

# THE HERALD

## *of Christ's Kingdom*

January-February 1993

### EDITORS' JOURNAL

"Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness. "-Psalm 65:11

When we review all of our experiences of the past year, the bad as well as the good, can we not all join in saying that they have been topped off, crowned, with the goodness of God?

The Hebrew word for *crowned* is frequently translated *compassed*. This leaves the thought that not only has the year been topped off with the goodness of God but we have experienced that goodness surrounding us all during the year.

Perhaps no promise is more frequently claimed by the Christian than that of Romans 8:28

*"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. "*

Have we had especially rich blessings this year? These are for our good, to show that the Lord is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him.

Have we had financial setbacks? These are for our good, for they teach us to rely more and more heavily on his promise that *"our bread and water shall be sure."* (Isa. 33:16)

Have we had unusually rich fellowship with other Christians? This is for our good, for it draws us ever more closely in the bonds of Christian love with other members of the body of Christ.

Have we had physical difficulties? This, too, is for our good, for it gives us the opportunity to serve when service is hard and magnifies our ability to show our love for the Lord. It is for our good, also, because it teaches us deeper sympathy with others so afflicted.

Whatever the experience whether it seem good or bad-it is good, for there is the certainty that it is being overruled by a kind and loving heavenly Father according to the purpose he is working out in our lives.

*"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. "-Hebrews 12:11*

Yes, even chastisements and punishments are good, for they show that the Father is still dealing with us and if we are properly exercised by them they will develop in us *"the peaceable fruit of righteousness."*

*"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." James 1:2-4*

## IN THIS ISSUE

We are introducing a periodic feature: *"Echoes from the Past,"* with condensations of discourses delivered by Bible students who have finished their earthly course in death. We begin with an abridgment of Robert Seklemian's study on *"Namaan the Syrian."*

Verse by verse studies continue with a study in the first chapter of Zephaniah-*"The Day of Jehovah"*

*"Archaeology and the Bible"* examines a little known town in ancient Palestine which may have been the "city set on a hill" in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

The poetry page, *"And Finally"* and *"The Question Box,"* omitted last issue because of space requirements, appear once again.

## TWO NEW CHANGES

At a **combined** meeting in Richmond, Virginia of the Editorial Board of THE HERALD and Board of Directors of the Pastoral Bible Institute, two changes were approved for future issues of the magazine.

For the foreseeable future the magazine will contain 28 pages per issue, provided sufficient material is available. It has been customary to publish four 20-page issues and two of 28 pages. In addition to the 28 pages, the PBI Newsletter, *"News and Views,"* will appear in every other issue.

The second change has to do with the attribution of articles. Over the years of publication there has been a wavering course between listing and not listing the names of authors. The greatest argument in favor of using names is that of responsibility-the author accepting the blame or fame for his own views. The strongest point against such use was that of possible bias.

After contemplating the matter, it was decided to omit authors names in the future issues with the exception of poetry, the *Question Box*, and articles which are condensations of discourses of deceased brethren so that those who knew them may take another stroll down memory's lane.

Cognizant of the validity of the argument of responsibility, the name of any author will be available upon request to the editorial board.

## **THE YEAR 1993 BRINGS A NEW REALITY**

*"I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir. Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger. And it shall be as the chased roe, and as a sheep that no man taketh up: they shall every man turn to his own people and flee every one into his own land. "-Isaiah 13:12-14*

Current events certainly suggest that man's attempt to improve the quality of life is indeed "shaking up" this earth. Some citizens of the world have been successful and have reached a higher plateau in life by escaping the heavy hand of oppressive governments in Eastern Europe; others have not been as fortunate and have escaped the oppression only by resting in the unmarked graves of Bosnia and South Africa. A review of the past year's events leads to the conclusion that a new reality faces man in 1993. It is a reality quite unlike anything of the past.

### **THE NATIONS**

The former Soviet Union is now fifteen new republics, ranging in population from under two million people to over 148 million people. The oppressive years of communism created a vast working class which went from having life directed to directing the life of the new republics. Yet the masses are restless and uncomfortable with their newly found power. Grievances and frustrations of the past are surfacing so rapidly that none can keep up. The motto of politics has become "here comes everybody." Patience is short. The people are demanding today what has taken 200 years for others to develop. A senior Polish official commented, "Revenge, fueled by decades of domination by Russia, is in the air. The underdogs are now in power."

Meanwhile, Western Europe struggles to save itself from economic extinction in this new reality. Three hundred and twenty four million people are attempting to bury centuries of national hatred and cultural distrust in order to preserve a place in the changed world and salvage some degree of economic independence.

In Asia, China struggles with a huge burden of one billion people who are for the most part extremely poor and demanding relief. While more than half of those people are in the labor force, they earn less than the equivalent of \$270 annually.

The Japan which dominated the world economy for two decades has found its fortune reversed in what some predict will be a permanent decline. The total dependence on imported resources, a modest population growth, and lack of immigration has created a vast disparity between the rich and the poor. It, too, struggles to keep from slipping into world and economic obscurity.

Emerging nations like Viet Nam, Angola, and Cuba have given up conflicts that drained both economic and human resources, while South Africans have revived hopes that the human tragedy of Apartheid will end soon.

### **ISRAEL**

In the Middle East momentous events have created a new reality in the land of the Bible not witnessed since the decline of the Ottoman and Persian monarchies almost 500 years ago. No longer contested for between rival outside powers, the Middle East now makes its own decisions and devises its own policies for the first time. Observers say that only the strong will survive and

that the strongest is Israel. This calls to mind Ezekiel's vision of dry bones (Ezek. 37) where the spirit breathed life into the bones and sinews. Disencumbered from Gentile powers, Israel in 1993 witnesses a revival of the hope of the divine promises. Benny Begin, who is the son of the late Prime Minister Menachim Begin, may be the next leader of Israel. He has said that Israel is seeking "the historic rights and natural rights that we acquired 4,000 years ago in Judea, Samaria and Gaza as attested by the political document called the Bible." While we do not support his assessment of the character of the Holy Scriptures, we can at least note his interest in the promises given to father Abraham.

## **IDEOLOGY NO LONGER THE DRIVING FORCE**

In today's new reality ideology is no longer the major driving force. Clashes over human and civil rights and demands for economic equality cause the unrest. Because these clashes arise from the people, not the governments, they are much more severe. They disrupt the social order; they cut through national frontiers; they are more divisive and more threatening to world order than the petty quarrels of the past.

In 1993 the world becomes a world not of bipolar interests but of multipolar interests. The economic, political, and military power once controlled by two large nations is now dispersed amongst many nations. People are struggling to find a place in the new order of things and are testing their ability to alter world events for their own interests. We have witnessed a basic change analogous to a sea battle. There were two big battleships. The battleships were clumsy at times, but their captains were skilled and the ships circled each other cautiously waiting for moves that might threaten collision. It was easy to avoid accidents. Today the water is crowded with ships of all kinds and sizes. The captains of these ships have varying degrees of skill. The odds of collision are much greater than they have been at any time in the past.

## **THE PEOPLE**

In Joel 2:2 the prophet describes a *great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations.*

The multiple causes of the past have become secondary to the struggle for human rights. Despite more than 300 wars in our century, more have died from human rights violations than have been killed in armed conflict. Although wars have taken the lives of thirty-one million people, the former Soviet government executed, slaughtered, starved, and beat to death over thirty-nine million of its own people. During Mao-Tse Tung's rule in China, over forty-five million people were "eliminated" from the population. Our day has witnessed a release from much of this oppression. Where such oppression still exists, the inhabitants of the land clamor for relief; and the rest of the world demands its elimination. As our text suggests, man today is voicing more and more his desire for a meaningful-life.

## **THE CHRISTIAN**

For the Christian events around the world give cause for hope and joy, not despair. Psalms 46 says that *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.* What an apt description of our position in the world today! The earth (society) struggles to maintain itself, while the mountains (governments) are shaken by revolution and unrest and "*carried into the sea*" (dissolved into the rule of the restless people crying out). Almost a hundred years ago, C. T. Russell, in *The Battle of Armageddon*, wrote: "The Lord by his overruling

providence will take a general charge of this great army of discontents, patriots, reformers, socialists, moralists, anarchists, ignorants and hopeless-and use their hopes, fears, to work out his purposes." As we look at the events of the past two years, what a hope should be stirred within us!

When Jesus describes in Matthew 24 the signs leading up to the establishment of his kingdom, he chronicles a long catalogue of events that would play out on the earth. He appraises those watching to assess events as they unfold. He admonishes his disciples to view these signs with excitement-without them the end could not come and God's kingdom would be delayed. He encourages his followers to gather together to feast on those truths which he will give the

Brethren, let us resist the temptation to fear the changes unfolding before us, or to criticize and participate in preserving the order of things. Let us view the world's rapid change as a step closer to the establishment of God's kingdom. Let us see these things leading to a more rapid fulfillment of our prayer, thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Let us thrill with the reading of Haggai 2:7, "*I will shake the nations and the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.*" Let us strive to keep our vows as consecrated Christians.

### **THE PROMISE IS SURE**

Jesus promises in Revelation 2:26, 27 that *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.* Rotherham alters the beginning of this second phrase to "*he will shepherd them with the shepherd's club.*" The "*rod of iron*" or "*shepherd's club*" was used to protect the flock from preying animals that sought to harm the sheep and also to beat paths to new feeding grounds. That is quite an apt picture of how Christ protects his people while he leads the world toward his new kingdom.

