

Born of the Spirit

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." -
- John 3:3

THE words of our text were addressed by Jesus to Nicodemus, a Pharisee who came to the Master by night for the purpose of learning more about him and his teachings. This Pharisee had been impressed with the reports he had heard concerning Jesus, particularly the miracles he had wrought, and he acknowledged to the Master that in his opinion no one could do such things "except God be with him." -- John 3:2

Nicodemus was a ruler in Israel and, together with other religious leaders, "sat in Moses' seat." Jesus seemed to sense that his interest was associated somewhat with the position he occupied and the manner in which that position would be affected. In the event the Messiah had indeed appeared. It was perhaps for this reason that Jesus entered immediately into a discussion of the "kingdom of God," rather than the more general subject of how one might be saved, although he reached this point later in the discussion.

Jesus did not say that it was necessary to be born again in order to receive everlasting life at his hands, but he did emphasize that a new birth was essential in order to "see," or to enter into, the "kingdom of God." Many scriptural references to the "kingdom of heaven," the "kingdom of God," or the "kingdom of Christ," apply to the rulers in this kingdom, its governmental agencies, and not to the subjects who will be blessed under its beneficent rulership.

For example, the Scriptures tell us that "flesh and blood" -- that is, human beings -- cannot inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 15:50) On the other hand, Christ, as the great King in that kingdom, is to "have dominion ... from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth," bestowing blessings of peace and health and life upon all flesh. (Psalm 72:8) Another promise relating to the blessings of the kingdom of God and the people who will receive them assures us that "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together." -- Isaiah 40:5

The Scriptures clearly teach that while Jesus is the Ruler supreme in the kingdom, he will have others associated with him -- those who will "live and reign with him a thousand years." (Revelation 20:4,6) The subjects will be human beings, for the kingdom will be "on the earth." (Revelation 5:10) But, as Jesus explained to Nicodemus, in order to be in the kingdom in the sense of being a part of it, one must be "born again."

What did Jesus mean by being "born again"? He explains what a change this would make in one's capability, saying, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8) With this explanation before him, Nicodemus asked the question which almost all would be inclined to ask, "How can these things be?" -- vs. 9

Jesus climaxed his reply to this question saying, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" (vs. 12) The "earthly things" which Jesus had testified to the Pharisees and to the people of Israel generally were evidently the lessons he had taught by means of his miracles. He healed the sick, which was an illustration of that great program of human restoration to health and life under the administration of his coming kingdom, described by Peter as "times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." -- Acts 3:19-21

Nicodemus seemed to have been convinced by these miracles that Jesus was a man sent by God; but apparently he had not grasped the full import of what they meant -- that they were a manifestation of the coming glory of the messianic kingdom, as that glory would be demonstrated in the work of restitution. (John 2:11) Since he had not comprehended, nor believed, that Jesus was the Messiah, the glorious One of promise who would restore all the willing and obedient of mankind to health and life as human beings, how could he understand and believe if Jesus told him about the heavenly phase of that great kingdom, under the rulership of which "all flesh" would yet see the glory of God?

"How shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" While this was not a direct answer to the question, "How can these things be?" it does throw light on the Master's assertion that those who are born of the Spirit can come and go as the wind without being observed by human eyes, and it was this that puzzled Nicodemus. It was a partial explanation, because it tells us that being born again is related to "heavenly things," that it is something beyond human experience and understanding.

The Heavenly Calling

In Hebrews 3:1 the Apostle Paul, addressing those who have the hope of being in the kingdom with Jesus, writes: "Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus." Note the expression "heavenly calling." The Apostle Peter wrote, "Unto us ... are given exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature." (2 Peter 1:4) Paul wrote to the Colossians: "if ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." -- Colossians 3:1,2

All these scriptures combine to tell us that there is something better, something higher, than earthly life in store for the faithful disciples of Christ. Besides, Jesus couples this heavenly hope with the idea of joint rulership with him, in the promise, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." -- Revelation 3:21

But, as Jesus explained to Nicodemus, in order to "see" the kingdom, in the sense of sharing in its rulership, it is necessary to be born again, that is, born of the Spirit. Jesus explained that "that which is born of the flesh is flesh," and Paul declares that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Corinthians 15:50) This was true in the case of Jesus, and it is also true of his footstep followers, the church.

