

The Herald Of Christ's Kingdom

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Ages and Dispensations

EDITOR'S JOURNAL

"And to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery which for ages hath been hid in God who created all things."—Ephesians 3:9 (ASV)

Time has always been an important element in God's plan for man. Such biblical phrases as "in due time" and "at the time appointed" indicate that God is a precise God and punctual. True, his concept of time may differ from ours, for a day with the Lord is "as a thousand years" (2 Peter 3:8). Therefore many feel that God's plans delay too long in coming to pass. But, as he informed the prophet Habakkuk, "though it tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not tarry" (2:3).

Noting the importance of time, many Christian scholars are termed "dispensationalists," meaning that they see large periods of time in God's plan devoted to specific works. Most of these scholars divide the Bible into seven such periods: the age of innocence, before sin entered; the age of conscience, to the flood; the age of human government, up to the time of Abraham; the age of promise, from Abraham to Sinai; the age of law, from Sinai to Christ; the age of grace, from the cross to the present; and the foretold kingdom age of a thousand years.

In the chart below, familiar to most within the historic Bible Student movement, this division is simplified into three dispensations, the middle of which is subdivided into three ages. In this issue of THE HERALD, we will look at these various time divisions. In this chart the dispensations are designated by their scriptural term, "worlds" (2 Peter 3:6, 13; Gal. 1:4).

While the terms "ages" and "dispensations" are similar, there are distinct differences between them. The word "dispensation," as found in the New Testament, is a translation of the Greek *oikumene*, meaning an administration. These dispensations refer to the period before the flood when man was left to his own conscience and angelic beings freely sought to intermingle with humans; to the period from the flood to Christ's

kingdom when earth is described as being subject to Satan as "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4). During this second period God dealt with three selected groups successively: (1) a chosen family of patriarchs who (2) would father the nation of Israel of whom God said "you only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2); and (3) the footstep followers of Jesus who would be selected from both Jews and Gentiles. In the third dispensation there will be a totally new administration, a righteous one under the leadership of Jesus Christ and his church, which will establish eternal peace and harmony for "ages without end" (Eph. 3:21, margin).

Each of these periods of time will be dealt with in successive articles with a view to noting the purpose each plays in the ultimate design of God for the accomplishing of his will that "all men be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth"(1 Tim. 2:4).

Tragically, many today look at the sorry state of affairs which prevails on the earth and reject the concept of a God. "How," they say, "can a God of power and love permit such evils and atrocities we witness every day?" But as an architect can not be judged by his unfinished building, so God can not be judged by the current status of humankind. When each of his ages will have accomplished their intended design, all men can join in singing "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!" Then "the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isa. 35:10).

Before the Flood

The World That Was

"The world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished." — 2 Peter 3:6

David Rice

Only six chapters of scripture are devoted to "the world that was" of the remote past, which endured more than 1½ millennia. Yet notwithstanding the relative brevity of the account, these chapters contain information of the most vital sort.

The narrative begins by describing the creation of the world and its preparation for living organisms. With simple elegance it explains that "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," and then specifies the sequence of seven eons of time which ordered and developed this creation for God's intended purpose—a habitation for living creatures.

The sequence is at once striking for the reasonable and natural progression of events, in fullest harmony with our best ability to judge of these things with our present retrospect of knowledge and inference. First dim light appeared, quite distinct from the pervasive darkness, as the mists settled sufficient for the glow of the sun to reach the earth. The large mass of vapors aggregated into two bodies, the seas below and the canopy of vapors above, separated by the atmosphere. Dry land began to emerge evidently through tectonic activity, which allowed the formation of land vegetation, grasses, trees and herbs—each producing after its own kind. At last the atmosphere became sufficiently cleared, perhaps through the organic respiration of the prolific plant life, so that the heavenly luminaries became clearly apparent and distinguishable, right down to the stars of heaven. Now animal life could be supported, first birds and sea life, subsequently the larger and more developed land animals. At last, in the end of the sixth epoch, God produced the crowning glory of it all: the direct creation of earth's intelligent lord and master, a human being, Adam.

A Living Soul

The Bible explains simply that "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). How natural, how plain, how clear. Man is not a mystical spirit—an immortal soul confined briefly to flesh and released through death. Man is a living creature, a brain and body enlivened with the animating spirit of life common even to animals, but created with the higher capacity of mind and intellect which makes him, though on a vastly reduced scale, worthy of the description: "in the image of God" (Gen. 1:27). God honored him with the capacity for unending, eternal life—a special privilege not allowed for the brute creation.

By disobedience Adam forfeited that privilege, though it will be restored through Christ in the Kingdom. But now humans do die, and the Bible describes man's death as simply as it did his creation. "His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (Psa. 146:4). Thus he waits for the resurrection.

The nature of man would have been greatly clarified to the English reader if the translators of the Bible had rendered the Hebrew *nephesh* (soul) consistently. As it is, the same word when applied to animals is rendered creature (Gen. 1:20, 21, 24, 30; 2:19; 9:10, 12, 15) except once in Numbers 31:28 where the context describes both humans and animals, forcing the translation "soul." And had English readers for 400 years been noting the several mentions of "dead *nephesh*" (soul) rather than "dead body," surely much more progress would have been made in their minds against the unscriptural Grecian philosophical belief that souls are imperishable (Num. 6:6; 9:6, 7, 10; 19:11, 13, 16; Hag. 2:13).

A Lovely Companion

If there ever was truly a "marriage made in heaven," it was surely the one between Adam and Eve. She was directly formed to be a perfect mate and companion for Adam. No doubt lovely in grace and form, we can imagine what joy and appreciation each must have felt for the other. No wonder that when Eve fell to the tempter, Adam was so strongly induced to join her, against his better judgment. How gracious that he will be granted another opportunity, with greater experience and having learned greater trust, to do better.

