

The Mission of the Messiah

By H. C. Heffren

INTRODUCTION

The study of the kingdom of God is one of the most enlightening and intensely interesting subjects in the Word of God. Every book in the Bible makes some contribution on this theme. Each prophet in some way unfolds the pattern of God's rule over men. For this reason the study of the kingdom of God is one of the most fruitful pursuits in providing a better knowledge of the Bible.

The author acknowledges a debt both of interest and instruction on this subject to many writers. Due to the fact that much controversy surrounds the doctrines of the kingdom of God and the Second Coming, an attempt has been made to read the arguments set forth by the ablest scholars on every phase of the subject. After years of painstaking study, a definite conviction concerning the nature of the kingdom of God was formulated and this material became the subject of frequent discourses before Christian audiences. Because of the insistence of many listeners to obtain the substance of the lectures in printed form, an attempt has been made to assemble the main thoughts in this simple readable Bible study.

The first edition of the Mission of the Messiah found many friends and even went to remote places in the world. With the supply exhausted, it became necessary to make a new edition. In sending forth this revised edition, we offer a much more comprehensive volume than was possible in the first edition. New material has been added and all the old work has been carefully revised. Particular recognition in this connection is due Reverend G. P. Tasker, a retired missionary from India. Being an able scholar, he gave freely of his time both,

counseling the author, and offering many helpful suggestions as well as criticizing the manuscript.

This book is primarily written for a study guide. It is meant to be read along with the Bible so that comparisons may be made throughout. It does not attempt to cover the entire subject, but it is hoped that what is written, can be readily understood by the beginner and at the same time interest those who are better acquainted with the Bible. It is our earnest prayer that this book may contribute toward a better understanding of the kingdom of God and a greater reverence and appreciation of the Messiah as He is presented in the Word of God.

Yours to Exalt Him,
H. C. Heffren

CHAPTER ONE

The Nature of Bible Prophecy

In setting forth the Bible teaching on the Kingdom of God, one is reminded very forcibly of the words of Luke 1:1, "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order, a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us...it seemed good to me also...to write." Many indeed, have endeavored to unfold the glorious mysteries of the Kingdom of God, and yet the theme is not exhausted. It is still vital and still new. For that reason there is no reason for an apology in writing about the Kingdom of God.

The origin of nations. There is a significant contrast between the secular history of nations written by men, and that which is inspired by God. Profane history begins with chaos and ends with chaos. The early history of every people is clouded with mythology. The early Britons emerged from the forests as sun-worshippers; the first Romans were supposed to

be two boys who were, according to the legends, raised by a she-wolf; the early history of the Greeks is lost in mythology; the same is true of the Egyptians and all other races. In contrast with this, inspired history has a definite historic beginning and moves upon a determined course to a definite purpose and end. The farther back you go, the clearer it is. Notice, for instance, that the human race began with the creation of Adam and Eve by God. The 10th chapter of Genesis is the only authentic record in existence that tells of the origin of the earliest branches of the human family. Shem, the oldest son of Noah, is the progenitor of the Semitic peoples, including the Babylonians, Assyrians, Phoenicians and the Hebrews. Japheth gave rise to the white race, which was cradled chiefly in Europe. The black races owe their origin to Ham, a word derived from "Keme" which in Egyptian means black. It is also interpreted "hum" meaning "hot" and is applied to those people who settled in southern or hot climates. The Hebrew race, of course, began with Abraham who was a descendent of Shem.

Nor is this all, for the Bible also reveals the end of which all mankind moves. Some future day the entire human family is destined to stand before the judgment bar of God, to be rewarded according to the deeds done in the body, and then eternity will be ushered in. In this manner, the Scriptural history declares that man came from God and that he moves to God. This also implies man's fundamental dependence on God. Life without God has no purpose; with God, it has a meaning. Without God there is no prospect for the future; with God there is an assuring answer for both.

Why Methuselah lived so long. Another very interesting story shows how God observes even minute details in the course of history. Take for example the record of Methuselah in connection with the flood. Methuselah is best known as the man who lived longer than any other person, but not many know why he lived so long. Few would guess that his great age had anything to do with the mercy of God, and yet, that fact is

clearly shown. In Gen. 5:24 we are told that "Enoch walked with God." In Genesis 6:6 we read, "It repented the Lord that He had made man upon the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart." And the Lord said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth." The word Methuselah means, "At his death, the sending forth of waters." (Collin's Bible marg.)

It is quite apparent that God revealed His intention to destroy the earth with a flood, to Enoch during one of His walks with that patriarch. He also showed him that the flood would come at the death of his son. Enoch, being a man of faith, called the name of his son Methuselah, and thus he became a living prophecy. By consulting the genealogy recorded in Gen. 5, we note that Methuselah was 187 years old when his son Lamech was born. Lamech was 183 years old when his son Noah was born. Turning to Gen. 7:11, 12, it says, "In the 600th year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened, and the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights." By adding 187 plus 182 plus 600, we get 969, or the exact age of Methuselah. Thus, Noah knew that the flood would come when Methuselah died, and the fact that Methuselah lived so long bears testimony to God's mercy and forbearance, then as now, that "God is not willing that any should perish," 2 Pet. 3:9. It shows also, the close relationship and harmony between prophecy and history. Not least it shows the absolute certainty of God's judgments being carried out even though long delayed in execution.

The Mission of the Prophets. It is perhaps natural for us to endeavor to draw back the veil of the future and to peer into events yet to be. Prophecy for that reason creates an instant appeal to most people. We must beware, however, of the danger of using prophecy merely as a means to forecast future events. According to Young's Analytical Concordance, a

prophet is a "public expounder." To prophesy is to expound publicly. The original meaning of the word prophesy, was preaching and a prophet was a preacher. A prophet was not so much a "foreteller" as a "forthteller." See Cruden's Concordance. The root meaning is that of one who utters a message, that is, "he who speaks forth." Universal Bible Dictionary, p. 398.

In earliest times the prophets were called seers. 1 Sam. 9:9. It literally means, "see-er," that is, one who sees. Under Divine inspiration they foretold future events, especially as these events pertained to the coming of Christ and His kingdom. On more than one occasion they fearlessly confronted cruel and haughty tyrants with stinging rebukes; they continually exposed the sham of idolatry, the hypocrisy of false priests and they pronounced the judgments of God on erring people. They were the messengers of God in their day.

The foregoing explains the Bible definition of prophecy found in Rev. 19:10, which says, "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." The fundamental purpose of Old Testament prophecy then, is the preaching and proclaiming of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the central figure and His message is the central theme. A further limitation is placed on prophetic interpretation in 2 Peter 1:20 which says, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation." The Scriptures themselves must interpret prophecy and when this is done the verdict is final and conclusive. Any attempt to forecast the day for the end of the world, or to call some living person the Antichrist is private interpretation. Prophecy and mere predicting must not be confused.

Inspired prophecy is truth uttered under Divine guidance. So when the Bible does foretell an event we should look for its fulfillment. "When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which

the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously; thou shalt not be afraid of him." Deut. 18:22. There are frequent references to time in Bible prophecy such as the seven good years followed by the seven bad years in Joseph's time; the seventy years captivity foretold by Jeremiah and the seventy weeks foretold by Daniel to name a few examples. That the history of these events always fulfilled the prophecy will be clearly demonstrated in the Bible. The prophecies relating to the Kingdom of God constitute one of the greatest themes in the Bible and they furnish us with a most comprehensive knowledge of the Word of God. Abraham is our first character study and his life is one of the most important in the Old Testament.

CHAPTER TWO

The Significance of God's Covenant with Abraham

The Confusion of Tongues. The 10th chapter of Genesis is a very important record telling of the origin of races and peoples and of HOW the earth was divided. (ch. 10:32). The 11th chapter tells us WHY the earth was divided. In building the tower of Babel, the survivors of the flood and their descendents revealed how far their hearts were alienated from God. Their purpose was to defy God and possibly to escape a similar judgment in the future. "Let US build US a city and a tower...and let US make US a name." Ch. 11:4. God was left out of their planning. It was us, us, us. So God confounded their language and they were forced to cease their wicked plan and were scattered all over the world. Verse 8 says, "So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth." The confusion of tongues is a judgment of God.

Among the scattered people were the descendants of Shem and from his lineage came Abram. He was also called "Abram the Hebrew," but is best known as Abraham. Possibly no life

other than that of Jesus Christ has meant so much to the world as Abraham's. The Mohammedans trace their origin to him through Ishmael, the son of Abraham and Hagar the bondwoman. The Jews look to him as the founder of their faith and the patriarchal head of their race. Christianity recognizes him as "the father of the faithful." It is impossible to study all the details of his life, but we shall endeavor to see why his life is important to us.

God's Covenant with Abraham. Let us first introduce God's promise to Abraham as found in Gen. 12:1-3. "Now the Lord had said unto Abram. Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house unto a land that I will shew thee; and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." This promise is renewed in Gen. 15:5, with the additional promise that he should have a son. "And he (God) brought him forth abroad and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them; and he saith unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed God and he counted it to him for righteousness." This is probably the most important event in Abram's life. The words "Abram believed God" are the foundation of all righteousness by faith. God counted Abraham righteous, that is, justified him, because he believed. So that from that time, Abraham attributed his righteousness, to Another. Read Romans 4:3, 9, 22. It was the birth of righteousness by faith and in this manner Abraham became the "Father of all them that believe." Rom. 4:11. There can be no doubt that Christ had reference to this great event when He said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and saw it and was glad." John 8:56. This statement also throws more light on Paul's teaching in Gal. 3:16, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith, not, And to seeds, as of many, but as of one which is Christ."

Now since the promises were made to Abraham through Christ it is easy to trace their fulfillment in each particular. The promise already quoted from Gen. 12:1-3 is repeated by Peter in Acts 3:25, 26. "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the Covenant which God made with Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." The "seed" you have noted is Christ, and Peter declares here that the blessing is salvation from sin. Salvation is a universal blessing and is offered to all the families of the earth. God's promise that Abraham should be the "father of many nations," (Gen.17:4, 5) is thus fulfilled in Christ. Since Abraham is the father of all them that believe, he has children in every country on earth today and so becomes "heir of the world." Rom. 4:13. Gal. 3:7, 9, says, "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." It should also be noted in passing that the blessing was not given until Abram believed God and his name was changed to Abraham. We are blessed in faithful Abraham.

The Contrast between Abraham's Flesh and Abraham's Faith

Abundant proof is furnished in God's Word to show that it is Abraham's Faith that is important rather than his Flesh. This is a very important distinction, since it determines those who inherit the promises of God. It is not Abraham's descendants in the flesh but his children by faith who are heirs to the promises. Notice, for instance, the preaching of John the Baptist in Matt. 3:9, "And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." The people whom John was addressing were Abraham's descendants, but they did not have Abraham's faith. John compared their flesh to be of no more value in God's sight than the stones about them. A

glimpse of what happens should one persist in trusting in the flesh is given in Luke 16:22-30. It relates that "The rich man cried out in his torment, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me'...but Abraham said, 'Son, remember...' " Being a child of Abraham in the flesh did not prevent the rich man from going into torment. He failed to have Abraham's faith.

In John 8:33-58 Jesus gives us a comprehensive idea of His attitude toward the fleshly descendants of Abraham. There He characterized them as "children of the devil," when they rejected Him and sought to slay Him. It is pointed out in Gal. 4:22-31 that Abraham had two sons. These two sons signify God's two covenants, that is, the Old and the New. Ishmael typified natural Israel with its law and bondage. Isaac was the child of promise and he typified the believers, or the spiritual Israel. The one represents the descendants of Abraham in the flesh, the other his children in the faith. The judgments of God are just as certain as His promises. Gal. 4:30,31 gives both. "Cast out the bondwoman and her son; for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free." This casting out of the bondwoman and her son was final. They never returned to Abraham's home again to mock Isaac. Paul declares, therefore, that God will never again deal with the natural or fleshly Israel as a nation. The New Covenant is for all people and will neither be revised nor revoked for it is everlasting. Heb. 13: 20.

The Chosen People. The confusing of the natural Israel with the spiritual Israel has led to much error and controversy. Sometimes people refer to the Jews even yet as "God's chosen people." This is true only in the sense defined by Paul in Rom. 2:28, 29, "For he is NOT a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart in the spirit and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men but of God." Like the true child of Abraham, the true Jew is the

product of faith and not of the flesh. To claim to be a Jew on any other ground is declared to be blasphemy in Rev. 2:9, "I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." Depending on the flesh and "saying" one is a Jew does not make one a Jew any more than saying one is a Christian makes one a Christian. Faith is required in order to be truly one of the chosen people.

In John 3:6 Jesus said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh:" and in Ch. 6:63 He said, "The flesh profiteth nothing." That applies to all flesh, even the descendants of Abraham. This is what Paul had reference to in Rom. 9:6-8. "For they are NOT all Israel which are OF Israel; neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children; but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are NOT the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted for the seed."

The "Chosen People" of the New Testament are clearly defined as the host of believers. Jesus declared that, "Many are called but few are chosen." Matt. 20:16. He further restricts the choosing to His followers. John 15:16, 19, "Ye have not chosen me but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit...if ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." Paul shows that from the beginning of time God had this plan of counting His chosen ones as we read in Eph. 1:4 "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world..." This is the group whom Peter fondly refers to in 1 Pet. 2:9, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people..." Out of the eighteen times in the N. T. that the word "chosen" is used, all of the references are either definitely or indirectly applied to the believers.

Thus we conclude that the true Jew or the true Israelite is not reckoned according to fleshly descent from Abraham, but

according to spiritual descent, by having his faith. The significance of this fact is that the promises of God belong to the children of God and not to Israel after the flesh. Concerning Israel after the flesh, Paul said, "They please not God and are contrary to all men...for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost." 1 Thess. 2:15, 16. We need but study the history of these unfortunate people during the past nineteen hundred years to see abundant testimony to the truth of the above declaration. The Israel of faith, the Christians inherit ALL the promises of God, according to 2 Cor. 1:20. "For ALL the promises of God in him (Christ) are yea, and in him, Amen, unto the glory of God by us."

CHAPTER THREE

The Relation of the Law to the Messiah

Moses the Man. Next to Abraham, probably Moses is the most outstanding character in Hebrew history. His name is revered wherever the Bible is known. "As a historian, an orator, a leader, a statesman, a legislator, a patriot, and as a man. Moses stands preeminent. But no mere genius could have made him the originator of sound jurisprudence and the great teacher of monotheism and sound morality--except he had also been a prophet of the Most High, supernaturally guided and aided in his work." Young's Analytical Concordance. P.670.

Our chief concern in this study is to note the part, which the law of Moses played in introducing righteousness. Remembering that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy, (Rev. 19:10), we are not surprised to find a close relationship between the law and the gospel and between Moses and Christ. The inspired writer to the Hebrews wrote thus of Moses, "He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter...esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches

than the treasures in Egypt...for he endured as seeing him who is invisible." This shows how closely Moses was associated with Christ by faith.

Covenant Nature of the Law. The name of Moses is inseparably connected with the Law. The first five books of the Bible are known as the Pentateuch: "Penta" meaning five, and "teuch" meaning tool or book. Webster. They are also referred to as the Books of Moses or the Law of Moses, or just the Law. Sometimes they are called statutes and judgments and they were venerated as Divine injunctions by the Hebrew people. The terms of the Old Covenant or Testament which, God made with Israel under Moses rightly engage our attention at this point. In Ex. 2:24, we read, "And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob." Notice here, the continuity of God's covenant with Abraham, which was essentially a covenant of justification by faith, and designed to bless every family on earth. Let us see how the law advanced the cause of justification by faith.

