

# THE HERALD OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

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## Israel Today

(Is the present Middle East conflict related to Bible prophecy?)

**Starting on this page is the first half of a timely article related to current events. The second installment will appear in the next issue. A new booklet ISRAEL and the Middle East -- containing the entire article is available to Herald readers.**

*"And the Lord shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and heal it: and they shall return even to the Lord, and he shall be intreated of them, and shall heal them. In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance." - Isaiah 19:22-25.*

TWENTY years ago (in the December 1946 Herald) we discussed this scripture, endeavoring, with such light as we then possessed, to furnish an answer to the question: "*When and how will this prophecy of Isaiah be fulfilled?*" At that time we observed:

"As a matter of fact the passage on which our question is based is really only a part of a section of the Book of Isaiah devoted to predictions as to the final end of all the nations. Commencing with chapter 13, the Prophet mentions, first, the 'burden' or 'doom' of Babylon (in which is included Assyria, these two kingdoms being viewed as successive stages of one and the same power). Then follow the 'dooms' predicted for Philistia, Moab, and Damascus, leading up to the doom of Egypt, which is portrayed in the chapter to which our question relates. The section culminates in chapters 24-27 in a general summary of judgment, in which the overthrow of the whole earth is predicted and the glory of the ransomed both of Israel and of the nations in the holy mountain of the Lord. To quote from the last verse of this section:

'And it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown [God's providences in this work will be as loud and clear as a trumpet voice], and they shall come which were ready to

perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem' (Isa. 27:13)."

Again, in our 1946 article, we expressed the thought that: "Aside from such partial fulfillments as may or may not have occurred its complete fulfillment is still future. *When*, in that future, shall it be? Precisely when, we cannot say. It will be 'in that day' -- the day long promised -- the thousand-year day of Christ. It will be early in that day. *How* will the prophecy be fulfilled? We are not sure. *We expect to have a part in both the smiting and the healing of Egypt*, our expectation being based on the promises of our Lord. To the Christian Church the promise of our glorified Lord is: 'To him that, overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne'-'And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father' (Rev. 3:21; 2:26, 27; Psa. 2:8-12). Yes, the nations will be broken to shivers, but not the individuals composing those nations. For, when the iron rod, in his hands and ours (exercised, not from this side but from the other side of the veil), has accomplished the work of destruction, then will the hands that smote be turned to heal, and the people, under his guidance and ours, will return to the Lord and he shall heal them, giving them beauty for ashes, [the beauty of the Resurrection for the ashes of death], the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness (Jer. 32:22, 23; Hos. 6:1; 14:4; Isa. 2:3)."

Those were our views twenty years ago. Less than two years later, on May 14, 1948, the British mandate was terminated and the Jewish State of Israel was proclaimed. Since then that nation, both its people and its land, has been making the headlines. Scarcely a day goes by without the newspapers publishing a report of some new development concerning them.

What is the Divine Plan for Israel? And why should it interest both Jews and Gentiles? I answer: The Divine Plan for Israel is an important feature of the Divine Plan for all mankind. Israel is the nation it has pleased God to choose. They are his chosen people -- chosen, not for favoritism, but for service - to be the channel through whom his blessings are yet destined to flow to all mankind.

### **GOD'S SELECTION OF ABRAHAM**

To get the record straight we must refer back to the first Book of the Bible. There, in Genesis 12:1-3, we read of the promise made by God to Abraham, whose name at that time was Abram. Listen:

"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee [and in thy seed - Gen. 22:18] shall all families of the earth be blessed."

There is no question but that God has fulfilled a part of this promise, namely, to make the name of Abram great. I venture to say that most people who read these lines could tell us more about Abraham than about their own great-grandfathers!

This selection of Abram did not go to his head, as so wonderful a promise might easily have done, but, lest it should have that effect on his offspring, the children of Israel were expressly informed that it was not because they were a great nation, but for the exact opposite reason that they were chosen. Hear the words of Moses on this point, found in Deuteronomy 7:7:

"The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people."

Very early in our investigation we discover that, supplementing the promise that Abraham and his seed should be God's channel of blessing to mankind, God made a specific promise that Abraham and his seed should inherit land. No sooner has he obeyed God's command and journeyed to the land to which God guided him than he is promised, by God himself:

"Unto thy seed will I give this land" (Gen. 12:7).

In later chapters this promise is amplified:

"Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed [for 100 years? No!] *for ever* . . . .

"Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.... and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an *everlasting possession*" (Gen. 13:14-17; 17:8). How has the promise progressed, is it asked? First, we note that it was not realized by Abraham personally.

However, it was confirmed to his son, Isaac (Gen. 26:23, 24); and again, to Isaac's son, Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel (Gen. 28:10-15; 32:28; 35:9-15). Thereafter the promise passed to Israel's twelve sons and to the nation of which they were the tribal heads.

After their experience with slavery in Egypt, and deliverance therefrom at the hand of Moses, the children of Israel were led into Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. Here in this, the land of promise, they dwelt for centuries, and experienced the special favor of God. With them he dealt as he dealt with no other nation (Psa. 147:19, 20). According to his promises, detailed in Leviticus 26, he blessed them in basket and in store when they sought to walk in his counsels. He also graciously chastised them when they deflected from the paths of truth and righteousness, so that their national conscience might be kept tender. While they walked in his statutes, he sent them rain in due season and blessed their crops. Their enemies fled from them.

On the other hand, when as a nation they departed from the ways of God, exactly the reverse conditions were permitted to come upon them. Rain was withheld. Crops failed. They were defeated in battle. Those not slain were taken captive. And then, since this treatment proved unavailing, the "seven times" of punishment predicted in Leviticus 26 began to take effect.