That opportunity awaits him in the resurrection, secured by the Redeemer's fidelity. Jesus becomes the second life-giver for the race. "The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam a quickening spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45).

The second Adam will also have a bride (Rev. 21:2), made lovely by every grace of character. For Eve's creation God "caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam . . . and he took one of his ribs" from his side as living material from which to fashion his companion (Gen. 2:21). In a parallel way the second Adam fell into the sleep of death on the cross, after which his side was pierced by a spear, allowing both blood and water to issue out (John 19:34). By Jesus' death, and the sufferings he endured as he "poured out his soul unto death" (Isa. 53:12), both the blood of atonement and the life-giving water of truth was provided, which gives life to his bride, the church.

The Garden of Eden

The Garden was a real place, at a real location on this globe. It was specially prepared for Adam, lush with vegetation watered by a thick "mist from the earth" (Gen. 2:6). Probably we should not surmise that rain had never fallen anywhere, for four rivers converged near Eden and their volume was likely composed of rain waters. However, atmospheric conditions were different before the flood (thus the intimation of Gen. 9:11-15 that the

rainbow was a new phenomenon after the flood) and evidently Adam and Eve did not experience rain while in the Garden (Gen. 2:5).

Where was Eden? Chapter 2 gives these clues. (1) It was "eastward," probably in relation to what we would consider "Bible lands." (2) It was near the convergence of the Pison, Gihon, Hiddekel [Tigris], and Euphrates rivers. Today the Tigris and Euphrates rivers converge as they empty into the Persian Gulf. Perhaps the Garden of Eden was located under what became the Persian Gulf after the flood waters augmented the sea depths.

Long range aerial photos of the Gulf region do show dry beds running from the east and the west into this basin, as the presently unidentified Pison and Gihon may have done then. The Pison passed through "Havilah, where there is gold," and probably is the area later inhabited by "Ophir and Havilah," sons of Joktan who after the flood dwelt in the "east" (Gen. 10:29). Since Ophir is coupled with Havilah, and Ophir also is associated with gold (Job 22:24; 28:16; Psa. 45:9; Isa. 13:12), probably to locate Ophir is to locate Havilah. Solomon sent ships from Elath on the Red Sea to fetch gold from Ophir (2Chron. 8:17, 18), which many ancient authorities place in the direction of India (McClintock & Strong, "Ophir," page 384, item 4), or more broadly the area east of the Persian Gulf. The Gihon passes through "the whole land of Cush." A glance at a map suggests this would be Arabian Cush rather than modern Ethiopia. "Under the denomination "Cush" were included both Arabia and the country south of Egypt on the western coast of the Red Sea" (ibid., "Cush," page 613).

It is at least consistent with this that the oil fields near the Persian Gulf imply a formerly lush growth of vegetation, and such a low-lying Eden could easily have been a tropical paradise. In this case "a river went out of Eden . . . from thence it was parted and became into four heads" (Gen. 2:10) means as one traced the river upstream out of Eden one discerned that it's source was four rivers converging upon the low-lying Eden.

Pictures of the Atonement to Come

The Old Testament is filled with types and allegories, some explicitly interpreted (Gal. 4:24; Heb. 5:6), but most left as jewels for discovery by the earnest student. The deeper one studies these gems, the more one sees a pattern and purpose behind the various allegories. They are not simply scattered randomly. Rather, the allegories pertain in some direct way to the subject of the narrative itself. For example, in the lives of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to whom God gave his covenants of promise, are intertwined allegories of those very covenants and the classes to develop from them. Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel all represent one aspect or another of these covenants, and their children represent one or another of the classes developed in one stage or another of the divine plan as a result of God's promises.

It is so here also. After the sin of Adam and Eve a ray of promise was given by God that "the seed of the woman" would bring a deliverance from sin and its penalty, and intertwined with the narrative are pictures of that coming atonement. Not until our first parentssinned did the need of a covering become apparent, representing that sin brings to

us the need for a covering for our iniquity. Adam and Eve first used fig leaves, but this proved unsuitable and God provided animal skins as a replacement. The fig tree is a picture of Israel, and the leaves are a picture of professions (Matt. 21:19; Rev. 22:2). Thus the fig leaves picture man's first hope of regaining a righteous standing by performing the teachings of the law, but this proved impossible and thus an inadequate covering. A blood atonement was necessary, represented by the death necessary to procure the durable covering of skins.

In the next scene a similar picture is provided by the offerings of Cain and Abel as they matured. Cain offered his vegetable produce, and Abel an animal sacrifice, "a more excellent sacrifice than Cain" (Heb. 11:4), and by it "he being dead yet speaketh," his gift typifying the sacrifice of Jesus which actually atones for sin. Cain represents Israel, who slew their younger sibling Jesus in jealousy. For this act Cain received a mark of punishment and became a wanderer, just as Israel has been marked with their sin and wandered through the Gospel age estranged from the greater blessings of God's plan.

Very Long Lives

A remarkable feature of this era was the extreme life-spans of all the generations before the flood. Omitting Enoch, who was specially taken that he not see death in its normal course, the life-spans from Adam to Noah inclusive were 930, 912, 905, 910, 895, 962, 969, 777, and 950 years. These ages do not reflect any systematic decline, indicating that the health and vigor of the condemned race remained at a high and constant level from one generation to the next. But after the flood life-spans sloped downward dramatically. Evidently the radical alteration of the environment was a causative factor. Perhaps the canopy of waters which descended had shielded ultraviolet or other radiations harmful to the human frame; if so, some appropriate remedy for this would have to be effected in the Kingdom.

Despite the long lives, it is striking that none reached or exceeded 1000 years. God's warning that "in the day that thou eatest [of the forbidden tree] thou shalt surely die" evidently was fulfilled on God's time, "a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday" (Psa. 90:4).