In Exodus 19:5, 6 we find one of the most important statements concerning this law. "Now therefore, IF ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, THEN ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine; and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." The "IF" and "THEN" of the above agreement suggest conditions which Israel had to fulfill before they could claim any blessing from the contract. Again we turn to Deut. 11:26-28 and read, "Behold I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing IF ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day; and a curse IF ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day to go after gods which ye have not known"

The covenant Broken. The story of Israel's transgression is told in Exodus Ch. 32. Moses had been forty days on the

mountain communing with God and during his absence the people had made a golden calf and worshipped it. In doing so, they not only broke the covenant of the Ten Commandments but they forfeited all its blessings and became exposed to the curse. Only persistent importunity in prayer by Moses prevented God from destroying the nation and beginning over again with Moses at the head of it. (Ch. 32:10). God punished Israel and never did renew to them the particular promise that they should be a "kingdom of priests, and a holy nation." It was not lost however, for God's purpose cannot fail. Thus we find a new "Israel" composed of a priesthood of believers, an holy nation, redeemed by the blood of Christ; fulfilling the conditions in 1 Pet. 2:9, "But ye (believers) are a chosen generation, (that is the chosen people,) a royal priesthood, and holy nation, a purchased people, that ye should shew forth the virtues (marg.) of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." The reason Israel failed is told by Paul in Rom. 9:32, "They sought it (i.e. righteousness) not by faith." They forfeited their claim to the main promises given them and these were transferred to the faithful followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We should not lose sight of the fact that the law provided a curse for disobedience as well as a blessing for obedience. This is reiterated time and again throughout Deuteronomy. A correct understanding of God's promises is not possible unless we recognize the conditions on which they are given. We must remember that a Covenant is an agreement, the terms of which must be carried out by both contracting parties in order for it to remain in force. It is evident that the one who fails to fulfill his part of the contract automatically loses the right to claim any benefit from it. Considering the fact that the terms of the law Covenant are so clearly stated, and so flagrantly broken by the Jews, it seems passing strange that anyone could overlook the significance of this. The bitter complaint of Moses and the prophets was that the people had forsaken, transgressed and had broken the law of God. The curse, therefore, became a

certainty. At first glance it may appear that a law, which demanded such a high moral and spiritual standard, with the threat of such dire consequences for an infraction of the sacred covenant, was an unjust requirement by God. It is quite apparent that the average worshipper found its attainment impossible. This was what God intended, for it permitted the operation of His grace, which was their only hope. God's benign purpose will be unfolded more fully as this important phase of the subject is considered in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Purpose of the Law

Since the law provided a curse for disobedience and a blessing for keeping it, we may well ask, "Why did God give the law if the people could not keep it?" The answer to this important question is found in Gal. 3:19, which says, "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made." This means that the law was given to bring conviction for sin. To be "added because of transgressions" does not mean that the law was added as a punishment or to make people more sinful than they were formerly. It was given to make people more aware of their sins. The preaching of the gospel has the same effect today in bringing conviction for sin. The gospel points us to a Saviour however, whereas the law condemned, except in so far as atonement was provided in blood sacrifice.

Gal. 3:23 says, "But before faith came, we were kept under the law shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed." Even the condemnation and conviction, which the law produced had its beneficial and merciful side. The law imprisoned, as it were, on every side except that of faith--transgressors were "shut up unto faith." In other words, the only way they could escape the penalty of the broken law was

through faith. This of course was our heavenly Father's all wise design, because faith pointed the way to Christ.

Next we turn to Gal. 3:24, "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith." Here again the merciful side of the law is beautifully portrayed. Concerning the duty of a schoolmaster in olden days a New Standard Bible Dictionary has this to say: "The task of taking children to school primarily devolved upon the parent but in certain communities the fear that on account of lukewarmness the parents might neglect this duty led to the choice of special officials to perform it. This servant was called the "child-conductor" or "schoolmaster." You will observe then that the schoolmaster's responsibility was to take the child to the teacher or instructor. Once the child was delivered to the care of the instructor, the responsibility of the schoolmaster, or slave servant, ceased. This is what Paul inferred when he said, "the law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ." It served in similar fashion to that of the slave servant, but once it introduced the individual to Christ, the law had fulfilled its mission and was no longer in charge. It was superseded by grace in Christ.

Grace Manifested Through the Law. The same argument is found in Romans chapter 7. In verse 7 Paul asks, "Is the law sin?" Then he answers, "Nay, I had not known sin but by the law." The law did not make sin but it made sin known. It brought about the knowledge of the conviction for sin. In verses 12, 14 Paul declares, "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. For we know the law is spiritual." The law condemned without giving power to live above sin, but at the same time, the offender was pointed to a Saviour who was to come. Faith in God, which was implicit faith in this coming Saviour, gave the believers of the Old Testament a testimony like David's, who said, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" Psa. 32.1.

The ultimate purpose of the law was to make men righteous. In order to accomplish this end it condemned men for unrighteousness and disobedience to God's commands, and there was no escape except turning to God in faith for mercy and pardon. Paul declared, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." The law, therefore, has no claim now upon those who put their faith in Christ. Notice the beautiful harmony of the plan of salvation. It is faith rather than the flesh that counted, even under the law. Under grace we see Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and barbarians, bond and free, all included in one blessed fellowship of faith possessed of one Spirit.

Relation of the Law to the Gospel. The law had the same relation to the gospel as a foundation has to a magnificent building. This parallel is beautifully portrayed in Eph. 2:11-20. Without the law the gospel was not possible, but law without gospel was incomplete. Grace sets a person free from the law the same as memory sets a musician free from the notes of his music. The power of memory and the force of habit enable a player to cease depending upon reading the notes, for he has the music in him. The harmony he produces is the same, for it is the result of being bound by a higher law, namely that of memory, or the musical nature. In the same manner when we turn to Christ, His law is written on our hearts and we yield obedience through being bound to Him by the higher law of love. In that sense Christ is the end of the law. The worthy aim of the law was righteousness and that purpose is gloriously fulfilled in those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. For that reason the outer law was done away with when Christ came. Her. 8:7-13.

CHAPTER FIVE

Are the Messianic Promises Still in Effect?

Who are the Israel of God? This question would be meaningless if there were not some doubt or a possibility of one being mistaken about who is heir to the promises of God. To make sure that we should not err regarding this important truth Paul declared, "They which are the children of the flesh, (natural descendants of Abraham) these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise (faith) are counted for the seed." Rom. 9:8. The purpose of this enquiry is to examine the Word of God briefly and see what promises God made to the Jews and what became of them.

Let us turn our attention to the land God promised to Abraham. The borders and extent of this land are first defined in Gen. 15:18, "In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt, unto the great river, the river Euphrates." This promise was fulfilled during the reign of Solomon as recorded in 2 Chron. 9:26, "And he, reigned over all the kings from the river, (Euphrates, marg.) even unto the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt."

The terms of God's Covenant Concerning the Promised Land.

God gave the Jews very definite conditions for them to observe in order for them to remain in the land. This was part of His covenant. In Deut. 8:19, 20 we read, "And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the Lord thy God, and, walk after other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the Lord destroyed before your face, SO shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the Lord your God." The conditions are defined at greater length and more emphatically in Deut. 30:17-20, "But IF thine heart turn away...and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall

not prolong your days upon the land whither thou passest over Jordan to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life that both thou and thy seed may live...that thou mayest dwell in the land which the Lord sware unto thy fathers , to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob to give them."

Herein lies the sternest warning to the Jews. It sets forth the conditions imposed on them in order for them to remain in the land, and the penalty for their disobedience. "Heaven and earth" does bear witness to the fact that they broke their covenant and that they were expelled from Palestine. Accordingly we read the very nature of their punishment in Deut. 28:25, "The Lord shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies; thou shalt go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them; and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth." God fulfilled His obligation, when He gave them the land; it was their duty to obey God in order to remain there. God did not promise to give it to them a second or third time if they, through their disobedience, lost the blessing. When they willfully broke the covenant they became heirs to the curses thereof. History abundantly attests the fact that they have reaped the consequences of their choice. Proof that God fulfilled His pledge to them is given in 1 Kings 8:56. "Blessed be the Lord, that hath given rest to Israel, according to all that He promised; there hath not failed one word of all His good promises which He promised by the hand of Moses His servant." This same statement is made at least three times, the other two being found in Joshua 21:45 and 23:14.

We have seen how God fulfilled His promises to the natural Israel in giving them the land, and the conditions set forth in order that they might claim the blessing He promised. It remains for us now to show the result of their disobeying God. Turning to Ezek. 16:55, 59, we read, "When thy sisters, Sodom and her daughters shall return to their former estate, then thou

(Jerusalem) and thy daughters shall return to your former estate...for thus saith the Lord God: I will even deal with thee as thou hast done, which hast despised the oath in breaking the covenant." When the Jews broke their covenant with God they brought upon themselves and their nation utter and irretrievable judgment for they forfeited all the benefits of the promises and condemned themselves on a scale comparable in its finality to the ruin of Sodom. *[End of part one]*

The Mission of the Messiah Part two

CHAPTER SIX

What Happened to God's Promises?

The Promises transferred to the Church. Thus far we have shown the reciprocal nature of God's covenant with Israel, that is, the conditions which had to be fulfilled by each party. We have noted that God kept His Word as He always does, but that Israel broke her vows. Having done so, the promises to Israel as a nation were nullified and no longer in effect. Notwithstanding this fact, God still had mercy and achieved His purpose in a different manner. This truth is made clear in Ezek. 16:60, 61. "Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting Covenant...and I will give...unto thee for daughters, but not by thy covenant. And I will establish My covenant with thee and thou shalt know that I am the Lord." You will notice that God makes it clear that His original covenant with Israel is not binding and that all His dealings with them are on the basis of an "everlasting covenant."

The New and Everlasting covenant. This is further corroborated by Jer. 31:31-34, "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: NOT according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord; but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After those days saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts;...for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their

sin nor more." Again, indisputable evidence is furnished that God kept His Word and Israel broke her vows. This is likened to the breaking of a marriage vow in which God himself is the husband. God, therefore, instituted a new and everlasting covenant. Let us see what it was and to whom it applied.

Turning to Matt. 26:28 we read, "For this is MY blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." This plain statement by Christ shows that He instituted the New Covenant Himself when He shed His blood for us. Now turning to Heb. 13:20 we read, "Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting Covenant." We discover here that the covenant, which Jesus inaugurated is the one foretold by Ezekiel and Jeremiah. In Heb. 8:8-13 the prophecy of Jer. 31:31-34 is quoted in full and is applied explicitly to the believers of the gospel era. The first covenant, which was broken and therefore nullified was entirely done away with when Jesus died, thereby establishing the New Covenant. And since this everlasting covenant is the only one in force, it follows that it is the only one to which God's promises apply.

So far as the fleshly Israel is concerned, God fulfilled all that He promised to them. Since they broke the covenant, there remains nothing for Israel after the flesh, except the curse, as long as they remain under the law. God in His mercy has abrogated their covenant and has established a new and better one upon better promises. Heb. 8:6. This new covenant includes a believing remnant of the first Israel, together with all other people who put their faith in Christ. "Israel (fleshly) hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election (remnant) hath obtained it and the rest were blinded." Rom. 11:7. This "election" as Paul calls them is the remnant of Israel who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ through the ministry of the Apostles. Together with all the believing Gentiles these saved Israelites comprise the Israel of God. Gal. 6:15, 16.

God's Israel is composed of saved people; a people who are His by faith rather than by the flesh. It is to them that all the promises of God apply. Comp. Rom. 9:27 and 11:5-7.

The proof that the believers are heirs to all God's promises both present and future is very convincing. Rom. 4:16 states that the promise is to those who are of the "faith of Abraham" who is father of us all. In Gal. 3:16 it says, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." And again in 2 Cor. 1:20 we read, "For all the promises of God in him are yea and in him, Amen, unto the glory of God by us." Now referring to Gal. 3:29, "And if ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." These plain Scriptures show that Christians inherit all the promises of God. It declares that we are the true children of Abraham by promise and therefore we are the true Israel of God. Christ Himself is the great Promiser and in Him all the blessings of Abraham and Moses and the Prophets are fulfilled. When we are in Christ we become heirs to all the promises. Furthermore, this believing Israel, which is under the new and everlasting covenant, is the only people God now recognizes as His own and to whom He is obliged. They are His chosen People as Jesus said, "Ye have not chosen me but I have chosen you." John 15:16. And as Peter said, "Ye are a chosen generation," 1 Per. 2:9. This fact will be made more clear as we continue this study with its accumulating evidence.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Important Events in David's Reign

The first and last name in the New Testament is significantly that of Jesus Christ. The second in each case is the name of David. This fact shows the close connection between David and Christ and adds new emphasis to the truth already stated,

that "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Rev. 19:10. The name of David suggests royalty. He was Israel's greatest king and a man after God's own heart.

How Israel became a Kingdom. Perhaps we should point out that God did not originally intend for Israel to have a king at all. Their government was designed to be theocratic, that is, government by God. Their nation was to be a kingdom of God. God planned to make His will known through the administration of specially called judges and His priests. Gideon furnished an excellent example, in Judges 8:22, 23, "Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou and thy son, and thy son's son also; for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian. And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you." As spirituality declined in Israel, the people began to clamor for a king and the story of how they got their king is told in 1 Sam. 8-12.

We are told that the sons of Samuel departed from the godly example of their father and as Samuel grew older in years the people confronted him with this request, "Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations." 1 Sam. 8:5. Samuel knew that God did not want Israel to be like other nations and his first impulse was one of displeasure but as he prayed he got this answer from God. "Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee; for they have not rejected thee; but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them." V. 7. After the coronation of Saul, Samuel spoke concerning their decision to have a king like the nations about them. He gave a lengthy description of how God saved them on numerous occasions from their enemies, and ended by repeating their request. "Ye said unto me, Nay but a king shall reign over us; when the Lord your God was your king. Now therefore, behold the king whom ye have chosen and whom ye have desired! And behold, the Lord hath set a king over

you...And all the people said unto Samuel. Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king." 1 Sam. 12:12, 13, 19.

Despite the fact that it was not God's intention that Israel should be a kingdom like other nations, still He accommodated Himself to the situation and covenanted to help them if they would serve Him. Samuel's concluding words were. "Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king." V. 24, 25. It appears evident, however, that the entire history of Israel under her kings was abhorrent to God for He said, "I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath." Hos. 13:11.

After Saul's troubled reign came to its dismal end, David succeeded to the throne. During the reigns of David and Solomon the kingdom of Israel rose to its highest pinnacle of earthly power. David's resourcefulness and courage in battle together with his wisdom in administration made him the ideal of Israel's kings for all time.

Prophet, Priest and King. There are many ways in which the reign of David over Israel bears a striking resemblance to the kingdom of God over which Christ reigns. First we learn that both David and Christ were prophets. Acts 2:30 speaks of David saying "Therefore being a prophet." The Psalms of David abound in prophecies about Christ. We are told in Acts 3:22 and 7:37 that Jesus Christ is the Prophet spoken of by Moses in Deut. 18:15. Jesus was the greatest of the prophets but David was a great prophet.