## **GENTILE TIMES**

While it may be questioned if, in this Leviticus chapter, the expression "seven times" has any chronological significance, history has shown that such was, indeed, to be the case. Israel was to become subject to Gentile rule for a long period of time. The length of that period was to be the same as that covered by two of the prophecies contained in the Book of Daniel. One of these was that of the great image seen in his dream by the Babylonian monarch, Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2); the other was that of Daniel's own vision of four wild beasts (Dan. 7). The meaning of these two prophecies is not left to surmise. Each is interpreted in the Scriptures themselves to represent four Gentile World Empires: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, which in one form or another have held sway over the earth from that day to this.

A remarkable scale for measuring the duration of the periods indicated in the two prophecies has been furnished in the Old Testament. It is known as the year-day scale; that is, a day in prophecy stands as a symbol for a year. A year, sometimes called a time, and reckoned as containing 360 days, stands as a symbol for 360 years. This scale is subject to minor modifications, depending on whether lunar, calendar, or solar years are intended.

Such minor modifications are, of course, important, and must not be overlooked when students are seeking precise computations. However, a detailed consideration of them would be going beyond the scope of our discussion here. Suffice it to say now that, using the year-day scale, "Gentile Times" are seen to extend over the long period of 2,520 years.

That the year-day scale is a God given key becomes abundantly evident when we find that by its use not only the prophecy of Nebuchadnezzar's image and that of Daniel's four beasts but all other related time prophecies are readily unlocked.

Speaking in broad, general terms, we may say that, so far as Israel is concerned, the characteristics of this long period are three in number:

1. Jewish loss of dominion and independence, and their subjugation to and suffering under Gentile conquerors.
2. Dispersion of the Jews.
3. Desolation of their land.

The period of Gentile Times would affect three factors in Israel's national life:

1. The land.
2. The throne.
3. The temple.

Insofar as the land was concerned, this period would extend from the desolation of their land by Babylon to the restoration of the Jews back to Palestine.

Insofar as their throne was concerned, it would extend from the fall of Zedekiah, their last king, to the restoration of the throne under Shiloh.

And, insofar as the temple was concerned, it would extend from the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem to the reestablishment of the worship of God on Mount Zion.

Stated very concisely, we may say that immediately prior to the commencement of Gentile Times the Jewish monarchy was recognized by God, and that immediately after the close of that long period God's Kingdom is scheduled to be established on earth.

### **ISRAEL'S DOUBLE**

Another very striking set of prophecies concerning Israel's experiences ought not to go unnoticed, even in so brief a discussion as this. I refer to what is three times designated in the Scriptures as Israel's double.

From the time she became a nation at Jacob's death, Israel had enjoyed God's favor continuously, until for reasons all too apparent his favor towards her was, of necessity, withdrawn. Whatever the length of this period of favor, for an equal period of time would she be required to experience his disfavor. Only when this period of disfavor had run its course would he be ready to take her back into favor again. Let us hear the testimony of three Prophets on this matter.

1. Jeremiah 16:14-15 says that the days will come when God will accomplish such a wonderful deliverance for Israel that his former miraculous deliverance of her from Egyptian bondage at the hand of Moses would fade into significance. Then in verse 18 he adds this further statement:

"First I will recompense their iniquity and their sin *double*."

2. Zechariah 9:9-12, predicts the coming of Messiah and then, speaking for Jehovah, addresses Israel in these remarkable words:

"Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even to day do I declare that I will render *double unto thee*."

Here the word "double" is translated from the Hebrew word *mishneh* as in the prophecy by Jeremiah. It signifies a second portion, a repetition.

3. A third Prophet, Isaiah, testifies concerning the matter in these words:

"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her appointed time is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand *double* for all her sins" (Isa. 40:1, 2 - margin). Here the Hebrew word translated "double" is *kephel*, which signifies double, in the sense of a thing having been folded in the middle.

In connection with these three prophecies it has been well observed:

"The student of prophecy should notice that the Prophets vary in their standpoints of utterance, sometimes speaking of future things as future, and sometimes assuming a position future, and speaking from that assumed standpoint."

No better illustration of this principle of different prophetic standpoints can be given than the three prophecies related to Israel's double already noticed. Jeremiah foretold that the days *would come* when God would scatter them among all nations, and that when they had received double he would gather them again by a more mighty display of power on their behalf than when they came out of Egyptian bondage. Zechariah speaks as though living at the time of Messiah's offering himself to Israel as their king, and tells us that there, *in that very day*, their double began to count. Isaiah takes his position still further down the stream of time and, as though living at the very end of the period, announces the message of comfort to Israel that her double *is completed*.

That these three Prophets lived hundreds of years apart and wrote things quite contrary to Israel's expectations only serves to increase the force and value of their utterances.

One other Scripture bears directly on this phase of our subject. It is found in Psalm 102, verse 13, and reads:

"Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come."

Evidently the same spirit which operated in Jeremiah, Zechariah, and Isaiah inspired the words of the Psalmist. The time to favor Zion, "yea, the set time, is come."

When is that to be? Is there any way of ascertaining this information? To this question I reply: Yes, I think there is. With no desire to speak dogmatically, I am, nevertheless, convinced that we may know today, if not precisely, certainly within a very close approximation, our position on the stream of time.

I could not begin to discuss adequately that phase of our subject here. I will, however, make this general statement. As in the case of "Gentile Times" so also in reference to Israel's double of disfavor, these great time prophecies are not to be measured from any one particular year to another, but from one era to another. This is so, because the rise and fall of nations must, in the very nature of the case, cover more or less extended eras. The fall of Israel and Judah covered a period of 160 years, culminating in the overthrow of their last king, Zedekiah. It should not surprise us then if we find their restoration extending over a number of years, or decades, or even longer periods. What we should be on the lookout for is not a thunderbolt from the skies but a *noticeable change* in the *trend* of events. We should be watching and intelligently reading the signs of the times and noting how they are fitting in with the prophetic forecasts. (*To be concluded in our next issue.*)

- P. L. Read

## Notice of Annual Meeting

As announced in our March-April issue, the Annual Meeting of the Pastoral Bible Institute, Inc., is scheduled to be held on Saturday, September 23, at 10:00 a.m., in the Central Y.M.C.A., 1315 Pacific Avenue, Atlantic City, New Jersey.