Angelic Interbreeding

One of the strangest elements of the pre-flood world is that some of the angelic hosts, without divine authorization, materialized into human form to effect an inbreeding among the Adamic race. "The sons of God [angels, cf. Job 1:6; 38:7] saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose . . . There were giants in the earth in those days . . . when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown" (Gen. 6:2-4).

It is possible that these angels were motivated at least in part by a wish to energize the dying race. But their influence proved pernicious. "The earth is filled with violence . . .

behold, I will destroy them" (Gen. 6:13) said God. The hybrid race was destroyed, but the angels themselves merely dematerialized, though with restrictions imposed upon them. "The angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6, cf. 2 Peter 2:4). If they prove repentant they will be judged for life, and if defiant in rebellion they will be destroyed. And who shall make this judgment? "We [the church] shall judge angels," Paul said (1 Cor. 6:3).

From these events a great lesson has been demonstrated: not even angelic infusions can save humanity from the condemnation of death. Only Christ, as the divinely appointed substitute for Father Adam, can through his offering release Adam and his seed from the pale of destruction, and as the "everlasting father" provide lasting, wholesome, eternal life.

Preparing the Ark

The first intimation recorded in Genesis of the impending doom upon the "world that was" appears in Genesis 6:3. "My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years." This might have been a 120-year preannouncement to Noah of God's intent (since at no time did the age of mankind stabilize at about 120 years). However, this was not the time Noah was commanded to construct an ark. That message appears in Genesis 6:13-22, and includes mention of his "sons," which Genesis 5:32 says were born when Noah was 500 years old, just 100 years before the flood. However, evidently the foreboding sense of approaching judgment had been very, very long-standing. Jude says that "Enoch . . . the seventh from Adam, prophesied . . . saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all" (Jude 14, 15), and no doubt these words had an application to the flood, though another to the judgment pending today. Enoch was taken by God more than 600 years before the flood.

The dimensions of Noah's ark were stipulated by God, 300 x 50 x 30 cubits high, and some have observed that its 6:1 length to width ratio was ideally suited to its purpose—floating with stability, something like a huge barge, with no concern for propulsion and little for direction.

Finally the calamity fell. God gave Noah a warning of seven days as the time approached. "And it came to pass on the seventh day [marginal reading] that the waters of the flood were upon the earth" (Gen. 7:10). Thus the rains began after 6 days, at the end of Noah's sixth century, and wiped away the sinful race. Adam's race less eight souls was laid to rest, waiting for a better opportunity and a brighter day, when they shall be called from the tomb to a better experience.

And now today, after six millennia of sin and death, the world is passing through a purging which also will lead to a better day and a brighter future. With the dawning of the seventh millennium comes a new world, the fruition of all the planning and preparation God has laid down age by age for the glorious consummation in the Kingdom of Christ.

The early rays of dawn are visible to the watchers, the preparatory drama is already unfolding, and the celestial rulers are coming into their kingdom authority beyond the veil. Soon the crescendo of events will give birth to the new order. And then the bright shining of the Lord's presence will bring uplift, healing, and blessing to a new world.

Therefore we join with the Apostle Paul in his words to the Ephesians, "May [God] be given glory forever and ever through endless ages because of his master plan of salvation for the Church through Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3:21; The Living Bible).

The Patriarchal Age

The Age of Promise

"He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations. Which covenant he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac; And confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant."—Psalms 105:8-10

Contributed

The patriarchal age began with the receding of the flood of Noah's day, when a family of eight souls walked out onto dry land. It ended with the death of Jacob, the last patriarch. It was a unique period of history when the Creator of the universe made an oath to a man. To this day, God has never broken that oath. The best is yet to come when its complete fulfillment will be realized.

In a cave purchased by Abraham can be found the burial place of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob and Leah. Machpelah, as it is still known, is located in the city of Hebron, a focal point of strife in the Israeli-Arab conflict of today. Throughout the ages Machpelah has survived, sacred to the Jew, and an inspiration in troublous times. It is a reminder of the promise which the Creator of the universe made directly with their fathers.

The Faith of the Fathers

To comprehend the importance of the patriarchal age and its role in God's plan, we must go back and consider the written record preserved for us of the events after the days of the flood. When the nation of Israel was ready to embark on the conquest of Canaan, Moses reminded them that God's favor was not because they were a mighty nation (Deut. 7:7, 8). The favor they received was not through their deeds and acts of righteousness. No, instead Moses pointed back to the faith of their fathers, the patriarchs, whom God had promised to bless. His oath to their fathers would be kept. God would give them, the descendants, the promised inheritance of the land. The Almighty keeps his promises.

"Pass over Jordan this day to go in to possess nations greater and mightier than thyself . . . the LORD thy God is he which goeth before thee . . . Speak not in thine heart, after the LORD thy God hath cast them out before thee, saying, For my righteousness the LORD hath brought me in to possess this land . . . and that he may perform the word which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Deut. 9:1-5).

As long as the children of Israel followed the ways of their fathers, the patriarchs, they could expect God's blessing: "if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, that I will give you the rain of your land in his due

season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine and thy oil, . . . teach your children . . . that your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children in the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth. . . . I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God . . . and a curse if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God" (Deut. 11:13-28).

The Patriarchs

The patriarchal age covered 660 years, ending about 3800 years ago. During those 660 years God developed a relationship with a few individuals. The bond became so strong that God made an oath which would affect their descendants forever.

Who were these patriarchs? What did they do to develop such a relationship with the Creator of the universe?

A number of men who lived during the patriarchal age are recorded in Genesis, chapters 10 and 11. Most have been written in history with little significance being given other than that they lived and died. A few names are better known: Noah, Shem, and Melchizedek. The key figures, though, of the patriarchal age are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When we think of the patriarchs, these three stand out as the forefathers of the nation of Israel. To these patriarchs the God of heaven began to reveal his promises and plans which would give hope for the fallen race. With these patriarchs God established a covenant, setting the theme for the rest of the Bible and establishing the groundwork for God's dealings in the ages to follow.

