

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Volume 98 Issue 3

May / June 2021



He gives rain for the earth and water for the fields.
Job 5:10 NLT

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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)

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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"He gives rain for the earth and water for the fields." (Job 5:10 NLT)

The British weather is one of commonest topics of conversation for those of us so fortunate as to live here. Rain or precipitation is also one reason to check the weather forecast on the apps which are so useful for everyday life. Will I need a coat and if so which one is best for rain is a question we ask ourselves. Usually we feel we have too much rain but rain is necessary for reservoirs of water for homes and business as well as for the fields and market gardens. Drought can be a problem too as in 1921 until 25 June there had been 100 days without rain. Flooding seems to be coming more commonplace as those who live near the rivers Severn and Avon and their tributaries can attest from rain that falls in the west and Wales. It takes days to reach places like Evesham, Ironbridge, Shrewsbury, Tewkesbury and Worcester and other towns in the west of England. Floods in other parts like in June 2019 severely affected the cauliflower crops. At times it has been dry when we expected wet and vice versa.

Rainy conditions is not just a British issue. The apostle Paul on arriving in Malta found conditions cold and rainy on arriving so much so that the locals lit a fire for him and the other passengers finally to make land on that Mediterranean island. (Acts 28:2)

Rain was associated with God's favour. God promised rain in due season but this was conditional on Israel keeping His laws and statutes and certainly not indulging in idol worship. (Lev. 26:1-4)

At other times such as with Deborah and Barak, God used heavy rain to foil the chariots and warriors of the King of Canaan's army led by Sisera. (Judg. 5:4) This was not the only act of nature that God has used and even may use to bring about a certain outcome. It is "overflowing rain" and "great hailstones" which are used to overcome the foes that come against Israel in what is called "Armageddon" in Revelation. (Ezek. 38:22)

Disfavour with God led to a lack of rain. This occurred in the days of Elimelech, the husband of Naomi. There was a drought in Israel which led to a famine because of crop failure and problems maintaining their herds. He chose to move his family to Moab. This did not turn out well because the account tells of his death and the death of his sons after which Naomi heard that the famine in Israel had ended and returned to the land of promise with her daughter-in-law Ruth.

Evil king Ahab and his Sidonian queen Jezebel did more to provoke God's anger than any of the kings of Israel. Therefore "*Elijah...prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.*" (James 5:17 NKJV) Actually there was no dew either because of the altar to Baal and the Asherah pole Ahab built. In this Christian era (Gospel age) this drought was pictured by the spiritual drought in the Dark Ages before the Reformation.

Rain symbolises truth. This is borne out by Deut. 32:2 in which the heavenly Father teaches "My doctrine (teaching) shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass." This is an understanding of Psalm 68:9 that there would be a time of "plentiful rain." This has been experienced at this end of the Christian era following the gradual emergence from the Dark Ages to a time of printing, translating and study, aided by mass education.

Hosea (6:3) and Joel (2:23) spoke of former and latter rains. In Israel rain fell in the autumn and spring and their agriculture depended upon this rain for cereal crops as well as fruit, vegetables and drinking water. Hosea of the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel prophesied at a time when that kingdom was about to fall and Joel about twenty years later in the kingdom of Judah. Both spoke of the restoration of rain. Nowadays we see Israel doing better in terms of food and water which is a sign that favour is beginning to return.

ENCAMPED BY THE WATERS



Map of Israel showing location of Beersheba

Much has been written about the Tabernacle or Tent of Meeting in the wilderness, with its ceremonies and sacrifices, so much so that other meeting places between God and men seem to have been overlooked. A study of the early records of God's dealings with men indicate that a well or spring was such a place. When Hagar showed her contempt for Sarah she was forced to leave Abraham's household and go into the desert. The Angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water and told her to return to her mistress. This well or spring became known as Beer-lahai-roi, ("a well to the living one who sees me" Gen. 16:7-14).

Later, when Isaac was weaned, Sarah saw Ishmael mocking Isaac. As a result Hagar was again forced to go into the desert, this time with her son Ishmael. Abraham gave her bread and water, but while she wandered in the desert of Beer-sheba ("the well of the oath") the water ran out and Hagar put her son under a shrub to die, and they both wept. God heard the voice of the lad and the Angel of the LORD spoke to Hagar again. The record states that "God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the (empty) bottle with water." (Gen. 21:19) In the same chapter (v.33) we read that Abraham planted a grove in Beer-sheba and called upon the name of the LORD there, but other renderings prefer "tree" to "grove," which is much more likely.

In Genesis 18 it is stated that the LORD appeared to Abraham by the terebinths of Mamre.* There three angels (messengers) appeared, and Abraham begged them to stay while water (from the well) was fetched to wash their feet while they rested "under the tree." Then in Gen. 26:19-25 there is an account of a quarrel over the ownership of some wells, but eventually Isaac's herdsmen dug a third well over which there was no quarrel, and this was named Rehoboth ("Now the LORD has made room for us.") During his lifetime Isaac made his home by Beer-lahai-roi (Gen. 25:11), and once he returned to Beer-sheba and built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord, and Isaac's servants were digging a well. (Gen. 26:25) Jacob met God at Beer-sheba and offered sacrifices there and God spoke to him. The Amplified Bible describes Beersheba as

“a place hallowed by sacred memories” (Gen. 46:1); many of God’s people today have their Beershebas.

In time this combination of trees and wells became oases, where rest and refreshment could be found in the heat of the wilderness or desert. The last verse of Exodus 15 describes such a place, and the scene stirs the imagination. And “*they came to Elim, where there were twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees; so they encamped there by the waters.*” (NKJV) We might dwell on the significance of the twelve wells and seventy palm trees, but it is more important to liken this wonderful oasis to the periods of rest and refreshment which are provided by a loving Father for his people as they journey through the wilderness of this life. However, it is important to remember that these oases do not just “happen.” During their wanderings the children of Israel came to Beer (meaning “a well”). This is identified as the place where the LORD spoke to Moses saying “*Gather the people together, and I will give them water.*” (Num. 21:16-18) Then Israel sang this song, “*Spring up, O well! Let all sing to it,*” (Amp*) but water did not gush out of the rock. As they sang they dug deep into the earth and tapped the life-giving stream that had been flowing beneath the surface, out of sight for so long.

So in this life we need to combine the songs of faith with digging in the Word of God, where we find still new beauties and still increasing light. Dwelling by the waters is pictured in another way in Jer. 17:7-8 (Amp.) “Most blessed is the man who believes in, trusts in, and relies on the LORD, and whose hope and confidence the LORD is. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters that spreads out its roots by the river; and shall not see and fear when heat comes; but its leaf shall be green. It shall not be anxious and full of care in the year of drought, nor shall it cease from yielding fruit.” The words of Jesus, as recorded in John 7:37,38, (Amp.) express the reality behind this picture. “If any man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink! He who believes in me, who cleaves to and trusts in and relies on me...from his innermost being shall flow continuously springs and rivers of living water.”

The most spectacular pictures of dwelling by the waters are seen in the visions of Ezekiel and John. In Ezekiel 47 the prophet describes a spring (trickle) of water issuing from beneath the Altar in the New Temple, which becomes a river that could not be passed over. These waters reach the sea of “putrid waters” (v.8 Amp.*) and heal it and make it fresh so that fish can live in it, “*and everything shall live wherever the river goes.*” (v.9 Amp.) On both banks of this river grow all kinds of trees for food; their

leaf shall not fade nor shall their fruit fail to meet the demand. Their fruit shall be for food and their leaves for healing.

The new heavens and new earth, pictured by the New Jerusalem, portrays the same scene. (Rev. 21) The “Alpha and Omega” promises to give to the thirsty, water without price from the fountain (springs) of the water of life. This is depicted by the river flowing out from the throne of God through the Broadway of the city; this too has trees (as in Ezekiel) on both banks yielding twelve varieties of fruit, each month its fresh crop and leaves for the healing of the nations.

So through the ages the tree by a well, the dwelling place of Abraham, the father of the faithful, will, according to the Divine plan, become a great river lined with trees on both sides, beside which the whole world will one day be “encamped by the waters.”

*Bible Study Monthly,
May / June 1979*



God often digs wells of joy with the spade of sorrow and adversity.

Blessed is the man who digs a well from which another may draw faith.

The well of God’s promises is deep and full; it is the buckets of our faith that we bring to it that are small.

In the Well with God

A young boy, walking through the field one day, preoccupied in thought, fell into a well. He was not hurt; however, his mother, on finding him, but unable to extricate him from the well at the moment, stood at the mouth of the well speaking comforting words to him. Sensing his mother’s anxiety, he said to her, “Mother, do not worry, I was talking to God when he and I fell into this well together.”

How comforting, when in the furnace of affliction, to know that He is there with us, too!

*A. C. Frey
Deep Waters and a Bubbling Brook*

THE RAINBOW OF GOD

In the way of life after the storm comes the calm, comes the fullness of life. It is by contrasting the uncertainty and at times hopelessness in the storm with the joy of life following it that the true appreciation of life can be made.