While only members of the Institute may vote (in person or by proxy), all those who love our Lord Jesus and his appearing are welcome to attend.

The agenda will include a report by the chairman, reviewing the activities of the Institute for the preceding period. Following his report, the election of directors for the coming year will take place. Opportunity will also be given for the consideration of such other matters as may properly come before the meeting.

The seven brethren now serving as directors are candidates for reelection. Brothers Casimer Lanowick and Edward Zielinski have also been nominated.

## A Pilgrim's Reverie

"So he bringeth them unto their desired haven." - Psalm 107:30.

WHAT would life be without its bridges and its fords, its resting spots where we recline beneath the blossoming boughs and beside the still waters of quietness? What would it be without its royal summits where we gather to our hearts visions of the Home Land that lies beyond the tiresome journey, its halls of friendship where hand grips hand with the earnestness of true love, and heart becomes knit to heart in confidence and trust? And last, but not least, how important its starting places, where having taken a retrospective glance along the years and braced our hearts with new determination, we once more turn our feet toward the road, buoyed up with an optimism which whispers to us that bigger, better, nobler days lie ahead of us, and that some day we shall reach the Palace of Blessedness, the place of life's consummation, which lies beyond the arduous country of endeavor. How often the mind travels back - away back - to air castles built in sunny childhood and buoyant youth, for "The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts." Old scenes and memories, how they throng upon us and will not be lightly thrust aside. And through the varying way how well we know that a great hand has been guiding our steps, leading us into the light of an unfading and wondrous hope.

"So long Thy power hath blessed me, sure it still  
Will lead me on  
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till  
The night is gone."

Ah, yes, for there shall be no night there, and the end shall pay us a thousand fold for all the toil and struggle of the way. Thus we cogitate, and in these meditations which, effulgent in silvery light, brighten the night like stars, we find the quiescence and the joy of faith, affording comfort through every day and keeping alive that hope which is as an "anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil. What a forepicture of the Ages of Glory when the cold blasts of selfishness and pride shall be shut out from human hearts, and the purest goodwill and love shall glow and fill the world with the light of God.

And as the years have passed, the advance of time has meant much to some of us. We are richer in experience because of the days and hours God has spread before us. We think our love has a farther range, a fuller sweep, a stronger and truer grip on "Love divine all loves excelling." Our sympathies have broadened, our faith has deepened, our hope bears iridescent hues of a brighter glow. Our craving for righteousness is more intense. We have moved farther up the stream of truth; we are less from its source than we were years ago. Nor have we forgotten to ask, What is truth? If formerly we held up a gem and said, "This is truth," we have learned to qualify the statement. No more we affirm, "The gem that I hold is all the truth, but the gem that you hold is not truth." Rather we now say, "My gem has truth." So the tree has water, but is not water, and the earth has gold, but is not gold, and the diamond has beauty, but is not beauty. Even so my pearl has truth, but truth has not stopped with my pearl. There are other pearls, rare and wondrous pearls. Some day we'll know more about them, for now "we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away."

And so we have no desire to be severe with the other finders of gems, for the ocean of truth is great, and God is not severe with us. He is glad we have our gem, because when we gaze upon its



liquid-like fairness, we catch glimpses of his face, and he smiles upon us from out the gem and we are glad because of the smile.

And as we think of these things, our hearts warm more to the journey before us, more to our fellow-travelers, more to the possibility of complete victory, more to the goal. Love has taken his royal seat. We see him crowned. He is there to stay, yea, to subdue all things unto himself. His accents are very gentle as he speaks to us, and his countenance is lit with "the light that never was on sea or land." He stretches out his arms and blessing drops from his hands upon the world of men.

Welcome, love. Your kingship of our minds is monarchy exalted and sublime. Ever wield your scepter o'er us. In every moment of the day we need you, we need your power, your peace, your assuagement of life's woes.

- W. Sargent

## My Song

So long have I dreamed of the beautiful goal,  
That a touch of its sunshine has lit up my soul;  
Its chords are all thrilling, with music divine,  
And its song is forever, "Dear Jesus is mine!"

The bird, when the tempest is raging with power,  
Flies in haste to her snug little nest in the bower;  
Thus safe 'neath his wing I can sweetly recline,  
And sing on forever, "Dear Jesus is mine!"

When beautiful Eden awakes from the fires,  
And the conflict of ages of sorrow expires,  
In the great restitution, and glory divine,  
I'll still sing in Paradise, "Jesus is mine!"

## The Divine Permission of Evil

*"The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." - Isa. 32:17.*

FROM time to time there occurs some great catastrophe -- an earthquake, a flood, a rail or plane crash or a shipwreck -- which stirs the world out of its complacency and leads some to ask why God permits these things. If God is Love, as the Bible affirms, how is it that he does not do something to prevent such disasters happening? Not only do these untoward tragic events inspire the question, but the whole story of suffering amongst men -- the ravages of physical disease, mental sickness, all the things that make for unhappiness and despair, the whole catalogue of woes that afflict men, which men are powerless to avert. Why does God permit them?