*"But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins."-Isaiah 11:4, 5*

Christ will supplant this world's many republics with one true republic established in righteousness. Men will no longer struggle for equality because they will receive it as a gift from their newly found king. In that government the removal of sin will direct their focus on their equal share of the Kingdom of God. Isaiah 60:13 describes this kingdom:

*"The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious. "*

As we enter the new year of 1993, when the promises of earthly leaders will find no fulfillment, let us look forward to the future year in which the sure promises of God will reach fulfillment and bring life eternal in the new reality of His kingdom.

## THE YEAR OF LIBERTY-Leviticus 25:8-11

*But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober." - 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6*

With the media constantly bringing the world to us, we can easily be distracted from the critical part of this admonition: *"be sober."* How easy it is to become caught up in the passions of the moment. When the world suffers an anxiety attack, when human hearts fail for fear (Luke 21:26), it can be highly contagious. Fear is one of the most communicable diseases known. The only protection is God's Word, the Truth. It is the Truth that *shall make you free* (John 8:32). In order to *"be sober"* it is important we keep our Truth inoculations up-to-date and at full strength

In this context let us reflect on a well-known Old Testament arrangement to see if it can help us to be better watchers: and, more importantly, if it can assist us in being *"sober."* We are the *children of light, and the children of the day*, so events in the world should not *overtake us as a thief*. They should be to us as *signs of the times*. (Matt. 16:1-3)

### JUBILEE - THE FIFTIETH YEAR SABBATH

To begin, let us go back some 3500 years-to the time God gave Moses instructions on Mount Sinai:

*"And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years. Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee [yobel, Strong's #3104] to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty [derowr, Strong's #1865] throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof., it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family. A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be unto you;. . ." (Lev. 25:8-11).*

God through Moses instructed Israel to set aside every fiftieth year as a sabbath. They were to *return every man unto his possession*. It was to be **a year of liberty**. Liberty was to be proclaimed throughout all the land and unto all the inhabitants! This year of liberty was to be universal.

This year of liberty, the Jubilee, was the culmination of the system of sabbaths God gave Israel. A system that began with every seventh day and climaxed with the fiftieth year.

### THE ESSENCE OF JUBILEE

The essence of Jubilee is simple and emphatic: *Ye shall not therefore oppress [yanah, Strong's #3238] one another. . .* (Lev. 25:17). Jubilee was given Israel by God as a means to forestall oppression. Oppression is a root cause of much of the evil that has afflicted humanity since Cain killed Abel. When God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden he gave them dominion over all the earthly creation except for man. God did not create man to rule man! And, as Paul declared, one

work of the Lord in the Kingdom is the removal of such oppression, the putting down of *all rule and all authority and power*. (1 Cor. 15:24)

Man not ruling man was typically demonstrated by God when he established Israel in the land:

*"In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." (Judges 21:25)*

In other words in Israel during the time of the judges man was not subject to man. Each Israelite was free and responsible to God for his conduct. No one stood between! This was God's design and desire for Israel.

Nevertheless, it was not Israel's desire. After God raised up Gideon to take care of a problem with the Midianites, the Israelites asked Gideon to rule over them. Considering his fallen condition, Gideon's reply is remarkable: *"And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you."* (Judges 8:23)

Israel was not to be denied, however, and after much insistence God allowed them to change the system and to install a king. Subsequent history revealed the error of such a course. For, as Solomon observed, man's dominion over man is as injurious to the ruler as it is to the ruled: *there is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt.* (Eccl. 8:9)

This principle applies to the angelic host as well. No doubt the desire to have dominion, to rule, was a root cause of Lucifer's fall.

The purpose of Jubilee, then, was to provide a periodic economic and social leveling which would prevent any long term establishment of ruling and serving classes. Jubilee was given to promote and insure a classless society in Israel. God knew that should classes develop it would be harmful to the nation.

## **ISRAEL'S FAILURE**

Israel did not appreciate the wisdom of God's arrangement. They failed to observe Jubilee. As the Old Testament prophets recorded, Israel did all it could to circumvent God's law. For example, in Ezekiel 22:7, 8 God lamented over Israel:

*"In thee have they set light by father and mother: in the midst of thee they have dealt by oppression [osheq, Strong's #6233] with the stranger: in thee have they vexed [yanah, Strong's #3238] the fatherless and the widow. Thou hast despised mine holy things, and hast profaned my sabbaths. "*

Note the word "sabbaths" is plural. God was referring to all his sabbath arrangements, the seventh day to the fiftieth year. The plural is used again in verse 26:

*"Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. "*

And, finally, verse 29 leaves no doubt that Israel's failure to observe Jubilee was very much a part of God's lament:

*"The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy: yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully. "*

The prophets left little doubt. Israel failed to keep God's Jubilee.

## **A HYPOTHESIS FOR ISRAEL'S FAILURE**

Though we have scant Scriptural evidence on the details of Israel's failure, we can readily develop a reasonable hypothesis. We know, as Jeremiah observed, that *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."* (Jer. 17:9) There can be little question, therefore, the Jews who were fortunate enough to gain land and riches would resist in every possible way the redistribution of their accumulated wealth. And if in the end they were forced to comply, it would be grudgingly, not cheerfully; and they would delay as long as was possible.

So when the sound of the ram's horn echoed throughout the land, there were mixed reactions. The poor, the unfortunate, "have-nots" rejoiced and impatiently demanded their rights. The wealthy, the "haves" of Israel on the other hand moaned and sadly shook their heads. No doubt they looked upon the "have-nots" as good-for-nothing riffraff. Anything worthwhile given to such ne'er-do-wells would be utterly wasted. For them, then, Jubilee was a call to arms, a time for battle, a time to save as much of their wealth as they could. The standard of living they had acquired was not something to be surrendered readily.

Thus, the ram's horn awakened great contention and controversy in the land. No doubt the number of legal proceedings increased dramatically, everyone believing they were the injured party: the "have-nots" claiming their Jubilee rights; the "haves" trying to save all for which they had worked so hard, their families' inheritance, their families' way of life.

Because of their fallen nature, that which God had given Israel for good resulted in conflict and resentment. In the angry struggle the Jews forgot the underlying purpose of God. They forgot the blessings they had received from him. What had been intended to bring rejoicing and jubilation brought strife and bitterness.

## **THE ANTITYPE**

So far we have found God's purpose for giving Israel the Jubilee to be to provide a periodic leveling of society, thereby preventing the development of upper and lower classes. We have seen that Israel failed to observe this Jubilee, and we have developed a reasonable scenario for that failure. Let us now determine if this arrangement by God has importance for us today. Does the Jubilee have application only to the Jew of a previous age? Or is there an antitypical significance that applies to us?

The English word "jubilee" appears in only two Old Testament books, Leviticus and Numbers. The Hebrew word from which it is translated is found in only four books, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Joshua. None of the prophets used it. There is no Greek equivalent in the New Testament.

This lack of use may seem to preclude any possible antitypical application. But such is not the case! If we follow the thought of the "year of liberty" noted in Leviticus 25:10, we find it leads to the temple vision of Ezekiel. In that vision instructions were given concerning gifts to sons and gifts to servants:



*"Thus saith the Lord GOD; If the prince give a gift unto any of his sons, the inheritance thereof shall be his sons'; it shall be their possession by inheritance. But if he give a gift of his inheritance to one of his servants, then it shall be his to the **year of liberty**; after it shall return to the prince: but his inheritance shall be his sons' for them. " (Ezek. 46:16,17)*

The context indicates the phrase "*year of liberty*" has reference to the year of Jubilee. So, though the prophets did not use the word, the concept of Jubilee was not set aside. And from this use in Ezekiel's temple vision, we find persuasive evidence for an antitypical significance.

Turning to the New Testament, we find yet another text using *liberty*:

*"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature [creation] waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature [creation] was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope. Because the creature [creation] itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty [eleutheria, Strong's #1657] of the children of God. " (Rom. 8:18-21)*

The language of verse 21 is the language of Jubilee. So, for Paul, there was an antitypical meaning to the instructions given to Moses so many centuries earlier; and he applied those instructions to the Kingdom that was to come. The human creation was to be delivered. They were to be given *the glorious liberty of the children of God*.

## **FULFILLING THE LAW**

Jesus' words in Matthew 5:17,18 also demonstrate the validity of an antitypical Jubilee:

*"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be **fulfilled**. "*

The word *fulfilled* in this text does not mean "keep." The point Jesus made was not that the Law must be kept or obeyed. As has been stated by another, "The keeping of a type is not the fulfilling of it. The fulfilling is reached where the type ceases, being displaced by the reality, the antitype." Jesus' fulfilling of the Passover type by dying as the paschal lamb illustrates this principle. (1 Cor. 5:7)

The writer to the Hebrews declared the Law was *a shadow of good things to come* (Heb. 10:1). Jubilee was part of that Law. Thus, if it was a shadow, there must be a greater, a grander reality beyond that shadow.

Paul was even more specific on this point:

*"Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days [of the sabbaths]: Which are a shadow of things to come. " (Col. 2:16, 17)*

It is unfortunate the King James translators felt it necessary to add the word "days" here. As the italic type in most editions shows, "days" is not found in the Greek. A literal rendering would be "of the sabbaths"-plural, with no "days" added. Paul had more than the seventh day in mind. He

was thinking of the whole system of Sabbaths, from the seventh day to the fiftieth year. And, as he declared, these sabbaths are a *shadow of things to come*.