Jesus will not reign in his kingdom as a human. He said to his disciples, "My flesh ... I will give for the life of the world." (John 6:51) Paul, addressing some who had been acquainted with Jesus in the flesh, wrote, "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more." -- 2 Corinthians 5:16

The Apostle Peter tells us that Jesus was "put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." (1 Peter 3:18) This clearly indicates that after his resurrection he was no longer "flesh." In Hebrews 5:7, the Apostle Paul, in connection with Jesus' earthly ministry, speaks of "the days of his flesh." Obviously, he did not believe that Jesus was still in the flesh.

Another very revealing comment on this viewpoint is given to us by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:44,45. Here he is telling us about those who in the resurrection will no longer be flesh and

blood and says: "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam [which is Christ] was made a quickening spirit."

All these scriptures affirm the tremendous change which occurred in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the last one quoted ties in beautifully with Jesus' statement to Nicodemus concerning those who are born of the Spirit, for he said, "That which is born of the Spirit IS spirit." In the resurrection, as Paul explains, Jesus was made a spirit, a "quickenning spirit"; so it seems evident that it was in his resurrection that he experienced Spirit birth, or was born of the Spirit.

The Scriptures reveal that God possesses the highest form of spirit nature, the divine nature. He is immortal, that is, possessing inherent, everlasting, indestructible life. (1 Timothy 1:17) Apparently the Holy Spirit revealed to Jesus that at his resurrection he, too, would be given immortality. (John 5:26) And it is the blessed hope of the faithful footstep followers of Jesus likewise to gain that wonderful prize of immortality. Addressing these, Paul wrote, "This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." -- 1 Corinthians 15:53; 2 Timothy 1:10; 2 Peter 1:4; Romans 2:7

Before the Due Time

It is impossible for the human mind to comprehend the lories of the spirit realm or know what a spirit body is like. The nearest any human has come to actually seeing Christ as a glorious divine being was when Saul of Tarsus met him on the road to Damascus, and the momentary glimpse of such heavenly glory -- shining "above the brightness of the sun" -- blinded Saul. (Acts 26:13) Later he wrote about this experience, saying that he was one who had seen Jesus after his resurrection. But Paul's sight of the Master was different from that experienced by the other apostles, for he said that he saw him "as ... one born out of due time." -- 1 Corinthians 15:8

Evidently Paul understood clearly the import of the lesson Jesus outlined to Nicodemus concerning the necessity of being born again in order to enter into the kingdom of God. In many places in his writings he speaks of the Christian's hope of living and reigning with Christ. In that famous treatise on the resurrection in which he speaks of seeing Jesus as one "born out of due time," he emphasizes that the true followers of the Master are, in the resurrection, exalted to immortality with him, that their resurrection puts them in the same position of glory as that occupied by the Master, and that they, too, are to be "quickenning spirits."

Obviously, then, the apostle understood that the Spirit birth of Christians would be the same as it was with Jesus, occurring when they were raised from the dead and made like him. But as Paul explained, on the Damascus road he had seen Jesus as one "born out of due time," that is, he had momentarily seen Jesus as all his followers will see him when, in the resurrection, they are made like him.

This will be in the "first resurrection," at the close of the Gospel Age. It is in "that day" mentioned by Paul when he wrote to Timothy, saying, "There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but to all them ... that love his appearing." -- 2 Timothy 4:8

As the Wind

Nicodemus was unable to comprehend the idea of being "born again," even though Jesus used the wind as an illustration to help make it plain. Nor does the illustration reveal fully to our finite

minds just what a spirit being is like, although it does help us realize some of the capabilities of those who are "born of the Spirit." The wind is both powerful and invisible. It moves about, Jesus said, and while we may hear the sound or see the effects, we cannot tell whence it comes, or whither it goes -- "So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

As we have seen, Jesus experienced Spirit birth in his resurrection, and, in keeping with the illustration which he had used, he did come and go as the wind, and even his most intimate disciples could not discern whence he came, or whither he went. On one occasion he entered into the room where they were eating, when the door was locked.

On another occasion when Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, they were "terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit." But Jesus said to them, "A spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." (Luke 24:37,39) This does not contradict the scriptural fact that Jesus, after his resurrection, was a glorious spirit being, for the disciples did not actually see him "as he is"; they did not see him as "one born out of due time," as Saul had the privilege of seeing him.

John gives us the clue as to just what occurred on the occasions of the Master's appearances to his disciples after he was raised from the dead. After relating the circumstances of one of these appearances, John said, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book." (John 20:30) Note that John speaks of these appearances as "signs," which means that they were not realities.

