

INTRODUCTION

The book which you are about to read has important theological and practical implications. In fact, they are monumental! Therefore it should be read carefully, thoughtfully and prayerfully.

It is also essential to start from the beginning and read through to the end of the book without skipping over any material. Since the ideas presented here are developed over many chapters, if the reader does not familiarize himself with the entire work, misunderstanding could result.

There is sometimes a great temptation when first picking up a new book to look through the table of contents, find a chapter that looks interesting, and start reading there. Since many believers are not well acquainted with this subject matter the results of such reading could be misleading. With this in mind I would like to urge all serious readers to thoroughly study the information presented here before they form their final conclusions.

Another fact which should be mentioned is that to understand the contents of this book requires spiritual revelation. Since we are going to be investigating the truth of God as contained in the scriptures, we must seek Divine revelation. Due to the inadequacy of the human mind to know God independently, when we are seeking to understand His will we must rely on Him to enlighten us.

So I would like to urge you while reading through these pages to do so in an attitude of prayer, having your heart and mind open to Jesus, that He may reveal His truth to you. Of course this book is only a human effort; never-

theless, let us pray together that God could use it to further unveil to His own more of Himself and His purposes upon the earth.

D.W.D.

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1.

“THY KINGDOM COME”

*W*hen Jesus Christ returns in His glory, it is not the end of the story for this present earth. Our Lord’s plan is not to return momentarily, whisk believers off to heaven and abandon the earth to a later destruction by fire (II Pet 3:10).

As a matter of fact, God still has plans for this present earth. After His return, He intends to set up a kingdom here, centered in Jerusalem in the land of Israel. From there, His authority will be established over all the inhabited earth. This kingdom will last for one thousand years and, therefore, is known as the “Millennial Kingdom.”

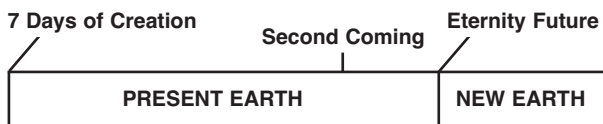
The people over whom He will reign are those few who have survived what many call the “tribulation” period. Although initially their numbers will be very reduced from today’s population because of the tribulation judgments, since there will be no wars and, undoubtedly, a lack of plagues and diseases during the millennium, the number of human beings on the earth will grow rapidly. We are not speaking here about the church or believers, but about “normal” people who by God’s mercy survived His judgments on the earth.

Not only will Jesus be reigning on this earth for 1,000 years, but Christians too will be involved in this Kingdom. Those who have made themselves ready will reign with Him (Rev 20:4).

Many believers have their hearts and minds set on heaven but God is not finished with this earth yet. While it is good to “set our mind on things which are above” (Col 3:2), we also should be aware of and looking forward to what God is planning. We should understand what really is going to happen.

After His return, His plan is to spend one thousand more years on this earth. It is only after this millennial kingdom that there will be “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21:1) which is what many think of as “heaven.”

A brief time chart is being included here to aid the reader in understanding these events in their proper sequence.



In light of the above facts, perhaps we, as Christians, should reconsider our present suppositions concerning the future of this earth and what our role in it could be. Perhaps we should relinquish our escapist philosophy and realize that God is not finished with the earth yet and neither are we.

I am not talking here about a new plan to improve the environment or to end nuclear war. Neither am I going to recommend some social action to improve the present state of affairs. What I am proposing is that believers need to be getting ready for the next phase of God's plan on this present earth – the coming Kingdom.

Now I realize that there are those who do not believe that there is an earthly Kingdom coming, or think that it is here today or even that it has come and gone already. But dealing with these doubts, misconceptions and misunderstandings in any kind of a thorough way is really beyond the scope of this book.

Suffice it to say that if people do not see from the scriptures a Millennial (1,000 year) Kingdom where Satan is bound (Rev 20:3,7) – which surely he is not today – where Jesus Christ is ruling the nations with a rod of iron and they are infinitely obedient to His will (Rev 19:15), where the sucking child will play on the hole of the asp and the wolf will lie down with the lamb (Is 11:6-8), where men beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks and there is no more war (Is 2:4), where Christ reigns physically on the earth (I Cor 15:25, Is 24:23, Rev 20:6), reapporitions the land of Israel among the twelve tribes (Ezek 48) and builds again the temple (Ezek 40-43, Zech 6:12,13), then they are not carefully reading the scriptures or just being wilfully blind.

If they do not see in all this an earthly, physical Kingdom of Jesus Christ, then I do not know how to convince them. There is just no way to prove anything to anybody from the scriptures if they are not open to it. However, if there are those who are not certain about this and are genuinely interested in a better understanding of the coming Kingdom of God, then I suggest they buy some books written by authors who believe the Bible literally, just as it reads, and do some further study.

Also a partial listing of scriptures concerning the Kingdom is being included at the end of this book for the serious Bible student. “And we shall reign on the earth”...“with him a thousand years” (Rev 5:10, 20:6).

This earthly reign of Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God’s promise to King David that there would never fail of his seed one to sit on his throne (II Sam 7:12, Jn 7:42). It is the completion of God’s commandment to Adam to have dominion over the earth (Gen 1:28), a sabbath rest to the people of God (Heb 4:1), the Day of the Lord (I Thess 5:2), and much, much more.

What a blessed fact that we, God’s people, can be a part of it with Him. The participation of believers in this Millennial reign of Christ is one of the most neglected parts of the gospel. Too often we have skipped over this

most serious subject while looking towards going to heaven for eternity. This misdirected focus has deprived many children of God of the understanding necessary for them to move forward in their Christian lives.

Yes, we should set our affections on things above, and it is true that our reward is laid up for us in heaven, but the Bible teaches that when Jesus Christ returns He is bringing these rewards to earth with Him (Rev 22:12). I am not suggesting that we fill our minds with earthly things, but that we prepare to bring the heavenly things to earth. This is part of the gospel.

The Kingdom reign of Jesus Christ is an indispensable part of what He came for and is going to do. And our role in this plan is of the utmost importance. So central is the idea of the coming Kingdom to the gospel that when Jesus taught His disciples to pray, the very first petition He spoke was "Thy kingdom come...on earth," just as it now is in heaven (Mt 6:10 NASB).

It should be very significant to us that the first thing which our Lord taught us to ask for was the arrival on earth of God's kingdom. Also, a great many parables which He taught were about the coming Kingdom and what it would be like. Certainly we should not treat this subject as unimportant or inconsequential. Rather, with the return of the Lord drawing nigh, it is something to which all of God's children need to give serious and prolonged consideration.

There is no way for the people of God to circumvent the Kingdom. It is a part of God's plan for the earth in which we will all participate in some fashion or other. The amazing but largely unannounced truth is that what we do today has everything to do with what our role in that Kingdom will be.

No matter how old we are, our time on the earth is not "just about over." We still have at least 1,000 years to work together with our Lord for the accomplishment of His purposes in this world. Our faithfulness, our diligence, and, in fact, our whole manner of living in this present world will

be the determining factor for what role Christ gives us in His Kingdom when He returns. Can this be any surprise? Even in this earthly realm, people give places of responsibility and honor to those who are hard working and faithful. Does not Jesus say that He will reward each man according to his works (Rev 22:12, I Cor 3:14)? This is exactly what He will do.

With this in mind, in the following chapters we will examine several aspects of the Kingdom which have great relevance to us today. Many of these truths may seem startling but I beg you for your own sake, do not close your mind to them. After reading this book, search the scriptures for yourself to see if these things are true.

By all means do not be talked out of them by some well-meaning individual without looking into it thoroughly. The coming Kingdom has much to do with you and no one else can change your part in it. "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rm 14:12).

"And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt 8:11,12).

2.

THE TWO “KINGDOMS”

*B*efore we get very far in this book, one thing must be made very clear if the readers are to properly understand this message, and that is that the “Kingdom of Heaven” is not the same thing as heaven. Let me say that again. When the New Testament uses the phrase “the Kingdom of Heaven” it is not referring to heaven. Instead it is referring to the Millennial Kingdom about which we have been talking.

Such a mistake is easy to make if we do not read the Bible carefully. Since many believers have heard a great deal of preaching and teaching about heaven as a destination, it is easy to read about “the Kingdom of Heaven” and automatically think “heaven.” However, as we will see throughout this book, this phrase has a very different and important meaning.

Perhaps the confusing element in the phrase “the Kingdom of Heaven” are the words “of heaven.” What these words actually mean is that the coming earthly Kingdom has its origin in heaven – that it is heavenly in its nature and content. Yet it is a kingdom *from* heaven, not a kingdom *in* heaven. It is not the “heaven” about which the Bible speaks in other places.

In fact, in the Greek language this word “heaven” is actually in the plural, “heavens.” So, really, these verses should read: “the Kingdom of (or better, *from*) the heavens.”

God reigns supreme in heaven. Heaven is the locus of His authority – the point from which He rules the universe. The words “of heaven” then are referring to the source of this Kingdom about which Jesus testified. It is the place from which the Kingdom is coming, not a destination to which we are going.

Again, the prayer which He taught His disciples to pray clearly paints the picture: “Thy kingdom come ...on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10 NASB). Jesus’ prayer was that the Father’s heavenly Kingdom would be fully manifested on the earth. So we see that, although the Kingdom of Heaven is heavenly in character and origin, it is not the same thing as heaven.

It is interesting to note that of all the New Testament writers, only Matthew uses the phrase “the Kingdom of Heaven.” All of the other writers use the phrase “the Kingdom of God.” In the four gospels, when the writers are quoting the same parables of Jesus, Matthew uses “the Kingdom of Heaven” and the other three say “the Kingdom of God.”

This shows us that these terms are used interchangeably in the inspired Word. There is no difference between the two. Such an observation also reinforces the idea that the “Kingdom of Heaven” is not heaven, rather it is the kingdom of God which will come to this earth when Jesus returns.

The distinction between the Kingdom of Heaven and “heaven” becomes important when we read the parables which Jesus taught about this kingdom. If we apply the “kingdom parables” to heaven, then we can come away with some very confusing and even wrong ideas. But when we apply them correctly to the coming earthly kingdom of Jesus Christ, much more of God’s truth becomes clear. This is exactly what we will be doing in some of the later chapters of this book.

The Jewish people who were listening to Jesus teach did not have a problem understanding that He was referring to an earthly Kingdom. On the contrary, many of

them had difficulty realizing the spiritual aspects of it. For centuries they had been waiting for Messiah the King who would lead them out of bondage. They well knew the scriptures prophesying that One would come to sit on the throne of David and rule over them (Is 9:7). When Herod questioned the scribes regarding the place of the Messiah's birth, they knew the exact location.

The coming of a King to set up an earthly Kingdom was no secret to them. It was exactly what they were waiting for! What they failed to realize was that the prophesied coming of Jesus consisted of two events. There was a first coming and there will be a second coming – one to which all true believers are looking forward. And it is at the second one that He will establish His earthly, physical Kingdom.

TWO ASPECTS OF THE KINGDOM

What the Jews did not realize then, but what we know now, is that these two comings of Christ correspond to two aspects of the Kingdom of God. First, there is a present spiritual experience of the Kingdom into which Christians can enter. And second, there is the coming outward manifestation of the Kingdom on this earth.

Today we can experience the Kingdom spiritually, and someday soon it is coming to the earth physically. On the one hand, referring to the first, Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn 18:36). But on the other hand, the scriptures read, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ" (Rev 11:15).

Although the spiritual aspect of the Kingdom, ushered in with the first advent of Christ, and the outward manifestation of it which begins with the second coming, are separated by 2,000 years, they have very much in common. In fact, they are inseparable and completely interrelated.

In order to convey a clear comprehension of these two facets of the Kingdom of God, perhaps it will first be necessary to talk about just what a kingdom is. A kingdom is a certain geographical area which is governed by a king. A

kingdom is also a collection of people who are subjected to the will and dictates of a particular king.

Actually these two definitions fit exactly with the two aspects of the Kingdom about which we have been talking. With Christ's first coming He is gathering to Himself a people. With His second, He will establish His rightful rulership over this world. His first advent heralded the assertion of His Lordship over hearts and lives of men who are willing to submit themselves to Him. His second coming will establish His Kingship over all the inhabited earth.

In most of the free world today people have a lot of trouble understanding the concept of "king." There are very few rulers today who claim to be kings, and those that do (except perhaps in the Middle East) actually wield very little power. The idea of bowing before someone and being obedient to his every wish is foreign to us if not even repulsive. The very thought of not being in control of their own lives has not even entered very many men's minds.

We, especially in the "West," are used to "freedom" and any "kings" that come along may have some difficulty asserting their influence over us. Alas, such is the situation with Jesus Christ and much of His Church today. We, His people, rightfully belong to Him but are submitted to His authority very little.

Perhaps a word which could be used to better describe what the Biblical word "king" should mean to us is the word "dictator." Here is a word to which our world can relate. It holds for us the idea of a man who wields absolute power. His word is law and no one dares to disobey.

This is really what the Bible means when it uses the word "king." (The word "Lord," by the way, has a very similar meaning.) Although "dictator" may convey to us the idea of harshness or cruelty while our King, Jesus, is not that way, still the concept of absolute power and authority is exactly correct. God has made this same Jesus who was crucified both King and Lord. In fact, He is King

of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:16). It is to Him we must submit ourselves and Him we must obey.

Now, with this in mind, we can talk a little about the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of Heaven, is the sphere over which God's authority extends. It consists of the territory and the beings over which He rules.

We might assume that most of the universe fits into this category. One exception is this earth and the majority of the people on it. The Bible teaches us that this world is presently in the hands of the devil and he is a prince over it and its inhabitants (Jn 14:30).

Although Jesus has defeated him at the cross, this victory has not yet been fully manifested. God is just now in the process of establishing His rightful authority over this world. When Jesus Christ returns, the devil will be chained up for 1,000 years (Rev 20:1-3) and Jesus will reign supreme in all the earth.

As mentioned previously, the first place that He is starting to rule and the area in which He is working today is the hearts and lives of men and women. Through the events of His first advent, Jesus Christ demonstrated His right to transfer people out of this world's kingdom of darkness into His own Kingdom of light. He has redeemed mankind with His own precious blood and purchased us for His own possession.

Now we are rightfully His! Whereas once we were obedient to the evil ruler of this age, now we need be subjected to him no longer. Jesus has set us free. Although we were God's because He made us, Satan usurped this authority in the garden of Eden through his temptation of Adam and Eve. Now, Jesus Christ is in the process of recovering us from this fall and reestablishing His Kingship over His people. Hallelujah!

OUR WILLINGNESS IS ESSENTIAL

There is, however, a very interesting aspect of Christ's Kingdom to which we must pay very careful attention.

Jesus will reign over only those who are willing. Today He will be a King over only those who want Him to be.

When He came in person to the Jews in Israel most of them rejected Him. At one point their leaders (who were supposed to be waiting for Messiah) declared, "We have no king but Caesar" (Jn 19:15). And so it is still today. We can either accept or reject the Kingship of Jesus Christ. But there is a day coming when this option will lapse. When Jesus Christ comes again, the scriptures tell us that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord (Phil 2:10,11). At this time He will powerfully subject the whole earth and the inhabitants thereof to Himself (Lk 19:27).

These days in evangelical circles, a person can hear many people preaching such things as "receive Jesus," "trust Jesus," or "ask Jesus into your life." These things are true and right and good.

However, this is not the whole story. What seems to be missing from this kind of preaching is that when we receive Jesus, we receive Him for what He is – King and Lord. When the first disciples preached, they preached the *Lord* Jesus Christ. They proclaimed a Christ who wanted full allegiance, who asked for a total commitment of the rest of their lives and who required a complete separation from what was not in His Kingdom. This is why they saw such marvelous results.

Those preachers did not overemphasize what Christ could do for the people but they announced what the people's responsibility was toward God. They knew who Jesus was. He was the King promised long ago and they were wise enough to submit themselves totally to Him. How we could stand a good dose of this kind of preaching today! How we need to follow their example!

This is one explanation of why we have so many lukewarm, insincere converts to Christianity today. We tell them something like: "If only you will receive Jesus He will make you happy and make you feel good and help you with your life." On the other hand Jesus preached:

“Repent (change your mind and agree with God concerning your sins) for the Kingdom (the rulership) of Heaven is at hand.”

This then is the problem. When we lead someone to receive Christ without making it very plain to them the total commitment which is required, at first things may go along just fine. But sooner or later Jesus will begin to assert His rightful Lordship over their lives. Since these converts have not been prepared for anything like that, many times they turn away and don't walk with Him any more. Or sometimes there begins a long and painful struggle with God about who is to run their lives.

We could easily spare people this problem by telling them the truth from the beginning. Let us tell them plainly that they should not even begin to build a tower until they sit down and thoroughly count the cost. I am afraid that we water down the gospel to get “numbers” “saved” when in reality we are doing service neither to God nor to them. It is all too easy to immunize converts with easy Christianity, making it all the harder for them to later realize the truth.

This then is the gospel of the Kingdom. It is the gospel that Jesus preached. We are to repent because there is a spiritual Kingdom which has been announced in which God is to have complete control over every aspect of our lives. He is to rule over our minds, our emotions and our will. Our bodies are to be His to use to further His plans and purposes. Our money, our future, our hopes and dreams, all these things are to be completely submitted to the authority of our King.

Furthermore, there is an outward, earthly manifestation of this Kingdom coming soon to this earth of which we can be a part if we are willing. Actually, there is no other gospel. Although we usually hear only other aspects of it, this is really what the Bible teaches.

The Kingdom of God today is an inward, spiritual Kingdom. It is a Kingdom which does not come with observation (Lk 17:20,21). This means that it is not yet

manifested outwardly. The subjection of a man's heart to Jesus Christ is a hidden thing. To enter such a Kingdom, which is spiritual in nature, firstly requires a new, spiritual birth. Just as we were born physically to enter into this world, so we need to be born again of the Spirit of God to enter into the spiritual Kingdom of God (Jn 3:5).

This new birth itself requires an element of submission to God. To have it we must repent for our sins and acknowledge Jesus' rightful Lordship over our lives. In the process He forgives us for our sins with His precious blood and makes us one with God.

Once we enter the sphere of God's reigning over us, it is essential that we continue submitting ourselves to Him if we are to keep on experiencing the present Kingdom of God. Unfortunately, after we enter God's Kingdom, it is all too possible for us to later rebel against Him.

As mentioned previously, today Jesus will rule over only those who are willing for Him to do so. Just as our initial entrance into His Kingdom depended upon our willingness to meet certain requirements, so our continued willingness is crucial if we are to be His subjects. God will not force Himself on anyone. Unless we want Him to be our King, He will not be. We all have to choose.

I would like to emphasize here that this is a choice which we have to make every day if not every minute of every day. There is a constant battle going on. Satan wants to retain his control over our lives and keep us subjected to himself.

Unfortunately, there is still an old nature within us, a product of our first natural birth, which sides with the devil against God. But Jesus Christ has overcome all that is within us and all that is within the world which is the sphere of the devil. The new life with the new nature which has been born into us has the power to overcome all opposition. Within us we have the supernatural power to overcome Satan and his kingdom.

The pivotal point, however, is our will. We must be completely willing to submit ourselves to God. If we are,

He will give us the power to overcome. If not, we will only end up, whether knowingly or not, being a servant of the devil. How many Christians are in this boat! They belong to God but in their daily lives they are pursuing the things of this world and their own pleasure and so have become slaves to the ruler of the world.

Oh how we believers need to submit ourselves totally, without reservation, to our rightful Lord and Creator! What a shame it is when we go our own way but what a glory to God when we willingly live in His Kingdom and allow Him to be the Lord of our lives!

So we see that there are two aspects of the Kingdom of God. There is a present spiritual reality of which we can be a part and there is the coming earthly manifestation of it. As stated earlier, our role in the coming Kingdom has everything to do with our participation in the present one.

Do not be fooled. No one who serves themselves today will be rewarded tomorrow. The Kingdom of Heaven which is coming is not separate from the one we can be experiencing today. They are really the same thing. They have one King, one purpose, and one reality. I beg you, submit yourselves to God today.

3.

A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY

Chronology is: "The science of ascertaining the fixed periods when past events took place and of arranging them in the order of occurrence." (*Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979]). Biblical chronology, then, is the science of putting together the events and dates which are found in the Bible. This chapter is a simple examination of God's timetable for His work on this earth and approximately where we are on it.

In the Bible we read: "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day" (Ex 20:11). God's work of creation and restoration on this present earth consisted of six days with a seventh day of rest.

God did not choose to take weeks, months, or billions of years to accomplish this work. (The fact that geology and other sciences seem to indicate an older earth will be dealt with in chapter five.) Our God is capable of doing anything. He could have created the universe in six minutes if He so desired. We should realize that even time is the invention of God which He is using to accomplish His own purposes. Just because we are confined to it, does not mean that He is. He exists eternally and is Almighty; there are no limitations on Him whatsoever.

However, our real purpose here is to examine the reason that God had for making the heavens and the earth in

six days and resting on the seventh. Why did He do things this way? Why not eight days or five or even 50? Since there is nothing recorded in the Bible which is accidental or does not have some meaning for us, perhaps there is something about God and His creation which we can understand from this number. So, the remainder of this chapter will be an investigation of God's seven days.

There is another very significant verse of scripture which also speaks about "days." Peter, in his second epistle, addresses the question of the end of the age and the second coming of the Lord. In this context he says: "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (II Pet 3:8).

In this verse is the key to understanding the six days of creation. It contains a fact that the writer considered very important and about which he was concerned that believers would not be ignorant. Here we find a simple equation. One day equals one thousand years and one thousand years equals one day.

To take this one step further we could say that one day of creation represents one thousand years of time which God has allotted to man upon this earth and one thousand years corresponds to one day of creation. Lest some of you think that I am taking this too far, let us investigate some Biblical chronology.

Although many people do not realize it, through the years some very scholarly men of God have studied Biblical chronology. Among them are: Theophilus of Antioch (3rd century A.D.), Clement of Alexandria (3rd century A.D.), Eusebius (265-340 A.D.), Wm. Hales (fl. 1809), J. N. Darby, and Martin Anstey, to name just a few. One publication which may be of interest to the readers is: *Chronology of the Old Testament* by Martin Anstey, published by Kregel Publications in Grand Rapids, MI.

These men and others have traced the often slender thread of dates through the scriptures to arrive at a very good idea of how many years it has been since the creation

of Adam and Eve, as well as the timing of important events, such as God's covenant with Abraham and the advent of Christ.

Although no two of these men agree completely on every date, the interesting thing is that almost without exception they are very close to one another. Within a reasonable amount of "scientific error" and considering the great age of the documents and dates with which they must work, they essentially agree. Most of them come within one hundred to two hundred years of each other.

Now for a simple person like myself, such in-depth study of ancient history is a bit beyond my scope. But since these scholars agree with one another to a reasonable extent, I am inclined to accept their learned opinion.

Peter the fisherman's brief chronology is more in my league. The surprising thing is, however, that Peter and the scholars agree! Their study and his revelation do not contradict one another. As one would suspect, honest intellectual investigation only serves to further support the scriptures.

Did you realize that according to the Bible the present earth has been in existence for almost six thousand years? Since the six days of creation until now about six thousand years have elapsed. Another interesting observation is that from the beginning of this world until Abraham about two thousand years passed; from Abraham until Christ, about two thousand years; and from the birth of Jesus Christ until today, about two thousand years.

This is no coincidence. God's plan and His way of carrying out His plan since the creation are very orderly. There is nothing haphazard or disjointed about it. Things are going just the way He intended them to and, as time goes by, His masterful plan unfolds.

Let us assume here that when Peter wrote about one day being equal to one thousand years he meant something specific by it and was not simply being poetic. Imagine for a moment that when God spoke these words through Peter, He was revealing something to us which

could be of use in comprehending His timetable and that He was speaking to us about the end of the age.

To go further, let us believe just what the Bible says and take heed to it. God chose to make the earth, the heaven, the sea and all that is in them in six days because He had already decided that man's time upon the earth would be six thousand years. (Of course let's not forget the seventh thousand). Since the "I Am" of creation knows both the beginning and the end, He planned to do things in this way. Much later He revealed this to Peter the apostle for our edification and benefit.

These observations all point to one thing. We are rapidly approaching the end of this age. We are on the very verge of its completion! We stand upon the threshold of the second coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of His Millennial (one thousand year) Kingdom upon this earth. And all this corresponds exactly to the six days of creation and the seventh day of Sabbath rest.

The simple chronology of Peter the fisherman is correct and is attested to by all the other scriptures. The prophetic utterances in the Bible – including the words of Jesus concerning the restoration of Jerusalem to the Jews (Lk 21:24) and the signs of His second coming – point to this fact: we are rapidly approaching the end of the six days, the completion of the age.

We have said all this to build up to one conclusion and that is that there is a seventh "day" coming, a one-thousand year period of time, which is the Millennial Kingdom of Jesus Christ. God is not through with the earth yet. If Jesus returned today, there would still be at least one thousand years of time remaining on this earth.

The next stop for God's people is not heaven. Those who are already "with the Lord" will actually come back with Him and assist Him in setting up His heavenly Kingdom on the earth (Jude 14). God still has some work to do here in this world. And His people have the privilege of helping Him do it. Jesus is in the business of subduing the whole earth unto Himself. All the nations, the people

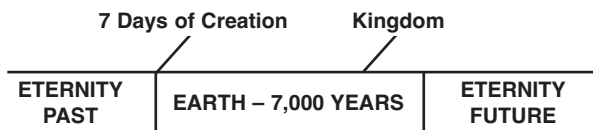
in them, even the animals and the environment will be put in subjection to Him. This is the Kingdom of Heaven which will come down to the earth. This is the Father's answer to the first part of the "Lord's prayer:" "Thy kingdom come...on earth, as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10 NASB).

Let us now take time for a brief summary. God has always existed and will exist eternally. So before the earth was created He was there, without time, in what can be called "eternity past."

At some point He created the earth. Later, after a conference with Himself, He decided to make man and place him on it (Gen 1:26). During this process He also created what we call "time" and confined man to it. The forming of this present earth took six days plus one day of rest, which corresponds to the time which God has allotted to man to dwell on the earth and accomplish His purposes.

These seven days are a foreshadowing of the seven thousand years during which man will have inhabited this present earth. Then, after the last one thousand years which is the Kingdom reign of Christ, God will dissolve both the present heavens and earth and create new ones. There will be new heavens and a new earth. This is what most people call "heaven" or "eternity."

For our purposes we will refer to it as "eternity future." Man then has been allotted a seven thousand year period on earth in between two "eternities."



It is at the end of the last one thousand years that the New Jerusalem, the bride of Christ, is seen descending out of heaven from God (Rev 21:10). This holy city will then be located on the new earth which God will create. The New Jerusalem and the new earth are what most people are referring to when they talk about spending eternity in

“heaven.” Actually will not be the present heaven at all but a whole new creation.

Of course it will be heavenly in nature. In fact, it will be a whole lot better than the present heaven, since what exists today has been polluted by the sin of the fallen angels and will completely pass away (Mark 13:31). If heaven today were what God considered perfect, there would be no need for Him to destroy it (II Pet 3:10-13).

No, what God has prepared for those who love Him is glorious indeed. It is an entirely new creation, the thought of which has not entered into the mind of man, but which God is revealing to His servants (I Cor 2:9,10).

Now for a word of caution. Although this little chronology of events is very simple, we cannot be too sure about their exact timing. We are told the order of the things to come, but we are not told exactly when they will occur. As a matter of fact, the scripture plainly tells us that no one will know the exact day or the hour (Mt 24:36).

Specifically, we do not know just when our Lord Jesus will return and usher in the Millennial Kingdom. God has given us the prophecies and the timetable of six thousand years, but no one knows perfectly when it will be.

It has already been mentioned that the Bible chronologers seem to agree within one hundred to two hundred years. Even they, scholarly though they might be, cannot be certain of the date.

We do know that it will be about two thousand years from the first appearing of Christ. But where shall we begin counting? Shall we count from His death or from His birth? As you know our calendar begins roughly near the time of His birth (give or take three to five years). Just because secular history has chosen this date as its reference point does not mean that God has.

A very powerful argument could be made that His death at Calvary is the real focal point of history and the turning point for mankind. What I am saying here is: even though the year 2,000 A.D. has come and gone and Jesus has not yet returned, don't give up your faith. God is not

slack as men count slackness. He is just not willing that anyone would perish. If we were to calculate the two thousand years from His death and resurrection, we would not even expect Him until the year 2,030.

As a matter of fact, the verse in II Peter about which we have been talking was written to address this very problem. People who have been expecting the Lord and looking for His coming will become disappointed and disillusioned. Towards the end some will even begin scoffing and asking, "Where is the promise of His coming?"

No doubt many will be questioning this very thing if He delays longer than we think He should. Some Bible teachers will begin to invent new doctrines to explain away the Millennium and/or the second coming. Many Christians may even turn away from following Jesus because their hopes were raised again and again by preachers predicting the advent of Christ and then dashed when it did not happen.

In these days when wickedness is abounding there is a great temptation for our love for the Lord to grow cold. While others are enjoying the temporary pleasures of sin, Jesus is asking us to deny ourselves and follow Him. If His coming does not coincide with our concepts, we may be tempted to disbelieve and fall away.

I myself had expected the return of Jesus during the 20th century. But since He has not yet come, I by His mercy will not abandon my faith, and neither should you. Our faith should not be based upon a timetable but upon Him.

In reality the teaching of the scriptures is that we should live each moment as if He were coming today. Our lives and our hearts should be ready for Him. The attitude we need to cultivate is one of constantly watching and waiting. If we do this, then we will be ready. Then He will find us doing His will. As we willingly subject ourselves to His Lordship and live in His Kingdom today, there will be no problem tomorrow. "Blessed is that servant, whom his master will find so doing when He comes" (Lk 12:43).

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF DARBY'S CHRONOLOGY

	<i>Years</i>
From the creation to the flood, when Noah was 600 yrs. old (Gen. 5:3-29; 7:11)	1656
From the flood to the birth of Terah (Gen 11:10-25)	222
When his father died at the age of 205 yrs., Abraham was 75	130
Which fixes his birth, from the creation at	2,008
His entrance into the land of Canaan took place 75 yrs. later (Gen 12:4)	75
Up to the exodus from Egypt (Gen 15:13,16; Ex 12:40)	430
Up to the building of the temple 480 yrs. later	480
Length of Solomon's reign, less three yrs. already past (I Kings 6:1)	37
Kings of Israel and Judah, up to the captivity in Babylon	370
Length of the captivity 70 yrs., and up to Nehemiah 80 yrs	150
Sixty-nine "weeks" less 33 yrs. (Dan 9:26)	450
From creation to the birth of the Messiah	4,000

4.

THE DAY OF THE LORD

*T*he Day of the Lord is the seventh (and last) 1,000 year “day” of this world. It begins with the appearing of Jesus Christ – the “second coming” – and ends with the advent of eternity future. The Day of the Lord is also the Millennial Kingdom about which we have been speaking.

Some Christians, not realizing that the Day of the Lord is a 1,000 year long “day,” often experience confusion when reading verses concerning it. Hopefully this chapter will help to clear up some of that confusion.

At least part of people’s misunderstanding about the Day of the Lord stems from the fact that when the Bible mentions the Day of the Lord, it not only talks about Jesus’ coming in the clouds and His judgment of the saints, but it also speaks of the heavens and the earth dissolving, burning up, and passing away (II Pet 3:10).

From reading verses such as these, a person might be led to believe that Jesus’ return is the beginning of eternity. Such is not the case. With the knowledge that the Day of the Lord is a 1,000 year day, all perplexity disappears. Many things happen during the Day of the Lord and, in this chapter, we are going to be investigating some of the more important ones.

One of the first events to occur during the Day of the Lord is something which we already mentioned: the judgment of the believers. When Jesus Christ returns we will

rise to meet Him in the air and then come back with Him to the earth to help Him set up His Millennial Kingdom.

After the rapture (the term which some people use for the catching up into the air of the saints) and *before* we begin our role in Christ's Kingdom, there will be a judgment. We will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give account to Him of the things which we have done while in our physical bodies (II Cor 5:10). The word "we" here must refer to believers since it is to them that this epistle was written.

This judgment is different from the final judgment of all people at the end of the Millennium which is usually called "the great white throne judgment." The "judgment seat of Christ," on the other hand, is *before* the Millennium and involves only believers. It is at the first judgment that what we have done will be weighed. This judgment of believers is an essential element in the Day of the Lord.

There are many interesting aspects of it which Christians should understand; however, most of them will be covered in succeeding chapters. Suffice it to say here that there will be a thorough examination of believers at the beginning of the Day of the Lord before their entrance with Him into the Millennial Kingdom.