Another text supporting an antitypical significance for Jubilee is Matthew 11:13. Jesus, when talking to the multitudes about John the Baptist, asserted that *all the prophets and the law prophesied until John*. Jesus stated the Law prophesied! Thus, he indicated the Law foretold of a greater reality just as did the prophets. So, as with prophecy, the Law will be fulfilled when that greater reality is realized. Only when all of humanity experience the greater year of liberty, only when all that was lost is restored (Matt. 18:11) will that which was pictured by God with the Jubilee be fulfilled. Yes! There is to be an antitypical Jubilee, an antitypical year of liberty.

## THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Some students of the Bible have combined chronology and various cyclic calculations to determine the time of the antitypical Jubilee. Some believe certain prophecy related trumpets refer to the trumpet of Jubilee. These include the *great trumpet of Isaiah 27:13*, the *last trump of I Corinthians 15:52*, the *trump of God of I Thessalonians 4:16*, and the *seventh trumpet of Revelation 11*. Others believe that some or that all of these prophecies should not be identified with Jubilee. Still others accept such identification and add even more such as the trumpets of Joel 2:1, 15 and Zephaniah 1:16.

It is not the intent of this article to discuss the relative merits of any of these interpretations. As indicated earlier, the purpose is to emphasize the need for us to *watch and be sober* in this time of fear and apprehension.

If we see the *sky is red* (Matt. 16:1-3) we have no choice but to say there is foul weather ahead. And the *signs of the times* are so evident, so graphic, there can be no doubt. We are in the time of fulfillment of that marvelous type God gave Israel so many years ago.

This belief is not based on chronology or complex mathematics. Antitypical Jubilee is the only reasonable explanation for that which has transpired and is transpiring in today's world. These signs demonstrate conclusively we are living in the time of God's great antitypical *year of liberty*.

The most obvious signs are the most recent. The cry for liberty is now being heard throughout the world. From Tiananmen Square to the Berlin Wall, from Johannesburg to Quebec, from the Middle East to the Baltic, from Latin America to the Balkans to Southeast Asia, the cry for liberty is going up. It is heard and echoed *throughout the land and unto all the inhabitants thereof*. (Lev. 25:10)

The economic "have-nots," the political "have-nots," throughout the world are demanding their rights, their "jubilee" rights. It is universal. No corner of the Earth is exempt. And as in Old Testament Israel, the "haves" are not cooperating. They are resisting in every way possible - legal and illegal, moral and immoral, nonviolent and violent.

Jubilee is a process - a process that began very quietly as a *thief in the night* and has gradually grown, becoming more and more intense, just as *travail upon a woman with child* (1 Thess. 5:2, 3). In the type it lasted for a full year. In the fulfillment it will take 1000 years. Deliverance of all the human creation, the returning of *every man unto his possession* (Lev. 25:10), cannot be accomplished overnight. It will be a long, difficult process, bitterly opposed by those who exercise worldly power.

Some may have difficulty understanding how all that is happening today, all the evil that is in the world, can be associated with such a glorious arrangement as Jubilee. The problem is not with God's plan. Just as with Israel, the problem is the result of the fallen condition. The overcoming of that condition is a long, painful experience.

The curse in the Garden of Eden included sorrow: *1 will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow [in pain, in toil] thou shalt bring forth children* (Gen. 3:16). The birth of liberty requires *sorrow*. It requires *travail*.

Just as the typical Jubilee brought strife and bitterness in Israel, so in the world the antitypical Jubilee brings a time of great trouble, and for the same reasons. The "haves" are not eager to participate in the redistribution of their wealth. The "have-nots" have little patience with their foot dragging.

David foretold of this day in the second Psalm:

*"Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. " (Psa. 2:1-3)*

The *kings of the earth* have set themselves against God and his *year of liberty*. They are doing all that is in their power to hold back the tide of Jubilee. From the aristocracy at the beginning of the century (the kings, the czars), to the rulers of today (Bush, Yeltsin, de Klerk, Kohl, the "angry old men" of China, etc.), they all have resisted God and his Anointed. They are doing all that is in their power to preserve the present order, the present establishment. Because of this resistance there has been and will continue to be strife and bitterness in the world.

As we watch this painful process, this birth of liberty, this fulfillment of the Jubilee type, we must not allow ourselves to be caught up in the ebb and flow of the great *sea*. (Isa. 17:12, 13; Psa. 46:2) We must not fall prey to the passions of the moment. We must not "take sides." We must never lose sight of the "bigger picture," always remembering the Lord is in control.

In this century we have had great economic, political, and social upheavals unlike that in any previous time. There has been communism, socialism, civil rights, women's rights, human rights, animal rights, environmental rights. Oppression is no longer accepted as the natural right of a ruler. Though it has not been eliminated, the world's society repudiates all who practice it. Amnesty International, for example, is a product of this century. It could not have existed in earlier times.

"Have-pots" have learned to make their cry for justice and equality more effective by joining together. In the United States, for instance, we have AFofL, CIO, NAACP, and more recently, NOW. Such groups are found worldwide—there is the ANC of South Africa, the various Moslem groups in the Middle East. Yes, even OPEC! Their number ever increasing.

The successes they have had, however, do not solve the problem. The most common result has been to create additional groupings of "haves" and "have-hots" and, thereby, increase the level of anger and indignation. The communist movement over the past 70 years is an illustration. The Iraqi reaction to Kuwait's arrogant conduct is another. A third is the ANC's demand for one man--one vote in South Africa.

So the signs are there in *the face of the sky*. As we see and appreciate the great changes that have taken place in this century there can be no doubt. The sound of the ram's horn has been echoing throughout the land, to every corner of the earth. The spirit of Jubilee, the spirit of liberty, has infected *all the inhabitants thereof* (Lev. 25:10). Truly, we live in the time of fulfillment of this marvelous type.

But let us not forget Foul's admonition. We are not only to watch, but we are also to be sober. (1Thess. 5:6) We must not become embroiled in the struggles that result from the spirit of Jubilee. As this spirit envelopes *all the inhabitants*, we must not allow ourselves to become aligned with one side or the other. Usually, there is right and wrong on both sides. We know the only solution is the full establishment of the Kingdom on earth.

### **ADVICE FOR THE CHURCH**

David gave some advice in his psalm 37 that is especially appropriate for the Church today:

*"Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: **fret not thyself** because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: **fret not thyself** in any wise to do evil. For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. " (Psa. 37:5-9)*

We must not fret ourselves as we watch the rulers of the earth do all in their power to stay the Jubilee process from returning *every man unto his possession*. (Lev. 25:10; Psa. 2:2) We are to trust in the Lord, for he will *bring it to pass*.

Having watched, having discerned the signs, we must not be distracted from our goal. As Apostle Paul wrote:

*"But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. But let us who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. " (1 Thess. 5:4, 8)*

## ***Yahweh Menuchah Shafom***

**Ruth 1:9,**

### ***Jehovah's House of Rest and Peace***

*Go, make for yourself a home,  
Yahweh Menuchah Shalom:  
A place you're ever at rest,  
A place Jehovah has blest,  
A place 'bove others the best,  
Yahweh Menuchah Shalom!*

*Jehovah make you a home,  
Yahweh Meuchah Shalom:  
Where service to God holds sway,  
His praises are heard all day,  
Where Scripture points out the way,  
Yahweh Menuchah Shalom!*

*May peace be always at home,  
Yahweh Menuchah Shalom:  
The peace of the tranquil in soul,  
The peace that makes you feel whole,  
The peace that's sure of its goal,  
Yahweh Menuchah Shalom!*

*A rest from which you'll ne'er more roam,  
Yahweh Menuchah Shalom:  
A home, relaxed and serene,  
Where spiritual things are seen,  
Where love and joy reign supreme,  
Yahweh Menuchah Shalom!*

## ABUSING GOD'S MERCY

*"O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. "-Psalm 136:1*

*"We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. "-2 Corinthians 6:1*

When God handed the tables of stone containing his Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai, he introduced himself as a God of mercy. The God of justice prefaced his law of justice with the assurance that he is also the God of mercy.

*"And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, 'The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. '"-Exod 34:6, 7*

How many of us have had occasion to thank the Lord for his mercy? How many of us have needed that mercy when we pleaded for forgiveness for our shortcomings? All of us have only his mercy to thank for the fact of any relationship with him at all. *O give thanks unto the LORD . . . for his mercy endureth forever!*

But precious and enduring and necessary as the mercy of God is, it is, like most gifts, subject to abuse. Some fear his mercy. Some take it **for granted**.

## FEARING GOD'S MERCY

Consider the case of Jonah. He was given a commission to preach the word of the Lord to Nineveh. He refused. He fled that commission by taking a boat from Joppa in the opposite direction. Why? Was it from fear of the perils of the journey? Hardly! The perils of the voyage by ship proved far more perilous. Was it from fear of a hostile reception in a foreign capital?

Plausible! After all Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, Israel's mortal enemy. But, plausible as this reason was, it was not the main reason. Jonah reveals the reason himself.

*"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the LORD and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? **Therefore I fled** before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live. " Jonah 4:1-3*

Jonah was an Israelite. He loved his people. Nineveh was the capitol city of an enemy country, a country that in a few years would overthrow the kingdom of Israel and take them captive. Jonah knew his own abilities. In a land where prophets of the Lord were seldom heeded, Jonah had successfully convinced King Jeroboam II, the son of Joash, to do the one righteous act in his reign. (2 Kings 14:25)

Above all, Jonah knew the character of his God, that he was a merciful God. He knew that upon the slightest sign of repentance, God might either cancel or defer the threatened punishment.

Jonah did not want that to happen. He knew the basic character of the Assyrians, that they were warlike and cruel. Time proved his fears to be justified.