Only too often people ask the question hastily and expect an equally hasty answer. That cannot be. There are a great many factors, things present and things past, which have to be taken into account before the reason for Divine permission of evil can be understood. Long years ago a man wise in the ways of God said, ' *I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven; this sore travail hath God given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith*' (Eccl. 1:13), or as Ferrar Fenton renders, "*It is a difficult exercise which God has imposed upon the sons of Adam, to develop themselves by it.*" At first sight it seems hard and unfeeling to say that evil is allowed to be a factor in human life that mankind might be exercised and profited by the experience, but that is principally because we tend to take the keener notice when it affects us personally. "Why should God do this to me -- or to mine?" It is not so easily realized that our individual affairs are but part of the entire world situation, and it is the greater problem which includes all the lesser ones; the answer to the former becomes also the answer to the latter.

The story of the ancient patriarch Job is the finest Bible expression of this truth. Job, an upright and honorable man, was stricken with every possible form of adversity until, friendless, deserted, destitute, smitten by loathsome disease, and at the point of death, he voiced his faith that God would yet reveal his purpose and restore him to life and health. "*God hath delivered me to the ungodly,*" he said, "*and turned me over into the hands of the wicked. I was at ease, but he hath broken me asunder: . . . and on my eyelids is the shadow of death; Not for any injustice in mine hands*" (Job 16:11-17). The whole of the 16th, 17th and 19th chapters detail his sufferings and the evil that had come upon him, as men would say, unjustly. But then comes his testimony of faith. "*I know that my Vindicator liveth*"; he goes on to declare his conviction that in the end, even though his diseased and wasted body be destroyed and go into corruption, he himself shall stand and see God. In other words, job saw this present human, life with all its injustice and disappointment and suffering as one aspect only of a profound experience which at the end would bring him forth into that full perfection of development, the Divine ideal; thus he would "see God."

All human suffering of whatever kind and however caused is the result of evil. That evil may be the consequence of some natural catastrophe such as a flood or a famine; it may be due to a disruption of the works of man, such as a railway accident, or it may be because of human avarice or cruelty, in short, sin. Although an evil is not always the direct consequence of sin it is a fact that sin is always evil and there is good reason for thinking that even such evils as natural calamities would not be any menace to human life and therefore no longer evils if sin had not

entered the world at first. In order to understand how this can be it is necessary to go right back to the beginning of the Bible.

## ORIGINAL PERFECTION

The story of Eden and the Fall enshrines the truth that God created man perfect and sinless, placing him in an environment to which he was completely adapted, with power to live everlastingly provided that he observed the laws of his being and fulfilled the purpose for which he was created. It is logical to think that the perfection of primitive men - a state that cannot be accurately visualized because it has never been seen or known since, apart from the case of those who saw Jesus Christ in the flesh-included the power or instinct to sense the coming of such convulsions of Nature as might be physically harmful and to avoid them. It is common observation that many animals and birds can foresee such things as earthquakes and volcanic eruptions and will often spontaneously evacuate a threatened area where men can discern nothing ominous. Perhaps this is one of the faculties that sin has destroyed. In any case, man transgressed the laws of God, and that transgression introduced death and every manifestation of evil which now exists amongst men. Therefore St. Paul says, "*By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned*" (Rom. 5:12).

It is fundamental to a correct understanding of the purpose of God in permitting evil to realize that man himself brought sin and evil into the world. God, whilst permitting its continuance for a space of time, controls its course so that the outcome might be to the benefit of those who have experienced it. The Psalmist, reflecting upon this fact, expressed it in poetry when he declared, "*Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain*" (Psa. 76:10). In this modern age man is gaining increasing understanding and control of the forces of Nature, and it may well be concluded that this is part of the commission given to man at the first to "*replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion . . .*" (Gen. 1:28). Probably, if sin had not entered, this power would have come to its full much earlier so that the cataclysms of Nature which still afflict mankind would long since have lost their terrors. Be this as it may, there is no doubt that when the "new heavens and new earth" which God has ordained have been established, and sin has been removed, there will no more be anything in Nature which man needs to fear. "*Nothing shall hurt nor destroy*" is the promise. "*The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever*" (Isa. 32:17).

That aspect of the burden of evil which is due to human sin is in rather a different category. Sorrow, pain, suffering, and death continue with the human race all the time that sin reigns unchecked amongst men. It is inevitable that the innocent suffer with the guilty; disease, pestilence, famine, affecting individuals or communities, have their origin in sin, either of omission or commission, either on the part of men of contemporary or perhaps long antecedent generations. All men are interdependent; the actions of any one react upon others, and the end of the process no man can foresee. So the Scriptures lay down as a maxim that all men are involved in the sin of Adam which became the sin of the whole world. "*None of us liveth to himself,*" says St. Paul in Rom. 14:7. Each man is a member of that unity which is the human race, and the entire race is one component part of a greater entity which is the earth with all its variety of sentient life, plant life, and so on, all of which are interrelated and must function together to maintain their joint existence. This is why the sin of Adam of necessity affects all his posterity and why the sin of any man affects his fellows.

There is in this connection a very general misunderstanding of the statements in Exodus and Deuteronomy to the effect that God visits "*the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation.*" This declaration is all too often taken to be a general expression of Divine

action, as though God contributes to the impact of evil upon otherwise innocent people by punishing them for their parents' sins. This is totally incorrect. The words appear five times in the books of Moses, nowhere else, and they refer always and only to the condemnation which came upon the faithless generation of the Exodus, whose children had to remain in the wilderness of Sinai with them until that generation had passed away. Until then their children, to the third and fourth generation, who were destined eventually to enter the land, must wander with them and share their hardships. Remembering that the condemned generation could themselves have entered Canaan had they maintained faith in God, it is clear that the children, innocently involved in their parents' failure, thus had the sin of their fathers visited upon them. Says Num. 14:30-35 concerning this: *"Ye shall not come into the land, . . . But your little ones, . . . them will I bring in, and they shall know the land . . . And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness."*

In no other sense and at no other time has it been said that God will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children. But it is true that individuals of every generation are liable to suffer for the misdeeds of their fathers, in the way of inherited disease and tendency to wrong doing; all men are sons of Adam and cannot but be affected by much of what has occurred in past generations. As Ezekiel was told (Ezek. 18:2): *"The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge,"* but this general condition among men subsists not by reason of Divine ordinance but by reason of man's sin. And it will eventually come to an end. *"As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel.... The soul that sinneth, it shall die. But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right, . . . he shall surely live"* (Ezek. 18:3-9).