It happens on the grand scale such as in time of war when one longs for the hostilities to cease and the building of a lasting peace, or in time of an epidemic when the unseen virus cuts down those far and near and one longs for the days of health without fear, or in the true storm of the elements when one longs for it to cease and the sunshine to appear and birds to sing again. Then it is good to be alive. There are the small-scale events too when a family member is unwell with its anxiety and concern, or friends or neighbours become antagonised and fall out or husband and wife become estranged. How good it is for all such when the family member regains health, the antagonisms depart, understanding returns, the offended pair look at one another again and see not the problem but themselves which matters. The peace treaty, the bill of health, the bunch of flowers; in these there is a promise of better conditions, better relations –there is hope for the future.

So it has been with God and man. It began with a relationship of communion followed by estrangement but there is a promise of reconciliation with peace and life to follow. Meanwhile pain and suffering continue as the spirit of disobedience in man fostered and encouraged by Satan, works to bring about the destruction of society through corruption which will be found to exist at the manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus likened that day to the time of Noah. There is today development towards corruption in which, amongst others, the mass media of communication plays its part for commercial gain. With this development there has come a decline in Christian interest and activity which has led to a sense of despair and a seeking after not reality but the unreal.

Time of Noah

So it was in Noah's day; the society was corrupt and violence was general. God looked and saw man's condition, He who had created with such care a good environment for mankind, a paradise no less, was now grieved in heart. "It repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth." (Gen. 6:6) Of all scripture this is the most pathetic to read. In consequence God determined to end the society including beast and fowl. The flood of unprecedented magnitude overwhelmed the Earth and its

inhabitants. What a storm it was 40 days and 40 nights. When it stopped how peaceful it must have been.

Genesis 1:6-7 refers to a firmament or expanse as the Hebrew word *raqia* implies. It divided or separated two water zones, one that covered the Earth in liquid form and one that was above the Earth in vapour form. This firmament was most likely the airspace as Gen. 1:20 indicates for the birds flew in it. The waters above the firmament are referred to in Gen. 7:11 as the great deep. A deep cloud covering would have given uniform temperature patterns throughout the world to give abundant green growth. Gen. 2:6 refers to a ground mist watering system which existed. At the breakup of the deep cloud cover the deluge followed.

It is only after the flood when new climatic conditions must have developed that reference is first made to cold and heat, summer and winter. (Gen. 8:22) Also to “the cloud” and “a cloud” in Gen. 9, as distinct from what was before, a great deep vapour cover. If this was so then Noah and his family would see new sights, clouds and sky. But there was also to be seen another sight, the rainbow. A great arc of concentric colours of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet set up against a cloud by light scattered from the sun.

Gen. 9:13 “I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token (sign) of a covenant (agreement) between me and the earth.” God would never again destroy all flesh by means of a total flood for by breaking up the waters above the firmament or great deep He had destroyed the very means whereby it was possible to do so.

“And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.” (Gen. 9:16)

This is important for us and all mankind because:

1. God set up a sign, glorious to behold
 2. God looked on it
 3. God remembered its significance, namely the everlasting agreement.
- We too when we see a rainbow should remember its appearance followed the destruction of a society or civilisation that became corrupt and violent and is a sign of hope and promise for all mankind.

Time of Ezekiel a prophet of Israel

Ezekiel was a priest and amongst those who were taken into captivity in

Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar between the first deportation at the time of King Jehoiachin and King Zedekiah. The captives were probably in an encampment beside the banks of the river named Chebar (Ezekiel 1:1), in the land of the Chaldeans just south of Babylon. It was here that Ezekiel had visions of God through the Holy Spirit. These visions were very wonderful.

In the first visions he saw a whirlwind from the north and a great cloud and a fire enveloped it from which came four living creatures or beings described as having the likeness of a man. They must have been a little fearful to behold. Above or over their heads was a firmament or expanse even as there is over mankind, and in it was a sapphire throne and on the throne was one who appeared in form as a man whose appearance was as of amber fire and there was a brilliance of light about him which resembled the rainbow; concentric, blending colours of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. The revealed whole spectrum of the Eternal Light. "This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD." (Ezek. 1:28) A voice spoke "Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you." And the spirit entered him. (Ezek. 2:1 NIV)

Time of our Lord Jesus Christ

The occasion of significance followed after Jesus had been talking to the Jews in Jerusalem and his words had so incensed them that they took up stones to stone him because they said that he being a man made himself out to be God. But Jesus escaped with his disciples across the Jordan to Bethabara where the people were more well disposed towards him, they believed in him. There too, he could remind himself of when his Father had baptised him with the Holy Spirit as he stood up out from the river Jordan and received power from on high. His was the privilege to exercise that power as it pleased him within the desire of God to bring glory and honour to his Father.

Together with his disciples he stayed inactive, waiting as it were. There were times such as this to calm down, to meditate and wait for the Spirit's leading before acting. Where better than where one was baptised to renew again, after the heat of the encounters with the opposition, the heart conviction that had turned one permanently to God. Have you ever thought of the place where you were baptised and openly professed your belief and faith? It is strange what strength comes in so doing.

Then came news that Lazarus, a friend of his, was very ill with a request from his two sisters, Mary and Martha, that he should go quickly to see

him. Our Lord's reaction was odd in that he seemed reluctant to respond to the invitation. John 11:4 "This sickness is not unto death." What were the disciples and those who came on behalf of Martha and Mary to make of these words? Did they not imply that Lazarus would recover? So when Jesus "abode two days" in the same place it would not have alarmed them that were with him. But Jesus did add after, this "sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." Jesus knew then of the condition of Lazarus before the invitation came and further he knew that God would use him to perform an act of mercy. But the time was not yet and in accordance with God's will he waited two days rather than go straightaway.

After two days Jesus announced, "Let us go into Judea again." (John 11:7) The disciples were not at all anxious to go. Our Lord replied. "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbles not, because he sees the light of this world." (vv. 9 AKJ) What did Jesus mean? It was his way of saying that one can only work effectively when the conditions and opportunities are right. They were right now so they went. "We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work." (John 9:4 RSV) Jesus let them know what it was he was to do. "Our friend Lazarus is sleeping, but I will go and wake him." (John 11:11 Weymouth) In one sense it was a relief to the disciples; at least they would not be going to Jerusalem but to Bethany, just two miles east of the city walls. Even so a bit close for comfort. The disciples replied to Jesus it was good for him to sleep, presumably to help him recover. They had misinterpreted our Lord's words. But it was a gentle way to prepare them for the worst, for our Lord told them plainly and simply "Lazarus is dead" or more exactly has died and is dead. "I am glad...I was not there" he said, it will help you to believe and trust and rely on me "let us go unto him." Whether they all understood it is clear Thomas did have the general fear which the disciples had of the Jews "let us also go, that we may die with him" he said. (vv.15-16)

At last approaching Bethany the news reached them Lazarus had already lain in a tomb four days. Friends of Martha and Mary the bereaved sisters had come from Jerusalem to comfort them as their brother Lazarus was the one who provided for them so it was an added loss which touched their friends so. Martha, who as the Lord had said of her was careful and troubled about many things, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming was off to meet him. Mary on the other hand seemed to be a completely different character sat still in the house. Martha met Jesus outside the

village and immediately opened her mind and thoughts to him “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Almost an accusation by her of the thoughtlessness on the part of Jesus. And yet with that came a half-hearted thought on Martha’s part “but I know, that even now, whatever you will ask of God, God will give it you.” (v.22 AKJ) In itself this sounds a declaration of faith but as we shall see Jesus would test her faith to the full.

Martha was obviously agitated and probably annoyed in her feelings of grief over Jesus’ behaviour. So maybe in an endeavour to pacify Martha Jesus said to her “your brother shall rise again.” Martha must have felt at this a certain resignation to the truth of a future resurrection of the dead. “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” This affirmation “I know” how like that of Job’s “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth...Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.” (Job 19:25,27) Then Jesus revealed to her the truth concerning himself, one of his seven colours we might say to wonder at; “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Believe you this?” he asked Martha. (John 11:25-26 AKJ)

Some in explaining these words of our Lord have in mind the spiritual condition of the unbeliever who is dead in sin through Adam and who as a believer is made alive in Christ and comes to eternal life. This is in itself true, but it is suggested here Jesus has something else in mind which the apostle Paul was later to state in different words. Jesus gave his disciples to understand he would be returning to his Father in heaven. He also indicated the manner of his coming again not only to them but also in answer to the high priest at his trial. The subject Jesus here has to explain is the resurrection at the last day which Martha had raised. The last day is when our Lord returns, though Martha was not to know that then. Our Lord revealed himself to be the resurrection and the life and that those that believe in him are certain of either a resurrection from the dead and hence to life with him or if they are alive, that is at his return, will never die but be with him as he later promised “that where I am there you may be also.” (John 14:3 RSV)

Paul was to write on another occasion for purposes of comfort in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout...and the dead in Christ shall rise first...so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

Do you believe this? Jesus asked Martha. Perhaps it was too much to expect of her in a state of worry and grief to understand then but whether or not she understood there is an object lesson in her answer for us of complete trust and faith whether or not we comprehend our Lord and his word. “Yes, Lord: I believe, (not what you just said but what you are) that you are the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.” (John 11:27 AKJ) Remember Martha for that. John wrote “these are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life through his name.” (John 20:31)

After this Jesus asked to see Mary and she fell down at his feet “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died,” (John 11:32 RSV) and wept loudly such was the loss, the tragedy. And the sight and hearing of her and the others also weeping moved our Lord deeply as would any man of like compassion. “Where have you laid him?” “Come and see” they answered. At which Jesus could contain himself no longer and wept also, not audibly as the others but with tears; so the Greek word ‘*edakrysen*’ indicates. Jesus came to the grave; a cave with a stone laid against the entrance. One wonders what may have passed through our Lord’s mind at the sight of the stone at that moment? Whatever it was he commanded “Take away the stone.” (v.39 RSV)

It was at this point that Martha’s faith was put to the test. She pleaded for the stone to be left alone for it was four days since Lazarus had died. Jesus reminded her what he had told her “if you would believe, you should see the glory of God.” (v.40 AKJ) Martha fell silent and the men moved the stone away. Whereupon Jesus looked up heavenward to his Father and with thanks said “I know that you hear me always.” How Martha’s heart must have leaped at this, thinking of her reply to the Lord “I know that even now whatsoever you will ask of God, God will give it to you.” Here now was the opportunity to vindicate his claim, demonstrate to all, that death even after corruption has set in is no barrier to the power of God to bring into being yet once more those who were once alive. Jesus called out in a loud voice “Lazarus, come forth.” To the amazement and wonder of all Lazarus still wrapped in graveclothes walked out of the cave “unbind him” said Jesus “let him go.” The joy that followed!

