

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Volume 97 Issue 1

January / February 2020



Contents

Thought for the month	2
John the Baptist—Pt. 1	4
A Note on the "Times of the Gentiles"	8
A Note on the Time of the End	9
Times of Restitution of All Things	10
Waiting	14
Zechariah—Pt. 13	15
The Gathering Home of Saints—Pt. 5	23
The Day of the Lord	27
The Sands of Time are sinking—A hymn	32
God's Wonderful Time Clock	35
Notices	39

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

FOUNDED 1924

The Bible Study Monthly, published to promote knowledge of the Bible, sees the Scriptures as a true record of God's dealings with the human race, needing to be understood in our generation. It stands for the pre-millennial advent of our Lord, and His reign of peace and justice on the earth.

"Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Ephesians 4:15 NRSV).

The Bible Study Monthly is sent free of charge on request to all who are genuinely interested. It should never be sold for money.

Secretary & Treasurer: Nicholas Charcharos

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

Its about 30 years since George Michael recorded and released the song 'Praying for time'. One would not pretend to know all that was on his mind but it appears to be a suggestion he was making to himself and his listeners.

Time plays such a prominent place in our lives from "What time do I have to leave?", "not enough time" and "its time I...". Checking the time and making deadlines is part of the structure of everyday life from the moment we awake to the time we go to sleep.

For Zacharias and Elizabeth they thought the time was past to have their first child after many years of marriage. Yet John came at exactly the right time to be the forerunner to the Messiah.

In eschatological terms students of the Bible have always looked to gauge whether we are in the "last days" or when the time of the end finishes. It has often been said "the time is short" although not so short as when one tries to recall when one first used that expression.

One concept that has been important to grasp all through the Gospel age, otherwise called the Christian era, are the times of restitution of all things and the times of refreshing that Peter exclaimed in his second sermon in Acts 3. The import is that there are times of refreshing and times of restitution and we look forward to that work of restitution while there is yet suffering.

Waiting is common in everyday life. Politicians have been debating the waiting times for a doctor's appointment, or time waiting to be seen at the local hospital's accident and emergency department. The world is waiting for Christ's kingdom to be established on earth if only they all knew it and that is the type of waiting that is really important.

While Christians wait they also watch, watch for the signs of the consummation of this age. Several of the old testament prophets, like Zechariah, wrote as they were inspired, of events that were yet to occur. To the Bible student it details the signs, where to look and in what order they should be expected.

The Day of the Lord is a time that has concerned readers of the Bible. The events are not happy, beautiful or bright. But they do precede what is the world's 'Golden Future' and for the Christian life in the heavenly home or abode.

The Golden Future

Available free on request

A thirty page booklet available free on request from the address on the back page

In the long and distant past, God the glorious Creator of the universe, began his work. He foreknew all things and has made ample provision for life and blessing through his only begotten Son—the beginning of his creation. Times and seasons were also allotted in advance, to be fulfilled according to his grand design. A wise and intimate knowledge of these things, is the heritage of his chosen people; those who would give him his rightful due, even the first place in their hearts and lives.

God's Wonderful Time Clock (Page 1)
Frederick Lardent

ANOTHER WEBSITE FOR BIBLE FELLOWSHIP UNION

In addition to our website www.biblefellowshipunion.co.uk there is a new website which contains most previous issues of the BSM from 1937 to 1962 and 2005 onwards. With thanks for those who laboured so lovingly to bring this about and those who work to maintain our websites.

www.biblestudymonthly.uk

Magazine content. What is published is believed to have a wide interest, but everything printed may not necessarily be the opinion of the editor and his colleagues.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

1. A Voice crying in the Wilderness

“Like a voice crying in the wilderness” is an expression used in the modern world to denote an unpopular message. It refers to ideas which oppose the fashion of the time. It is a lone voice pleading against the action being taken by the majority. In a sense this was how it was used concerning John the Baptist. Matthew, Mark and Luke quote from Isaiah 40:3. Modern translators have tended to separate the ‘voice’ from the ‘wilderness’ at least in Isaiah. It can be translated “*A voice of one calling: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD’*” (NIV).

John was the last of the great prophets of Israel and followed quite distinctly in their tradition. His birth and preparation were directly guided by God and he was the “voice of God” bringing his people back to the way of the Lord. He was not expressing his own opinions or looking for popular applause; he had a mission and a message from God. He was, as Malachi promised, the messenger who was to come “*to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple*”. (Mal. 3:1 RSV) This picture is of a slave who went before the entourage of ancient royalty, clearing the way and making sure that people and materials were swept from the road. Thus he was the herald of the presence of the king. For many centuries Israel had waited for a Deliverer. At first Moses referred to “that prophet”. Much later, God’s promises to David led to the idea of an anointed one—the Messiah. He was to represent God in a very special way to bring salvation to God’s people. He was to put right that which was wrong and usher in a time of peace and prosperity. To John was committed the task of preparing the way for the Son of God. It was the greatest task any human being could do apart from Christ himself. Luke very carefully sets the political and religious scene in the first century (Luke 3:1-2). Those verses speak of Roman tyranny and immorality; of local intrigue and weakness and of priestcraft and the oppression of ordinary people. Into this kind of world John the Baptist was born. It was here that he and his cousin were to work and suffer and die. For centuries God had been preparing his people to receive his Son. They had not listened to the messengers God sent, and they were not ready to receive him. The hearts of that generation in Israel were like uncultivated soil. Nothing short of a mighty storm could now make them ready for their Messiah, so that he could sow his seed of the Kingdom. In that “voice” from the wilderness Israel had her storm and it was a voice which thundered to slave and prince alike without expediency or partiality. It was a voice which broke up the stony hearts of God’s

people and came down like rain upon the lives of ordinary but neglected people. Where did such a preacher come from and how had he been reared and trained for his mighty task? Why of all places did he come from the desert? John was born in the hill country of Judea, the child of elderly parents. They were of priestly families within the tribe of Levi. The record says that they were law abiding folk, upright in character and the ones to rear a boy who has to serve the Lord, except that they were past the time when they would normally expect to start a family.

It would be easy to get a very unfavourable view of the priesthood from the Gospels unless we note such comments about Zacharias and Elizabeth. They correlate with the report that came later concerning the growth of the Early Church, which records that "*many of the priests were obedient to the faith*" (Acts 6:7 RSV). Elizabeth had endured an aching heart for many a long year, for she had no children. It was common in Israel for women to want a child who might deliver God's people from their enemies. This aged couple had the double honour of entertaining in their home the mother of the One who was to be Messiah and to be the parents of a son who would one day herald that Messiah.

It is reasonable to suppose that Zacharias taught John to be a priest from his earliest years. It was a father's duty to rear his son to follow his own calling; how much more this boy of whom the angel Gabriel had spoken. Much more, the old father had been filled with God's spirit at John's birth and prophesied that the boy would become the prophet of the Most High. With what interest John must have learned about Zacharias' encounter with an angel in the Temple as he was fulfilling his duties as a priest. How did the old man relate the shock which amounted to unbelief? With what enthusiasm did John listen again and again to the angel's words and his father's prediction concerning his own future.

Zacharias' words recorded in Luke 1:67-79 form quite a remarkable hymn of praise. They embody much important teaching and bring together the hopes and promises of God to Israel. This is more than a celebration of his restored speech or the jubilation of a father who has gained a remarkable son in his old age. This is no less than an announcement that God is about to break through into the world of men and come to his people Israel. Zacharias would not know just how this was going to be fulfilled; like so many in Israel at that time, the things contained in his prophecy meant to him that Israel would be restored to her former glory. Nevertheless the vision of the old priest is conveyed to us in words which aptly describe the work of Jesus. He was coming to bring light to replace darkness,

salvation from sin and a restored relationship with God. His work would herald that Kingdom which would eventually bring peace and goodwill to all men.

John's education with his father would be much more than was required to become a priest. Every Hebrew boy learned by heart the Messianic promises. Something of their significance would begin to dawn in the boy's heart as he became familiar with those promises. John's parents were old when he was born; by the time he reached manhood it is probable that they slept with their fathers. To whom would John turn? In the period when the Qumran scrolls were coming to light and the Essene community was being publicised, some writers made a case for John having spent time in their monastery. Whether or not he came under their influence for a while the Scriptures remain silent. The Gospel description of John's diet and clothing do not fit at all with the Qumran group; they cultivated their own vegetables, but John found his food among the wildlife of the desert. His cloak was like the desert nomad's garments which were made from woven animal hair and quite unlike the Essene white linen tunics. All we are told is that he was in the desert until the day of his appearance to Israel.