## **LOVE YOUR ENEMIES**

Do we ever act like Jonah? Do we want God's mercy for ourselves, but resent it when others, particularly those we do not especially like, are recipients of the same mercy? In his sermon on the mount Jesus said:

*"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." -- Matt. 5:44*

And again, the Apostle Paul states:

*"Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." -- Rom. 12:20, 21*

The love spoken of here is more than passive love. Jesus does not merely say, *"Love your enemies,"* but also *"bless them."* Paul speaks in the active voice: *"overcome evil with good."* This is exactly what Jonah was asked to do-to show love for his enemies by preaching to them the message of repentance.

True, this message might bring them deliverance. True, this deliverance might not change their character or their attitude toward the one blessing them. No matter" -- bless them."

The thought of heaping coals *of* fire upon the head is not one of shaming them, or doing them harm. The illustration is taken from the custom of a beggar seeking to borrow some food. Instead of merely giving him the food, heaping coals *of* fire on his head was an idiom for giving him the necessary means to cook the food as well-burning embers which would start a cook fire.

How well do we bless our enemies? Do we communicate with those with whom we are at disagreement, where some point of friction has put us at odds? Do we seek to show them the better way, as Jonah was commissioned to do for Nineveh? Or, on the other hand, do we shun them, go the opposite way when we are commissioned to give them a message from God?

## **TAKING GOD'S MERCY FOR GRANTED**

Another abuse of the mercy of God is to take it for granted, to use it as an excuse for further sin. Paul addresses this question directly in the sixth chapter of Romans.

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" -Rom. 6:1, 2

"What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether *of* sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" -Rom. 6:15, 16

Although the above was written in a discussion of the relationship between the Law and the Gospel, its principles are relevant on a larger scale. It is only too easy for us to not only

appreciate God's mercy and forgiveness but to count on it so much as not to work on ridding ourselves of the underlying sin.

This is like a doctor treating the symptom and not the cause. The symptom is our own guilty conscience, but the cause is our failure to follow righteousness. We can become too dependent upon God's forgiving mercy, relying on such texts as Psa. 103:14:

"For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust"

And again, Psalm 139:1-3:

"O *LORD*, thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; thou understandest my thought afar off. *Thou* compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways."

The Lord is a forgiving God -- forgiving iniquity, and transgression and sin -- but he is also a God who will not clear the guilty. (Exod. 34:7)

His forgiveness is great and repetitive. Not only does he recognize that a just man falleth seven times, and riseth again, but he goes to the proverbial seventy times seven. (Prov. 24:16; Matt. 18:22)

The phrase seventy times seven, rather than seven times seven would seem to indicate an infinite number of times to forgive our brethren for their trespasses against us. This appears also to be the number of times that God forgave Israel before he gave up on them and cast them off in their Diaspora. (Dan. 7:24-27)

This mercy is a wonderful grace for the believer, but it is no excuse for him to fail to work on his problems and seek to overcome the underlying sin. To do so is to abuse the mercy of God, to take it for granted.

## **THE LIMITS OF FORGIVENESS**

There is a limit to God's forgiveness. Esau discovered this limit when, repentantly, he sought it with tears (Heb. 12:17). True repentance will produce a positive reaction from God in every circumstance. Only those doomed to second death cannot be renewed unto repentance (Heb. 6:6). But repentance must be accompanied by action, not necessarily a successful reversal of a wrong course, but at the very least, a sincere effort to overcome.

God's forgiveness does not always require vocalized repentance but looks for any action that can be interpreted as repentant. Note in this regard the rushing of the father to meet the prodigal and his quick embrace **before the son** vocalized his repentance. Nor need vocalized repentance necessarily be accompanied by dramatic action. Jesus gave a lesson in this regard to his disciples:

*"Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him." -Luke 17:3, 4*

A seven-fold repentance in a single day allows little time to demonstrate the fruit of that repentance, yet it calls for the injured one to proffer forgiveness. It does not follow, however, that



subsequent days must not show the fruitage of that repentance—a changed life, a new course of conduct.

## **SUMMARY**

In summary then, we cannot be too appreciative of the mercy of a God who is a kind, loving, and forgiving Father; but neither can we presume upon that forgiveness. He forgives, not to encourage a continued life of sin but to give a new opportunity to overcome. The just man who falls is indeed forgiven seven times. But he cannot fall the second time unless he arises the first time. This repetitive rising illustrates the continuing struggle of the Christian to overcome his shortcomings and to develop a character more and more in the likeness of his Lord and his heavenly Father.

Nor should we ever resent the merciful grace of God extended to others, even our enemies. We should, on the contrary, *bless them—forgiving them*, helping them, edifying them with encouragement to a better way of life.

If we do these things we shall not *take the grace of God in vain*, but, properly using it, grow from grace to grace, from *glory to glory*, until we are found in his own image. (2 Cor. 3:18)

## CLEAN AND UNCLEAN ANIMALS

*"Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. "-Genesis 9:3*

**QUESTION:** Since God told Noah that all s had been given to him for food, why did God make a distinction later between clean and unclean animals?

**ANSWER:** Genesis 7:2 indicates that the division between clean and unclean animals existed before the Flood. This was closely linked to the practice of animal sacrifice.

Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 detail the regulations concerning clean and unclean animals. Leviticus 11:43-45 *NIV* states:

*"Do not defile yourselves by any of these creatures. Do not make yourselves unclean by means of them or be made unclean by them. I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy . . . I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy. "*

Israel was to be totally devoted to God. This holiness was to be reflected in everything. The instructions concerning clean and unclean foods were intended to separate Israel from things the Lord had identified as defiling and ceremonially unclean.

Israel's selection from other nations was to preserve the knowledge and worship of the true God while the heathen followed false deities and practices. The distinction of meats was an observation of national distinction, separation, and consecration.

It may be significant that the flesh of many of the unclean animals was unhealthy, while others were objects of idolatrous worship among the heathen. However, the main reason for the divine decree seems to be the establishment of a system which would distinguish the Chosen People from all other nations.

*Tim Thomassen*

## THE DAY OF JEHOVAH

*"The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly." -Zephaniah 1:14*

A verse by verse study in the first chapter of Zephaniah.

The term *Day of the LORD* or *Day of Jehovah* is described in such dismal terms by ancient prophets that it is little wonder men hold it in dread. While used descriptively by several of the minor prophets, Zephaniah describes it in greatest detail.

Although the term is used generally to describe the climactic events which precede the establishment of God's kingdom on earth, Zephaniah narrows it down to the final refining judgments on Israel to prepare that nation for its unique role in kingdom blessings. Therefore, time-wise, it is parallel to the epic prophecies found in such places as Ezekiel 38 and 39, Joel 3 and Zechariah 14 depicting Israel's final bout of trouble before their full deliverance.

*"The word of the LORD which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah." (v. 1)*

As the fourth-generation descendant of Hezekiah [*Hizkiah*], Zephaniah was a direct relative of Josiah, the reigning king, who was a third-generation descendant of Hezekiah. The generational difference in the two lines suggests that the prophecy of Zephaniah may have been given somewhat in the latter part of Josiah's reign.

This time frame may help to explain the gloomy nature of much of Zephaniah's prophecy. Josiah was known as one of the great kings of Israel and was responsible for a large-scale reform some forty years before the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. His reform, however, failed to maintain its momentum and Judah once again came under the judgment of God.

Contemporary with the start of the ministry of Jeremiah, both prophets spoke of the need of a judgmental sifting in Judah and the necessity for divine chastisement. Both, however, foresaw the purification of a remnant that would carry forth as God's special people on earth. It is for this reason that most Bible scholars give a double application to these prophecies: one relating to the events then current and a second, eschatologically, to the end-time experiences of the nation of Israel before the inauguration of the kingdom of God.

*"I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumbling-blocks with the wicked; and I will cut off **man from** off the land, saith the LORD." (vs. 2, 3)*

The judgment was carried out literally in less than four decades by the invasions of Nebuchadnezzar and the complete removal of the Jewish people to Babylon. Yet, even there, as Zephaniah says later (3:12, 13) a "remnant" would remain. The same is true of the end-time scenario in Jeremiah 30:11.

*"For I am with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished." -Jeremiah 30:11*

*"I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests; And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham; And them that are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor inquired for him." (vs. 4-6)*

Speaking of the same time, the prophet Ezekiel predicts that God would *purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me (20:38)*; similarly, in the last chapter of his prophecy, Zephaniah says that God will *take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride. (3:11)*

It is these *rebels* and *them that rejoice in thy pride* which the prophet here separates into seven specific categories:

**THE REMNANT OF BAAL:** While Baal worship, as such, has long since passed away, there remain many false gods to worship money, fame, and self, to name a few.

**THE CHEMARIM AND THE PRIESTS:** The Hebrew word *Chemarim* appears in only two other places in the Old Testament. Speaking of the same time period of King Josiah, it is translated *idolatrous priests* in 2 Kings 23:5. It is also translated *priests* in Hosea 10:5. In both instances it is speaking of priests who had polarized Judaism by splitting off, starting separate sects that mingled the religion of Israel with that of surrounding nations. These were also known as the *black-robed priests* from the distinctive garb they wore. As such, they seem to well represent the sectarianism which has divided Judaism today into many camps.

**THEM THAT WORSHIP THE HOSTS OF HEAVEN UPON THE HOUSETOPS:** This term is used historically of Israel's deviation from their religion in making the golden calf during the Exodus:

*"And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness?" -Acts 7:41, 42*

Israel panicked when their visible leader, Moses, was gone up into the mountain and did not return. They needed a visible manifestation of leadership. The calf, to them, represented the *host of heaven* who would provide sustenance for their journey to the promised land.