### **FREE MORAL AGENCY**

Some may be tempted to ask why God had to make man this way. Why not have made him so that he could do naught else but right, and so sin would never have entered? A little reflection will show that the bondage of such a constraint would be more than any intelligent mind could endure. To live at all under that condition would relegate man to the level of the animals, who live out their lives under the direction of instinct and cannot be credited with any sense of moral responsibility. Of man the Psalmist says, *"Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour"* (Psa. 8:5). The picture in the Garden of Eden story is that of a creature of free will, having complete power to accept or reject for himself his offered place in creation. That must involve the possibility of his choosing evil, as in fact man did do, but it does not mean that the cause is lost. God still has control of the springs of life, and he has declared that in his own due time he will intervene to bring men to a realization of the effect of their choice. The day comes when God will say to all, *"I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; ... choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live"* (Deut. 30:15, 19).

In that wonderful vision of the millennial world which was seen by John and recorded in the twenty-first chapter of Revelation the promise is that *"God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain for the former things are passed away"* (Rev. 21:4). Speaking of the same time the Psalmist says, *"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning"* (Psa. 30:5). The history of evil, which he there likens to the anger of God, is, he says, but for a moment, and that is how it will appear when at last the power and effects of sin have been broken and man has attained his destiny. *"The creature itself,"* says St. Paul, *"also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God,"* adding as it were in an afterthought, *"For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now"* (Rom. 8:21-22).

Thus this general experience with evil, which is the lot of all men, is in the economy of God to be turned to good account, in that man, having at the first chosen sin, is allowed to learn at first hand the consequence of that choice in the wreck of his life and his world and the degeneration of his moral character, being then presented with an experience of the world under Divine mandate, having every opportunity to be recovered from his sin stricken condition, thus seeing the world as it can be if conducted according to Divine Law. Thus can he make an intelligent choice and take up his place in God's creation, if he elects to take it at all, as of free will and in full allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ, whom he must and will recognize as the One through whom all life comes and in whom all things subsist.

- *A.O. Hudson, England*

## **The Divine Slowness**

*"Wait." - Hab. 2:3.*

FROM THE above verse we have selected the one word "wait" as a guide for our thoughts. This is the word which divine wisdom often seems to utter in rebuke of human impatience. Man is eager, hurried, and impatient; God is never in haste. The divine proceedings are slow. In Holy Scripture men are often counseled to wait; to wait upon God, to wait for God: language which supposes delay and the need of patience. So frequently does this language occur that it indicates that power to be still, to wait for the set time of divine action, is a habit of soul not common, and of high value where possessed. And the early recognition of this broad principle, of the important element of time in all divine procedure, will assist to that quality in the Christian commended of the Lord and expressed in the words: "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." - Lam. 3:26.

Let us examine in detail the divine slowness as it is revealed in nature, providence, and grace; all media through which God reveals Himself to man. We will find in all these manifestations consistency and harmony -- the same God. This is a great fact, full of light which will contribute to guide us safely through many a season.

## **The History of the Earth**

As regards the heavens and the process by which they were peopled with the brilliances we now see there, we know nothing. But as regards the history of the earth, we have some knowledge of the changes through which it had to pass to become a fitting habitation for man. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." We are not told how far back that beginning was, but we are informed of six days, or intervals, which gradually brought the earth to the state in which man found it. In the solitude of those far-off ages, progressive change gave existence to progressive life. Mysterious forces from below burst through the crust of our planet and determined, according to divine forethought, where the hills should rise. Gigantic vegetation appeared through which monster animals, now extinct, roamed in search of prey. All things were developing to that point where man was to appear, although for him there is long waiting. But the Creator is from everlasting, and eternity is His. He may well be slow. As the handiwork of God unfolded before

the observing spiritual hosts, much may have seemed crude, futile, and meaningless; but the Infinite could wait, as He has waited often since, And He would have us regard the operation of His hands, so that we also may know how to wait. "Show me Thy ways, O Lord; teach me Thy paths. Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me: for Thou art the God of my salvation; on Thee do I wait all the day." - Psa. 25:4, 5.

### **The Movement of the Seasons**

These also remind us of this great principle of time in divine procedure. How slow, how gradual, how imperceptible are the changes of day and night! How gentle is the coming of light, and how slowly and silently does it give place to the darkness! There is a stateliness in the transition from the one to the other, which is as noiseless as it is gradual. These might have come with suddenness, as if from a hurried hand, but they do not. It is as if the will of a great King were being done, by powers which none can venture to resist.

We read the same lesson in the winter as it retires before the springtime; and likewise in spring as it in turn is succeeded by summer and autumn. This circle of change has been likened to a mystic dance wherein the figures, gracefully moving, blend their colors together as in a garland. An Intelligence has said that it shall be so, and to that Mind there is majesty in slowness. And while the seasons pass before our gaze as a procession in honor of the Great King, we seem to hear them whisper, 'Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and bath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain; be ye also patient.' - Jas. 5:7, 8.