While we may find it tantalising that there is so little information about John, it was never intended that he should draw attention to himself. People commented on the fact that he "did no miracle". (John 10:41) He came to prepare God's people for their Messiah and point them to him. He did this without thought of ambition or personal success in the most selfless way possible. He could draw men to Christ and then shrink away into the shadows. His attitude is enshrined in the words of Katie Barclay Wilkinson.

*"May his beauty rest upon me, as I seek the lost to win,
And may they forget the channel, seeing only him."* Golden Bells 551

It is a vital lesson to learn from one who was so near to Christ. It is more than likely that Jesus and John spent time together in their boyhood as cousins. Yet the words recorded of John about Jesus were not of his human life. John speaks not of the person whom he had known for 30 years; rather it is the spiritual life with which John is concerned, the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world. This was to be echoed in Paul's words to the Corinthians; "...we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer" (2 Cor. 5:16 RSV). Had John gone into the priesthood he might have become a great preacher in the cities and moved

among the throngs. He might have spent his time in learning or exchanging thoughts with the great teachers in Jerusalem as Jesus did. God's purpose for John was not in that direction. He spent a long time in the desert, alone and quietly meditating upon the great God of Israel and his word; thus he came to know him in the quietness of his inner being. Not for this Nazarite were the busy streets and public places which could snare him from his purpose; with only the wild animals as neighbours he was away from that which could divert his attention and hinder God's purpose. This is how God has often prepared those who are to speak for him. There must be silence, when self stops striving and God is allowed to act and speak in our lives.

(To be continued)
AOH

The Essenes

This was an ascetic group of Jews living in Jesus' day who rigorously observed the Sabbath and other Mosaic laws, including ritual purification (although not animal sacrifice). They worked at agriculture and other pursuits, ate in silence, remained celibate, cared for their elderly, and owned all things in common. Many have suggested that the community of Jews living on the Dead sea, at Qumran, was an Essene community.

Fascinating Bible Facts
Howard & Burge

The Dead Sea Scrolls

Thousands of biblical documents and fragments (dating two or three centuries before Christ's death) were discovered in 11 caves high up in the cliffs near the Qumran Brook, at the northwest corner of the Dead Sea, between 1947 and 1956. The first discovery was made by a Bedouin shepherd searching for lost animals. Many of the documents are biblical and many are nonbiblical (such as commentaries and devotional literature).

Fascinating Bible Facts
Howard & Burge

"A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'" Isa. 40:3 RSV

A NOTE ON THE “TIMES OF THE GENTILES”

“Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” (Luke 21:24)

The expression occurs only this once in the Bible. Jesus used it in connection with His foreview of the troubles soon to come upon the Jewish nation. *“...there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled”* (Luke 21:23-24). The succeeding verses make it clear that the ending of these “times” coincides with the events of the Second Advent so that at the least they span the period between the First and Second Advents. But Jerusalem was “trodden down of the Gentiles” for several centuries before that, and since the expression evidently refers to the domination not only of Jerusalem but of the land and people by “Gentile” nations, the fairest definition of these “times” is that they commenced when the old Hebrew monarchy came to an end in the 6th century B.C. at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and continue until the people of Israel are again in full possession of their ancient land and capital, and—this is important—completely independent of the Gentile nations.

In 586 B.C. the last shreds of independence were wrested from Israel and Jerusalem was destroyed. Since that day no king has reigned on the “throne of the Lord” in Jerusalem and—apart from about a hundred years in the Maccabean period—no independent Jewish State existed until the year 1948. It has been argued that 1948 thus marked the end of the Times of the Gentiles, but a goodly part of Biblical Jerusalem remained in non-Jewish hands. The occupation of East Jerusalem by the Israeli authorities in 1967 renewed the claim that the Times of the Gentiles had now ended, but the fact is ignored that Jesus’ words imply much more than the mere question of who administers affairs in the city itself. Until Israel is completely independent of the remainder of the world and no longer subject to any kind of restraint or control from outside influence the Times of the Gentiles must be held to continue. It must not be forgotten that these “times” were imposed upon Israel because of their faithlessness to the Divine Covenant; it can hardly be expected that they will end until that faithlessness has been replaced by faith. The condemnation which ushered in this period, passed upon Zedekiah the last monarch to sit upon David’s throne, is conclusive as to this. *“And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel,*

whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown...I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him” (Ezek. 21:25-27). It might well be that the full end of the Times of the Gentiles will coincide with the revelation of our Lord in power for the deliverance of all men at the full end of the Age; that is the time when Israel will turn to God in full faith and repudiate the unbelief of the past. Contemporary events in the land of Israel may well indicate the close proximity of that great climax in human history so that it might be logically concluded that the end of the Times of the Gentiles is imminent, but not that they have actually, as yet, ended.

AOH 1988

A NOTE ON THE TIME OF THE END

What is the meaning of the expression “the time of the end” in Dan. 11:40; 12:4 and 9, etc., and to what period in history does it apply?

The phrase is found only in the Book of Daniel and denotes the culmination of the prophetic foreviews of the book, the final conversion of Israel and the setting up of the Kingdom of God upon earth. Daniel himself was primarily interested in the welfare of his own people and the realisation of their destiny; it is obvious that he had no conception of the length of time that intervenes between his own day and that event. There is not much doubt that he looked to the imminent release from Babylonian captivity as the decisive step in that direction and in this he was not so very different from many Christians of almost every century in this Era who have expected and looked for the coming of the Lord and His Kingdom each in his own day and generation. Dan. 11:40 leads closely up to the events which mark the change of sovereignty from the kingdoms of this world to that of God; the “king” there pictured is the last great evil power to oppose the incoming Kingdom and hence is pictured as arising “at the time of the end”. In Dan. 12:4 and 9 the revealing angel tells the prophet, in effect, that his words are “sealed” until the Time of the End and this means that having once been uttered and written they remain true and certain of realisation even although in the intervening time they will be more or less uncomprehended and lost to sight. Daniel was to reconcile himself to a long wait; he would not see the golden vision fulfilled in his own time but would “rest”, i.e., sleep in death, in the grave, and “stand his lot at the end of the days”, (Dan. 12:13) i.e., come forth in the resurrection to inherit the place in God’s purposes for which he had prayed and waited so long.

AOH 1968

TIMES OF RESTITUTION OF ALL THINGS

The words of our title were used by Peter and are recorded in Acts 3:21 and are part of the passage comprising verses 19 to 21 which reads correctly in this way: *“Repent ye therefore, and be converted that your sins may be blotted out, and that so the times of refreshing (lit. a breathing space) may come from the presence (lit. countenance) of the Lord; and that he may send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you, whom the heaven must receive and keep until the times of restitution of all things...”*

These verses must mean that a renewed offer of Jesus as Messiah and of the kingdom was being made to the Jews; that upon their repentance and conversion the Lord Jesus would return, and the times of restitution set in without delay. It must not be thought that Peter in so speaking, had any such two-thousand-year “postponement” in mind as that which we believers now see retrospectively to have intervened between then and the return of our Lord.

“Restitution” means the restoration of a thing to its former situation, and restoration in respect of Israel nationally was in the disciples’ minds when they asked our Lord prior to His ascension: “wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). But as “all things” are to be restored, it must be more widely understood.

The “times of restitution” promised must be of the greatest importance, seeing that Peter declared that God had spoken of them through all His prophets from the beginning. Of our first parents it was written “Let them have dominion”, (Gen. 1:26) and the Psalmist refers to this in Psalm 8:6: “Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet”. But the writer to the Hebrews much later wrote: “But now we see not yet all things put under him” (2:8) although in the verse following, he adds: “But we see Jesus...that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man”. Thus the death of Jesus according to this writer, together with His coming again affirmed by Peter in Acts 3, are shown to be the combined means by which God shall accomplish the restitution or restoration of all things, including man’s lost dominion.

There is a sense of universality respecting our Saviour’s death shown in such Scriptural declarations as: “Christ Jesus...gave himself a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:5-6); “that he by the grace of God should taste death for

every man” (Heb. 2:9); as well as the words in Gal. 3:14-16 that Christ is the seed of Abraham, through whom by an oath-bound covenant God has guaranteed that all nations of the earth would be blessed. In harmony with all these words are those by which the angel of God heralded our Lord’s birth as Saviour: “I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people” (Luke 2:10).