The disciples did not see Jesus as he really is, that Is, as a spirit being. Let us remember that it was John who later wrote: "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he [Christ] shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." If in the case of these appearances John had seen Jesus as "he is," he would have known what we would be like when in the resurrection we are made like him.

Yes, they were "signs," in which Jesus appeared as a human; for this was the only way, under the circumstances, they could comprehend the fact of his resurrection. Even so, he did not always look the same. Mary saw him as a gardener. He walked and talked with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, and they thought him to be a "Stranger in Israel." So the fleshly body in which he appeared was different on each occasion, proving that in no instance was it his real body but merely one in which he manifested his presence to them, as angels had appeared to servants of God on various occasions in the past.

Jesus was now "born again," not to be known henceforth "after the flesh." He was now a glorious, a divine, spirit being, a "quickening spirit," exalted to the right hand of the throne of God and qualified to rule in his coming kingdom and, through his rulership, to provide everlasting human life to all who believe and obey. And it is the hope of every Christian to be exalted with him and, through spirit birth, also to be a "partaker of the divine nature." Paul speaks of this as "Christ in you, the hope of glory." -- 2 Peter 1:4; Colossians 1:27

"Begotten" Now -- "Born" in the Resurrection

The Apostle John is the only New Testament writer who recorded Jesus' lesson on the subject of being born of the Spirit, and in his own writings he makes liberal use of this symbolism in association with the work of grace in the Christian's heart which ultimately leads to glory, honor, and immortality in the kingdom of heaven -- that high position of trust and authority in the divine plan which cannot be inherited by "flesh and blood."

John writes, for example, "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." (1 John 5:18) In this text the words "born" and "begotten" are both used, and strangely enough, they are a translation of the same Greek word, **gennao**. Its primary meaning is to beget -- an act of the father -- but by extension it also signifies birth, as from the mother. It is this ultimate application of **gennao** that was made by Jesus when he said to Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again."

It is this same Greek word (**gennao**) that is used by Matthew in recording the lineage of Jesus, beginning with Abraham: "Abraham beget [**gennao**] Isaac; and Isaac beget [**gennao**] Jacob; and Jacob beget [**gennao**] Judas and his brethren." (Matthew 1:2) This account continues to the 16th verse of the chapter, and in it Matthew uses the word **gennao** 39 times and applies it, not to the birth of the ones mentioned, but to their begetting, the original beginning of their life.

However, this same Greek word also appears in the New Testament over and over again in describing natural birth. So it is apparent that, in our study of its use as a symbolism of the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians, it is necessary to determine from the thought of the text in which it appears whether the reference is to the beginning of a new life or to the complete fruition of that life in the resurrection.

Yes, let it be emphasized that the Holy Spirit does enter the life of the accepted believer. This occurs at the time he yields his will in full consecration to do the will of God. From that time onward the Spirit continues to energize his life and to promote growth of the Christian graces of peace, joy, longsuffering, brotherly kindness, and love. (Galatians 5:22; 2 Peter 1:5-7) Paul gives us a beautiful description of this work of the Spirit, saying, "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind; ... put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." (Ephesians 4:23,24) And again, "The fruit of the Spirit [Greek, light] is in all goodness and righteousness and truth." -- Ephesians 5:9

There can be no disagreement among Christians concerning the fact that the Holy Spirit does influence their lives and concerning the necessity of their being emptied of self-will in order that they might be "filled with the Spirit." (Ephesians 5:18) However, for clarity of expression and in order to appreciate more fully the marvelous harmony of the full scriptural testimony on the subject, we think it is better to refer to the entrance of the Holy Spirit into the life of the Christian at the time he becomes a consecrated and accepted believer as the "begetting" of the Spirit, not the full birth, for this takes place later, in the "first resurrection."

And how well this scriptural use of the symbolism takes into consideration the full thought which is illustrated! All of God's illustrations are apt and revealing. In the natural realm, there must always be first the begetting, then a period of growth, or gestation, and finally birth. To suppose that it is otherwise in the case of our becoming "new creatures" in Christ Jesus would be a distortion of the illustration used in the Scriptures.

This particular symbol of what the Holy Spirit accomplishes in our lives is not used many times in the New Testament, but let us note these few instances in order to make sure of the exact thought involved. We have already noted 1 John 5:18 in which the words "born" and "begotten" are both used to translate the Greek word **gennao**. Following are the other uses of the word by the Apostle John, as he relates it to Christian experience:

1 John 5:1 -- "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born [**gennao**] of God: and everyone that loveth him that begat [**gennao**] loveth him also that is begotten [**gennao**] of him."