THE RAPTURE

Please allow me to take a few moments here to speak concerning the rapture which signals the beginning of the Millennium. This is the event in which all the children of God are caught up from the earth to meet the Lord in the air (I Thess 4:17). Describing this event, Jesus says that where, "the carcass is there the eagles [vultures] will be gathered together" (Mt 24:28). This is a reference to how large numbers of vultures often will circle in the air over the carcass of a dead animal.

Don't allow yourself to be offended with Jesus' use of an analogy about vultures. There is no negative connotation to be taken from this. It is simply the best natural illustration which He could use and is something that every-

one of His day would understand. This is a very common sight in many parts of the world today.

When the Lord appears, all believers will be gathered together to Him. No matter where we are, we will rise into the air and be gathered to the place where He is. We will meet Him "in the air" and then come back with Him to the earth.

And to where is He coming? He is coming to Jerusalem. His feet will touch down upon the Mount of Olives, the earth will split open, and many will flee into this crevasse for protection (Zech 14:4,5). All believers will be eyewitnesses of this event.

Not only will living believers be caught up but, at the same time, the dead in Christ shall rise from their graves and ascend to meet Him in the air too. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven... with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (I Thess 4:16,17).

A friend of mine once shared with me an interesting idea concerning this word "meet." He said that in New Testament times when a victorious king would return to his city with his army and all of his captives, the inhabitants of that city would come out to *meet* him and *then would return with him* to enjoy his victory celebration.

What a picture! This exactly portrays how the rapture will occur. We will ascend to meet Him in the air and we will then return with Him to the earth. The reason for being caught up seems to be mainly for gathering the believers together into one place.

When the Lord comes back we will be caught up to where He is so that we can come back with Him to where He is going – the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem.

Now in order to avoid confusion we must remember one thing: this event is *not* the beginning of eternity. It is just the first part of the Day of the Lord, the day toward which we should all be looking.

Many have thought that the judgment which happens at this time will take place while we are suspended in mid-air. Others have speculated that we will go with the Lord back to heaven, wait for a while and then return again with Him, thus requiring several “appearings” of Jesus Christ at the end of the age.

However, it seems possible that the judgment of believers could take place right here on earth. One thing the scripture does tell us plainly is that there will be such a judgment and that we will be involved in it.

Another thing which we can know with certainty is that when we are caught up our bodies will be glorified. We read, “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet... the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (I Cor 15:52).

Oh what glory there will be in that day! Our vile, fallen bodies will be made heavenly. The evil effects of the fall – death working in our bodies – will be eliminated completely. This receiving of our glorified body is just the beginning, a preparatory step for our inheriting the Kingdom which Christ is preparing.

Notice here that this verse tells us exactly when the rapture will occur – “at the last trumpet.” Most Christians realize that during the tribulation period there are seven trumpets which sound (see Rev 8:2 ff.). In order for this trumpet of which Paul speaks to be the “*last* trump” it must, of necessity, be either *after* the seven mentioned in Revelation or possibly it could be the seventh. It certainly could not be before, since then it couldn’t be the “*last*” trumpet. This would place the time of the rapture at the end of the tribulation period, or at least toward the end.

Another passage which sheds some light on the timing of this event is Matthew 24:29-31 where we read, “Immediately *after* the tribulation of those days... He will send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together his elect from the four winds...”

Although there are some who would insist that the “elect” here refers to the Jews and not to Christians, this

idea does not fit with the Old Testament prophecies which tell that the people of the earth (not the angels) will bring the Jews back to Israel after the Lord's return (Is 49:22). Furthermore, believers are often referred to as "God's elect" (Rm 8:33, Col 3:12, Lk 18:7).

Actually, the time of the rapture is not the central theme of this book. Neither should it be a point of controversy. I am merely offering these thoughts for the reader to contemplate and form his own conclusions. Therefore, please do not be distracted by it from the content of the rest of the book. The timing of the rapture has very little bearing upon the remainder of this message.

THE SABBATH DAY

Many of you may know from memory the scripture which says, "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day" (Ex 20:11). This seventh day is the Sabbath day. It is the day of the Lord's rest. Not only was it the initial rest of God but it also foreshadows a further day of rest, the Day of the Lord.

The Millennial Kingdom is the seventh 1,000 year long day, which is also a time of rest for God and His people. Although it is not the final rest or the complete rest which will be in eternity, still it is a partial rest that God will be having; and we, God's people, will be enjoying it with Him.

In Hebrews chapters three and four the writer mentions this rest of God which is coming, and he exhorts his readers to labor to enter into it so that none of them should seem to come short of it (Heb 4:1). It might be worthwhile for every reader to pause a moment here and read these two chapters (Hebrews 3 and 4) to see how this idea fits into their context.

Not only is the sabbath day a foreshadowing of the rest which we will have with God in the Millennium, it is also a type of the rest which we can now have in Jesus Christ.

Today spiritually we can enter into the Sabbath rest of God through Him. We can cease from our own labors as God did from His. As a matter of fact, this is a real key to a living Christian experience. We must learn to cease from our own works – that is, doing what we want to do by ourselves, for ourselves, and with our own energy – and rest in God. Do not get me wrong, this resting does not imply that we do nothing. It is only a cessation of doing things with our own efforts and energy.

When the Pharisees challenged Jesus about not keeping the Sabbath day, He said, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working” (Jn 5:17). Even though God rested from His labors after He created the heavens and the earth, Jesus tells us that He is still working. He is still doing something to accomplish His purposes. The reason that God continues to work is that His enemy, the devil, corrupted what He originally made and there arose a need for Him to do something further to fulfill His plans.

Yes, today Jesus Christ is working and we are to be working with Him. We are to perform the “...good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). However, such laboring can also be resting. If we abide in Him, and rely on His strength to do His bidding, we will find peace. He explains to us that His yoke is easy, His burden light and that we will find rest in doing His work (Mt 11:29,30).

When we find ourselves striving and trying very hard to serve the Lord – when we realize that we’re weary and exhausted – this is only an indication that we are not experiencing the rest of God. We have not entered into the supernatural rest which is available for us. Of course we know that this present rest is incomplete. During the Day of the Lord we will enjoy an even deeper rest and, in eternity, a full rest.

One reason we will be able to rest during the 1,000 years is that Jesus Christ will defeat all of His enemies. In the scriptures we read that He must reign until He has put

all His enemies under His feet (I Cor 15:25). This Millennial or “Kingdom” reign of Jesus Christ is another aspect of the Day of the Lord. In it He is going to establish His rightful rulership over the whole earth.

All the peoples, nations, animals, and even nature itself will be subdued before Him. We read that He will rule the nations with a rod of iron (Rev 2:27). We are also told that the lions will eat straw like oxen and the children will be safe around venomous beasts (Is 11:6-8). It sounds as if the whole course of nature will be changed and made to be at peace.

The last enemy to be destroyed will be death. At the end of the Millennium, the victorious Son will deliver up to God the Father the Kingdom which He has subdued to Himself so that God may have complete rulership over all that He has made (I Cor 15:24-28).

During the Kingdom reign of Christ, He will make all things right. He will stop injustice, clear up the problem of pollution, and bring an end to war (Mic 4:3). All crimes which are committed will be punished in a just and equitable way which only God Himself could administer. The many things about our present evil world which so perplex and grieve us will be straightened out when Jesus returns. He will rule this world perfectly.

Another thing which will greatly further His correcting of this world’s mess is that the devil will be chained up for 1,000 years. During this time he will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit (Rev 20:2,3). Satan’s influence – his rulership over this present world – will be eliminated, and Jesus Christ will take his rightful place as King. Jesus will be reigning and establishing His Kingdom over the peoples and nations of the earth.

Unfortunately, this rulership of Jesus Christ will be, in many cases, only an outward subjugation. When the devil is loosed again for a little while at the end of the 1,000 year reign, all the nations will follow him in a rebellion against the Lord (Rev 20:7-9). They will gather themselves an army and surround the holy city to fight against Him and

His saints. This uprising ends when fire comes down out of heaven and consumes them (Rev 20:9).

This tragic episode graphically illustrates an important fact. The Millennial Kingdom reign will not reach into the hearts of all men. Although the whole earth will be outwardly subjected to Jesus, inwardly the evil nature of fallen man will continue living on. The sinful nature which they inherited from Adam will still be existent.

Even though, outwardly, there may be righteousness with the external manifestations of sin put away, the hearts of men do not change unless they have a real, personal experience with God. Without this essential ingredient all the inward sins such as covetousness, greed, lust, hate – the things that cannot always be seen on the outside – will still be active in the hearts of these people who inhabit the earth during the reign of Christ.

How blessed we are today to have the opportunity to know Jesus personally – to have His life living inside of our being and to have Him cleansing us from the inside out! Through the indwelling Spirit, He can purify our lives of the very sinful nature which causes us to do immoral things.

He can save us completely from all of the evil that is in our hearts. We Christians are able not only to stop performing those outward deeds which are sinful, but we can be changed inwardly to be like Jesus. Oh what a salvation!

Another aspect of the 1,000 year, earthly reign of Jesus Christ is that it is the fulfillment of God's promise to David the king that there would never fail someone of his lineage to sit on his throne. David, the king of Israel, was promised that one of his descendants would reign in his stead forever (II Sam 7:12,13). This descendant is the "Prince of Peace"! Of His Kingdom there will be no end (Is 9:6,7). What God promised to David, He will do, and we will be part of it.

The Kingdom reign of Christ is also the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that his seed would inherit the land of Israel and possess it forever (Gen 17:8). When Jesus

Christ returns He will gather all the Jews out of the nations where they are scattered – every last one of them – and will bring them back to the land of Israel (Ezek 39:28).

After this, Jesus will, according to Ezekiel chapter 48, reapportion this land among the twelve tribes. These verses in Ezekiel are very interesting reading and they detail the division of the land minutely. Also mentioned here is the fact that there will be a strip of land going from east to west called the Land of the Prince (Ezek 48:21,22). It is in this land that the people of God may be dwelling.

It is from the city of God, called at that time “the Lord is there,” that He will be reigning (Ezek 48:35). Abraham’s seed, the Jews according to earthly lineage, will inherit the land which God promised. Those who are of “the seed of faith,” the New Testament Jewish and Gentile believers, will reign over the earth with Him. Here is the literal fulfillment of God’s promises once again.

Of course we do not know exactly what form our reigning with Christ will take. One thing we do know, however, is that we will be in our glorified bodies which are bodies just like Jesus Christ has had since His resurrection. This body is not confined to time and space.

In the Bible it is recorded that Jesus walked through walls and seemingly appeared at will wherever He wished. No doubt our new bodies will have these same capabilities. So, during the Millennial reign, we also will probably not be limited in our abilities regarding time and space.

The scriptures do not state specifically whether our presence and our reigning during this time will be fully realized by the inhabitants of the earth. Although we may be visible to them and known by them, it is equally possible that we may not be at all times.

There are, today, spiritual rulers of this world led by the devil which are not seen by men but which nevertheless exert full sway over them. Believers’ role in the coming Kingdom could conceivably be similar to this. Another possibility is that they may function in ways similar to the

Old Testament judges (see Mt 19:28). Although it is impossible to form any definite conclusions, we do know certainly that we will reign with Jesus Christ on this earth (Rev 5:10).

The people of the earth over whom those who are with Him will reign are the descendants of the men and women who survive the judgments of God. During what is called the “great tribulation” period a large portion of the world’s population will be killed by various plagues and judgments from God. Also, at the Battle of Armageddon (which takes place just before the return of Jesus Christ), literally millions of soldiers will be slain.

It is possible that only two or three percent of the world’s people will survive until the end. The Bible describes the number of people on the earth after this time as being like an olive tree which has been shaken (a method of harvesting the olives) and as a grape vine after it’s been picked (Is 17:6; 24:13).

When harvesting, no one leaves available fruit. It is only those few olives which are unripe which do not fall off then the tree is shaken. Also, it is only those few small clusters of grapes hidden behind some leaves which the harvesters don’t find, which are left on the vine. This could lead us to a very rough calculation of about two or three percent of the people on the earth surviving the coming judgment period.

Since the world today has over 7 billion inhabitants, then would might speculate that if as many as 10 percent survive, that would leave 700 million. If two to three percent survive, that would leave only 130 to 210 million. These would probably be scattered over the world individually or in small pockets of people.

Further supporting the smaller number we read that a human being will be as scarce as gold and that a male human being will be as scarce as “gold of Ophir” (Is 13:12).

In other words, during the first part of the Millennium the inhabitants of the land will not be many. But one thousand years is a long time and these men no doubt will mul-

tiply. Without wars, with few, if any, diseases and without various other natural calamities, they will increase quite rapidly and the earth will be populated again quickly.

Aiding in this process is the fact that men will live much longer, somewhat similar to how long people lived before the flood. We are told that they will live as long as trees, which can live about 600-900 years (Is 65:22). Further, we read that someone who dies at one hundred years of age will be considered a child (Is 65:20).

THE WEDDING FEAST

Not only is the 1,000 year Day of the Lord the judgment day for believers, a day of judgment upon the unbelievers who oppose Him at the battle of Armageddon, the seventh day, the sabbath day of rest, and the day of restoration of God's Kingdom, but it is also the Lord's wedding day.

Perhaps many of you have heard or read about the wedding feast which is being prepared. The general concept among Christians seems to be that when the Lord returns and we are caught up to meet Him, everyone will quickly sit down around a large table and gulp down a huge feast. Possibly it will consist of turkey or ham or something like that (well, probably not ham), and then we will all rush back to the earth to set up the Kingdom.

Some people think this feast occurs in a few days. Others surmise that it takes weeks or even three and one half to seven years.

But, let us consider for a moment that this is the wedding feast of the Son of God. It is no small or unimportant event. This will be the most meaningful, supremely holy, and spectacular wedding ever to occur in the whole universe. This will not be a feast of several days or even seven years. There is going to be nothing hurried about the wedding feast of God.

This feast will actually be taking place over 1,000 years because the Day of the Lord is also the Lord's wedding day and it is during this "day" that we will be feasting. Jesus said: "And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My

Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table *in My kingdom*" (Lk 22:29,30).

Another verse which supports this idea is found in Matthew 8:11 where we read: "Many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom." This phrase "sit down" means literally "recline" and is speaking about how the Jews of Jesus' day reclined when they ate and feasted together. (See also Jn 13:25).

In Biblical times it seems the way people celebrated a wedding was to put on a large feast and invite all their friends and family. They started sometime during the day, perhaps in the morning, and they began to eat and drink and make merry. All of the guests would have a good time with their companions and relatives.

They feasted throughout the day until evening when the bride and the bridegroom went off to consummate the marriage. This is exactly how the Lord's wedding day will be.

We know from the scriptures that it is at the *end* of the Millennium that the wedding, the marriage of the Lamb, occurs (Rev 21:9-27). This is when the marriage of Jesus Christ and His holy bride is consummated. There is no such thing as our gulping down a feast, racing off to reign with Christ 1,000 years, and then afterwards being involved in the wedding.

No, the marriage supper of Jesus Christ will last for 1,000 years. Our reigning with Christ, our resting with Christ, and our feasting with Christ are all simply different aspects of the same period of time. This is the Millennial Kingdom.

In the book of Revelation, in the letters to the seven churches, Jesus not only speaks about our sitting with Him on His throne (reigning) (Rev 3:21), and ruling the nations with a rod of iron (ruling) (Rev 2:27), but He also promises that we will eat of the hidden manna and the tree of life (feasting) (Rev 2:7,17). These verses portray to us three of

the aspects of Kingdom living into which we are to be entering.

During the 1,000 year reign of Christ, we will be feasting. We will be feasting with Jesus Christ and we will be feasting on Jesus Christ. He explained to His disciples that He is the living bread that came down. He is our feast. Certainly at that time we won't need turkey, bread, or wine to sustain us. Our desire will be the supernatural elements of the divine life of Jesus Christ.

Today we have a foretaste of this. On that day we will have a full taste. The new wine will be abundant and the heavenly manna will be spread everywhere. None of God's chosen people will go hungry. We can then feast on Jesus Christ and be fully satisfied.

Of course it's a good idea to get our appetites ready. There is no doubt in my mind that our capacity for enjoying God in that day will be very much dependent upon how we develop that capacity right now.

If we learn to feed on the Lord, in the scriptures and through prayer, and to have intimate times daily with Him basking in His presence, then I believe our enjoyment of Him during the Millennial reign will be greatly enlarged.

It's worth it, I would say, to apply ourselves in this direction. Not only will we be rewarded today for our efforts, but we will also be rewarded greatly in the age which is to come.

5.

IN THE BEGINNING

*I*n the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And as part of this creative work He made many angels, one of whom was named Lucifer. He was the mightiest, most beautiful angel which God made. Probably he was also the first being to be formed.

In Isaiah chapter 14, verse 12, he is referred to as the “day-star, son of the morning” (ASV). This verse alludes to the fact that in the dawning of creation, when God was just beginning His wondrous works, the angel Lucifer was created. Not only was he the highest and most powerful angel, he was also one of the cherubim and dwelt near the very presence of God.

Ezekiel chapter 28 reveals some very interesting facts about this Lucifer, known today as Satan. Although here the prophet is speaking of someone referred to as the “king of Tyre,” almost all Bible expositors agree that this passage refers to the devil in his original state. No man or earthly king could ever fit such a description. Let us read it together, starting with verse 12, the second half of the verse:

“Thus says the Lord God; ‘You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every pre-

cious stone was your covering: the sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created.

You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.

By the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence within, and you sinned; therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God; and I destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the fiery stones.

Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, that they might gaze at you.

You defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities, by the iniquity of your trading; therefore I brought fire from your midst; it devoured you, and I turned you to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all who saw you. All who knew you among the peoples are astonished at you; you have become a horror, and shall be no more for ever' " (Ezek 28:12-19).

What a tremendous passage of scripture this is, revealing to us the status and the nature of Satan as he was originally created. He is referred to here as "the anointed cherub who covers." Lucifer was one of the cherubim – created, chosen, and anointed by God for a special task about which we will speak more shortly.

In the first part of Ezekiel we can learn more about cherubim. We know, for example, that they are winged creatures each having several sets of wings. Instead of feet,

they have hooves and each has four faces on its head, one on each side. Rather than having a back of the head and two sides of the head they have four faces. One is like a man, one is like a lion, one is like a cherub, and one is like an eagle.

They also have other interesting features such as wheels full of eyes which go with them wherever they go. When they move they don't turn toward the direction they are going but simply move in that direction instantly, seemingly violating the laws of nature.

By the way, these beings are most likely the same as the "living creatures" or "beasts" that we find mentioned in the book of Revelation. Many times the scriptures speak of God's throne being surrounded by cherubim. Psalm 80, verse 1, reads, "You who dwell between (or "among") the cherubim, shine forth." (See also II Kings 19:15, I Ch 13:6, Is 37:16, I Sam 4:4, II Sam 6:2, Rev 4:6-8.) In the book of Revelation it is the "living creatures" which occupy this position.

You may notice that while Revelation 4:6-8 describes each "living creature" as having a different face, Ezekiel sees each cherub having four faces. Why is there this apparent discrepancy? The secret is that the John was seeing these cherubim from only one direction. These four beings stand on each side of the throne of God and each of them faces it.

Since John was looking from only one direction he saw only the one corresponding face on each of the cherubim. Consequently, it appeared to him as if each one had a different face. However, Ezekiel gives a more complete description and explains that each cherub has four faces.

Apparently, Lucifer was once one of these cherubim. These celestial beings' duty is to surround the throne of God and cover His presence. With their wings they conceal the glory and majesty of the Most High God from any would-be onlookers. These cherubim are constantly in the presence of God worshipping Him and covering His glory with their wings (Rev 4:8).

The cherubim also appear symbolically on the top of the ark of the covenant which the children of Israel were instructed to build while they were traveling in the wilderness. The King James version of the Bible and some others use the term "mercy seat" for the top lid of the ark.

However there is no chair or "seat" on this cover. Actually, this lid should probably be called the "propitiatory cover" rather than the "mercy seat," since no seat of any sort is ever described as being there. All we are told is that the lid was flat, made out of pure gold, and at each end was fashioned a cherub also made of pure gold.

These two cherubim stood at each end with their wings stretching up over the top almost touching in the middle over the ark (Ex 25:20). It was here, underneath the covering cherubim wings and above the top of the ark, that the holy presence of God appeared.

The high priest would enter into the holiest of holies once a year. There he would sprinkle the blood of the sacrifices upon the lid. When he sprinkled the blood, the presence of God would be manifested and the Almighty would commune with the priest from between the golden cherubim. These are symbolic of the cherubim that cover God's glory in the heavenly places.

So now we know who Lucifer used to be. No doubt, he was the first created angelic being (Is 14:12) and probably occupied the highest position in the universe. He was one of the cherubim.

It is not impossible that he was also the high priest of the universe and led all of creation in worship, praise, and adoration of the Most High God. At least we know that he understands something about religion, since he has started numerous false ones. Perhaps he is using his experience before his rebellion to do so.

Not only do we know that Satan was great in glory, power, and beauty when he was created, but also that he fell, was corrupted, and began to sin. He began to think of himself very highly and was lifted up within himself because of his greatness. His pride was his undoing. He

must have thought something like this: "I am so beautiful, so mighty; all the other creatures in the universe respect and admire me. Why do I need God? Why do I need to submit to Him and worship Him? I'll start my own thing." And so he did.

Of course in order to do this he needed to establish his own kingdom. He had to lure away from God's kingdom a number of adherents – followers who would worship him and do his bidding instead of loving and obeying God. I'm sure that he found it impossible to be more righteous, holy, just, true, perfect, and pure than God Almighty. So he had to choose something different. He had to base his kingdom on something else.

The Bible tells us that the devil is the father of lies. He invented this for himself. He became the originator of all kinds of sin, establishing his kingdom on hatred, darkness, lust, greed, corruption, lying, and every imaginable kind of evil.

He changed his nature to be the opposite of all that God is. And no doubt he began to visit other beings in the universe to seduce them to join his kingdom and to follow him in his rebellion against the Most High. As we all know, he is still engaged in this same evil activity today.

HOW DID SATAN BECOME THE RULER?

It is probable that God gave the earth to Satan as part of his jurisdiction sometime before his fall. The scriptures are not explicit about these things and so we can only speculate concerning some of these ideas, but we do know that at some point in time the devil obtained authority over the earth. He is called the "ruler of this world" (Jn 12:31, 14:30, 16:11).

We also know that the angels are sometimes referred to as "stars" (Job 38:7, Dan 8:10, Rev 12:4). It is possible that in the beginning, each angel was given a star and the surrounding planets, if any, over which to rule. If this is so, the devil's domain would be our solar system, the center of

which is the sun. It is interesting to note how many of the ancient pagan religions worshiped the sun, and by so doing, were really worshiping the devil. It is even possible that powerful angels were given a galaxy over which to rule.

One thing we know with certainty is that the devil is the ruler of this present world. When he was tempting Jesus in the wilderness he claimed to have authority over it and the Lord did not dispute that authority. He only rebuked him by quoting the holy scriptures.

Other places in the scriptures also show us that the devil has jurisdiction and authority over this earth (Jn 14:30, 16:11, II Cor 4:4). In all probability this authority was given to him before his rebellion while he still retained his original position before God.

BEFORE THE "SIX DAYS"

Since it appears safe to assume that Satan (Lucifer), the highest angelic being whom God created, was given this earth as part of his domain before his fall, we can't help but wonder what it was like at that time. Although the Bible does not tell us these things specifically it does give us some hints from which we can draw some reasonable conclusions.

The book of Genesis states that God made the heavens, the earth and all that is in them in six days. However, this scenario does not provide an explanation for when the angels were created and when and how Satan fell. Neither does it tell us how his fall affected the earth over which he ruled. In order to investigate these things further let us look at the first verse in the book of Genesis.

We read, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). This first verse tells us of God's creation and we can be assured that when God creates anything He makes it perfect and beautiful in every detail.

But surprisingly, the second verse begins: "The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep" (Gen 1:2). This sounds as if God created a formless blob – a dark, empty wasteland – and then

began working on it to make it look better. Although God could have done things in this way, or any other way which He chose, the remainder of His creative work was not done in that way.

Actually, there is a better understanding of verse two to be seen. In fact, there is a better translation of it which will help us to understand more clearly what the Biblical record is saying.

The third word in the second verse of Genesis is translated by the New King James version “was” – “The earth was...” This Hebrew word can equally correctly be translated “became.” It is the same Hebrew word used in the story of Lot and his wife fleeing from Sodom and Gomorrah in which we read that Lot’s wife “became” a pillar of salt. In this case Lot’s wife was not originally a pillar of salt, but she became one as a result of God’s judgment upon her for her disobedience.

This Hebrew word can be correctly translated either “was” or “became.” Therefore, it would be acceptable to translate this word “became” in the second verse of Genesis, which would then read: “The earth *became* without form, and void,” thus giving a whole new perspective on this passage. This translation opens up many new possibilities about how to understand the creation of this world.

The phrase “without form and void” can also be translated differently, and to do so will help us see more clearly what had happened. The Hebrew words here are “tohu wah bohu” and could better be rendered “waste and empty.”

These two Hebrew words, “tohu” and “bohu” are found together two other times in the Biblical record. In both places, they refer to God’s judgment upon and subsequent destruction of something (Is 34:11, Jer 4:23-27). They do not speak of creation but of wrath and desolation (note context). In these verses they refer to the judgment of God upon something which leaves it waste and empty.

These words “tohu” and “bohu” are found separately many other times in the Old Testament and most of the

time they clearly refer to God's judgment, His wrath, or His destruction. Only a few times can they be construed to mean something positive and none of these occurrences conclusively refer to something good.

One passage which is particularly striking concerning this subject is Isaiah 45:18 where we read, "For thus says the Lord who created the heavens; who is God, who formed the earth and made it; who has established it, who did not create it in vain." The Hebrew word here for "in vain" is "tohu." Clearly then, God originally created the earth not tohu or "without form," as our present translation would lead us to believe.

Linking all of these items together, a picture emerges. It becomes clear that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth perfectly, just as we would expect, but something happened. At some point in time something occurred and the earth "became waste and empty."

This most logically corresponds to the time of Satan's rebellion. When the god of this world rebelled against the one true God, corrupting himself and his own nature, in the process he corrupted the territory over which he ruled. It is very probable that God then judged that world and destroyed it by a flood of water.

This is the condition in which we find the earth in the second half of Genesis 1:2 – covered with water and in darkness and desolation. Although we cannot make an airtight case from this one verse and a few others which are associated with it, still I feel that in all probability this is the way it happened. What is hinted to us in the second verse of the first chapter of Genesis is the way things actually occurred. For a more in-depth study of this subject see: G. H. Pember, *Earth's Earliest Ages* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1975).

Another interesting point here is that this word "created" which is used in the first verse of Genesis where we read, "God *created* the heavens and the earth," means "to make something out of nothing." Most of the other words in the first chapter of Genesis which are translated "made"

refer to something being constructed out of materials that were already present. The word “created” meaning to make something out of nothing is used only two other times: in verse 21, concerning the animals, and in verses 26 and 27 regarding the creation of human life.

The other acts which God did during what we know as “the six days of creation” are most probably six days of restoration – a restoring of the earth which God had originally created. A good example of this is found in Genesis 1:11 where God says, “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth.”

It is quite possible that these seeds which sprouted and began to bring forth many varieties of plants were already in the earth. The ruined earth which God was restoring possibly contained seeds that God simply caused to germinate, sprout, and begin bringing forth fruit.

The “destroyed” earth which we read about in verse 2 of Genesis chapter 1, had been flooded with water. In the absence of any light, this water would have been frozen. If there were light previously which was removed as a result of judgment, this would result in a sudden and widespread “ice age” killing most, if not all, life.

Possibly, this layer of ice covering the oceans and much of the land, would insulate the extreme depths of the sea near the thermal vents where, conceivably, some ocean life could have survived. This could explain the “living fossil” fish such as the coelacanth, which are encountered at great depths. These thoughts are, of course, only speculation and do not have any extensive scriptural basis.

So, what we could very possibly have then in the first chapter of Genesis is a record of God restoring and recreating something which He once made perfect and complete but which He destroyed because of Satan and his rebellion.

Though we cannot prove any of these things conclusively and it is nothing to base our faith upon, I believe you will see as we proceed how it explains many more things than it makes unclear and how this understanding

provides us with a much better picture of what God is doing on the earth today.

In fact a good criteria for judging the truth of certain teachings may be: that they explain more things than they confuse, that is to say that they enlarge our revelation concerning the purposes of God rather than obscuring them. Any teaching concerning scripture which reveals, unveils, and expands our understanding concerning God should carry a certain amount of weight.

THE LAYER OF WATER

An interesting fact which is worthy of mention here is that during what we know as the "six days of creation" God suspended a layer of water above the atmosphere covering the entire earth. This is shown in Genesis 1:6-8 where we read: "Then God said, 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.' Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven."

So, we are told that God separated the waters. Some He situated above "heaven" and others below heaven. This particular "heaven" is what we know today as the "air," sky, or atmosphere. Although we don't know how this was done, we can be confident that it was done.

Having a suspended layer of water above the atmosphere produced various effects. One result was that the climate and the weather was very different than what we know today. We are led to understand that during the time when this layer of water was intact, it did not rain on the earth but that the vegetation was watered by a mist which came up from the ground (Gen 2:5,6).

It may also be that this layer of water acted like the glass in a greenhouse and that the earth was pretty much one temperature and that the climate did not vary much from place to place.

Perhaps another result of this layer of water is that, in those days, people lived much longer – approximately ten times longer than we do today. It can be theorized that this was a result of this suspended water layer.

Although no one knows with certainty every cause of aging, it is possible that it is aggravated by radiation and the bombardment of subatomic particles reaching the earth from outer space. These particles are literally tearing through our body every minute of every day.

This watery suspension would have protected the earth and its inhabitants from such things by absorbing these rays and particles. Today, for example, some radioactive materials are stored under water because the water absorbs the radiation which is emitted. This water then, would have contributed to the longevity of the people in those days. What we do know certainly is that when this layer of water was removed, the maximum ages of individuals begin to decline rapidly.

When God flooded the earth in the days of Noah, we are told that the “windows of heaven were opened” (Gen 7:11). So, when this first rain occurred, the water which was suspended above the “heaven” or atmosphere was released and it rained torrentially down upon the earth, flooding it completely.

When all the water was released and the sun began to shine once again, the first rainbow appeared as a sign of God’s faithfulness (Gen 9:13). Naturally, since it had never rained before, there could never have been a rainbow.

Immediately afterwards, the ages of men began to decline. Whatever it is that is bombarding the earth from space began to build up in the soil, the environment, and also in the plants and animals until reaching a kind of equilibrium.

This process took a few hundred years, but when we track the ages of the descendants of Noah, it is easy to see the steady downward progression until we arrive at ages which approximate what we experience today. So part of God’s judgment upon mankind during the days of Noah

was to remove the watery, protective layer and so to reduce the number of days that any one man could practice evil upon the earth. As already stated, it seems that this judgment too will be lifted during the Kingdom age and men will again live to be much older (see Is 65:20).

Another incidental idea which can be surmised is that the existence of this layer of water, protecting the earth from radiation, would greatly skew some of the scientific dating techniques used to determine the ages of fossils and bones from this period.

DEMONS AND FALLEN ANGELS

We do not know with any certainty when Satan fell. With our new understanding of the second verse of Genesis, however, we see that it could have been long before – perhaps millions of years before – the creation of man. What we do know is that, shortly after man was created, Satan was in the Garden of Eden in his fallen state.

But what was this first earth, over which Satan ruled, like? What the fossil record seems to show is that the first world which was destroyed was filled with animal and plant life. The earth seems to have been populated with, among other things, dinosaurs which appear to have been vicious, aggressive, “armored,” scaly animals.

An explanation for this could be that they reflected the nature of the being who ruled over them. Certainly, it is hard to imagine that they reflect the nature of God as our present creation did before the fall and still does in a small measure today. (Although some insist that early man and dinosaurs co-existed, the evidence for this is very scanty.)

When God judged that first creation with an inundation of water, all the animals upon the earth were destroyed. This is exactly the picture of the earth which we are shown in the second verse of Genesis: the earth waste, empty, covered with darkness, and submerged under water. As already mentioned, in the absence of light, this water would have frozen, thus producing a very desolate, uninhabitable world.

This then could then explain to us the origin of the demons. Most Christians have been taught that demons are fallen angels. This is not necessarily the case. Although this is a strong traditional belief within the church, there is not one verse of scripture which says that this is so. Unfortunately, this connection has been made mainly by guesswork and many have accepted it as a fact, without any scriptural basis.