Considering all these assuring words, however, honest enquirers have been known to say, in effect: But Christ came 2,000 years ago and we do not see that mankind as a whole has benefitted. Sin and dying have continued to afflict the human family. Millions are still steeped in superstition and dwell in darkness—without Christ and God. Every Christmas are heard the prophet Isaiah’s words: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.” (Isa. 9:6-7)

There is an answer to all this seeming non-fulfilment. Earlier we saw that the restitution of all things is made dependent not only upon Christ’s redemptive death, when He first came, but also upon His work of restoration when He comes the second time. But it may still be asked, has nothing transpired towards that end during that interval? Our answer is that the divine purpose has unfolded exactly as God intended from the beginning.

It is clear that the proclamation of the Gospel has been restricted by God. The message was limited at first to Israel, as Jesus said to His disciples: “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5-6). Some of these “sheep” were “found”, and are referred to by such words as “He (Jesus) came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become sons of God.” (John 1:11,12); and these are described by Paul in Rom. 11:5 thus: “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace”. Our Lord’s own conduct showed that He did not expect that His message would be received by all. For example, He said: “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.” (Luke

10:21); and, “Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye (His disciples) see: for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them” (vv. 23,24); “Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matt. 7:14). Contrary to the view that is current in Christendom, Christ gave no suggestion that world-conversion was then His aim. True, He said “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations” (Matt. 24:14) and this has been fulfilled; but “as a witness” unto all nations does not mean that the Divine intention then was world-conversion.

Later, there was a development after Israel’s national rejection of their Messiah, expressed in Paul’s words: “From henceforth I will go to the Gentiles” (Acts 18:6)—and even before this God had shown Peter in a vision that the time was right to preach the message of salvation to the Gentiles as recorded in Acts, chapter 10. Peter related his experience to an assembly in Jerusalem, and afterwards, as Acts 15:14-17 shows, James interpreted the new development thus: “Simeon (Peter) hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.” The words that should be particularly stressed are “to take out”, contrasted with “the residue of men” and “all the Gentiles” in verse 17. The “taking out” clearly shows a selection or election, and this is confirmed by Paul in Rom. 11:25 when he writes that “blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness (the full number) of the Gentiles be come in.” In the same chapter, as we have already seen, Paul had referred to a remnant from Israel (v. 5), to which is now added the complement from believing Gentiles. In both cases, the principle of election is clearly seen.

So we conclude, that the interval between Christ’s first and second advents, or between His death for all mankind and the times of restitution of all things, has been to select those who shall be members of His true church—or of His mystical body (Eph. 1:22,23)—and not until the “gathering together unto him” is accomplished will His reign with them begin to introduce “the times of restitution” in respect of “all Israel” and “all the Gentiles”.

It should be noted again that “the times of restitution” or restoration are concerned with “all things”. We are told by Paul in Rom. 5:12 “as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men”, so that restitution must involve the removal of sin and

death from mankind. Thus our Saviour will reap the full harvest secured by His redemptive sacrifice. “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied”. (Isa. 53:11) This is in harmony with Paul’s declaration in 1 Cor. 15:25-26 when he shows that our Lord “must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” He has already referred to “they that are Christ’s at his coming”, and they will be with Him in heavenly glory, but what has just been quoted refers to another band—mankind in general—who shall proceed to a restored state of human life in perfection on a restored earth, to fulfil God’s original design for mankind—a purpose that has been temporarily opposed by Satan.

John in the Revelation, chapter 21:1-5, gives a wonderful picture of the conditions that will eventually obtain on earth after “the times of restitution” have fulfilled their purpose: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away...And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.”

In conclusion, we must also add the words of Paul which he wrote in his letter to the Ephesians 1:9-10 (Weymouth’s translation): “This is in harmony with God’s merciful purpose for the government of the world when the times are ripe for it—the purpose which He has cherished in His own mind of restoring the whole creation to find its one Head in Christ; yes, things in Heaven and things on earth, to find their one Head in Him.”

The Forest Gate Bible Monthly

None but God had power to lay our sins upon Christ, both because sin was committed against him and to him the satisfaction was to be made, and because Christ, on whom the iniquity was to be laid, was his own Son, the Son of his love, and his holy child Jesus, who himself knew no sin.

Matthew Henry

WAITING

“The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God” (Rom. 8:19 RSV).

This is one of those statements which can only be understood when it is accepted that God is actively working in history to bring about a desired consummation which is yet future. There is nothing static about such a statement; it does not define a condition of life or society which can be expected to remain the same generation after generation into infinity. Here is a plain indication of *“that far-off Divine event, to which the whole creation moves.”* (Tennyson) Man, says Paul in this noteworthy passage, is at present subject to futility. There will be no disagreement or dispute as to that. One day future, he also says, men will be set free from this bondage and obtain liberty. The verse above quoted equates that desirable end with the “revealing of the sons of God”. To anyone acquainted with Scripture terminology this can only refer to the manifestation of the Christian Church to all mankind “in glory” at the consummation of the Age (“end of the world” in common parlance) in association with the Lord Christ at His Second Advent at which time He puts into operation the second stage of the Divine Plan for human development—the rule of righteousness. This doctrine and expectation finds no favour with quite a few serious Christians who feel more impressed with the claims for orderly evolution of the human society toward Christian ideals than for the catastrophic or authoritarian intervention of God Most High to save men from their own folly, but the doctrine is a true one nevertheless. The fact must be faced, that man, after thousands of years on this planet and possessed of marvellous powers of perception and invention, is creating problems of survival far faster than he is solving them, and the end can only be disaster—unless God intervenes. It remains now for the Church of today to rise to its destiny and be worthy of being thus “revealed” when the time comes.

AOH

God’s Care of Israel

God formed the nation for Himself. The nation had been unceasingly disobedient. Still they were God’s nation, and through all their sins and sufferings God would work to demonstrate to ALL the world that He, and He alone, is God.

Halley’s Bible Handbook

ZECHARIAH, PROPHET OF THE RESTORATION

13. Sinners in Zion

We come now to the most difficult passage in the whole of Zechariah's prophecy—difficult, because the opening sentences seem on the surface as though they could apply only to the First Advent whilst almost immediately there appear expressions which can only refer to the Second Advent. The sword is raised against the Lord's Shepherd and in consequence the sheep are scattered. Two parts among them die but the third part is preserved in the fires and becomes the people of the Lord. The Day of the Lord dawns and the nations surround Jerusalem. One part of the citizens is led into exile but the other part is preserved. At this point the Lord rises up to defend Israel and scatter the besiegers. The difficulty lies in reconciling the smiting of the Lord's Shepherd with the rising up of God to overthrow all evil and deliver those who trust in Him.

“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones” (ch. 13:7). This “shepherd” who is also the Lord's “fellow” can be none other than Christ; the word rendered “fellow” is literally “my companion”, the “man of my fellowship”, and indicates one bound to the Father by the closest possible ties of association, much more so than the ordinary bonds of friendship. Abraham and Moses were said to be the “friends” of God; Daniel was the “greatly beloved”, but this word indicates a closer and more constant oneness and when associated with God cannot be applied to other than the Son. Zechariah must have known this and seen in the expression a reference to Israel's Messiah. Jesus endorsed this (Matt. 26: 31). The R.S.V. adopts a rendering which is peculiarly fitting; “the man who stands next to me”. However the passage is interpreted, this, the central figure, is undoubtedly Christ the Messiah.

The smiting of this Shepherd is then the rejection of him by the flock; not only that initial rejection which led to his crucifixion in the days of his humanity, but the long-continued rejection which has subsisted throughout the Age and is still true, at least in part, at the Age's end. In this the rejection of chapter 13 differs from the rejection of the same Shepherd in chapter 11, where the reference is only to the First Advent. But to perceive how this can be it is necessary to examine the structure of the passage more closely.

The point that emerges most noticeably is that chap. 13:7 to 14:2 is written

in a style dissimilar from that which goes before or comes after. It really forms a self-contained little section in its own right. Up to chap. 13:6 and also from chap. 14:3 onward the style is prose narrative, telling in the one case of the progress of Israel's repentance and cleansing, and in the other of active Divine intervention and the establishment of the Kingdom. But this little section is not narrative and it is not prose; it is poetry written in the characteristic style of Hebrew poetry, and gives every evidence of being a kind of triumph song in highly rhetorical terms inserted at this point to give maximum effect to what it has to say. The passage consists of nine couplets, the typical form of Old Testament poetry, arranged in sets of three each. Couplets 1 to 3 tell of the smitten Shepherd and the consequent scattered flock, of whom two parts die and a remnant is left. Couplets 4 to 6 describe God's care for the "remnant" which is saved out of that scattering, and couplets 7 to 9 sing of the further purifying of that remnant by the elimination of a further part proved unworthy so that a fully tried and tested nucleus remains to experience deliverance. Thus understood, the passage stands in the following fashion.