In yet another sense the prophets used *"heaven"* to predict the introduction of Christianity with its heavenly aspirations-as in the term *new heavens and a new earth*. In this sense Amos predicts that God would separate out those Jews who fled into the nominalism of the Christian heavens.

*"Though they dig into hell [oblivion, obscurity], thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven [Christendom], thence will I bring them down." -Amos 9: 2*

Whether or not Zephaniah refers to those who lack sufficient faith to follow the unseen God or to those who seek refuge by turning to one of the many sects of Christendom, he refers to a further separational judgment by God.

**THEM THAT SWEAR BY THE LORD:** Even those who swear by Jehovah were to be judged and removed. The reference here is apparently to those who seek salvation in ultra-orthodox

conservatism without letting their faith teach and guide them. These take refuge in ritual and ceremony without letting the power of God's Word be their guide. (Note Colossians 2:20-23)

**THEM THAT SWEAR BY MALCHAM:** Malcham is a reference to the false god Molech-the god through whom the devotee *passed his children through the fire*. Speaking of this practice, God utterly abhorred it and spoke concerning it in Jeremiah 19:5.

*"They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind. "*

The similarity between Molech and a god whom many Christians believe will roast people forever in an eternity of torture is too marked to be missed. Such *rebels will* also be purged out.

**THEM THAT ARE TURNED BACK FROM THE LORD:** Religion was never meant to be a set of cold beliefs but a code of conduct.

*"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. "-James 1:27 (Also see Isa. 9:17.)*

Those who follow religion in name only, not letting it change their lives, are among the ones purged out by this *Day of Jehovah*.

**THOSE THAT HAVE NOT SOUGHT THE LORD:** The final category are those who have written off religion totally-not only the atheist but the materialist as well.

*"Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD: for the day of the LORD is at hand: for the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests." (v. 7)*

More properly, *the LORD hath prepared a slaughter*. We read of this same slaughter and the guests who come to it in two other texts of Scripture:

*"And, thou son of man, thus saith the Lord GOD; Speak unto every feathered fowl, and to every beast of the field, Assemble yourselves, and come; gather yourselves on every side to my sacrifice that I do sacrifice for you, even a great sacrifice upon the mountains of Israel, that ye may eat flesh, and drink blood. Ye shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, of rams, of lambs, and of goats, of bullocks, all of them fadings of Bashan. And ye shall eat fat till ye be full, and drink blood till ye be drunken, of my sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you. "-Ezekiel 39:17-19*

*"And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. "-Revelation 19:17, 18*

*This will be the slaughter when God fights for Israel as in the days of old. The guests are described as all the fowls [unclean birds] that fly in the midst of heaven.*

*"And it shall come to pass in the day of the **LORD'S** sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel. In the same day also will I*

*punish all those that leap on the threshold, which fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit." (vs. 8, 9)*

Three groups are singled out for special punishment:

**THE PRINCES, THE KING'S CHILDREN:** *The political leadership for relying on their own might and going down to Egypt for help (Isa. 31:1), seeking worldly alliances to solve their political and military troubles. This is another form of them that rejoice in thy pride.*

**THOSE CLOTHED IN STRANGE APPAREL:** *Israel's true apparel was their law, providing a typical justification for them individually and as a nation. To the Christian, it is the robe of Christ's righteousness. Any attempt to appear before the courts of divine judgment in one's own righteousness is an attempt to appear in strange apparel indeed.*

*"And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach "-Isaiah 4:1*

**THOSE THAT LEAP ON THE THRESHOLD:** *Further described as filling their masters' houses with violence and deceit, they aptly describe the anarchists and discontents that have a large place in end time prophecy and are elsewhere called the Lord's great army.*

*It is under this name that they are described in great detail by the prophet Joel, who notes of them:*

*"They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war; and they shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks: . . . They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief. "Joel 2: 7, 9*

*The purge of Israel's rebels will be complete in rooting out of her all of these undesirable elements before introducing the kingdom of peace in which the remaining remnant will play such an important part.*

*"And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the **LORD**, that there shall be the noise of a cry from the fish gate, and an howling from the second, and a great crashing from the hills. Howl, ye inhabitants of Maktesh, for all the merchant people are cut down; all they that bear silver are cut Off." (VS. 10, 11)*

*The effects of this purging are particularly felt in four areas: the fish gate, the second [city], the hills, and Maktesh. The same is true with another simultaneous event, the fall of antitypical Babylon in Revelation, chapter 18. There the howling is by the kings of earth, the merchants and the ship owners-those who traffic by sea.*

*The fish gate of our text has obvious reference to those who trafficked in the fish trade and corresponds well to the ship owners of the Revelation account.*

*The second, or second quarter - Rsv, referred to the suburban area of Jerusalem on the western mountain where the high officials of the city dwelt, distancing themselves from the central urban blight. The symbol thus refers to the religious and political elite-the kings of earth of the Revelation account. The political hierarchy represent those who put themselves in the forefront, as Zephaniah said later, "them that rejoice in thy pride." These are joined further by those from*

*the hills*, the further-out suburbs of the very elite, filled even then with summer homes and dachas of the rich, eager to escape the hotter, smellier climes of the city itself.

*Maktesh* is translated *the mortar* in the Revised Version and *market place* in the New International Version of the Bible. Both are right. The Hebrew word literally means *mortar* and referred to the mortar-shaped depression at the northern end of the Tyropean valley in Jerusalem. It was here, close to the temple gates, that the merchants set up shop. Thus the name was idiomatic for the market place, and corresponds to *the merchants* of the Revelation account. Those who make economic gain from the commercialism of present conditions will be adversely affected and thus *howl* when the present order collapses.

***"And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil " (v. 12)***

Summarizing this section, the LORD gives the purpose of this final trouble -to *search Jerusalem with candles*, exposing their motives in every dark corner through the light of his word.

He groups *the rebels* now into one broad *category-the men that are settled on their lees*, content with present conditions because they feel that the LORD will not judge them, that God has distanced himself from their present situation. *"The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil" is* their mistaken boast.

***"Therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation: they shall also build houses, but not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof." (v. 13)***

What a contrast with those who are not purged and enter into that kingdom!

*"And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof, they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. " --Amps 9:14 (See also Isa. 65:21.)*

Jehovah is not here pronouncing an everlasting judgment upon the *rebels* of Israel but a taking away of their special privilege-to be a part of the nation of Israel which will help in bringing God's favor to the entire world of restored mankind.

*Settled on their lees* describes the placidness of a class in Israel who has made out well economically under present conditions, and therefore there is a certain justice to the punishment of building and not inhabiting, of planting and not eating the fruit thereof. But it also describes the reality that much of the prosperity of Israel today is directly attributable to this class of doers. Despite the blessing of the Lord upon their hard endeavors to bring prosperity to fleshly Israel, they themselves will not enjoy its rich fruitage if they exhibit a heart condition of pride and not of humility.

***"The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers." (vs. 14-16)***

Here we have Zephaniah's description of this transitional time as *the great day of the LORD*, the **Day of Jehovah**. The imagery he uses in this description can be grouped roughly into four categories.

**WRATH, TROUBLE AND DISTRESS:** Showing that it is a period of judgment with great travail upon those on whom it comes -- Israel. But like travail in the natural sense, it will be followed by a birth--the birth of a new nation, God's nation, regathered and restructured Israel.

**WASTENESS AND DESOLATION:** Showing the effects of the final climactic battle on the land itself. The beauty and fertility which man has brought to a desert and drought-ridden land will be replaced however with even greater greenery when the desert truly *blossoms as the rose*. (Isa. 35:1)

**DARKNESS AND GLOOMINESS, CLOUDS AND THICK DARKNESS:** All of these terms describe conditions of uncertainty and perplexity. Only the *remnant*, attuned to the voice of God will understand the complexities that Surround this final judgment by God of his people. The *perplexity* that encircles the earth at that time (Luke 21:25) [literally, *no way out*] will reach its height during this final battle in Israel.

**A DAY OF TRUMPET AND ALARM AGAINST THE DEFENCED CITIES AND THE HIGH TOWERS:** The particular danger will be to the fortified areas. The main purging which Zephaniah foresees is of *them that rejoice in thy pride*, seeking to accomplish their defence and deliverance by militarism instead of by trusting in the Lord.

In an associated picture, the prophet Zechariah sees a vision of a man measuring the walls of Jerusalem. He restrains him with the assurance that deliverance will not come from walls they build:

*"For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her. " (2:5)*

Zechariah summarizes the lesson in these words:

*"Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts. " (4:6)*

***"And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung.***

***Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land. " (vs. 17, 18)***

In concluding this first chapter of Zephaniah the prophet once again emphasizes the confusion of that time. The purged rebels will be as *blind men*, not evil as deliberate sinners but blind because they have not searched for nor do they know the mind of their God in the matters they confront.

The punishments are great, and if Zephaniah ended his prophecy here it would be gloomy indeed. Fortunately he does not. He is not a prophet of pessimism but of optimism. As his prophecy



continues, he sees that the removal of ***all them that dwell in the land*** excludes a *remnant*, which will provide the nucleus of the reborn and restructured Israel.

*"In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain. I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD. The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid. Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing. I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden. Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame. At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD." -Zephaniah 3:11-20*

# ECHOES FROM THE PAST

## NAAMAN THE SYRIAN

*"And Naaman said . . . thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD. "-2 Kings 5:17*

*Condensed from a discourse by: Robert Seklemian*

The kingdom of Syria bordered the land of Israel on the north and east. It was quite influential among the nations of the earth.