Lazarus means in the Greek ‘without help.’ In the Hebrew ‘whom God helps.’ Lazarus certainly was without help; no one could save him from an illness which ended in death. But there was one who was able to and not only heal the sick but also raise the dead to life. Likewise who is there to help mankind subject to the illness of sin which ends in death? But “God

so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” And as Jesus delayed his coming to Lazarus for two days so he has delayed his coming for 2,000 years to finally help mankind when “all who are in their graves will hear his voice, and come out.”

Meanwhile the Marthas, Marys and their friends of this world will come to believe and to be tried. In fact now we marvel at the glory of God even Jesus in his revealed colours as it were seven in all, which blend together; I am the bread of life, the light of the world, the door of the sheep, the good shepherd, the way the truth the life, the resurrection and the true vine. Noah came out of the Ark and saw the wonder of God’s bow, a token and a sign which God looks on and remembers. Ezekiel saw it surrounding God in His glory. Lazarus came out of the cave and saw Jesus his friend, the rainbow of God. Soon we too will see him in the clouds as we look to his promised return having believed the miracles, the signs he demonstrated and manifested he is the Christ, the way to the fulness of life.

ANC

Real joy is not common happiness, but rather a zest that springs from an inner sense of peace even in the face of conflict.

Deep Waters and a Bubbling Brook

O LOVE that will not let me go,—
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

O Joy, that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to Thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be.

O, Light that followest all my way—
I yield my flick’ring torch to Thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in Thy sunshine’s blaze its day
May brighter, fairer, be.

O Cross, that liftest up my head,
I would not ask to fly from Thee;
E’en death’s cold wave I need not dread,
For in Thy home where glories spread
My life shall endless be.

George Matheson

TEN VISIONS OF CHRIST TRIUMPHANT

Part 4. Visions 6 & 7. The Beginning of the Advent

Five visions are past; five more are to come. The events of the First Advent are now left behind; vision six takes us well along the way towards the Second Advent and after that we have four glorious pictures of the stirring happenings of that Advent and the inception of the Millennial Kingdom. But first of all it is necessary to view **vision six**.

John saw another mighty angel come down from heaven. (Rev. 10:1-3) The splendour and glory accompanying this visitant from above was something greater by far than that revealed in any of the former visions. John had seen our Lord once as a man-child, twice as a sacrificial Lamb, twice as an officiating priest. All these appearances had to do with his First coming to earth, his resurrection and ministry on behalf of his Church. But now there is evidence of action; the time has come to set in motion those forces which are to gain power and momentum until at last they overturn and destroy all that there is of evil in the earth and establish a world of everlasting righteousness. No wonder that John, looking upon this new scene, described the visitant as a “mighty” angel.

The newcomer was “clothed with a cloud”—that is, he appeared as if surrounded by the clouds of heaven and almost as if walking upon clouds which were swiftly bearing him earthwards. His head was encircled by the rainbow, his face radiant as the sun, and his feet—properly “legs”—shimmered like pillars of fire. There is much in this description that is reminiscent of the vision of Deity seen by Ezekiel and described in chapter 1 of his prophecy, He too saw a transcendently glorious Being enthroned in the clouds, surrounded by the rainbow, and radiant in a fiery glory. There is one difference. Ezekiel perceived that he was face to face with the Lord God of Israel, and the voice which spoke to him was the voice of God. John knew that the appearance which was before his eyes was a representation of Christ, the Son; his mind went instantly to the vision of the Heavenly Assizes in Dan. 7 where “One like the Son of Man” comes before the Ancient of Days to receive his kingdom. Just as that Son of Man descended from Heaven to earth to assert his power and claim his domain, so now John saw this visitant from Heaven “*set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth.*” (ch. 10:2) In symbolic gesture he comes to assert his authority over a world which is in rebellion against him, but not yet to institute the Millennial reign which will quieten that rebellion. First of all there is to be an enlightenment, the dawning rays of the “Sun of righteousness,” who Malachi (4:2) said would arise with healing in his wings—his beams. Jesus himself likened

his Advent to the *astrape*, the radiance of sunrise. (Matt. 24:27) So now, John saw the angel with a countenance “as the sun” and he looked intently to see what the vision should portend.

The angel “*had in his hand a little book open*” from which he proclaimed a message. Later on John was told to take the book and eat it; it would be sweet as honey in his mouth but afterwards he would experience bitterness. In this he did but repeat the experience of Ezekiel who also was given a book, in which was written “lamentations, and mourning, and woe.” (Ezek. 2:10) Ezekiel too, was commanded to eat the book “*and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness,*” (ch. 3:3) but he soon sensed the bitterness of the message he was to preach from the book. Here the similarity ends, for Ezekiel’s mission was to an unfaithful and apostate nation who had been taken into captivity to Babylon for their sins, and the message was one of condemnation. John’s vision had to do with the coming of new light and new knowledge into the world, the rising of a sun which is never going to set, and the bitterness represented the fiery trials and hard experiences of those who championed this new light against the entrenched forces of darkness. For this vision of Revelation chapter 10 continues into chapter 11, where there is depicted the symbol of two witness-martyrs who are raised up to bear faithful testimony during the persecution period of the mystic twelve hundred and sixty days, and are finally silenced for a short space only to receive and be vindicated by the coming to earth of the Messianic kingdom, when the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of Christ. (Rev. 11:3-15) That seems to indicate the interpretation of this vision of the rainbow angel and the little book. This is Christ, three-quarters of the way through the Christian Age, bringing the first harbinger of the light and truth of his Second Advent which itself is still in the future, and the time indicated is that of the Reformation.

The Reformation was the first effective challenge to the power of Antichrist. The battle was not won then—it is not completely won yet—but that great event in the history of the Age does mark the point when the risen Christ intervened from Heaven to halt the downward decline of true Christian faith in the world and begin to bring before the minds of men the true gospel of the Kingdom. The light which then began to shine upon the Word of God has never been extinguished; not only so, but it has increased and grown brighter as the centuries passed until now in these closing days of the Age understanding of the Divine Plan and the purposes of God is clearer and more complete than at any previous time. But this is only to the Church, the true-hearted followers of Jesus. The

rest of the world goes on its way, unknowing, until the cataclysm comes, as Jesus himself said. (Matt. 24:37-39) This is shown here in Revelation. The resplendent angel, standing upon sea and land with the open book in his hand, reads from it in a stentorian (powerful) voice like the roar of a lion. (ch. 10:2-3) Nevertheless only John, the symbol of the faithful, the Church, heard what he said. Then “*seven thunders uttered their voices*”—the proclamation of the angel echoed and re-echoed from the skies sevenfold, and John made ready to write down what had been said. But a voice from heaven commanded him to seal up the things that had been said and not to write them. In other words, the proclamation and the revelation of the Divine purposes which it brought was not for all; it was only for those who are pictured by John.

During the long centuries of the Reformation period, when as yet the end of the Age was a measurable distance away, the power of Antichrist was exerted to suppress the truth and the true faith. The faithful were in the main submerged and oppressed and the Faith, although becoming better and better understood by the Reformers and their followers, was still a closed book to the greater part of Christendom. The message of the seven thunders was continually and consistently being given in secret and under cover, but it remained largely unwritten and unknown. Only as time went on did it slowly force its way to the surface. Only at the end of the Age does the voice of the seven thunders become audible to the many, when the power of the Antichrist is in process of being broken. Paul referred to this in 2 Thess. 2:8 (YLT) when he said of the Antichrist that the Lord would consume that great system “*with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy (it) with the manifestation of his presence,*” a clear reference to one of the consequences of his Second Advent.