1. Awake, O sword, against my shepherd;
And against the man that is my fellow.
2. Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered;
And I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.
3. And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, two parts therein shall be cut off and die;
But the third shall be left therein.
* * * *
4. And I will bring the third part through the fires;
And I will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried.
5. They shall call on my name;
And I will hear them.
6. I will say, it is my people;
And they shall say. the LORD is my God.
* * * *
7. Behold, the day of the LORD cometh;
And thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee.
8. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle;
And the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished.
9. And half of the city shall go forth into captivity;
But the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city.

Now if this is recognised as a “theme song” then its theme is clearly that the rejection of God’s Shepherd has become a means whereby the apostates are separated from the faithful, the dross from the pure metal, until only the truehearted “remnant” remain in the land of God’s choosing and face the massed evil of the world in complete faith that God will deliver. Perhaps this is why the “song” is inserted at this point, between the account in chapters 12 and 13 of the preparation of the land and nation for the final battle, and the stirring picture in chapter 14 in which the kingdoms of this world pass away and the Lord becomes King over the whole earth. If this is so it becomes easier to accept the language of this song as covering, in a poetic fashion, the entire story of apostasy and faith from the First to the Second Advents, so that Jesus could logically apply ch. 13:7 to himself in his earthly life, when the rejection began, and yet prophetically Zechariah could see that rejection still persisting at the time of his coming again, when, as Jesus predicted, there would still be a lack of faith in the earth. At the same time the rapid development of the “remnant” which is to face the final challenge becomes a very real and present part of the picture.

Who are the sheep that are scattered and what is meant by God turning his hand “upon the little ones”. In chap. 11 the sheep are the whole house of Israel and they are abandoned to dispersal and death because of their rejection of the Shepherd. That was fulfilled in full measure at the First Advent. This later picture might well extend the same theme to the whole of the Age with particular relevance to the Age’s end. Throughout the Age, the sword has been smiting the Shepherd and the sheep have been scattered, for Israel has been continually “abiding in unbelief” (Rom. 11: 23). And if the whole history of Israel’s rejection of Messiah is looked at from the viewpoint of the resultant situation at the end of the Age a solution to the problem of the two parts that are cut off and die presents itself. Out of Israel there have always been, and are still, those who remain in the lands of their dispersion, in every part of the world, by choice, having no faith in the promises of God and no intention of taking any part in the rebuilding of the Land of Promise. These constitute one part. Then there are those who do settle and live in the Land, sharing in the creation of that State and people, but either do so from a purely nationalistic motive or, if they start out on the basis of faith in the Divine promise, later repudiate that faith and revert to the standards and expectations of this present world. These form the second part. One part still in the Dispersion, and one part within the frontiers of Israel, but both parts have rejected the Shepherd and both parts, so far as inclusion in the Divine purpose is concerned, are “cut off and die”. Like their forerunners

in the days of Jesus, they see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets, sit down in the Kingdom of God, whilst they themselves are thrust out (Luke 13:28).

There remains the “third part” which is left therein. This third part would seem to be identical with the “little ones” of verse 7. The Shepherd is smitten and the sheep scattered but, says God, “*I will turn mine hand upon the little ones*”. The “little ones” are, literally, those who are esteemed mean, despised, small in others’ view. This can well fit the few who retain their faith in God. The expression “turn mine hand upon” is not so easy to interpret. “Upon” is a word having a negative power, most frequently used in the sense of forbidding or being against a thing, and would be more accurately rendered “against the little ones” which is how the RSV and a number of other modern translations render it. In fact the same word is rendered “against” twice in this same 7th verse. The Septuagint uses the Greek *epi* to translate the Hebrew word all three times in this verse, and *epi* has the sense of being on, upon or over the subject. It might be then that the hand of God is “over” or “upon” the little ones in the sense of protection and this is the view usually taken of this verse. Since however the “third part” is later said to be brought into the fires of testing it might be in this sense that God turns his hand “against” them. Zephaniah, speaking of this same “third part” in the same prophetic setting, says that God will “*leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD.*” (Zeph. 3:12) It may be therefore that the expression is intended to indicate that from the onlooker’s point of view the Lord, having allowed His Shepherd to be smitten and the sheep scattered, has indeed turned His hand against His little ones, although from the long term angle it is clear that He is dealing with them, to use Malachi’s expression, as a refiner and purifier of silver.

This is where the second stanza of the poem comes before notice. “*I will bring the third part through the fires, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried. They shall call on my name and I will hear them. I will say, it is my people; and they shall say, the Lord is my God.*” This refined and purified and tested people is, of course, the Remnant, the stalwart nation of faith which will experience the Deliverance. The time can only be the end of the Age and the eleventh hour of the End at that, for at no other time in history will such a national faith in God, and such a consequent Divine acceptance, be true. Despite the smiting of the Shepherd which has subsisted throughout the Age, and the falling away of so many, God has at last completed the formation of His earthly elect. Ready for their glorious destiny they stand in their places in

the land they have made ready, waiting.

So to the third stanza which appears in the A.V. as the first two verses of chapter 14. Were this poem set to music, here most certainly would come the fanfare of trumpets. "*Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee.*" The time has come, the time of Israel's victory, and nothing can now hold back the march of events already irrevocably ordained in the Divine timetable. The powers of Heaven and earth are drawn up in martial array and they face each other, waiting.

A failure to understand aright the nature of this prophetic picture of the attack upon Jerusalem leads some to see in this expression the division, among the attackers, of spoil taken from Israel at this time. The idea of such proceeding is not consistent with the basic principle that this is the time, not of Israel's defeat, but of Israel's victory. Neither does the text read that way. "Thy spoil" means Israel's spoil. Had it been otherwise the passage would read "*Their spoil shall be divided...*" The point here is that despite the overwhelming physical superiority of the enemy and their proud boast that they have come "to take a spoil, and to take a prey" (see Ezek. 38:12-13) it will be the devoted people in the city who will take spoil of their attackers, as Ezekiel again says in 39:10 "*They shall spoil those that spoiled them*". And the nature of that "spoil" is well described by Isaiah; it will be no less than the allegiance and devotion of the erstwhile godless nations to the standard of righteousness which will be unfurled by the Holy Nation in that day, "spoil" more valuable to the people of God by far than treasure of gold or silver or possessions or lands. "*The nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising...the wealth of the nations shall come unto thee...the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee...ye shall eat the riches of the nations, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves...and the nations shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory...thou shalt be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God*" (Isa. 60-62 RV & AV*). The forces of the Lord in that day will have no need of earthly treasures for their spoil; their God already owns "all the gold and silver, and the cattle upon a thousand hills". (Hag. 2:8 & Psa. 50:10) The spoil they look for and will take is something much more precious, the hearts and minds and the lives of men, and this it is that will be yielded to them at that historic period of human history.

But first there has to come the peak, the crucial phase, of the refining fire

(*Isa. 60:3; 60:5; 60:10; 61:6; 62:2-3)

that is to winnow all that is dross from the community of Israel. Chap. 14 verse 2 presents what is to all appearances a strange and unexpected anti-climax. At that momentous hour when God moves in, as it were, to intervene and deliver, the prophet sees the city “taken”, the houses rifled, the women ravished, and half of the inhabitants driven into exile. Nowhere else in all the many Old Testament foreviews of this dramatic time is such an eventuality pictured; in every other instance the attacking forces come immediately up against the irresistible powers of Heaven and are utterly broken. Here in Zechariah the very next verse presents the same theme, and shows the all-powerful Lord advancing to the battle. What then is the significance of this strange diversion, introducing itself as it were at the last minute of the eleventh hour?

It must be remembered that we are still hearing the strains of the “triumph song” which closes with this verse 2. To a great extent the language used reflects past occasions of triumph and rejoicing in Israel’s history, and the nature of the coming event is described in terms reminiscent of past similar happenings in Israel’s history. The man of Israel, hearing or reading the words, was expected to cast his mind back to the former event and visualise the predicted reality within the general background of that event. In this case there is not much doubt that the background is that of Sennacherib’s defeat outside Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah. In both cases the enemy surrounds Jerusalem in confidence that he will capture the city with ease; he openly defies God, God answers the challenge, and he is defeated and expelled from the land—Jerusalem is saved. In both cases that salvation is in consequence of faith and reliance upon God. Hence to understand this verse it is necessary to compare it with the things that happened in the days of Hezekiah. There is an abundance of material upon which to draw, for the record of that celebrated event, the defeat of Sennacherib, is repeated no less than four times in the Old Testament, in 2 Kings 18-19, 2 Chron. 32, Isaiah 21-22 and Isaiah 37, with another “triumph song” extolling the victory in Isaiah 33. As if all this were not enough, we in our day have the additional advantage of Sennacherib’s own account of the campaign, inscribed on a six-sided cylinder which is at present in the British Museum, and another which is held by the University of Chicago. From all of this the aptness of this incident from history to illustrate the deliverance of Israel at the end of this Age is very marked.