Naaman was commander-in-chief of the army under Benhadad II. Naaman was noted for his ability as a soldier and strategist, called "a mighty man in valour" (2 Kings 5:1). "The Lord had given deliverance unto Syria."

But Naaman was a leper. In those days leprosy was incurable; it was a disease that brought about a horrible, lingering death.

It usually began with a speck on the eyelids and gradually spread over the body. It dulled the nerves and was comparatively painless until its final stages. The process took years, but death was inevitable.

Consider Naaman's consternation and frustration in this disease. A human enemy he could face fearlessly in battle, but his disease was something with which he could not cope. Then, in Naaman's most desperate hour, a ray of hope was given to him.

The Syrians had conducted raids across the border into Israel. In one of these forays "a little maid" was captured and sold as a slave to General Naaman, becoming his wife's personal attendant.

She felt kindly toward Naaman. When she heard that he had contracted leprosy, she was concerned. She said to her mistress, *"Would to God my lord were with the prophet . . . in Samaria, for he would [cure] him of his leprosy."*

She was referring to Elisha the prophet in Israel's capital city, Samaria. In Israel she had, undoubtedly heard of the many wonderful miracles Elisha had performed. She knew that Elisha was an instrument of God's power, and correctly reasoned that Naaman could be cured by that power. Her remark to her mistress was immediately communicated to Naaman.

Ordinarily, Naaman would have discounted miracles. He was a military man, a realist, believing in physical force, not ethereal power. He was not swayed by superstition. But Naaman was desperate, ready to grasp at straws. He must investigate the words of even a little Hebrew slave girl.

## NAAMAN'S JOURNEY

He went to the king of Syria and asked for a leave of absence, telling him of his intention to go to Israel where there was a prophet who supposedly had the power to heal him.

The king had worried about losing his most able general and was enthusiastic to hear that he might be healed. "Go," he said. "I will give you a letter of introduction to the king of Israel. A prophet who can perform such miracles must be close to the king. Probably he is a high official, a member of the royal court. For my sake, the king of Israel will see that you receive the very best attention."

Naaman gladly accepted the letter and left for Israel. *"He took ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment."* (2 Kings 5:5) This probably represented all his wealth. Naaman was a wealthy man and was prepared to pay handsomely.

Naaman's party, probably including a strong troop of cavalry to protect them over the robber-ridden roads, arrived and presented the letter to the king of Israel. It said, *"I have sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy."* There was not a word about the prophet Elisha in the letter. It was presumed that the king of Israel would know where to direct Naaman.

The king of Israel was Jehoram, son of Ahab, of whom it is written, *"He wrought evil in the sight of the Lord; . . . he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin."*-(2 Kings 3:2, 3)

Jehoram was an idolater. He had no dealings with Elisha nor much knowledge of him. He misconstrued this sincere letter. He thought that the king of Syria, by asking him for something impossible, was trying to provoke a quarrel with him to provide an excuse for invasion. Naaman's detachment of soldiers supported this erroneous conclusion.

*"When the king of Israel read the letter, he rent his clothes, and said, `Am I God, . . . that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? . . . See how he seeketh a quarrel against me. " (2 Kings 5: 7)*

## ELISHA INTERVENES

*"Elisha . . . sent to the king, saying, `Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel. " "*

This was a rebuke to Jehoram the idolater. Elisha was saying, "Do you not know that God has a prophet in Israel? If you do not know, Naaman WILL soon know."

The king was relieved to be rid of Naaman's problem, and directed him to follow the servant of Elisha.

Think of Naaman's disappointment when his chariots and horsemen arrived at the home of Elisha. He probably expected a splendid palace, befitting a person of supernatural powers.

Naaman dismounted from his chariot, and Elisha's servant disappeared into the abode. Naaman expected that Elisha would appear and greet him. He waited, standing *at the door of the house of Elisha*. Finally the door opened, but it was not Elisha. His servant gave Elisha's message to Naaman, *"Go and wash in Jordan seven times, . . . and thou shalt be clean."*

## NAAMAN'S ANGER

"Naaman was wroth." He had expected consideration for his rank and as a representative of the kingdom of Syria. He had come many days' journey bearing costly presents, and now this man would not even come out of his house.

Elisha's direction to wash seven times seemed insulting. "Does he think I need a bath? We have rivers in Syria with cleaner water than this muddy River Jordan." Naaman was very angry, and gave the order to start back to Syria.

However, to return to Syria, Naaman and his company had to cross the Jordan. His party probably stopped at the river to rest and water their horses. Naaman's anger cooled somewhat. He began to think more rationally. He reminded himself that the prophet's reputation for miracles was too widespread to be groundless. His humble dwelling might indicate nobility of character rather than meanness. Possibly he was not accustomed to taking bribes for his services. That may have been the reason for not coming out. Perhaps he did not want to claim the reward for healing Naaman.

Naaman may have thought that as a representative of Jehovah God, the greatest King of all, the prophet's dignified office would prevent him from coming out to a mere general. Perhaps it was only his pride that made him angry with Elisha. As he rested at Jordan, Naaman mused over this.

A delegation of his soldiers approached and asked to speak with him. They sincerely wanted him to be healed. They said, "If the prophet had asked you to perform some great exploits, such as leading an army against Israel's enemies as a condition for your healing, would you not do it? He has asked something very easy; why not do that? We are at the river. It would be simple to do as the prophet says."

This encouraged Naaman. He walked to the water. His soldiers watched as he went. He immersed himself once and then looked at his horribly leprous skin. No sign of improvement. He dipped himself again. Still no improvement. Three, four, five, six times. Still no sign. A lesser man would have been discouraged. But Naaman was disciplined. He gave orders; he carried them out. The prophet had said, "seven times." He dipped himself once more. When Naaman emerged, his leprosy was gone; his flesh was like a baby's-soft, smooth, pink, healthy.

## A NEW GOD

Naaman knelt down on Jordan's shore, thanking the God of Israel, and swore that *from* henceforth he would worship no other god but Jehovah

So Naaman was healed, of his leprosy and of his idolatry. He started back to Samaria to see Elisha.

This time Elisha came out to see Naaman. "*Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing (or a present) of thy servant,*" Naaman said. But Elisha responded with these words: "*As the LORD liveth, I will receive none.*" Naaman urged him to take it; but Elisha refused.

Elisha, who lived frugally in a hovel, refused the bounteous gift. He could have used the money in the Lard's service. Sometimes the fifty young men, known as Sons of the Prophets (2 Kings 2:7), who were in his care did not have enough to eat (2 Kings 4:38). Why, then, would Elisha not

accept the gift? He would not, because accepting a gift from Namaan would have meant making merchandise of the divine power operating through him. God's gifts are not for sale.

## **THE LEPROSY OF SIN**

There are many lessons to be derived from the story of Naaman the Syrian. There is the broad outline of the divine plan of the ages for the salvation of mankind:

Leprosy, like sin, is an incurable disease that is loathsome and contagious. Its destructive progression from small beginnings deforms, distorts, and makes ugly. Once the nerves are dulled it is deceptively painless.

Sin, like leprosy, is also incurable without divine intervention. It, too, is contagious and loathsome. It progresses from small beginnings and deforms, distorts, and makes ugly. Once the conscience is dulled, it is painless. But *sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.* (James 1:15)

Namaan contracted leprosy. He lost all hope; then he was given a ray of hope. He heard from the little Israelitish maid that there was a prophet in Israel capable of healing his leprosy.

Adam contracted the leprosy of sin. Since Adam, every member of his race is " . . . shapen in iniquity; in sin did my mother conceive me." (Psa. 51:5) As centuries passed humanity's situation appeared hopeless. Then a ray of hope was given mankind:

*"The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet, Prophet... Of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken." (Deut. 18:15)*

In due time the prophet foretold by Moses came to earth. The people came to realize that there was among them a great prophet who was endowed with power over sin and death. When Jesus raised the son of the widow of Nain *they glorified God, saying, A great prophet is risen up among us, . . .* (Luke 7:16)

In Acts 3:20-22 Peter conclusively links Jesus of Nazareth, *"a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people"* (Luke 24:19) with *the times of restitution* during which the whole world will be healed of the leprosy of sin.

When Namaan sought permission to go to Israel, the king of Syria eagerly sent him forth. So in the day of restitution " . . . many people shall go and say, 'Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD . . . for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. '" (Isa. 2:3; also see Zech. 8:21-23)

## **THE HEALING INCENTIVE**

Physical healing will be one of the great incentives to induce men to fall in line with the Kingdom of God under the ancient worthies. As people hear that the obedient in Israel are attaining perfect health and are getting younger instead of older, there will be a veritable stampede to find out how they also can qualify for such benefits. And thus they will learn of the Lord's ways and walk in his paths.

The coming of leprous Naaman from Syria to the prophet Elisha in Israel for healing may well picture the world of mankind, aliens from God, and leprous with sin, submitting themselves to the

princes in all the earth for deliverance from sin and death. Elisha directing Naaman to the rivers to be healed of the curse of leprosy reminds us of the beautiful promise of Revelation 22:1-3:

*"He showed me a pure river of water of life, . . . proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb . . . There was the tree of life, which yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the trees were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse. "*

This is the time foretold Revelation 22:17:

*"And the Spirit and the bride say 'Come.' And let him that heareth say, 'Come.' And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. "*

Naaman found that the river was indeed the water of life. He had been despondent, discouraged and afflicted, facing death. But after the seventh dip, he was delivered from his affliction.