Obviously, the idea of being begotten is clearly the thought of the apostle in his first use of **gennaio** in this text, even as it is in the other two uses.

1 John 2:29 -- "If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born [**gennaio**] of Him." Begotten is clearly the thought here, rather than born.

1 John 3:9 -- "Whosoever is born [**gennaio**] of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born [**gennaio**] of God." The key to the correct translation here is the expression, his "seed" remaineth in him. This clearly refers to the begotten state, for after birth there is no longer the thought of a seed. But there the Spirit of God, like the seed in natural begetting, is spoken of by John as entering the mind and heart of a Christian and becoming the moving principle of his life.

1 John 4:7 -- "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born [**gennaio**] of God, and knoweth God." There is no reason at all why **gennaio** should not here be translated begotten. To do so, in fact, makes the text more meaningful and practical.

1 John 5:4 -- "For whatsoever is born [**gennaio**] of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Here again, begotten would be more suitable as a translation of **gennaio**.

We have now cited every instance in which John employs the symbolisms of begetting and birth in association with Christian experience. No sermon by Peter or Paul or by any of the disciples that is recorded in the Book of The Acts makes mention either of being begotten of the Spirit or born of the Spirit. The Apostle Paul, except where he speaks of seeing Jesus as one "born out of due time," makes no mention of it in any of his writings. This does not mean, however, that Paul did not rejoice in the "heavenly things" which Jesus spoke of as being "born" of the Spirit, for he used other language to describe the same glorious hope.

Peter uses the illustration twice in his first epistle. In verse 3 of the opening chapter he writes, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Here the same Greek word **gennaio** is used, but with a prefix which adds the thought of "again." How apparent it is that the word "born" would not fit the meaning of this text.

In verse 23 of this chapter, using the same Greek word, Peter says, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." Obviously, a Christian is not born by the Word, but he is, nevertheless, begotten; that is, the exceeding great and precious promises of the Word beget in him the hope of a new life, even of immortality, the divine nature. -- 2 Peter 1:4

There is only one more direct use of this symbolism by the inspired writers of the New Testament, and that is by James. Using a slightly different Greek word, but one with a very similar meaning, he says, speaking of God, "Of his own will begat he us with the Word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." -- James 1:16

It is interesting to note that both Peter and James refer to the new life which begins in the Christian as being the result of the "Word of truth." This is quite in keeping with Jesus' promise that he would send the Holy Spirit upon his disciples, for in making this promise he spoke of the Holy Spirit as being the "Spirit of truth."

The Firstfruits

In the text just quoted (James 1:18) the statement is made that we -- that is, Christians -- are a "firstfruits" unto God of his creatures. This is an allusion to the custom of ancient Israel, in keeping with the divine requirements, to bring the firstfruits of their crops to God for an offering. Using this as an illustration, James speaks of the church as a "kind of firstfruits."

The Apostle Paul gives us a similar thought when he speaks of the "church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven." (Hebrews 12:23) James emphasizes that these "firstfruits" are those who have been begotten to a new life by the Word of truth, and Paul says that this firstborn class have a heavenly hope -- their names "are written in heaven." Both these writers, while they employ different language, thus emphasize that the ones they refer to are of the kingdom of heaven class, that they are begotten now by the Spirit and In the resurrection will be born Into the heavenly realm to live and reign with Christ.

But these are only the "firstborn," the "firstfruits," obtained by God through the redemptive work accomplished by his beloved Son. Together with Jesus, they are to be the spiritual rulers in the kingdom of Christ; but that kingdom is for the purpose of extending the blessings of redemption to all the families of the earth, for Christ and the church together will be the "seed" of Abraham through which these blessings were promised. -- Genesis 12:1-3; Galatians 3:16,21-29

"Whosoever Believeth"

After explaining to Nicodemus that to be in the kingdom of God one would need to be "born again," Jesus then expresses the wider purpose of God, centered in him, as it relates to all mankind. In this he says nothing about being born again, but only the necessity of believing. Outlining the more general opportunity for salvation which eventually will be offered to all, he says, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." -- John 3:14,15

In John 12:32 Jesus is quoted as saying, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Here is a very revealing statement. On another occasion Jesus explained that no one could come to him unless he was drawn by the Father. (John 6:44) But in the text just quoted he speaks of himself as the One who will do the drawing and that it will not be in any limited manner, for all shall then be "drawn."