So this mighty angel, our Lord at the time of the Reformation, gave this message to his Church. But he also had another and a wider proclamation. “*The angel...lifted up his hand to heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever and ever...that the time should no longer be delayed but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel...the hidden purpose of God will be fulfilled.*” (ch. 10:5-7)* When, later on in chapter 11, the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, it is to announce the transfer of world sovereignty from the powers of this Age to the benevolent and just rulership of Christ. The Second Advent will have become fully accomplished “*and he shall reign for ever and ever.*” (ch. 11:15)

The setting of this vision, then, is from the time of the Reformation onward to the end of the Age. In a sense the descent of this mighty angel

and his proclamation was a kind of preparation for “the gospel of the kingdom” which was to be so marked a feature of Christian witness in the final few centuries of the Age. The message was sweet, sweet as honey, but its consequences in opposition, oppression, persecution, and all the horrors inflicted by Antichrist upon the faithful in Christ Jesus made it bitter when eaten. Nevertheless the witnesses were faithful in their testimony and at the end they were raised to heaven and to life immortal, *“and their enemies beheld them.”* (ch. 11:12) As Jesus had already said, *“then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”* (Matt. 13:43)

There now come into view the four visions which between them picture various aspects of the Second Advent itself. Vision **seven** enshrines very familiar Scripture symbolism—the Son of Man crowned as a king, coming to take possession of his kingdom but first of all to gather to himself those who are truly his. The harvest of the earth is the description given, taking the theme from the parable of the wheat and tares in Matt. 13. The 14th chapter of Revelation contains the glorious picture. *“I looked, and behold a white (bright, brilliant) cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of Man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.”* (ch. 14:14) A cry from heaven comes to this kingly figure, calling upon him to thrust in his sickle and reap the harvest of the earth, for the time of harvest has come. So the harvest is reaped.

It is very important to observe here that in this vision the King does not come immediately to take his kingdom and reign over the nations. That aspect does figure in the later visions but not here. He comes for a specific purpose, to reap a harvest. Following this reaping there is another factor in the sequence of events leading to the full end of the Age, the gathering of the “vine of the earth” and the treading of the winepress, Armageddon. (ch. 14:17-20) Only after that does the kingly function, the reign of Christ and his Church over the earth, commence. At this point in chapter 14 the Lord returns to gather his Church, to resurrect to immortal life all who during the Age, having “made their calling and election sure” have been laid aside in death to await the resurrection call. And beside those who are thus raised from the dead to be with the Lord, there are those still living at the time He comes. These, says the Apostle Paul, will not sleep (in death) but will be *“changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”* (1 Cor. 15:51-52) Again in writing to the Thessalonians he says, *“we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (precede) them which are asleep. For*

the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them...to meet the Lord..." (1 Thess. 4:15-17) This is the same as is pictured by the harvest of wheat in the parable of Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43. The seed, sown by our Lord through his servants and agents throughout the Age from Pentecost to the end, has borne fruitage in those faithful souls of all generations laid aside to wait the coming of the Chief Reaper to initiate and supervise the harvest. The harvest, he said in this parable, is the end of the Age. Now in Revelation 14 we have this very thing pictured in a vision. The kingly reaper, sickle in hand, comes to reap. Those who are thus reaped are joined with him to be revealed with him a little later on to a wondering world. But at this moment the world knows nothing of this. The harvest is a process that is unknown to and unobserved by mankind in general. The resurrection of the sleeping ones is not to a renewed terrestrial existence upon this earth. They closed their eyes in death, perhaps, some of them, many centuries ago; they open them again to a celestial world outside the range of human sense but one in which their Lord is waiting to greet them. The others, who are, to use Paul's words, "alive and remain," will pass into death in the normal fashion and find themselves, again in Paul's words, "in the twinkling of an eye" in that same celestial world and amidst that exalted celestial company. "*It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him: for we shall see him as he is.*" (1 John 3:2)

Later on in Revelation (chapter 19) there is a picture of a somewhat later stage in the events of the Advent. The Church, the Bride of Christ, has now been gathered together and translated to that celestial home which the Lord himself has prepared. He said so to his disciples "*I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*" (John 14:2-3) This union with Christ in the heavens, immediately prior to the manifestation of the Church with him to the world at the establishment of the Messianic kingdom, is described in Revelation chapter 19 as the "marriage supper of the Lamb." Just what is the reality behind this vivid metaphor is difficult to surmise; it relates to conditions and activities in the celestial realm of which we, having only terrestrial experience and knowledge, can have little if any conception. The language of Rev. 19 appears to indicate a kind of triumphal reception into Heaven and introduction to the citizens of the celestial realms. It must surely indicate a being familiarised with the privileges and duties of life

in that realm and those connected with the ordained work of the Church among mankind upon earth during the Messianic era, the Millennium. For be it remembered that the glorified Church is destined, in association with her Lord and Head, to minister Millennial blessings to men and lead them through the successive stages of repentance, conversion, and acceptance of Christ, to reconciliation with God and entry into the eternal state, as many as will or can be thus persuaded. So this “marriage supper” must be accomplished before the climacteric of the Advent when the Lord Christ, accompanied by the Church, is revealed to the entire human race as earth’s ruler and man’s shepherd. The prophet Isaiah, saw that in vision. *“He shall feed his flock like a shepherd...the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.”* (Isa. 40:11,5) The earlier events of the Advent are hidden from the eyes of men but when at last all things are ready, the resurrection and translation of the Church has become an accomplished fact, the kingdoms of the earth have given place to the Kingdom of our Lord, then all men shall know, and see, and accept the fact, that Christ is Lord, and will cry, as Isaiah, again said they will cry, *“Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”* (Isa. 25:9)

So the harvest, the gathering of the Church, occupies the earlier part of the Advent period and is followed in Heaven by the “marriage supper,” the union of the Church with her Lord, and upon earth by the onset of Armageddon, the final scenes of the breakdown of human society. Both these events are succeeded by the commencement of Divine rule in the earth, when Christ and his Church are manifested in a manner not yet comprehended by men, but one which will amply fulfil the prediction of Jesus *“they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”* (Matt. 24:30) It is the province of the remaining three visions to depict the essential characteristics of the various aspects of that final event.

To be continued
AOH

Building Prison Walls

At one time many convicts were employed in building high walls around the prison grounds of Portland. Armed soldiers posted above the men watched them at their work. Every brick laid rendered their escape more impossible, and yet they themselves were laying them. So each sin committed makes it harder to refrain from further sin, more difficult to turn back.

A. C. Frey
Deep Waters and a Bubbling Brook

FIRST-BORN FROM THE DEAD

Pt. 2 Ruth and Boaz

Now of all the figures of the first-born from the dead that the scriptures afford us, the most perfect of all is found in the Book of Ruth. It is with the delightful imagery of this book that we will close. In this beautiful little book we are instructed in the law of first-born in all its detail. Its chief character is Boaz through whom our dear Lord himself is perfectly portrayed as the true first-born kinsman-redeemer. Ruth the Moabitess fills every particular of the true believer, faithfully demonstrating for us every step that the believer needs to take in the first-born walk.

In returning with Naomi, Ruth demonstrates the Gentile's faith in the covenant relationship that God had established through Abraham. She also marks the first step of faith of every believer, and from then on as she enters into the land of Israel, she marks out the steps that we must take if we are to enter into the first-born privileges. At the same time by this walk of faith in the God of Israel and love towards Naomi, she makes it possible for Boaz to find her and fulfil his kinsman's duties.

This gives us exactly the information we need. We see every duty we must perform, and, much more importantly, we see where these duties should end and, for our fuller instruction in spiritual things, that part which is exclusively the Lord's.

By chance, the record tells us Ruth comes to the field of Boaz and seeks permission to glean. At the end of the day when the other gleaners depart, she "tarried a little in the house." (Ruth 2:7) We might think that she would have been glad to return home to Naomi after a long day's toil, but not so. This one simple action is the turning point in her life. Boaz was not in the field that day but came to his house from Bethlehem. If Ruth had gone home and not "tarried a little in the house," he would not have seen her. Hearing of her kindness to Naomi, the wife of his kinsman, he determines to bless her. This is a crucial point also in our walk before the Lord as we glean in his harvest field. As we study his word and put into practice those covenant principles, what is it that catches his attention and marks us out for his special care? It is not sacrifice. It is the spirit of sacrifice that carries us beyond its letter. This is not always easy for us to detect, but there are simple tests that we may apply which will reveal to us our true standing in this matter.

How do we react when we find that we have been treated unfairly? Do we stifle the complaint? Yes, one hopes so. For instance, when waiting in

line, do we find we resent someone pushing in before us but contain the impulse to retaliate? This is certainly sacrifice, but is it the spirit of the Lord? Or do we go a little bit further and make the incident an opportunity to witness to that true spirit of sacrifice that was the Lord's, blessing those who curse, suggesting, for instance, that if their need is so urgent that we would be *glad* to let them go before us. This is just a trivial example, of course, but exactly what would mark us out as a "Moabites."

Noting then the "damsel," Boaz makes inquiry of all the good that she had done to Naomi and begins to specially bless her. That first day gleaning in the field of Boaz she had been blessed in an "earnest" or foretaste of the riches of Boaz. Now this blessing is added to. She may now drink from the supply of water set aside for the reapers, she may eat with them at their table, and Boaz himself reaches out a "morsel of parched corn" (v.14) with his own hand. But more especially he ensures that the reapers let fall handfuls from the sheaves as they reap.

This is the witness of the spirit. When Ruth returns to Naomi that next night, Naomi recognizes that something extraordinary is taking place. So too if we, while being blessed in sharing the work of our Lord's field, just take that little extra step into the spirit of true sacrifice, we will be led with Paul and those others he holds out as examples to "mark," into the deeper apprehension of the working of the spirit. As the writer to the Hebrews had to point out to those he wrote, "there *remaineth* therefore a rest to the people of God." (Heb. 4:9)

This deeper aspect of the first-born life is also perfectly mirrored in this beautiful little type. Ruth had really shown in all that she had done for Naomi that true spirit of sacrifice, but we must note that this had not, *and never could*, restore the heritage of Elimelech, Naomi's husband. They were still poor, the inheritance was not theirs. This is a fundamental truth of the utmost importance to the prospective first-born. It did not lie within Ruth's power to obtain the blessed rest.