Then, too, both David and Christ were priests. Perhaps the most significant event in the life of David was his bringing the ark to Jerusalem and setting it up in the tabernacle he

prepared for it. In 2 Sam. 6:14 we are told, that "David was girded with a linen ephod." This ephod was the distinguishing garment of the ministering priest. In 2 Sam. 6:18 we read, "And as soon as David had made an end of offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of Hosts." So David the king, performed the duties of the officiating priest.

All Israel went into raptures of joy on this eventful occasion. Even David danced for joy before the Lord. 2 Sam 6:14. It is evident that something of tremendous spiritual significance is symbolized in this historic event. First, you will observe that the ark was placed in the midst of the tabernacle that David had built. This was a startling departure from the usual custom of placing it in the inner sanctuary where only the high priest had access to it once a year. This ark was the symbol of God's presence and when placed in the midst of the tabernacle, all the people had access to it without the mediation of a priest. In other words, the traditional worship prescribed by Moses was temporarily suspended and in its place was something on a vastly superior spiritual plane. Little wonder that it was accompanied with shouting and music and great joy in Israel. For a detailed account read 2 Sam. 6 and 1 Chron. 15, and 16.

After the death of David, the temple of Solomon was built and the ark was transferred to that beautiful shrine. The tabernacle of David gradually fell into ruin. Its memory, however, could not be forgotten. Spiritual Israelites cast longing eyes back to the happy days when the ark of God was in the midst of David's tabernacle. Many years later, the prophet Amos prophesied that the tabernacle of David would be raised up again, from its ruins and restored to its ancient glory. Amos 9:11.

It was to this important event that the Council at Jerusalem referred in Acts 15:6. Some of the believing Jews maintained that it was necessary to keep the law of Moses in order to be

saved, verse 1. The apostles deliberated for some time and then James spoke quoting the words of Amos: "After this I will return and build again the tabernacle of David which is fallen down." This meant that men could come to God through faith in Christ without keeping the Jewish ritual. Conclusive proof that this is the correct interpretation, is apparent in the verdict reached by the assembly. "Wherefore, (that is, in view of the prophecy of Amos) my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God...forasmuch as we have heard that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law; to whom we gave no such commandment." See Acts 15:19-30. On the basis of this interpretation of Amos 9, Christianity forever shook off the shackles of Judaism. Just as David suspended it during his reign, so Christ "raised up the tabernacle of David" and suspended forever the necessity of one having mediating priests. Christ Himself is our High Priest and He offered up Himself as a sacrifice for us and thus He became our mediator, to stand between us and God. 1 Tim. 2:5. All mankind can come to God through Him. "Christ being come an high priest of good things to come..." Heb. 9:11-15. David was a great priest, but Christ is the greatest.

Not only were both David and Christ prophets and priests but both were also kings. David was called to the throne because he was a man after God's own heart and elected to do God's will. Jesus declared Himself to be a king, saying, "To this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world." John 18:36. Both David and Christ were prophet, priest and king at the same time, that is, they held all offices simultaneously. But in each case, Christ exceeded David to an infinite degree. David was inferior and for that reason he called Christ his Lord even though according to the flesh, Christ was his son. Matt. 22:41-45. This was something the Pharisees could not understand.

Contrasts between David and Christ. While we are recounting the similarities between David and Christ it might be in order also to point out some of the contrasts in the nature of his reign and that of Christ's. When David brought the ark to Jerusalem it is recorded that he dealt to every one, "A loaf of bread, a good piece of flesh and a flagon of wine." 1 Chron. 16:3. This was an occasion of great feasting and tumultuous joy in Israel lasting several days. Perhaps Paul was recalling this event when he said, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." Rom. 14:17. The temporary carnal delights of David's reign are superseded by the permanent spiritual satisfactions of Christ.

Moreover, David could do little to alleviate the sufferings of his subjects. The inhabitants of Jerusalem, known as the Jebusites, said, "Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither; thinking David cannot come in hither." 2 Sam. 5:6. To this David replied, "Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain." V. 8. This is far removed from Christ's glorious power in causing the lame to walk and the blind to see. The best David could do for the lame Prince Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, was to offer him hospitality and security in his helpless condition. David's life is a record of war and conquest and his rule was imposed by force of arms. We turn to Christ and find that His will is dominant through love and the use of the sword is condemned. David rose to lofty spiritual heights, but when tempted he fell. Christ was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. David reigned a limited time over a territory from the Euphrates to the Egyptian border and while this was a great achievement, it does not compare with the myriads in every land who owe their allegiance through succeeding generations to the Lord Jesus Christ. Eventually, David bowed to old age and he slept with his fathers. But with Christ, the story is gloriously different; for death could not hold Him. He was raised up from the dead to reign

as Sovereign of the kingdom of God, and exercise theocratic dominion over the hearts of all the redeemed. Acts 2:25-36.

CHAPTER EIGHT

God's Covenant with David

We shall now examine the terms of God's covenant with David as given in 2 Sam. 7:12-14, 16. "And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish His kingdom forever. I will be his father and he shall be my Son...And, thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee; thy throne shall be established for ever." This unconditional promise was fulfilled in Christ. Heb. 1:5-8.

David's Natural Seed Rejected. It is well to remember that God did not make any unconditional promises concerning the earthly throne of David or to his fleshly descendants. Concerning them we read, in 1 Kings 2:3, 4, in David's charge to Solomon, "Keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes and His commandments...That the Lord may continue His word which He spake concerning me, saying, if thy children take heed...there shall not fail thee a man on the throne of Israel." See also 1 Chron. 28:9 and 2 Chron. 6:14, 15. This conditional covenant concerning David's earthly throne required obedience to God's commandments on the part of each succeeding sovereign. Attention is now directed to 1 Kings 11:11. "Wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee and give it to thy servant." So far as God's obligation to any of David's fleshly descendants was concerned, they were ended as soon as the covenant was broken. This is apparent as we follow the Scriptures in 2 Kings

17:18-20, "Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them out of His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah only. Also Judah kept not the commandments of the Lord their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel, which they made. And the Lord rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them...and cast them out of His sight." Continuing now with Ezek. 21:25-27, "And thou profane and wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, Thus saith the Lord God; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown...I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it; and it shall be no more until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him." The sword of judgment was now unsheathed against the last of David's kingly line. God's forbearance at last came to an end. His reluctance to pronounce their doom is seen in these words: "And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes and sending; because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place; but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy." 2 Chron. 36:15:16. The same passage relates the defeat of king Jehoiakim and later of king Zedekiah, of the destruction of the magnificent temple and the city of Jerusalem with its majestic walls, and the carrying away into Babylon of all but the poorest of the inhabitants.

The fleshly descendants of David refused to obey God and they reaped the curses of the broken covenant. They were not permitted to wield the scepter. They ended in ignominy and shame and lost all their rights to an earthly throne.

Although David's family tree was shorn of its kingly glory and power, the root of his lineage remained. Isaiah recognized this when he prophesied, "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." Isa. 11:1. It is with a sense of relief that we turn from the dismal failure of these erring kings to the sure foundation of Christ who

rightfully succeeded to David's throne in the sense that He is King over all God's people.

The Covenant with David Fulfilled in Christ. The throne of Christ differed greatly from that of David. The purpose and scope of the reign of Christ are vividly set forth in Luke 1:32, 33. "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." We observe here that the kingdom over which Christ reigns is timeless in duration and limitless in scope. It is worldwide, universal. It has no frontiers; it overleaps national boundaries and racial barriers. The angels who announced the Saviour's birth said the "joy was for all the people: for unto you is born this day a Saviour." Luke 2:10, 11. A.S.V. The point to notice is that Jesus Christ came into the world as the Saviour and He was to reign over a saved people. The prophecy of Isaiah quoted by Paul in Rom. 15:12 lends additional support to this statement. "There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles." This passage declares that Jesus rose from the grave to reign. The resurrection is vitally connected with the reign of Christ also in Acts 2:29, 30, 32, in these words, "...he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He, seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ... This Jesus hath God raised up."

Turning to Psalm 45:6 we read, "Thy throne, O God is for ever and ever: the scepter of thy kingdom is a right scepter." This Scripture together with 2 Sam. 7:14 is quoted in Heb. 1:5-8. Therein we learn that Christ is the "Son" referred to in the covenant made with David. It also shows us that it was "His" throne: that is, Christ's that was to be established forever. Heb. 1:8 says, "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne O God is forever and ever:" The throne to which Jesus ascended after His resurrection is far greater than any earthly throne. From it, He

exerts His sovereignty over all the universe, for He said, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth." Matt. 28:18.

Jesus Christ is the King of the Jews who are of the faith of Abraham. He does not reign over fleshly descendants. He said, "My kingdom is not of this world." Instead of setting up a grand earthly monarchy opposed to Rome or any succeeding earthly dominion, the Bible shows us that His Kingdom is the opposite to that Of Satan. He wields a scepter of righteousness, whereas Satan reigns in wickedness. In Rom. 5:21 we read, "For as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." The reign of Christ, is a reign of grace. It is the opposite of the reign of sin. We are translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, Col. 1:13. Of this reign there is no end. It reaches over all the world wherever the gospel makes Christ known; it lasts for all time; Christ wields His scepter in righteousness and He reigns over the Israel of God, the children of the faith of Abraham, who is father of all who believe. The true nature of His kingdom comes more properly under a later chapter dealing with the Messiah.

CHAPTER NINE

The Message of Daniel

Daniel's Rise to Power. Possibly the prophecies of Daniel are the most interesting in the Old Testament. Many books have been written about them, but unfortunately, a wide difference of opinion exists concerning their interpretation. While this fact is regrettable, it should not discourage us from a careful study of this important book. Remembering again that "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy," let us see how God's plan is served by Daniel.

Very little is known of Daniel personally. He was of the tribe of Judah and is thought to have been of royal or noble birth. He was carried captive to Babylon while very young and rose to a position of influence in the country of his captors. Two immortal incidents should be told in passing. First, Daniel Ch. 3 tells the story of the miraculous deliverance of the three young Hebrews from the burning fiery furnace because they refused to bow down to the great image erected by Nebuchadnezzar. This remarkable event is characterized by the special intervention of God. When Nebuchadnezzar gazed into the raging inferno he was astonished to see a fourth Person there whom he described as being like the "Son of God." This is the first mention in the Bible of the term Son of God. The story of Daniel in the lions' den, Ch. 6, and how God miraculously preserved his life, is also one of undying interest.

Nebuchadnezzar's Strange Dream, and its Significance.

Daniel's rise to fame in Babylon was sudden and dramatic. King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream but could not remember it. It troubled him so that he threatened all the wise men of Babylon with death if they failed to reveal it to him. In all the land, Daniel was the only one who could tell the dream, for God revealed it to him. The entire second chapter of Daniel should be read in connection with this study. The interpretation of the dream is given in Daniel 2:36-45. "This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the King. Thou, O king, art a king of kings; for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength and glory...thou art this head of gold. And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron; forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things; and as iron that breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things; and as iron that breaketh all these shalt break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms and it shall stand forever.

Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces, the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter; and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure." This vision tells us that God would set up a kingdom; it tells the result of its impact upon world civilization; it also tells us exactly when it would begin; and it describes its Divine origin.

The Miraculous Stone of Divine Origin. The starting point in the prophecy is the Babylonian Empire, which is symbolized by the "head of gold." Then follow the Medo-Persian, the Greek and Roman empires, which are signified by the breast of silver, the thighs of brass, and the legs of iron and clay. The latter two were world empires. It was in the days of these kings that God determined to set up His everlasting kingdom, which is symbolized struck the image while it was standing. The empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Roman have long since passed into oblivion; and there is nothing in history or prophecy to indicate that they will be revived; in fact, a reconstructed Roman Empire would not fulfill the prophecy at all, because the stone did not strike a reconstructed image. There is nothing in the vision to indicate that the toes belong to a future restored Roman empire. Apart from the ridiculous conclusion that such an interpretation would make the toes longer than all the rest of the image combined, there is the statement that the stone smote the image on the feet. In doing so, it crumbled, not only the feet, but the "brass, silver and gold," i.e. the entire image. In order for the prophecy to relate to the future it would require the complete restoration of the Roman, Greek, Medo-Persian and Babylonian empires and all they stood for. V. 45.

From the study of ancient history we learn about the culture, civilization and religions of the old world empires. Ancient Babylon was among the foremost, having extensive libraries of art and literature. They also had an advanced system of

worship, with deities of various names and significances, and in addition they had many heathen arts of witchcraft and divination. It was a diabolical system, both cruel and degrading. With the fall of Babylon before the armies of Medo-Persia a new empire ruled the Eastern world. The Persians took all the Babylonian libraries, and the art and adopted much of their culture and religion and incorporated it into the Persian system.

The Religious Policy of Rome. The conquests of Alexander the Great form a turning point in history. Before his armies the mighty empires of the East fell, never to rise again. All the Oriental culture and literature and learning and religions were released like a flood upon the Western world. Much of it was incorporated into the religious life of the Greeks. When the Romans began to rise to power in the West, they came into mortal combat with the Greeks and succeeded in extending their scepter over all the ancient world. These proud tyrants ruled with despotic force, pillaging, and confiscating anything they chose. Thus the literature, art, culture and religions of the east found their way to Rome.

The Romans granted their subjects freedom of religion with the exception of Emperor worship. Every subject in the empire had to burn incense to the reigning emperor, a custom they adopted from the oriental practice. In Rome a temple called the Pantheon was built in which the gods of every nation were housed and every subject in the empire could worship at the shrine of his god. Thus Rome preserved and upheld the entire heathen system of idolatry. All the arts, culture and religions of ancient Babylon, of Persia and of Greece were incorporated into the Roman Empire. The "image" seen by Daniel still stood. Heathenism in all its diabolical ugliness gripped the minds and hearts of men in its cruel degrading sway. Apart from Israel all the world was in the depths of darkness and despair bowing down to one colossal image of Satan's making before Christ came.

CHAPTER TEN

The Stone Cut Out Without Hands

Spiritual Condition of the World Before Christ Came. It was when the Roman Empire was at the height of its power during the reign of Augustus Caesar that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem. The event is told in simple words in Luke 2. The birth was heralded by a choir of angels saying, "Glory to God in the highest" to a group of astonished shepherds in a nearby field as they watched their flocks by night. A new star in the heavens guided wise men from the East to the humble place when the Saviour was born. Otherwise the most significant birth this world has ever known took place in obscurity. We quote from Myers' *Ancient History*, p.449 as follows: "From the East the cult of Emperor worship spread to the West, and became the favorite worship of the masses everywhere. Its establishment had far reaching consequences, as we shall see; since at the very time the polytheistic religion of the Graeco-Roman world was taking form, there was springing up in a remote corner of the Empire a new religion with which this imperial cult must necessarily come into violent conflict." This new religion was Christianity; it was the stone cut out from the mountain without hands, which because of its divine origin, was destined to become a mountain and fill the earth. The conflict which history anticipated between Christianity and paganism could not be pictured better than by a rock smiting the image and causing its utter and ruinous downfall.