### **The History of All Life**

There is that in the life of all things that teaches the same lesson. Life, whether in plants or animals, is a growth, at once silent and gradual, so gradual as not to be perceived. This is indeed a mystery. Everywhere life grows up, man knoweth not how. "First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear"; these stages melt one into the other and cannot be marked. Once begun, life's course is a ceaseless onwardness towards perfection, and in each transition there can be nothing hurried or abrupt, but the end shall be attained with the steadiness and certainty of law. In all the marvelous handiwork of God and in the slow but sure development of living things, whether it be the flowers of the field or the smallest creatures of the air, our thoughts are lifted to the same Agency which works after the same manner, whether it be scattering gold dust over an insect's wing or shaping a world. "These wait all upon Thee." - Psa. 104:27.

Again in the individual life of man as it progresses from the apprehensions of childhood to the acquisitions of manhood, the wisdom of slowness is manifested. The human intelligence grows continuously to its three-score years and ten, but only by protracted toil in scholarship, science, and art, and through long waiting ere the goal sought for is attained. There is no perfection through haste.

And in the history of national life, how well is this same principle of slow development revealed. If the education of the individual be slow, much slower is the education of a people. The life of an individual soon runs its course, but nations live on through centuries. What labor, what self-sacrifice, what sad experiences must nations pass through to rise from barbarism to a state of comparative civilization. Much sorrow, many battlefields, many wretched prison-cells, and many bloodstained scaffolds have been the price paid by nations in the slow rise from rudeness and slavery to enlightenment and freedom.

These facts from nature and providence teach us to guard against impatience in judging the ways of God and to learn how to wait. "I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry." - Psa. 40:1.

### **The Divine Slowness in the Redemption**

And as we turn to revealed religion we are more than ever schooled to wait. Consider the long interval which was to pass between the promise of a Savior and His advent. With the entrance of sin into the world with its disastrous effects, evil triumphs in the consequent dreadful downward path of mankind. Death begins its reign, and sorrow spreads its mantle everywhere. But a Deliverer is promised, a Seed of the woman who shall bruise the serpent's head. Had this course of things been entrusted to our hands, we should surely have been eager, in haste, to further the coming of the Redeemer and the overthrow of the Evil One. But the Divine Mind does not evince this eagerness, this haste. Four thousand years pass, and the Promised One does not come. True the Infinite speaks from heaven by voices and by messengers. He inspires prophets to reiterate His solemn pledge. He originates institutions to be shadows of the great things to come. But humanity has to wait through many centuries, for in this, the moral regeneration of the world, we find God exercising the same silent slowness which characterized the evolution of nature. The work of redemption, like the work of creation, has its stages also. This is difficult for hurried man to comprehend, who is prone to murmur and complain, but the man of faith knows that long preliminary steps are necessary for the accomplishment of the divine purposes, and will patiently wait, for God's salvation. "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." - Hab. 2:3.

Again, in the manner of the Savior's first coming there was much to disappoint the man of impatience. The great work of deliverance began under humble and inconspicuous circumstances. Prophecy had depicted the advent in glowing colors. Were not the great kingdoms of earth to become tributary to Him, the greatest of kings in the greatest of kingdoms? But the Kingdom of God comes without outward show (Luke 17:20), and its Founder was to many as a root out of a dry ground, as one without form or comeliness. (Isa. 53.) How humble is His birth. He is homeless and poor. He attaches to Himself men from the humbler classes. He seeks not to be great. He is meek and lowly. Even with regard to His spiritual mission, the results are limited and unimposing and have stumbled many then and since. To ascribe salvation to so humble a source is offensive to human pride.

But all this is in harmony with the divine conduct as known elsewhere. God does not cause great things to become great at once. They must grow out of small things, and that by slow degrees. Atoms contribute to the formation of worlds, and substances change and become what they are destined to be in the process of ages. God's ways admonish us not to despair of the day of small things but to remember that under His rule the small is everywhere made to be as parent to the great. The Savior revealed Himself gradually and slowly to His disciples, for that was only in accordance with the divine law of things. The Church which is to fill the earth has its beginning in the hut of a fisherman and in the upper room in Jerusalem. The great forces of nature all move thus, without noise, without haste, so secretly that we never know their beginnings, and so slowly that we can never see their motion, though we know that they are moving. And so eventually God's salvation will be revealed to all. "And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him and He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation." - Isa. 25:9.

## Slowness in the Christian's Development

In the spiritual history of the individual believer we learn again this same lesson of divine slowness. When we enter the Christian life, we naturally desire that it should mature speedily. But it does not so mature. We unlearn the evil slowly; we learn the good still more slowly. Weaknesses we hope to subdue quickly are not to be so overcome. Vanquished today, they return to the field tomorrow. The new and better habit of the soul does not settle and ripen as we had fondly expected. The sin most easily besetting us returns (it may be like an old associate offended and exasperated) from being resisted, spurned, commanded to be gone, and we even fall under it as Peter did and as many have done. All this is very humiliating and painful. "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord." - Psa. 27:13, 14.

Yes, the Christian must often feel that the conflict between flesh and spirit in his case might have been less protracted, less alternating, less painful. But in time he learns that the character derived from this personal conflict between good and evil would be much less complete and less fruitful of good were his lot an exception to that of his fellow Christians. The new life, in common with life everywhere, is a growth, and grows slowly, imperceptibly. The morning light shines steadily onward until day is perfected; so it is with the path of the just. But here, as everywhere, we are schooled to wait. "Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually." (Hosea 12:6.) Call to mind the experience in this respect of the saints of old.

Noah waited long for the fulfillment of God's judgment on earth in the flood. Abraham must wait many years for the coming of the promised seed and still longer for his inheritance of the land and the eventual blessing of all nations. Joseph endured many years of affliction and imprisonment ere his dreams from God were fulfilled in his rulership over Egypt. So also must Moses wait forty years in the wilderness for God to call him in His own time. The lesson is taught over and over again, and must be learned by all who walk acceptably with God. The grandest revelation of this divine principle of slowness in operation is to be found in the development of the New Creation class. Two millenniums have been set apart for this greatest of God's works, and when it is accomplished, all intelligent beings will marvel. To each Christian is vouchsafed the individual privilege of humbly and patiently submitting to the Divine Power as it slowly transforms him from the image of the earthly to that of the heavenly. More than all else must he learn not to be weary in well-doing, for in due season he shall reap if he faints not. Let us all, therefore, take closer to ourselves this lesson of divine slowness and learn to wait. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." -- Isa. 40:30, 31.