But there is a way in which we may be led to this rest and it is revealed to us in this wonderful Word, our antitypical Naomi: "Then Naomi her mother-in-law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee." (Ruth 3:1-11) And then Naomi gives us exact and precise instructions as to how our rest in Christ can be achieved. "Now is not Boaz of our kindred...Behold, he winnoweth barley tonight in the threshingfloor. Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor: but make not thyself known unto the man,

until he shall have done eating and drinking. And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do...And she went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother-in-law bade her. And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn: and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down. And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself: and, behold, a woman lay at his feet. And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman. And he said...my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest.”

Of the washing, anointing, and changing of garment we have no need to speak. These are familiar figures. But the instruction to us not to make ourselves known to our antitypical Boaz until he had finished the harvesting of the barley is a little obscure even though we are aware of the significances of the barley and wheat harvests.

The understanding of this most significant figure lies with the more familiar type of the first-fruits of the harvests. Christ is the first-fruit from the dead, as we read in 1 Corinthians 15:20. “Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.” Christ’s offering was symbolized by the first-fruit offering of the barley harvest at Passover time, the Church’s offering by the wheat harvest at the time of Pentecost.

The account in Ruth has already confirmed that both harvests were reaped, so the fact that we see Boaz still winnowing barley indicates that this was the final work of bringing in the first harvest. Naomi’s instructions were quite plain: Ruth was to wait until this was done and that Boaz had both eaten and drunk and had lain down to rest. When she so does, she finds him “at the end of the heap of corn,” (v.7) the work all done.

In all of this, so far, it is clear Ruth’s love toward Naomi and her God, her giving up of all things because of this love, her industrious labours in the harvest field, and especially her sweet character in respect to the house of Boaz, had been instrumental in bringing her to this point. But this was as far as she could go. The real source of blessing lay with the silent figure of Boaz.

This figure of Boaz at rest after the completion of his work is the entire basis of the first-born inheritance. We have drawn it specifically to notice

already but with the evidence of the type before us, we can now mark it out with certainty. We know that the Lord as the *Logos* in his office of first-born of every creature with all the power invested in him, could not effect our change to new creatures. What is less obvious but implicit in the figures in scripture is that as first-born of every creature he could not effect our prospective death to self either. He could become flesh and die for us and purchase the lost possession, but without the winnowing experiences by which even his faith was tested, he could not have been heir of the “first-born from the dead” inheritance. “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation *perfect through sufferings.*” (Heb. 2:10)

The imagery of the “threshingfloor” wonderfully depicts the completion of the Lord’s perfect ministry and his joy and satisfaction in its completion. “Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work” (John 4:34) and “for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb. 12:2) “Set down at the right hand of the throne of God,” our Boaz has “eaten and drunk” and has entered into the “joy that was set before him,” seated at rest in his Father’s throne. This is where Ruth found Boaz, “at the *end* of the heap of corn.”

From the day she had made the momentous decision to leave all and follow Naomi, Ruth had listened to and carefully followed all the instructions of her mother-in-law. May the Lord grant that we have been as diligent. If we are serious about entering the “rest” that remains to the “people of God,” Naomi’s final instructions to Ruth should be of the utmost interest to us: “And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do.” We have marked the place where he waits to bless us, at the end of the heap of barley. We wait to be blessed with Ruth when Boaz fills her “vail” with a measure of his harvest. But first we have the enigmatic instructions of our antitypical Naomi, to uncover the feet of the sleeping Boaz and lie quietly down.

It goes without saying that we need to understand the figure if we are to fulfil the reality. Happily the understanding comes easily to hand, for we have an abundance of scriptures—our Naomi—which brings this to us.

A concordance quickly reveals that the feet of Jesus is the place of

blessing. References too numerous to mention here show supplicants at his feet make petition for help. This should not particularly surprise us. This was undoubtedly a customary form of supplication where the petitioner was in great need. The great difference with the petitioners at Jesus' feet was that they were the recipients of miracles.

This uncovering of the feet of Jesus reveals a wealth of spiritual teaching but we only need the one, of the many citations, which brings out the significance of Boaz lying "at the *end* of the heap of corn." This is found in Matthew 28:9, the occasion where the women who had been to the tomb were hurrying back to tell the disciples that the body of Jesus had been removed: "And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. *And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.*"

I have no certain idea why the women acted so. We have seen that kneeling at the feet of Jesus would not be an extraordinary thing itself and it would be feasible to understand them grasping him by the feet while so doing. The thing that is unique about this incident is that of all the many people that fell, knelt, and worshipped at, or washed, anointed, or kissed our dear Lord's feet, these were the only ones who touched the feet of the *risen* Lord. This incident stands entirely on its own. All before had certainly received of the power of the spirit, miracles of health in mind and body. More than this: even life from the dead. But all this work passed away. Lazarus returned eventually to the dust. All that they had received was by the first-born of every creature. The women kneeling and worshipping had taken hold of the feet of the first-born from the dead.

Thanks to the wonderful typical teaching of the Word, we have been able to mark the place where our Lord rested after entering into the blessing of his finished work. Today as we have meditated together on the instructions of Naomi, we have found the place where he lies at the end of the heap of barley. We have uncovered his feet, and here we are now resting quietly like Ruth in the silence of the midnight darkness at the feet of the true first-born from the dead. We wait for him to wake for we know that Naomi has told us that when he does, he will tell us what we must do to obtain our inheritance. What he will say to you in the silence of your heart, I cannot say. This is as far as the written word can take us.

The Lesson for Us

We have shared together the passing inheritance of the first-born creature. We pass on from "those things which are behind," as did Paul, (Phil. 3:13)

and now “reaching forth unto those things which are before” as the apostle also directed, we can note his words elsewhere spoken on this matter to the Ephesian church: “If so be that ye *have heard him*, and have been *taught by him*, as the truth is in Jesus.” (Eph. 4:21)

What we have here then is a most wonderful and detailed description of the step that we should take as prospective first-borns. By it we may discern exactly at what stage of the race for the prize we have attained and see before us every step that still needs to be taken. Have we left all to come into the covenant relationship of the people of God? Yes, but even here there will have been some like Orpah who first said yes and then went back. Have we gleaned in the field of the Word? Why yes, certainly, and undoubtedly returned to our Naomi to learn that it is the field of Boaz and to learn something of our first-born inheritance. More difficult to affirm unequivocally is that we have continued a little in the house of Boaz, doing good to those who spitefully use us, returning good for evil, and even more actually overcoming evil with good—not just learning the Word of the Lord, but putting it into practice and living his life, abiding in his house.

This is what brings the “Moabite damsel” to the attention of Boaz who then sees how really serious she is in her care of Naomi. We know this is an important part in our walk in Christ. Only as he sees us putting his Word into practice is he able to bless us further. But perhaps this is so also, and we find new refreshing insights into his will for us, portions of his Word guiding us in difficult experiences. Perhaps we can see special providences in some trial, his hand, as it were, putting forth the “morsel of parched corn,” bread of life touched by the fire of experience. All this, and the deepening understanding of the Word thrown down by the reapers at his command, is the growing witness of the spirit, but it is still only an earnest, not the final sealing. This is not measured out to us until we come down to the threshingfloor to see through the eyes of a “Moabitish damsel” her beloved, winnowing through the night.

“Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; despised and rejected...acquainted with grief:” bearing griefs, carrying our sorrows yet ignored, dis-esteemed, “stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.” (1 Pet. 2:23; Isa. 53:3-4) Boaz never rests, the flail* falls relentlessly, the golden store of grains fills the threshingfloor. “Wounded...bruised for iniquities:” chastised for our peace, beaten, falsely accused, spat upon, mocked. Never murmuring Boaz toils until, as the last grain falls to the threshingfloor, we hear his words, “It is

* hand threshing implement

finished.” (Isa. 53:5; Matt. 27:28-30; John 19:30)

Still the Moabitess waits. The words of Naomi are clear. Boaz, his strength renewed, his heart rejoicing lies down at the end of the harvest store. The Moabitess walks quietly along the heap of barley towards her Lord marvelling at it, “able to comprehend with all saints...the breadth, and length, and depth, and height” of “the love of Christ.” (Eph. 3:18-19)

We must wait patiently in “hope” with her if we are to receive a measure of the divine store of the love of Christ. “Patience, (brings) experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us.” (Rom. 5:4-5) Christ speaks to us as we lie in supplication at his feet. “Fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest.” (Ruth 3:11)

“Then he said, Bring the vail that thou hast upon thee, and hold it. And when she held it, he measured six measures of barley...and when she came to her mother in law...she told her all that the man had done to her. And she said, these six measures of barley gave he me; for he said to me, Go not empty unto thy mother in law.” (Ruth 3:15-17)

Naomi recognizes the sign. It is the seal of the overcomer, the second sealing, if you like, of the spirit. It is still an earnest of the reality in heaven, but a complete sealing, given to us while still in the flesh, a complete confirmation which all those who “love his appearing” recognize. But we are still in the flesh for the store in our veil of faith is just *six* measures. We must attend still to the voice of Naomi. “Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall.” But Naomi recognizes the seal, “for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day.” (v.18)

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SOWING

Ever as I go thru life
 Help me, Lord, to brighten
 Those who journey with me,
 And their burdens lighten.
 Like a gift, a trust from Thee
 Help me so to use it,
 Knowing what on earth I sow
 I at last shall reap it.