“*The city shall be taken*” says the A.V. “Taken”* is *asaph*, to gather or encompass, as in a net. Hosea 4. 3 uses the word of fishes of the sea thus taken, and the meaning here is that the city is surrounded or besieged, but

*Editor’s note *laqach* H3947 (to take wide variety of applications) appears to be the correct Hebrew word

not captured in the sense of a forcible entry being effected. Incidentally the same word is used for “gather” in the same verse where God says He will gather all nations against Jerusalem; the enemy encompasses the city but God encompasses the enemy! It is rather remarkable that Sennacherib uses the same term in his account. *“Hezekiah himself, like a bird in a cage, I shut up within Jerusalem, his royal city.”* And of course Sennacherib, despite his boasting, never did get inside the city! From this picture it would seem justifiable to conclude that in a poetic manner Zechariah is saying what all the other prophets do say, that the enemy will surround the Holy Land but not actually capture it; the intervention of God will come first as it did in the case of Sennacherib.

Now Zechariah expands his theme. *“The houses (shall be) rifled, and the women ravished”* he says. This at first sight would seem to contradict the inviolability of the city. Again the historical precedent can be a guide to the meaning. According to the account in 2 Kings there was a period immediately before the great deliverance when faith on the part of Hezekiah and his people was not as strong as it should have been and they yielded to the Assyrian demands for treasure and tribute. The cylinder of Sennacherib gives a more complete list of the booty the invader took from Hezekiah at this time. *“Thirty talents of gold, eight hundred talents of silver, precious stones of all kinds, pearls, thrones adorned with ivory, tusks of ivory, sandal wood, ebony, the contents of Hezekiah’s treasure house, his daughters, the women of his palace, and his male and female slaves.”*

All these did the Assyrian take and send to Nineveh, the treasure for the adornment of his city and the women for the rest of their lives to be at the mercy of their captors. Not only so, but during the actual siege some there were who left the city trusting to the Assyrians rather than in God, and these too were captured and sent also to Nineveh. *“I threw up mounds against him”* goes on the remorseless conqueror *“and I took vengeance upon any man who came forth from the city. All who came outside the great gate of the city were captured and led off.”* That there were a number of such among the leaders of Israel is recorded by Isaiah 22:3 which is an account of this siege. *“All your rulers have fled together, without the bow they were captured. All of you who were found were captured though they had fled far away.”* (RSV) So that when Zechariah declares that the houses are rifled, the women ravished, half of the city go forth into exile, he is telling us that just as in the days of Sennacherib there was an element of unbelief which led to the loss, all part in the coming deliverance for some of the people, so will it be now. After all the

purging fires of the Age which has resulted in a dedicated people awaiting in a dedicated land the onslaught of the enemy, there will be at the last moment a portion whose faith does not hold and who in consequence are abandoned to the powers of this world. The particular details given by Zechariah are symbols only, drawn from the story of Sennacherib. The reality is that, for the last time, unbelief is found in Israel, and because deliverance can only come by faith and God is now waiting to deliver, the unbelievers go forth into exile.

Isaiah seems to have had a keen insight into this position. The language he uses in Isa. 33:14-15 although primarily directed to the unbelievers who left the city in Hezekiah's day, is even more cogently applicable to the similar situation at the end of the Age. "*The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites*" he says, and poses their terrified questions "*who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?*" The prophet gives the obvious answer; "*He that walketh righteously...*" and so on, but from other prophetic writings it is evident that he is not heeded. When Amos comes to speak of the same great Day he says "*All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, which say, The evil shall not overtake us*" (Amos 9:10) and then immediately the Lord proceeds to "*raise up the tabernacle of David, which is fallen*" i.e. introduce the opening stage of the Millennial Kingdom.

But "*the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city.*" That is the concluding triumphant line of this victory song. This word "residue" is the one so often rendered "remnant" in reference to the people of faith found ready for the Divine purpose at the end. And here Zechariah concludes his poem and prepares to draw aside the curtain to reveal the last great act in this wonderful drama. The enemy is in position around the Holy Land, all unbelievers and idolaters have been excluded from within its borders, the "remnant" is fully prepared and strong in faith. All things are now ready.

"Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations as when he fought in the day of battle." (Zech. 14:3)

AOH
(To be continued)

THE GATHERING HOME OF SAINTS

Part 5

RECEPTION AT THE FATHER'S HOUSE

The Lord's own choice of human analogy now prompts the heart to reach beyond that blessed moment of completed union, Bridegroom and Bride, to that scene of joy, that festal occasion of shared delight, the *marriage supper*.

In eastern custom this glad feast of revelry and dance and love, would last for many days, and involve a whole community. That which began with the Bridegroom's approach to the home of the Bride in accordance with the promise, "I will come again and receive you unto myself;" now continues in rejoicing as He takes her to His Father's House.

"My Father's House."

With feeling must those holy lips have framed those words, and yet He surely knew that words could not convey to finite minds, still strangers to the place of which He spoke, the fullness of the glories of His Father's House. For this is Heaven itself, to which the Holiest of all in Tabernacle and in Temple points, where shone between the gold-winged cherubim that light of the presence of God, the only illumination of that sacred place. Hidden from the eye of common man, that glory remained veiled throughout the days of this shadowy portrayal of Heaven itself, and to this hour the veil of human limitation intervenes between the state of man and things divine. Even in this enlightened age of advancing knowledge we have yet so much to learn regarding the things of the material realm. We do not nearly comprehend the fullness of its countless wonders and mysteries. If we do not understand earthly things, how shall we fathom Heaven?

Heaven is no 'place' as earth is a place in the material universe. While man long centuries past has looked above and pointed to the starry space beyond terrestrial things when indicating heaven, regardless of his location on this sphere of earth, in such vague gesture only could he indicate the dwelling place of God. For space expands the further we might go, the opposite of finite here on earth. This is our Father's realm, immeasurable in human terms, not 'place' but state of the divine, and human language formed but to describe all human life and thought at once must fail when venturing into the divine, or else must coin expressions lacking meaning in the experience of man. "Omniscience," "omnipotence," like "ether," confess only our ignorance, but give a term

whereby we speak of that defying human comprehension. In Scripture also do we find expressions which by stating opposites thus contrast with the things we know. “Not mortal”, “not corruptible”, “incapable of fading away”, by such terms does the mind reach out towards that glory which is Heaven, and the state of those who share that wondrous realm.

This is the Father’s House where Jesus said He went again, to there prepare, in holy realm of things divine, a place for each beloved “friend” to share with Him. Then would He come again and take His own within that home of love, the palace of blessedness, “the habitation of His holiness and glory.” (Isaiah 63:15) Concerning Him, Whose Name is Holy and Who inhabits eternity, no man has “heard His voice or seen His shape;” yet in our Saviour do His glories shine, and while the natural eye has likewise never seen the glorious things prepared for the sons of His love yet to our hearts the Spirit grants such precious senses of these things to come. It is a brightness ill-defined. The intellect draws back. With no precision can it view those scenes in heaven when the Lamb, with such rejoicing, brings His Bride. Yet hearts now touched by the Spirit’s power can feel the warmth of heaven’s love and apprehend the joy of that blessed hour that lies beyond the sphere of natural sense, and opens to eternal life.

What comfort lies in the master’s assurance that His Father’s House embraced so many resting places for the sons of His love. Since our common version used the word four centuries ago, “mansions” has somewhat lost its onetime simple thought of “home”. John 14 once again repeats the word in verse 23, where translated “abode”, and in its roots John’s favourite word “abide” gives clue to that sweet sense of warmth and rest and every satisfaction of the soul, first ours in Him, then, wondrous thought, *His rest* of satisfied desire *in us!* These places of delight the Master has prepared within His Father’s House each bear a written name. Oh can it be that one is marked “reserved” for *me*? Within the heart now lies the key. “Do you find there within, Dear Father, and blessed Lord, a place of sweet accord and rest *reserved* alone for Thee?” What feasting and rejoicing there awaits the holy hearts of saints! What untold depths of Father’s heart of love will find their full expression of delight as He draws His family to Him, such precious jewels in His glorious crown! The atmosphere of love of that occasion! Each heart delighting in its heavenly “treasure” in each other’s precious company. Each child of love the Father thus brings forth will share those sacred holy things dear to His heart. Their glory and their brightness in the present human state we could not bear. The riches of His wisdom, and the

wonders of His skill, and every blessed purpose of His holy perfect Will. Then shall we more perfectly explore the heights and the depths, the full dimensions of His great love.