- W. J. Siekman



## A Life Well Spent

Softly, O softly, the years have swept by thee,  
Touching thee gently with tenderest care;  
Sorrow and death they've often brought nigh thee  
Yet have they left thee but beauty to wear;  
Growing old gracefully,  
Gracefully fair.

Past all the winds that were adverse and chilling  
Past all the islands that lured thee to rest;  
Past all the currents that urged thee unwilling,  
Far from thy course to the home of the blest;  
Growing old peacefully,  
Peaceful and blest.

Never a feeling of envy and sorrow  
When the bright faces of children are seen;  
Never a year from the young wouldst thou borrow -  
Thou dost remember what lieth between:  
*Growing old willingly,*  
Thankful, serene.

Rich in experience that angels might covet;  
Rich in a faith that has grown with thy years;  
Rich in a love that grew from and above it,  
Soothing thy sorrows and hushing thy fears;  
Growing old wealthily,  
Loving and dear.

Hearts at the sound of thy coming are lightened,  
Ready and willing thy hand to relieve;  
Many a face at thy kind word hath brightened  
"It is more blessed to give than receive."  
Growing old happily,  
Ceasing to grieve.

Eyes that grow dim to the earth and its glory  
Have a sweet recompense youth cannot know;  
Ears that grow dull to the world and its story  
Drink in the songs that from Paradise flow;  
Growing old graciously  
Purer than snow.

## **The Question Box**

### **THE BARREN FIG-TREE**

*Question:*

Will you please discuss the Barren Fig-tree incident - Matthew 21:18-22; Mark 11:12-14, 20-25?

In your discussion kindly answer the following questions:

1. Mark 11:13 states that "the time of figs was not yet." Notwithstanding this, its condemnation was evidently because it had no fruit. Please explain.
2. Did this barren fig-tree represent the Jewish nation?
3. If this fig-tree did represent the Jewish nation, how are we to reconcile the words of our Lord in Matthew 21:19 and Mark 11:14 that no fruit should grow on it henceforth *for ever*, with the general teaching of the Scriptures that Israel is yet to be restored?
4. When the disciples noted the withering effect of our Lord's condemnation of the tree, and called his attention to it, he replied: "Have faith in God." While we realize it is always proper to have faith in God, what was there in the circumstances which made his counsel especially appropriate to the disciples then?

*Answer:*

The first question certainly calls for an answer. On its surface this incident represents our Lord as acting unjustly. On the one hand it was not the time of the year when figs should be expected; while, on the other hand, the tree is condemned for not having any.

To avoid this difficulty which all admit, most scholars conclude that Mark meant something it is quite certain he did not say. They interpret his statement that "it was not the time of figs" to mean that it was not the season for gathering figs, or that the season for gathering figs had not yet passed. This view is advanced by Barnes in his New Testament Notes. A similar view, given by Pearce, is quoted approvingly by Wilson in the Emphatic Diaglott, in an elaborate footnote on Mark 11:13.

This view, as we see it, simply reverses what Mark says. He says the time of figs was not yet; they say, in effect, that it was. And, of course, if it was, the question as to the conduct of our Lord is solved.

Such a viewpoint, however, is certainly not supported in the word-for-word translation of the Emphatic Diaglott, nor even in the translation given in the right hand margin. Moreover, none of the other translations we have consulted differ in meaning from that given in the Authorized Version. The American Revised Version puts it in these words: "It was not the season of figs."

Furthermore, the context proves the accuracy of Mark's statement, for when our Lord came to this fig-tree, it was just before the Passover -- that is to say; in the spring of the year. According to competent testimony it would not be until late May or early June that the season for ripe figs would begin.

In view of these considerations it seems clear that the solution of the problem must be sought in another direction.

To begin with it will be helpful, if we have not already done so, to acquaint ourselves with the manner in which figs grow. According to an article in Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible, the branches of the fig-tree are straggled and naked in winter, but when the rains are nearly or quite over, small green knobs appear at the ends of the twigs. These are the young fruits -- the green figs. They are thus named in Canticles 2:13. The fruit, then, appears first, before the leaves appear. (This point, by the way, is correctly noted in the Diaglott footnote, previously mentioned.) Next the leaf-bud expands and the new pale green leaves soon more or less overshadow the little figs. When this occurs it is a sign that summer is not far away. To this familiar sign our Lord referred in Matthew 24:32, when he said:

"Now learn a parable of the fig-tree: When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh."

With these facts before us let us return to the Barren Fig-tree incident. "It was not the season of figs" Mark tells us. It was also *too early for fig-leaves*, and that is the point generally overlooked. At that time of year neither leaves nor fruit were naturally to be looked for on a fig tree. This particular tree, however, unlike all the other fig-trees did have leaves, *and therefore*, should have had fruit. Jesus, hungry, saw in the distance a surprising thing-surprising at that time of year -- a fig-tree in full leaf, as Weymouth renders it. (Mark 11:13.) Since he was hungry, and since, notwithstanding the time of year, this fig-tree was so advanced, he went to see, to quote once more from Weymouth, "whether perhaps he could find some figs on it. When however he came to it, he found *nothing but leaves*."