Poems of the Way

THE BIBLE'S SONG OF LOVE

Verse by verse through the Song of Songs Part 2a CHAPTERS 2:8 – 2:13

All references RV unless otherwise specified

The second part portrays our relationship to the Lord from a new viewpoint. The first part was very much in the spirit of “Lo, I am with you always, even to the consummation of the age.” (Matt. 28:20 mar.) Part 2 seems to tell of the signs of His presence at the end of the age. It would seem strange, in fact, if this glorious doctrine of our Lord’s return for His loved ones should find no place in the scriptures of the Old Testament for this, the dearest hope of every Christian, occupies such a prominent place in the New Testament. One verse in every thirteen refers either directly or indirectly to “this blessed hope” and in the Epistles alone it is alluded to once in every ten verses.

Of the Old Testament Scriptures Jesus said—These “are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39 KJV) and it is but reasonable to expect that the “Song of Songs” which, by common consent, Christian students accept as portraying the mutual love of Christ and His Church, should show forth the eagerness, the joyful anticipation and the realisation of the Christian’s hope.

2:8 “He that hath ears to hear let him hear” is our Lord’s recurring injunction. “Watch therefore—” is also the keynote of His message to those who “love His appearing.” And so the maiden continues the Song with the words which suggest alertness, watchfulness and eagerness. “THE VOICE OF MY BELOVED,” she cries, which reminds us of our Lord’s Parable “At midnight there is a cry, Behold, the Bridegroom! Come ye forth to meet Him.” (Matt 25:6) “Remember therefore...if...thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief...” (Rev. 3:3 KJV) Only the watchers discern the coming of the Beloved and hear His voice in “the signs of the times.” The Hebrew word for “voice” has the meaning of “sound” in many passages, e.g. 1 Kings 14:6. When we read it in conjunction with the rest of the verse it seems probable that this opening phrase is intended to emphasise the sound which heralds the coming of her Beloved. “For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.” (1 Thess. 4:16)

“BEHOLD, HE COMETH, LEAPING UPON THE MOUNTAINS, SKIPPING UPON THE HILLS.” Mountains and hills are used in the Bible as symbols of the kingdoms and “high places” of the world. (Psa. 30:7; 72:3) The Beloved leaps over them all for He comes to bring his loved one to the pastures which the mountains cannot provide. “And if I

go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself..." (John 14:3 KJV)

2:9 "MY BELOVED IS LIKE A ROE OR A YOUNG HART: BEHOLD, HE STANDETH BEHIND OUR WALL." Here is the unseen presence—He stands behind a wall—OUR wall. We cannot see Him in person but in the next verse we note that His voice is clearly heard and His presence discerned in many ways.

May not the maiden's reference to "OUR wall" represent the enclosures of Christian organisations which have hitherto sheltered and enclosed the Lord's people, but which can no longer be recognised by Him? This distinction is shown in our Lord's prophecy of these times in the message to the Church at Laodicea. There He rebukes them in terms which picture our Lord as being outside the wall. "Behold" he says "I stand at the door and knock" "HE LOOKETH IN AT THE WINDOWS, HE GLANCETH THROUGH THE LATTICE." (mar.) the maiden adds. He whose eyes are as a flame of fire (Rev. 1:14) observes the general condition within. The word "looketh" signifies in the Hebrew "to peep," "to glance sharply at." "For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither anything hid, that shall not be known." (Luke 8:17 KJV) The suggestions implied in "glancing through the windows" emphasises that this second half of the verse does not imply a self-revelation as suggested by the A.V. but rather that He looks with critical scrutiny for His own, the "The Lord knoweth them that are His." (2 Tim. 2:19) "I...know my sheep, and am known of mine." (John 10:14 KJV)

2:10 It seems that the Song is written in the past tense. The spiritual progress of the maiden is viewed by her from the position reached at the end of her earthly course. From the standpoint of spiritual perfection she looks back and recounts the varied experiences of the way. And so in recounting the past she says "MY BELOVED SPAKE."

To those who love each other dearly, the sound of a voice, the mention of a name, can bring a thrill of pleasure; words which appear as ordinary words of welcome and greeting seem to have a hidden depth of meaning and sweetness; the expression of a wish is law. In like manner, it may perhaps be thought not altogether out of place to suggest how the signs of earthly love may serve as teachers of the signs of heavenly love.

Then come His own words "RISE UP, MY LOVE, MY FAIR ONE, AND COME AWAY." For centuries God spoke similarly to Israel "Arise ye,

and depart; for this is not your rest..." (Micah 2:10) Here is seen the purpose of His coming—He comes for His own. (John 14:3) The returned Lord calls her away from within the "walls" of rejected Christendom to be with Him. "Come forth, my people, out of her, that ye have no fellowship with her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." (Rev. 18:4) "After centuries of waiting she shall hear the archangel's trump, and it will be the call of her Beloved to rise up and come away." (F.B.M.)

2:11 "FOR, LO, THE WINTER IS PAST, THE RAIN IS OVER AND GONE." Winter is a time of seeming deadness and stagnation. This was the experience of the Church for the centuries covered by the prophetic messages to the churches at Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira and Sardis. (Rev. 2:8 - 3:6) But these wintry experiences were followed by the refreshing rains in the period represented in the message to the church at Philadelphia. This was a time of spiritual revival and refreshment, for God says "My doctrine shall drop as the rain...as the showers upon the grass..." (Deut. 32:2 KJV) The Psalmist confirms that this is the Divine way with God's people in the words "Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby thou didst confirm thine inheritance." (Psa. 68:9 KJV) or, as in Psa. 72:6, "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth."

2:12 When "the rain is over and gone," "THE FLOWERS APPEAR ON THE EARTH." It is a time of awakening and blossoming for the true believer and "THE TIME OF THE PRUNING OF VINES IS COME." (mar.) The Revised Version chooses "pruning" in place of "singing." (KJV) (The words "of birds" do not appear in the original.) The Revised rendering agrees with the Septuagint version (used by the Apostle Paul) and the Targum (the Aramaic Version of the Old Testament translated after the return from the Babylonian Exile). This suggests to us a time of cutting away of the branches which give no sign of flowers or fruit. Although the parable of the vine (John 15) is not restricted to the closing days of the age, the teaching of scripture is that this "harvest" period is to be especially distinguished as a time of "cutting off." (Rev. 3:16) In the vine culture pruning is for the purpose of strengthening the entire plant. "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch..." (John 15:2-6) The harvest at the end of the age is a time of separating the good from the worthless. (Matt. 13:47-49)

On the other hand, if the thought of the A.V. is correct, it carries us into His next few words: "AND THE VOICE OF THE TURTLE (DOVE) IS HEARD IN OUR LAND." How often the scriptures alone explain

themselves. First we read in Genesis 8:11 how the dove was the first bird associated with the rain that was over and gone. This phrase is explained for us chiefly, however, in Jer. 8:7 where the turtle dove (a migratory bird which comes to Israel in the spring) is referred to as a time keeper. Thus with His call of love we are reminded that it is God's due time for those who love Him to "rise up...and come away." Have we responded to His call to "come" to Him away from any walls and enclosures which keep Him out or do we still choose to live in a spiritual home built by men—a fellowship which is apart from His intimate company?

The turtle dove is an apt illustration of the Lord's people. In the Tabernacle sacrifices it was "the poor man's lamb" and in Psa. 74:19 the Psalmist pictures the Lord's people as the turtle dove which is defenceless against those who prey on it, except the Lord protect it. But "God chose the weak things of the world, that He might put to shame the things that are strong." (1 Cor. 1:27) When he comes the voice of His true followers are heard—like the turtle dove and the Wise Virgins they have recognised the time and have responded "Behold He cometh."

2:13 The great doctrines of the Bible are revealed throughout its pages in many ways but each scriptural picture bears unmistakable hallmarks to guide the student of God's word. At this point in the Song there appears one of these unmistakable hallmarks of our Lord's return in the words "THE FIG TREE RIPENETH HER GREEN FIGS." The green or unripe figs which grow slowly in the winter, begin to ripen early in the spring and by the summer are fully matured. This picture is associated with one of our Lord's signs of His return given in Matt. 24:32,33. "...the fig tree" (the Jewish Nation—see Luke 13:6-10) "...when her branch is now become tender, and putteth forth its leaves, ye know that summer is nigh; even so ye also, when ye see all these things, know ye that he is nigh, even at the doors." Through the prophet Jeremiah God gave a striking prophecy of Israel's restoration (Jer. 24:5-7) in which He also likened Israel to good figs. The fig and fig tree are the new symbols used after Israel, as God's vineyard, had been laid waste. (Isa. 5) From thenceforward Israel was derelict until the ROOT and the BRANCH of the true vine was to flourish. (Jer. 31:5; Zech. 6:12; Isa. 11:1; John 15:1-8)

The word translated "ripeneth" includes the suggestion of a perfume or spice intruding itself upon the notice of others. Israel's return to the Land is doing this today to many who had previously ignored her national existence.