What we do know, however, is that in the scriptures there is a strong association between demons (unclean spirits) and water. Jesus taught that when a demon has gone out of a man it wanders through *waterless* places seeking rest (Mt 12:43). It seems that demons need some kind of water to have "rest." When Jesus cast out the legion of demons they requested that they could enter into the swine feeding nearby. These swine then rushed down the embankment into the sea (Mk 5:12,13). Evidently those demons were anxious to get there.

There is also a verse in Job which mentions "the shades (spirits) of the dead" trembling underneath the water (Job 26:5 Amplified). Who are these "shades" if they are not demons? It is doubtful that this verse is referring only to the limited number of sailors who had died at sea before the book of Job was written.

All the dead, whether they drown or die by other means, go to the place God has prepared for them, be it hades or sheol. Those who drown do not get special treatment and have their spirits waiting at the bottom of the sea. Therefore, these "shades" cannot be the spirits of men.

Thus, we can conclude that in the original creation, there were creatures on the earth with both bodies and spirits. After a judgment from God, which seems to have been a flooding of the earth with water, their bodies were destroyed yet their spirits continued to live on under the water. (See Ecc 3:21).

These then could be what we now know as the demons – the unclean spirits. These unclean spirits are then understood as the disembodied spirits of creatures which lived

under the fallen domain of Satan on the earth which existed before this present creation. Furthermore, these unclean spirits live, or prefer to live, in water.

(G. H. Pember, in this book *Earth's Earliest Ages*, speculates that these beings which gave rise to the demons were men-like creatures. In fact, in the previous edition of this book, I adopted this as a possibility. Now, however, since the fossil record has not produced any solid evidence of this, my views have changed.) Although, again, we may not be able to draw absolute conclusions from these things there is some scriptural evidence supporting them.

This would also provide an explanation for us as to why demons would desire to possess or inhabit a human body. If they were once spirits dwelling in some kind of body and then were "disembodied" by God's judgment, no doubt they would want to again inhabit a body in order to feel comfortable. Also, when they are not in a body, it may be that they prefer living in water because it might closely simulate being in a physical body which is 57-60% water.

Another significant verse is found in Revelation 20:13 where we are told about the coming final judgment. We read: "The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works."

I would like to submit to you that all dead human beings (these cannot be believers since believers are resurrected 1,000 years earlier), whether they died by drowning or other means, are in "death and Hades." They are not in the sea. Therefore, the "dead in the sea" must be some other form of creature. Interestingly, these are resurrected first, perhaps being judged first since they were made first.

Angels, on the other hand, were created higher than human beings. We read that man was created a little lower than the angels (Ps 8:5). They seemingly can appear in bodily form whenever they desire. They have no need or apparent desire to possess a human body.

Also we are told that the fallen angels live, not in the sea, but in the air (Eph 2:2). These facts show us that the

fallen angels who are ruling this earth with Satan have their dwelling place in the atmosphere, the air, and not in water or the sea.

The complete picture of the enemies of God – the demons in the sea and the fallen angels in the air – is clearly portrayed by the passage which describes Jesus going across the sea in a boat (Mk 4:35-41). The waves (home of the demons) rose up and the wind (the domain of the fallen angels) blew while Jesus was asleep, seemingly in an effort to destroy Him. When He awoke He rebuked them and said, "Peace, be still" (vs 39). Jesus Christ has full authority over both the fallen angels and the demons.

Why is understanding the difference between fallen angels and demons important? It is important because we need to know what kind of spirits we are dealing with. In our warfare against evil, we need to be aware of what kind of forces we are confronting. If we err in this understanding we may end up practicing many foolish and even harmful things.

Perhaps in your walk with the Lord you have had some experiences which this new interpretation could help explain. From reading the New Testament we know that Jesus gave His followers absolute authority over the unclean spirits – the demons. Jesus, and later his disciples, cast them out with a word.

However, sometimes we find ourselves harassed and attacked by spiritual forces which, when we rebuke them, do not instantly obey our commands. Often, we find ourselves involved in a spiritual struggle which is not simply resolved with "a word."

A logical explanation for this is that they are not demons at all but fallen angels – principalities and powers against whom we are fighting. Although we have the power to win these battles, we are not yet today given full authority over our antagonists. Paul says we "wrestle" against principalities and powers (Eph 6:12). Our warfare against them is a wrestling and a fighting. If you have complete authority over someone else, there is no need to wrestle.

On the other hand, our warfare with the demons is one of absolute authority and command. When we rebuke them they will flee. So if you can rebuke evil spirits which are bothering you and they flee away, this may indicate that they were demonic forces. But on the other hand if you find you must wrestle, strive, resist, and seek God's help for a long period of time, it is probable that this is the wrestling with fallen angels about which the scripture speaks.

I am not saying that we cannot win these battles but only that the manner of warfare and victory is different and should be clearly understood by those who are walking with the Lord.

There are some believers today who, not realizing the foregoing assertions, have followed a policy of rebuking and even hurling insults at the devil and his angels. I have been in some prayer meetings where believers called the devil names and made fun of him – shouting, “binding,” and rebuking him and his minions with a lot of volume, if not authority.

This is an activity which is warned against both in II Peter 2:10 and Jude 8. Here we find strong admonitions against “railing at glories (Gr)” or “slander[ing] celestial beings” (NIV). “Railing” means “to revile or scold in harsh or insolent language.” “Glories” here refers to the glorious beings or angels. Some translations use the word “dignitaries” instead of “glories” but the verses following this admonition makes it clear that this refers to the devil and his angels. We are told that this “railing” is a foolish, fleshly thing which even the highest, holy angels do not dare to do.

Brethren, let us be careful in our warfare with the enemy and do so according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh. We should have some discernment from the Lord concerning exactly what kind of enemies we are facing.

Do not be led astray into silly and hurtful practices and ideas but rather focus your attention on the Lord Jesus

Christ, serve Him with your life, and resist the advances of the devil at all times.

Now before we get too far afield let's get back to our subject at hand. After God's first creating work, the original earth was corrupted by the fall of Satan and his rebellion against God along with all the creatures of the earth. God then judged that earth, destroying it by an inundation of water. This ruined, corrupted earth God later set out to restore, recover, and bring back to Himself.

He has not allowed and did not allow the devil to defeat Him. He simply began the further outworking of His plan for this earth: to restore it to Himself, to assert His rightful authority over it, and to fill it again with beings who would be obedient to Him. This is what we'll be talking about in the next chapter.

The foregoing discussion has been an effort to paint a picture and set the stage, so to speak, for what we are to be seeing in the rest of this book. If we are to understand God's purposes for the earth, it is essential that we know its history.

The Kingdom of God – His rulership over the earth – is something which is very much on His heart. The view of earth which has been presented here should be a great help to us in understanding why God is attempting to again establish His authority upon it.

In order for Him to defeat His enemy completely He must regain control of the territory which has been usurped. It is not sufficient just to save a few souls and whisk them off to heaven. This earth, along with the inhabitants thereof, must be completely subjected to His authority. And we know that this plan will be completed when Jesus returns to reign. God's Kingdom will come to the earth at last.

6.

GOD'S COMMISSION – MAN'S FAILURE

*I*t can be postulated then, as shown in the last chapter, that the original earth which God created was corrupted and ruined by Satan in his rebellion and that God then judged and destroyed that earth as a consequence. Therefore, the first several chapters of the book of Genesis could actually be understood as a history of God's restoration and reconstruction of the earth.

This restoration, like the original earth, was perfect since it also was the work of God. After each day's work of what we could call "re-creation," (with the exception of the second), God "saw that it was good." God was pleased with His work when it was finished (Gen 1:31).

Although this is so, there was still something wrong. In this beautiful, lush, recreated earth which God made was the presence of His enemy with all his hosts of wickedness. The atmosphere surrounding the earth was full of fallen angels (Eph 6:12, Col 2:15), and the sea (the abyss or the deep) was teeming with evil demons. This was the situation into which God placed the first man, Adam.

Once we realize how the earth was corrupted by Satan and filled with his evil forces, we should then have some

understanding of why God created man in the first place. Of course we know that man was created for God's pleasure, but here in the book of Genesis we see a hint of something further. Part of His plan was to recover the earth for Himself. Before we get into these things, however, let us take a moment to examine this man whom God made.

When man was created, he was made in God's image and after His likeness (Gen 1:26). To be created in God's image means that man is inwardly like God. And to be created in God's likeness means that outwardly, physically, man also resembles God.

To demonstrate this a little further, let us begin on the inside. All men have within them three distinct abilities. They can think, they feel, and they decide. These three capabilities are generally known as the mind, the emotions, and the will.

Significantly, God too thinks, feels, and decides. In fact, God's thoughts, sentiments, and decisions are infinitely greater and stronger than what we possess. He too has a mind, emotions, and will. Therefore, it is easy to see that inwardly, man was made in God's image. In his inner parts, man's make-up reflects – albeit in a very inferior way – that of His Maker.

A man's body gives him his outward appearance. When God has revealed Himself throughout biblical history to various people including Moses, Elijah, and Daniel, His appearance was like that of a man. This is to say that He was seen having legs, arms, feet, body, a head with one face, etc.

On the other hand, He does not have hooves, claws, wings, feathers, horns, scales, or multiple "faces." When we see Him we will recognize the form in which He exists because man appears just like God. The likeness or the outward form of man is made after the likeness of God.

As a matter of fact, man is the only creature in the whole universe which has this privilege of inwardly and outwardly resembling God. Hallelujah! What a glorious fact this is that we have been fashioned after God Himself.

GOD'S COMMISSION TO MAN

Now to return to our original discussion: God made a new creature, man, in His image and after His likeness and placed him in the garden of Eden. In so doing, He put him right in the middle of a hostile environment full of fallen angels and demons. Then He charged him saying, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28). (The Hebrew word for "subdue" can also be translated "conquer.")

God's plan was for man to exercise "dominion" (Gen 1:26) over this planet. Here we find God creating a man after His similitude, placing him in the midst of the devil's territory, and charging him to conquer, subdue it, and have dominion over it. Man was given the task of having authority over the earth.

But wait a minute. There were already other beings here who had been given authority before they rebelled. There were already other rulers in existence.

Therefore, Adam's appearance in the Garden was a direct challenge to the rulership of Satan. He was being put on the earth to confront and overcome the authority of the devil.

Man's job was to be a substitute. He was to take the place of the present evil rulers. This was the beginning of God's plan to recover the earth, Satan's domain, back for Himself. God placed man upon the earth as His emissary to retake what had been lost during Satan's rebellion.

You see, man was not just one of God's experiments. God did not make him merely on a whim. When our Creator fashioned us, He had in mind a very definite purpose and objective. Mankind was created to be the agency through which God would defeat His enemy and recover the lost territory for Himself.

To accomplish this plan, man, resembling God and having communion with Him, was commissioned with the work of populating the earth with men just like him-

self who were submitted to the authority and rulership of God.

As they multiplied on the earth God could again claim it as His own because it would be filled with creatures who loved and obeyed Him. What a glorious victory! But as we all know at that time the victory was not to be immediately forthcoming.

Satan, no doubt, understood at least part of what God was doing. He probably could not stand a being who looked like God inhabiting his world. It must have galled him to the very core to see Adam and Eve living and working in submission to God on his earth.

So he came and subtly deceived Eve. She in turn seduced her husband and they fell. Instead of living for God and serving Him, they rebelled against God and became constituents of Satan's kingdom. They partook of the tree of which God had instructed them not to eat. Their natures were corrupted and death began to work in them.

At that time they came under God's curse and became, for all practical purposes, servants of the evil kingdom. It seemed as if the Most High's plan had completely failed.

However, God is not easily thwarted. He does not give up quickly. He has the power to carry out His plans in the face of seemingly insurmountable adversity.

Even before He began His plan by making Adam and Eve, He knew everything that would happen. Man's fall did not take Him by surprise. Though the first man Adam failed to perform the charge of God to have dominion over the earth, God promised to the woman a seed. And of this seed He said, "He shall bruise your head" (meaning the head of the serpent) (Gen 3:15).

Although the devil had won an apparent victory, still God had a plan. From woman, through the race of man, God was going to bring forth a "seed" that would finally fulfill His desire, crushing and defeating the enemy. This seed is the man Jesus Christ, the One who triumphed over the devil and made an open display of this victory to the principalities and powers (Col 2:15).

THE DEVIL'S APPARENT VICTORY

After the fall, men began to multiply on the face of the earth. As time went on God would occasionally find a man who was open to Him, who would love Him, and who would serve Him. Enoch, the seventh descendant of Adam, was such a man. The scriptures testify that he walked with God, and "was not, for God took Him" (Gen 5:24).

In the long run, however, the multitudes of fallen men corrupted their behavior upon the earth very much. They walked in evil, lust, greed, and violence. They continually practiced all the things which God hates. These men performed daily what the enemy with all his evil desires led them to do.

This situation worsened until mankind became so much a part of Satan's kingdom and rebelled against God to such an extent that they engaged in every imaginable sin. Violence was rampant. No human government existed at that time to subdue the passions of men and so they beat or killed one another at the slightest provocation.

Unrestrained sexual lusts also were in evidence. This situation went so far that it appears that some began to have sexual intercourse with the fallen angels. In the first several verses of Genesis chapter six we read about the "sons of God" coming in to the "daughters of men" and intermarrying with them. The product of such an unholy union we are told was the giants, the Nephalim, a race of beings whom God never intended and did not want on His earth.

A careful reading of Genesis chapter six will make this evil development undeniably clear. At this juncture God saw that the imaginations of men's hearts were only evil continually. Not only was man himself rebelling but he was polluting the human race by illegal sexual intercourse.

The "sons of God" of Genesis chapter 6 must be angelic beings since the scripture in other places refers to them

as such (Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7, Dan 3:25). In fact, some of the ancient scripture manuscripts render the words “sons of God” as “angels of God” in this passage.

Although some believers, being offended by the very idea, have tried to find another explanation and taught that these must be the descendants of Seth (i.e. men in the lineage of those who walked with God) this cannot be the case. Such a theory does not explain why the offspring of these marriages were giants or why God considered their activities to be so wicked. The procreation of normal men, especially those of godly descent, was actually commanded by God.

Some also argue against this rather obvious fact by insisting that angels do not marry (Mt 22:30). Of course, angels do not intermarry or procreate among themselves, yet this does not mean that they cannot appear in a physical form and engage in sexual intercourse with women. Even though this sin is extremely shocking, the Bible records it as an historical truth.

As depraved as we may believe the sin of intercourse with angels to be, and as much as we might like to deny it, it is likely to occur again before the second coming of Christ. Jesus plainly tells us, “as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Mt 24:37).

In fact, this sin was not limited to the age before the flood. The situation in the land of Caanan before being occupied by the Israelites, demonstrates that this sin was practiced at other times in history. At that time also, the land was filled with giants.

In Noah’s day, the situation on the earth had become so bad that God repented that He had ever made man. He looked upon the earth and saw that it was altogether corrupted, filled with violence and evil deeds, and increasingly populated with giant beings whom He never desired to exist. This grieved His heart so much that God decided to destroy the earth with all the creatures that inhabited it, including the men which he had made in His image. But in one man, Noah, God found someone who was righteous.

Noah walked with God. And so God decided to save this man and his family from the destruction which He was planning. God instructed him to build an ark and take into it one pair of every unclean animal along with seven pairs of every clean animal. This ark was to be the vehicle whereby they would all be saved from the second flood of waters upon the earth.

It is interesting to note that Noah's ark, through which this salvation was effected, is a type of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the side of the ark was a door through which all who entered were borne up above the judgment of God.

When Jesus died, an opening was also made in His side. This proved to also be a kind of "doorway" through which we can enter into Him and be saved. It is through the pierced side of Jesus Christ, from which blood and water flowed, that we are saved from the impending judgment of God for a new world which is to come.

Although Satan had apparently won a great victory by corrupting mankind and again ruining God's earth, God found one man with whom He could start over and begin a new world to eventually accomplish His purposes. After the flood waters subsided and the ark landed, Noah's descendants once again began to populate the earth.

Sadly, they too failed to know God, to love God, and to fulfill God's commission to the first man. Evil and rebellion again began to spread unrestrained. Striking examples of this are recorded, such as the incident of the Tower of Babel where man decided that he could control his own destiny, essentially claiming that he was God and could do whatever he desired.

It is here that the Lord confounded them by changing their languages so that they could not understand one another and dispersed them across the face of the earth.

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah provides another graphic illustration of how depraved mankind became. Apparently Satan continued to triumph and man continued to fall deeper into sin. At this point it appears that God altered His method of working. Instead of dealing with

mankind as a whole, He decided to choose for Himself a people – to call out from among all men a race that was especially His. And it was with these people that He would work towards accomplishing His original goals.

For this plan, God chose a man of faith, Abraham. When he was still childless he was called by God and was promised that his seed would multiply and inherit all the land of Canaan. God told him that He would make of him a great nation and that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed.

It was with this select group of people that God planned to accomplish His original desire. He would separate them from the rest of the inhabitants of the earth to Himself and teach them about His statutes and His ways. He would instruct them concerning His laws and His judgments and cause them to overcome the devil and to live instead for Him.

As you probably know, God carried out this “phase” of His plan with the children of Israel – the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. After Moses led them out of Egypt into the wilderness, God began to speak with them and work with them to mold them into the kind of people He desired.

There He tried them, purified them, revealed Himself to them, and it was there – separated from all the rest of the world – that He prepared them to be a people for His own possession. After 40 years of God’s dealing they were ready to enter into the land which God promised, take it from the inhabitants, and set up a kingdom of righteousness over which God Himself would rule supreme.

Biblical history tells us that, in the course of time, this project also ended in apparent failure. The people of Israel, after their entry into the land of Canaan, began to mingle themselves with the indigenous population which God had specifically commanded them not to do.

Consequently, they began to practice their evil ways. Idolatry, fornication, lust, and sin again sprang forth in God’s people. Time and time again God would do some-

thing to turn them back to Himself. He would arrange circumstances to make them miserable and then raise up a leader who would rescue them out of the bondage into which they were falling. Again and again He would save them from the power of the devil that was encroaching into their lives and restore them to Himself.

At one point in their history, it seemed as if the victory had almost been won. During the reign of Kings David and Solomon the kingdom of Israel under the rulership of God had become a real testimony. Its fame had reached to the ends of the earth and, to a large extent, at least outwardly, the people were fulfilling God's commands.

It was at this time that God again promised a seed that would come to sit on the throne of David and rule according to God's desires forever. This promise also was and will be fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. Someday He is coming again as King to rule over all the inhabited earth and subdue it in righteousness to God Almighty.

Eventually this kingdom of Israel also fell into degradation. Idol worship and sin of every kind crept in and many of the kings who succeeded David and Solomon chose not to continue in God's way. After several small restorations and numerous larger failures, God allowed His people to be carried away captive into Assyria and Babylon.

Seemingly all was lost and the devil had again won the victory. God's plan of subduing the earth to Himself through a select group of overcoming people was apparently thwarted and the devil reigned supreme. But as we all know, God's plan and His purposes remained. He still had a way in which He was going to fulfill all that He set out to accomplish.

The many defeats suffered by God's agent, mankind, will serve in the long run only to bring more glory to God, and to show His might and power in finally fulfilling His original purpose through such weak, frail human beings.

No, God is not defeated, and neither will He be. He has not abandoned His original plan and now simply gone

into the business of just rescuing man from the earth. He is not accepting defeat, leaving the earth to the devil and simply whisking a few souls who believe in Him off to heaven. No, He is going to establish His Kingdom, His authority, His rightful rulership here on the earth!

All the territory which was “lost” will be regained. Man, who was originally charged with this job of recovery, will, through the power of Jesus Christ, have victory over Satan. The charge which He gave to the first man, Adam, will be fulfilled. His people, with Christ at their head, WILL have complete dominion over this earth for 1,000 years. This is the Millennial Kingdom which is coming. It is the fulfillment of what God started out to do in the beginning.

Some, when reading about the coming Millennial Kingdom, have perhaps been perplexed and have not really understood what the purpose of it is. Hopefully this chapter has been of some assistance in helping the readers understand God’s eternal purposes and to see the revelation of the Bible as a whole – a total picture of God’s working in man on the earth from beginning to end.

God has intended from the beginning to defeat His enemy and He has chosen to do it through created human beings. He has not lowered Himself to fight with Satan personally, but through His emissary – who looks like Him outwardly and resembles Him inwardly – God (as we will see in the following chapters) is retaking the earth. He is filling it with human beings who are subjected to Him, who love Him and who are serving Him.

7.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AMONG YOU

*I*n the last chapter we examined one of God's primary purposes for creating man and putting him on the earth. This purpose was to establish His Kingdom here by recapturing this planet from the domination of the devil and reestablishing it under His rightful authority. We have also seen that God created man in His image and after His likeness and placed him on the earth to be the agent through which He would accomplish this plan.

Man repeatedly failed to carry out the commission with which God entrusted him in the first chapter of Genesis. Seemingly, the devil reigned supreme. But throughout this history, God had promised a seed who would prevail. The fulfillment of this promise is found in Jesus Christ. He was the Son of God, born of a woman, in the family of Israel, of the tribe of Judah, and from the seed of David the King. It is He who God promised would sit upon the throne of His Kingdom forever.

Since Jesus was born of Mary, a woman of this earth, He was fully man. The scripture says that He Himself partook of flesh and blood (Heb 2:14). He became what we are in order to transform us to be as He is. Not only is Jesus a complete man, He is also truly God. In Him, the scripture

reads, dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col 2:9). This man is the incarnation or the embodiment of the Word of God. John 1:14 states: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

This man who was God, Jesus Christ, is the fulfillment of God's promise to send a seed of the woman that would crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). This is exactly what Jesus did. From His birth, the man Jesus Christ was completely sinless. He never did anything that displeased the Father (Jn 8:29). His earthly life was in total opposition to all that the devil's kingdom is. He never participated in evil in any way. His life was the living manifestation of God's righteousness on this earth, right in the middle of the devil's domain.

How Satan must have hated Him. He was a perfect man. At one point He said, "the prince of this world is coming, and he has nothing in me" (Jn 14:30). Hallelujah! God sent His Son and He became a man in whom the devil had nothing – no control, no dominion, and no way through which he could influence Him. What a glory to God and what a victory over the enemy that a real man walked this earth sinlessly, living in perfect submission to God. He was never drawn into all the evil and the corruption that Satan had to offer.

Now don't think that Jesus wasn't tempted. His sinlessness was not a result of an easy life. In the wilderness He fasted for forty days and forty nights and was tempted by the devil. He was tried in every aspect just as we are today (Heb 4:15). He did not escape temptation – He overcame it. He lived victoriously above it. He did not give in to the seduction of evil, which is why the Bible says the Father is well pleased with Him (Mt 3:17). Jesus lived in this sinless, perfect way from His birth to His death on the cross.

It is worth mentioning here that His dying on the cross was the fulfillment of all the typology of sacrifice in the

Old Testament. Jesus was the Lamb of God who offered Himself, without spot or blemish, for the sins of the world.

The Israelites were supposed to find a perfect male lamb to offer to God. But before it could be offered, it had to be examined carefully to make sure that it had no imperfections.

In the same way Jesus too, before He was crucified, was examined. Pontius Pilate and his soldiers did their own brand of examination. They beat Him, spit on Him, and mocked Him. They tried everything they knew to get some kind of ungodly reaction from Him which would satisfy their craving to see someone break down under their abuse.

Herod also checked Him out thoroughly. Later Pilate, after he was finished with his exam, said, "I find no fault in him" (Jn 19:4, 19:6). This is really impressive. No doubt Pilate spent much of his time dealing with men and passing out judgment. I'm sure many different kind of characters had passed in front of his tribunal of justice. Yet without a doubt, he could not have said this about any other man. He was so impressed with this one man, Jesus, that he could truthfully say that he couldn't find any fault in Him whatsoever.

This was a man that overcame all that the devil threw at Him. He lived a victor. Not only this, but when Jesus rose from the dead He overcame the most powerful tool that the devil has – death. He overcame sin during His life and He overcame death in His resurrection from the grave. Death could not hold Him.

The strength of Satan was overcome in the resurrection life of Jesus Christ, the man who was God. All that the enemy and his forces could muster was thwarted. When Jesus rose from the dead, He made an open show of their defeat. He triumphed over them completely (Col 2:15).

There was nothing – no weapon which they possessed – which could stop Him from fulfilling the will of God. How glorious this is to see that finally a man – a divine, holy man – fulfilled God's will and accomplished His

plan. In Jesus Christ, God's commission was fulfilled. This was one important step in the plan of God being realized.

THE KINGDOM AMONG YOU

When Jesus walked on this earth almost 2,000 years ago He was the living manifestation of the Kingdom of God. In every aspect of His life He was completely submitted to God's reigning and ruling. For the first time since the creation of Adam, there was a man walking the earth who was satisfying God's requirements. Through Jesus' human living, the Kingdom of God was declared to men.

When the Pharisees asked Him where His Kingdom was, He told them, "For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst" (Lk 17:21 NASB*). When He said this, Jesus was referring to Himself. He was the unique manifestation of God's Kingdom. In all that He said or did He reflected the will of the Father.

At one point He boldly declared, "I always do those things that please Him [the Father]" (Jn 8:29). This was truly a manifestation of the Kingdom of God. Although He was living in the midst of a hostile environment, He expressed God in every aspect of His life.

As Jesus began His ministry, He preached repentance for the sake of the Kingdom. He said, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 4:17). This meant that the rulership or the authority of heaven was being manifested and that men needed to repent for their part in Satan's kingdom.

They were being called upon to repent for the deeds which they were doing and even the thoughts which they were thinking which were contrary to the new, heavenly Kingdom. Since the Kingdom of God was now at hand men needed to turn away from the other kingdom in

*The reason I have chosen this translation is that it gives a more correct understanding of this verse. Some versions have "within you" instead of "in the midst of you" or "among you." Although it is true that we can experience the Kingdom of God inwardly today, at the time when Jesus spoke these words the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out and thus it would have been impossible for any of His hearers to have the Kingdom of God residing in them.

which they had been participating, in order to become a part of the Kingdom which God was offering.

The gospel of the Kingdom means the gospel of repentance for the sake of entering into God's Kingdom. If we are to enter in we must turn away from all the evil and the sin of the devil's kingdom in which we have been living. We must change camps, so to speak. God requires that we defect and come to the other side. This is the gospel which Jesus preached. It is an absolute, radical message and leaves no room for compromise.

The two kingdoms about which we have been speaking – the kingdom of this world and the heavenly Kingdom – are in total opposition to each other. There is no middle ground. In order to become completely subjected to God's Kingdom, we must be wholly set free from Satan's. This requires a deep, thorough repentance in the heart of every man concerning the things which he was doing, saying, and thinking before he knew about the Kingdom of God.

I'm afraid that many Christian preachers do not announce this gospel of the Kingdom. Becoming a Christian is too often portrayed as being easy and demanding nothing more than a simple acceptance of a gift.

Although we must accept the gift, this is just a part of the message. There is actually much more to it than that. When Jesus and John the Baptist preached, they preached repentance for the sake of the Kingdom.

If we are really going to do God's will and fully enter His Kingdom, we must repent categorically for everything in which we have been participating that is against Him. Repentance means that we turn our hearts away from these things and determine never to be involved in them again. It means agreeing with God that those who practice such things are worthy of death. It means making a decision to leave one kingdom and enter into another.

This gospel is not watered down or easy but through Jesus Christ it is entirely possible for anyone who desires it. We can all live in victory just as Jesus did.

THE OVERCOMING LIFE

The reason that we can live as Christ did is that He has given us His very own life. The eternal life which God promises to give through His Son Jesus, is His own divine life. When Jesus Christ, who lived victoriously conquering Satan and sin, now begins to live in us, we too can live as He did.

The scripture asks of those who believe, "Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?" (II Cor 13:5). Praise God, this same Jesus who lived on this earth apart from the kingdom of the enemy now resides in us. Jesus has given His "Kingdom life" to men. When we receive Jesus Christ we receive all that He is and all that He accomplished. When He comes into us He brings all His attributes, virtues, and power with Him. Through the Holy Spirit every believer can enter into victory.

Since God has poured His Holy Spirit into men upon this earth (the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, Rm 8:2) there are now thousands of individuals who have the life and the power to live in God's Kingdom. Now, through the Spirit, the overcoming life of Christ is being fruitful and multiplying in people all over the earth. These men and women can fulfill God's original command to overcome the powers of evil in this world and live according to God.

This eternal power dwells in all believers. And if they are only willing to repent, to change kingdoms, to cease from doing the works of darkness, and to enter into the Kingdom of light, Jesus Christ within them will supply them to do it. His life, His victorious life, will enable them to overcome.

This is not something which we can do by our own efforts. It is not a victory which we can gain by our own determination and willpower. Instead, it is a submission of our entire being to Another. We can, through the opening of our heart to Him, allow His divine, overcoming life to live through us. The secret of our victory over sin and the

enemy is not to try harder, but to yield ourselves more and more to Him.

Here we find the purpose for which Jesus came and died. He came to gather to Himself a special people who would allow Him to live in them and live His victorious life through them. Thus, they would express Him and manifest His dominion over His enemy. By His power, they now can live in this hostile world and yet be subjecting themselves to His authority. By allowing Jesus Christ to fill them and live through them, they manifest Christ's victory and establish God's authority over this earth.

At last, the purpose for which man was created is finding fulfillment. All that now remains is for God to finish gathering all those whom He has chosen and prepare them for that final day. Very soon we will all be caught up to meet Him in the air and return with Him to reign. Our role is to submit ourselves completely to Him and to announce this gospel of the Kingdom in all the earth.

The Church is the body of Christ. Just as Jesus' physical body was the vehicle through which He expressed Himself many years ago, so the church is His expression on this earth today. Since He has ascended to the Father, we, His people, are now the vessel through which He wishes to express Himself and accomplish His work.

This word "body" is not just a nice religious expression. It contains much important spiritual meaning. God's will is to use His people as instruments of righteousness and as a testimony of Himself. This is both a privilege and an awesome responsibility. We are to be expressing the invisible God of the universe to the inhabitants of the earth as well as displaying His victory to the heavenly hosts.

Today, through His body the Church, God is manifesting His wisdom and His eternal plan (Eph 3:10). How we need to take this commission of Christ's seriously! It is of the utmost importance to Him to accomplish this work through us – so much so, in fact, that He died in order that it might be done. This is not a small or unimportant thing to which we have been called. One day soon when we

stand before His judgment seat we will be called upon to give an account of our response to this all-important commission.

One very important aspect of this work is that we are to announce this gospel to every creature (Mk 16:15). Part of our job as Jesus' disciples is to preach, as He did, the gospel of the Kingdom. His will is for all men to hear the message of repentance and to receive His new life. For this to happen, we must cooperate. We must be willing to go wherever He sends us and spread the good news. We too need to "be fruitful and multiply" spiritually.

If we are willing and obedient, He will empower us to rescue men and women out of Satan's kingdom of darkness and transfer them into His own Kingdom of light. Jesus Christ is coming back again soon and I am very sure that He would be happy to find you standing in the gap, saving people from God's wrath and getting them ready for the wedding feast.

PREPARING GOD'S PEOPLE

This brings up another essential aspect of our Kingdom commission. It is also our responsibility to assist God in perfecting His people and preparing them for His coming. Not only do we need to introduce them to Christ's Kingdom, but we also need to teach them how to live in it. God does not want a collection of spiritual babies but a multitude of mature saints with whom He can dwell in intimate fellowship forever.

Before He ascended He said: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations... teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Mt 28:19,20 NASB). Building up the body of Christ is not a secondary responsibility but an equal part of the task.

Not only do we need to bring in the raw materials, but we are also being called upon to assist Him in fashioning them into what He wishes them to be. We must be helping each other prepare for His coming.

It should be noted that not all members of Jesus' body have the same function. All of us are not called to do the same thing. There are many different kinds of work to be done. The scripture specifically mentions in several places that there are various gifts, administrations, and abilities which the Spirit gives and with which we can serve God (I Cor 12:4-12, Rm 12:4).

The important message is not that we are all to do the same job, but that we are all to do what Jesus is calling us to do. Each and every one of us is to be actively serving God in some capacity. All believers must live under the authority and direction of Jesus today if we are to find His approval when He returns.

Whatever your job or function is, you should be doing it with all of your energy. If you do not know what it is, then you should seek the Lord's face through prayer and seek fellowship with other believers until you know that you are walking in His will.

One reason that many Christians have difficulty knowing the will of God for their lives is that they have so many priorities which come ahead of serving God. For example, first they get an education, marry a wife, find a good job, buy a house, and then they wonder what God's will for their life is.

No wonder they are confused! If we are to really know the will of God, we must be open to Him in *every* area of our lives. All things must be put in subjection to Him. The extent to which we are truly open to Him is the extent to which we can know His will. No one who is genuinely seeking God will be left hanging in bewilderment for long. God is able to lead His people.