It was not the season for figs, but this tree, by putting forth leaves, claimed, so to speak, to be something more than other fig-trees; claimed, indeed, (since we have seen that in the fig-tree the fruit appears before the leaves) to have fruit on it. This remarkable fig-tree, in the attitude of false pride, may we say, vaunted itself, claimed to be in advance of other fig-trees, and challenged the passer-by that he should come and refresh himself with its fruit. Yet, when the Lord accepted the challenge, and drew near, it proved to be but as the others, without fruit. It was, in fact, in a far worse state than the others; for they doubtless had young fruits which needed only the heat of the summer to ripen them, whereas this one had *nothing but leaves*.

The fault of this tree, then, was not that in the spring of the year it had no ripe fruit, but that, having none, not even green figs, it had clothed itself abundantly with leaves, with the foliage which, according to the natural order of the tree's development, gave a pledge and a promise that fruit would be found *on* it, if sought. In the circumstances our Lord's conduct is vindicated; the tree was justly condemned.

2. We come now to the second question: "Did this barren fig-tree represent the Jewish nation? To our understanding it did, and this is the view held by most scholars.

In support of this view we offer three considerations:

(1) The fig-tree is used in the Old Testament as representing Israel. - Joel 1:7.

(2) The parable of the fig-tree given by Jesus in Luke 13:6-9 undoubtedly was intended to apply to Israel.

(3) It accurately symbolized Israel's condition. In itself the fig-tree was neither good nor bad, morally. When, therefore, Christ condemned it for its deception, he did not attribute moral responsibilities to it, but he did attribute to it a fitness for representing moral qualities. And the sin of Israel was exactly that which the tree symbolized. The true fruit of that people, prior to our Lord's first advent, would have been to admit its absolute inability to produce fruit apart from their coming Messiah, to have presented itself before God bare and naked and empty altogether. But this was exactly what Israel refused to do. Other nations might have nothing' to boast of, but for themselves they claimed much. And yet, on close inspection, the substance of righteousness was as much lacking in their case as in that of the Gentiles, as Paul so abundantly demonstrates in the second chapter of Romans. Since the characteristics of the barren fig-tree so faithfully represented those of Israel, we think we are justified in believing they were intended to do so.

3. Our third question is answered by reference to better translations. While the fig-tree itself was withered "for ever," this was not to be in the case of Israel. The word translated "for ever" really means "to the end of the age," and is so rendered in the Diaglott and other translations. As St. Paul explains, it is only until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in, that blindness in part is happened to Israel-thereafter there shall come out of Zion the Deliverer who shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob, and thus all Israel shall be saved. (Isa. 59:20; Rom. 11:2.5, 26.) A day will come, indeed, when Israel which now says, "I am a dry tree" (Isa. 56:3), shall consent to that word of its true Lord, which of old it denied: "From Me is thy fruit found." (Hos. 14:8.) It shall then be arrayed with the richest foliage and fruit of all the trees of the field. That time is near, very near, we think. May we once again quote our Lord's words: "Now learn a parable" (it is more accurately translated "the" parable); "Now learn *the* parable of the fig-tree. When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer *is* nigh; so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors." (Matt. 24:32, 33.) If this be true for Israel, what message has it for the Church?

4. We come now to the fourth and last question. The explanation of our Lord's words, "Have faith in God" is to be found in the astonishment which the disciples manifested at the rapidity with which the Lord's sentence was executed. From the account in Matthew it appears that the withering began almost as soon as the Lord spoke. It was, however, on the following morning, as we learn from Mark, that the disciples specially noticed its condition. "Master, behold, the fig-tree which thou cursedst *is* withered away." It was as though they had said one to another: "Did you notice the instant effect yesterday, just when our Lord spoke? The leaves seemed to droop in a moment. But who would have thought that the withering would have been so complete in a single day? Verily, he speaks and it is done. How great, how thorough, how marvelous is his power!"

He will not let the occasion go without its further lesson. What he had done, they might do, and more. "Have faith in God." Faith in God would place them in relation with the same power which he wielded, so that they might do mightier things even than this at which they marveled so much. Listen to his words in the next verse:

"Verily I say unto you: Whosoever shall say to this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe, that what he saith cometh to pass; he shall have it."

Faith has already removed greater mountains than the Mount of Olives on which our Lord and his disciples were then standing; and many more shall it yet lift aloft and fling far out of sight *in* the depths of the sea. What mountains of obstacles and obstructions! what mountains of prejudices! what mountains of accumulated evil habits! what "hills of *difficulty*," apparently insurmountable -

inner, outer, social, political, spiritual, has faith tossed, and is faith still tossing, away! It is the Almighty God in whom our faith is to rest. If the removal of Olivet itself is needed, or of any other mountain, material or spiritual, he *is* still ready and able to put his finger on its summit, when it will leap from its very socket.

Of course this marvelous promise is conditional. But it is not too large for God to perform. It has always been fulfilled and always will be, if the conditions are met. If our wills are truly, immersed into *the* will of God, so that his will becomes truly our will, we may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us. (John 15:7.) And greater works than Jesus did (including the miracle of withering the fig-tree) shall we do. - John 14:12.

This lesson was for the disciples then; it has been *for* the whole Church since; it belongs to us today. "Have faith in God."

- P. L. Read

## Recently Deceased

Eva Bartel, Clarence Gardens, Aust.  
Annie E. Bartley, Enniskillen, N. Ireland  
Etta Boecker, Weatherford, Tex.  
Anna Cisek, Chicago, Ill.  
Elizabeth Cole, Tucson, Ariz.  
Jacob E. DeBoer Grand Rapids, Mich.  
H. J. Hanson, Alborn, Minn.  
Ida Luttermoser, Detroit, Mich.  
Marion Marten, Des Plaines, Ill.  
Martha Nelson, Worcester, Mass.  
Helen Pangrac, Minneapolis, Minn.  
Stephen Polniaszek, Chicago, Ill.  
John M. Zytkeiwicz, Holyoke, Mass.