It is understandable that the picture of the fig tree should lead to that of the vine for it was to the nation of Israel that Christ first offered the privilege of a place in the heavenly calling—the mystery which our Lord typified in the parable of the vine. (John 15) Moreover in Palestine fig trees were allowed to grow in vineyards, thus giving an interesting picture of the close, though quite different, relationship of the faithful of God’s chosen nation—Israel, (the fig tree) to His elect of spiritual Israel (the vine). And so the Bridegroom continues “AND THE VINES ARE IN BLOSSOM, THEY GIVE FORTH THEIR FRAGRANCE.” Towards the end of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th, whilst Israel was beginning to develop, there was evidence of much spiritual fragrance amongst the followers of Christ, a promise of great fruitage of “the vine.” In the life of the individual this “harvest” period has given great opportunities for blossoming, leading ultimately to the development of fruit.

But the “walls” and barriers of Christendom have hindered the discernment of these signs in the earth and so the call of verse 10 is repeated “RISE UP, MY LOVE, MY FAIR ONE, AND COME AWAY.”

EAA/ LB

To be continued



The Latter Rain

James 5:7

The latter rain is falling,
Just like Mount Hermon’s dew;
And our Great God Jehovah,
Is making all things new.
We’ve reached the end of harvest,
And the gleaning must be done;
Let us go into the vineyard,
In obedience to God’s Son.
Jordan’s banks are overflowing,
And the priests are standing by;
They must step into the Jordan,
Then the seabed will be dry.
For Joshua, our Great Leader,
He now issues his commands;

We must be strong and of good
courage, We’ve approached the
promised land.
We draw closer to Mount Zion,
Where God’s heavenly angels stand;
Let’s throw off weights of sin now,
As Joshua demands.
So brethren let’s go forward,
Jordan’s waters are a heap;
Let us stand upon the seabed,
As God’s obedient sheep.
For our Leader gives assurance,
Of his backing and his love;
Let’s praise his name forever—
Our glorious God above.

Selected

THE PLAN OF GOD—IN BRIEF

STUDY 3—“The Mystery Hid”—Col. 1:26

While mankind was under the discipline of evil, and unable to understand its necessity, God repeatedly expressed His purpose to restore and bless them through a coming deliverer. But who that deliverer should be was a mystery for four thousand years, and it only began to be clearly revealed after the resurrection of Christ, in the beginning of the Christian age*.

Looking back to the time when life and Edenic happiness were forfeited by our first parents, we see them under the just penalty of sin filled with sorrow, and without a ray of hope, except that drawn from the obscure statement that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head. Though in the light of subsequent developments this is full of significance to us, to them it was but a faint and glimmering light. Nearly two thousand years rolled by with no evidence of a fulfilment.

About two thousand years after, God called Abraham, and promised that his seed should bless all the families of the earth. This looked as though God still held to His previously expressed purpose, and was now about to fulfil it. Time sped on; the promised land of Canaan was not yet in his possession; they had yet no offspring, and Abraham and Sarah were growing old. Abraham reasoned that he must help God to fulfil His promise; so Ishmael was born. But his assistance was not needed, for in *due time* Isaac, the child of hope and promise, was born. Then it seemed that the promised ruler and blesser of nations had come. But no: years rolled by, and seemingly God’s promise had failed; for Isaac died, and his heir, Jacob, also. But the faith of a few still held firmly to the promise, and was sustained by God; for “the covenant which He made with Abraham” was assured by God’s “oath unto Isaac; and confirmed...to Jacob...and to Israel for an everlasting covenant.”—1 Chron. 16:16,17.

When at the time of Jacob’s death his descendants were first called the TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL, and recognized of God as a “chosen nation” (Gen. 49:28; Deut. 26:5), the expectation that this nation as a whole, as the promised seed of Abraham, should possess Canaan, and rule and bless the world, seemed to be on the eve of realization; for already, under the favour of Egypt, they were becoming a strong nation. But hope was almost blasted and the promise almost forgotten when the Egyptians, having gained control of them, held them as slaves for a long period.

Truly God’s promises were shrouded in mystery, and His ways seemed past finding out. However, in due time came Moses, a great deliverer, by

whose hand God led them out of bondage, working mighty miracles on their behalf. Before entering Canaan this great deliverer died; but as the Lord's mouthpiece he declared, "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me." (Acts 3:22; Deut. 18:15) This gave a further insight into God's plan, showing that not only would their nation, as a whole, be associated in some way with the future work of ruling and blessing, but that one to be selected from among them would lead to victory and to the fulfilment of the promise. Then Joshua, whose name signifies deliverer, or saviour, became their leader, and under him they won great victories, and actually entered the land promised in the covenant. Surely then it seemed that the true leader had come, and that the promise was about to have complete fulfilment.

But Joshua died, and they made no headway as a nation until David, and then Solomon, were given them as kings. There they reached the very zenith of their glory; but soon, instead of seeing the promise accomplished, they were shorn of their power, and became tributary to other nations. Some held fast the promise of God, however, and still looked for the great deliverer of whom Moses, Joshua, David and Solomon were only types.

About the time when Jesus was born, all men were in expectation of the Messiah, the coming king of Israel and, through Israel, of the world. But Israel's hope of the glory and honour of their coming king, inspired as it was by the types and prophecies of His greatness and power, caused them to overlook another set of types and prophecies, which pointed to a work of suffering and death, as a ransom for sinners, necessary before the blessing could come. This was prefigured in the Passover before they were delivered from Egypt, in the slaying of the animals at the giving of the law covenant (Heb. 9:11-20; 10:8-18), and in the Atonement sacrifices performed year by year continually by the priesthood. They overlooked, too, the statement of the prophets, who "testified beforehand the *sufferings* of Christ, and the glory that *should follow*." (1 Pet. 1:11) Hence, when Jesus came as a sacrifice, they did not recognize Him: they knew not the time of their visitation. (Luke 19:44) Even His immediate followers were sorely perplexed when Jesus died; and sadly they said. "We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel." (Luke 24:21) Apparently, their confidence in Him had been misplaced. They failed to see that the death of their leader was a ratification of the New Covenant under which the blessings were to come, a partial fulfilment of the covenant of promise. However, when they found that He had risen from the tomb, their withered hopes again began to revive (1 Pet. 1:3), and when

He was about to leave them, they asked concerning their long-cherished and oft-deferred hope, saying “Lord, will You at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” That their hopes were in the main correct, though they might not know the time when they would be fulfilled, is evident from our Lord’s reply: “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power.”—Acts 1:6,7

What turn has God’s plan now taken? must have been the query of His disciples when Jesus had ascended; for we must remember that our Lord’s teachings concerning the Kingdom were principally in parables and dark sayings. He had said to them, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.” “He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” (John 16:12-13; 14:26) So they could not understand before the Pentecostal blessing came.

Even then it was some time before they got a clear, full understanding of the work being done and its relation to the original covenant. (Acts 11:9; Gal. 2:2,12,14) However, it would seem that even before they fully and clearly understood, they were used as the mouthpieces of God and their inspired words were probably clearer and deeper expressions of truth than they themselves fully comprehended. For instance, read James’ discourse in which he says: “Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name [a bride]. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this [after this people from the Gentiles has been taken out] I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David [the earthly dominion], which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up”—Acts 15:14-16.

James began to read in God’s providence, in the sending of the Gospel through Peter to the first Gentile convert and through Paul to Gentiles in general, that during this age believing Jews and Gentiles were to be alike favoured. He then looked up the prophecies and found it so written; and that after the work of this Gospel age is completed, then the promises to fleshly Israel will be fulfilled. Gradually the great mystery, so long hidden, began to be understood by a few—the saints, the special “friends” of God. Paul declares (Col. 1:27) that this mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, now made manifest to His saints, is “*Christ in You, The Hope Of Glory.*”

This is the great mystery of God which has been hidden from all previous

ages, and is still hidden from all except a special class—the saints, or consecrated believers. But what is meant by “Christ in you”? We have learned that Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38), and so we recognize Him to be the Christ—the anointed—for the word *Christ* signifies *anointed*. And the Apostle John says that *the anointing* which we (consecrated believers) have received *abides in us*. (1 John 2:27) Thus the saints of this Gospel age are an anointed company—anointed to be kings and priests unto God (2 Cor. 1:21; 1 Pet. 2:9); and together with Jesus, their Chief and Lord, they constitute Jehovah’s Anointed—the Christ.

In harmony with this teaching of John, that we also are *anointed*, Paul assures us that this mystery which has been kept secret in ages past, but which is now made known to the saints, is that *the Christ* (the Anointed) is “not one member, but many,” just as the human body is one, and has many members; but as all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Anointed—the Christ. (1 Cor. 12:12-28) Jesus is anointed to be the Head or Lord over the Church, which is His body (or His bride, as expressed in another figure—Eph. 5:25-30), and unitedly they constitute the *promised “Seed”*—the Great Deliverer: “If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s *seed*, and *heirs* according to the promise.”—Gal. 3:29 NKJV.