In this, we have brought to our attention the work of two ages. During the present Gospel Age the Heavenly Father does the drawing of those whom he invites to the "high" or "heavenly calling," those who must suffer and die with Jesus if they would live and reign with him. But with this "little flock" class complete -- the class to whom it is the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom (Luke 12:32) -- the work of another age will begin. Then there will be another drawing, the one in which Jesus will "draw all men" and give them an opportunity to believe on him and receive life.

"He Shall See His Seed"

Everywhere throughout the New Testament, Spirit-begotten believers in this age are referred to as the children, or sons, of God, never as the children of Jesus. Jesus is our Master and elder brother, and he is not ashamed to call us his brethren, but we are not his children. (Hebrews 2:11,12,17) In contrast to this, and in one of the most wonderful prophecies in the Old Testament pertaining to

the sacrificial work of Christ and its purpose, "his seed" is mentioned and the statement made that "he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." -- Isaiah 53:10,11

Here again, then, a fruitage of Christ's redemptive work, in addition to the "firstfruits" of this age, is brought to our attention. And how obvious it is that this is still a future work! How could the loving heart of Jesus be "satisfied" with the results thus far obtained from his suffering and death -- the "travail of his soul"?

It is not necessary to labor this point, for all know that until now comparatively few of earth's millions have had a fair opportunity to know about the redemptive work of Christ in a sufficiently intelligent manner to enable them to make a choice. Millions of heathen have died in total ignorance of him. To other millions the Gospel of Christ has been so terribly distorted by the blinding errors of Satan that they have never really known of divine love, nor of the provision of life which has been made for them through the death and resurrection of the Redeemer.

But Jesus said that he would "draw all men." While this has not yet been accomplished, the Bible clearly reveals that there is another age in the divine plan, when the Master's promise will be fulfilled. That will be the thousand-year age during which Christ and his church shall reign together for the blessing of the people. It will be during that age that all will be drawn by Christ and given a full opportunity to believe.

The Rich Young Ruler

Jesus' conversation with the rich young ruler and his subsequent promise to his disciples also reveal the work of two ages. This young ruler asked how he might obtain eternal life -- not in heaven, for, being a Jew to whom God had made earthly promises, like Nicodemus, he was not acquainted with "heavenly things." On conditions of obedience to the Law given at Sinai, the Israelites had been promised life, that is, life on the earth, as humans. Jesus reminded this young ruler of the Law, and he said he had kept the commandments since his youth.

He had probably done his best, but being imperfect he was unable to keep God's Law inviolate, so he had not obtained eternal life. Jesus then said to him that he should sell his possessions, give the proceeds to the poor, and then take up his cross and follow him. Jesus promised that if he would do this he would have "treasure in heaven." (Matthew 19:21) When the young man heard this "he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions." Then Jesus explained that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of the needle (a reference to the needle's eye gate in the walls of Jerusalem) than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven -- that is, to become one of the associate rulers in that kingdom.

The disciples were perplexed by this interview. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah and that the divine purpose centered in him was to save and bless the whole world. Perhaps they had already heard him say that he would "draw all men" unto himself. But now an apparently sincere inquirer had come to him seeking life yet had been turned away because the conditions had been made so difficult. Certainly Jesus did not say to this young man, "Only believe." No, in addition to this, he was invited to use his earthly possessions for the good of others and to follow in the Master's footsteps, even unto death.

Also, what did Jesus mean by "treasure in heaven"? Even the disciples knew little or nothing about this, for they understood that the blessings which the Messiah, the Christ, would give to the people were of an earthly character, the "restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the

mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:19-21) So the disciples went to Jesus with their perplexities, and asked, "Who then can be saved?" -- Matthew 19:25

It is not difficult to see why they asked this question, for they expected that the work of the Messiah would have a much wider appeal than was indicated by this encounter with the rich young ruler. They had thought, and correctly so, that the Messiah would "bless all the families of the earth."

To begin with, Jesus did not give them a direct answer to their question. He simply said, "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26) The disciples were viewing the problem purely from the human standpoint, even as so many do today, and to them it seemed that perhaps not so many would be saved through Christ as they had once supposed or had hoped.

But still they were not satisfied; for, having become the disciples of Jesus, they had a stake in the divine arrangements and felt that they were entitled to a further explanation. So again they went to Jesus. Peter spoke for them, and said, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" (Matthew 19:27) Peter was explaining, in other words, that they had complied with the conditions Jesus had imposed upon the rich young ruler, that they had left all and had become his followers. Now the question was, what could they expect in the way of compensation, or reward?