Only the best of fare becomes a marriage feast. Poorer families with modest means may well incur great debt to rise to such occasion, or depend on gifts to supplement their fare. What nightmare would it be, what shame, if, say, the wine ran out before the climax of the feast. No wonder it was known in those first advent times, to water the wine, and eke the food out with some cheaper fare, when the effect of the first and better spread had made the heart glad and the senses and palate less discerning. The feast our Father has prepared for those that love Him reflects both highest taste and riches beyond dream. Nor will the fare decline with time, for as it progresses further guests appear, and joys are shared and thus increase, until all shall say, “the best He has kept to the last!”

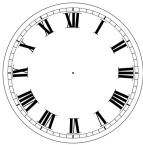
At such a wedding festival two families meet and celebrate the new-formed bond that now unites the people of the Bride with the family of the Groom. Thus, in the course of this great feast, as men begin to hear the sound of truth and taste the blessings stemming from this union in Heaven, the Bride with God’s dear Son, they will respond in heartfelt joy to that glad call to celebrate and join (while still on earth as men) with hearts above, acknowledging the union that will bind the family in Heaven with that of earth. Psalm 45 includes amongst the guests that come to share that atmosphere of nuptial joy and great exuberance of spirit, one named “the daughter of Tyre.” And, look, she bears a gift! In Holy Writ we read of Tyre’s Prince, and recognize in his arrogance and pride the description of Satan too. This one was born in his domain, and once had known indeed the power of sin, the pride of this world’s life estranging her soul from God. Yet, now responding to the invitation, there she stands, to bring the gift of gratitude and praise, a willing offering of her heart, while all in heaven rejoice at this glad sight.

So will excitement grow as more and more come into truth and fellowship and sing the songs of life with hosts above, until from every part of earth the chorus rises, to form with that same song of heaven a mighty anthem full of joy and praise, from lives reflective of the Lord, and hearts that love His ways. The feast of fat things that will gladden earth has its beginnings in those scenes in heaven when Jesus takes His Bride within His father’s House to drink with her anew the wine of sacred love. Nor will it end until all men that ‘river of His pleasure’ come to drink.

Then will the Christ, with healing beams, rise as the sun to gladden hearts on earth with cheering warmth, and overspill to earth the joys of truth and righteousness, the atmosphere of love, the pure devotion to His Will that fills all heaven. And thus will the Father's House, His dwelling place, expand to then include the hearts and lives of men that fill a sin-cleansed earth. So will His House become a House of Prayer for all mankind, when all desires of human hearts there meet, and satisfaction find forever in their God.

They all will eat the fatness, drink the goodness of the Lord, and come to know the treasures of His holy faithful Word. When the Spirit with the Bride say "Come!", and of life's abundance man will freely drink, what showers of blessing then will gladden earth! What joy the prospect brings us even now. What strength from that rejoicing now we gain. What stirring of our faith to know that hour for others of our brethren has begun. Beyond is all rejoicing! Now is the intervening veil so thin. We hear the now not far off voice that hails these joys begun. We sense the gladness, taste the feast now spread, and test the power of eagle's wings that lift our minds away to share in Heaven's bliss. They carry us on through every age to be whose blessedness will stem from this great feast, the Marriage of the Lamb.

DH



SPEAK LORD

Speak, Lord, in the stillness,
While I wait on thee;
Hushed my heart to listen
In expectancy.

Speak, Oh blessed Master,
In this quiet hour.
Let me see thy face, Lord,
Feel thy touch of power.

For the words thou speakest,
They are life indeed,
Giving bread from heaven,
Now my spirit feed.

Speak, thy servant heareth!
Be not silent, Lord,
Waits my soul upon thee
For the quickening word.

songs of the nightingale

THE DAY OF THE LORD

The Day of the Lord or Day of Jehovah has to be a significant time otherwise it would not have the heavenly Father's name. Consequently it must be considered seriously as a time when matters come to a head, a time of change to remove the old so that the new can emerge. It's much like working in a garden where weeds, like ground elder, have taken over and all you can do is dig up the whole bed and make a fresh start. This is a time in which God's interests come to the fore at His appointed time.

Peter uses this label in the third chapter of his second epistle, Zephaniah (1:14) calls it "the great day of the LORD", Ezekiel (7:19) goes even further to label it "the day of wrath of the LORD" and Isaiah (61:1-3) labels it "the day of vengeance of our God". What begins to emerge is a picture of destruction.

How this day is described in Biblical language

Zephaniah 1:15-18 gives this day a colourful but dark description by calling it a day of wrath, of trouble, of distress, darkness, gloominess, of clouds, of the trumpet and alarm. Isaiah uses the language of grapes being trampled decisively in a winepress from the old days when they were trodden down by the weight from human feet and similar language is used by John in Revelation. (Isa. 63:3-4; Rev. 19:15) Jesus described it as great tribulation. (Matt. 24:21-22)

Why should this be so? Zephaniah answers simply because they have sinned. (1:17) Malachi contains a similar thought because they have done "wickedly" and to Isaiah were given similar reasons (Mal. 4.1; Isa. 13:11). Its like Noah's day before the flood when God saw the wickedness of mankind and their thoughts were evil continually. (Gen. 6:5; Matt. 24:37) Therefore God saw this can only be permitted for so long before the decree comes 'enough' and those times have to be stopped in their tracks.

What happens in this day?

- the **heavens** pass away with a great noise and be dissolved (2 Pet. 3:10)
- the **earth** and the works that are in it will be burned up (Zeph. 3:8; 2 Pet. 3:10)
- the kings will be shattered (Psalm 110:5; Dan. 2:44)
- the chiefs or leaders will be shattered (Psalm 110:6)
- money will become worthless and provide no protection (Ezek. 7:

- 19; Zeph. 1:18)
- the mountains (nations) shall melt (Psa. 97:5; Dan. 2:44; Rev. 19:15)

Some of this language is simpler to understand as some language is more literal than some of the other language being pictorial! The heavens usually represent the religious or ecclesiastical world in this imperfect world as these present religious orders will be superseded by a one world religion. The earth represents the civil systems of this world such as the imperfect laws and traditions that bring some sort of order, even if they do not work 100%.

Peter indicates three events of the day of the Lord. The middle event of the day of the Lord indicated by Peter describes the elements melting with fervent heat. What elements are these? *Stoicheia* is the Greek word translated by the A.V. as ‘elements’. It is Strong’s word 4747 which can be a row of letters and by extension the elements of knowledge. This is a word closely related to the *stoic* philosophers that Paul encountered in Athens in Acts 17:18. “Stoic philosophy concentrated upon logic, physics, and ethics.”* Such people were without God and used their own mental powers to try to understand the people in the world around them and how they interact.

The kings are easily discerned especially in former days when many nations were ruled by monarchs who were head of state and head of the governments. If they were not ruled by hereditary kings or queens often it was a dictator or similar like Oliver Cromwell from 1649 to 1658. These kings will not be needed once they are replaced by ‘the kingdom of His Christ’. (Rev. 11:15) Likewise the kingdoms or nations and the divisions of land marking the border of one country to another and the people living there will be under pressure with division and conflict where the stronger one exerts control over another because it can and so does. This brings war between nations and civil war leading to the dividing one country into two or more.

A mountain is oft thought to represent a nation. War between nations is destructive and expensive in terms of lives lost as well as in financial resources. These mountains or nations shall be brought low (Isaiah 2:12,14). Presently most countries are ruled by presidents in charge of capitalist economies and this feature of the current civil governments will have to end in order to come under the direct influence of Christ’s government.

*Fascinating Bible Facts (Howard & Burge)

The financial systems will pass away so one will not work and another profit and those elements of selfishness that create resentment in this present world will cease. This could be applied to the stock market, paper money, credit and debt, trade and other such financial matters. Isa. 2:16 talks about the ships of Tarshish being brought low. Tarshish is the geographical area commonly connected with the coastlands and therefore trade by sea was the principal method of transporting goods around the Mediterranean and beyond in Greco-Roman times. This indicated trade will be problematic and the balance where strong and large countries and trading blocks will no longer be able to profit from their present advantage once Christ's government is finally established here.

Another feature of this process will be the spasmodic nature of the Day of the Lord. It could be described as birth pangs or birth pains. These are Jesus' words in Matt 24:8 (TLV) speaking about the Gospel age (Christian era) when looking towards the consummation of the age.