Of course simply standing in one place and praying for years may not bring the answer. Sometimes, to find His will, we must begin to move in the direction in which we think He might be leading. As we walk, we will have the inner assurance of His blessing or the conviction that we have made a mistake. Be bold! Take steps toward doing the work to which you think Jesus is calling you. Making

mistakes is not fatal but burying your talents will bring His disapproval on judgment day. "Blessed are those who listen to God's message and practice it!" (Lk 11:28 Williams).

Once we receive the Lord, this is not the end. Instead it is the beginning of a life-long process of following Him, doing His will, and expressing His life and nature to the perishing world. Jesus has run the race before us, overcome all the power of the enemy, and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High. Now we, His people, are faced with the responsibility of following Him in this victory.

By faith we can serve Him and accomplish His will upon the earth. Since we have His life within us, we too can live as He did. There is no acceptable excuse for not living in God's Kingdom today and manifesting His will upon the earth. The great and terrible Day of the Lord is coming. Who can stand in the day of His appearing? I tell you, it will be those who have done His will.

8.

“LORD, LORD”

*T*he chapter you are about to read covers a subject of extreme importance. It is an issue which is of tremendous consequence to every believer in Jesus Christ. It is a topic which is not very well understood in our day and about which many have some erroneous ideas and even entrenched misconceptions.

Therefore, I would like to ask all the readers to pay careful attention to what is being said. Please read these words with an open mind and a heart which is genuinely seeking to know the truth. Do not jump to any instantaneous conclusions, but rather read the entire chapter before forming your own opinion about these things.

In fact, I would urge you to also read carefully the several chapters following this one because this subject is so important that we are going to dwell on it at length. There is no other single topic which I know of in the scriptures that has been so neglected and so misunderstood by God's children in these days. May the Lord add His blessing to these words.

It is well known by most Christians that when a person is born again he receives eternal life. This means that in eternity he will be with the Lord. It is my belief that all true believers will be dwelling with Christ forever. Once we receive Jesus Christ, nothing any man or angel can do can

take Him away from us. He Himself promises us that He will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb 13:5). His plan is that all of His children be with Him for eternity.

The scriptures read: "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). This means that they are rescued from God's eternal judgment and they will dwell with the Lord forever. In my understanding, the scriptures provide an ample basis to trust in this position.

However, there are many who believe – perhaps even some of you readers – that you can "lose your salvation" or, in other words, be unborn again. I have no desire to begin a theological argument with these dear brothers. Such discussions are usually not very fruitful in the spiritual sense.

I would only like to point out here that many verses which are used to support this view are not actually addressing the subject of the new life at all but, instead, are speaking about the coming Kingdom. You will see as we continue our study that there are many verses which detail some very serious consequences for disobedience. Yet, when we look closely at these scriptures with the Kingdom in mind, we find that most of these verses are clearly speaking about the Millennium – not about eternity.

Perhaps you are one who believes that your spiritual rebirth and that of others is constantly in jeopardy. I don't believe it is essential to convince you of my position. I would only respectfully request that you finish reading the subsequent chapters with an open mind to find perhaps a different understanding of many Bible passages than you have had before.

With this in mind, there is an essential fact of which we must not be ignorant. While I believe that eternal life is indeed eternal, although others may not, the Bible is crystal clear about another subject. That is that not all Christians will enter into the coming Millennial Kingdom.

Let me repeat this. The holy scriptures clearly teach us that not all believers will participate in the coming Kingdom reign of Christ.

Some may be actually born again. They may be God's children. But many of God's own, will not be allowed into His coming Kingdom. This is a scriptural truth which we will be investigating together. As we open God's word, let us also open our hearts to Him so that He can reveal His purposes to us.

Remembering once again here that the words, "the kingdom of heaven," do not refer to "heaven" but to the Millennial Kingdom, let us read Matthew 7:21. "Not every one that says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father in heaven."

On one hand, we have just read that "whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). Anyone who calls on His name can be born again. Yet, on the other hand, not everyone who calls on Him will enter His Kingdom. Here, there is another qualification: those who enter must do God's will or, in other words, be obedient to Him.

Please consider this carefully. Even though all believers will be in eternity, not all of them will be allowed into the 1,000 year Kingdom of Jesus Christ, but only those who are obedient. Is this surprising to you? Should it be? It certainly makes sense that Jesus Christ will want as part of His earthly Kingdom only those who have obeyed Him and served Him faithfully while they lived on the earth.

Surely He would not want His heavenly administration to be full of lazy, irresponsible, rebellious individuals. No, only those who are obedient and faithful will enter into the Millennial Kingdom of Jesus Christ and will reign with Him.

The reason for this is very simple. You cannot subdue rebellion with rebellious individuals as your representatives. You cannot take a thief and make him the president of a bank. You cannot use an unfaithful person to help others become faithful. It simply will not work. Therefore, in order for Jesus to establish His kingdom on the earth, He must first establish it *within* those through whom He will

reign. This is the aspect of the Kingdom of God which is taking place today.

We will speak more on this subject in later chapters, but for now, we must spend some time looking at the scriptures which teach us this most important truth.

THE TEN VIRGINS

Perhaps one of the clearest sections of the Bible which applies to this subject is the parable of the ten virgins. This parable is found in Matthew chapter 25, beginning with verse 1. Once again remembering that "the kingdom of heaven" is not "heaven," let us read it together:

"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

Those who were foolish took their lamps, and took no [extra] oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

And at midnight a cry was heard, 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you: but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.'

And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding (festivities Gk); and the door was shut. Afterwards the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us.'

But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you

know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of man is coming" (Mt 25:1-13).

This is a very interesting and enlightening parable. It is a parable concerning the Kingdom and the "wedding feast" (vs. 10 Gk) aspect of it. That it is a parable which applies to Christians – real believers – shall also become apparent as we look at this passage together.

(Please do not let anyone tell you that these verses apply only to the Jews or that they are not for this present dispensation. To say such a thing is to render this passage of scripture virtually meaningless to believers and to blind their eyes to the truth which is revealed in it.)

Who then are these ten virgins and what does this parable mean? We know from the scriptures that virginity is a term which is applied to believers. Paul says that he had promised in marriage (espoused) certain believers as "a chaste virgin to Christ" (II Cor 11:2).

Virginity here means purity, holiness, and an undefiled life. This is a reference to believers who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, who have been cleansed from all their defilement, and who are now holy and pure before the Lord.

All ten of these individuals were virgins. The only difference between them is that five of them were wise and five were foolish. The Bible does not say that five were saved and five were unsaved or that five were good and five were wicked. We read only that five were wise and five, foolish.

All ten of these virgins had at least some oil in their lamps. This is shown by the fact that, before they fell asleep, all of their lamps were lighted, otherwise they could not later have been "going out" (vs 8). A lamp wick without oil would have burned out almost immediately.

The wise ones had extra oil in their "vessels" (vs 4) while the foolish ones apparently had only a little in their lamps. The "vessels" here must have been an extra container of oil which they brought to replenish their lamps when the need arose.

This oil which they had is a type of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament the priests were instructed through Moses to compound an anointing oil (Ex 30:22-25) symbolizing the Holy Spirit which God has now poured out. Of these ten persons, all had oil. They had all partaken of the Holy Spirit.

Notice also that each of these lamps was lighted and burning. The scripture reads: "The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the inner depths of his heart" (Pr 20:27). The spirit of man is where the Holy Spirit of God dwells in a born-again person.

I Corinthians 6:17 reads: "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." The joining of God's Spirit to man's results in the kindling of a spiritual flame in each believer which begins to give them supernatural light. Surely these virgins who had oil in their lamps and had their lamps burning must have been regenerated, born-again believers.

Another thing which tells us that these were believers is that they were waiting for the bridegroom. No unbeliever is waiting for the bridegroom. Only those who know Him and love Him are waiting for Him. We read in verse 5 that while the bridegroom tarried they all fell asleep. Symbolically, all these believers died while they were still waiting for their Lord.

But at midnight a cry went out, "Behold, the bridegroom is coming!" and they awoke. The scripture reads, "And many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake" (Dan 12:2). When the Lord returned, these believers were resurrected, raised up from the dead to meet the bridegroom.

Still another positive proof that all these "virgins" were real Christians is that *only* believers are resurrected when Jesus returns. Please pay careful attention to this since it is a very important truth and has a strong impact upon a proper understanding of the scriptures. No unbelievers are going to be raptured! There will be no non-Christians accidentally resurrected when Jesus comes again. Therefore, there is no possibility of any unbeliever trying to get

into the wedding feast. No unbeliever could be there outside the door crying "Lord, Lord" seeking entrance. Those who do not believe are not resurrected until 1,000 later at what is known as "The Great White Throne" judgment. Therefore, it can only be that these virgins are believers.

OUR TRUE CONDITION

But here we see that after their resurrection some of these virgins began to notice their true spiritual condition. They were in trouble. They lacked oil and their lamps were going out. They had not paid the price to go and buy while they were still living. Evidently, they all had the opportunity but five of them were foolish.

No doubt, while they were living their life on this earth they chose to please themselves. They didn't seek the Lord's face and do His will. They didn't pay the price necessary to be full of the oil of the Holy Spirit. Their foolishness caused them to be disobedient, negligent, and wasteful of their time and energy.

So when the bridegroom came and entered into the wedding feast, these five foolish virgins were left out. Those who had been obedient – who had gotten the necessary oil – were allowed to enter. But those who were disobedient, unfaithful, and slothful in their dealings were instructed by the others to go and buy – to go and pay the required price. While they went, the door was shut and when they came again knocking, they were not let in.

This passage corresponds exactly to the other one we have already quoted which says that not everyone who merely claims Jesus as their Lord will enter into the Kingdom, but those that do the will of the Father.

Here is an immensely sobering truth. It is one to which every believer should give serious consideration. If, in our individual lives, we are unfaithful and disobedient, the Son of Man will come at a time when we are not looking for Him (Lk 12:46) and will find us unprepared. Since we see that not every Christian will be allowed to enter, how should this knowledge affect our daily living? My hope is

that this realization will sober some who are only pleasing themselves, cause them to repent and to begin living from this moment on for their King.

"I DON'T KNOW YOU"

No doubt we should take a moment here to discuss one phrase which is used in this parable that might cause some misunderstanding. It is the one where the Lord is heard saying, "I don't know you." These words are found both in the passage where we read, "Not every one will enter the Kingdom" and in this parable about the ten virgins.

Some have insisted that because Jesus says he doesn't know these people, they could not be His children. They argue, how could He say "I don't know you" if He had begotten them. Please pay careful attention to the answer for it is very significant. There are several reasons which explain this statement of the Lord.

To begin with, the word "know" – the Greek word which is used here – is translated in another place in the King James Version, "allow." In Romans 7:15 Paul says, "For that which I do, I allow not." This means that he didn't approve of doing it. This word can also be translated "certify," according to W. E. Vine in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*.

Using these other possible translations, Jesus would then be found saying in these passages, "I certify you not" or "I approve you not." "You have not measured up to the standard and, therefore, you are not certified or approved." These individuals who were foolish, unfaithful, and did not do the will of God while they were alive were not certified, approved, or allowed by God when He came to establish His Millennial Kingdom.

Obviously God knows everyone who has ever existed upon the earth. He knows their name and all the things they have done. But when He comes to inherit His kingdom, He is only going to acknowledge knowing those who have been faithful and obedient.

Would the Lord Jesus deny that He knew some of His own children? Yes, He would. It is one of His solemn promises which you can count on being true. He says plainly that whoever “denies me before men, I will also deny {or disown} before my Father” (Mt 10:33). This means that He will deny that He knew us. He will deny having knowledge of us because we denied Him.

And what does it mean to deny Him? It means that by our lives, including our attitudes, words, actions, and decisions, we denied His kingship, His lordship, and His rightful authority over us. In short, we were disobedient children.

You don’t have to say with words, “I deny Jesus,” to deny Him. All you have to do is ignore Him and deny that He has any claim of authority over your life.

Don’t get me wrong; our denial of Jesus can be verbal and outward, but it can just as easily be non-verbal and inward, manifesting itself in stubbornness, disobedience, and self-serving living. Those people who conduct their lives in this way are the ones to whom Jesus Christ will say, “I never knew you: depart from me, you who practice lawlessness {rebellion, sin, disobedience}” (Mt 7:23).

This situation could be compared to a woman who had a son. She loved her son very much and raised him the best she could. But when he grew up, he became disobedient. Let us imagine that he became a murderer, a thief, a rapist, a drug pusher, and was involved in evil of every kind. His mother naturally was ashamed of him.

Let us suppose that after many years this man came back home and said, “Hi, mom, how are you doing? Can you lend me some money?”

This woman would probably say, “I don’t know you. I disavow that you are my son. I am ashamed of you because of your disobedience, rebellion, and evil works and I am disclaiming any knowledge of you. You are not allowed inside my house.” This is just how it will be on the day of the Lord’s return with those who have acted foolishly and unrighteously.

PAUL'S GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

Let us now go on to several other passages of scripture which tell specifically who will or will not inherit the Kingdom of God. In I Corinthians chapter 6 we find just such a passage. Here Paul, the apostle, says:

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (I Cor 6:9-12).

What Paul is telling these believers is that if they continue to participate in the rebellion and sin in which they once participated before they came to know Jesus Christ, they will not inherit the Kingdom of God. He is reminding them that since they know that people who practice these things will not inherit the Kingdom, they should not expect to either if they continue to do them. Although they once did them, they have now been cleansed and should not go back to doing them.

For what other motive would he write this passage to these Christians? Surely everyone already knew that unbelieving sinners will not inherit the Kingdom of God. But here he is speaking specifically about believers who continually and unrepentantly practice various sins.

Since this is so, we should be careful not to live in the old way because if we do, we will not inherit the Kingdom. I sincerely pray that no Christian allows himself to be

deceived about this. No one who is living an insubordinate life will enter into the Kingdom of God.

A passage in Galatians 5, starting with verse 19, says essentially the same thing: "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revels, and the like: of the which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that *those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God*" (Gal 5:19-21).

Do you know any Christians who are involved in these kinds of sins? Do you practice these things yourself? If you do, then you can be assured that you will not inherit the Kingdom. You will not enter into all that God has prepared for you. Although we usually think of unbelievers as the people who do these things, it is a shame to say, but yet true, that there are many Christians who still practice them.

Let us start with the first word in verse 21, "envy." How many of us envy others and are jealous of what they have and who they are? How many of us have hatred in our hearts towards someone else? Or, how many of us love to strive about certain doctrinal teachings?

Could it be that some of us are "serving Christ" with some kind of selfish ambition as our motivation? Don't you know that those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God? I'm writing this to warn you, to tell you plainly that not everyone will enter in, but only those who are obedient.

Not only are there believers who strive, envy, and hate but it has also come to my attention that there are literally thousands of Christian men and women who regularly commit fornication and other sexual sins. There are also innumerable people who profess to know Jesus but spend countless hours in bars, drinking and participating in the worldly atmosphere, jokes and conversation. The sad truth is that many of the individuals who "come to

church” on Sunday morning do other things during the week that would raise the eyebrows if not the hair of anyone who genuinely loves the Lord.

It is even true that there is a growing number of Christians who use marijuana and other drugs claiming that they enhance their “spiritual” experience. This is a lie from the pit. And it is these kinds of activities about which the scripture is talking. No one who does these things will enter into the Kingdom but only those who do the Father’s will.

THE STORY OF ESAU

Perhaps you remember the story of Esau. He was the firstborn son of Isaac and, because he was the first born, he was the rightful heir of all that his father had. However, one day returning from hunting he was tired and hungry. His brother Jacob had just cooked up a delicious pot of beans.

So Esau entered into a bargain with Jacob. He traded his birthright – that is his right to be the first to inherit from his father – for the food. He exchanged something of extreme value for temporary, earthly, physical gratification.

Later, when he thought about, he changed his mind and wanted his birthright back. He repented and cried, but it was too late. He had already sold out for a very cheap price. This story still speaks to us today.

Hebrews 12:15,16 exhorts us to be: “looking diligently lest anyone should fall short of the grace of God... lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.”

This is an exact picture of how it will be when Jesus returns. There are many believers in today’s church who are exchanging their right to inherit the Kingdom together with Jesus Christ, for earthly pleasure. They are indulging their flesh in various types of sins and imagining that tomorrow they will be able to reign and rule with Christ.

However, these individuals will be excluded from the Kingdom. They will not be let in, even when they cry out with tears and repentance. "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mt 25:30).

Please notice here how the writer especially emphasizes sexual sins. How easy it is to think that these things don't matter. How small a "morsel" a little sexual indulgence may appear in our own eyes. However, when temptation strikes, when our flesh cries out with every cell for sensual gratification, let us remember what lies ahead. Our destiny depends upon our choices. For many disobedient believers there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth on that day.

I am not saying that there is not room for repentance. Surely there is – TODAY. But when the heavens open and Jesus appears in glory, it will be too late. Take advantage of this opportunity, therefore, right now and thoroughly repent for everything in which you are involved which does not glorify God. Change your thinking and your activities to conform your life to His will. In this way, and only in this way, will you be ready when He comes and be able to enter with Him into His kingdom and glory.

Now let us read together in chapter five of Ephesians, starting with verse 1. Here, again, Paul is writing to believers:

"Therefore, be followers of God, as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and has given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God" (Eph 5:1-5).

I believe that these verses speak for themselves. It is very true that in Jesus Christ we have cleansing from these sins – that His blood is available to us today to wash us clean. However, I would like to submit to you that it is only the repentant ones who confess their sins whom God is going to cleanse (I Jn 1:9).

Those who are unfaithful, rebellious, disobedient, and continue unrepentantly in their sin are going to be held accountable. True, if they are believers they have escaped the wrath of God and eternal judgment, but the scriptures tell us clearly that they will not inherit the Millennial Kingdom.

In I John chapter 2, verse 28 we encounter a very serious warning. This verse verifies all of what we have been understanding. In *The Father's Life Version* we read: "And now little children, continue in him so that when he is revealed we may have confidence and not be ashamed, *and be separated from him at his appearing.*" Although many translations render "separated" as "before," the Greek word means "from," "away from," "off," or "separated." Although few translators have had the courage to translate it this way, this is actually what the verse says.

WHO WILL ENTER

Who then will enter into God's kingdom? It will be those who have submitted their life completely to Jesus Christ and are allowing Him to express His life and nature through them. Jesus taught: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:3). "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Mt 5:5). "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:10).

Those people who are humble, who are meek, who are obedient, and who submit themselves to the heavenly rulership of Jesus Christ are the ones who will possess the earth when He comes again. They are the ones to whom He will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant... enter into the joy of your lord" (Mt 25:21).

A passage in II Peter also speaks clearly to us about this subject. Starting with verse 9 in chapter 1, we read, "For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things, you will never stumble; For so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (II Pet 1:9-11).

"He that lacks these things" is somebody who is foolish, someone who is lazy and irresponsible in his relationship with Jesus. Peter explains to us here that if we do the will of the Lord, our entrance into His Kingdom is assured.

Praise God! What a glorious day this will be, when all those who love Jesus Christ, who look forward to His appearing, and who have served Him during their lifetime, will enter into the joy and the abundance which He is preparing! Oh, hallelujah, what a glory it will be to see all those faithful saints, some of whom have even lost their lives for the Kingdom of God, enter into this wonderful 1,000 year reigning and feasting experience.

THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

Everything written in the Scriptures is written for our benefit. Therefore, it might be good for us here to spend a little time thinking about the Children of Israel. After hundreds of years of bondage in Egypt, God came to rescue them. He sent Moses and delivered them from their heavy burden of slavery to the whims of an earthly king.

After miraculously delivering them, He led them through the wilderness toward the "promised land." It was in this land that they were meant to finally have rest and live a life of blessing and fruitfulness.

However, most of them continually rebelled against God. They refused His speaking and were disobedient. Therefore, God swore an oath that they would never enter into this "rest" and that they would die in the wilderness.

The writer of Hebrews refers to this part of Jewish history at great length to make a very important and sobering point. Beginning in chapter 3, he begins to quote Old Testament scriptures and generally develop a parallel between what happened with the Children of Israel and what will happen also with believers. He is using Jewish history to make an extremely important point.

Here the writer speaks of the future rest, the seventh day rest, i.e. the Millennial Kingdom (Heb 4:4,5). He is referring to the Day of the Lord, *His* day of rest which is coming.

In this connection he says, beginning with verse 1 in chapter 4: "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it" (Heb 4:1). This "you" mentioned here must refer to believers since it is to them that he is writing.

Verse 9 says, "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God" (Heb 4:9). Verse 11 states, "Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest any should fall after the same example of disobedience" (Heb 4:11).

Here we have clearly and carefully elucidated for us by the writer of Hebrews exactly the same truth which we have been studying. That is that it is very possible for someone to become born again, to actually be a child of God, but not be allowed to enter the coming Kingdom – the coming rest. The reasons for not entering are the same as that of the Children of Israel – unbelief and disobedience.

I urge you all to read chapters three and four of Hebrews carefully and see how this passage applies specifically to the coming Kingdom; how the rest, the victory over the enemy, and the enjoyment of Christ in His coming glory, are something which we must labor to enter into.

Our entrance into the Kingdom requires diligence and faithfulness. It is quite clearly written here that it is possible to "come short of it" or in other words not be able to enter. It is even quite scriptural to have within us a certain

amount of fear – a holy, Godly fear – of not measuring up to the standard which God requires.

WHEN JESUS COMES

Interestingly, it is our condition when Jesus comes that will determine whether or not we enter into the Millennial reign of Christ. It may be that we have been faithful to the Lord for many years. We have always been a faithful servant. But as we get older, certain temptations enter in.

For example, perhaps we think that God would forgive us if we divorced our older, somewhat wrinkled, saggy, less attractive wife and married some cute, young “morsel,” someone more “spiritually attuned to our needs.” Maybe we hope that it wouldn’t be “too bad” to just indulge ourselves a little after so many years of service. After all, maybe we imagine, God’s forgiveness is great and He understands our weaknesses and our “needs”.

Ezekiel 18:24 speaks to this situation very clearly saying: “But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity... All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed.”

It is not enough to have been faithful in the past. We must remain faithful until the end. Paul says in one place that he did not count on having “already attained.” At that time he did not have the confidence that he had already “apprehended” (Phil 3:12,13).

You see, Paul definitely had eternal life. He had certainly been born again. Yet, he could not be sure of inheriting the Kingdom. He was constantly pressing on (Phil 3:14). In I Cor 9:27 Paul says that “I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”

I don’t think Paul was afraid of losing eternal life. He knew that nothing could separate him from God’s love (Rom 8:35). But he was concerned about the possibility of

being “disqualified” from something – something very important. He knew that to inherit the coming Kingdom, he must continue faithful until the end.

But later on, near the end of his life – a life of faithfulness and fruitfulness – he did receive the assurance of the Kingdom. In II Timothy 4:7,8 he asserts that now: “I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.” The “crown” here refers to reigning in the Kingdom. So we see that it is only through a lifetime of faithfulness that we can be assured of inheriting the Kingdom with Jesus Christ.

While it is possible for someone who was faithful to become unfaithful, it is also possible for someone who has lived a life of sin, to repent, become obedient to the Lord, and succeed in entering God’s Kingdom.

In God, there is room for repentance. Our sin can be forgiven and we can change the course of our life. Our Lord is very forgiving and loving and will allow us to return to Him again. It is not what we have done in the past but how we are living when Jesus comes that will determine our entrance into His Kingdom.

If you are realizing that you have not been pleasing to the Lord, right now is a good opportunity to turn again to Him, repent and allow Him to reign over every aspect of your life. Once again Ezekiel speaks to us saying: “But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed... None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him” (Ezek 18:21,22).

Hallelujah, it is possible for a sinning child of God to return to Him, do His will, and be able to inherit the Kingdom!

9.

A JUST REWARD

*I*n the last chapter we discussed the fact that not all God's children will enter into His Millennial Kingdom. Although they will all be with Him eternally, still, not everyone who names the name of the Lord will enter into the blessing of reigning and feasting with Him in His Kingdom.

In this chapter we will be investigating an even further aspect of this truth. That is this: not only will some believers not enter into Jesus' Kingdom, but some of them who are rebellious and disobedient will also be punished. Not only will they miss out on the precious reward of the Kingdom, but they will be punished in various ways, some of them punished severely, for their disobedience. What we will be doing here is investigating the scriptures which illustrate this sobering truth.

The Bible teaches us that God is "bringing many sons unto glory" (Heb 2:10). What a privilege it is that we could be one of them. Since we have been redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb, we have been saved from the wrath of God and He no longer deals with us as He deals with His enemies. Instead, He deals with us as His children.

However, becoming God's sons does not mean that we have escaped His disciplining or that we can do as we please. Just as you, as a parent, would not allow your chil-

dren to be rebellious and disobedient but would keep them from living that kind of life by disciplining them, so too, God disciplines His children.

The scripture reads: "For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives" (Heb 12:6). This word "scourge" means to beat with a whip or a rod. God is not the kind of father which some people are today. He does not advocate permissiveness. He loves His children and, in His wisdom, He realizes that discipline is healthy – that to chastise them for their wrongdoings will cause them to do the right thing in the future. In fact, His disciplining of us proves that we are His sons because in His great love, He provides us with correction (Heb 12:8).

Now we come to a very important divine principle. Galatians 6:7 reads: "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." Whatever kind of seed a gardener or farmer puts into the ground, that is exactly the kind of plant which will grow up. If he plants corn he will not get beans, and if he plants onions he will not harvest carrots. The seed that is sown produces exactly after its kind.

The same principle is true with us in the spiritual world. Consequently, we can be assured that whatever kind of life we live, we will reap the corresponding consequences, both now and in the future. If we live a sinful life, or in other words "sow to the flesh," we will reap the result of "corruption" (Gal 6:8). If we "sow to the spirit" we will receive more and more of God's eternal life or, in other words, spiritual maturity. God's children are not immune to this inalterable principle. We will certainly receive the results of what we are sowing today.

Don't think that, just because we are under the grace of God and have been delivered from the wrath with which He will destroy His enemies, we can do as we please. God is not mocked, neither is He blind. Don't be deceived about this. The Bible tells us that the eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding both the evil and the good (Pr 15:3). It is He that "searches the minds and the hearts" (Rev 2:23). He

knows what we think, He knows what we say, and He knows what we do. All the things that are hidden from others, He knows. And for all these things we will be brought to give account before the judgment seat of Christ.

At that time, though no one will be in danger of the lake of fire, if we have been disobedient, we will be in danger of the proper punishment which we have earned. We will reap exactly what we have sown. God will punish His rebellious children. Yes, He certainly will.

In Revelation 2:23 we read of Jesus saying, "and I will give to each one of you according to your works." Revelation 22:12 reads, "...behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every one according to his work." And again in II Corinthians chapter 5, verse 10 we read: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive [be rewarded or punished for] the things done in the body, according to that he has done, whether good or bad."

Concerning these verses I've heard some teach that whether the things we have done are good or whether they are bad, God will still reward us. He will still bless us. He will still give us only good things.

This kind of thinking typifies what it means to be deceived. Somehow, the devil or your own thoughts have deluded you into believing something that cannot possibly be true. It is impossible to sow bad seeds and grow up good rewards.

I've also heard it said: "Well, those who have done good will receive many rewards and those who have done bad will receive only a few good things." I feel I must tell you in the name of Jesus Christ that this is not the truth.

When the Bible uses the word "reward" it does not always refer to something good or a blessing. The word "reward" is also used in the New Testament to refer to just punishment of ungodly acts. Basically, it means that we will get our "just recompense."

When Jesus was hanging on the cross between the two thieves, one of them said, "...for we receive the due reward

of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong" (Lk 23:41). They were being crucified because they had done evil. Therefore, they were suffering the "reward" which they deserved.

When Jesus Christ comes with His reward, we must not think that it will be only good no matter what we have done with the things that He has given us. Then He will judge us according to what we have done with our time and our talents (Acts 1:18, II Tim 4:14, II Pet 2:13, Rev 18:6).

Would God punish some of His children? Yes, indeed He would, and He is going to if they are rebellious and disobedient. In fact, this is one of His great promises upon which we can depend! Now there are some who say that the chastening and scourging to which the Bible is referring happen today in this life only. They think that the Lord would never do that when He comes.

While it is true that, in this world, God does discipline and chasten us very much, it is equally true that some of God's children do not respond to this. They do not heed the admonitions of God and do not allow themselves to be guided and corrected by Him. Instead, they continue in their rebellious ways.

Oftentimes, these people will attribute the unfortunate circumstances which come upon them as natural happenings and refuse to recognize the hand of God in His dealing with them. Some will find any excuse not to admit that the problems through which they are passing are the divine disciplining of the heavenly Father. These people stiffen their necks and harden their hearts against what God is doing. Therefore, they do not benefit from the divine discipline in this life.

Due to their resistant disposition they do not allow the Holy Spirit to do His work. Though they may deceive themselves, by trying to imagine that everything is O.K., when Jesus Christ returns all things will be exposed. All the hidden counsels and thoughts of the heart will be brought to light and these men and women who knew the Lord's will but didn't do it will be justly punished by Him.

Let us turn again to Matthew chapter 25 and examine another Kingdom parable which details this truth for us. Starting in verse 14, this passage reads:

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his ability; and immediately went on a journey.

Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he that had received two, gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the earth, and hid his lord’s money.

After a long time the lord of those servants came, and settled accounts with them. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’

He also who had received two talents came and said, ‘Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter into the joy of your lord.’

Then he who had received the one talent came and said, ‘Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.’

But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. Therefore, you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.

Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.' For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him that does not have, even what he has will be taken away.

And cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt 25:14-30).

What a tremendously sobering parable this is. In it, Jesus Christ is speaking about His "servants." If we think honestly about it, we must arrive at the conclusion that these three servants were all believers. They were all servants of the Lord, and each one of them received talents from Him to do His will while He was away.

No unbeliever fits into this category. Do not make the mistake of calling two servants believers and the other servant an unbeliever. All three must be the same thing. And all three are born-again believers who are servants of Jesus Christ.

In this Kingdom parable we are informed that the unprofitable servant will be cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. We aren't told exactly what or where "outer darkness is," but one can imagine that it is a place which is separate from the direct presence of Jesus Christ and that it is a place of deep soul searching by the individuals who are cast there.

The "weeping and gnashing of teeth" about which the scripture speaks is caused by the anguish of these believers who have realized what they could have had, the joy into which they could have entered, if only they had taken a little effort to be faithful. But now they see that it is too

late. They cannot at this point recover themselves to enter into the Kingdom and they are left out in this dark state for 1,000 years during the wedding feast until the beginning of "eternity future."

This is a serious punishment. It is something which I am sure no one would like to experience. Fortunately, no believer has to, since God has enabled us all to be faithful and He will empower us to be obedient.

It is important to note that outer darkness is not the same thing as the lake of fire. Please pay careful attention this. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that outer darkness is the same as the lake of fire. It is common for Christians to put these two things together when they should not.

There are several good reasons to make such a distinction. To begin, the lake of fire cannot be dark. For many thousands of years, until the recent use of electricity, the only way to have light in a dark place was to have a fire. A candle or a lamp is simply a small fire. Therefore, no one living in Jesus' time would think of a fiery place as being dark. In fact, they would think in just the opposite way.

Next, we must remember that this judgment of "servants" takes place when Jesus returns. As we have already seen, no unbeliever will be raptured. Therefore, no unbeliever could be present before the judgment seat of Christ when the other "servants" are rewarded.

It is only *after* the millennium that the non-believers are resurrected and judged and it is only *then* that anyone (other than the beast and false prophet) will be thrown into the lake of fire.

Let us not take our inspiration from Dante or Milton, who portray hell as a place of various kinds of punishments and sufferings (i.e. darkness, scourgings, fire etc.). No, being cast into outer darkness is a punishment for God's children. It is temporary and it is something which happens at the judgment seat of Christ, at the beginning of the Millennium.

In many people's eyes this servant's sin does not really seem to be too bad. He didn't really do anything blatantly

evil. He simply didn't do anything at all. We have spoken before about the fact that there is no neutral ground in this world. In our lives we are participating in either one kingdom or the other. Either we are living in Christ's Kingdom and in obedience to Him, or, knowingly or unknowingly, we are serving the devil.

Jesus Christ has entrusted us with a commission to go into the world, teach all nations, and make disciples of them (Mt 28:19). A disciple is someone who is obedient and disciplined by his Master. Believers are entrusted with this message and are given various abilities to use in carrying it out.

If through fear, laziness, or simple disobedience we do not exercise our gifts and talents to fulfill what God has commanded us to do, we will answer for this at the judgment seat of Christ. At this time, some of God's children will be cast into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Not only will some believers be left out of the wedding feast, but also some will be punished in this manner for their lassitude and disobedience.