It is difficult for us to comprehend the true condition of the world before Christ came. Heathenism spawned a loathsome brood of vices but gave the world few virtues. In government the state with its despotic king was supreme: the individual had little private freedom. In war the most horrible cruelties were

inflicted upon conquered peoples. Slavery with all its attendant evils was rife. Women were regarded as chattels and children were forced to work hard at a tender age. The weak and handicapped ones had to fend for themselves in a hostile society and little pity was extended to the aged or infirm. Lying stealing and other vices were regarded with indifference under most circumstances. In religion people sank into the vilest corruption. The conscience, being seared, the mind darkened, unenlightened, ignorant and blinded to any true conception of a holy God, they groped their way in a maze of frightening superstitions and fears. Violence, of course, was prevalent and since "might was considered right" the people lived for the most part in moral depravity and spiritual despair. The gods themselves were pictured as being sensual, vindictive and capricious and the worshippers often accompanied their religious rites with orgies of drinking and sensuality.

As we turn our thoughts to the gospel proclaimed by Christ we discover that it was different from anything the world had ever heard. His words were life, while others offered no hope beyond death. His message was light in a world of darkness; His way led to life in contrast with eternal death. He asked men to believe on Him and, in the strength of the Spirit he promised to give them, to live lives pleasing to God. The world had never heard anything so revolutionary and wonderful before.

The Destruction of the Image. Naturally a doctrine so obviously contradictory to the customs and religions of the rest of the world would provoke conflict. The Christians refused to burn incense to the image of the Emperor because they believed Christ is king. (Acts 17:7). On this point Myers' History says, p.467, "The Roman rulers required that men of every faith should at least...burn incense before the statue of the emperor. This, the Christians steadfastly refused to do. Their neglect was believed to have angered the gods and endangered the safety of the state, bringing drought, pestilence and every disaster. Hence their persecution by pagan emperors." It will be seen

that since the Christians recognized Christ as supreme king, they made Christianity a political issue. The gospel of Christ came into violent conflict with the entire pagan system and philosophy of life. It challenged the degrading heathen customs; it condemned the sensuality of pagan orgies; it repudiated the claims of sorceries and black arts; (Acts 19:19), and it proclaimed love as the real motive for life. This Divine truth, heralded men redeemed by the blood of the Crucified and resurrected Saviour, smote the very roots of paganism.

At first, heathenism fought back. Christians were stoned to death; they were burned alive; they were thrown to the lions; they were tortured in every conceivable way; they were deprived of property and made outcasts. But "they overcame by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony." Rev. 12:11. Gradually the heathen shrines became emptied of devotees; the heathen gods were no longer in demand (Acts 19:24-27); the world, which for thousands of years had been held in superstition and darkness, began to shake off its fetters and enjoy the new-found freedom of the gospel. The little stone which was cut out of the mountain without hands had smitten the image on its feet, as signified by Rome, and caused it to tremble, totter, and finally fall with such a shattering crash that the grip of heathenism was loosed forever.

At one time, Zeus and Diana and thousands of other venerated deities held sway over the minds of men, but today they are almost forgotten and they wield no influence; but the Name of Jesus Christ has grown to mountainous proportions, overflowing and extending to the farthest corners of the earth. Daniel was inspired to reveal this vision to Nebuchadnezzar and to preserve its message for us. In that way, we can trace the origin of the Kingdom of God and its effect on the world held in Satan's bondage. We can see how the Kingdom came during the days of the Roman Empire and crumbled everything signified by the great image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. It will

never be reconstructed again. The "little stone," now of mountainous proportions, will see to that.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Birth of the Messiah

How God Prepared the World for the Coming of Christ.

We shall begin this chapter by quoting, "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law." Gal. 4:4. A careful scrutiny of the history of man upon this earth will convince anyone that no period was more advantageous for the advent of the Messiah than the exact time in which He appeared. With meticulous care and providential foresight God prepared the world for the Saviour and the message He was to bring.

The fact that peace prevailed throughout the world is most important. The ensign of Caesar's legions fluttered victoriously over every citadel from the border of India to the British Isles. Roman guards and centurions held every bastion and preserved a rigorous peace throughout their vast realm. This was known to history as the Pax Romanum, or Roman Peace, and it lasted approximately one hundred years. During this time, Christ was born and the first evangelists heralded His soul saving message.

It is tremendously significant that the Greek language was in almost universal use. Not only was ancient Greek language the most beautiful language the world has ever known, but, it was capable of conveying the spiritual qualities of the gospel of Christ in a manner unequalled before or since. The prevalence of the Greek tongue permitted evangelists, like Paul, to make converts everywhere they went.

Roman law and Roman citizenship provided unparalleled advantages. Not only did they ensure security under the best civil law known till that time, but individuals possessed of Roman citizenship were permitted to travel freely anywhere throughout the empire. This afforded maximum liberty for the evangelists to propagate the gospel in every land.

Roman ingenuity and engineering skill is best illustrated in their marvelous network of unsurpassed highways. These roads radiated from their great metropolis and connected all their thriving cities by the most direct means of communication. Along these commercial and military arteries they inaugurated a stage system not unlike our modern train service to provide transportation with regularity and precision to every point. This made it possible for people to travel and thus, exchange ideas and news in every section of the empire.

Not only were the physical and civil aspects of the world best calculated to speed the gospel message, but the mental and spiritual forces were at work also. Great philosophers like Aristotle, Plato, Socrates and Seneca had done much to undermine the time-worn veneration of pagan gods. Greek freedom of thought has seldom been duplicated in the history of the world and it provided a soil for receiving new ideas such as was enjoyed by no previous civilization. A general spiritual dissatisfaction, together with a weakening of the grip of idolatry, pervaded society and many hearts were longing for something better based on reality.

All of these factors, along with many more we have not mentioned in detail, give us some idea of what Paul meant when he said, "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son." God times His actions perfectly. There could be no mistake on His part. The message of our Saviour and Lord waited to unfold His plan, the world was more fully prepared to receive it than at any other time on record.

The Genealogy of Christ. The story of the miraculous birth of Christ is intensely interesting. The term Messiah is a Hebrew word meaning, "The Anointed One." It is only found twice in the Old Testament and an equal number of times in the New. Greek, the language in which the New Testament was written uses the name "Christ" most frequently. This, however, is the Greek equivalent to Messiah. When Peter declared, "Thou art the Christ," he meant that he had found the One promised in the Old Testament, the Messiah.

The first promise in the Bible points to the Virgin Birth. Christ was to be the "seed of the woman." Gen. 3:15. The genealogy in Matthew goes back to Abraham who is the patriarchal father of the Jewish people. Luke traces His lineage back to Adam and thus connects Christ with the entire human race as Son of Man. John gives no genealogy whatsoever because he directs us at once to His heavenly origin and declares Him as the incarnate Son of God. An amazing thing to observe is that the Bible does not give an ordinary father-to-eldest-son record but rather what may be termed "faithful-father to faithful-son" record. We do well to ponder this though a moment for it very definitely bears evidence of inspiration.* **Note:**

It is puzzling to many to note the divergence of names recorded in Matthew compared with the lineage of Christ given in Luke. There are several reasons for the contrasting names. Matthew gave his list primarily to show that Christ did not have an earthly father. Matt. 1:17 says, "...there are fourteen generations from the carrying away into Babylon to Christ."

By counting the names given we discover that Joseph is the twelfth generation and the only way Christ could be the fourteenth is to count Mary as a separate generation from Joseph. This precludes any possibility of his being father of Jesus and is a positive assertion of the Virgin Birth.

There are other evidences in the lineage to prove that Matthew gave his record to prove the Virgin Birth. The genealogy of Luke traces the record down on Mary's side of the family to Heli, who is reckoned to be the father-in-law of Joseph, that is, Mary's father.

You will remember that Abraham had eight sons, two of whom are specially mentioned. Of those sons it was Isaac the second son who was chosen. Isaac in turn had two sons and

again the second son was chosen. His son Jacob had twelve sons and Judah the fourth was chosen to be in the line to Christ. David was the eighth son of Jesse. The lineage does not even stay within the Hebrew race, as we see in the case of Rahab and Ruth; and yet, with unerring accuracy each father preserved the record of him through whom Christ was to come according to the flesh. Each family through several thousands of years presented many choices and possibilities of being mistaken; but God ordained the preservation of an unbroken record from Adam to Christ of the one line in all the world whose members all had one quality in common--that quality was "faith." Whether it was Rahab concealing the spies, or David on the throne; whether it was peace-loving Isaac the patriarch, or Joseph the carpenter; each had faith. Not every member of any family had faith. Ishmael did not. Esau did not. There is nothing to indicate that the seven older brothers of David had faith. The unerring accuracy by which each link in the chain is chosen bears irrefutable evidence of the inspiration of the Bible, since no possible guesswork could account for the record. Moreover, the genealogy of Christ precludes any possibility of accounting for His matchless character on the basis of heredity. His lineage includes people from almost every level of society, from the socially outcast Rahab to the morally upright, contemplative and peace-loving Isaac. This is meant to demonstrate that as Son of Man, Christ came from all men, and as Son of God He came in order to save all men.

We must keep in mind that the basic conception of the Messiah in the Word of God is the Saviour of man. During the spiritual apostasy in the Jewish religion after their return from Babylon, there developed the idea of a Jewish Messiah who would save the Jews from foreign oppression and make their kingdom the greatest in the world. This teaching is found to a large extent in Jewish writings known as the Talmud, a book of traditions and Jewish explanations of the Old Testament. Their traditions were specifically condemned by Jesus because they

contradicted the true meaning of the Law and "made the Word of God of none effect." Matt. 15:3, 6.

Let us call attention once more to the inspired prophecy of Gen. 12:3, "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." An illuminating comment is given in Cruden's Concordance on the word Gentile. "The Hebrews called the Gentiles by the general name of Goiim, which signifies the nations that have not received the faith or law of God. All who were not Jews and circumcised are comprised under the word Goiim. The old prophets declared in a very particular manner the calling of the Gentiles. Jacob foretold that when Shiloh, or Messiah would come, to Him should the gathering of the people be, that is, the Gentiles should yield obedience to Christ and acknowledge Him as their Lord and Saviour."

If we keep in mind the universal meaning of the term Gentiles, it throws light on many prophecies concerning the mission of the Messiah. Isa. 11:10, says, "And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek." Mal. 1:11, says, "For from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles." Many other Scriptures may be found which reveal how the prophets recognized Christ as the Saviour of the world and not merely as a Jewish Messiah with political ambitions, for a world-wide kingdom here on earth.

Matthew, whose gospel is primarily written for Jews, relates that the first to worship the new born Messiah were the wise men from the East. These men were Gentiles who were unfamiliar with the Scripture telling that Christ would be born in Bethlehem. Matthew relates also that the ministry of Jesus began in "Galilee of the Gentiles." Matt. 4:12-15. The testimony of Luke in Ch. 2:10, 11, 31, 32 follows: "Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour which is Christ the

Lord." In similar vein Simeon spoke by inspiration upon seeing the infant Messiah, saying, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel." So he also drew attention to the universal mission of the Messiah. Notice that the angels declared that the birth of the Messiah provided a blessing for all people because Christ was born a Saviour. Truly God knew what men needed better than they knew themselves.

The kingship of the Messiah, like his Saviourhood, is also universal. His scepter and sovereignty reach as far as His salvation; they are as universal as mankind, both endless in duration and limitless in scope. They are the opposite of the reign of Satan and sin. This was God's purpose for His Son Jesus when He confidently placed Him on the bosom of Mary and committed Him to the mission of redeeming mankind and bringing a lost world back to God. Let us see how convincingly the Messiah fulfilled all that was written, concerning Himself.

[End of part two]

The Mission of the Messiah Part Three

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Kingdom of the Messiah

The Sufferings of the Messiah Foretold. Possibly no words define the mission of the Messiah better than His own in John 3: 16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life." In the word "whosoever" we can all take comfort, for it includes all who will believe. It is well for us to remember that God's plan of salvation is from eternity. Rev. 13:8 says that Christ is "The Lamb slain from the Foundation of the World." Thus we see that God's plan to redeem men was conceived long before the fall, even before man was created. God sees the end from the beginning and plans everything after the counsel of His own will. Acts 2:23; 4:23-30.

Not only did God have the plan of Salvation in His mind, but He knew how sinful men would reject the Messiah. The 53rd chapter of Isaiah grows with evidence of divine inspiration as it foretells the death and resurrection of our Lord. We are all familiar with the 6th verse, which says, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." From the very beginning Jesus the Son was God's Lamb through whose sacrificial death man would be redeemed. We can ponder long with wonder and amazement the vivid picture of Christ's sufferings and death as they are written in Isaiah 53. This was written 700 years before Christ was born and yet it tells such details as the fact that Christ would be smitten and numbered with transgressors. This was fulfilled when Christ was crucified.

Bible prophecy shows that Christ came to die; to give His life, as an atonement for sin.

Christ came to Reign. But the Bible insists upon another equally prominent fact, namely that Christ came to reign. He came to inaugurate the Kingdom of God among men. He came to dispute the dominion of Satan and the power of sin in the lives and hearts of men. By redeeming men to God, he established his right to rule. Sometimes our habit of thinking of kingdoms and reigns only in terms of earthly empires causes us to mistake the true nature of Christ's kingdom. It is quite obvious that Christ has not set up any kind of earthly kingdom that in any way resembles that of nations past or present. In view of the fact that He specifically proclaimed the Kingdom of God as a present reality, we should examine His words and see what kind of a kingdom He had in mind.

Turning to Mark 1:1 we read, "The beginning of the gospel Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Since this passage introduces us to the beginning of the gospel it is in order for us to note what it "began" with. We have not far to look, for in vv. 14, 15 we read, "Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye and believe the gospel." It is quite evident that we need not look for a future time to introduce the kingdom because Jesus said in the first words of His ministry, that "The time is fulfilled." The word "fulfill" means to perform or carry out, as that which is promised, foretold or anticipated; to accomplish or execute." Webster. When Jesus said the time is fulfilled, He meant the time to execute the promises of God had arrived. The terms "gospel" and "kingdom of God" are used interchangeably.

The Nature of the Kingdom of God. According to John 3:3, to preach the Kingdom of God is to preach the gospel, "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, Verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom

of God." Jesus declared that His kingdom was such that a person had to be converted in order to "see" it. It is one that we behold with eyes of faith; eyes that have been enlightened. In verse 5 He continues: "Verily, Verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." We pause here to stress the fact that the kingdom of Christ is one that can only be entered through conversion. We have to be saved in order to enter it. It is not difficult to see why Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world." Our citizenship on earth is the result of natural birth, but to become a citizen of Christ's kingdom requires spiritual birth.

According to Luke 18:16, 17 the kingdom of heaven is a realm where innocent little children are members. Jesus said, "Of such is the kingdom of God." The atonement of Christ includes little children and the nature of His kingdom is such that they are members of it, because as yet they have made no sinful choice. In contrast with the foregoing is the story of the rich young ruler told in Luke 18:18-27. Concerning him Jesus said sorrowfully, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Some speculate that Jesus meant a low narrow gate through the city wall and that a camel might succeed in crawling through it on its knees and stripped of its load. We are confident the disciples would have been familiar with that custom in their time had it existed but their question shows that they did not understand Christ to be talking about that at all. In v. 25 they asked in amazement, "Who then can be saved? Quite rightly they understood the kingdom of God to be something only saved people could enter and the reply Jesus gave in v. 27 shows that they were not mistaken. He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." Salvation is impossible for men and only possible for God. To trust in riches or rank or heritage, and even the performance of religious rites, is not enough. "Ye must be born again."