Do we see anything similar today?

In the U.K. society has become increasingly secular since 1914 with most people either agnostic or atheist. According to the Church of England the worshipping community was 2.0% of the population with the average for October 2018 being 1.5% and in total 1.1m adults and children. Gallup International says Christian church attendance was 11% in the UK, about 75% in Africa and 35% in Ireland (2016). About a hundred years ago in 1918 Church of England membership was 2.3m and including all Christian groups 8m. This is in the context that the UK population including Ireland was 45m in the 1911 census compared to 63m including Northern Ireland in 2011. This indicates a gradual decline in religious observance over the course of 100 years.

In everyday life the civil government continues and although the connection between church and state continues to decline those countries have continued to exist. However 26 Lords Spiritual of the Church of England still sit in the House of Lords. The Empires of Britain, France and other West European countries have reduced. Britain ruled large areas of Africa, India and the Caribbean and has seen nearly all those countries obtained independence primarily between 1946 and 1969. In 1914 there were about 60 countries in the world whereas now there are 195. Civil governments have led their citizens into two world wars, a so-called cold war and other conflicts in and around the Middle East. The 'Arab spring' has led to ongoing conflict especially now in Syria. Politics has supplied a succession of left and right-wing governments as well as centre left and

centre right administrations. In recent years politics has become increasingly polarised as a significant percentage of the populace remain dissatisfied with their present situation and look to new solutions and administrations to try and make a better life.

The day of the ruling king has come to an end. Russia, Germany, Italy, Greece, Romania, Serbia, Austria, and Hungary were ruled by kings although some were only constitutional monarchs. These are no longer ruled by kings or queens. There are only a handful of constitutional monarchs in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Spain. They have no real power like the Tsar did in Russia and the Kaiser in Germany and King Charles I in England. The principle of the ‘divine right of the kings’ has been banished. Their day has passed away but the traditions and those that survive have had to adapt and find another way to serve their people and preserve the institution.

Outside Europe there were monarchs in 1950 in the following countries Egypt (King Farouk I), Iraq (King Faisal II), Persia (now Iran, Shah Mohammed) as well as ones that still continue to this day—Saudi Arabia and Jordan in the Middle East. Japan and Thailand are other Far eastern countries which have just constitutional monarchs. Most countries have presidents instead.

Economic ups and downs continue to affect the economies of the world, especially the Great Depression of the 1930s. Rampant inflation has plagued countries such as Germany after WW1. Emerging countries like Zimbabwe have seen their economies collapse with at present no evidence of any real recovery. However the progress has not always been downward. World Vision reports the following, “The world is making huge strides in overcoming global poverty. Since 1990, a quarter of the world has risen out of extreme poverty. Now, less than 10 percent of the world lives in extreme poverty, surviving on \$1.90 a day or less. When families move out of poverty, children’s health and well-being improve. Since 1990, the number of children dying—mostly from preventable causes such as poverty, hunger, and disease—is less than half of what it was, dropping from more than 35,000 a day to under 15,000. While progress continues, fragile contexts and countries affected by conflict, poor governance, and natural disasters, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, have seen an increase in people living in poverty.” So some lives are really improving.

Progress is not all downward and this is what Daniel was told to predict that knowledge and wisdom would increase and people would run back and forth, while the problems in the world were getting worse. (Dan. 12:4) In 1969 two men even walked on the moon because of the discoveries made. In aviation, it's expected that 2019 will set a new record in terms of the number of scheduled passengers with almost 4.6 billion, around 130 percent higher than in 2004 according to E. Mazareanu. Labour-saving devices like washing machines have made life easier and central heating systems make life comfortable and lengthened life where the climate is cold in winter.

People are becoming healthier and living longer. According to the UN's populations division in 1950 there were about 23,000 centenarians in the world and this grew to 316,000 in 2012. However in the U.K. the current generation is not forecast to live as long as its parents for the first-time and it is suggested obesity and poor diet choices are some of the primary causes.

Economies continue to grow and the average person in the world is 4.4-times richer than in 1950 according to Core-Econ. Nevertheless there is often talk of a coming recession, or growth flattening out, market volatility and wealth inequality.

Despite economic growth, labour-saving devices, more leisure time, people living longer and so on there have also been the invention of many efficient and worrying ways to kill each other like the deadly gas in WW1 and the holocaust. Poor management has led to problems with nuclear power like at Chernobyl and industrialisation has led to breathing issues and probably global warming and the current climate emergency.

This needs to be set in the background that God's four attributes are wisdom, justice, love and power. Is it wise, is it just, is it loving and does God have the power to do it? The answer is yes. It's wise to give people the opportunity to experience the consequences of sin and disobedience, just as the penalty was death not punishment. He has the power to do it as we see daily all around us from creation and its properties, and see his love because he sent His son Jesus to die as a ransom for all and by His power raised him from the grave.

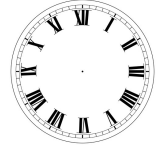
Afterwards

After any war there is peace and that should not be forgotten and it is the

Continued on page 34

THE SANDS OF TIME ARE SINKING—A HYMN

THE sands of time are sinking,
 The dawn of Heaven breaks,
 The summer morn I've sighed for,
 The fair sweet morn awakes:
 Dark, dark hath been the midnight,
 But day-spring is at hand,
 And glory, glory dwelleth
 In Immanuel's land.



Oh, Christ, He is the fountain,
 The deep, sweet well of love!
 The streams on earth I've tasted,
 More deep I'll drink above;
 There, to an ocean fulness,
 His mercy doth expand,
 And glory, glory dwelleth
 In Immanuel's land.

The bride eyes not her garment,
 But her dear bridegroom's face:
 I will not gaze at glory,
 But on my King of grace—
 Not at the crown He giveth,
 But on His outstretched hand;
 The Lamb is all the glory
 Of Immanuel's land.

With mercy and with judgment
 My web of time He wove,
 And aye the dews of sorrow
 Were lusted by His love.
 I'll bless the hand that guided,
 I'll bless the heart that planned,
 When throned where glory dwelleth,
 In Immanuel's land.



The author of these words is Mrs. A. R. Cousin the widow of a minister in Melrose, Scotland. It was first published in 1857 and the source of the words seems to be the letters of Samuel Rutherford from the 17th Century. In fact the most common tune for these words is called 'Rutherford'. The

tune was composed by a French composer Chretien Urhan and reflects the melancholic waiting rising to a treasured prospect.

The following verses are reckoned to have inspired the writer;

Luke 1:78-79 Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

2 Peter 1:19 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Isaiah 8:8-10 He shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel. Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye of far countries: gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces. Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God is with us.

Matthew 25:6 At midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

Isaiah 33:17 Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

Psalms 101:1 I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O LORD, will I sing.

Revelation 21:23 The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

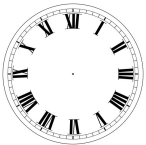
Revelation 22:3-5 The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.

same here after the Day of the LORD there is peace for 1,000 years. The picture language of the wolf dwelling with the lamb (Isa. 11:6) speaks of peaceful times, as does the still small voice of 1 Kings 19:12 and the stillness of Psalm 46:10.

Daniel (2:44) tells us the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom. Therefore having removed all that is unholy, the prince of this world, Satan, will be replaced by Christ's kingdom (Rev. 11:15). Peter in 2 Pet. 3:13 expresses it as "a new heaven and earth wherein dwells righteousness".

The resurrection of the dead will be one of the greatest and most exciting features after the day of the LORD when everything will be restored. The philosophers in Athens thought it impossible that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and that therefore there was a resurrection of the dead. (Acts 17:31,32; 26:8)

A massive campaign of education will begin bringing all to a knowledge of God (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14) Malachi uses the expression of "healing in his wings". Christ will heal all the problems of ignorance and prejudice that have blinded the minds of so many people. Small boys will not be taught to slaughter their enemies. Satan being bound will remove his influence on men, women and children. In the stillness people will get to know God and His attributes (Psalm 46:10)



NAC

DAWN (Millennial)

Foretold light, prophetic ray
Indicate Millennial Day,
Indicate the Kingdom sway
Now is due and due to stay.

But the forces of the night
Sin and darkness and their might
Satan's cohorts fighting right,
Fight to hinder dawn of light.

But "The Sun of Righteousness"
Shall dispel the frightfulness.
Heal and light earth's blightedness.
Arise, O sun of righteousness!