Jesus repeats this same warning in another place where He states that "many shall come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven [this is the wedding feast]; but [some of] the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt 8:11,12 NASB).

Who are these "sons of the Kingdom?" They are those who, by virtue of being sons because they were born of God, had the right to inherit the Kingdom. Just as the son of an earthly man will inherit his substance when he dies, so the sons of God have the right to inherit the Kingdom which He has promised.

The Williams translation makes this very clear by saying: "...many will come from the east and from the west and take their seats at the feast with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be turned out into the darkness outside,

where they will be weeping and grinding their teeth." Those of God's children who are unfaithful will be disinherited and, not only will they be disinherited, but they will also be punished.

There are many who mistakenly try to apply this and other "Kingdom" parables to "eternity." Thus, they reason that the unfaithful servant who is punished is "lost." They suppose that he lost his eternal life. He was once born of God but, because of his disobedience, he ceased being one of God's sons.

If we take this view, then we would have to assume that God is generating children randomly and even irresponsibly. If this is true, then our heavenly Father is allowing people to receive His life and become part of His family without any plan for dealing with their problems and deficiencies.

This idea leads us to think of the new birth simply as a kind of experiment to see if it will go right or not. This would be like a man having, let us say, a dozen children and then, when some of them do not please him, shooting half of them, "culling the herd" so to speak.

No, God is doing nothing without a preplanned purpose. He knows the beginning and the end. In fact, He *is* the beginning and the end. Therefore, when anyone comes to Him and is received by Him, He already had the plan and power to deal with Him as a son and to eventually bring that son into submission to Him. This divine plan includes discipline, including during the kingdom age.

Why is God punishing and disciplining His sons in this way? Everything He does concerning His children is done because of His love. So we can be sure that this future punishment also has the same motive. He will do it for our own good. This chastisement of God's children is to break down their stubbornness and their resistant will. If we do not submit to Him in this lifetime, then He will have to work to correct this problem when He comes.

He will do this so that we will learn to be obedient, so that when eternity comes we will be ready. When the

Millennial Kingdom is over and “eternity future” begins, all rebellion must have been cleansed from the hearts of God’s children so that they can enjoy freely the new creation. God knows what is best for us. I’m sure it grieves Him tremendously that His children have not made themselves ready. But in His divine providence He has made a way to help us so that eventually, we will be ready.

MANY STRIPES

Let us turn now to another passage in Luke chapter 12, starting with verse 35. Keep in mind that this passage is also spoken in the context of the Kingdom (see verse 31):

“Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately.

Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. [This speaks of feasting in the Kingdom]. And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants” (Lk 12:35-37).

“And the Lord said, ‘Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has.’ [This speaks of reigning in the kingdom..

But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming’ and begins to beat the men servants and maidservants, and to eat and

drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at hour when he is not aware; and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers." [This word "unbelievers" should be translated "unfaithful" according to the Concordant Literal translation].

"And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many blows. But he who did not know, yet committed things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few" (Lk 12:42-48).

Here we have elaborated for us clearly and undisputedly the fact that when Jesus Christ returns, some of His servants will be punished. The particular servant of whom the scripture speaks here was beaten with many stripes. The words in the New King James version, "cut him in two," (vs 46) do not mean to cut him into pieces but mean to "scourge him severely," according to a marginal note in the American Standard Version.

This is acutally referring to how the skin on the back is cut open by repeated lashing with a whip. This must be the correct translation since God is not some kind of maniac who will hack people up into pieces, but is a loving Father who will discipline His children.

Will the Lord actually castigate His children in such a severe manner? You can be confident that He will do just that if we have been unfaithful and disobedient. This discipline which rebellious children will receive will be severe and prolonged. It is something which will take place during the Kingdom age. Furthermore, it something which any wise child of God would want to avoid at all costs.

Although I cannot predict exactly what form this punishment will take, it seems possible that, as we have already mentioned, a large part of it will be to see very clearly what they have missed. Those who were disobedient will see others enjoying the rewards of the Kingdom while they are left out.

In Luke 13:28 Jesus warns about the possibility of seeing “Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out.” While those who are excluded are waiting for the Kingdom age to finish, they will no doubt have time to review very clearly their lifestyle in this world. I imagine that this would cause great and prolonged anguish – weeping and gnashing of teeth – to see how easy it would have been to be obedient and how much God would have helped them to overcome if they had only been willing.

Although some would like to deny this stark, unpleasant reality by again trying to believe that the person who is punished could not be a Christian, here the scripture makes it plain that this is a believer.

We read in verse 45, “But if that servant says in his heart, My lord is delaying his coming.” This is the very same servant who in the preceding verses was blessed by the Lord and made to be ruler over His household. There should be no doubt that this servant about which the scripture is speaking was a child of God but who, in the latter part of this passage, became disobedient.

Yes, God will surely punish His children when they deserve it. Both in this life and in the Kingdom age which is to come, He will reward every man according to his works whether they be good or evil. All of God’s children should take this message seriously.

Colossians 3:23-25, which are words written to believers, reads: “And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance [this means inheriting the Kingdom]; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.”

I have stated here that these punishments for believers are temporary – that they will last “only” one thousand years. Through the years, many have asked if there are any texts which prove such a thing. Is there any indication in the Bible that afterwards God will restore these individu-

als in some way? Although there are no references in the scriptures which specifically state this, it can be strongly inferred from the fact that these verses which we have been studying are specifically about the coming Kingdom. And we know that the Kingdom of God on this earth will last for one thousand years.

Further, we do encounter in Revelation 22:4 something very interesting. Let us read it together. "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

Significantly, this passage is recorded *after* the Millennium, at the beginning of "eternity" when God makes a new heaven and new earth (see verse 1). I would like to submit for your consideration that no one who is feasting, reigning, and resting with Jesus Christ will be weeping or in pain. They will have no sorrow. They are rejoicing and celebrating.

But here we encounter another group of people. They have been weeping and having both pain and sorrow and so they need special attention and comfort. It is God Himself who will do this for them, wiping away every tear. I think that it is not stretching the scriptures too far to imagine that these people could be those whom the Father has disciplined during the Kingdom age but now at the beginning of "eternity" is restoring and comforting.

Still another interesting passage is found in Jude 8-13. Here the writer is describing a very special group of church goers. These are "Christians" who "defile the flesh" or in other words are sexually impure committing fornication and adultery. They "reject authority" and we can assume this means the authority of Jesus. They are "self serving" and they "corrupt themselves" like "animals" (NIV). They produce no good fruit, are only serving themselves and not the Lord, and should have the good sense to feel ashamed but do not.

These are people participating in the activities of the church but who are not living in the present Kingdom of

God. In other words they are not submitted to the rulership of God. It is for these that a special place is reserved, "the blackness of darkness." This is the same as the "outer darkness" which we have been studying.

While some versions say that this punishment is "forever" (vs 13) the Greek text here does not support this. "Forever" is normally a translation of the Greek "to the ages of the ages." But in this verse the Greek reads "to the age" (singular) not "to the ages of the ages."

This then is referring to the coming Kingdom age and not to eternity. The proper rendering of this verse also lends support to the thought that this indeed is a punishment which is for a predetermined, limited period of time. (The most reliable ancient texts do not mention a time frame in the parallel passage II Peter 2:17).

Brothers and sisters in Christ I beg you for your own sake, pay careful attention to all that has been said here. The way we live today has monumental consequences!

Whatever we are sowing is exactly the reward which we will reap. No one will get special treatment or be able to escape the just reward which they have earned. If you or I are disobedient we will be punished by the Lord when He returns. Not only will we be left out of the wedding feast but, for 1,000 years, we will suffer God's righteous discipline.

With these things in mind, let us examine our manner of living thoroughly to see if what we are doing is pleasing to God. And if we find that it is not, let us then repent for the sake of the Kingdom. It is very scriptural to live both soberly and circumspectly in this world so that we will be pleasing to our Lord.

The things and worldly pleasures which we must deny ourselves today are not even worthy to be compared to the things which God has prepared for us. Our life here is short and fleeting. It is well worth the investment to spend our time here wisely and gain a Millennium of joy.

10.

FORGIVENESS AND JUDGMENT

*I*n this book have been investigating various truths concerning the Kingdom of God – both the present aspects of it and the coming Millennium. Among these truths is the fact that not all of God's children are living in a manner which will qualify them to participate in the coming Kingdom reign of Christ. Although they will be "saved" and be with the Lord in eternity, they will not enter into the coming Kingdom. A kind of brief summary of these things is found in II Timothy were we read:

For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we will also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself [in us] (II Tim 2:11-13).

God will judge His people (Heb 10:30). It is not possible that God could righteously judge the world, if He does not first correctly judge His own house. In fact, the scriptures reveal clearly that judgment will begin in the house of God (I Pet 4:17).

Today we live in what is known as "the age of grace." In His marvelous goodness, God has suspended His judgment. He is overlooking our sins and is not dealing with us in the manner we deserve. The grace of God is one of the predominate features of this church age.

Unfortunately, many have become deceived by this. They have begun to imagine that since our Lord is not judging their sin today, He never will. Since they do not experience the judgment of God falling on them when they sin (besides, perhaps, a troubled conscience) they suppose that God must not see or care very much about what they do.

What they are failing to understand is that the goodness of God should lead them to repentance (Rm 2:4). Instead of deluding them into thinking that there will never be a judgment, it should cause them to love Him more and give themselves ever more into His hands so that the sin within them could be removed. They should use the grace of God which is available today to be freed from their sin, not to continue in it.

We have already studied in this book some of the adverse consequences of disobedience, which is unbelief. Among them are: being left out of the Millennial Kingdom of Christ (Mt 25:1-14), being cast into outer darkness (Mt 25:14-30), and being beaten with many stripes (Lk 12:35-48). As we have seen, these punishments are only for believers, since they are received before the judgment seat of Christ. There, we can be quite certain there will be no unbelievers present. These judgments are very profound and extremely prolonged.

Such things are written for us so that we have within us a healthy amount of godly fear. We read that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Pr 1:7). The fear of the Lord is one of the most important elements for a healthy Christian experience. It is essential for every believer to have within them the clear understanding that the things of God are not a game. We are not believing in some fairy tale.

These precious, eternal things which are available to us are extremely important and the neglect of them has the most serious consequences. The writers of the New Testament teach about the coming judgments specifically for the purpose of generating within us the fear of God.

One of the many examples of this is found in II Corinthians 5:10,11. Here Paul is speaking about the future judgment of believers. We read: "For *we* must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men."

Here we read about something called "the terror of the Lord." From the context we are forced to conclude that this is not something for unbelievers but for Christians. It is not speaking here about unbelieving sinners being cast into the lake of fire (which will happen 1,000 years later) but about children of God being judged by their Father.

Here there is room for "terror." Here we must have a good dose of holy fear of the consequences for our rebellion against Him and our resistance of His work in our lives. Understanding this, Paul says that he does his best to persuade men and women to repent from their present evil pursuits and serve God.

Such godly fear is an essential ingredient in every believer's life. We should serve the Lord with great "reverence and godly fear" (Heb 12:28). Without it, we will not progress spiritually, not seek the Lord the way we should, and end up only deceiving ourselves.

The fear of the Lord is a very healthy thing. It will cleanse our lives. It will help us in times of trial, suffering, and pain to endure and persevere. It will cause us to seek the face of God with all of our heart so that we do not suffer these negative consequences in the future.

Psalms 19:9 says that "the fear of the Lord is clean." It really does have a cleansing effect. When we fear God in a proper way, we orient our lives with His judgment seat in view. We both love Him and respect Him so that we live in obedient service to Him.

We should all understand clearly that the punishments which believers suffer both today and in the future (if they continue in disobedience) are remedial. This means that since God loves all His children, He will use the aforemen-

tioned means and methods for their good in the course of time.

Although it is clear that the consequences of disobedience in the Millennium are extremely severe and of long duration, in fact we really deserve worse. If it were not for the grace of God and His goodness, we would all be cast into the lake of fire.

But through Jesus Christ, we have become sons of God and so are not going to be forever damned or "lost." However, it is a certainty that we will be disciplined by our Heavenly Father (Heb 12:6). Those who do not respond to this discipline in this lifetime will need further treatment when Jesus comes.

Even though there are many, many verses in the New Testament which demonstrate these things clearly, it is not a subject which is commonly understood or taught. Since it is something very new for many people, it is possible that some may misunderstand because their previous concepts get in the way of their comprehension of the truth.

Much of the church today does not have the fear of God but instead a whole series of half-truths and misunderstandings. Many are emphasizing only one side of the gospel of grace and neglect any verses which do not please them. The grace of God and the goodness of God have often been taken to an extreme where they cease to be true.

THE BLOOD OF JESUS

One modern example of such teaching is about the blood of Jesus. While the blood of Jesus is most precious and this author would never think of trying to diminish the potency and effectiveness of it, today there are some popular errors concerning this subject which need to be corrected. Some have emphasized one part of the truth and neglected the other, thus producing a lopsided and, therefore, incorrect teaching.

For example: While meditating on the Word of God, some teachers have noticed that Jesus died for the sins of the whole world. He died once and died for all. In one act

of redemption, Jesus shed His blood so that the whole world could be saved.

From this they conclude that once we “accept Jesus” all of our sins are forgiven – past, present and future. They reason that since our judgment has fallen upon Jesus, God no longer can see any of our sin and could not possibly judge us in any way. Since He has died once for all, then every single sin of every person is already forgiven. All man has to do, they insist, is sort of give a nod of acknowledgement to this fact, or in other words “believe it” and then we are “saved” and on our way to heaven.

The problem with this view is that it is only one-sided. Every equation has two sides. Every relationship involves more than one person. So it is too with the forgiveness available to us through the blood of Jesus. God indeed has done His part. On His side, “it is finished” (Jn 19:30).

However, there still exists our part to fulfill. According to God’s word, we also must do some things. One of the most obvious is that we must repent. If we are not repentant, then God will not forgive us.

We are taught that it is necessary for us to “draw near [to God] with a true [sincere] heart” (Heb 10:22). This means that we must be wholehearted in our sorrow and repentance. When God sees our sincerity, then our forgiveness is abundantly provided. If we are not sincere, He also will not grant forgiveness.

Under the Old Testament law, God did not accept the sacrifices of unrepentant sinners. If someone was fully intending to keep on with their sin, simply killing an innocent animal would not relieve them of their just judgment before God. He considered them hypocrites. In the same way today, those who are not repentant will not be forgiven. Although, if they have received Christ they have been rescued from eternal damnation, they have not escaped the just reward which God will give them when He comes.

When you think honestly about this, it becomes clear that on our side, all of our sins cannot possibly be already forgiven. For one thing, we have not done them yet, so we

have not had the opportunity to confess them and repent for them.

Only by confession and repentance can the way be opened for forgiveness. In I Jn (1:9) we are told: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The word "if" here is an important factor in the equation. On our side of the relationship, we must confess our sin to receive forgiveness. It is then on God's side to liberate His wonderful forgiveness.

The word "confess" here does not merely mean admitting that we did something wrong. The Greek word here literally means "to speak together." This signifies that we are agreeing with God's viewpoint concerning our sins and also with His judgment upon it. His judgment is this: whoever sins is worthy of death.

So in "confessing" we must be agreeing that we are worthy of death. We agree with God's judgment on our sin. We see our sin, hate our sin, and agree with His judgment. From this position we can then receive forgiveness.

Only when we agree that our sin requires our death, is the death of Jesus available for us. Think about it this way: If you don't think that you are worthy of death, how could it possibly be necessary for Someone to die in your place? If your death is not required, why would someone else need to take your place in this execution? Therefore, the death of Christ is not necessary for your case. So then, His death cannot apply to you and you are not forgiven.

In I John we also encounter another important "if." We read that "if we walk in the light, as He is in the light... the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (I Jn 1:7). Here we see that there is another necessity on our part if we are to receive cleansing from our sins: that is to "walk in the light."

But what does this mean? It means that day by day we are walking in communion with Jesus and enjoying His presence. If and when we sin, we are immediately conscious of it because we sense the disapproval of God

through the Spirit. Then we can repent and receive forgiveness. If we refuse to repent, then this breaks our fellowship with Him. Our relationship is damaged and we are no longer walking in the light. The “if” no longer is in force. The consequence of this is that our sin is not being forgiven and we are in danger of the coming judgment.

Another clear passage which shows that we have our part to do to receive forgiveness is where we read that if we do not forgive others who sin against us, God will not forgive us (Mt 6:14,15).

If all our sins are already forgiven, how can it be possible that God will not forgive us? Here again, we see that forgiveness is not automatic and universal. On our side of the relationship, we need to be obedient to God, forgiving of others and repenting for the sins which we do. On His side, He gives us full and free forgiveness.

Certainly forgiveness is available for any and every sin. However, as wise children of God, we are not trying to take advantage of the situation and sin as much as we please hoping that sometime later we can repent, be forgiven, and escape our just punishment. We read that: “If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment” (Heb 10:26,27).

You see, when we become hypocrites and not truly repentant, but merely try to take advantage of the grace of God, His sacrifice no longer is available to us. The Father will not allow us to abuse His goodness and take advantage of the precious blood of His Son. He will never think of relieving those who do not have a right heart attitude of their just punishment. These sins have not “already been forgiven” and in fact will not be.

It must be said here that “sinning willfully” is not referring to those who occasionally sin, even when they know it is wrong. Most of the time when we sin, we already know that it is sin. Yet afterwards, we are convicted and repent before God. This passage is not addressing this kind of situation. However, there are those who persist in

their sin. They know their error but they continue on rebelling against God.

For example, perhaps their sinful relationship with a member of the opposite sex is something they love more than God. They refuse to give it up. Possibly their drug use or excessive drinking is more valuable to them than their intimacy with Jesus. They persist in their rebellion. For some such as these, their sin has become an ingrained habit. They stubbornly refuse to repent and turn their hearts to their Maker for forgiveness. For them, there is only waiting for the day of judgment.

Only God knows where His limits are. Only He knows how the human heart works. Only He knows when we have pushed beyond the point where our sincere repentance is no longer an option. He is surely aware when we have toyed with the eternal truths, not valuing them as essential, and so hardened our heart to the point where we can no longer repent in sincerity and truth.

Is there such a point? John, in his epistles, seems to indicate this. He says, "there is sin leading to death" (I Jn 5:16). Further he indicates that even our prayers for this person will not be effective.

Esau was such a case. He sold his birthright for temporary, sensual gratification. In his situation it was food, but there are many parallels in our present evil world. Referring to Esau, the author of Hebrews specifically mentions fornication (vs 16). Afterwards, Esau sought repentance with tears but was not able to find it (Heb. 12:17).

How many of God's children are today in such a state? They have gone against God and their consciences so long and to such a point that they are no longer even able to repent with sincerity. They have abused the grace of God so long that it no longer has any effect. Theirs is only a "fearful expectation of judgment" (Heb 10:27).

Further in this chapter of Hebrews (10:28-31) we read: "Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment do you suppose, will he be thought

worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord'. 'And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.'"

That this passage is speaking about believers is clear. These people were "sanctified" by the blood. Only born-again Christians are sanctified. Also, we read that the Lord will judge "His people."

Please do not ignore these important truths. Do not make the mistake of trying to escape the obvious consequences of disobedience by misapplying these verses to unbelievers. To continue on in sin which you know is wrong is to insult God's Spirit, cheapen the value of the blood by trying to abuse it, grinding Jesus along with His sacrifice for you under your feet.

But some may argue, "What could be worse punishment than the death mentioned in this passage?" To answer this, let me tell you a little story. My wife and I were involved for a short time with a mission ship which was making trips to Haiti. Since there was some sailing time for those working with the mission, from time to time, the subject of seasickness came up. Those who were new to the mission, including myself, were often concerned that they might get seasick and if they did, how bad would it be.

One helpful individual there who had had a lot of time at sea explained it this way. He said, "There are three stages of seasickness. The first stage is where you begin to feel queasy, turn green, and begin to vomit. The second stage is when you are feeling so bad you think that you are going to die. The third stage is when you begin to be afraid that you won't die and that this will continue on forever."

You see, there are things worse than death. Among these things is suffering which never seems to end. One thousand years is a long time and I'm sure that no one will enjoy the punishment which God will give to His children

who are disobedient. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31).

Another error concerning the blood of Jesus goes something like this: "Since we have become Christians, God no longer sees our sin. We are completely covered by the blood so that the Father no longer knows when we sin, but only sees Jesus."

This is plain foolishness. It has no scriptural basis. In fact, the Bible teaches just the opposite. We read: "All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Heb 4:13). Every single thing we do, say or think is as obvious and plain as it could be to our Lord. "All things" are clear to Him. We also are taught: "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Pr 15:3 KJV). God "understands our thought afar off" (Ps 139:2).

Dear brothers and sisters, we must live with the judgment seat in view. We must live and walk in the light of His countenance so that every attitude, action, and word is available for His inspection and approval. It is very true that when we confess and repent of our sins, they are removed forever. However, it is just as true that they will not be removed if we are not contrite and repentant.

Forgiveness from sin is abundantly available for every believer. It is one of the most fundamental truths revealed in the Bible. It is our privilege, as children of God, to come before Him, confess our sins in true repentance, and receive everlasting forgiveness. None of our many sins which are forgiven in such a manner will ever be remembered by God. They are removed forever as far as the east is from the west (Ps 103:12). Before His judgment seat, no such sins will be a factor. We can have complete confidence in this fact and rest our conscience on His everlasting grace.

Therefore, beloved brothers and sisters, let us come continually before the throne of God and repent for our sins before it is too late. Let us take His offer of mercy and grace seriously and humble our hearts before Him while it

is still “today” (Heb 3:13). God loves us. He sent His Son to die in our place. If we are weak, He will help us. When we feel unable, He can strengthen us to do His will. Our failure and weakness should not become an excuse for not seeking God’s will and grace with all of our hearts.

As we walk with Him in intimate communion, we should always be quick to repent for anything which He shows us is against His holy nature. Our repentance will open the way for His life to flow in us and through us to cleanse us. Not only will our God freely forgive us, but He will also work to change us from what we are into all that He is. This is a wonderful promise. It will be for us also a great liberty. We can be forgiven and freed from sin.

UNDERSTANDING THE KINGDOM

Hopefully, this chapter will be of some help to the readers in understanding the plans and purposes of God in a clearer way. Without such revelation, it is easy to become very confused when trying to understand certain Bible passages.

Some, for example, have mistakenly tried to apply the many Kingdom verses to the subject of our eternal life. Not realizing the place of the Millennial Kingdom in God’s plan, they try to understand many of the verses mentioned in this chapter in light of our eternal destiny. In doing so they have devised a very insecure and confusing theology.

Having read the verses about judgment and punishment, they have been honest enough to admit that these must apply to believers. But, not realizing the truth about the Kingdom, they have been led to suppose that a child of God can lose his or her eternal life.

Many of these teachers also see the great necessity of the fear of God. To them, the “once saved, always saved” viewpoint seems to take away all the fear of the Lord and, therefore, much of our motivation to flee the pleasures of the world and sin. So they cite some of these verses to try to prove that some of God’s children will be lost. However, many of the verses which the “lose your salva-

tion" teachers use to prove their points are actually passages about the coming Kingdom.

As we have said, the fear of the Lord is essential. It is an ingredient which seems to be largely lost in the church of our day. It is something which desperately needs to be restored among God's people. However, to help believers know this fear, we must teach what is true. Any doctrine which is not the truth has no power to really change the hearts of the hearers.

For example, some teach that believers can lose their eternal life if they sin. But sinning Christians often have an incongruous experience. Their conscience bothers them, perhaps intensely at times, but they do not feel "lost." They still sense something of the presence of God in their spirit. So, although they may believe with their mind that they are lost, their heart tells them something different.

Although they know what they are doing is wrong, they often comfort themselves that God has not left them completely. The teaching they are receiving and their experience do not match up. True fear of the Lord is not generated in this way.

Another problem which is encountered when teaching that our eternal life can be lost through sin is: how much sin is necessary? How "bad" a sin or how many sins do we have to do before we are really lost? Seemingly, it should be a really evil sin or a great quantity of sin to qualify for such awful results. This then leaves those who have few or no overt sins, but are really resisting the Lord in many areas of their lives, free of much condemnation .

They are disobedient, but not in any way obvious enough for others to really notice. Perhaps those close to them realize there is some problem, but most of the other believers they know think that they are O.K.

This kind of teaching only touches on the most obvious kinds of sins but does not penetrate into the heart and demand complete submission to the King. It does not generate the true fear of the Lord. Many churches which believe in "losing their salvation" are full of gossip, lying,

lust, dissension, envy, murmuring, hate, jealousy, anger, pride, and many other such things. Yet no one believes or teaches that these members have lost their salvation.

The teaching of losing our eternal life is meant to generate the kind of respect for God which will purify the lives of the adherents. But in my experience, it does not. If we were to honestly compare the amount of sin found in churches which believe in eternal security with those who do not, I think that the results would be the same.

If we could lay aside such external factors such as dress codes or superficial practices, the sins of the heart are evidenced in equal quantities in both kinds of groups. Human beings are the same in every kind of setting.

Still another factor which enters into this discussion is the gifts of God. When we minister to others using the spiritual gifts which our Lord has given us, there is often a powerful sense of the anointing and of His presence.

When we sin, or are living in known sin, this anointing on our gifts is not always taken away. Let us take the example of a preacher who also has a gift of healing. When he preaches, he senses a powerful anointing on his words and many people are healed through his ministry.

But let us suppose that this brother falls into sin. He begins to have a sexual relationship with one of the church members with whom he is not married. Naturally, his conscience condemns him.

But when he gets up to preach, the anointing is there. He still "feels" the presence of God in the use of his ministry gift. Perhaps some people are still getting healed. So, he comforts himself with this fact. He is not lost. God has not left him. Perhaps even, he supposes, his sin is not so bad or is being "allowed by God" because of his special position, circumstance, or "need." Of course this is a lie, but it is easy to deceive ourselves, especially when our doctrine is faulty from the start.

While some may insist that any one living in known sin could not experience power in their areas of gifting, the experience of many believers through the years tells a dif-

ferent story. Countless men and women of God have found themselves in just such a position. They have fallen into sin but still know that to some extent God has not left them. Their gifts still “work.” They still sense an anointing. So, they cling to their experiences and try to justify themselves in their own minds and hearts.

What is needed in these cases is the gospel of the Kingdom. These brothers and sisters need desperately to know the truth. God is not mocked (Gal 6:7). They cannot continue to “serve the Lord” and live in known sin. They will reap exactly what they are sowing when Jesus comes. Unless they repent, they will be brought into judgment for these things and be punished by their heavenly Father for them.

It is not the intention of this book to try to address the subject of eternal security in any intensive or complete way. However, it is my hope that many readers will, through this text, have some new light with which to interpret the Bible in a clear, cohesive way. For a better understanding of the complete picture, I would like to recommend my book *From Glory to Glory* which examines in greater detail the subject of salvation.

What will cause believers to fear God is a good dose of His truth, preached under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. How much we need the revelation of the New Testament apostles concerning the Kingdom of God and His coming judgment of His people.

The gospel of the Kingdom was something which was well understood by the churches of Paul’s day. We will do well if we practice and preach it also.

11.

THE MANCHILD

Continuing on with our discussion of this most important theme of how God is working to establish His kingdom on this earth and defeat His enemy, let us read together from the book of Revelation, chapter 12, verses 1-11.

“Now a great sign appeared in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.

And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.

And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she bore a male child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her child was caught up to God and to His throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now, salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. "

Let us begin our investigation into the meaning of this important vision with the question: Who is this manchild? There are two possibilities to consider here. The first option is that this could be referring to Jesus Christ. Our main clue to the identity of this manchild is found in verse 5 where we read that he is destined to "rule all nations with a rod of iron."

Whoever he is, he has been selected by God to rule over the earth. In Revelation chapter 19 we are told about a rider on a white horse who will rule the nations with a rod of iron (vs 15). Clearly this is a reference to Jesus Christ coming to establish His kingdom on the earth. Therefore, the first possibility is that this manchild could be the Lord Jesus.

However, there is also a second option which must also be considered as to the identity of the manchild. In Revelation 2:26,27 we read: "And he who overcomes, and keeps my works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations – he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the potter's vessels shall be broken to pieces."

So here we see that there is a second possibility. There is another "person" or group of persons to whom this same authority will be given. Consequently, the manchild could also be a group of followers of Jesus Christ who have demonstrated through their life and "works" (vs 26) that they are faithful and, therefore, have "overcome." From now on in this writing we will refer to them as "overcomers."

If this "manchild" is Jesus Christ, then the "woman" who gives birth to him would have to be Mary. Historically, Jesus was not caught up to the throne of God "as soon as he was born" (Rev 12:4) to avoid being devoured by the dragon. Also, we know that Mary did not "flee into the wilderness" after Jesus' resurrection for "one thousand two hundred and sixty days."

In fact, just a few months after the crucifixion, she was specifically mentioned as being in the "upper room" with the other disciples on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14). Therefore, without stretching and twisting the words of the Bible beyond all recognition, the "woman" cannot be Mary and, therefore, the "manchild" cannot be Jesus Christ.

This, then, leaves us with our second possibility. The manchild here must be a group of "overcomers" to whom Jesus Himself promised that they would rule the nations with a rod of iron. This understanding is further strengthened when we read that the manchild (singular) is later referred to as "they" (plural). In verse 11 of this chapter we see that "*they* overcame him [the dragon] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony."

Thus, this one manchild, in the course of the vision, is revealed as being a group of many spiritually victorious individuals. The identity of the "woman" would then have to be the church or some kind of collection of God's people.

The arrival of this group or "manchild" before the throne of God has a surprising result: it provokes a war. Suddenly, Michael and all of his angels are fighting against the dragon and his group of angels. When the battle is over, Michael's forces have won and the devil is thrown out of heaven along with his fallen angels.

This leads one to ponder another important question. If Michael has the necessary forces and power to defeat the devil and throw him out of heaven, why wasn't this done before? Why hasn't he been thrown out long ago?

Of course there are some Christians who think that the devil has already been cast down out of heaven. However, this cannot be the case. Here we read in the book of Revelation, at the end of the "church age," that the devil still is "in heaven" (Rev 12:3). We also know with certainty from other scriptures that the devil and his angels are "in heavenly places" (Eph 3:10, 6:12) right now, reigning with authority over this earth. The devil is indeed the prince of the powers of the air (Eph 2:2).

Therefore, when Jesus said that He had seen "Satan fall from heaven like lightning" (Lk 10:18), this must either be a prophetic foresight or a description of how he rebelled against the Most High for the first time.

NO "PLACE" FOR THEM

So, let us consider here what it is about the manchild's arrival before the throne of God that precipitates this war. Verse 8 of this chapter gives us our necessary insight. Here we read that there was no "*place* found for them (the devil and his angels) in heaven any longer."

Before the arrival of the manchild, it seems that Satan and his forces had some kind of "place" in heaven. But when the manchild arrives, their places have been taken over. Those who have been authorized to replace these evil rulers have finally come. This then, apparently gives Michael and his angels the right to fight against the devil's hordes, win the battle, and finally throw them out.

Right now, the devil and his evil hosts are reigning over the earth from their positions of power in "heavenly places." But there is going to come a day, perhaps very soon, when "the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in heaven shall be shaken" (Mk 13:25).

You will remember from chapter 5 that the angels are sometimes referred to as "the stars of heaven" (Job 38:7,

Dan 8:10). Although this has not yet happened, it is something which Jesus prophesied and it will come to pass. The present rulers of this world will have their place in the heavens taken away and their authority removed.

What then is it about this manchild that is so special? In verse 11 we read that “they overcame him [meaning the devil].” This select group of men and women is essential to God’s plan because they are those who were victorious in their Christian lives. They are those who have wrestled against the “principalities and powers in heavenly places” (Eph 6:12) – and won. They are those over whom the power and the temptations of the devil have no influence. Therefore, they are qualified to rule over the earth with Christ, taking the place of the present evil, spiritual rulers.

Do you remember how we spoke of God’s plan from the beginning? How He created mankind with the purpose that they would submit himself to Him and recover the lost earth from the reign of the devil? Also, do you remember how, when the majority failed to do His will, He then turned to a select group of overcoming people through whom He could accomplish His purposes?

Well, here we see that in the end, God will succeed. He will, living in and living through men and women who are submitted to Him, demonstrate His authority to the universe. “To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be known through the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places” (Eph 3:10).

Unfortunately, it seems that these evil spirits know much more about this than we do. Many Christians have difficulty understanding why the devil is fighting against them at all. Why should he care if God wants to fill heaven with a bunch of human beings whom He redeemed from the earth? Of what importance is it to Satan if many people become born again?