The nature of Christ's kingdom is further revealed in Luke 17:20-21 as follows: "And when he as demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, "The kingdom of God cometh not with outward show, (marg.); neither shall they say lo here! Or lo there! For behold the kingdom of God is within you." First, you will notice that the kingdom of God is. It was a present reality when Christ made that statement. He also declared it to be a kingdom without outward show. How different from any earthly kingdom! It was built, to be seen with the eye of faith rather than of the flesh. You have to be born again to "see" it. So while the Pharisees were wondering "when" it was coming Jesus explained "how" it was in existence.

No Earthly Kingdom Attempted or Promised by Christ.

To emphasize the contrast between His kingdom and earthly kingdoms, we read John 6:15, "When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone." Prior to this decision He had fed the multitude of five thousand men. It was then that the people said, "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world." V. 14. Immediately they began to throng Him and would have proclaimed Him king right there had He yielded. This is an important event to remember. But the kingdom that Jesus came to inaugurate was such that to have yielded to these ardent but misguided enthusiasts would have frustrated His kingdom entirely. It was because His kingdom differed from what the Jews of that time were expecting, that they rejected Him. In so rejecting Him the nation lost the kingdom.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Why the Jews Rejected the Messiah

Old Testament Prophecies Fulfilled. We all know the Jews rejected Christ and it is believed that they committed a grave error in so doing. Their guilt is possible however, only if Christ fulfilled all that was written concerning Himself in the Old Testament. If He failed to fulfill any particular prophecy spoken by the prophets concerning the Messiah, then the Jews were justified in rejecting Him as an imposter. This fact accounts for the constant appeal both Christ and His apostles made to the Old Testament in support of His work and ministry. Due to the fact that the Jews had developed a carnal conception of the kingdom of God, they expected the Messiah to conquer all their oppressors and give them a preeminent place in the world with plenty of everything for the enjoyment of human life. When it became apparent that Christ had a very different idea of the Messiahship, the Jews first became impatient and then maliciously opposed to Him and sought to slay Him.

At one time, apparently John the Baptist wondered if Jesus were indeed the true Messiah, for we read in Matt. 11:2, 3: "Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto Him, Art thou he that should come or do we look for another?" To this question Jesus replied by quoting Isa. 35:5, 6. "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped..." This was sufficient to convince John that Jesus was the Messiah. So far as the disciples were concerned, the supreme test appeared to have taken place at Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus asked, "Whom say Ye, that I am?" It was on this memorable occasion that Peter uttered his inspired confession, "Thou art the Christ (Messiah) the Son of the living God." Matt. 16:16.

Man Cannot Defeat
God's Eternal Purpose

The disciples, having become convinced of His Person at last, Jesus unfolds the mission He had come to perform. And we read that, "From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and be raised again the third day." Matt. 16:21. Although Jesus knew the Jews would reject Him, still the events leading to the crucifixion are most tragic. God's foreknowledge does not interfere with man's freedom of choice. God knows the end from the beginning, but He does not will any man's choice. For that reason the Jews were responsible for their part in crucifying Christ.

We should bear in mind that the kingdom that Christ came to establish was set up in spite of His rejection by the Jews, for His kingdom was founded on God's will and not on their plebiscite. In Luke 10:9-11 we read, "And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But into whatsoever city ye enter and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same and say, Even the very dust of your city which cleaveth to us we do wipe off against you; notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." This shows that their rejection did not prevent the coming of the kingdom of God as proclaimed by Christ.

In Matt. 21:33-46, the parable of the Wicked Husbandman is recorded. The entire passage should be read in this connection. In it we are told of a householder who planted a vineyard and took a journey to a distant land. During his lengthy absence the husbandman took the servants of the householder and beat them and otherwise mistreated them. When the heir of the vineyard came they took him also and slew him, thinking thereby to obtain possession of the vineyard for themselves. Having stated the parable, Jesus asked those Pharisees what the householder ought to do to the

husbandman, and they answered, "He will miserably destroy those wicked men and let the vineyard out to others." Unwittingly they pronounced their own fate. Jesus made it clear that the vineyard He had reference to was the kingdom of God, concerning which He declared, "It shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." Matt. 21:43. Turning now to Luke 12:32, we read, "Fear not little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." This little flock of believers became the nucleus of the new nation of believers who receive Christ as Saviour and King. The unbelieving Jews could not receive the kingdom because of their unbelief and hardness of heart, but the saved remnant of Israel who were born again became heirs of the promises.

In this connection we should remember the 23rd chapter of Matthew where Jesus delivered His most scathing address to the Pharisees and Sadducees. In addition to seven "woes," we find this stern judgment, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate." Vv. 37, 38. These chilling words, spoken on quivering lips and with eyes filled with tears, show how hopelessly the Jews rejected the Messiah and how they reaped the inevitable consequences.

Sin the Underlying Cause for Rejecting Christ. We ask now, why the Jews rejected the Messiah when they had so much to gain by receiving Him. The answer is found in the words of Christ. In John 3:19-21, we read, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light neither cometh to the light lest his deeds should be reproved." Also John 5:40, "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life." Just as salvation opens your eyes to see the Kingdom of God and opens the

door so you can enter in, so sin blinds the eyes, hardens the heart and shuts the door. The real reason for His rejection was sin in the human heart.

As a nation the Jews rejected Christ because they trusted in the flesh that they were Abraham's descendants, but they failed to have Abraham's faith. John 8:39, they rejected Christ because they belonged to Satan's kingdom rather than the kingdom of God. John 8:44. We must remember that Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. 1 John 3:8. It was sin that caused men to reject Christ. Sin led Him to prison and judgment. Sin mocked Him and cruelly scourged Him. It was sin that led Him to dark Calvary and nailed Him to the cursed cross. It was sin, but not the sin of the Jews alone. In Acts 4:26-28 it says, "The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel (the whole world) were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy had and thy counsel determined before to be done."

The Guilt of the Human Race Manifested. You will notice that it was the sin of the human race and not the Jewish nation alone that brought Christ to Calvary. How dark is the record of sin! How blinding its folly and how ruinous its results! How tragic its history! It degrades the mind and corrupts the heart of man! It warps his judgment and perverts his appetites! Its story is an unbroken record of sorrow and tears, heartaches and woe, of corruption and infamy, deceit and defilement. It leaves a trail of reproach, remorse and death. Sin is all that and more, for it is rebellion against God. It disputes His Sovereignty and rejects with scorn His righteous rule. You can hear the echo of its defiance in the words of the angry mob at the trial of Jesus. "We have no king but Caesar." John 19:15. Thus the words of the parable become applicable, "We will not have this man to reign over us." Luke 19:14.

Because God loved us with an everlasting love even when we were enemies, lost and undone, full of trespasses and sins, He came in the Person of the Son and suffered and died in our stead. In doing so He broke the fetters of Satan and established His right to rule and reign in the hearts of the redeemed in the manner described by Paul in Rom. 5:21. "That as (in like manner) sin hath reigned unto death, even so (in like manner) might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." Christ came to oppose the reign of Satan and sin and to establish the reign of righteousness, in accordance with Isa. 31:1, "Behold a King shall reign in righteousness."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Trial and Death of the Messiah

Events Preceding the Arrest of Christ. The death of Jesus Christ fills a very prominent place in the inspired account of the Messiah. Almost one third of the gospel narrative is devoted to this sacred event. In this study we shall seek to discover what relationship the death of Christ had to the kingdom of God, which He came to establish and which during His ministry, He proclaimed as being at hand. We will pay heed to the charges, which were made against Him before the Sanhedrin and before Pontius Pilate.

Following His triumphant entry into Jerusalem amidst the thronging crowds of jubilant singers we find that the anger of the Jewish leaders rapidly rose to a pitch of desperation. In Luke 20 the rulers made repeated efforts to catch Him in His words in order that they might accuse Him before the Roman tribunal. Their craftiness is shown in vv 21-26 where they asked Him "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or no." Had Christ said,

"Yes it is lawful," they would have accused Him to His followers as upholding the Roman oppression: but if He had said, "No, it is not lawful," they would have immediately accused Him before Pilate. His answer was "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things which are God's." By their own confession "they could find nothing in His answers whereof to accuse Him." Had Christ ever proclaimed an earthly kingdom during His three years of ministry, they would have accused Him of it on this occasion. Proof of this fact is seen in John 18:19-21. "The high priest then asked Jesus of His disciples and of His doctrine. Jesus answered him, "I spake openly to the world: I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple whither the Jews resort: and in secret I have said nothing. Why asketh thou me? Ask them which heard me what I said unto them: behold they know what I said."

Proceedings before the Sanhedrin Court. Had Jesus ever proclaimed an earthly kingdom, there would have been thousands of Jews in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast who could have sworn evidence against Him. Since no such witnesses could be found, the high priest had to resort to seeking "false witnesses against Jesus to put Him to death." Matt 26:59. But this diabolical scheme also failed. Next we read in Matt. 26:63-66 as follows: "And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure Thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said...then the high priest rent his clothes saying, He hath spoken blasphemy...what think ye? They answered, He is guilty of death." Thus ended the trial of Jesus the Messiah so far as the Jews were concerned. No crime was laid against Him. He was condemned to death because of His claim that He was the Son of God. In other words, it was not what He did that provoked His death, but who He was. They rejected His Person.

From the Sanhedrin the scene was immediately transferred to the official courtroom of the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate.

The Sanhedrin was composed of seventy-one members including the high priest who presided over it. The Sadducees were the most influential element in it although it included some Scribes and Pharisees. It was the highest council in the Jewish nation and it had authority to administer minor justice of a civil and religious nature. It could not, however, carry out the death penalty without having it ratified by the Roman court. That is why Jesus had to appear before Pilate.

The Trial Before Pilate. The Sanhedrin, as pointed out, pronounced Christ's death sentence on the charge of blasphemy, because of His claim that He is the Son of God. This charge, however, was not a capital offence in the Roman state, so a different charge had to be made before Pilate. At first, they tried to evade the issue by saying, "If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee." John 18:30. They hoped to have the death sentence confirmed without revealing the underlying cause, but Pilate refused to grant it without further evidence of His guilt. They were forced, therefore, to prove that Jesus was in some way a menace to the Roman government and that is the reason for their charge of sedition. A seething mob of frantic men vociferously hurled a torrent of indignant accusations against Him calculated to encompass His death. Above the din one spokesman shouted, "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ, a King." Luke 23:2.

This charge amounted to treason against the Roman state, a crime for which death was the penalty. Barabbas was already languishing in prison because of a similar charge of insurrection. Had Christ ever proclaimed an earthly kingdom, either present or future, this accusation would have been true and capital punishment would have been warranted. Since there were no witnesses present to verify the accusation, Pilate took Jesus into the judgment hall and questioned Him privately. It is at this point that we protest in strongest terms against the

teaching of the Scofield Reference Bible which states that Jesus "first offered the Jews an earthly Davidic kingdom, but later withdrew the offer because of Jewish opposition. In its place, He substituted a "kingdom of rest and service." See S.R.B. p. 1011. If we accept the Scofield notes as correct, then we must conclude that the court testimony given by Jesus was rank perjury, since He disclaimed ever to have taught that His kingdom was of an earthly character. Had it been so, Pilate could not have exonerated Him. Moreover, if the promises of the Old Testament demanded an earthly kingdom as fulfillment, then the only possible way Jesus could claim to be the Messiah was to fulfill them. He could not alter God's eternal purpose and be "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever." Heb. 13:8. Any deviation from the prophetic fulfillment would immediately have convicted Him of being an imposter, and indeed that is what the Jews maintained He was.

It is noteworthy that each of the four gospels mention, that Pilate expressly asked Jesus, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" Obviously this question is of paramount importance. Jesus calmly replied, "Thou sayest that I am," which was equivalent to saying, "Most certainly, I am," adding, "My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world then would my servants fight that I would not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence." John 18:36. When Jesus said, "But now my kingdom is not from hence," He used an adverbial expression which means, " But as it really is, my kingdom is not from hence," that is, not of an earthly character, such as would be gained through fighting for it. When Pilate discerned that the kingship and kingdom of Jesus Christ differed fundamentally from that of Caesar, he was convinced of His innocence of the charge of "perverting the nation," and he determined to let Him go. According to Matt. 27:18, "He knew that for envy they had delivered Him unto him." He therefore gave his verdict of not guilty, but tried to compromise with justice and pacify the mob by ordering Jesus to be scourged. Although this was an extremely painful punishment, the decision only infuriated the

people. Pandemonium broke loose. The whole scene became a violent uproar. Stentorian voices shouted, "If you let this man go you are not Caesar's friend. Whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar." John 19:12. The people raged in this shocking manner until the blackest chapter in human history was written in the shed blood of the innocent Lamb of God. "The voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed, and Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required." Luke 23:23.

Man's Guilt Invariably Incurs God's Judgment

Significantly, the last statement made by the Jews in the official proceedings was voiced by the chief priests, in John 19:15. "We have no king but Caesar." God took them at their word. For almost two thousand years, they have reaped the lamentable consequences of their fateful choice. The prophecy of Deut. 28:64, that "The Lord shall scatter thee among all people from one end of the earth even unto the other," certainly has been rigidly fulfilled. To regain God's favour they must return, "not to the land, but to the Lord"...the New and everlasting covenant is now in effect.

We pause now to gaze at the motley procession wending its way to Golgotha so sorrowfully. The central figure is that of Christ; His bruised and wearied body lacerated with many lashes: His strength exhausted and His head crowned with cruel thorns. He reels under the ponderous weight of the cross He is forced to carry. At last they reach the appointed place--"the place of a skull." The executioners quickly perform their grim duty. The Messiah is crucified. In the course of a few agonizing hours, the silence was broken by a startling cry when the Saviour announced to all the world the culmination of His mission in the words, "It is finished." So saying, He committed His spirit into the loving hands of the Father, then He bowed His head and died. Even nature itself seemed to revolt against the

horrible deed that man committed. An ominous darkness obscured the light of the sun from midday until 3P.M. A terrifying earthquake rent the rocks and spread panic in the appalling gloom. Some graves were opened and departed ones reappeared.

Then slowly and mysteriously the veil of the temple parted from top to bottom. This must be construed as a deliberate act of God having spiritual significance. With the rending of the veil, the way into the holy of holies was symbolically opened and at that moment the old Jewish sacrifices ceased to have any further efficacious value. It is the fulfillment of Dan. 9:27 where "He caused the sacrifice and oblation to cease." All future relations with God were from that moment based on the "new and everlasting covenant" which became effective with the death of Christ. The old covenant had served its purpose and now it was superseded by a new and better one established upon better promises. Heb. 8:8-13.

The death of Christ was part of God's eternal plan. Acts 4:28. It was the gateway to His coronation, which He announced in these words after the resurrection; "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Matt. 28:18. The grave was but the stepping-stone to the throne. The events of the trial and death of Christ, reflect the human heart in all its sinfulness and depravity. In glorious contrast, they vividly demonstrate the Deity of Jesus Christ in His complete victory over every circumstance. The eternal purpose of God moved with majestic serenity toward its predetermined fulfillment. God makes even the wrath of man to praise Him! Ps. 76:10.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Heralds of the Messiah

The Kingdom Message. The book of the Acts is one of the most interesting, in all the Bible, in fact it is one of the most thrilling historical narratives ever written. It furnishes "many infallible proofs" of the resurrection and a vivid account of the consequences of that event. It is frequently referred to as the Acts of the Holy Spirit, due to the prominent place given to Him throughout the record of the Apostles' work. In our study we should notice the frequent references to the Old Testament promises and the inspired interpretation of them as they were fulfilled. Christ spent forty days with His disciples after the resurrection speaking to them "of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Acts 1:3.