Poems of the Way

GOD'S WONDEFUL TIME CLOCK

“And he said unto Abram, know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years.” (Genesis 15:13)

“Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years.” (Exodus 12:40)

400 years affliction

A right understanding means the combining of reverence and teachableness: the teachableness of a child. *“The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.”* (Psalm 25:9)

In this spirit we approach the word of the Lord to Abraham: *“Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years.”* Again we observe how a superficial reading may incline one to the thought that Israel was subject to Egypt for that amount of time. We readily discern a difference, however. Why not 430 years? Evidently we are called to think again! The same culminating point of time, as marked by the exodus, is referred to in connection with the 400 years. The next verse reads: *“And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.”* (Gen. 15:13,14)

It is, therefore, clear that the end of the 430 years and the end of the 400 years are brought simultaneously to a close. The apostle Paul in Gal. 3:16,17, as we have seen, makes the promise to Abraham as marking the start of the 430 years, therefore, the beginning of the 400 years affliction must have commenced thirty years later. In this connection the words of God are definite. *“Know of a surety.”* Some kind of affliction must have occurred to Abraham's rightful heir just as predicted. If we are able to see an accurate fulfilment, then our faith in the Divine providences associating this portion of chronology will become stabilised. Remembering that 25 years after the promise was made, Isaac was born, then persecution must have occurred to him when he was five years of age, at which time his half-brother, Ishmael, was nineteen years of age.

We mention Ishmael because he was, in this case, the persecutor, which assumed the form of mocking, a word implying derision. It took place on the day that Isaac was weaned and during a great feast which had been arranged by Abraham. Now, for the benefit of those unfamiliar with the

customs of the East, we may mention that it was the usual procedure to wean a child at about five years of age. Perhaps we cannot do better than to quote a few sentences from a work, entitled: *Everyday life in the Holy Land*, as follows: "It is no extraordinary thing for a mother to continue to give a 'man-child' the breast till he is four or five years old, especially a first-born. Indeed, boys of seven may sometimes be seen fed in this way. It is evident that the 400 years of affliction and bondage foretold as coming upon Abraham's seed, start from the time when Isaac was weaned."

A Remarkable Significance!

Not only are these two features of time clarified—the 430 years and the 400 years—but we further see that the Lord was foreshadowing an event of supreme importance in the eyes of the Scriptural student. Referring to the picture, we learn that the taunts of Ishmael resulted in a complete severance of Hagar and her son from the house of Abraham (Gen. 21:8-13). Hinging on this the apostle defines the immense differences existing between the freeborn children of God and those who were developed under the law covenant. It was the result of the Lord's first advent which meant the casting away of fleshly Israel to give place to the House of Sons, who are otherwise termed the Church of the Living God. The apostle said: "*Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? 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.*" Gal. 4:28-31.

We may enlarge upon the picture by viewing the Christian (Gospel) age as the weaning period of the Church's history. They are weaned from things earthly to things heavenly. This is attended by a mockery, yea, even a persecution from some who deem themselves equally freeborn! Have they not, likewise, taken the name of God and Jesus to themselves? Meanwhile the Lord looks on and addresses words of comfort to his afflicted people, saying: "Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the LORD be glorified: but He shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed." (Isaiah 66:5)

From this and the general tenor of the Scriptural injunctions, we may settle it in our minds that everyone who makes a stand against a fellow Christian without a just cause, gives evidence that he is a persecutor in the

sight of God. Such a one denotes—no matter what his professions and activities may be—that the Holy Spirit of Truth is no longer the prevailing factor. In contrast to this, the Lord’s true people are like children in the hands of loving parents. Realising their helplessness, they nestle closer and closer in the arms of the Saviour. And, even though they are called upon to make a valiant stand for what they believe is true, yet, under no circumstances do they yield to malice or nurture grievances. They patiently long for the blessing and recovery of all who profess to be on the Lord’s side, even though this is attended by disappointments which are grave and enduring. Howbeit, because they possess that spirit which makes for peace and unity, they abhor every non-essential division and ostracism. It is for this reason that the apostles have drawn vivid contrasts between those who make true spiritual advancement and those who no longer produce the fruits of the spirit (Gal. 5:15-26; James 3). Thus we see how many things evolve from that simple incident of Ishmael’s mockery of Isaac!

Number of the elect foreshadowed!

Shall we now go deeper still with regard to the 400 years? The fact that this was declared in advance gives hint of some hidden meaning. Why 400 years? Why not more or less? While it does refer to an actual length of years, yet we bear in mind that it also stands as a symbol of affliction. *“They shall afflict them 400 years.”* (Gen. 15:13) Our attention is therefore drawn to that afflicted class whose faith is tried “so as by fire.” We refer to Israel after the spirit: the elect, whose number is given as 144,000 (Rev. 7:4; 14:1)

From this angle of viewing things it would appear that it was the Divine intention to foreshadow by the numerical itself, the actual number of his elect. Know therefore, that when 400 years is reduced to days, the result is 144,000 ($400 \times 360 = 144,000$). Relative to these figures we have in mind the Scriptural method of reckoning, which was twelve months of thirty days each, which produces a total of 360 days in a year! The time periods associating the flood is one indication of its use. Five months are there stated to equal 150 days. See Gen 7:11; 8:3-4.

To see these things fitting so precisely into the Divine arrangements enables us to enter into the apostle’s feelings when he exclaimed: *“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”* (Romans 11:33)

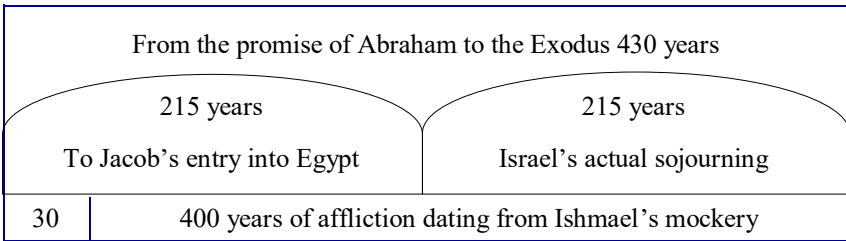
The Dividing of Time!

The rhythm of God’s dealings will likewise establish our confidence that we have adopted the right lines of interpretation. These rhythms arise to the surface through the simple process of reasoning. Such conclusions are not at all strained, but they come in the course of direct reflection. They reveal a God of order; an order surpassing by far anything associating human ingenuity.

Having completely satisfied ourselves that the apostle was used of God to affirm to us the precise duration from the promise to Abraham to the exodus, and that the 430 years cannot possibly appertain to the actual time spent by Israel in Egypt, we are yet to learn just how long they were under the dominion of the Pharaohs. We find that the period is 215 years which we tabulate as follows. From the promise to Abraham to the birth of Isaac was 25 years. Jacob was born when Isaac was 60, and Jacob entered into Egypt at the age of 130 (Gen. 12:4; 21:5; 25:26; 47:9). These three numerals, 25, 60 and 130, added together produce a total of 215 years, which is just half way across the foreordained 430-year period! We gather from this, a knowledge of God’s power over human life and activity, as well as an understanding appreciation of the rhythm of his dealings.

This is confirmed by means of the following chart.

FL



GOD’S SPEED

LOVE’S labour now completed,
 How can I better pray
 That God’s goodwill and favour,
 May speed its onward way.
 His blessing means his guidance,
 His providence and grace;
 Sweet token of his presence
 In every time and place.

FL

NOTICES

**BIBLE STUDENTS SEMINAR DAY
West Haddon Village Hall, Nr Rugby
Saturday 25 January 2020**

Theme: Micah 6:8

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Bible Students International Convention, Poland, 5-9 August 2020

**BIBLE STUDENTS FELLOWSHIP CONFERENCE
HIGH LEIGH CONFERENCE CENTRE
HODDESDON**

12—16 AUGUST 2020

Thank you to the anonymous donor.

**UK CONVENTION 2020
30 OCTOBER-1 NOVEMBER
HIGH LEIGH CONFERENCE CENTRE**
For early enquiries please contact
Dina Hinde—dina6ro@yahoo.com
Dorota Pilch—dorota.broda@gmail.com
Nicholas Charcharos—nick.charcharos@btinternet.com

Time spent waiting on God is never wasted.

*Deep Waters and a Bubbling Brook
Harvest Activities*

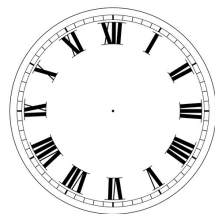
PRAYER

The act of prayer is ours
Its mysteries are God's.
In faith we make our prayers,
God gives them effect.

Poems of the Way

Ecclesiastes 3:1 -8

*To every thing there is a season,
and a time to every purpose
under the heaven:*



*a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that
which is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build
up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to cast away stones,
and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain
from embracing;
a time to get, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
a time to rend, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time of war, and a time of peace.*