The significant factor here is that everyone who receives eternal life, becomes a potential threat to his kingdom. Every newborn spiritual babe has the potential to grow to maturity, submit themselves completely to God,

and become a threat to the devil's empire. Every believer has the capacity to overcome. Each and every child of God has the Most High residing in them and, therefore, has the possibility to live victoriously in this world.

You see, there must be some finite number of fallen angels who are working with Satan. Revelation 12:4 mentions that he draws one third of the "stars" to earth with his tail. So logically, God must need the same number of human beings who have overcome to take the places of these evil beings in the rulership of the world.

Although this idea about a certain number may not be exactly correct, it seems important that God would have at least this many overcomers through whom He can rule. These, then, will take the places of those evil spirits who are today exercising authority over the earth.

At this point, when the man child is caught up, Satan is totally, practically defeated. Notice please the song which is sung after this event, starting with verse 10 of chapter 12: "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their [soul] lives to the death" (Rev 12:10,11).

Praise God! Now is come salvation and strength and the Kingdom! At last the Kingdom of God is manifested in victory!

This, then, explains why the devil and his hosts are fighting against you and me. They are constantly trying to get us discouraged, get us to give up or to give in to their constant temptations. They are battling to cause us to sin in some kind of way. It may be gross sin such as fornication, adultery, theft etc. or simple, "innocent" sins such as gossiping and criticizing others, losing our temper, coveting something someone else has, proud thoughts, or any such thing. Then, as soon as we bite the bait and sin, they go running off to the throne of God to accuse us. In verse

10 of our passage we see that we are being accused before God day and night.

But why are they accusing us? It is to demonstrate to the Most High that they are winning. It is to show that they are overcoming us with their power and we are succumbing to their temptations. This is essential to them because as long as they can deceive us and have their little (or big) victories over us, they can prove to God that we are not qualified to take their places.

Although we can be forgiven and are still loved by God, this does not negate the fact that when we sin, we reveal to the watching universe that we are not yet qualified to reign in place of the present evil forces.

Are you being tempted and tested in your daily life? Are you in some situation which seems very difficult, if not impossible, to bear? Does it seem as if there is no way out, except to sin? Don't do it! God can give you the grace to withstand any and all trials and temptations. You will never be happy outside of God's perfect will. The universe is watching. In fact, the creation itself is groaning in travail, like a woman about to give birth, waiting for the mature sons of God to be manifested (Rm 8:19).

Babies are nice. Sometimes, they are cute and cuddly. Yet, it is the mature sons and daughters who are useful to do work and help the family. So it is in the house of God. Our Father is looking for those who will be faithful, those who will continue to follow Him through every circumstance and trial, those who will allow Him to demonstrate His victory in their lives.

How we live is essential, not only for own benefit, but also for the kingdom of God and even for the whole creation. Our daily choices have many consequences. God's plan for His children is not just to give them a new birth and then whisk them off to heaven. No, His intentions are much more profound than this. What God is planning requires our complete cooperation and faithfulness.

His will is to establish His authority over the earth, over both the inhabitants and the territory. He will do this

through His representative, man. The weak, frail vessel whom the devil despised and defeated in the Garden of Eden will, through the grace of God, finally overcome God's enemy and have dominion over the earth.

God is working in and through human beings to defeat His enemy. When His work is accomplished in us, we become mature sons of God who are able to resist the efforts and temptations of the evil one.

In I John 2:13 we read about a group of believers who are called "young men." These ones, John says "have overcome the wicked one." When Christian men and women submit themselves to God every day and begin to live more and more in Christ's victory, the very gates of hell begin to tremble. The principalities and powers see more and more saints being made ready. They see that their deceptions and temptations are no longer working and that they are being defeated by lowly human beings who are submitted to, and full of, the living God.

I believe in these days their efforts are becoming ever more desperate as they see the day coming when God's mature sons will be manifested for all the universe to see (Rm 8:19) and then take their place as the rulers of this world.

Can you see from this short explanation why our daily living is so important, both to God and to us? Every little detail of our lives, all our attitudes, words, and actions are being carefully monitored by many different beings. There is indeed "a great cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12:1). Whether we like it or not, whether we want it or not, we are involved in a battle for the control of the earth. Every child of God is involved in this struggle.

Consequently, it is not sufficient to simply have an appearance of righteousness, perhaps being a "regular" church attender, giving up a few "gross" sins, or doing a few things for God. Now we see that it is essential for every child of God to actually allow Jesus Christ to reign over every aspect of their being. He must be Lord of our thoughts, our words, our attitudes, and our actions. He must be the One who is being seen in and through every

aspect of our lives. We must enter into the Kingdom of God today! Only by allowing the life of God to dominate and predominate in our whole being will we experience being an “overcomer.”

Hopefully, this will help clarify for all readers why we often encounter so much difficulty trying to live a Christian life. The powers of hell are arrayed against us. The forces of the enemy are constantly trying to show that their “place” is secure as the rulers of this world. Yet, our Lord Jesus Christ has overcome them all. He has run the race before us (Heb 6:20) and exhibited God’s victory.

Therefore, since He now lives in every one of His children, He can show forth this same victory in our lives. No one is too weak. No one is unable. Consequently, when we appear before the judgment seat of Christ, there will be no acceptable excuses.

The most awesome power of the universe lives inside of us. The man Christ Jesus who overcame every temptation of the devil and exhibited God’s life and nature to the world is now living within every believer. All we need to do is submit our lives to Him completely and allow Him to dominate every aspect of them. In this way, His victory will be manifested through us.

Amazingly, these same trials and tribulations which the devil is trying to use to defeat us are also being used by God. What the devil tries to do to tempt us and discourage us, our Father is using for our good. He is using our difficulties to purify our lives. All the tribulation through which we pass, gaining the victory by the power of Jesus, serves to transform us into the image of Christ.

Our difficulties work to expose the sin within us. Then, as we repent and give ourselves more completely to God so that He can do His work in us, we are changed more into His likeness. You see, even the devil is being used by God to accomplish His purposes upon the earth. So don’t be discouraged, everything is working together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purposes (Rm 8:28).

THE WOMAN

Since we have discovered together that the “manchild” of Revelation 12 is a group of overcoming believers, how are we to understand the woman who gives birth to him? While this woman could be a kind of “composite” of various things, such as Israel, new covenant believers, all of creation, etc. it seems plain that the group of God’s people whom we know as “the church,” must at least be a part of this “woman” if not the complete woman.

It is the church which is cooperating with God to generate overcoming believers. It is through the church that God will display His manifold wisdom (Eph 3:10). And so it is the church that must make up at least the major part of this group.

However, as we examine the church as she is today, we are brought to an unfortunate conclusion. Not all who are part of her are living in spiritual victory. Many Christians are not living in God’s kingdom today – that is they are not permitting Christ to rule over every aspect of their lives.

Although they may be born again, they are not taking advantage of the opportunity to allow the life of God to prevail in them and live through them. Their lives still exhibit much of the old nature. Many of their pursuits are worldly and much sin is still in evidence. Consequently, they cannot be thought of as being part of the manchild, but merely part of the woman. They are not exhibiting the overcoming life and Jesus’ victory over the devil.

We notice in verse 14 that when this woman is rescued from the dragon and taken to the wilderness, she is in need of nourishment. She needs feeding. Possibly this would be a reference to the fact that many in the “body” today are not getting the food they need. They are not growing to maturity and victory partly because of the lack of proper spiritual food.

It is there in the wilderness that she is “nourished” with some kind of sustenance which will help her. I don’t know

how it is that God is going to accomplish all these things, but it is interesting to see how God is caring for all of His people, even those who are not yet where they should be in terms of growth and maturity.

This brings us to an interesting observation. A woman who is pregnant is a person who has inside of her another person. There is a body within another body. When the child is male, he has the potential to be stronger than the one who gives him birth.

Applying this to the church today, we could begin to suspect that within this "woman" who in many respects does not appear to be fulfilling the purposes of God by overcoming the forces of evil, exists another "body." Within the woman who might be seen to be somewhat weak, lives a strong, overcoming manchild. This would be true not only of the church of our day, but is a situation which, no doubt, existed since the early days of the church.

Consequently, when looking at the church as a whole and the unprepared state in which we find many believers, we should not be discouraged. We can have confidence in God, that, in the midst of what might seem a mess, He is working to accomplish His purposes. He has many of His own, just as in the days of Elijah (I Kings 19:18) who are succeeding in overcoming and having the testimony of His victory.

In Matthew 22:14 Jesus teaches us that: "...many are called, but few are chosen." What does this mean? What are these "few" chosen for? Why is it only a few? Since the death and resurrection of Christ, our Lord has been calling many millions of individuals to Himself.

However, as we have already stated, even though many are coming to Christ every day, only a few of these many are entering into the victory which He has purchased for them. Just a very few believers are succeeding in overcoming the forces of evil. It seems that the majority are not exhibiting a righteousness in their daily lives which is qualifying them to substitute for the principalities and powers who are now in control.

Therefore, these are not qualified to reign. It is only those who have a testimony (Rev 12:11) before God and the watching universe, showing that they have been faithful, who can take over the positions of the satanic legions and reign. Therefore, it is only these that can be "chosen" by God for this task. It is only the overcomers who will be chosen by God to exercise His authority over the planet and eventually over the universe.

We cannot continue on here much further without an important word of warning. When we begin understanding these things, there is the possibility of an error into which many of God's people have fallen. That is that some begin to think of themselves as being "overcomers." Along with this thought comes another one which is that others are not as spiritually advanced as they are.

Innumerable groups, "churches," and individuals who begin to understand this and similar truths, begin to suppose that because they understand them, then they must actually be what they see. The truth is that God is revealing to them the goal, not their position in the race. They may see what God wants but not where they actually are.

This is a serious mistake. It is not ourselves who will decide whether or not we will enter into God's coming Kingdom. We are not the judges of ourselves or of others. When we begin to think that we are better or more advanced, this is proof that we have then fallen from a humble attitude and, thus, are no longer living in the Kingdom. When we begin to imagine that we and/or our little group who agrees with us are some kind of spiritual elite, we have become disqualified from entering the Kingdom by our pride and arrogance.

SPECIAL OFFERS

Even though the door to the Millennial Kingdom of Jesus Christ is open to all believers, not all choose to enter in. For various reasons, many of God's children refuse His rightful Lordship over their lives and, instead, live largely for themselves and the pleasures of this world.

Perhaps it is for this reason that in the book of Revelation, Jesus Christ issues many calls to the “overcomers.” When speaking to each church, He states their attributes and their shortcomings and then makes some very special offers to those who are willing to overcome – those who have “ears to hear” (Rev 2:7).

By the time the book of Revelation was written, it had become apparent that not all believers were going to be obedient and so, again, God sends forth a call to those few who would respond to Him and promises them special rewards (See Rev 2:7,11,17,26-28; 3:5,12,21).

There should be no doubt from reading these verses that many of the rewards which are mentioned here apply to the coming Kingdom. The verses which speak of ruling the nations with a rod of iron (Rev 2:27) and sitting with Him in His throne (Rev 3:21) are obvious references to sharing Christ’s authority during His Millennial reign. The passages which mention having the right to eat of the tree of life (Rev 2:7) and eating of the hidden manna (Rev 2:17) show the feasting aspect of the Kingdom experience.

A couple of other “overcomer” promises which relate to the Kingdom are the one which mentions being clothed in white raiment and the one in which Jesus promises to confess the faithful believers’ names before His Father and the angels (Rev 3:5). You may remember that we have already discussed in chapter 9 whom the Lord will or will not confess knowing in that day.

Jesus is calling to men and women today, to anyone who will listen, to overcome. He is saying: if you overcome you will feast with Me; if you overcome you will reign with Me; if you overcome I will reward you with more than you can even understand or imagine.

Finally, through these overcomers, God’s original commission to mankind is fulfilled. Here is a group of individuals, made in the image and likeness of God, who have had and will have dominion over the earth. They conquered the hostile forces which were upon it. They did not live according to the rulership of Satan, but according to

God; and in so doing, they gave Jesus Christ the right to claim this earth as His own and set up His Millennial Kingdom upon it.

These people wanted Jesus Christ more than they wanted the devil or any part of his kingdom and were willing to sacrifice even their lives to see God's Kingdom brought to this earth.

Praise God for such men and women who were willing to pay any price to see the kingdom of this world transferred to Jesus Christ, thus fulfilling His prayer to the Father, "Thy kingdom come... in earth, as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10).

Now let me ask you, will you be one of these? You have the opportunity. Jesus' call to the overcomers has gone forth to all who have ears to hear. The door is closed to no one but you must be willing if necessary (and it probably will be) to give all for the sake of the Kingdom.

If you are ready and willing, God is ready and He will enable you to live in this way. His life, living within you, will become in you all that you need to overcome the world, Satan, "self," and sin – all the things that are standing in the way. May God by His tender mercy grant you the willingness to live for Him until He comes.

12.

LIVING IN THE VICTORY

We have been examining the wonderful possibility of living a life which overcomes the enemy. We have seen that within the body of Christ today there are many thousands of men and women who are, through the power of God, succeeding in resisting temptation and enduring through much tribulation.

Thus, they are manifesting the victory of Jesus to the watching universe. But how can we also live in this way? How can we too exhibit to the principalities and powers the manifold wisdom of God?

Some have thought that their victory over the invisible forces of evil is a question of spiritual warfare. In the church today, this is a topic which is very popular. Many are writing books, conducting seminars, and focusing intently upon this one aspect of the Christian life.

However, it seems that much of what is being taught – although those doing the teaching no doubt have good intentions – involves much misunderstanding and even error.

We have already touched on this subject earlier in chapter 5. There we studied the probability that fallen angels are not the same kind of being as demons. (If you have not read or do not remember this chapter, please review it now before proceeding.) Since they are not the same thing,

our warfare with them and victory over them are somewhat different.

One tactic which is seemingly very popular today among some groups is to "bind" the devil. Oh, how much breath has been expended, how much energetic shouting and emotional exertion has been wrought "binding the devil to the sides of the pit."

But strangely, he seems somehow still loose. It seems as if the devil is still able to operate just as always. If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that he is not "bound" at all. The world is just as evil, if not more so, than before. Wars and evil of every kind are still in evidence. Christians still are under attack and still confronted with every kind of trial and temptation.

Let us think about this logically and honestly. If "binding the devil" and his angels really worked, then everyone should be seriously involved in this business. If victory over the devil were a simple question of shouting or praying in his direction, then let us by all means gather together the most spiritual brothers and sisters in the world and "pray" in this way night and day until there is not one single principality or power left functioning.

Then, we can go about the work of preaching the kingdom of God without hindrance. But if this really does no good and is just a waste of time and even a distraction from the true victory, let us go on to seek a better solution.

If, then, "binding" the devil is not the key, how is it that we are supposed to be battling these kind of evil forces? How can we overcome them?

To understand the answer, we must first look at the life of Jesus. He is the one who has already defeated the foe. He is the one who has gone before us and overcome. But how did He do it? How was it that He succeeded in completely defeating Satan?

The answer here is something which seems very simple, yet is extremely profound. Jesus defeated the devil by living by the life of the Father. Through the purity of this Life, He resisted the enemy and all of his temptations. His

overcoming life culminated in His dying on the cross. This is how Jesus overcame Satan.

Significantly, no shouting was done. It was not some special kind of prayer that did the trick. Instead, it was the result of a lowly, humble life completely submitted to the Father. Ultimately, Jesus was crucified and it was there that He exhibited His total victory over the enemy.

You see, during Jesus' life here on earth, the devil threw everything he had at Him. Jesus was tempted in every aspect of His living. In the wilderness He was tempted with hunger and thirst; even with all the "glorious" things of Satan's kingdom.

Later, He was falsely accused. He was slandered, mocked, harassed, threatened, and rejected by many men. The religious leaders of His day not only refused His words but set about to try to kill Him. All those in whom the enemy had ground and over whom he had control, he employed to try to cause Jesus to do or say just one wrong thing.

Even Jesus' own followers were used as part of this strategy (Mt 16:23). Satan's whole effort was to try everything which normally causes men to sin. He tried to create situations in which an ordinary man would finally get angry, say something rash or wrong, become sarcastic, begin to hate, become discouraged, or in any other way manifest the fallen nature.

The devil used his whole arsenal. But nothing worked. Amazingly, Jesus withstood every trial without sinning. He was the first man over whom all the devil's power had no effect. Eve lasted under the Satan's deception perhaps about 5 or 10 minutes. Jesus lived a perfect life and was never influenced by him in any way.

Finally, in desperation, Lucifer worked through his servants to have Jesus killed. Not only did he have Him killed, but he had Him put to death in the most horrible, painful, humiliating way. But throughout all the torture and torment, through all the pain and shame, Jesus never succumbed. He never said one wrong word or did one evil

thing. He never even had one attitude or facial expression which was selfish or sinful.

Glory to God, here was a man who defeated the devil! How did He do it? He did it by remaining faithful to the Father through it all, even “unto death” (Philip 2:8), by never giving “place” (Eph 4:27) to the devil, and by refusing to allow His circumstances and difficulties to cause Him to sin.

In every situation, He allowed the Father to live in Him and through Him. He submitted Himself completely to God and allowed Him to reign over every aspect of His being. Thus, He overcame. He won the victory.

HOW TO LIVE IN THE VICTORY

The incorruptible life of Jesus makes for wonderful meditation. His undefiled character and purity is a great encouragement and inspiration. Yet, far too many believers remain content just to know that Jesus overcame. They rejoice in what He has done, but do not realize that this has important implications for themselves.

What they fail to understand is that we too must experience this victory in our daily lives. It is not enough that Jesus has overcome and ascended into heaven. We also are required by God to follow Him in this victorious path.

So then the question becomes, how can we also “overcome” and live in this kind of victory? How can we defeat the devil and manifest the Kingdom of God in this world? How can we “do spiritual warfare” which will be successful?

To understand this clearly, we must first have a most basic revelation. That is that once we receive eternal life, we have within us two “lives.” We have our old, natural life which we received from Adam and we have a new, supernatural life which we receive from the Father. It is this new life of God which has the holy nature necessary to overcome. *Only* God’s life which He gives us in Christ Jesus can withstand the enemy. There is no amount of

effort, no level of consecration, no intensity of zeal on our part which will do the job. Only God's life is and will be victorious.

On the other hand, just as certainly, our old, natural life will always fail. The natural man which manifests the sinful nature will always succumb to the temptations and trials of the enemy. Just as Adam and Eve fell quickly and easily, so the natural life which we inherited from them will never and can never pass the test.

Therefore, to overcome we need to learn to live by the new life which we have from God. Just as Jesus did not live by His human life but lived by the Father (Jn 6:57), so we too must learn to "walk in newness of [God's] life" (Rm 6:4).

You see, Jesus had a natural life which He inherited from Mary. But He also received a supernatural life from His Father. So, He also had within Him these two lives.

However, He constantly chose to live by the uncreated life. He faithfully chose to let the life of God dominate His every thought, attitude, word, and action. He said, "The words which I speak, I don't speak on my own, but the Father who dwells in Me does the works" (Jn 14:10). All the words and works of Jesus were the result of the manifestation of the Divine life within Him.

In the same way, we also can live "by Him" (Jn 6:57). We have the possibility of living as Jesus did – not by our own natural life – but by the life of God within us. This same Jesus who overcame the devil in every aspect of life, who resisted temptation even unto death, now lives in every believer.

It does not matter if we are weak. It makes no difference what our personal capabilities may or may not be. The God of the universe lives within us and He has already overcome. All we need to do is to submit ourselves completely to Him. We must only choose to let His life dominate and predominate within us. As we allow His life to fill us and live through us, we can then demonstrate the same victory over Satan and sin.

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

One of the most important aspects of this victory involves dying to self. We too must experience death, even the death of the cross. Jesus taught His disciples that in order to follow Him, they must deny themselves, pick up their cross and follow Him (Mt 16:24).

This does not mean that we must carry around a piece of wood in the shape of a cross. It means that our old life, which we received from Adam must die. While it lives, it will inevitably express itself in sin. The devil will always be able to be victorious over it. The only answer is for it to be eliminated.

When Jesus died on the cross, we also died with Him (Gal 2:20). Therefore, the reality of this death can and must become our experience. We can "die daily" (I Cor 15:31). We can always experience "the dying of the Lord Jesus" (II Cor 4:10).

One of the great secrets to living in victory over Satan is our death on the cross. We must die to self and live to God. This is the way in which Jesus exhibited the final victory over the devil. If we want to also have the spiritual power to defeat the kingdom of darkness and live in Christ's victory, this is the only way. We too must die.

The more we experience living by the supernatural life and dying to our own self, the more we will overcome the devil and his evil forces. The more the cross operates in us and upon us, the more victory we will experience.

Please notice that those who make up the manchild in Revelation "did not love their lives unto death" (Rev 12:11). This word "lives" here in Greek is "PSUCHE" indicating our natural, soulish life. One of the ways they "overcame him" was by not loving themselves. They were willing to die.

Our victory here has little to do with shouting and "binding" and very much to do with submitting and dying. It is as we submit our lives to Jesus, allowing Him

to actually “be” our life (Col 3:4), that we will overcome. It is as we die to self and live to God that we will notice that the “strong man” is bound and we will have the power to plunder Satan’s kingdom. May God grant us grace to live every day more and more in this victory.

Jesus taught that “...unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and die, it remains alone. But if it dies, it brings forth much fruit” (Jn 12:24). Here we see that dying is the secret of a fruitful life. It is as we die that the life of Christ has more “space” to live and move within us.

It is also as we die to “self” that the kingdom of darkness has less influence over us. Therefore we can, following the orientation of the Holy Spirit, be ever more fruitful in our work for Him. We can live a life of victory over sin and over all the wiles of the enemy while helping others to do the same.

The Bible teaches us that it is only through much tribulation that we enter into the Kingdom (Acts 14:22). We read that, “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him” (II Tim 2:12 KJV). Thus, our entrance into His Kingdom will certainly involve much difficulty, struggle, and affliction.

This is a biblical fact. Jesus never said that following Him would be easy. He did not indicate that we would have no sorrow or pain. Those who insist that believers must always be healthy, happy, and rich are deceiving both themselves and their followers. Jesus did promise us however an inward joy and strength which comes from believing obedience.

It is only when we deny our “self” and lay it down at the feet of Jesus that we can enter into the eternal, spiritual joys which are available in Christ. It is only as we lose our own life that we can experience His.

Much of Christianity today is shallow simply because it has not passed through the cross. The life which we Christians live has so little of the power of Jesus’ resurrection because we have so little of the fellowship of His suffering (Philip 3:10). We do not experience His exaltation and glorification because we do not share in His cross. We

do not exhibit His victory because it is still our own life which is predominant within us.

It is very easy for us, in the middle of our life situations, to become discouraged. There are some sufferings which never seem to end. Sometimes we find ourselves in situations which are emotionally or physically painful. We pray and pray and pray. Yet, no answer seems to come. We cry out to God. Yet the heavens seem to remain shut. The suffering goes on year after year after long year.

The great temptation here is to give up, to do something we know is wrong to end the pain, or to become bitter. What in the world is God doing? Why doesn't He respond? The truth is that God is indeed hearing and responding. But instead of doing what we want, He is doing what is best for us.

Instead of doing what we think is right in an earthly, short-term sense, He is doing what He knows is for our good from an eternal perspective. You, yes you, need desperately to die. Your old life with its old nature with all its desires and "needs" is in tremendous need of crucifixion. Your death to self is essential for your eternal joy.

The answer is to humble yourself before God, accept His will for you where you are, and let His Spirit do a transforming work within you. It is as you submit yourself to God in the middle of your trial and pain, that you will find a sweet deliverance from what you are and from what you want. Little by little you will be put to death. Someday you will even thank Him for your experience.

Finally, when you have given up your own important desires and precious "feelings," when you are no longer troubled by your situation, when you are content in Christ in whatever condition you find yourself, then you are ready for a change.

When Jesus has delivered you from what you are, then He can deliver you from *where* you are. When the bread is well baked, it is time to take it out of the oven. It is then that your life becomes a testimony, both to the world and to the principalities and powers. It is as you become faith-

ful unto death that you become victorious over the enemy, self, and sin. It is then that your life can begin to be used by God in a powerful way to plunder the kingdom of darkness and bear much fruit. When you have passed through death, you can then experience the resurrection life and victory.

RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT QUALIFIES

While teaching about the Kingdom Jesus said: "Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:20).

Here is a surprising statement. The scribes and pharisees were the religious elite of their day. They had an appearance of righteousness which was right down to the letter of the law. They tithed, fasted, prayed, and studied the scriptures daily in a manner which was very impressive. Apparently they were the pinnacle of what God was requiring.

Many Christians' lives do not even come close to this kind of dedication. Yet Jesus insists that we exhibit even more righteousness. How can this be?

In the Scriptures we find that the righteous requirements for entering into His Kingdom are defined even further. We read Jesus' words: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Mt 5:5). "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom" (Mt 5:3). So we see that there is a requirement of meekness and humility.

In II Peter, we are presented with an even longer list of prerequisites. Peter exhorts us to: "...add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love."

"For if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance shall be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom" (II Pet 1:5-7, 10,11).

What a list! All these things are desirable Christian characteristics, but how could anyone possibly live in this

way? If such godly character is required, how could any of us even imagine that we could enter in?

What God is seeking and what will enable us to enter into His Kingdom is his new Life about which we have been speaking. Once again, our own life, even exerting all the effort and energy we possess, can never measure up to the Divine standard.

Perhaps there are many believers today who imagine that they are consecrated. They have zeal and determination to please God and do His will. It is even possible that they secretly imagine that they are somewhat above others spiritually because of their dedication. This opinion could be somewhat reinforced if they have evident, powerful, spiritual gifts.

But this does not qualify as meekness. It is not humility. It is only the kind of righteousness the scribes and pharisees were able to produce. And we have been clearly told that this will not suffice to enter into God's Kingdom.

When Jesus was walking on this earth, He said, "I am the way" (Jn 14:6). It is significant that He did not say that He was merely showing us the way, but that He actually *was* the way. God's way today is a person. It is by allowing this Person to live in us and through us that we go along this divine path.

Jesus exhorts us to "enter in by the narrow gate" and further states that "many will seek to enter in and not be able" (Lk 13:24). He is also the narrow gate. It is by allowing Him to be our life that we will succeed in entering. As we enter in through this narrow opening, all that we are must be left behind.

What we have and what we are by nature, even if it seems to be "good" in our eyes, simply will not fit through. When we seek to enter in but are not willing for all that we have and are to be removed, we fail to pass through the Gate and enter into the Kingdom.

Only the life of Jesus living in us and living through us can satisfy the Father. It is with Him that the Father is well pleased (Lk 3:22). Indeed the way is narrow. It is only one

Person and we must enter in through Him. The gate is exceedingly narrow and so, just like the camel passing through the eye of the needle, the only way to get through is to unload ourselves of all our baggage. Our abilities, our zeal, our natural leadership, our possessions, yes, even our own life will not fit through.

When we yield our life more and more to Him so that our life can be put to death and His life can live through us in its place, then these wonderful attributes of God's own nature begin to be seen in our lives. All the attributes of His character are in evidence. When it is no longer we who live, but Christ (Gal 2:20), then the world around us can begin to see what Jesus really is like.

When the life of God is dominant in us, then our testimony is no longer just words, but also in evidence in all our attitudes and actions. In this way, our entrance into His kingdom will be "abundantly supplied."

OVERCOMING THE WORLD

Another aspect of the Kingdom victory involves overcoming the world. The Bible teaches us that the world and everything in it is part of the devil's kingdom. Therefore, any believer who desires to enter the kingdom of God must also overcome the world. This includes what could be called "the system of this world" with all its lust, opulence, greed, flash, and glitter.

God has called us to separate ourselves from the world. He says in His Word: "...come out from among them, and be separate, says the Lord, and do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you" (II Cor 6:17).

Another verse states: "Do not love the world, or the things in the world... For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life is not of the Father but is of the world... And the world is passing away and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides for ever" (I Jn 2:15-17).

The world and all the things in it are an important ingredient of the devil's kingdom. It is one of the most sub-

tle snares in which he entraps the people of God. Satan offered to Jesus and he is offering to us today all the kingdoms of this world if we will submit ourselves to him.

The devil is able to give men and women many things which seem, from a human standpoint, desirable. This includes such things as money, fame, possessions, and status in the eyes of others. He is able to bestow recognition, power, and influence. But like our Master, we must learn to flee from these things at all costs because if we do not, it will cost us the Kingdom.

In the scriptures we read, "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will be loyal to the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Mt 6:24). The mammon that the scripture is talking about here is the riches, pleasures, entertainments, and accolades which the world and its inhabitants might impart.

It is impossible to serve God and be pursuing the things of the world. Unless our hearts are purified from these things and we determine to serve God alone, we will be swallowed up by the cares of this life, by the things of this world which we think that we need, and we will fall short of the goal to which we have been called. "Whosoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (Jas 4:4).

Money is the singularly most powerful thing in the physical world today. Jesus says that it is harder for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of heaven than it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (Mt 19:24). His disciples thought surely this must be impossible, but Jesus assured them that with God all things are possible.

Riches are deceitful. They deceive those who possess them into thinking that they are an end unto themselves. More people have been deceived by this one thing perhaps than any other.

Today there is even a whole segment of Christianity that is teaching men and women to pursue wealth. By so doing these teachers turn the minds of believers away

from the Kingdom of God and towards the most powerful influence in the kingdom of Satan.

I Timothy 6:9,10 reads: "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition {losses}. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

Not only are riches a distraction, but if we are taken in by them and spend our time pursuing them we will not enter into the Kingdom which God is preparing.

If we do possess money, it is only by subjecting all that we have completely to the authority of Jesus Christ that we can overcome. And like the rich young ruler, this may require that we give much, if not all, of it away.

Money should be used for doing God's work and fulfilling His purposes and not for setting ourselves up in a comfortable and secure position, gaining material possessions, and satisfying all our own desires. Money which is under God's control will be used to support His servants, to give to the poor, and in every way to see that the purposes of God are furthered in this world.

Money can be a very important tool for those who know how to use it for God's Kingdom, but the scripture warns us that the power of money is extremely deceitful, so deceitful in fact that we must exercise extreme caution and care in dealing with it. "No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life" (II Tim 2:4).

All of God's children should make sure that their finances are completely under the authority of God and that they are willing to obey Him whatever it may cost.

Peter at one time said to Jesus, "See, we have left all, and followed You" (Lk 18:28). And Jesus replied to him: "Assuredly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers, or wife, or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come everlast-

ing life" (Lk 18:29,30). In this "present time," that "more" might mean spiritual blessings. It might mean that we never possess many earthly things for ourselves, but on the day that Jesus returns, we will be greatly rewarded.

I beg you brethren and readers, do not put the world and the things in it first. Put them all aside. Don't become entangled in the things of this life. Let us seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and trust that He will add to us the things which are needful to continue living in this present world (Mt 6:33).

13.

LEADERSHIP AND THE KINGDOM

We have been speaking about the Kingdom of God; both how to enter into it and how to live in it. While meditating upon these things and seeking to understand God's ways, there often arises in our minds, as it did in the minds of the disciples, a question about the subject of leadership.

There is no doubt that in the church of God there is such a thing as leadership. Among God's people, there are those who are more mature, those who are more experienced, those who are more gifted, and those who are called by God to lead. This is indisputable.

However, in God's kingdom this leadership is exercised in a very unusual way. His way and the way of the world are completely contrary to one another. Therefore, if we wish to live in His supernatural Kingdom, we must learn how to do so. All our worldly understanding and definitions must be put aside and we must receive from God a new heavenly vision.

In order to be in the Kingdom today it is essential for every believer to live in submission to the authority of the King. But how can we do this? How can we understand true Kingdom authority? This all-important subject cannot be overlooked as we seek to understand the Kingdom of God.

Perhaps the first and most basic tenet which we must understand is that Jesus is the King in this kingdom. He is the one who is ruling and He is the one who is sitting on the throne. No one else – ever – gets to usurp this position. Although He can and does use different men and women from time to time to transmit His authority, this authority is always His and does not belong to the person through whom it flows.

He is the head of the body (Col 1:18). He is “head over all things to the church” (Eph 1:22). In all things He is to have the preeminence (Col 1:18). This principle is of the utmost importance. Jesus is the head and no one else can fulfill this position.

When the head of a human body loses control over the members, awful and undesirable results are seen. If another member of the body tried to fulfill the function of the head and direct all the activities of the body, you can imagine what sort of confusion would result. Only Jesus can and should be the head directing all the activities of His church.

It is true that today Jesus is invisible. We cannot see Him with our physical eyes. Although this is so, He is not handicapped by this. He is still able to lead every one of us in every aspect of our lives. It is, therefore, incumbent upon us to develop a real, deep, spiritual relationship with Him so that we can know and understand His leadership and authority.