We are reminded of that grand restitution promise of Job 33:24, 25 to all mankind afflicted with the leprosy of sin: *His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth.*

As Naaman acknowledged Jehovah as the only true God, and said that he would henceforth serve no other, we read in Zephaniah 3:9:

*"Then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD to serve him with one consent. "*

Habakkuk 2:14 adds:

*"For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. "*

## **7000 YEARS**

The dipping of Naaman seven times is also significant. A similar picture is given in the fourth chapter of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar was deprived of his sanity until seven times had passed over him. Then his reason returned to him, and he praised and extolled and honored the King of Heaven.

Six thousand years of sin and death have already passed over mankind. When seven thousand years shall have passed, at the end of the Millennial Age, man's reason shall have fully returned; and, as also pictured by the seven times of Naaman's dipping himself in the waters, the leprosy of sin and death will be cured. All mankind will praise and extol and honor great Jehovah God, King of Heaven.

## **SPIRITUAL LESSONS**

Besides this general outline of the divine plan, the account of Naaman the Syrian contains valuable spiritual lessons for the household of faith:

The progression of a Christian is depicted. As Naaman, the hopeless leper, was a man of Syria, an alien nation having neither part nor lot with Israel, having no covenant relationship with God, it is written of him in Ephesians 2:12:

*"At that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world "*

Before the Lord draws us, there must be a consciousness of sin, a realization that of our own selves we can do nothing, just as Naaman was aware of his hopeless, leprous condition.

Then, as Naaman heard that there was a prophet who was able to save him from his leprosy, we are given ears to hear. Our attention is drawn to our savior, Jesus Christ, of whom we read (1 John 1:7), *"The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."*

The Lord draws us to his Truth. We discern the ransom, by which sin may be remitted.

### **A LITTLE SLAVE GIRL**

In Naaman's case, a little maid was the agency used. One wonders. Elisha had done so many marvels in Israel; should not the people of Syria, a nation immediately adjacent, know something about them? Caravans carried news (as well as trading goods). Miracles of the magnitude that Elisha performed would be exciting news.

Also, nations who were potential enemies had spies in each other's territories. Would it not be reasonable to think that Syrian spies would report the miracles of Elisha? Yet Naaman heard of the prophet-healer of Israel only from the mouth of a little slave girl.

Would it not be logical today, to expect to hear the message of Truth from the churches? But that is not where we get it. Instead, we are put in contact with the Truth in all sorts of strange ways.

The tremendously important event of Jesus' birth was not announced by the scribes and Pharisees, but by a few humble and unlearned shepherds, to whom the people gave almost no heed.

So it is with us. We may come to the stupendously important message of Truth which will transform us from simple humans to the divine nature-to glory, honor and immortality, the highest prize in the universe-by means of a tract which "just happens" to be put under our particular door by some poor sister who can scarcely walk.

One saint was brought into the Truth by a robin that took a sheet of paper from a trash pile and made it the foundation for her nest. She wove her nest upon it and raised a family.

The next winter a windstorm dislodged the nest and deposited it upon a front porch. The lady of the house came out to pick it up, and the big black word "HELL" caught her eye. She smoothed out the paper and saw the title "*WHAT SAY THE SCRIPTURES ABOUT HELL?*" She had been worrying about hell-fire and had been earnestly praying about it.

Let us not despise the small opportunities of service-mailing a tract to the bereaved, distributing an invitation to hear a local Bible lecture or TV program, a word to your boss-that's what the little maid did-or to your co-worker or a neighbor or a relative.

The Lord uses various means to draw his people. They are sometimes unusual, but rarely spectacular.

## OUR CURE

As Naaman came to the capital of Israel to find the prophet, we read (Heb. 12:22, 23), *"Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem."*

As Naaman was drawn to the prophet, so we are drawn to Christ (John 6:44), *No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.*

Elisha told Naaman that if he immersed himself in water seven times his leprosy would be healed. Water immersion is a symbol of consecration, and the number seven means completeness. The two symbols combined would indicate that a full and complete consecration is required to bring about the cancellation of Adamic condemnation.

Initially, Naaman was not willing to do what the prophet said, and went away grieved. This reminds us of the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16-22), who came to Jesus, seeking life.

*"Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. "*

## COUNTING THE COST

As Naaman sat at the seashore, thinking over Elisha's instructions and undecided what to do, we sit down and count the cost, as instructed in Luke 14:28. The Apostle Paul did some reckoning, too:

*"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. " (Rom. 8:18):*

Naaman required a little persuasion. But once having made up his mind, he completely carried out the prophet's instructions. Upon rising from the water, his leprosy was gone. For years he had been haunted by death and despair; and now, it all slipped away. His mind was set at peace.

What a joy to know that our leprosy is cured, that we are justified in the sight of God, that our sins are forgiven! The robe of Christ's righteousness covers us, and we are released from the power of sin and death. As David expressed it in Psalms 32:1, 2:

*"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity."*

After being cleansed, Naaman offered Elisha all of his wealth. The refusal of Elisha to accept it, and his permitting Naaman to retain control of it, may well illustrate the fact that when we consecrate our all to the Lord, he hands it back to us for us to administer as his stewards. *It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. (1 Cor. 4:2)*

Jesus found Naaman worthy to mention as an example of faith (Luke 4:27). Naaman dedicated himself to the worship of Jehovah the true God. I have no doubt he will be accorded some special place in the government of the world, and be a ready, able, and willing instrument in the service of the *princes in all the earth.*



# Archaeology & The Bible

## Sepphoris—A City Set On a Hill

A recent book has been published describing results of some recent excavations in an important city just a few miles from Nazareth, Jesus' boyhood home. *Jesus and the Forgotten City* by Richard A. Batey, 1991, is a colorful story about an urban center that could have influenced Jesus' early life experiences. A brief synopsis of this material was prepared by Batey in the May/June 1992 issue of *The Biblical Archaeology Review*. Three reviews were published in the June 1992 issue of *Biblical Archaeologist* with variant conclusions which we shall consider here.

The core of the story is derived from recent archaeological research on a hill top city that had been selected and built up by the Romans during their occupation of Palestine in the first century BCE. Sepphoris was the center of government selected by Herod Antipas for the district of Galilee after his father, Herod the Great, died. Herod's death coincided with and perhaps sparked a local Jewish rebellion against the Roman authorities, which then resulted in the massive destruction of Sepphoris. This Batey dates to 4 BCE. Subsequent rebuilding and enhancements by the Romans produced a military strategic center of commerce, government, theater and religion. This reconstruction project lasted a good number of years concurrent with Jesus' youth in Nazareth, only three miles from Sepphoris.

Batey suggests that Jesus may have derived certain terms or figures of speech from this Sepphoris environment:

A city set on a hill—"You are the light of the world, a city set on a hill cannot be hidden." This would be an appropriate image for local people, based on the dominance of the city and its visibility at night.

The son of a carpenter, or artisan (Greek: tekton; Mark 6:3)—Skilled trades would have been indispensable for the rebuilding of this Roman project. It would be well understood to the average person in the area and have identified Jesus with the common people instead of those of high birth.

Hypocrites; Matt. 6:5, 6—This term describes an actor in the Roman theaters (prominent in Sepphoris), and was a telling admonition among the Jews about outward shows of worship and prayer which were performed insincerely, as a show.

Contact with Herod Antipas, representing the Roman government, was generally avoided by Jesus. (Compare Matthew 14:1 and 13) Herod was concerned about the popularity of John and Jesus, and as a result, Jesus withdrew from Herod's attention. (See *Herod Antipas*: Harold Hoehner, 1980, Zondervan press.) Jesus' judgment concerning undesirable Roman influences is shown in Mark 8:15: "And he was giving orders to them, saying, 'Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.'"

Sepphoris was a secondary center for the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious court, since 63 BCE, when Pompey conquered Palestine. The Sepphoris Jewish court became more important after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Early in Jesus' life it could have been a source of instruction

by learned Jewish teachers. Ironically, being close to this local ruling body may have motivated Jesus from the Sepphoris area to towns less dominated by them when he began his teaching ministry. The influence of the Herodians, sympathetic to the Roman authority, would have also been strong in a Roman center like Sepphoris. This is quite the opposite of the earlier revolt by the Jewish inhabitants following the abortive Jewish revolt around Sepphoris at the death of Herod the great (popularly dated in 4 BCE, but more likely in 1 CE.)

The archaeological record can be interwoven with general cultural circumstances if Sepphoris is to be connected with Jesus as is suggested by Batey.

Some major questions concerning the influence of Sepphoris upon Jesus remain:

1. Why doesn't the New Testament ever make mention of Sepphoris? The answer supposes that Jesus did not focus on this sort of environment during his ministry and that thus it played little or no role in the New Testament story. Early Christian writers do not make mention of Sepphoris, although it is named numerous times in Talmudic literature.

2. References that Batey makes about words like hypocrites, which he claims is based on Jesus' acquaintance with the theater in Sepphoris are purely suppositions. It is known that the word rendered hypocrite, an actor on a stage, was in general use, meaning playacting or hypocrisy. Evidence is not even clear that the theater in Sepphoris was even built until the time of Felix in 52-60 CE. The analogy is still appropriate in either case. Based on some of the technical criticisms, the book by Batey should be used cautiously due to its being written for a popular audience. A forthcoming book by Meyers, Meyers and Netzer, titled Sepphoris, to be published by Eisenbrauns in late 1993 should be more critically accurate.