Evidence that the idea of a restoration of the Jewish kingdom still clung to the minds of some followers is seen in Acts 1:6 which says, "Lord wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" In reply, Jesus tenderly admonished His disciples, that some things were hidden in the counsels of God and assured them that the Holy Spirit would descend on them shortly, Ch. 1:709. From this point, the kingdom of Israel is never mentioned in the Bible again. Significantly, you will recall that Jesus said, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth." John 16:12, 13. No doubt, some of the those "hard things" concerned the kingdom of Israel as was currently held by Talmudic teachers. We have already noted that many Jews did look for an earthly kingdom. See Matt. 20: 20-29. When the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and guided into the full truth by His unerring inspiration, the idea of the kingdom of Israel faded out forever and the kingdom of God became a glorious reality. In Acts 20:25 we read, "And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more." The book of the Acts everywhere demonstrates the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and the promises to the fathers in its proclamation of the kingdom of God.

The Coronation and Enthronement of the Messiah

There are two facts that we should observe in the sermon preached by Peter on the day of Pentecost. In Acts 2:30 Peter referred to the promise that Christ, the Son of David, was to sit on His throne. We have already made it clear that the pronoun "His" does not refer to David's earthly throne in Jerusalem. Verse 33 lends additional proof to this fact in these words, "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted." This exaltation of Christ to the throne on the right hand of God Almighty is the throne referred to as "His throne." This is the throne that will last forever and from which Christ wields the scepter of righteousness spoken of in Heb. 1:8. This is the throne Christ ascended to when He said, "All Power is given unto me in Heaven and Earth." Matt. 28:18. He is there now.

Secondly, notice verse 36 which says, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ," that is, King, Messiah. Remember that the only way He could be the Messiah was by fulfilling the prophecies and promises written of Him in the Old Testament. Going back a few months in the career of Peter we find him at Caesarea Philippi making his memorable confession. "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Matt. 16:16. Upon that occasion, Jesus told him that he had received that revelation from God. Jesus then said that He would give Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven, but charged him not to make known the fact that Jesus was the Messiah until after the resurrection.

In Acts 2, the resurrection was past and Peter preached under the anointing of the Holy Ghost. He was the first preacher to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah, and this declaration was the

key that unlocked the kingdom of heaven. No sooner had he uttered those words than conviction smote the multitude and three thousand souls were born again. Remember that one has to be born again in order to enter the kingdom of God. John 3:5. When Christ is embraced as Saviour and Lord He unlocks all of Gods kingdom to us. When Peter perceived that Jesus was the Messiah he had that key, and Christ commissioned him to be the first one to use it, which he did in Acts 2:36.

In Ch. 3:18 we read, "But those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled." Observe briefly that the sufferings of Christ, "So fulfilled" that which was written by all the prophets. In the verses, which follow Peter says that "Moses and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets and of the covenant, which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you in turning everyone of you from his iniquities." Acts 3:22-26. Suffice it to point out that Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, explained that the salvation of the soul from sin is the blessing that God promised to Abraham. The sufferings and death of Christ not only fulfilled prophecy, but through them, Christ atoned for our sins and became the Author of a universal redemption in which all the families of the earth are blessed.

The Gospel Fulfills Prophecy. We now direct special attention to the 13th chapter of Acts. The entire chapter should be carefully studied, but we shall quote from the 23rd verse: "Of this man's (i.e. David's) seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus." This again verifies how the resurrection fulfilled the promise God made to David. Verses 24-26 mention the harmony of the message of John the Baptist with that of Christ in proclaiming repentance and salvation. Then in verse 27, the apostle Paul makes a sweeping indictment

that the Jewish rulers misinterpreted the Scriptures. It reads as follows: "For they that dwell at Jerusalem and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him." The Jews expected an earthly kingdom and a national Messiah. They were mistaken as to the nature of His kingdom and they misinterpreted the promises. We must be careful not to make the same mistake they did, and repeat the same error.

Continuing in v. 29, "And when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning him, they took him down from the tree." Again we note that all that was written concerning Him was fulfilled. We find the same thought in verses 32, 33. Paul places the emphasis on the word fulfilled, so we enquire, "What was fulfilled?" The answer is given in vv.38, 39, "Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by Him all that believe are justified from all things..." In every instance we discover the promises fulfilled when men believe on Christ to the saving of their souls. As a nation, the Jews refused to believe and so the apostles turned to the Gentiles. V.46. But we must observe that the promises did no fail; it was the people who failed to embrace them, and consequently they lost the benefits thereby. "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed." V.48. In believing, the promises came to pass and took effect.

We pass now to Ch. 17:2, 3 where Paul again reasoned from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah. In fact he was so zealous and insistent, that some local opposition lodged a charge against him that he was proclaiming Christ as King. V. 7. We conclude, of course, that the Christ Who died and rose again fulfilled the Scriptures from which Paul reasoned so earnestly. While the Jews insisted on a Messiah who would save them nationally from Rome, they rejected the Messiah who sought to save their souls from the Devil and sin. Their hopes were based

on a wrong interpretation of the Bible: an interpretation, which led to their ruin.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Heralds of the Messiah (Continued)

Paul's Arrest and Trial before Agrippa. We now turn to the 26th chapter of the Acts. The scene presented to us is in a Roman court. The prisoner in chains, accused by his countrymen, is none other than the beloved and battle scarred veteran of the cross, the apostle Paul. He is charged with sedition, that is, "of exciting tumult and working against the government." (Webster). Thus we read in Ch. 24:5, "We found this fellow a mover of sedition among the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes." This is almost identical with the charge the Jews brought against Christ. It was based, no doubt, on Paul's teaching and preaching the kingdom of God and that Jesus Christ is King, to which we referred in Acts 17:7. Of course, if Paul meant that Christ was going to establish an earthly kingdom eventually, the charge would have been valid and he would have been liable to a sentence of imprisonment or even death.

In Ch. 26:6, 7 we read, "And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers; unto which promise our twelve tribes instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews." Paul declared his faith in the promises God made to the fathers. He asserted that he was accused of the Jews because he believed the promises were fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Christ, whereas the Jews looked for a fulfillment of a different character. It is unthinkable that Paul could have been preaching about a kingdom offering a future restoration of the Jewish nation and of the supremacy over the nations of the world as God's chosen people, for that is the very thing they themselves hoped for. They would not have

persecuted him for that. In fact the Romans would have had grounds to convict him of sedition had he been teaching that doctrine.

How Paul Interpreted the Promises. In his own matchless defense Paul testified how Christ came into his life and transformed him from a murderous exterminator of the Christian faith to its foremost champion. He admitted that at one time he shared the view of his accusers, but that when he was enlightened, he could no longer accept their carnal interpretation of the promises. He repeated his heavenly call to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, his God-given message, "To open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they might receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith." Ch. 26:18. This gospel, Paul affirmed, translates from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God, a kingdom we enter by faith when we receive the forgiveness of sins. Col. 1:13, 14. Preaching this message Paul claimed was "Saying none other than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come, that Christ should suffer and that he should be the first to rise from the dead and shew light unto the people, (Jews) and to the Gentiles," (i.e. all others) in other words, to all the families of the earth. Had Paul believed any other fulfillment of the promises possible, he certainly would have declared it when he was thus on trial for his life.

Paul conducted his defense in such a manner that the Roman judge would have exonerated him of the charge of sedition were it not for the Jews clamoring for his death. In his own words he said (in Acts 28:17, 18) "I was delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, who, when they had examined me would have let me go because there was no cause of death in me." This amounted to saying that the kingdom of God did not conflict with the Roman rule.

Despite the Roman verdict, the Jews insisted so vehemently upon Paul's death that he was forced to appeal to Caesar, (Acts 25:11), a privilege granted to any Roman citizen. He was accordingly shipped to Rome in chains, bound as he said, for the hope of Israel, Ch. 28:20. His first act was, to call the Jews of Rome together and for days he "Expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus both out of the law of Moses and out of the prophets." V.23. Note again, that the kingdom of God and Jesus as the Messiah, is the "hope of Israel." And that proclamation is the fulfillment of the promises as prophesied by Moses and the prophets.

Some of the Jews believed Paul but the majority rejected his testimony, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Isa. 6:9, 10. "Hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see and not perceive. For the heart of this people is waxed gross...their eyes have they closed...Lest they should be converted, and I should heal them." Acts 28:25-27. The blessing of Christ as taught by Isaiah, referred to conversion, and Israel's failure to embrace the promises, was an act of the heart and mind for which they were accountable. They rejected their Hope. Verse 28 says, "Be it known unto you, therefore, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles and that they will hear it."

Summary of Paul's Message. Paul leaves the earthly scene, "Preaching the kingdom of God and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus." Ch. 28:31. His journeys have meant more to the world than the tramp of Caesar's legions. We learn that the kingdom of God offered to the Jews is the same as the one offered to the Gentiles, and the Hope of Israel is the Hope of the entire world.

The Acts of the Apostles begins with the resurrected Saviour teaching His disciples concerning the Kingdom of God and promising them the Holy Spirit to guide them into all the truth.

No book in the Bible testifies so eloquently to the prominence of the Holy Spirit. Nowhere is the preaching of the kingdom of God more evident, nor the appeal to the Old Testament fulfillment more insistent. Here we are confronted with the Holy Spirit's own interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies. Finally, the last act of Christianity's greatest advocate, shows Paul still "Preaching the kingdom of God in all confidence, no man forbidding him." Acts 28: 31. Inasmuch as this preaching was done at the very seat of Caesar's government, under the careful scrutiny of Caesar's guard, it is imperative to conclude that the kingdom of God as taught by Paul is the reign of Christ in the hearts of men as opposed to the reign of Satan. It is worthy of note also, to compare Acts 28: 20, 28, 31 where the terms, "Hope of Israel," "Kingdom of God," and "Salvation of God," are used interchangeably. It has the familiar ring of harmony with the message, which Christ Himself proclaimed when He said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand, repent and believe the Gospel." Mark 1:15.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Application of the Messianic Rule

The Testimony of the Epistles. The kingdom of God, as set forth in the epistles, is of the same nature and of the same universal scope as that depicted in the gospels and foretold by the prophets. Each writer contributes something in his own characteristic manner that adds to our knowledge of Christ's kingdom. With appropriate fitness, the opening words of Romans, corroborates the harmony of the gospel and prophecy. "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God, which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures." Rom. 1:1, 2. The gospel, you will notice, is that which God promised through the Old Testament prophecies. An illuminating definition of the Jew is given in Romans 2: 17-29.

The entire passage should be read carefully in this connection. Suffice to quote parts of verses 17, 24 and 29; "Behold thou are called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast in God...For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, (i.e. you who are called Jews)...But he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart." This has already been alluded to in chapter 2.

The 4th chapter of Romans should also be carefully studied for enlightenment on the difference between the flesh and the faith of Abraham. We quote from verses 13, 16, 17. "For the promise that he should be the Heir of the World was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. Therefore it is of faith that it might be by grace, to the end that the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all before Him whom he believed, even God." The universality of God's promise to Abraham is seen in the words that "he should be heir of the world." It was not confined to Palestine. Nor was it to come to pass under the law but under grace. Fulfillment of the promise is demonstrated by converts in every land in the world today as a result of preaching the gospel of grace through Jesus Christ. Each of these converts is a child of Abraham according to Rom. 4:11 and Gal.3:29 for "Abraham is the father of all them that believe."

How God Determines the True Israel. In Romans chapters 9-11, as already stated, Paul deals with Israel and the Israelites. The answer to the question as to who are the real Israelites is given in Rom. 9:6-8. "For they are not all Israel which are of Israel; neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children; but in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise

are counted for the seed." This is a clear assertion that the Israel of God is the born-again Israel of the faith of Abraham and distinctly not the fleshly seed. It is exceedingly important to remember this distinction between the Israel of the flesh and the Israel of God. Gal. 6:16. The Israel of God is heir to all the promises, while the other is under divine wrath for having broken the covenant and having incurred the curse thereof. This explains Paul's tremendous burden for his kinsmen according to the flesh. He said he had continual sorrow of heart for them and could even wish himself accursed from Christ if that would save them, Rom. 9:1, 2. "My heart's desire and prayer for Israel is, that they might be saved," he lamented in Rom 10:1. Salvation is the Hope of Israel and the world. To attempt any other form of righteousness is a mark of ignorance of God's righteousness and is bound to fail, Rom. 10:3. The reason why Israel made shipwreck in their search for righteousness is told in Rom. 9:32, "Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith." We must beware that we do not make a similar blunder and apply God's promises to the fleshly Israel today. The flesh has no claim on the promises of God. If there were any other hope for Israel besides the gospel, Paul certainly could not have wished himself accursed, which means literally to wish himself lost, in order that Israel might be saved. He was willing to sacrifice himself in order to win his countrymen to Christ. How certain it is that there is no other hope if Christ is rejected.

How Israel is to be Saved. We continue our study of the epistles with an examination of Romans 11. This chapter opens by contrasting again the Israel of God and the Israel of the flesh. "Hath God cast away His people? God forbid...God hath not cast away His people, which He foreknew," Ch. 11:1, 2. What did Paul mean by this statement? The answer is given in v. 7, "Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it and the rest were blinded." Notice that God still has a people and that the promises of God were inherited by them. They are called the election or the remnant.

All the rest of Abraham's natural descendents did not obtain what they were seeking, and in rejecting Christ they were blinded, or hardened, as the margin explains. The saved remnant of Israel together with all the believing Gentiles, comprise the Israel of God, the holy nation, the kingdom of priests and the peculiar people described in 1 Per. 2:9.

The natural Israel sought an earthly kingdom with a Messiah who would give them military and economic might and world supremacy with carnal joys, but they did not obtain what they sought. That is because what they sought did not correspond with the promises of God as given in the prophets. The election, or those who believed on Christ, obtained the promises, and they obtained them in the manner described in the remainder of the chapter.

In Rom. 11:26 we read, "And so, all Israel shall be saved." The little word "so," is an adverb of manner, thus it explains how Israel is to be saved, Paul compares God's plan to an olive tree. The Jewish people are represented as natural branches in the tree, but because of unbelief they are broken from the tree and cast aside. In their stead, wild branches, representing Gentiles were grafted into the tree through the operation of faith. This, Paul declared, demonstrated the "goodness and severity of God," because it revealed how the sin-benighted Gentiles, though totally ignorant of God's eternal purpose in Christ, could be saved and incorporated into a fellowship of oneness with the covenanted remnant of believing Jews. At the same time it demonstrates the severity of God toward the unbelieving Jews, who condemned in the same manner as the unbelieving Gentiles. God is absolutely impartial. His blessings are conferred in the same manner as His judgments without respect to persons. Verses 22, 23.