The Apostle carefully guards the Church against any presumptive claims, saying of Jesus that God “hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is His body,” “that in all things He might have the *pre-eminence*.” (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18) Yet, under the figure of the human body, he beautifully and forcibly shows our intimate relationship. This same oneness Jesus also taught, saying, “I am the vine, you are the branches.” (John 15:5 NKJV)

This is indeed a wonderful message, and, as we come to the Word of God to inquire concerning our great high calling, we find the prophets all eloquent in proclaiming the grace [favour or blessing] that is come unto us (1 Pet. 1:10); while types and parables, and hitherto dark sayings, now become luminous, shedding their light on the “narrow way” in which the anointed [Christ] company is called to run for the prize now disclosed to view. This was truly a mystery never before thought of—that God intends to raise up not only a deliverer, but a deliverer composed of many members. This is the “*high calling*” to which the consecrated believers of the Gospel age are privileged to attain. Jesus did not attempt to unfold it to the disciples while natural men, but waited until at Pentecost they were anointed—begotten to the new nature. From Paul’s explanation we know that none but “new creatures” can now appreciate or understand this high

calling. He says: “We speak the wisdom of God in a *mystery*, even the hidden wisdom [plan], which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes [chief ones] of this world knew: . . . as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit.”—1 Cor. 2:7-10.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul opens up the entire mystery, and shows how the Abrahamic covenant is to be fulfilled. He shows that the Law given to Israel did not interfere with the original covenant (Gal. 3:15-18), and that the seed of Abraham which is to bless all nations is Christ. (v.16) Then, carrying out the idea already alluded to, that the Christ includes all anointed of the Spirit, he says: “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ...and if you are Christ’s then *you* are [with Jesus] Abraham’s seed, and heirs, according to the promise.” (vv.27,29) Following up the same line of reasoning, he shows (Gal. 4) that Abraham was a type of Jehovah, Sarah a type of the covenant or promise, and Isaac a type of Christ (head and body); and then adds, “We, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.” (v.28) Thus the plan of God was hidden in types until the Gospel age began the development of the Christ.

There has existed a necessity for keeping this mystery hidden, else it would not have been so kept. It was necessary, because to have revealed the plan in full to mankind would have been to frustrate it. Had men known, they would not have crucified either the Lord of glory or the Church which is His body. (1 Cor. 2:8) Not only would the death of Christ, as the price of man’s redemption, have been interfered with, had not the plan been kept a mystery from the world, but the trial of the faith of the Church, as sharers in the sufferings of Christ, would thereby have been prevented also; for “The world does not know us [as His joint heirs], because [for the same reason that] it did not know Him.” (1 John 3:1 Diaglott) The greatness of the mystery, so long kept secret, and hidden in promises, types and figures, and the wonderful grace bestowed on those called to fellowship in this mystery (Eph. 3:9), suggest to us that the work to follow its completion, for which for six thousand years Jehovah has kept mankind in expectation and hope, must be an immense work, a grand work, worthy of such great preparations. What may we not expect in blessings upon the world, when the veil of mystery is withdrawn and the showers of blessing descend! It is this for which the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now, *waiting* for the completion of this mystery—for the manifestation of the Sons of God, the promised “Seed,” in whom they shall all be blessed. (Rom. 8:19,21,22)

Reprint 8th Edition 1993

EXCEPT THE LORD BUILD THE HOUSE

Part 2

God dwelleth not in temples made with hands

Israel's Temple at Jerusalem, in the Holy of Holies of which God was said to dwell and through which He received the worship of the people of Israel, was merely a type or figure of the true and greater Temple. The latter, not made by human hands, is now being built by God for *His place of rest* in the Heavenly Jerusalem—Christ's Kingdom. The glory and power of the earthly Kingdom *centred in its Temple* built with hands. That glory, however, afterwards vanished, and the Temple itself, being merely a figure, came to an end. In contrast, the spiritual Temple which God is now building, not with material stones but with the living stones of the new creation, will be the *eternal glory* of the New Jerusalem. That glory will never fade or diminish, but on the contrary will increase and abide throughout the countless Ages of eternity.

Before considering the building of this greater Temple, it will be well to have clearly in mind the distinction between *the Temple itself*, in which the Ark of God's strength was housed, and *the Kingdom at large*, the glory of which *emanated from the Holy of Holies* of the Divine presence. As regards the type, all can appreciate the distinction between the literal city of Jerusalem and its Temple, wherein God in a figure dwelt between the Cherubim. *The same distinction must also be recognised* in regard to the New Jerusalem—the city of the living God. (Heb. 12:22) Its Temple, built of living stones and now almost completed, will be the chosen habitation of God through the Spirit during the countless Ages of glory. Stated otherwise, it means that the Temple class, comprised of the overcoming "little flock" with their glorious Head, will be *nearer by far* to the Divine presence and have *more intimate fellowship* with the King of Glory than any others of the whole family of God. Indeed, it is God's good pleasure (declared the Apostle) "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one (united family) all things in (under) Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him." (Eph. 1:10)

It is appropriate, therefore, to enquire where and how God's house is being built. The house mentioned by the Psalmist in our text (Psa. 127:1) is undoubtedly the house that the Apostle had in mind when he wrote—Ye "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief (or top) corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in

whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” (Eph. 2:20-22)

These words of the Apostle make clear not only how and where the building operations are performed, but additionally the purpose for which the completed Temple will be used. In the primary sense, God Himself is said to be the Builder—“except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it.” This can only mean that God, as already mentioned, is its Architect and Designer, hence the vital necessity that all who would be satisfactory “labourers together with God” (1 Cor. 3:9) should learn thoroughly this all-important lesson.

Any building done in the service of the Lord *along other lines* would not be in accordance with His will. It would therefore be rejected because it would not fit into the Divine scheme, as set out in the terms of the specification. The Divine Architect does not do the actual building Himself, but like all human architects, invites labourers who are willing to co-operate in the work of building.

It might, at first, seem paradoxical to suggest that the members of Christ constitute the Temple which God is at present building, while at the same time they are said to be “labourers together with God” as living stones in building the self-same house. Actually, there is no real contradiction, when the matter is seen in the light of the Divine Plan.

The overcoming little flock of the present Age, when completed, will constitute the Temple of the New Jerusalem within which God by His Spirit will in a special sense dwell. Just as the material Temple of the earthly Jerusalem was the only means of approach unto God by the people of Israel, in the days of the typical Kingdom, so the spiritual Temple of the Heavenly Jerusalem will throughout the mediatorial reign of Christ provide the only medium of approach to the One who dwells in light unapproachable. (1 Tim. 6:16) God’s house, when completed, will be a house of prayer for all people. (Isa. 56:7)

God’s temple soon shall rise

The preparation of the stones for the Temple building has been in progress for almost two thousand years. It began with the Lord Himself. He was the first living stone prepared, and He will occupy the chief corner, as the head stone in the building. That stone has ever since been used by the Architect as a model, or pattern, according to which every other stone forming part of the building must be fashioned. This was

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clearly indicated by the Apostle when he wrote that God had predestined, or so arranged the specifications of His Plan, that every one of the foreknown Temple class must “be conformed to the image of his Son.” (Rom. 8:29)

Like every other material building, a suitable foundation must first of all be prepared, if the house, when built, would prove satisfactory and lasting. The wise architect will provide in his specification that it must be built upon a *solid rock foundation* because he knows that, if built upon sand, it will not stand the tests of storm and flood.

The foundation for God’s house has been in preparation for several thousand years, even long before the actual stones for the Temple were hewn out of the quarry of the human race. Ye “are built (declared the Apostle) upon the foundation (teachings) of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.” (Eph. 2:20) How very important, then, it is that all who would be labourers together with God in the building of His Temple should endeavour clearly to understand the requirements of the Architect, before attempting to join in the building operations.

Our Lord, as chief interpreter of the Architect’s Plan for the building, played the next most important part in the work of building. In Him can be seen a noble example of a true and faithful witness for the Father and for His Plan. His Plan concerns not only the building of His Temple, but all the human family who in due time will participate in the blessings which will flow to all the willing and obedient of the human race.

In reply to Peter’s confession of the truth that He was indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God, our Lord significantly said “I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter (of a rock disposition), and upon this rock

(foundation truth of which you have made confession) I will build my church.” (Matt. 16:18) The testimony (confession) of Jesus, as the Christ of God and Saviour of the world, is the spirit of prophecy; all who would eventually become part of the Temple structure of the New Jerusalem must accept Jesus as the true pattern for the entire building and the only means whereby salvation from sin and acceptance with God are possible.

Our Lord claimed no originality or plan of His own regarding the part which He played in the building of the House of God. On the contrary, He took every opportunity of bearing testimony to the fact that neither the words which He spake nor the works which He performed in their midst were His own, but were those of His Father in heaven. (John 14:10) In the truest sense of the term, He could say “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30)—one in purpose as well as one in method regarding the building of God’s House. Thus, while our Lord as the Father’s representative was the active agent in the work of building, yet He could truthfully say that it was God who was the Builder, inasmuch as it was His Spirit dwelling in the Son which was the guiding influence.

Our Lord not merely initiated the work of preparing the living stones for the Temple by example and precept; He also gave to His followers the means whereby the building work could be successfully carried forward to completion. To that end, He gave gifts to His followers in the capacity of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, all to aid in the work of building in order that each living stone in the building might be so shaped and polished as to conform to the instructions and specification of the Architect’s design. (Eph. 4:11-13)

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*Rest! rest! O how blessed this sweet rest at last!
Like music at even when labour is past,
Like dawn after darkness, like health after pain;
Like sunshine of gladness that follows the rain.*

H.R. Bishop