Abraham

Abraham (known originally as Abram) was told . . . to move to a new land that the Lord would show him. If Abraham would do this, the Lord would not only bless him by making of him a mighty nation but Abraham would be a blessing to other nations. Abraham would be a blessing not only to a few nations in the area but to all the families of the earth. Anyone that would bless Abraham would receive blessing from the Lord. Anyone that would curse Abraham would in return receive cursing from the Lord (Gen. 12:1-3). There is no record of this offer being made to anyone else. It was the beginning of a marvelous friendship. To be called a "friend of God" was an honor above all others. This honor was extended to Abraham: "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the friend of God" (James 2:23).

Because of Abraham's faith in God, it was "counted unto him for righteousness" (Rom. 4:3). This was important. The only way God could deal with him, considering Abraham was still imperfect through the fall of Adam, was for righteousness to be credited to him. There was at that time no other way for him to overcome his hereditary sinful standing before God.

At the age of 75, Abraham gathered his family and possessions and journeyed from Haran toward Canaan (Gen. 12:4). They walked through the plains and arid lands. After arriving in Canaan, their numbers grew. The flocks and herds increased. Abraham became rich in cattle, in silver and in gold—but he had no children, for Sarah, his wife, was barren.

When the group had grown to the point that the land could not support everyone, Abraham realized that there was plenty of land to sustain them if the group divided. Lot, Abraham's nephew, moved towards Sodom at the foot of the Dead Sea, while Abraham remained in the plains of Mamre, near Hebron (Gen. 13:18). Here Abraham dwelt and entertained travelers as guests.

While he dwelt on the plains of Mamre Abraham became known as a Hebrew (Gen. 14:13); here he waited for a son to be born—and waited—and waited. It was here that the Lord changed his name from Abram to Abraham. It was here that the Lord repeated his promise that he would become the father of many nations. It was here that he entertained three angels on their way to Sodom. It was here that, years later, his wife, Sarah, would die; and it was here that Abraham would purchase the cave of Machpelah to bury his beloved wife.

When Abraham experienced the joy of seeing the birth of his son, Ishmael, it seemed that finally the promise of a seed would be fulfilled. But then came the realization that Ishmael was not to be the promised seed.

Abraham waited in the land of Canaan for 25 years before having the joy of seeing Isaac's birth and receiving the assurance that this was the legitimate seed. Abraham was now 100 years old (Gen. 21:5). What a delight it must have been to watch Isaac grow up! But the Lord asked Abraham to embark on one more journey, to Mount Moriah. No journey he had ever taken would be more difficult. Each step was a mixture of obedience and heart searching. Why, another man might have thought, had the Lord brought him all the way for this one day . . . a day in which he would be asked to sacrifice his most precious possession, his son?

Abraham and Isaac climbed that mount together and prepared for the sacrifice. Isaac was aware of what was going on and willing to participate to whatever extent expected. The greatest test of obedience ever asked of Abraham stood before him. Would this man of faith be willing to follow the Lord's instruction—even to the point of sacrificing Isaac?

"And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven and said. . . . Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I see that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. . . . And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate

of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice" (Gen. 22:10-18).

Passing this test of obedience, Abraham heard God reiterate the promise of his becoming the father of many nations; and that his seed after him would bless all the world.

Before he died, Abraham gave gifts to Ishmael, his son by Hagar the handmaiden, and to the sons of his concubines, but Isaac was the heir of all that he had (Gen. 25:5). After Abraham died, God blessed his son Isaac. This blessing included a reminder of the oath which God had given to Abraham.

Isaac

"Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father; And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Gen. 26:3-5).

Isaac's servants were very good at digging wells. Wells in strategic locations provided water during the days of Abraham but they had since been plugged and filled in by the Philistines. One well after another was reopened and soon the land began to provide enough water for Isaac's herds. Surrounding tribes saw Isaac's prosperity and saw God's hand blessing him. They became eager to make peace with Isaac.

Years passed and Isaac had twin sons, Jacob and Esau. Isaac grew old and his eyesight dimmed. He wished to pass on the blessings which the Lord had given him to the eldest of the twins, Esau. A series of events changed that plan and the blessing intended for Esau went instead to his brother Jacob. This was according to the prophecy made at the birth of the twins (Gen. 25:23).

Jacob's purchase of the birthright and the later deception to obtain the blessing has often been difficult to understand and appreciate but the Lord honored these experiences by repeating the promise and blessing to Jacob. Jacob

"And Jacob went . . . toward Haran . . . and he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 28:10-14).

Jacob grew in the Lord's favor. He blessed Jacob in his dealings with his kinsman, Laban, and with Esau. The Lord also changed his name from Jacob to Israel, "A prince of

God"—"for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed"
(Gen. 32:28).

Jacob had twelve sons. From these sons came the twelve tribes of Israel. Even when the land was faced with drought and others died, the Lord overruled the experiences of Israel and his family to preserve them. The conspiracy of his sons to sell their brother Joseph into slavery eventually provided their means of survival. The Lord kept his promise to Jacob: "I am with thee and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again unto this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" (Gen. 28:15).

Before Jacob died in the land of Egypt, he made his son Joseph swear that he would bury him in the cave of Machpelah, the cave Abraham bought for a burying place. Machpelah was the cave where, years earlier, Jacob had buried his father Isaac and his mother Rebecca. Demonstrating his faith in God's covenant, Jacob wanted to be buried there also. This was done.

The death of Jacob signaled an end to the patriarchal age. After this the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob dealt with the twelve tribes as a nation. Everything the Lord did with the children of Israel was based on the original promises and oath made with their fathers.

"Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: . . . the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob"
(Deut. 9:5).