The place of Sepphoris in the life of Jesus is suppositional, but not unreasonable, considering the proximity of Sepphoris to Nazareth, and the occupation of Jesus' father Joseph as a carpenter. At the very least, it awakens us to background points that illuminate the words and actions of Jesus within his cultural upbringing and his ministry in Galilee. (Editor's note: The case for Sepphoris being the figure for Jesus' reference to a city set on a hill is most reasonable, but should be considered side by side with an alternative view that the city referred to was Safed, or Sfat.

Located at the summit of the Galilean hills between Capernaum and Acco, it was visible from either of the two locations where scholars feel the Sermon on the Mount was delivered—the traditional site near Capernaum on the north of the Sea of Galilee or at the Horns of Hattim overlooking the city of Tiberias, further south.

Safed today is an artist colony. Its prominence in Jewish history, however, goes back to the role it played after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. When the destruction of Jerusalem became evident, Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai arranged to have himself secreted out of the city in a coffin. Boldly approaching the tent of the Roman general, Titus, he predicted the general's succession as the next Caesar, requesting in return the right to establish a rabbinical school at Safed after the fall of Jerusalem.

His success is recorded in A History of the Jews: "The Sanhedrin for example, which used to meet in Jerusalem and which always everywhere had been looked upon as the central legislative and judicial body, could meet no more. Rome had forbidden its revival as it forbade everything else that pertained to Jewish national life. Quietly Johanan ben Zakkai gathered seventy-one

scholars, the number that used to sit in the Sanhedrin, organized them under similar offices, and set for them the same functions."

Thus Jesus' words could have been prophetic of the role that the city his audience would have seen "set on a hill" was to play in preserving the Jewish religion.).

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## THE TASTE OF MANNA

*"And the house of Israel called the name thereof Manna: and it was like coriander seed, white; and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey."-Exodus 16:31*

*"And the manna was as coriander seed, and the colour thereof as the colour of bdellium. And the people went about, and gathered it, and ground it in mills, or beat it in a mortar, and baked it in pans, and made cakes of it: and the taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil."-Numbers 11: 7, 8*

The trek through the barren Sinai soon took its toll on the wandering band of Israelites fleeing Egypt for their promised land. Oases were few and far between and furnished far too little sustenance for a host of approximately two million men, women, and children. Hunger soon drove them to murmuring.

*"And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger. "-Exod. 16:3*

God, who had freed them from Egyptian bondage through the plagues and directed their miraculous passage dry shod through the Red Sea, again came to their rescue.

*"I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, and covered the camp: and in the morning the dew lay round about the host. And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoarfrost on the ground And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat." -- Exod. 16:12-15*

Manna was given, not only to satisfy their hunger, but also to provide a test of their willingness to obey God. The provision of the manna was accompanied by explicit instructions as to its gathering-one omer a day, two omers on the day before the Sabbath and none on the Sabbath day.

Scholars disagree as to what produced the manna. Some identify it with an exuding from an insect living on the tamarisk bush and others to a resinous gum that drips from wilderness shrubs. However, none of these fulfills all the biblical requirements for manna. It is far simpler to assume it was a miraculous provision for Israel for their forty year wilderness journey.

The name itself implies the mysteriousness of its appearance, for it means *"What is it?"* This is apparent from the Israelite's response to its appearance on the ground *for they wist not what it was.* (Exod. 16:15) In Psa. 78:24, 25 it is poetically called *the corn of heaven* and *angels' food.*

### HONEY WAFERS

The taste of manna in the Exodus account is described as *wafers mixed with honey.* To a starving nation, the taste of this new-found food was most pleasant to the palate. It was not only nourishing but tasty as well. It could be fixed in a variety of ways-pounded out, baked or boiled-so that it would not become a routine dish.

## OIL-BAKED BREAD

Yet, in the Numbers account, it is described as tasting like *fresh oil*, or, as the *Revised Standard Version* has it, *cakes baked with oil*-a far different description from that of the honey-baked wafers given in Exodus.

The harmony can be seen in the frame of mind of the Israelites. When they were starving, the manna tasted like a sweet treat in their mouths. But after months and months of the same diet, they longed for variety.

*"But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes."  
"-Num. 11:6*

Once again God answered their murmuring by sending quail. However this time they were sickly quail driven by a wind from the sea, only able to fly about three feet above the ground and thus easy to capture. For a full month they were forced to eat this quail diet and many died as a result of the ensuing sickness.

*"And there went forth a wind from the LORD, and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp, as it were a days journey on this side, and as it were a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp, and as it were two cubits high upon the face of the earth. And the people stood up all that day, and all that night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails: he that gathered least gathered ten homers: and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp. And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague. And he called the name of that place Kibroth - hattaavah: because there they buried the people that lusted."  
"-Num. 11:31-34*

## THE LESSON FOR US

Quail was a clean food. It was not wrong for Israel to desire quail. God had provided quail for them in the Exodus account with no ill side-effects. Israel's error was not in desiring quail but in despising the manna.

As Israel hungered for food in a dry and thirsty land, so the Christian longs for the Word of God. It is given in abundance-sixty-six books worth-teeming with everything from history to poetry to prophecy to doctrine. There are simple lessons for easy consumption. There are passages steeped in symbolisms of unfathomable depth. There is milk for the babe and there is meat for the strong.

No truth is more basic to the scriptural theme than that Christ died for our sins, the just for the unjust. No promise is sweeter than that made to father Abraham: *In thee and in thy seed shall **all the families of the earth** be blessed.* Salvation for all is the central theme of the Bible. It tastes in our mouth like *wafers mixed with honey.*

Yet the Bible does not stop there. Ezekiel and Revelation, for instance, plumb the depths of inspired writing. How their romantic symbolisms of chariots of fire, intertwining wheels within wheels, beasts, dragons and a city whose streets are paved with gold pique the imagination! How we would love to probe the depths of these mysterious visions and place them, like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, into one glorious picture of the future!

Such aspirations are surely not wrong, for as Paul says to Timothy *"all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable . . ."* (2 Tim. 3:16) In fact, this same Apostle Paul seems to berate some for not proceeding deeper in their studies of God's Word.

## MEAT AND MILK

*"For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, aØØt of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. "-Heb. 5:12-14*

Paul goes on to describe the fundamentals as the *milk* of God's Word in the opening verses of the next chapter:

*"Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, aØof eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit. "-Heb. 6:1-3*

No, the Christian's problem lies not with desiring to probe the limitless depths of God's Word. It lies with his viewing the precious basics as routine, simple or mundane.

*"Jesus saves," "Christ died for our sins," "he brought me out of the miry pit"* are basic elemental truths which should never cease to thrill the Christian's heart. If they cease to taste like honey-wafers and begin to taste like oil-baked cakes, the Christian is in trouble. As long as he continues to rejoice in these simple fundamentals, he may enjoy the "quail" as the *meat* of the Scriptures. But if he fails to continue to appreciate these basics, the intricacies of prophetic interpretation will rot in his mouth, bringing on the plague of sterile intellectualism and vain speculation.

If the Christian after hearing a sermon responds with the observation, "Oh, it was just another talk about the kingdom" or "it was a nice simple discourse about restitution" he should view it as a symptom of a grave disease. He is not ready to ask for the quail, the meat that lies beyond.

But if his heart never ceases to thrill to the sweet strains of the song of **salvation for all, he is** invited to plumb the unfathomable depths of Scriptures' storehouse, for...

*'Tis a mine, aye, deeper too,  
Than can mortal ever go.  
Search we may for many a year,  
Still some new rich gem appears.*

## AND FINALLY . . .

### **Christian Love**

*We are such a special family,  
The chosen ones of God's elect,  
As true Christians we lovingly  
Care for those whom he did select.*

*A kind note here, a scripture there,  
Are the ways in which we express  
Our concerns for those far and near,  
Who know and receive God's goodness.*

*And the world cannot understand  
This strong Christian tie that binds us.  
Such dear love toward our brethren  
Begins with our love for Jesus.*

by: Cathy Montague

### **What Have We Done Today?**

*We shall do so much in the years to come,  
But what have we done today?  
We shall give our gold in a princely sum,  
But what did we give today?  
We shall lift the heart and dry the tear,  
We shall plant a hope in the place of fear,  
We shall speak the words of love and cheer,  
But what did we speak today?*

*We shall be so kind in the afterwhile,  
But what have we been today?  
We shall bring each lonely life a smile,  
But what have we brought today?  
We shall give to truth a grander birth,  
And to steadfast faith a deeper worth,  
We shall feed the hungering souls of earth,  
But whom have we fed today?*

*We shall reap such joys in the by and by,  
But what have we sown today?  
We shall build us a mansion in the sky,  
But what have we built today?  
'Tis sweet in the idle dreams to bask  
But here and now do we do our task,  
Yes, this is the thing our souls must ask,  
What have we done today'*

## ***A TOAST***

*Here's to the time when men shall love  
His fellow-man and God above.  
Here's to the time when the Sun of Light  
Shall scatter the mists and gloom of night,  
When earth shall shine in robes of peace,  
The carnage and thunder of battles cease.*

*Here's to one heritage of good,  
Here's to world-wide brotherhood.  
Here's to commercial greed destroyed,  
Power to grind the poor made void,  
Honor in man without a stain,  
The giants of vice and injustice slain.*

*Here's to happiness, health and life,  
Here's to the end of selfish strife,  
Here's to men's homes lit up with love,  
Here's to the symbol of the dove.  
Here's to where no surges roar,  
To life enthroned forevermore.*

*Here's to the curse erased and gone,  
Here's to trees and flowers and sun,  
And agriculture whose golden yields  
Shall bring men out to the glorious fields.  
Here's to purity of laws,  
Here's to one universal cause.*

by: Walter Sargent