To accomplish His divine purpose, God permitted a partial blindness of Israel "until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in." v.25. We recall that, the first believers were exclusively Jewish and the first church was Jewish in membership. Eventually, the

gospel was preached to Gentiles and they formed a part of the Christian church. As the number of believers multiplied, the Jewish predominance lessened in proportion to the Gentile element, which rapidly continued to expand. Finally, the judgment of God fell upon the rejecting Jewish nation and Jerusalem with its temple was destroyed and the Jewish people were dispersed. When this took place in the year 70 A. D., it can safely be said, that "The fullness of the Gentiles had come in," that is, the Gentile believers were no longer subservient or in any way dependent upon the Jewish brethren. The Gentiles now partake of the "root and fatness of the olive tree," v. 17. God does not exclude Jews from this fellowship; in fact He welcomes their return to be grafted in again, because "so" all the Israel of God shall be saved. There is only one root, which in turn, produces one tree. This tree includes all those who are united with the root, (that is Christ) both Jews and Gentiles. This fellowship comprises the Israel of God, which can only be saved in the foregoing manner. God's Israel is a saved Israel, a chosen people, a holy nation.

We conclude the remarks about the kingdom of God from Romans by referring to Ch. 14:17, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." This definition eliminates the possibility of a kingdom offering carnal satisfaction symbolized as meat and drink. Those who are born again, need not be reminded of the peace and joy that floods the soul when one believes on Christ. This peace and joy and righteousness through the Holy Ghost, is the heritage of those who are in the kingdom of God right now.

The Harmony of the Epistles Relating to the Kingdom.

It has already been pointed out that the kingdom of God is opposite to the kingdom of Satan. In col. 1:13, 14; this truth is emphasized as follows: "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear

Son; in whom we have redemption through his blood even the forgiveness of sins." This reiterates the fact that the new birth is the transaction wherein our sins are forgiven and we are translated from Satan's power into Christ's kingdom. Christ's kingdom is a present reality!

In 1 Cor. 4:20 we read, "For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." Everywhere in the epistles the kingdom of God is represented as a glorious present reality. It is also shown to be a kingdom of power, but it is spiritual power. Mere profession is not enough unless the fruit of the Spirit accompanies the testimony.

Let us now compare 1 Cor. 6:9, Gal. 5:21 and Eph. 5:5. In each of these passages a long list of sins of the flesh is given with the admonition that they bar one from the kingdom of God. Since sin is what keeps one out and salvation puts one into the kingdom of God, it is easy to conclude that the kingdom of God is opposed to that of Satan. Paul makes an honorable mention of Aristarchus, Mark and Justus in Col. 4:11 as follows: "These three are Jewish converts. They alone among such have worked loyally with me for the kingdom of God." (Weymouth's Translation). These three Jewish converts were part of the saved remnant of Israel and they were working loyally with Paul for the kingdom of God.

Sufficient Scriptures have been pointed out for us to see how beautifully the kingdom of God taught in the Epistles harmonizes in every sense with the teachings of the Gospels and the inspired interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies. Not one writer in the New Testament suggests or even hints that God's plan was changed, abrogated, postponed, frustrated or that it deviated from His eternal counsel and foreknowledge. From beginning to end there is a simple, plain, harmonious and glorious unfolding of the nature and worldwide scope of the kingdom of God.

That it differed from the general expectation of the Jews of Christ's time is clearly indicated, but the Bible makes it plain that those unbelieving Jews were mistaken and that they misinterpreted the Old Testament. Their opposition to Christ, far from thwarting or postponing His plan, had the effect of giving it the world-wide scope He had planned for it. Those who rejected Christ, did so to their eternal ruin, even as it is today, while those who accepted Him formed the remnant of Jacob that was saved; today that believing host, including the saved Gentiles, encircles the globe and comprises the seed of Abraham like the sand of the sea. These believers are the true Israel of God, a nation comprised of all people who own allegiance to the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ, their Sovereign. Such is the testimony of the epistles!

The Mission of the Messiah Part Four

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Second Coming of Christ

The Nature of the Promised Return. Possibly no theme in the Bible merits the attention of the followers of Christ more than His personal and visible return, which He promised. The resurrected Christ was seen by over 500 living people, the greater part of whom were still living when Paul wrote 1 Cor. 15. Jesus spent forty days after the resurrection during which He made frequent appearances to His disciples and conversed with them "of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Acts 1:3.

Having convinced them of the reality of His resurrection, He led the little company out upon Mount Olivet and charged them to tarry in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit whom Jesus promised to send them. Then He began to ascend into Heaven and before the bewildered apostles realized what was taking place, a cloud had enveloped Him from their sight. They were suddenly startled from their upward gaze by the presence of two angels, who addressed them with these words: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Acts 1:11. Significantly, the believers were left looking up; looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of their faith. The angelic messengers very definitely predicted that He would come again.

The doctrine of the Second coming of Christ is almost universally believed among Christians. However, the events preceding and following His coming are subjects of widely

divergent opinions. Some indulge in wild speculation; each generation produces a host of "date setters" predicting the date of His return; others interpret each passing event as marking the "times and seasons," still others claim He has already come, but is invisible. The result has been both confusing and detrimental to the glorious doctrine of the Second Coming.

The Word of God is very clear on this subject. According to Christ, the exact time of His coming is unknown. "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels in heaven, but my Father only." Matt. 24:36.

Predicted Signs before the Return. Christ did say that when he returns the world would be in a condition similar to the days of Noah and like the days of Lot. Luke 17:26-30. In each of these times, the moral condition of the world was in a state of hopeless degradation and the worship of God almost totally neglected. In both cases, there was nothing to indicate the exact time of judgment until the blow fell with irretrievably disastrous and exterminating effect. Jesus said it would be like that at his Second Coming.

The sequence of events preceding the Second Coming is given very clearly in Matt. 13:36-43. "His disciples came unto him saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom: but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world." This passage needs no explanation, since that is what it already is. It is Christ's own description of what will happen when He returns. Notice that the kingdom of heaven is a present reality and that its children are those who receive the words of Christ--His followers. They are in the world surrounded by evil and sinful men who are

described as tares among the wheat. These evil men are children of the wicked one. Thus they remain until the day of Christ's return. Then He will send forth His angels to consummate the destruction of the wicked and receive the righteous into the place He has gone to prepare for them. The punishment of the wicked and the rewards for the righteous both take place simultaneously with the coming of Christ.

The Sequence of Events According to Peter

Possibly the clearest statement on the Second Coming is given by the apostle Peter in 2 Pet. 3. Again, the entire chapter should be carefully read. Like Christ, Peter compares the judgment at the end of the world to the time of the flood. The present world, he states, is now "reserved unto fire against the day of judgment," verses 5-7. In verse 9 he says that the long delay in the promised coming indicates God's longsuffering, "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." This long delay, of course, precludes the possibility of anyone getting saved after Jesus comes. If there were any chance for people to get saved in masses after Christ appears, then it would not be long-suffering on God's part to delay that time. Since the Bible emphatically declares that "now is the day of salvation," 2 Cor. 6:2, we are not warranted in assuming that there is any future time when men can be saved. We are now living in the last time. 1 John 2:18.

Peter's next statement on the second coming is verses 10-14. Quoting from verse 12, "Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless we according to His promise look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace without spot and blameless." This passage plainly shows that the church of Peter's time was looking for, not an earthly reign of Christ, but

the passing away of the present order of things entirely. The next event in God's plan for this world is the judgment, after which a new heaven and a new earth will be ushered in. It is because of this fact that Peter, in verse 12, emphasizes how carefully we ought to live, since we are looking for and hasting to the judgment. This is in harmony with the message of Christ, as we have already seen in Luke 21:34-36 and Luke 17:26-30. He, too, warns us to watch and be ready, but gives no hint as to the exact time of the event. It is obvious however, that Peter would not have told us that we are now looking for the judgment and the end of the world if any other age or dispensation intervened before that event.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Paul's teaching on the Second Coming

Paul Explains His View Concerning the Future. We are now ready to further examine Paul's teaching on the Second Coming, but it is with confident assurance that his message is in perfect harmony with Peter's. In this we have Peter's own word in 2 Pet. 3:15, 16, "And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as **Our Beloved Brother Paul Also** according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles speaking in them of these things: in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction." Peter insists upon this being the "day of salvation" and that the coming day will usher in the judgment and the end of the world. And he claims that all Paul's epistles agree with him in this teaching.

Turning now to 1 Cor. 15:23-26, 52, we read, "But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; after they that are Christ's at his coming. (Note: "Coming" here does not refer to death. It is translated from the Greek word *parousia*, meaning

presence; it refers to the second advent.) Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death...In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed."

We learn from this that our resurrection will take place at the coming (parousia) of Christ. At that time Christ will leave the mediatorial throne and deliver the kingdom up to the Father. The day of mercy and salvation will be over. When Christ comes it says, then, meaning simultaneously with His coming, "Then cometh the end." Death will be conquered at His coming, for He will usher in eternity and our bodies will be made incorruptible. The last trump will be sounded. No trump will be sounded after the last one. When Christ comes eternity will begin.

Things that will accompany His Coming. The sequence of events at the time of Christ's coming is given in 1 Thess. 4:15-17 as follows: "For we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." In this connection the next two verses of chapter 5 should be read. "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." 1 Thess. 5:1, 2.

This passage has been the subject of considerable controversy, but it does not present any real problem if we

interpret it in the light of its context. Paul wrote the brethren at Thessalonica not to expect the Lord immediately. He told them to study to be quiet in conduct and do their own business. He comforted the living brethren concerning their departed friends by saying they should not sorrow for them, because Christ would bring them with Him at His coming. In 1 Thess. 4:15 the word "prevent" is from a Greek word meaning to precede. It means that the living Christians will not ascend to heaven before their resurrected dead brethren. When Christ comes, the dead will be raised and the living will be changed and together they will meet the Lord in the air and share the glories of eternity forever with the Lord in the place He has gone to prepare.

This great event is called the day of the Lord in chapter 5:2. It will come to the unbelieving world like a thief in the night. The condition of the world is told in the verses that follow, "For when they shall say peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape, But ye brethren are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief...Therefore, let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober." This is identical with the teachings of Christ and Peter. The wicked world will be caught unawares and destroyed, while the Christians are admonished to live in a state of readiness.

A Threefold Testimony Concerning the End Times

There is nothing in the passage to warrant the belief that anything takes place on this earth after the Christians are taken up. Nothing is said about it at any rate. It does say that the believers are taken up in the air to be "forever with the Lord." Obviously that is eternity. At the same moment, sudden destruction and eternal punishment is the lot of the unbelievers. The righteous and the wicked are both here until the end. No hint is given us to when the coming of the Lord will be, but he does tell us to watch and live soberly and walk in the light. By

following these instructions, we will not be taken unawares. In contrast to this serene waiting of the Christians, is the gross indifference of the wicked, and upon them will be poured the bitter vials of God's exterminating judgment as the final phase of this time-world is terminated.

The teachings of Christ and Peter and Paul all declare that our Lord is coming again at a time known only to God. His coming will usher in the judgment day and there will be a new heaven and a new earth. Heaven is the reward of the Christians who watch and pray as good stewards of "the mysteries of the kingdom of God." Our watching is neither anxious fear nor idleness, but just consistent Christian life, coupled with an earnest effort to spread the gospel until He comes again. The same event will spell doom for the 'neglecters' and the 'rejecters' and all those outside of Christ.

There is nothing difficult or mysterious about this teaching of the Second Coming. Any child can comply with the instructions given and no saint can excel beyond the need of them. There is no wresting of Scriptures, or resorting to obscure passages. Everything is taken exactly as it is written, in its most apparent meaning and in the most obvious intended sense. The result is perfect harmony of each writer concerning the next great event, toward which all creation moves with irresistible certainty. Our Lord is coming again; therefore, watch.

CHAPTER TWENTY

The Purpose and Meaning of Symbols

Interpretation of Prophecy. No study of prophecy would be complete without some reference to the symbolic language used by some of the sacred writers. Two main schools of thought approach this problem from opposite viewpoints. Those who interpret everything in its natural sense are termed

"literalists." They maintain that a millennial day will eventually come when the lion will eat straw like the ox and the desert will blossom as the rose. Another view is taken by those who believe the prophets intended for their words to be taken in a "figurative" sense. They are convinced that the language used was symbolic and that it was meant to convey a message of spiritual significance. Able scholars expound both these views and no one can question the sincerity of either one. At the same time it is obvious that both cannot be right; therefore, one is a mistaken view.

In searching for truth we must approach any problem with an open mind, free from prejudice and preconceived ideas. We must also be consistent in our conclusions. If we interpret a passage in a literal sense in one place, we are obligated to do likewise when dealing with similar subjects elsewhere. We know that some gifted writers have always indulged in the use of imagery to illustrate their thoughts, though this form of writing is much more prevalent with Oriental people than is the case with our prosaic Western mode of expression. Notwithstanding the risks involved, it is possible to derive great spiritual benefits and a clear and reasonable understanding of Bible symbols and types if we adhere to the sound principles set forth in this study namely, "That no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation." 2 Pet. 1:20. In other words, every Scripture in the Bible, must 'stand in the light' of every other Scripture in the Bible!

While at first glance, it may seem compulsory to accept each prophetic utterance of Scripture in the exact words in which it is written, a careful examination of scores of examples will prove that this destroys the meaning entirely. To illustrate this point, let us turn to Gen. 49, where Jacob blessed his sons. He said, "Judah is a lion's whelp." V. 9. We assuredly know that Jacob intended for us to understand that Judah had certain characteristics which resembled a lion's whelp, but he said, Judah is a lion's whelp. Of Issachar, he said, "Issachar is a

strong ass couching between two burdens." V.14. "Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path..." "Naphtali is a hind let loose..." "Joseph is a fruitful bough..." vv.16, 21, 22. It is needless to mention again that in each of these illustrations, the patriarch Jacob used a metaphor that was best calculated to describe the nature of the son whom he was blessing.

A passage that has perplexed many sincere students is found in Is. 11:6-9, "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." To this we should also quote from Is. 35:1, 5-7. "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool..."

As stated before, literalists interpret this passage in its natural sense. Children with their hands on lion's heads, and beasts of prey living in docile harmony with reptiles and lambs, they claim, will at some future day be a common sight on this earth. We submit that there is a certain appeal to such a prospect but, we cannot agree that the Bible teaches any such thing at all. Isaiah is concerned with something of tremendous spiritual significance as we can very easily demonstrate.

To illustrate our contention, we quote Is. 55:12, "For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and

the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." It is scarcely necessary to point out that Isaiah had no idea of mountains indulging in vocal harmony, and the trees do not have hands to clap in any case. Nevertheless, when a person gets real Bible salvation it is common to hear them testify that even nature looked different, and all the creation burst into glad singing because of the new found joy in the individual's heart. It is impossible to reconcile actual lions and wolves in Is. 11 with Is. 35:9 where we read, "No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there..." This glaring literal contradiction can only be resolved by looking for a more consistent interpretation of the text. This we shall proceed to do.

Animals Characterize People. It would be highly sensational to read in the papers that a pack of wolves had attacked a church, but Paul wrote something to that effect, "For I know this, that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you not sparing the flock." Acts 20:29. The Lord Jesus also told Peter, "Feed my lambs, and feed my sheep." John 21:15, 16. Again in Matt. 7:15, He said, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." Continuing, in Matt. 10:16 we read, "Behold I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." To pursue the literalist's interpretation to its logical conclusion, one might contend that no people will be at the Judgment at all, for Christ said, "He shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left." Matt. 25:33. Now if the sheep, goats, wolves and serpents mentioned by Christ symbolize people, then it is obvious and also consistent to assume that Isaiah was writing about people too. For instance, since the sheep obeyed Christ's command and went out among the wolves, it is certain that some of the wolves got converted like Saul of Tarsus, who made havoc of the early church, and who became Paul the

apostle. His rapacious preying nature was changed to an ardent servant of the faith he once destroyed. In his travels he probably laid down with the lamb-like Barnabas, who because of his gracious disposition was known as the son of consolation. These "ravening and grievous wolves" referred to by Christ and Paul, are the same "ravenous beasts" which Isaiah had in mind when he wrote of the gospel age saying, "No lion or any ravenous beast shall be there."

