.” The former will pass away in order that the other may come into existence. At the time when John wrote this, he was standing upon the “first earth” but was permitted a view of the distant future when he could see a new earth. If it was the same earth upon which he then stood, merely purged and purified, it is unlikely that he would describe it as “a new earth,” or use the expression “the first earth” for the one upon which he then resided. The scriptural import of the expressions “new” and “first” when used in conjunction may be found in Hebrews 8:13, “In that he saith, A new ... he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.”

The present earth was created for man in his present state. It was first created and the body of man was then made from it. When he dies his body returns to the earth from which he was taken, and becomes a part of it. A physical earth is adapted to physical men. When men no longer possess physical bodies they cannot dwell on a natural earth. “As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy, and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly” (1 Cor. 15:48). The present earth was created for man made from it, and for all who bear the image of

that man. A change in image will require a change in nature of the residence. “As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Cor. 15:49).

This is the very reason that a change is required. “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption” (1 Cor. 15:50). The argument that the earth will be purified of the effects of sin and restored to its original state, and that men will dwell upon it as Adam did before the fall, breaks down at this point. Adam was flesh and blood before he sinned. “The first man is of the earth.” The heirs of the kingdom of God will not be flesh and blood. They will be no more adapted to a life like that in Eden than would other celestial beings. It is for this reason we conclude that when the Messianic reign is succeeded by the unbroken theocracy, the citizens will have a completely new creation as their realm or habitat.

We look for such a state, says Peter, according to promise. It is no doubt that the apostle here refers to such passages as are found in Isaiah 65:17; 66:22. The fact that these may have a two-fold meaning and application in no sense militates against the use which he makes of them. In the new heavens and the new earth holiness will dwell unmarred. “There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie” (Rev. 21:27). “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9, 10).

Those who accept the sovereignty of Jesus, the Messiah, over their hearts and lives, are in the kingdom of God; yet they have an even more glorious state awaiting them. The purposes of God are ever unfolding in majesty and power. As children we are heirs. A rich heritage lies just beyond. We enter the present state of the kingdom through faith, and upon that foundation we are expected to construct a character consonant with the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. The stones which go into this superstructure are those of virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. If we add these things, we shall never fall. The gracious promise is “For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly *into the everlasting kingdom* of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:11).

The kingdom of the Messiah, the Christocracy, exists as an interim of conquest and subjugation. It is to be succeeded by the everlasting theocracy. As the Father gave the rule to the Son in order to accomplish his divine purpose in “a plan for the ages,” the Son will deliver up “the kingdom of God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power” (1 Cor. 15:24). The Christocracy was made necessary by revolt in heaven and rebellion on earth. When the revolt is overthrown and the rebellion overcome, the rule of the Messiah will end. “And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28).

That God may be all in all! This is the goal of the Reign of heaven. This is the theme of angels and archangels. This is the message of apostles and prophets. Is it also your aim in life, the purpose of your existence? “Thou shall have no other gods before me.” This was the cornerstone of the constitution given to the trembling seed of Abraham at the foot of quaking

Sinai? It should be the touchstone of your being! “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that you look for such things, be diligent that you may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”