Evidently they were concerned over Jesus' statement to the young ruler -- "Thou shalt have treasure in heaven." This was a new, and perhaps strange, thought to them. They did not yet fully grasp the divine purpose as centered in Christ. So they were perplexed, first as to the number who would be saved, and also over just what salvation implied.

The "Regeneration"

With this question put squarely to him, Jesus no longer evaded the point but gave them an answer which at once solved both difficulties they had in mind; for it showed clearly just what their reward as his disciples would be, and also that his reference to "treasure in heaven" did not mean that he was unmindful of the wider scope of blessings which would be administered to all mankind at a future time and that these would be blessings of life on the earth. He said, "Ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." -- Matt, 19:28

Let us look for a moment at that word "regeneration." Here is something different from being "born again." Adam was the progenitor of the human race, but all his descendants have been born in sin and shapen in Iniquity and have been under condemnation to death. (Psalm 51:5) But divine love has made provision to give life to all who accept it through Christ. It is for this reason that Jesus is referred to by Paul as being the "last Adam," for he will "regenerate" the race which lost life through the disobedience of the "first Adam." -- 1 Corinthians 15:45

And it should be noted also that Jesus associates the "regeneration" with the future work of judgment and explains that his disciples will at that time be with him in positions of authority, on "thrones," and doing a work of judging -- "judging the twelve tribes of Israel." A similar thought is presented to us by the Master in Matthew 25:31-34. Here he explains that when he "shall come in his glory" the "holy angels" will be "with him."

This statement is the introduction of the judgment day Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. In three ways this parable confirms Jesus' remarks concerning the "regeneration." (1) It shows that the time referred to is when he "shall come in his glory," (2) that his holy angels (Greek, messengers) -- his "born again" disciples -- will be with him to participate in the work of judgment, and (3) that the reward administered to the people during that future judgment day will be "regeneration," or restoration, of human life; for to the sheep class of the parable the statement is made, "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." -- vs. 34

This is the kingdom, or dominion, described in Genesis 1:28 -- let them "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." There was nothing heavenly in this dominion. It was an earthly kingdom, managed by human beings. It was lost because of sin but will be restored in the future judgment day to all who during that time manifest the true sheeplike qualities of humility and obedience to the laws of Christ's government which will then be in force.

In Jesus' reference to the time of "regeneration," he said his footstep followers would then be enthroned and would judge the "twelve tribes of Israel." In Matthew 25:31-34, where he also describes the judgment day work, he broadens the scope of authority to include "all nations." Both statements are true. In the divine arrangement, all God's blessings are first offered to the Jews. It was so when Jesus came at his first advent, and it will be thus in the beginning of his thousand-year kingdom and the judgment day. -- Romans 1:16; 2:10

Mercy for Unbelievers

Jesus said concerning the present age: "if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." -- John 12:47,48

In John 3:17,18 Jesus explains that those who do not now believe on him are not specially condemned, for they are already under condemnation. That condemnation will remain until the "last day," when again, as Jesus explained, his word will be heard by them, and upon the basis of their acceptance or rejection, they will be judged worthy or unworthy of everlasting life in that "kingdom prepared ... from the foundation of the world."

It is not necessary for us to decide who, in the Lord's sight, have been given a full opportunity in this life to believe. But let us remember that the Scriptures make it plain that during the kingdom period Jesus will "draw all man" unto himself and that no son or daughter of Adam will be lost in death eternally who has not first of all had a full opportunity, based upon accurate knowledge, to accept the gift of God and life. -- John 3:16

Paul writes that it is God's will that all shall be "saved and come to a knowledge of the truth." It is inopportune to ask a person, "Are you saved?" until he first knows what salvation is and the basis upon which he may obtain it. Paul says that all shall be "saved" in order that they might learn these great truths. Here, then, is a salvation which precedes knowledge, and the reference is to an awakening from the sleep of death, a salvation from adamic death. This is guaranteed to all, and we are also assured that the great truth of Christ's redemptive work, called by Paul the "ransom for all," is to be "testified in due time." -- 1 Timothy 2:3-6

Summing up, then, let us affirm the fact that in the kingdom there will be "born again" Christians -- 144,000 of them -- who as divine beings will reign with Christ for a thousand years. These,

together with Jesus, will be sons of God, Jehovah being their Heavenly Father. They will be "a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." -- James 1:18

And let us rejoice, also, that as subjects of that kingdom, all men will be drawn to Christ and given an opportunity to believe and be regenerated to life as human beings, thus becoming the children of Christ, his "seed," the after fruitage of his travail on Calvary.