In this world the more we get to know another person intimately, the more we can sense their will. We can know when they are unhappy or wanting something, often even without them speaking. In a similar way, the more we come to know Jesus intimately through the Spirit, the more we can sense His leadership and follow Him. Through faith we can know His will and follow Him every day, in every aspect of our lives.

There is no reason that every child of God cannot develop this intimacy with Him for themselves and learn to follow Him. In fact, this is something we all must do.

In God's kingdom, Jesus does not delegate His authority. He is perfectly capable of running things Himself. He is not so busy that He needs helpers. He has not gotten so old that He needs some assistance from men. The fact that He is invisible does not necessitate that He leave the "real leadership" to others who are more "tangible." The fact that He has ascended into heaven does not mean that He is so far away that He needs some representatives here to take His place.

Since He is infinite and omnipresent, our Lord is perfectly capable of directing the lives of every one of His children. There is absolutely no reason for Him to dole out portions of His authority to various men who would then act on His behalf in His absence. There is no necessity whatsoever for others to "help" Him carry the burden of directing the functions of His body.

In the Kingdom of God, instead of "delegating" authority to others, Jesus sometimes uses various members of His body as conduits through whom His authority is transmitted. Naturally, those who are more mature and have a more intimate relationship with Him are more easily used by Him to reveal His will and direction.

However, no matter how "spiritual" someone may be or no matter how often they may be used as a vessel to transmit God's authority to others, they never, ever become this authority themselves. They, themselves, do not begin to have their own authority, but are always and only a lowly servant through whom the authority of God is flowing. Jesus, in His church, does not give men personal authority, but uses them to reveal *His* authority.

Although Jesus did give His followers authority over the demons, He did not give them authority over each other. Significantly, this very dispute often arose among the disciples. They were frequently imagining and even haggling among themselves about who was to be "in authority" in the coming Kingdom.

They wanted to define who was to be in control. They wished to be the one who was running things and who

was to be greater than the others. On one occasion, to address this persistent problem, Jesus took a little child and set him down in front of them. Then He taught them that to enter the Kingdom, we must become like this little child (Mt 18:2-4).

This should be for us a very powerful illustration. Think about this carefully. Children run nothing. They are not in control of any grand schemes, great works for God, or corporations. Instead, since they are young and innocent, they are completely dependent upon their fathers for guidance and direction. They have no authority and control over others but are in constant need of protection and guidance themselves.

In order to enter into the Kingdom of God, we too must become like this. If not, the Scriptures assure us that we will *not* enter in. This is the basis for true authority in the Kingdom. No believer ever outgrows this great necessity to become like a little child. In fact, the more we mature, instead of progressing beyond this point, the more we arrive at exactly this condition. Instead of becoming great and receiving authority over others, the more spiritual we become, the more childlike we feel and act.

UNLESS YOU HUMBLE YOURSELVES

One of the most important secrets to entering into the Kingdom of God is that we must humble ourselves. In Matthew 18:3,4 Jesus teaches that unless we humble ourselves and become like little children, we will in no way enter into the Kingdom of heaven.

God resists the proud (Js 4:6). His kingdom is in many ways exactly the opposite of the way things are in this world. Here, we have presidents, governors, and kings who are often full of themselves and full of pride. Their minds are puffed up because of their position and power. They have luxurious wardrobes, houses, and means of transportation to match their status in the eyes of the world.

This is not the way into God's Kingdom. His way is very different. Those who are living in submission to Him are not proud. They are not seeking recognition, a special position, or their own "world-wide ministry." They are not looking for fame or attention. These are lowly people who are willing to become like little children who have no fame or status in the eyes of the world. Unless you too arrive at this point, you can be assured that you will not enter the coming Kingdom of God.

Jesus Himself taught that "...many who are first will be last, and the last first" (Mt 19:30) in the coming Kingdom. Why is this so? It is because, unfortunately, many believers are trying to use the things of God to benefit themselves. They are using worldly means and methods to elevate themselves in the eyes of other Christians. They use their gifts and ministries to accumulate wealth, power, and status. They elevate themselves above the others and employ others to further their schemes and "ministries."

These are constantly bragging about how many "churches they have under them" or how many people attend their meetings. These poor brothers and sisters are not entering into the Kingdom of God. They have missed the mark and strayed off the path. As someone once said, "Every ministry serves to meet a need, but it is not the need of the 'minister' to be seen and heard."

A true servant of Jesus must be broken by God. His ambition and zeal to "do great things for God" must be crushed. His trust in his own abilities, intelligence, and gifts must be brought to an end.

Someone who has learned to live today in God's kingdom is like a little child because he has learned to trust completely in the Father. He is no longer self-motivated and full of human energy. He is not overflowing with his own plans and projects. Instead, he has learned through hard experience simply to do every day what he sees the Father doing.

This is not to say that God cannot powerfully use a person. This is not even to say that God cannot raise up some-

one and use them to exalt His name. It is only to say that when a vessel is ready for the Master's use, he has been prepared so that in humility and childlike simplicity, he can be used to express the Divine will. Such servants are no longer "doing a work for God" but God is doing His work through them.

AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

While we are speaking about God's kingdom and what it is like, perhaps it would be useful here to speak briefly about "church government." Many Christian groups and "churches" have a kind of pyramid authority structure. They have a leader at the top who holds most of the power. Then below them is another level of more people with lesser authority and so on down the line to the people in the "rank and file."

This kind of structure is just like worldly governments or business organizations. This, they believe, is an expression of divine authority. There are even others who go so far as to insist that to enter into the kingdom of God, you have to submit to them and their organization. They teach that you have to become their disciples because they have a unique revelation of the will of God.

As we have been seeing, Jesus taught us a completely different way. In fact, it should be exactly the opposite way as the worldly structure. Instead of those who are spiritual exercising authority "over" the others, they should become the servants or even the slaves. It goes without saying that servants and slaves do not command their masters or tell them what to do.

Jesus clearly taught us about true the "authority structure" of His Kingdom. We read: "Let it not be among you as it is among the gentiles where one man exercises authority over another and is called 'benefactor' " (Lk 22:25). You see, among the gentiles, one person rose up to exercise authority over another and insisted that they were doing this for their "benefit." They were a "benefactor."

How many times in the church today do we see this very thing. Men and women exercising authority "over" others and claiming to do this for the benefit of the others. However, this is clearly not the way of the Kingdom of God. It has been forbidden by Jesus.

In His Kingdom, no one is ever over or above the others. He says: "you are all brothers" (Mt 23:8). You are all on the same "level." There is no such thing as bigger or smaller, better or worse, higher or lower. Furthermore, there are to be no titles such as "father," "leader," or "teacher" (Mt 23:8-12). Jesus' instructions are quite clear about this. No special titles or distinctions are permitted.

In fact, this list could be expanded to include such appellations as "pastor," "bishop," or "elder" also. Here, there is no hierarchy. Everyone is on the same plane, they are all simply brothers. There is only one Leader. Anyone who has the ambition to be great must learn to humble himself and become the servant of the others. He who desires to ascend to the top, must become the slave of all (Mk 10:44).

(Although such words as "pastor," "elder," etc. do appear in the biblical text, they are never used as titles but only as descriptions of the type of service these people perform. For example, you never read of Pastor Peter, or Apostle Paul, but rather of Paul, "a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ" (Titus 1:1), and of Peter "a servant and apostle" (II Pet 1:1).)

Unfortunately, God's people are often very gullible. They are easily taken in by those exuding energy and "leadership." Just like people in the world, they are impressed with other people's charisma and personality. So, they go along with such strong individuals' ambitions and plans.

Paul, writing to the Corinthians about "false apostles" and "deceitful workers" who were self-motivated leaders says: "For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage [submission to human authority], if one devours you [uses your love for Jesus to support them], if one takes from you [takes your time and money], if one exalts him-

self [becomes a “great spiritual leader”], if one strikes you on the face” (II Cor 11:13,20).

Paul mentions “strikes you on the face” here not because people were actually hitting others physically but to show how much of an insult this kind of activity was and yet these brothers in Corinth did not realize it. They put up with it!

Many of God’s children, who do not understand the way of the Kingdom and are still impressed by worldly things, are sucked into the wake of energetic, charismatic leaders and used by them.

Many Christians want to be humble and submissive. They desire to please God. But because they do not recognize true authority and do not really know the ways of God’s Kingdom, they submit themselves to men and human authority and so waste much time, energy, and money building up something that will not stand the test of that Day.

It can be very difficult to recognize true Kingdom authority. Since the servant of God is humble and does not exalt himself, the natural man does not easily respond to God’s leadership through him. In order to recognize true authority in an invisible Kingdom, we must have spiritual eyes and discernment.

Paul himself experienced much rejection because he did not elevate and glorify himself. In one of his letters he spends an entire two chapters (II Cor 11 and 12), speaking to the brothers about this very thing. He insists that he had “betrothed” them “to Christ” but some were coming into their midst with another agenda. These others were preaching another message with another goal, namely to exalt themselves and secure personal followers.

Paul had taught them how to follow Jesus, but these others were insisting that they follow them. They were using the message of Jesus to benefit themselves.

Dear brothers, Jesus Himself exhorts us that we should let no man take our crown [referring to reigning in the Kingdom] (Rev 3:11). No doubt here our Lord is speaking

about exactly this type of situation. No one in the universe is worthy to have followers except God. He is the one to whom we must submit and it is Him we must obey. Anyone else who elevates himself to seek “members” or adherents must, therefore, enter into competition with God Himself.

Who, then, was the first person to begin to use the talents, power, and abilities which God had given him to attract a group of followers? In fact, it was Satan himself. He carved out a little kingdom using subtlety and lies, drawing away others from God’s reign.

Sadly, this kind of activity is also common in the church today. Many men and women like to have authority and followers. Their soul thrives on the honor, titles, and attention this brings them. They want to be seen and heard and so they use verses from the Bible, usually with a subtle twist, to justify what they are doing.

Paul warned the church that this would happen. He said that after his departure men would rise up from among them who, “distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:30 NIV).

The way that they distort the truth is this. They insist that man can attain or receive some kind of authority – perhaps even from God – and so act and speak for Him as if they were “over” the others in some way. They imagine that because of their gifts or abilities, they are worthy of having followers or disciples.

This kind of thinking and practice is in direct violation of the principles of the Kingdom of God. It is the work of antichrist. Interestingly, one of the principle meanings of the word “anti” in the Greek language is “in the place of” rather than simply “against.” Therefore, an antichrist would be someone who is taking the place of Christ in the church.

When a man or woman sets up their own authority, or their own “church” where they are the leaders and the rest are the “sheep,” they establish their own kingdom, a parallel kingdom to the Kingdom of God. They enter into

competition with Jesus for authority and followers. While they, no doubt, use the Bible and the things of God to justify what they are doing, what they are building will not stand the test of Judgment Day. These brothers and sisters are falling into error because they have not really seen or understood God's Kingdom.

If and when a person assumes a position of authority over others in God's family (usually accompanied by some kind of title), they automatically rise up above the rest. It is impossible to be "over" and not be "above" at the same time. With this position comes automatically the honor and respect which people give those who occupy these kinds of positions.

A person may seek such honors for themselves or others may give it to them, yet the results are the same. It then becomes very difficult to be a true servant. A servant must be beneath the others and, therefore, below them. You cannot truly serve others from a position of superiority. The "service" done from being "over" others involves a kind of patronizing since the servant is pretending to be below, but is really considered superior. Even if we do not intend this to happen, it is an inevitable result.

The solution to this is simply not to accept any position of authority over others. In this way, we can maintain a humble position. Jesus, the One who was worthy of honor and status, fled any such suggestion. When they came to make Him King, He simply left (Jn 6:15). At another point, He said: "I do not receive honour from men" (Jn 5:41). Our Lord was never seeking an earthly position or human honor and glory. Certainly His example is worth following.

Another problem which enters in under such circumstances is pride. When we receive honor from men, it is almost inevitable that our ego begins to swell. When we accept a kind of position of authority, it is easy for our vanity to increase and our ego to be stroked. Over time, we may begin to believe that we are really worthy of the attention and admiration which we are being given. Sooner or later, whether we want it or not, this will have its effect on

hearts and minds. No human being is immune from this kind of homage. This then is what gives rise to that aura of self-importance which so many Christian leaders today exude.

My dear brothers, this is the snare of the devil (I Tim 3:7). When our pride increases and our ego is massaged by constant honor and attention from other men, we have fallen prey to the enemy of our souls.

The only way to avoid this is to not let yourself be put into such a false position. In the book of Ecclesiastes chapter 8, verse 9, we encounter an interesting truth. We read: "There is a time in which one man rules over another to his own hurt." When we assume a position in the church of being over others, we risk doing spiritual damage not only to them, but also to ourselves also.

To be fair, it must be said that many people do these things out of ignorance. I do not believe that the majority who practice such things are doing so out of malice or deliberately trying to compete with God. Instead, it seems that so many lack revelation.

They do not have a complete understanding of the ways of God's Kingdom. They do not really know how to let the Head lead and build up the body. They don't really see how the King can and will reign over His own Kingdom without so much help from them. They have much more confidence in themselves than in the invisible God.

Many of these folks often want to serve God but, lacking a heavenly vision, they begin to build and act following the examples they see in the world around them and in others who appear to be successful. When "the church down the street" begins to grow and attract many members, the others rush to copy their ways and methods. When some practice or other begins to "work" for someone else, they immediately want to implant it in their group.

Thus, the church of our day is saturated with many "wonderful works" of wood, hay, and stubble (I Cor 3:12).

But many of these “kingdoms” which are being constructed which seem so impressive to our natural eyes, lack something very fundamental. They cannot really be part of the Kingdom of God because they do not follow Jesus’ clear principles.

Interestingly, our Lord is so humble, so all-powerful, and so wise that He even uses things which are not right and even things which are in violation of His will. He will sometimes work through (or really around) the things which we do that are not in proper alignment with His Kingdom to accomplish His purposes.

When and where He finds an opening for His authority, He sometimes uses people who are involved in works which are not really submitted to Him, to do His will. Although the parallel kingdoms which men establish in Jesus’ name are a great hindrance to Him, He still finds ways to minister Himself to His people.

Sometimes those involved imagine that since God is doing something, they are being greatly used by God. Since Jesus finds a way to work around and through their parallel kingdoms, they begin to imagine that they are really effective.

But many times, our effectiveness is just a small fraction of what it could and should be. How much better it would be and how much more potent our work could be if we could learn to live and work in harmony with God’s Kingdom!

I have said that God will even use things which are contrary to His will. However, the fact that God tolerates and uses our errors does not excuse or justify them. Ultimately He even uses the devil to further His purposes.

Often men justify the use of worldly methods and authority claiming that it is producing results. But what standards are they using to measure these successes? It is a great mistake to use worldly ways and methods and then use human standards to judge their value. If great numbers, large “temples,” and worldly fame are the standards, then of course many are being “successful.”

However, the real question is: "How many people are really being brought into submission to the King and, therefore, entering the heavenly Kingdom?" "How many are truly learning to live under the government of God?" "Are they really coming to know Him intimately and hear His voice for themselves?" "Are they submitting every aspect of their lives to His inspection and rule?" "Are they becoming ever more humble and holy people?" Or are we simply filling up our buildings with those who have been convinced but not really converted and so have no real, deep-seated submission to God?

Jesus states that many will be refused entrance into His Kingdom. When this happens, they will argue their position saying, "Lord, Lord... have we not done many wonders in your name?" You already know His response. He said: "...depart from me, you who work lawlessness" [independent works or rebellion] (Mt 7:22,23). They had to depart from His presence because they did not submit to His authority in what they were doing.

Although there are some verses in the New Testament which seem to speak of something like the human authority structure which we see so often today among God's people, a careful examination of these verses reveals something else. Far too often, the Bible translators have arrived at their work with preconceived notions drawn from their experience and common practice.

For example, we read in I Timothy 3:1,10,13 that "those who desire the office of a bishop, desire a good thing" (KJV) thus implying that there is an "office" or "position of authority" within the church. But, in fact, this word "office" represents no word in the original Greek. It was simply invented by the translators.

Also, we read about submitting to those who are "over you in the Lord" (I Thess 5 :12, Heb 13: 17,24). This word "over" in Greek is "proistemi" which means literally "to stand before" and, therefore, means "to lead." There is no sense of being "over" or "in control of." The same is true of the word "rule" found in Hebrews 13:7,17, 24. Here the

word is "hegeomai" which means literally, "to go before" or "to lead the way."

New Testament leadership is by example, not by commandment or control, not by position of authority, or being "over" someone else. Peter confirms this, insisting that the "leaders" do so "not as being lords over" but rather "examples to" the flock (I Pet 5:3). A humble servant of God has a life which is worth imitating. Paul says to the Corinthians that he did not have "dominion over" their faith, but that he and the others were simply "fellow workers for [their] joy" (II Cor 1:24). What a difference this is!

Another example is the word "obey." In Hebrews 13:17 we read that we are to "obey" those who "rule" over us. This kind of translation gives the impression that there is indeed a hierarchy of authority to which we must submit, almost unquestioningly. But the Greek word here is "peitho" which means "to be persuaded" or "to listen to," and as a consequence of being convinced, to obey.

W. E. Vine in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* says: "The 'obedience' suggested is not by submission to authority, but resulting from persuasion." Nothing in God's word contradicts itself. So when we read translations which seem to be recommending an authority structure like that of the world, we must realize there is some misunderstanding.

None of the writings found in the New Testament epistles can possibly teach something contrary to Jesus' instructions concerning the Kingdom of God. If some other idea is conveyed, then we can be sure that the translation of that passage is not correct. Therefore, any puffed-up believer who is self-seeking and feels it is his calling to dominate or give direction to the lives of others should be avoided.

One passage in particular that has been often misconstrued is the one in which the Centurion whose daughter Jesus cured says: "I also am a man under authority having soldiers under me. And I say to one 'Go' and he goes; and to another 'Come,' and he comes" (Mt 8:9). From this some

have determined that there should be this kind of authority apparatus in the church.

But in no way was this dear Roman intending to give a lesson on church government. Only by twisting this scripture out of all plausible context can we imagine that this passage has anything to do with how believers should interact with one another in the church today. This man's statement is merely a recognition of the absolute authority of God Most High, something which we too must recognize.

Jesus' clear teaching and example must always prevail in our understanding of authority. He fled "kingship" (Jn 6:15). He constantly humbled Himself. After many miracles He told people to keep quiet about it. He was never looking for recognition and accolades. He was never seeking crowds so that He could be admired and heard.

One of my favorite verses says: "Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart" (Mt 8:18). Instead of seeing the multitudes as His chance to be seen and heard and then jumping up on a rock and beginning to preach, He turned and left. How about you? What are you seeking? Whose glory and honor are at the forefront of your efforts "for God?"

When the disciples asked about who was the greatest, He got up from the table, took off His outer garments, put on a towel and proceeded to perform the role of the most humble servant. Can we not hear what He is saying? Can we not see from His example how His Kingdom is to be?

No doubt, there are those in the church who are used by God as vessels to transmit His authority. Since some are often used by God in this way, they become known as "leaders." It is not wrong to seek counsel and guidance from such servants of God. He can and does use men and women who are mature and wise to help us.

However, we must never come to the place where we are looking to them instead of to God. Our gaze must never shift from the King to one or more of His servants. When we begin to depend upon other men for direction, it is a sure sign that we are not really living in submission to

our King. Somewhere or somehow, we have lost contact with our spiritual Head and so are seeking human direction and advice.

King Saul eventually came to this position. God had stopped speaking to him because of his rebellion against Him. So Saul began to seek counsel from human sources and even tried to contact the dead for help. How many of God's children are in this state. They are not living in true submission to Jesus and so they are always looking to some "leader" or other "covering" or "head" for direction. Often, the advice they get is really something from the spiritually "dead."

In the book of Judges, we have the principle of spiritual authority illustrated for us in a very remarkable way through the person of Gideon. Gideon was a man who was used by God to lead His people and effect a great deliverance for them from their oppressors.

Consequently, the masses wanted to elevate him to a position of authority over them. They wanted to "officialize" the situation by setting him up as their king. This would then give them the feeling of some kind of earthly security and leadership. It would give them a tangible leader in whom they could confide.

These men said: "Rule over us, both you and your son and your grandson also; for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian" (Jud. 8:22).

However, Gideon knew something about God's heart and His ways and so he wisely refused this offer of power and position. He responded to them by saying: "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you" (Judg. 8:23). This has always been God's intention, that He Himself would be our head and King.

Later on in this story, after the death of Gideon, one of his sons named Abimelech made his own move for power. Sensing the desires of the people for a king and seeing this as his opportunity, he killed the rest of Gideon's sons and had himself set up as their king.

However, one of the other sons escaped the slaughter. As he was fleeing for his life, he stopped on a nearby hill and made the following statements to his brother and the crowd. Perhaps they should still speak to us today. He shouted to them saying:

“The trees once went forth to anoint a king over them. And they said to the olive tree, ‘Reign over us!’ But the olive tree said to them, ‘Should I cease giving my oil, with which they honor God and men, and go to sway over the trees?’

Then the trees said to the fig tree, “You come and reign over us!” But the fig tree said to them, ‘Should I cease my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to sway over the trees?’

Then the trees said to the vine, ‘You come and reign over us!’ But the vine said to them, ‘Should I cease my new wine, which cheers both God and men, and go to sway over the trees?’

Then all the trees said to the bramble, ‘You come and reign over us!’ And the bramble said to the trees, ‘If in truth you anoint me as king over you, then come and take shelter in my shade’ ” (Judg. 9:8-15).

The reaction of these “trees” to the offer of power and position revealed what was in their hearts.

LIZARDS AND FISH

The human being was constructed with an important limitation. Although he has two eyes, he can look in only one direction at one time. There are creatures such as lizards, fish, and perhaps many others who can swivel their eyes to look in two directions at once. But man cannot. If and when we shift our gaze to a new view, we must at the same time, stop looking in the direction in which we were looking before.

This fact has spiritual implications. Inwardly we were also constructed with this limitation. Spiritually, we can

look towards only one leader at a time. Today, our Head and King is Jesus. Our gaze must be fixed on Him. We should be "...looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb 12:2). If we shift our gaze to another leader, discipler, pastor, or other authority figure, we automatically must take our eyes off of our King. In doing so, we leave the Kingdom of God and so will suffer the many pitfalls and consequences of this action.

In order to enter into God's Kingdom, we must submit ourselves completely to God. As we do this, we will also recognize Him expressing Himself through other brothers and sisters. We will hear His voice and obey. This submission "to one another" (Eph 5:21) is a sign that we are really living in the Kingdom. It is an evidence that we are really submitted to God.

But if we are not, no amount of human authority structure, leadership, and/or "submission" to man will resolve our problems. There is no substitute for true, thorough submission to the Lord.

Many times men will encourage us to submit ourselves to them or other leaders as a means to "resolve some of our problems" or because they insist that it is the right way. However, such submission to man does nothing to subdue a rebellious heart. On the contrary, many times submission to human authority only serves to hide our inner rebellion against God.

"False [or "voluntary"] humility" (Col 2:18) – in other words submitting to human leadership – will never get you into God's kingdom. In fact, it will do just the opposite. Paul explicitly states that it will rob you of your reward, which in this case, is entering into the Kingdom. Those who know how to live in the Kingdom are submissive people but they can and must discern when supposed authority is from God and when it is merely a human substitute.

Throughout the years, I have often encountered believers who are involved in some kind of group that emphasizes submission to man. Almost invariably, these dear

brothers and sisters seem to lack spiritual maturity. Their studious dependence upon man has turned their attention from God. They become afraid to seek God for themselves, hear His direction, and follow Him. They don't want to appear to be "independent" or "rebellious" and so, instead, they become completely dependent on human sources.

They are reluctant to act or speak without "permission" and so can be used by God very little. Thus, their growth is stunted and their work for God is ineffective. Although this submission to human leadership may be able to produce some kind of superficial appearance of correct behavior, their inward parts are not changed. They are only being reformed but not transformed.

Some imagine that this sort of control over various members by the leadership is necessary because some believers have lives which are completely out of order. In short, they are a mess. So, those "in authority" believe that they must exercise some kind of control to rectify the situation. They try to subject these "rebellious" members to some kind of discipline to correct their behavior.

This kind of activity can never produce spiritual results. Proverbs 27:22 reads: "Though you grind a fool in a mortar with a pestle... yet his foolishness will not depart from him." While it may be possible to produce some kind of conformation to a superficial standard, human "discipline" will do nothing to transform a human soul.

The real answer here is to help others come into a genuine submission to Jesus. We must lead others into a real relationship with the King. This will solve all their problems. When they are really learning to live in the present Kingdom of God, He will lead them in the way of salvation. Rather than making disciples for ourselves, we make disciples for Jesus. It is only as we look into His face and behold His glory that we are transformed (II Cor 3:18).

Perhaps the most difficult thing for us human beings to do is to trust in our invisible Master. Often, we have much more confidence in ourselves and in other human leadership than we do in our spiritual Savior. If we do nothing,

what will happen? If we don't rise up and take the reins of power, organize something, or do something, how will the world be saved and the church be built up? There is so much to be done. What if God doesn't do it?

I am not advocating passivity here. In no way am I saying that we do not have work to do. I am merely stating that it is not our human efforts and energy, our natural strength and abilities, our "spiritual gifts" and ministries which God needs. Instead it is our submission to Him. As we allow Him to live in us and through us, His work will be accomplished in an effective way.

Jesus is not handicapped. Perhaps He is only hindered by all our "help." We only need to have faith that, as we submit to Him in a humble, lowly way, His will can then be accomplished in and through us. All this will be done in accordance with the principles of His Kingdom which He has taught us. Thus, His Kingdom will come on earth just as it is in Heaven.

With all these things in mind, perhaps it would be good for us all to take some time to consider what it is that we are doing in Jesus' name. What is it we are building? In which kingdom are we really living?

If you find yourself in a position of authority over others, if you are in command and in control of large numbers of other believers, perhaps it is time you pause for a moment and reassess your position. Perhaps there is something which you have missed. Possibly there is some truth regarding the Kingdom of God which has not yet become completely clear to you. If you find yourself in a position of being "over" others in the church, you have missed the Kingdom of God. It is, therefore, imperative that you turn from this erroneous way before it is too late.

My brothers and sisters, please consider these things prayerfully and carefully. Our response to them has many consequences, both in this age and the age which is to come.

14.

“FAITH-WORKS”

*S*alvation is by grace through faith. In these days almost all Christians who have access to a Bible realize this fact. There is nothing which we can do, in and of ourselves, which will please God or cause Him to save us. It is only by His great mercy and the love which He has for us that He sent His Son to die in our place.

No works which we can do will bring us eternal life but only availing ourselves of the great sacrifice which Jesus made. When we genuinely repent of our sins and believe into Him, then God considers us to be just. He is satisfied with the perfect offering of His Son and He receives us into the Beloved. This is something which every Christian should understand.

Even though this is so, as we have been learning from the past several chapters, a believer's entrance into the Millennial Kingdom is based upon his works. When we stand before the judgment seat of Christ we must give account of the *deeds* done in our body, whether they have been good or evil (II Cor 5:10). Jesus says He will give to every man according to his works (Rev 2:23).

This presents us with an apparent contradiction. On the one hand, salvation is the free gift of God through Christ Jesus. Yet, on the other hand, when we appear before Him, He will judge us according to our works.

In this chapter we will be thoroughly discussing this apparent contradiction. It is hoped that the reader, after finishing this chapter, will see that there actually is no contradiction at all, but that our “works” are only the automatic result of true faith.

THE NECESSITY OF “WORKS”

Receiving eternal life is indeed by grace and is not of ourselves. But, our entrance into the Millennial Kingdom is another thing. Our entrance there will be determined by what we have done with what God has given to us. Jesus has supplied us with an indescribable gift and He expects us to do something with that gift while He is away.

Just as Jesus Christ spent His time doing the will of the Father, so we too should bear fruit unto God. When a farmer plants seeds in the ground he does so with the expectation that they will grow up and produce fruit. In the same way God is expecting us to bring forth works which glorify Him.

Peter writes that we should be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of Him (II Pet 1:8). God requires that we produce the fruit of good works while we are on this earth (Eph 2:10). Through Jesus, He has given us new life and entrusted us with a great commission. His purpose for doing this is that we would use our time here to serve Him, helping Him to accomplish His will.

Probably you all remember the parable found in Matthew 25:15-30 concerning the talents which were given to a certain king’s servants. It is clearly stated that this parable is concerning the coming Kingdom.

The servants who were faithful were rewarded by being able to “enter into the joy of [their] Lord.” But the servant who was given only one talent and did nothing with it was punished by being cast into outer darkness. He was disciplined because he did nothing in his lord’s absence.

There is an interesting portion of another Kingdom parable found in Matthew chapter 22 which addresses the

subject of wedding garments. We read, beginning in verse 11: "But when the king came in to see the guests [at the wedding feast], he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen" (Mt 22:11-14).

This poor man was obviously lacking some requirement for entering into the wedding feast aspect of the Kingdom. What was this requirement? It was to be clothed with the good works of faith. Revelation 19:8 shows us that the wedding garment was, in fact, good works, where we read: "...that she [the bride] should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (ASV).

TRIED BY FIRE

We understand then, that good works are necessary and desirable. They are something which every believer must be producing. But it is also clear from the scriptures that not just any kind of effort for the Lord will be acceptable. The works which we do in Jesus' name must be of a special kind to qualify for a reward.

When the Day of the Lord comes, all the works which we have done will be tested by fire. I Corinthians 3:12-15 reads: "Now if any one builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw; each one's work shall become manifest: for the Day will declare {expose} it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss: but he himself will be saved; yet so as through fire."

This fire which will test our works is nothing other than the presence of the eternal God. "For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:29). The intensity of His presence

and the glory of His countenance will quickly reveal the substance of our activities.

The phrase “suffer loss” used here must include the loss of inheriting the Millennial Kingdom since this is one of the rewards which the faithful will receive. Although there are other kinds of rewards mentioned in the Bible such as various kinds of crowns, many of these also can be understood in the context of the Kingdom.

Crowns, for example, speak of kingship and ruling, which as we have been seeing will be exactly the role of believers who are judged worthy. Losing our unacceptable works could not be the loss spoken of here since works will not be our reward but will only entitle us to one.

This passage also shows that those whose activities are rejected at the judgment seat of Christ are still eternally saved even though they “suffer loss” (I Cor 3:15).

We find mentioned in the foregoing passage two specific categories of works: wood, hay and stubble – gold, silver and precious stones. The valuable ones endure the test and entitle us to a reward while the combustible items are consumed and expose our disobedience, thus disqualifying us from entering into the Kingdom.

Since these deeds which we do are so critical in determining whether or not we will be approved when we stand before the Lord, it is well worth taking some time to discuss the substance of them at length. Every believer should have a good understanding of which activities will please God and which will not. Many Christians, being ignorant of God’s criteria, could all too easily be wasting their time building something which God does not desire.

Although we must spend a little time here speaking about negative, disagreeable things, it is essential for every follower of Jesus to have a firm grasp on these truths. So please, bear with me as we cover this ground together.

WOOD, HAY AND STUBBLE

Certainly we should all know that these works which we are to do while Jesus is away are not works of the law

for the scripture says that "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight" (Rm 3:20). Even though this should be obvious to anyone who opens his or her Bible and meditates on the things of God for themselves, there is a growing movement in these days encouraging believers to return to the law.

There is a new wind of doctrine, which in some parts of the world is almost a mania, to revert to Old Testament Judaism. It seems that there are many who have failed to penetrate behind the veil and establish an intimate relationship with God Himself. Or, perhaps through the years, their relationship with Him has become distant, boring, or cold. These, then, are seeking to find a superficial, human way to feel good about themselves and imagine that they are serving the Lord.

Not enjoying the kind of relationship with the Invisible which is justifying them day by day, they seek another avenue to satisfy their conscience and to feel that they are doing the right thing. They are occupying themselves with Old Testament rituals, terminology, festivals, and practices, hoping that this will somehow fill the void.

However, as we all should know, the law and all the ordinances are weak because they only work through the efforts of the flesh (Rm 8:3). Therefore, they can never produce the kinds of works which will stand the test of the Judgment Day.

Further, every believer should also be aware that trying to do the right thing according to "New Testament principles" will not be acceptable to Him either. While some have understood that the law cannot produce righteousness, they instead have developed for themselves another kind of "law" composed of New Testament principles.

They have researched the gospels and epistles and synthesized from them a kind of a "spiritual" code of ethics and behavior by which they try to guide their lives. They make every effort to follow these principles. They are zealous to do the right thing. But once again, these kinds of works can only be done through the efforts of the natural

man. Those with a strong will and much determination can perhaps make a good show of following these various principles. However, these efforts make very combustible materials.