The obedience of the patriarchs under difficult times and unusual circumstances have set us examples. Their faith is an inspiration to cling to the promises God has in reservation for those that love him—promises which have never been broken, nor ever shall be.

The Jewish Age

Choosing a Special People

"For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself above all people that are on the face of the earth."—Deuteronomy 7:6

Richard Evans

.When God began his earthly creation, it was first necessary to prepare him a home. "For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited" (Isa. 45:18).

Only after that home was prepared did he bring forth the creatures. The greatest and last of this earthly creation was man and woman—intelligent beings with free will who were able to relate to him with love. "And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deut. 6:5).

Though essential to the development of a loving creation, free will gave the individuals power to choose for themselves to do good or to do evil. Anticipating the inevitable negative response, God with infinite wisdom and patience set in motion a plan—a plan that required several ages to demonstrate to his creation the calamitous consequences of that response and to select and prepare two peoples to assist him in the recovery of his creation from those consequences.

In the Beginning

In the beginning of that plan the heavenly Father related to only a few individuals—those who were willing to respond to him in faith and love. "By faith Enoch . . . had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Heb. 11:5).

Also, God allowed his spiritual creation, the angels, to interact directly with the earthly. Like humans, these beings were created free moral agents. Some of them, like their earthly counterparts, chose to follow their own dictates rather than God's (Jude 6). The consequences were tragic.

"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. . . . But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 6:5-8).

Only the family of Noah survived the destruction this evil brought upon the earth. Afterward God's interaction with his creation continued to be on an individual basis, and

with just a few notable exceptions (e.g., Job, Melchizedek), this relationship was restricted to individual members of the family of Abraham. To the patriarchs of that family God revealed his intention to recover his earthly creation.

"Now the Lord had said unto Abram, . . . I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: . . . and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:1-3).

An Age for Choosing a Special People

After a few more centuries the time arrived when the divine plan called for a new and different relationship. To select the first of his chosen peoples, and to provide his people much needed instruction, it was necessary to establish an earthly nation with God as its king—a nation through which he could prepare his people and make manifest some important principles—principles necessary for life.

He chose a nation of slaves to accomplish this work. "For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, the LORD hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: . . . Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deut. 7:6, 7, 9).

The Old Testament, except for the book of Genesis, is a chronicle of God's work with this nation of slaves—their deliverance, their covenant with God, their wanderings, their faithfulness and unfaithfulness, their blessings and cursings. In spite of their failings, God pledged they would become a "holy people"—a people set apart for sacred service. He promised that when they were obedient to his principles, and lived in harmony with them, they would be a kingdom of priests.

"Now therefore, if [*im*, Strong's #518, 'if, when, since'] ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Exod. 19:5, 6).

No time limitation was specified in this promise. God did not say if you obey my voice by 606 B.C., or by A.D. 33 or 70, or by any other date. God pledged that when Israel obeys, with no date stipulated, they will be a peculiar treasure unto him, a holy nation.

The Purpose of the Special People

Later in his relationship with these special people God reaffirmed his promise by an unconditional covenant with David, their king. "Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move

no more; . . . and thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever" (2 Sam. 7:10-16).

There are three different entities addressed in this covenant—house, kingdom, and throne; though different, the three are inseparable and together are to be "established for ever."

As with the covenant made with Abraham, the ultimate outcome does not depend upon David's righteous conduct, nor that of his seed. Against all contingencies David's house, David's kingdom, David's throne are secure forever.

Verse 14 of this text is difficult and most versions do not render it adequately. One that gives the proper thought reads, "I [God] shall be his Father, and he [David's seed] shall be my son. He will be a guide to the wandering: and I will cause him to correct men with a staff, and the sons of Adam with a touch" (2 Sam. 7:14, Ferrar Fenton).

The statements of the Davidic covenant parallel those of the Abrahamic. Not only is it personal and national, it is also universal—the future work of David's kingdom will be the recovery of all the "sons of Adam."

The prophets and teachers God sent to his chosen nation made this universal promise clear and emphatic. David's kingdom was to be a kingdom of priests through whom God could fulfill his covenant with Abraham.

"Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord GOD, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel. Thus saith the Lord GOD; In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded. And the desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by. And they [the rest of the sons of Adam] shall say, This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited. Then the heathen [all humanity] that are left round about you, shall know that I the Lord build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate: I the LORD have spoken it, and I will do it. Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men [all humanity] like a flock. As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts; so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men: and they [the sons of Adam] shall know that I am the LORD" (Ezek. 36:32-38).

God promised his special people of Israel he would use them to provoke his earthly creation to return to his principles, to his ways; but, as he declared to Moses, Israel must first obey his voice. Ezekiel's prophecy addressed this prerequisite: "I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (Ezek. 36:26, 27).

There are no conditions attached to this promise, and it is yet to be fulfilled! At no time in the past has Israel received its "heart of flesh"; therefore, there is a time still future when God's chosen people will walk in his statutes and keep his judgments—when they will obey God's voice. Consequently, at that time, this special people will be a kingdom of priests. God decreed there will be a time when Israel will hearken to his principles. His people will be obedient! Israel, as a nation, is predestined to be a servant to their God:

"Thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee. I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine . . . for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him. . . . Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen; that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there is no God formed, neither shall there be after me" (Isa 43:1, 7, 10).

"Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified. . . . I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth" (Isa. 49:3, 6).

God predestined the nation of Israel to be "a light to the Gentiles" which would bring his salvation "unto the end of the earth"—to all his earthly creation. This predestination does not apply to individuals, it concerns the aggregate, the sum. Israel, as a nation, will be God's servant and his holy people. The individual Jew is not predestined to share in this divine purpose. God will not violate the free-will of his creatures, and will not have any serve him who is unwilling. The choice is the individual's.