As we consider the other animals mentioned in Isaiah, we discover characteristics of people in every one, which the bible interprets as people elsewhere. Consider the cockatrice, which is a serpent similar to the adder and the asp. In Is. 59:5, we read, "They hatch cockatrice eggs." Isaiah does not mean that these people hatched out literal snake's eggs, but that ideas and plans were as dangerous as if they did. Paul described people in Rom. 3:13-14, as follows, "The poison of asps is under their lips, which mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." What better metaphor could describe the tongue of a cunning, deceitful person? And yet many with that kind of a tongue have been a blessing to God's children.

Let us note some of the other places where the Bible uses animals to characterize people. We read in Zech. 10:3, "Mine anger was kindled against the shepherds, and I punished the goats..." In Hosea 8:9, Israel is called "a wild ass alone by himself." Special attention should be given to Exek. 19. There Israel's mother is called a "lioness." After a brief reference to the sojourn in Egypt and the captivity in Babylon, Ezekiel continues as follows: "And now she is planted in the wilderness in the dry and thirsty ground." V.13.

It is obvious that God is not particularly interested in taming animals or irrigating deserts. His concern is redeeming people. Although dogs are known as man's most faithful animal friend, the Bible says, "without are dogs." Rev. 22:15. Why should dogs be left without if wolves are taken in? And why should

the lion and the ox have to feed on straw for a thousand years when the ox at least would much prefer hay or some other fodder?

We are not left in doubt about what Isaiah is teaching. When John the Baptist was in prison, he wondered if Jesus were really the Messiah, so he sent two of his disciples to inquire. Jesus told them to return saying; "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see; the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." Mat. 11:4-6. This is a direct quotation of Is. 35, and it shows how it was fulfilled in the preaching of the gospel; in fact, it proved to John that Jesus was the Christ.

The passage in Is.11 is interpreted with equal clarity if we include the context, which follows: "And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek; and his rest shall be glorious." V.10. This verse is written by Paul in Rom. 15:12, and if we continue reading the context, it is unmistakably applied to the gospel age. Numberless examples like Augustine and George Mueller, who in their unsaved condition were profligate and rapacious in the extreme, were converted and their barren lives were changed into fruitful gardens by the power of god, which their ravenous characteristics become lamb-like. This is what Isaiah had reference to when writing of the gospel age.

It is possible that some may wonder why the Bible uses symbols instead of language that cannot be misinterpreted. There are at least two reasons. One, of course, is that symbolic language is more descriptive. To describe anyone as a snake, or an ass, or a fox, sums up 'volumes' of what it would require to explain those characteristics in other words. Jesus called Herod Antipas a fox, because it described Herod's sly cunning nature. There is no contradiction to Isaiah when he says, "The

lion will eat straw like the ox," and, "no lion will be there," if by "lion" you mean people having such a disposition. For when a person is converted, he loses the nature to prey upon his fellowman, and he becomes a useful servant. The lion disposition is but a memory, and the new nature is more docile, like the ox.

Another reason why symbols are used is to convey truth in such a way that it will not encounter unnecessary persecution. Much of the Bible was written under governments that were hostile to the propagation of its message. To be outspoken against the power of Rome, for instance, would have incurred certain death. For that, the early Christians spoke in symbols, which they well knew the meaning of, but which did not actually say the person or thing. Thus they spoke of pagan Rome as a seven-headed dragon. The seven heads are identified as the seven hills, on which Rome is built, (Rev. 17:9). The devilish character of the heathen religion, which Rome upheld, could not be better typified than by the horrible, devouring dragon depicted in Revelation, which sought to destroy the early church.

Paul recognized the wisdom of couching his words carefully as the fires of persecution commenced to rage. In 2 Thess. 2:7, we read, "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way." Paul was describing the advent of the Man of Sin, and the events leading up to its full manifestation. Although some teach that Paul was referring to the Holy Spirit in this passage, such an inference is untenable. Paul never hesitated to speak freely about the Holy Spirit, as even this chapter bears witness. There was no offence in speaking freely of the Holy Spirit. But with the power of Rome it was different. He had to use discretion in speaking about the government, which he did. As long as the Emperor remained in Rome the Papacy could not come into its full measure of power. However, when the Emperor of Rome removed the seat of government to Constantinople, the Bishop

of Rome became supreme. Then the Man of Sin was revealed. As long as the Roman government remained in Rome, it restrained the full exercise of the ecclesiastical authority, but when it was gone, the Papacy became all-powerful. Paul used symbols to convey this important truth, because he could do so in that manner without incurring persecution. Symbolic language adds greatly to the beauty of God's word, and if we interpret the symbols consistently, they convey inspired truth in a most vivid and convincing manner.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Unveiling the King

Jesus Christ Preeminent in the Revelation. We have now reached the last and in some respects the most difficult book in the Bible in our study of the kingdom of God, the Book of the Revelation. The word "Revelation" means unveiling or uncovering. The Greek word for Revelation is *Apokalupsis*, from which we derive the term *Apocalypse*. It is really the Unveiling of Jesus Christ. It was written by the apostle John while he was exiled on the lonely Island of Patmos.

The book of Revelation differs in some respects from most books in the Bible, although its symbols closely resemble those used in Daniel and Ezekiel. It contains a prophetic history of the Christian church written in symbolic language. The opening verse tells us this fact in these words: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto Him, to shew unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John." Webster. In the first chapter, a remarkable description of the glorified resurrected Christ is found. It is the only description of the personal appearance of Christ in the Bible. The gospel writers only portrayed His moral excellence, but made no attempt to describe his physical appearance.

History Foretold in Symbols. We also notice a striking similarity in the terms used here compared with those we find elsewhere in the Scriptures. For instance in Ch. 2:9 we read, "I know thy works, and tribulation and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan." This reminds us of Paul's description of the Jew in Rom. 2:17-29. Both John and Paul defined the true Jew as a born-again person, and the unredeemed even though of Jewish ancestry, belong to the synagogue of Satan. Then too, we discover that John had the same conception of the kingdom of God, in Ch. 1:9, as follows: "I, John, who also am your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ." This shows the existence of the kingdom of God then, and the fact that John was in it. Paul shows this also when he says in Rom. 14:17, "For the kingdom of God is righteous and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."

For our present study we shall quote from Rev. 20: 1-6: And I saw an angel come down from heaven having a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years should be fulfilled; and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them; and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power, but they

shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with him a thousand years."

We must remember that John wrote this message when the fires of persecution were already beginning to glow. John was the only apostle left who had not sealed his testimony with his blood. Thousands of Christians had become martyrs for their faith. What became of these martyrs? Where did they go when they left this earth? That is the question John answers in this passage when he said he saw the "souls of them that had been beheaded." As the drama of the history of the Church on earth progressed toward its final culmination, John was allowed to pull back the veil of the other world and there he beheld the souls of the early martyrs. Living in the presence of Christ. They are said to "live and reign" with Him for a period of one thousand years. There is nothing to indicate that this scene is on earth at all. It describes the existence of those who died for Christ from the time of their leaving this earth until the judgment day.

The Two Resurrections. The "first" resurrection mentioned in verses 5 and 6 is puzzling to some. It has reference to the new birth for that comes first in point of time and is the only resurrection that can make us "blessed and holy." A sinner is said to be dead in trespasses and sins, but in being saved he is raised to newness of life. Thus Paul describes the experience in Eph.2:1. "And you hath he quickened (made alive) who were dead in trespasses and sins." Again in 1 Tim. 5:6 it says, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." It is stated in Rom. 6:23 "For the wages is death." Death is separation from God and the penalty of death is passed on all who continue in sin. There is a parallel in civil law in the case of a murderer or anyone upon whom the death sentence is passed. Once the sentence is decreed, the felon is counted as dead by the law from the time the judgment is pronounced, even though the execution may not take place until several months later.

Likewise the death penalty is the sentence of all sinners. Sin brings death (condemnation) to the soul even now. Rom 7:9.

The same truth is expressed by Christ in John 5:24, 25, where to "hear" the voice of Christ in the gospel is to be made alive from the dead. Also in John 11:25, 26, where Jesus says to Martha, "I am the resurrection, and the life; he that liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" The teaching of Christ is that faith in Him brings spiritual life. The "blessed" experience of being born again makes one "holy" and fit for heaven; and it also deprives sin of its power to exact the penalty of final death, so that on such the second death hath no power. Just as believing gives us the power to become sons of God (John1:12), so, by the same believing relationship we are passed beyond the "power of the second death." The second death has reference to eternal punishment. In Rev. 2:11, it says, "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." Only saved people can overcome. John refers to the "first resurrection" in Revelation to differentiate between the experience that makes men blessed and holy when they are raised from sin to spiritual life, and the "general resurrection" where all mankind is raised for judgment, John 5:28, 29. He refers to that resurrection later in the chapter.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Conclusion

Devilish Opposition to Christianity by Paganism.

We shall conclude our study of the kingdom of God by considering the remainder of the 20th chapter of Revelation. Mention has already been made of the "devil" being bound for a thousand years. In verse 7 it says, "when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison." In order to gain a correct understanding of this portion of Scripture we

should compare it with other references to the devil in John's writings. For instance, in Ch. 2:10 we read, "For behold the devil will cast some of you into prison that ye may be tried." The "devil" mentioned here is, obviously, men working under the influence of Satan. It was men inspired by Satan that crucified the Lord. The devil also persuaded men to persecute the followers of Christ. This persecution was endorsed by, the pagan Rome State. In John's time the vision described in Daniel of "the little stone cut out of the mountain without hands and smiting the image on the feet," was in the process of fulfillment. Christianity was committed to destroy paganism and idolatry and all for which that devilish system stood. Already, that great image and all it symbolized had received a mortal blow from the impact of the dauntless Spirit-filled witnesses of Jesus Christ. The kingdom of God was assuming mountainous proportions and spreading over the earth. Because the Christians refused to worship the Roman emperor, they came into violent conflict with the civil authorities. This accounted for the terrible persecutions in the days of Nero and other Roman tyrants who sought to exterminate Christianity and uphold idolatry. In Rev. 12:3, 4, we have a description of the same dragon that is "bound" in Chap.20:2. It is really a symbol of Roman Paganism.

Instead of fighting back, the Christians simply testified of the resurrection, and the gospel spread in spite of all the diabolical persecutions of Rome. Eventually, Constantine became emperor and granted freedom to the Christian faith thus ending civil persecution. This was an event of tremendous significance to the followers of Christ, and John prophesied of it as follows: "And I 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; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto death." Rev. 12:10,11. this meant that the great image and all that it stood

for was shattered and the little stone of Divine origin (the kingdom of God) was the cause.

Devil Loosed a Little Season. It is quite apparent that Rev.12 is describing the same period of time as the 20th chapter. As the titanic struggle between darkness and light progressed, different phases projected themselves in the course of time. The 12th chapter depicts the early stages of the conflict, while the 20th deals with the closing phase. The great dragon, which in Rev. 12 is "called" the devil and Satan (v.9), is referred to in the latter chapter as the devil. In reality, John is describing Paganism under its Roman form signified by a cruel devouring remorseless consuming dragon.

When the infant church began to propagate the gospel in the world, the pagan state of Rome sought to exterminate it. John symbolized this as the dragon "trying to devour the child as soon as it was born." Rev. 12:4. For more than 200 years the church was subjected to the bitter torture sanctioned by the pagan State. What was endured only eternity will reveal. Such volumes as "Fox's Book of Martyrs" tell some of the examples of heroism that have been preserved to posterity. The dark stinking dungeons, the torturous racks, the bloody gladiatorial combats, the avenging fire and sword, all contributed remorselessly to the pains endured by men, "Who loved not their lives unto the death. At last Emperor Constantine ascended the throne and in due course of time, he declared Christianity a legal religion. The old dragon was cast down, that accused the saints day and night," in other words, the "devil was bound," and could no longer exert undisputed sway. He was limited. The period of his being bound is described as "1000 years" after which he is loosed a little season. This prophetic period has now passed and the world is again confronted with civil governments in many lands that are essentially pagan and anti-Christian, and which are committed to the abolition of Christianity, and the eradication of every vestige of it from the earth. The devil has gone forth to "deceive

the nations" and to "gather them to battle." We do not know how long the little season will last, nor how many nations will be totally deceived, but the ultimate triumph of evil will only be thwarted by the Second Coming of Jesus Christ our Lord. This phase of the prophecy is dealt within Rev. 20:8-15. The Second Coming will usher in the judgment. The dead from land and seas will rise to meet the summons from the skies and will assemble in two divergent companies, the believers on the right hand and the unbelievers on the left. Every one will be judged according to his works and the parting will be sealed for eternity, for either heaven or hell.

Harmony Maintained Throughout Scripture Prophecy

John's manner of describing the events leading up to the Second Coming of the Lord differ from those of Peter and Paul, but the truth he sets forth is identical with theirs. John tells by symbols of the early struggles and persecutions of the kingdom of God in its conflict with paganism. He traces its triumphs and struggles right through to the end, including the last final conflict between the devil and the believers. He shows how the Christians and the unbelievers are both here in this world until the day of judgment, which is in agreement with Christ, Peter and Paul. With the coming of Christ, he shows the same sequence of events, in that this earth flees away and eternity with the new heaven and new earth takes place.

Let us review once again the beautiful harmony of the Scriptures on the kingdom of God. First, Abraham is shown as "the Father of them that believe." All who believe in Christ are his children by faith and in that sense Abraham is the father of many (different) nations and in him all the families of the earth are blessed. The "Jews" who are God's chosen people are not exclusively Abraham's descendants but all those who have Abraham's faith. The only people that inherit the promises of the New and Everlasting Covenant are the Israel of God, which

includes the believing remnant of Israel together with all other believers from the beginning of the gospel era until the Second Coming. The message of the kingdom of God is identical with the gospel of God. It requires the new birth to see the kingdom and also to enter into it. Believers will be present in this world until Christ returns on the judgment day to resurrect all mankind, judge the world, and usher in eternity. Matt. 16:27. The final separation of the righteous and the wicked will coincide with the coming of the Lord, at which time, the present heaven and earth will be burned up and a new heaven and earth will take place.

Final Triumph of the Kingdom of God. The Bible very plainly asserts that this is the last time. 1 John 2:18. The resurrection of the dead is to take place on the last day in answer to the summons from the last trump, we have no alternative other than to conclude that there is no future day for this world after the present dispensation. There can only be one last day and one last trump. That trump will wake the dead. Since the dead will be raised when Christ comes, there is absolutely no time for a future millennium as our hope, but heaven. John 14. What a wonderfully satisfying future to look forward to! When Christ comes, we shall be forever with the Lord and the doom of the Devil and his angels will be sealed for eternity. What a glorious kingdom our Lord reigns over! What a wondrous plan of salvation! Matchless Son of Man! Exalted Son of God! Let us Exalt His Name! Amen.

~ The End ~