Those who are living their lives only by the outward directives found in the scriptures will be among the ones to whom Jesus says, "depart from me, you that work iniquity (lawlessness, rebellion)" (Mt 7:23). Significantly, the number of those in this category will be "many" (Mt 7:22).

To set out to accomplish the dictates of the Bible on our own, even "with the help of the Holy Spirit," is really an act of rebellion against God. Some of those who were rejected were individuals who had done impressive things in Jesus' name. They had preached and prophesied. They had cast out demons. They had done many extraordinary works and even miracles. Perhaps they even constructed great cathedrals and had far-reaching ministries.

But none of this was done in true submission to Him. It was just the works of the flesh. All these things can be done by human energy, knowledge, and ability acting in independence from Him. We can assume that these same people lived at least outwardly moral lives and perhaps those around them were impressed by their Christianity.

But moral living, miracles, beautiful buildings, and eloquent messages do not please the Father. Only by our submitting completely to Jesus and allowing Him to work through us is the Father satisfied.

Jesus' way is one of complete dependence and submission to Himself. His way for us is to simply abide in Him. Any works which we do which are legalistic, self-motivated, or merely human accomplishments will be exposed to be only "wood, hay and stubble."

THE NATURAL MAN

This brings us then to another category of rejected works which are the works of the natural man or the "flesh." When we come to the Lord and begin to know Him in an intimate way, it is normal for us to become

excited about working for Him. However, it is here that the natural, human nature can come into play. If we are intelligent, resourceful, and energetic with many great plans and ideas, it is all too easy for us to begin to do works for God.

However, our Lord has some very specific criteria for us in our work. That is that what we do for Him, must first be directed *by* Him. He must be the one who is initiating the work. Furthermore, what we do cannot be done simply by our own resources and energy, but rather, by a dependence upon His strength and power. Surely, “the flesh profits nothing” (Jn 6:63).

How many of God’s children are caught up in fleshy works. They want to please Him, but lack understanding of how to do so. They have mounted ministries, started churches, and initiated programs. They have preached, taught, and labored to do what they think the Lord might want them to do.

Whatever we can produce for God by our own energy and effort will be rejected on judgment day. It does not matter if we think our efforts are “biblical.” It makes no difference if what we are doing seems right or good. The question is not the appearance of the deeds we do – whether they are popular or successful, for example – but the substance of them.

Very impressive buildings can be constructed out of wood, but it is an extremely combustible material. Jesus must be the source and the content of all of our work for God. He must be the one who initiates our actions and He must be the one who is flowing through us to accomplish them.

FAITH

The works which will please God and pass the test of judgment day are works of faith. But what does this mean? What is this true faith which will produce works which glorify and please God? To really grasp this, it may be necessary to disabuse ourselves of some very common misin-

formation. We must understand very clearly what this faith is not.

Faith is not a mental exercise. Real faith is not our mental agreement with biblical facts. True faith is not something which we ourselves can create by constantly reaffirming scriptural truths. Instead, genuine faith is our heart's response to God's revelation of Himself.

When He reveals Himself, through His speaking in our spirit, in the Scriptures, or by other means and we believe what He is showing us – this is faith. Unless and until God reveals Himself to us in some way, we cannot possess the kind of faith that pleases Him. Real faith is not something which we can generate ourselves. Instead, it is “a gift of God” (Eph 2:8). When God reveals Himself to us and, by His grace we respond by believing, this is true faith.

Let us examine a few examples from the Bible to clarify this point. How did our father Abraham arrive at faith? Did he screw up his thought processes until they almost overheated and finally decided that there must be a God? Did he contemplate the cosmos using all his rational force and finally conclude that there must be a Creator? No.

Exactly the opposite occurred. First “...the God of glory appeared to Abraham” and second, “Abraham believed God” (Gen 15:1,6). The order of these events is very important. Abraham arrived at faith by responding positively to the revelation of God.

How about the early disciples? Did they come to faith by analyzing Jesus' family tree? Did they research the prophecies and conclude that He was the one who would fulfill them so He must be the Christ? No. In fact, those who knew of His prophesied birthplace were the very ones who did not believe and did not come to worship Him.

Although the genealogy of Jesus and His fulfillment of the prophecies came to the disciples' understanding later, it was not these things which generated their faith. Instead what happened first was: Jesus “manifested His glory,” then “His disciples believed in Him” (Jn 2:11).

When Peter made his famous declaration that Jesus was the Christ, Jesus affirmed that this had not been something of which he had become convinced by human means. It was not “flesh and blood” which had explained it to him, but was the “Father who is in heaven” who had revealed it (Mt 16:17).

Peter’s faith was a result of divine revelation. In every case, when the disciples first encountered Jesus, they followed Him because they saw something supernatural in Him. Humanly speaking Jesus was unattractive (Is 53:2), but God opened their eyes to see beyond the outward appearance and into the spiritual realm. Then, their hearts responded by believing in Him.

When we become born again, it is because in some way Jesus revealed Himself to us and we responded in faith to this revelation. If you have never had the Son of God revealed to you in any way, then, even if you are assenting to some Bible verses or have been convinced of some scriptural truths, you cannot be a true disciple of Jesus. You have only been convinced but not converted.

WALKING BY FAITH

Our relationship with Jesus begins with this supernatural revelation. It also continues in the same way. Day by day, Jesus is revealing Himself and His will to us by His Spirit in our spirit. When we are born again, we enter into this spiritual relationship with Him.

He is invisible, yet He is constantly showing us His will and His ways. He is continually revealing Himself to us in our spirit. As we keep responding in faith to what He is revealing and to the direction in which He is leading, we fulfill His desires.

This is what it means to walk by faith. It means that we have an intimate, personal relationship with our invisible Master through our faith. And it is through this faith relationship that we walk with Him.

When we first believe, we receive a living Person inside of us. Since He now lives within us, He is constantly reveal-

ing Himself to us in various ways. We know His inner speaking. We sense His sentiments with respect to various situations. We can perceive His compassion, His joy, His peace, His satisfaction, or even His anger. We can know His leadership and His desires. All the various components of His personality are being revealed within our spirit.

Therefore, we can constantly affirm and believe in what He is revealing of Himself to us. Thus, we walk in communion with Him by faith, believing in the invisible revelation of the Son who lives within us. In this way, we can follow Him day by day. In this way, we can express Him, since we are sensing all the aspects of His personality within our spirit. As we discern His feelings, thoughts, decisions, and leadership, we can choose to flow along with what is being revealed.

If we decide not to affirm what He is showing us in our spirit, we interrupt the flow of life. But when we believe, we express who and what He is to the universe.

Naturally, as a new believer, our faith is small and our ability to sense His presence in its fullness is restricted. Just as a child is very limited in many ways to understand the world around him, so God's children, when they are young, do not have such a clear sense of God's presence.

But we are not meant to stay children. Our Father's plan is for us to grow up to maturity. As we grow spiritually, our faith grows and our ability to sense the presence and personality of our Savior becomes more acute. Consequently, our expression of His nature and His will also become more clear.

For example, one sign of spiritual maturity – the fact that we are in constant, intimate communion with Jesus – is that we love each other. Since God is love and loves every one of His children passionately, when we are in a faith relationship with Him, we sense this great love for all other believers. As we affirm this love, we also express it. In this way and many others, the personality of Jesus and the will of God flow through us to be expressed to a perishing world.

The practice of prophecy also helps us understand faith. Romans 12:6 reads, "...let us prophecy in proportion to our faith." Some understand this to mean preaching, while others see a kind of spiritual gift which sees into the past or future. But whatever our understanding, the way prophecy works is the same.

While we are walking in an intimate relationship with Jesus, we sometimes sense that there is something He wants to speak through us. By faith we then affirm and believe that it is He who is revealing these words or thoughts. So, we speak in faith to others.

Also, in the above verse there is an implication that we should not go beyond our faith. We should be careful when speaking for God, not to let our own desires, thoughts, and opinions govern what we say. We should not go beyond the faith that we have and embellish what He is saying with things which come from ourselves. Conversely, we should not limit our words to only those things which we believe will be agreeable to others.

We walk by faith and not by sight (II Cor 5:7). This is to say that we are not following some visible program, but a living, invisible Person. We are not simply following rules and regulations, principles or laws which we learned from the Bible or from some teacher or other, but we are "seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb 11:27) and responding in faith.

The natural human being longs for tangible things. He trusts in them because they seem "real" to him. He is accustomed to things that he can see, feel, taste, touch, and smell. Therefore, many depend upon legalism, physical sensations, prophecies, and leaders for their spiritual guidance. However, this is walking by "sight" and not by the kind of faith which pleases God. True Christianity is walking by a faith relationship with an invisible King.

OUR FAITH OVERCOMES THE WORLD

As we walk in this intimate faith communion with Jesus, our lives are changed. Our attitudes and desires become different. We are no longer influenced so much by

outward and superficial stimuli but by the invisible Person of Jesus. Therefore, our lives become different from the other inhabitants of the world. We begin to love and seek different things. We are overcoming the world. I John 5:4 read: "And this is the victory which overcomes the world – our faith."

The world around us has many attractions. It offers us many kind of sensual pleasures, including romance, sex, entertainments, food, sports events, etc. All these things vie for our attention and seek to capture our affections.

Of course we all know the evil being who is behind such things. Our natural man, since it too is a product of the physical world, lusts after them. We have a yearning for satisfaction in all of these areas.

Yet those who walk by faith are not captured by these attractions. Their lives are somehow separate and different. They are "set apart" from the physical, natural things.

Many times the other "worldlings" do not understand. Believers' attitudes seem strange to them. It is like the "children in the marketplace" (the people of the world) who say something like: "Hey, we are having fun but you are not joining in with us" or "We are sad, but you aren't responding to the same things we are sad about" (see Lk 7:32). The children of the Kingdom of God are different. They are separated from the world and its people.

Our faith causes us to be set apart. It is our connection with the invisible Kingdom of God which governs our lives and makes us unique. Those who walk by faith are not attached to tangible, physical, earthly things. Their lives are not all wrapped up in entertainments and pleasures. Also, they are not mourning over the state of world affairs and spending their valuable time trying to change them.

Instead, they are constantly sensing the leadership and character of the invisible God. They are following and expressing Him. This, then, causes them to lead a life which is not worldly. They overcome the world by their faith. Their continuous faith relationship with God causes

them to have other attractions and values. Their affections are placed on different things.

Naturally, all of us must be somewhat involved with the things of this earth, since we need to eat, drink, work, and live. But the men and women of faith have a different attitude. Their involvement with the things of this earth has a different quality. They use them because they must, but they do not abuse them (I Cor 7:31). Their heart is not attached to them and they are not pursuing them in search of satisfaction. Being in continuous communion with God through faith, they are satisfied in Him and do not need to seek other sources to meet their needs.

WHAT IS FAITH?

Hebrews 11:1 gives us a definition of faith. We read: "Now faith is *when* what is hoped for is made real to us [in the spirit]. It is when we have a *genuine* inner conviction concerning unseen things" (FLV). Let us take the first part of this verse and look at it more closely. Biblical hope is a hope in invisible, spiritual things.

The glory of God into which He has called us is something which cannot be explained but only revealed to us through the Spirit. Once we have "seen" with spiritual eyes such glory which has been promised, this becomes within us our unshakable hope. It becomes the "substance" of what we are hoping for.

The second part of this verse speaks of "conviction." As we have been seeing, when we discern Jesus revealing Himself and we affirm, or agree to this revelation, this is faith. Therefore, we develop a conviction concerning things which are not seen.

To the world, what we are pursuing and doing is complete foolishness, because they cannot perceive it. It is invisible to them. However, those who have penetrated behind the veil and seen into the unseen world of the Kingdom of God, have a deep abiding conviction concerning the things of the Spirit of God. Perhaps some who have been only mentally convinced concerning Christ might be

easily turned away when things become difficult. But those who have received a real revelation of Jesus have a deep conviction which will see them through hard times.

It should be mentioned here that we are supposed to "walk by faith," but this is not the same thing as merely agreeing with "the faith." When people speak of "the faith," they mean a set of commonly understood truths concerning the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Among such truths would be the fact that He was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died for our sins, was resurrected from the dead, ascended into heaven, and will come back some day to the earth.

All these things are wonderful, true, and good. They do have an impact upon our walk with Jesus, since we know that the Spirit within us will never contradict such truths. However, following the Lord is not the same thing as simply trying to follow a set of doctrines or a creed. Our faith walk is not merely trying to adjust our life to a certain set of truths. It is not just agreeing in our mind to these things.

Instead, as we have seen, it is day by day, moment by moment, affirming the living revelation of Jesus Christ within us and allowing this revelation to be the source of our living. When we allow the One who gives us faith to permeate our lives with His, we will consequently be known as followers of "the faith."

There is a great difference between practicing a religion and following Jesus by faith. Some have taken the various truths and exhortations of the Bible and established for themselves a kind of "Christian" religious system. They have practices, rules, goals, meetings, special clothing, cathedrals, and all the trappings which appeal to the senses of the natural man.

They believe that they have "faith" because they have given their mental assent to various truths found in the scriptures. Since they continue to "believe" these things, and to obey the ordinances which they are taught, they imagine that they are pleasing God. They are depending upon tangible, mental doctrines, traditions, and practices

as their means to satisfy God. However, following Jesus is a completely different thing. He is a living Person. When we, by faith, respond to the revelation of His ever-present Person, then we are fulfilling the desires of the Father.

“FAITH-WORKS”

If our faith is a living faith it will produce works. James, in his epistle, shows us that in order to be genuine, our faith must be generating fruit. He explains that if our faith is not producing “works” today, then it has died and has become dead faith. And dead faith no longer produces any fruit. Furthermore, dead faith is not justifying, and will not justify before the judgment seat, any Christian.

So we see that our faith must always be up-to-date. In other words, we must maintain a living, daily faith relationship with Jesus to be justified by Him.

It is not enough just to have believed sometime in the past. It is not sufficient to mentally affirm a set of Bible doctrines. We must be maintaining a living relationship with Jesus by faith every day. Our heart’s response to God’s revelation must continue to be an active thing which is directing our very lives and actions. This then will produce good works which glorify Him. These are the works of faith.

Jesus teaches us that we should abide in Him. This means that we live in continuous intimate communion with Him, constantly affirming what He is revealing of Himself to us by faith. When we do this, then He also abides in us. As we maintain our faith relationship with Him, Jesus leads us in the works which He wishes to do through us.

Our faith response to His leadership brings the flow of His life into us and through us. It is His life then which brings forth everlasting fruit. Jesus taught us that if “you abide in Me and My words abide in you,” “you shall bring forth much fruit” and “your fruit should remain” (Jn 15:7,8,16) (In other words it will not be consumed on judgment day). Clearly we cannot bear fruit ourselves (Jn 15:4).

It is our continuing faith relationship with Him that causes us to be fruitful. These are the works of gold, silver, and precious stones.

FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

In order to maintain an intimate relationship with Jesus through the Spirit, we must be obedient to Him. We must learn to live under His rulership and, therefore, in His Kingdom. We must continue submitting ourselves in faith to our invisible King.

If we become disobedient, that is we refuse to believe and respond to His inward direction, this disturbs our intimacy with our Savior. When we continue in this defiance and do not yield to His direction, our sense of His presence diminishes more and more. Gradually, we fail to have that vital faith relationship and enjoyable intimacy with Him.

Our faith begins to die when we refuse to respond to His leading. Faith and obedience are inseparably linked together. When we resist the Holy Spirit and His authority in our lives, it becomes very difficult for us to remain in the presence of God.

How many believers are today in this condition? They once knew God intimately, but now feel like they are on the outside looking in. Their once sweet communion with Jesus is just a memory. At some point they have refused the heavenly speaking, resisted the leadership of the Spirit and so are now outside of the present Kingdom. Their rebellion against whatever it was that Jesus wanted of them has left them with only a hollow shell of Christianity.

The reasons why this happens are innumerable but it might be good to mention just a few possibilities. Perhaps these individuals were too afraid to follow Jesus into what He was wanting. Maybe they were too busy with their own pursuits such as pastimes or business. Possibly there were other believers or relatives who discouraged them from taking the steps which the Lord was indicating. It could even be that they were just too stubborn and resistant to yield to Him in the areas which He desired to rule.

Another possibility is that something happened in their walk with the Lord that left them bitter and disillusioned.

But whatever the case, the result is the same. Their living faith is gone and the sense of sweet intimacy with the Lord has receded from their lives. No doubt such people "still believe in Jesus." Probably the biblical facts about His life and ministry are still clear to them. But their faith is old and stale. It is a faith from their past and not of their present experience. It is not a faith which is alive today, providing the underpinning of their communion with God.

Those who find themselves in this condition must repent. It is the only solution. They must cry out to God for the grace to finally hear, believe, and obey what He is revealing to them. Their obedience will restore their intimate relationship with Jesus.

The necessary obedience might involve apologizing to someone for an unkind word or action. It might mean a career change or a move to another part of the world. Undoubtedly, it will mean humbling ourselves and admitting that we have been resistant, stubborn and wrong.

The number of ways we can become disobedient is infinite. Only our Lord can reveal to us what it might be that is interrupting our fellowship with Him. But once we are really willing and ready to hear His voice again, we will know what it is that we are to do.

This humbling of ourselves and the softening of our heart to receive correction is absolutely essential in the spiritual life. Only in this way will we again be able to walk in faith.

Far too many Christians today have tried another alternative. Instead of repenting, they try to justify themselves in their own eyes and the eyes of others by maintaining a superficial, religious appearance. However, just as in the days of His earthly ministry, Jesus is calling upon every one of us to repent for the sake of entering into the Kingdom.

When we stand before God on that Day, we will be judged according to our works. These works will be the

result of our faith which has brought us into and maintained an intimacy with God Himself. The works which will be approved will not be works which we have done for Him, but the works which He has done through us as a result of our faith relationship with Him. These are what I like to call "faith-works."

If you are not living in faith today and, therefore, are not producing fruit for His Kingdom, there is still time to repent. There is still time for you to get your relationship with Jesus right, respond to His leading, and live for the King in His Kingdom.

If, after reading this chapter, you find that your Christian life has been only legalistic and dead, if your life has only been worldly and, therefore, unfruitful or if you have been doing nothing to bring forth fruit unto God, the answer is repentance – repentance for the sake of the Kingdom.

God is calling to us today to repent of everything in which we are involved which is not of His Kingdom. Through our faith, we must overcome all that vain religion, the world, and the flesh have to offer. Instead of wood, hay, and stubble we can produce gold, silver, and precious stones.

Jesus Christ is coming again soon to judge the earth in righteousness. "Therefore since we also are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb 12:1,2).

15.

A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

*F*ear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Lk 12:32). Our heavenly Father desires very much that each and every one of His children would be obedient to Him and would enter into His Kingdom. It is not His desire to turn anyone away.

Surely in His own heart, when He begot us through His Son Jesus Christ, He yearned that we would be faithful and that we would inherit this great blessing. The scripture reads, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (Jn 3:16). We also read in Romans 8:32: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

These passages demonstrate to us God's great love toward men. He didn't even spare His own Son in manifesting to the world the immeasurable, immense love which He has. Concerning salvation, we know that it is not His will that any should perish but that all should come to the knowledge of the truth. I am certain that this same attitude also applies to His children entering into the Millennial Kingdom.

Just as God does not take pleasure in casting anyone into the lake of fire, so also He does not wish for any of His children to miss out on the things which He has prepared for them.

It is up to us. If we are willing and obedient, He is faithful and He will enable us to enter into these things. All the power and the authority of God are invested in Jesus Christ and they are available to us today through the Holy Spirit. We should never make excuses about being too weak or unable.

On the cross, by the shedding of His blood, Jesus purchased everything that is necessary for us to be obedient and to accomplish His will. Not only this, but He has poured out His Spirit upon us and will grant us His grace so that we may live according to God. If we are willing, He will empower us to overcome the devil's kingdom.

There is no need for even the smallest, weakest member of the body of Christ to be defeated. God has done it all. What remains is only for us by faith and obedience to enter into it. Let us not be condemned or afraid. It is the Father's good pleasure to give us the Kingdom.

Now, we need to say a word to backsliders. If you are a backslider and living in a backslidden, sinful condition, it is not too late to repent. You can turn from your evil, sinful living right now. And when you do you will find that the Father will welcome you with open arms.

Just as the prodigal son, about whom we read in the scriptures, went away from his father for awhile and squandered his substance on riotous living and evil companions, one day came to himself, returned to his father's house and was there received with joy and feasting by his father; so you too can repent and turn away from the direction in which you have been going and come back to God.

He will receive you, He will love you, He will again clothe you in a clean garment. And if you continue faithfully until He comes, you too can enter into the Kingdom.

It is not too late. It will never be too late to repent and turn again to Him until the day He comes. On that day it

will be too late, but until then there is opportunity for every child of God who has returned to his vomit and wallowed in the mire, to turn again and receive the inheritance. In His great love which He has for all of mankind and especially for His children, the Father will certainly receive you back and enable you to live for Him.

I must say here that those who have backslidden probably will not receive the same degree of reward. Nevertheless, they can still enter into the Kingdom of God if they turn to Him before it is too late.

There is an interesting parable in the New Testament (Mt 20:1-16) about workers whom the Lord sends out into the vineyard. The story is told of how some workers were hired early in the morning, others later on in the day, and some towards the end of the day. When they came to receive their pay, each one was paid the same thing.

Some of those who had been working hard all day long complained about this, but the Lord rebuked them and said, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good? So the last will be first, and the first last." (Mt 20:13-16).

This is how the Kingdom of God will be. Those who are born again early in life and who work faithfully and diligently until He comes again will enter into the Kingdom. And those who are saved later on and work for only a few short years will receive the same inheritance.

There is still time for you. If you have not received the Lord or if you have not yet begun laboring in the vineyard, Jesus Christ is calling to you. He is calling laborers to come and work to bring forth fruit unto God. If you hear this call, begin today. It is not too late to begin doing the Lord's will until He comes.

Don't let the devil deceive you into thinking that you're too old or that it would be too hard or that it's simply too late to do anything. If, from today onward, you work faith-

fully you will receive the same reward as those who have labored patiently throughout their lifetime.

In Matthew 5:19 there is another encouraging word. Here we find the story of a man who disobeyed one of the Lord's commandments and even taught others his disobedience. The scripture says that he will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven.

At first this may not seem very encouraging but the good thing about it is that this man was still found in the Kingdom. Even though he was in some measure mistaken and deceived and taught others his deception, because he was doing the work of the Lord he entered into the Kingdom. He may be the least perhaps but, nevertheless, he is there due to his efforts.

Of course there are others who will not enter in because of not striving lawfully; however, there does seem to be some room for error. God looks upon our hearts and He judges righteously.

All of us should do our best to work according to the light which we have seen. But let us be encouraged that if we are not perfect, but only faithful, God will recognize this on judgment day. However, remember this too: many who are first shall be last and the last, first (Mt 19:30).

Let us read together a portion of another parable about the Kingdom of God. This is the parable of the sower. I'm sure that most of you have heard it before. It is the story of a sower going forth to sow his seed which falls into different kinds of ground with varying results. Jesus explains:

"To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to the rest it is given in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they may not understand.

Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes, and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

But the ones on the rock are those, who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.

And the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity.

But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it, and bear fruit with patience" (Lk 8:10-15).

How accurately this parable describes the workings of the Word in the hearts of men and how clearly it applies to the coming Kingdom. The Word of the Lord has gone forth and, for most of you readers, it probably has been sown in your hearts.

It is really up to us what kind of response we are going to have to it. Since we are in control of our own heart we must decide which one of these several ways we will be going. I think it would be a good idea for all of us to examine ourselves in the light of these words.

Now I do not advocate long hours of self introspection but I do believe it is absolutely indispensable for us to have times of waiting before the Lord, allowing His Holy Spirit to search our hearts. We must be open and willing for the Spirit of God to expose us in many areas of our life, to shine into us and help us see the stones, the thorns, and all the things that will choke the Word, hinder it, and make it unfruitful.

No one who is truly willing to serve the Lord will be kept out of the Kingdom by these things, for we can, when we see them in our hearts, ask the Lord to remove them. We may request that He change us into the kind of person He wants us to be. God can take away the heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh (Ezek 36:26).

We, with the help of the Holy Spirit, can break up the ground, throw out the stones, cut down the weeds, and

bring forth fruit unto God. Let us, therefore, examine ourselves in the light of the Word and through the enlightening of the Holy Spirit and see which one of these kinds of hearts we have. If we find that our heart is evil, stony, or full of the thorns and thistles of this world, then let us repent – repent for the sake of the Kingdom – and renew our hearts toward God. He will greatly assist us in this and help us to enter into what He has promised.

It is important that all believers know the fear of God. The scripture tells us that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Pr 1:7). To have a healthy, reverent respect for the power of God and for the coming judgment day is good.

However, there are some believers who labor under constant condemnation from the devil. It is to these that I would like to write this word. Even though there are many things in this book which are frightening, do not allow the devil to use them to accuse you.

If you are doing your best, if you are obedient in everything that you know the Lord wants of you, and are in your heart living for God, do not permit Satan to condemn you and keep you from your joy. Resist his accusations and don’t believe what he says. The devil is a liar and would love to keep you under constant condemnation so that you cannot serve the Lord or know His will.

On the other hand, there may be many Christians who have the opposite kind of problem. These are those who refuse the speaking of the Lord, whose ears are grown dull of hearing. They hear but they don’t heed. These are the ones who constantly make excuses for not doing what they know God wants them to do. Since God today is invisible and we don’t see Him with our natural faculties, it is all too easy for the children of God to ignore His speaking or to excuse themselves from doing His will.

If you are one of these, I plead with you, unstop your ears, soften your heart, make it tender towards God, and allow yourself to respond to what He is saying. He may be asking you to do something which is very difficult.

Perhaps He is asking you to sell all and go to another nation to preach His Word. Perhaps He is leading you to get out of some occupation to which you look for security but which keeps you away from Him. Perhaps He is telling some of you younger people to give up that boyfriend or girlfriend who you know is not a believer, or is not living for Jesus Christ.

Nothing is too much to sacrifice for the sake of the Kingdom. Do not be like Esau who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, who sold his right to the inheritance simply to gratify his momentary cravings.

In God's Kingdom, both today and in His Millennial Kingdom which is coming, there are great spiritual rewards. The joy is unspeakable and full of glory but you will never know it or taste it unless you lay aside what is keeping you from entering in.

The scriptures exhort us to "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able" (Lk 13:24). This is referring to how a pack animal, in order to go through a narrow opening, first had to have all its baggage unloaded. It was only after being thus disencumbered that a beast of burden could squeeze through.

The sad reason that so many of God's precious children do not enter into the Kingdom is that they are unwilling to rid themselves of all the baggage which is keeping them from the will of God. They are hanging onto many things, being afraid to let go of them and trust Jesus to be all to them. Many believers have barely gotten the aroma of the rich enjoyment of God which is available to them today.

They stand in the outer court and never enter into the holy of holies, into the very presence of God, to feast with Him and enjoy Him because they are attached to outward, material, earthly things.

Let us lay aside the weights and the sin which so easily beset us and run the race. If there is something which is keeping you from entering in, cast it aside. Do not be encumbered so that you cannot enter. God will keep those

things which you have entrusted to Him until the day when He comes, and then He will reward you abundantly for what you have left behind for His sake.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the Kingdom of God lies waiting before us. The door is open and all may enter in. Let me say again that no one is too weak or too feeble. The ones who do not enter are simply unwilling. No matter what your state or your condition, you can repent today, turn to the heavenly Father, and He will strengthen you and enable you to work faithfully until He comes.

"Blessed is that servant, whom his Master when he comes will find so doing. Assuredly I say to you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods" (Mt 24:46,47).

May God have mercy on us to make us His obedient people, and those to whom He says, "Well done, good and faithful servant... enter into the joy of your lord" (Mt 25:21).

I would like to end this chapter with just a few verses which show how faithful God is if only we will be, and how much it is His will for us to enter into His heavenly Kingdom.

"Now may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it" (I Thess 5:23,24). "Who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful" (I Cor 1:8,9).

Paul says: "And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me for his heavenly kingdom" (II Tim 4:18). "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6).

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to God our Saviour, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen" (Jude 24,25).

CONCLUSION

We live today in a most crucial and difficult time. This "Church Age" is drawing to a close and the coming of the Lord is drawing near. The scripture says that the city "Jerusalem will be trampled by [be under the dominion of] Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Lk 21:24). In 1967 the second half of this city fell into Jewish hands, again giving them control of their ancient capitol for the first time in almost 2,000 years.

Since the Roman general Titus conquered and destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. until 1948 the Hebrew people had been without a country to call their own. But God has not forgotten His people whom He foreknew. Romans 11:25 explains that a blindness has happened in part to Israel until the "fulness of the Gentiles has come in." After this time we are told that God would again remember His Old Covenant people and fulfill His promises to the fathers.

This is exactly what we see happening before our very eyes. Never before in history has it been known that a people would be dispersed over the face of the earth for 2,000 years, retain their national identity, and be regathered again into their own land to become a nation. This is the Lord's doing.

I am not claiming that these Jews are today righteous or that God is somehow pleased with them in their present state. It is when Messiah Jesus comes again that He will "turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rm 11:26).

The point here is that God is doing what He promised and that His second coming is imminent. The stage is being set. These things are just signs which show those

who are watching and waiting the importance of the hour. No other time in history has been so pregnant with turmoil and anticipation. The Judge is at the door.

Jesus says: "behold, I am coming quickly... to give to every one according to his work" (Rev 22:12). The Greek word for "quickly" here does not necessarily mean fast, but can mean "suddenly". Those who are actively seeking Him and waiting eagerly for Him will not be taken by surprise when He appears. But to those whose love has grown cold and whose ears have become dull, He will come as a thief when they are least expecting Him (Lk 12:46).

What will you be doing when Jesus comes? Will He be pleased to find you in your present state? If not, then I want to exhort you as forcefully as I can to repent. Change your way of living before it's too late! Repent for the sake of the Kingdom!

Brethren, the time is short. We are being called upon to work the works of God while it is daylight, for night is coming when no man can work (Jn 9:4).

The Bible tells us that shortly before the Lord comes two important signs will be seen. The first is that there will be a great falling away (II Thess 2:3). This sign is now coming into full view. Today's church is full to overflowing with worldliness, error, and sin of every kind.

The second sign, for which we are now waiting, is the revelation of the "man of sin." Watching the world situation today, it is clear that this could happen at any moment. Yet many, if not most, believers today are unaware of the times. They appear to be sleeping. They are not being prepared by being transformed and made holy.

The message of this book is: "Awake, awake; the bridegroom is coming!" It is high time that we awake out of the sleep of serving ourselves and make ready for His coming. Brothers and sisters in Christ, prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight!

This message is going forth for that very purpose, to prepare God's children for Jesus' soon appearing. Men

and women everywhere need to be getting ready so that they will be allowed to enter into the coming Kingdom. The gospel of the Kingdom – the reality of the total rulership of Jesus Christ – must be preached to all nations and then the end will come (Mt 24:14).

Surely in these days, at the close of this age, this is the message which is on the Lord's heart. Friend, let me ask you one all-important question. When Jesus comes, will you be waiting and ready? I pray that we all will be.

NOTE:

As you read the Old Testament, you will encounter phrases or words (especially in the Prophets) such as: "in that day" or "in that mountain." The reader should understand that these expressions usually refer to the coming Kingdom about which we have been speaking.

The "day" being referred to here is the Day of the Lord. The word "mountain" speaks of His coming Kingdom.

PARTIAL LISTING OF KINGDOM VERSES

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Gen 35:10-12; 17:8 | 18. Ezek 44:15-24 |
| 2. Deut 30:1-10 | 19. Dan 7:13,14,27 |
| 3. II Sam 7:12-16 | 20. Amos 9:11-15 |
| 4. Is 2:2,3 | 21. Zech 6:12,13 |
| 5. Is 4:3-6 | 22. Zech 8:22,23 |
| 6. Is 9:6,7 | 23. Zech 10:10 |
| 7. Is 11:1-4,11,12 | 24. Zech 12:2-10 |
| 8. Is 56:6-8 | 25. Zech 14:1-9 |
| 9. Is 61:6 | 26. Mt 19:27-29 |
| 10. Is 66:14-20 | 27. Lk 1:31-33 |
| 11. Jer 23:5-8 | 28. Lk 13:24-29 |
| 12. Jer 30:3-11 | 29. Lk 22:28-30 |
| 13. Jer 33:7,8 | 30. I Cor 15:20-28 |
| 14. Ezek 20:33-42 | 31. Rev 5:9 |
| 15. Ezek 36:21-28; 37:14 | 32. Rev 11:15 |
| 16. Ezek 37:21-28 | 33. Rev 20:4-6 |
| 17. Ezek 39:25-28 | |

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