Another Age, Another People

The heavenly Father used the Jewish age for the work of selecting and developing his "holy nation." In his marvelous plan, however, he has predestined two peoples—Israel and the church. When the age arrived for the work of developing the second people, he sent forth his son. A wondrous sign marked the inauguration of its work when that son, Jesus, was baptized in the river Jordan. "And straightway coming out of the water, he saw the heavens opened [schizo, Strong's 4977, 'rent asunder'] and the spirit like a dove descending upon him" (Mark 1:10).

The word used here for the opening (rending) of the heavens is the same as used for the rending of the Temple veil in Luke 23:45. This rending of the heavens, and later the veil, demonstrated that yet another relationship between God and his creation had been introduced—a relationship that did not replace what had come before.

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am come not to destroy but to fulfill [*pleroo*, #4237, 'to complete']. 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 [*ginomai*, #1096, 'be accomplished']" (Matt. 5:17, 18).

The purpose of this age, the Gospel age, was not to replace Israel in the divine arrangements. It was an added dimension. His covenant with Israel remained in force while a new and different relationship was set in place to develop his second predestined people.

"James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me, Simeon [apostle Peter] hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I [God] will return and [the quotation from Amos 9:11, 12 begins here] will build again the tabernacle [tent] of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: [in order] that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things" (Acts 15:13-17).

At the time the words quoted by James were first spoken the house of David had so fallen the prophet Amos described it as a tent, or booth; thus symbolizing the frailty of it in a divided Israel. In spite of its condition at the time, however, God through Amos promised "in that day" he would return (Deut. 30:3,9; Jer. 12:14, 15; Psa. 6:4; 80:3, 7, 14, 19; 90:13; Num. 10:36) and "build it as in the days of old" (Amos 9:11,12).

Amos' prophecy dealt with all three aspects of the Davidic covenant—David's throne, David's house (tent), David's kingdom (2 Sam. 7:10-16). James, by quoting Amos, confirmed this direct link to that unconditional covenant, the covenant that reaffirmed the predestined Israel of the future.

James pointed out that before this promise could be fulfilled God must first take out of the world "a people for his name." After this, he would remember his covenant with David and then the divine purpose would be accomplished—the residue of men would seek after the Lord.

A Subsequent Age for Correction

The introduction of this new relationship between God and his creation, the calling and election of the church, did not mean God abandoned "the apple of his eye" (Deut. 32:10). The Apostle Paul's answer to just such a question was unequivocal, "I say, then, hath God cast away his people? God forbid" (Rom. 11:1). This affirmation was firmly founded on God's long-standing promise: "And the LORD thy God will make thee plenteous . . . for good [Hebrew *ki*] the Lord will again rejoice over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers: . . . if [*ki*, 'for'] thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, and if [*ki*, 'for'] thou [shalt] turn unto the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul" (Deut. 30:9, 10).

"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" (Jer. 30:11).

During the age in which God has been taking out of the world a people for his name (the church), he has been correcting Israel. Moses had prophesied long before of the need for this age of correction.

"And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; that then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee" (Deut. 30:1-3).

Moses foretold Israel's future would first be a time of blessing, followed by a time of cursing and scattering, then there would be a time of regathering and obedience. God promised he would return to Israel (Acts 15:16).

That the heavenly Father set aside an age for Israel's correction makes evident it has a future, a time when his favor will return; otherwise the correction would be in vain (Isa. 55:11).

"And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel, they [the Jews] are enemies for your [the church's] sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes, for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11:26-29).

The immediate context makes manifest the call of national Israel, Jacob; the "whole house" (Ezek. 37:11; 39:25) will never be repented of by God. God has predestined Israel to be a holy nation, his special people.

Other Purposes of the Jewish Age

A critical part of the work to bring about this glorious conclusion was accomplished during the Jewish age. Though God used this age to choose and develop his special people, it also provided needed instructions for subsequent ages—instructions for those whom God would call to be the church and, later, for all of his human creation.

1) The Jewish age prepared a people among whom would be some who would be receptive to the call of the Gospel age (Gal. 3:19-24).

2) The Jewish age provided "examples" from which those called to be of the church could learn important lessons (1 Cor. 10:1-11; Rom. 15:4)—lessons that would be of value to all humanity in the Messianic age.

3) The Jewish age made it manifest that a life of faith was essential for righteousness. Works of the law would not suffice (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:11).

4) The Jewish age provided graphic illustrations of the vast difference between good and evil (Rom. 3:20; 7:13).

5) The Jewish age furnished dramatic proof that the human creature is incapable of doing good outside of the laws of God (Rom. 3:19; 7:7-25).

God's Plan Irrevocable

From the beginning, then, God's promise to his servant Jacob has been irrevocable. As Jeremiah declared: "Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the LORD; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid. . . . Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will bring again the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have mercy on his dwelling place; and the city shall be builded upon her own heap, and the palace shall remain after the manner thereof. And out of them shall proceed thanksgiving and the voices of them that make merry; and I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small" (Jer. 30:10, 18, 19).

God has spoken. He will not repent! He will return to Israel! Then the grand purpose of the Jewish age will have been accomplished. God's servant Jacob will be a holy people—a special people that will be a witness of God's salvation for all the families of the earth. The sons of Adam shall return to their gracious Creator in love and obedience.

"And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away all tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth; for the LORD hath spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (Isa. 25:7-9).

The Gospel Age

Amazing Grace of the Gospel

"The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it."—Luke 16:16

Michael Brann

That God has an orderly and prearranged plan is beyond rational doubt. The Scriptures abound with words that this is true. Consider for instance Ephesians 1:9, 10 which states in the NIV: "And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."

Consider also Galatians 4:4 which says "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law."

The matter is stated more precisely in Hebrews 11:3. However a better translation than the King James rendering is necessary. The King James reads "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." A more proper reading is "In faith, we perceive that the ages have been so thoroughly adjusted by God's command." Thus we come to understand that God has precisely and purposefully calculated various time periods or ages to accomplish his will, and it is a matter of faith for us to perceive that eventually it will all come to pass as he has ordained it, even though we may not always understand every detail of the various stages or ages.

This latter verse brings to mind the way a house is "framed" or "thoroughly adjusted." Different rooms are planned or framed with the idea that each are to serve various needs and purposes. One room may be set aside for food preparation, one for resting, another for washing and cleaning, etc., yet all the rooms together make the complete house. So, in God's unfolding divine plan of the ages, he has set aside various periods of time to effect various purposes and designs which shall eventually all be incorporated into his larger over-all plan for eternity.

The Scriptures declare that all of God's works are good and show his handiwork, yet certain features may especially highlight one or another of his many wonderful attributes. In Genesis, chapters one and two, God took seven days to accomplish his purpose. There may be many reasons why he used seven "days," some of which may yet remain to be discerned, but one reason that is apparent is his desire to show a plan of purpose, progression, and orderly development. Perhaps he intended students of the Scriptures to likewise obtain from this a clue to his eternal purposes and that the unfolding of them was intentionally purposeful, progressive, and orderly. It is up to those who are truly

interested to search for what that purpose, progression, and order is and how it is to be fulfilled.

Labeling Time Periods

It is not inappropriate to classify or label these time periods to help our understanding. The Apostle Paul declared this as proper when he instructed Timothy to "rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

This advice we understand includes the idea of "dividing" or categorizing certain features of God's plans and instructions into their proper time frame. For instance, the Israelites, according to Old Testament law, had many regulations for diet and hygiene which are not laws for the Christian. Neither do Jewish cleansing rites and animal sacrifices apply to Christians today.

Our focus will be upon a "rightly divided" section of time often referred to as the "Gospel age." Although the term "Gospel age" is not found in the Scriptures, it does serve to identify the main thrust or emphasis of this time period. The term Gospel age helps distinguish it from the age which precedes it (the Jewish age) and the age which follows it (the Millennial or Messianic age).

The Gospel Age Begins

Our Lord himself initiated this particular period of time and spent much effort explaining its purpose and characteristics. The Apostle described this as "a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh" (Heb. 10:20). Here, he carefully distinguishes it from the Jewish age.

The Jewish age is referred to in this manner since during that period of time in God's plan he dealt specifically and exclusively with the nation of Israel, while all other nations and peoples played minor supporting roles (if any at all). By way of contrast, in the Millennial age the Lord will be dealing with a much broader group of people than either the Jewish or Gospel age. In that age the whole world of mankind, including all who have ever lived, will be the recipients of special attention from the Lord.

The Work of the Gospel

The Gospel age indicates a period of time when the chief work or focus will be centered around the message of the gospel and the spreading of it. The thrust of this period of time is directed mainly towards a select group of individuals. The word "gospel" means "good news" or "glad tidings." A variety of aspects of good news might be considered, but primarily they would include three main areas, each of which are very closely related and intertwined. These would be: 1) that Jesus was sent by his Father to redeem mankind from sin and death; 2) this was accomplished successfully and will mean a resurrection of all the human race from the prison-house of sin and death; and 3) that some amongst

mankind are to be chosen and developed to be a suitable bride for Jesus and will serve as his associates in blessing all the families of the earth.

One interesting and significant declaration made long before the Gospel age was even inaugurated and which would incorporate these three elements is described in Galatians 3:8: "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed." Unfortunately, many who claim to preach the gospel have entirely overlooked the intentions indicated by the Lord that the gospel or good news included the "blessing of all the nations of the earth." This divine promise implies that a resurrection must take place before many of these peoples can be blessed. This hope is also part of the "gospel" or good news, in that "Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man." (See Heb 2:9.)

The gathering, selection and development of the bride of Christ has taken the entire age. Already this has taken nearly 2000 years to accomplish! Jesus referred to this select group of people as a "little flock," and yet looking over the course of the last two millennia there have been several hundreds of millions who have named the name of Christ. According to the time and numbers, it seems as though the "little flock" or bride of Christ would be completed by now. Why is the kingdom for which we have been taught to pray not yet here? Why has it taken so long to complete the church before the next age can begin?

Terms of Discipleship

Apparently, this preparation and development of the little flock, the bride adorned for her husband, is more than just a matter of profession. Jesus spoke of this matter saying in Matthew 7:21-23, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." The terms of true discipleship go far beyond profession and desire.

God set the standard for those whom he will choose to be the associates of his Son to bless all the families of the earth when he said in Luke 9:23, 24, "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it."

During this Gospel age, the disciples must be like their Master in many ways. The Apostle indicates a similar condition is required of those who are to be eventually found faithful to the Lord in 2 Timothy 2:11, 12: "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us:" and that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).

Satan Still the God of this World

The Apostle Paul also tells us that Satan is the "god of this world" (Greek: aion, age or order). Thus during this Gospel age, Satan is permitted not only to rule and cause general chaos and confusion amongst the earthly creation in general, but he is also granted limited permission to persecute the saints, just as he did our Lord. It is by these buffetings, testings, trials, and temptations that the Lord is able to have us demonstrate our character as being truly one in harmony with him, his spirit, his plans, and his purposes. Because the special promise awaiting the faithful Christian is so high—life, honor and immortality, a share in the divine nature itself—the testing must be difficult before such a high and exalted position could be given with trust and confidence! (See Rom. 2:7 and 2 Peter 1:4.)

Throughout this Gospel age, we see how even those who profess to have been his followers have been instrumental in persecuting fellow Christians, Jews, and any others who may have appeared to get in their way. Wars, greed, political intrigue, power struggles, and fame and fortune have directed much of their course. How sad to think that these have identified themselves with the man who was the noblest who ever walked the face of the earth! How these mere professors of the Lord's followers have been blinded by the god of this world!

Due to the high standards which the Lord seeks for those who will eventually be found faithful, and in contrast to the millions who have perverted the standard of true Christian conduct, we begin to see why it has taken nearly 2000 years to finish the remaining work of the Gospel age.

An Age Nearing Its End

The work is nearing completion. Just how many years we who have devoted our lives to the Lord may have yet remaining for us to develop a character pleasing to him is not known. It is certain we only have the rest of our lives to accomplish it. The next age will usher in a new work, a work designed to uplift the fallen human race. It is up to us now to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1), that we may share in that glorious work with our beloved Bridegroom, Jesus Christ.

From eternity's shore, we may one day look back at this "Gospel age" and describe it as a special time when God displayed his amazing grace. It is indeed amazing grace that we who are born in sin and shapen in iniquity were called to occupy a place in that most glorious of places, the eternal abode of God and Jesus Christ, heaven itself—to there live and dwell in the presence of the Lord forever! "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple" (Psa. 27:4).

The Messianic Age

Light in the Evening

"And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: But it shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light."—Zechariah 14:6, 7

Carl Hagensick

Christ's Messianic, or millennial, kingdom is frequently portrayed as a utopia. It is envisioned as a time when peace reigns supreme on the earth and every man loves his fellow. The Bible, however, presents quite a different picture of this time.

While it is true that it is an era in which all evil will be restrained (Rev. 20:1-3), it does not follow that all of the effects of that evil will be immediately erased from the hearts of men. It is also true that the Bible does foresee a period of worldwide prosperity and good will. However that is not to be the situation at the beginning of the Messianic age but at its conclusion. That thousand-year day, as Zechariah foretells in our text (14:6, 7), will be "not day, nor night." It is an epoch of transition from the present dominion of sin and death to the post-millennial "ages to come," in which righteousness, justice, and harmony will indeed flourish. Christ's kingdom will neither be dominated by the present darkness of the night of sin and death nor be illuminated by the day star shining out of every human heart. But the prophet assures us that by its terminus, "at evening time," it will be light.

In this article we will examine three illustrations of this kingdom from the Old Testament that show the difficulties and traumas of the kingdom of Christ in the Messianic age.

Israel's Jubilee Year

The Mosaic law contained a feature for perpetuating an equal economic base among the Jewish people. This feature was called the year of Jubilee and is described in detail in Leviticus 25. Under this provision every member of the twelve tribes was to regain his family's inheritance of land every fifty years. Any who had been forced through debt into becoming indentured servants were to be freed. Thus a fresh economic base was laid to give every one an opportunity to avoid poverty and prevent a wide gap between the very rich and the very poor.

The jubilee did not guarantee absolute economic equality, however. The diligent farmer was allowed to keep his monetary profits while the indolent may regain his land but not have the capital to maintain it. The scope of the jubilee was limited also, in that it only applied to agricultural land and not to dwellings in the cities (Lev. 25:29, 30).

While our English word "jubilee" carries with it the thought of elation, the same is not true of the Hebrew word (Strong's #8643). That word simply means a loud noise, usually a trumpet blast, and can be either a loud sound of joy (Job 8:21) or the shout of alarm for war (Jer. 4:19). At one and the same time the jubilee would bring joy to the one who would receive back his property and a feeling of loss to the one who must give it back.

It is worthy of note that the Law allowed a full year for the jubilee process. It was not envisioned as a matter that would take place on one given day every fifty years, but a process that would require an entire year for its accomplishment. Nor is this hard to imagine, for it would be a year of adjudication. There would be genealogical records to trace and surveys would have to be made to assure property lines. Disputes might easily arise where there were large families and heirs had been born subsequent to the loss of the land. Divorce and remarriage situations would lend further complications, as would tribal intermarriages.

The Jewish historian Josephus had much to say about the jubilee law. He listed a number of exceptions and modifications that would not be necessary if the keeping of that law had been straightforward and simple. As in all legal matters, the original law laid down principles which required great wisdom in their application to specific situations.

So it will be in Christ's kingdom. As the Israelite who lost his land returned to his possession on the jubilee year, so the human creation will return from the grave to its long-lost possession. Notice the phraseology in Ezekiel 16:55, "When thy sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former estate, then thou and thy daughters shall return to your former estate." In a similar vein, Moses writes in Psalm 90:3, "Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men."

Obtaining that which was lost is one thing, maintaining it is another. Just as the diligent farmer who saved from his profits of prior years will be in a better position to maintain an inheritance than the slothful one who has set nothing aside, so the man who has built a good character in the present life will have much advantage over the one who has let his fleshly passions rule his life. "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment;" writes the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 5:24, "and some men they follow after."

As the jubilee required a full year to sort out the accounts, so it will not be until the end of the kingdom that full equality will be attained and all who have shown a sheep-like disposition will hear "the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34).

Battles in Canaan

As Canaan was the "promised land" for the children of Israel fleeing from Egypt in the time of the exodus, so eternal life will be the "promised land" for mankind leaving the graves in the resurrection morning. But, though God had promised to give the land of Canaan to the Israelites, he did not promise that they would obtain it without a struggle.

When Israel was about to cross the river Jordan into Canaan, the Lord told Moses to give them a message: "ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places: And ye shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein: for I have given you the land to possess it. . . . But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell" (Num. 33:52, 53, 55).

Crossing the river Jordan represented mankind passing over the sentence of death. This will be accomplished by bringing them forth from their tombs in the beginning of Messiah's kingdom. It is interesting to note that the river Jordan was dried up near a small village named Adam (Josh. 3:15-17). So the death sentence over man will be rolled back to the man who bore the same name—the first man, Adam.

But crossing the Jordan did not give them immediate possession. There were seven nations— "the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites" (Josh. 3:10)—which had to be first driven out. This was not instantaneous but required six years of war.

Mankind in the kingdom, coming back from the grave, will also face enemies. These enemies, like the natives that inhabited Canaan before the Israelites, represent one's former habits and manner of life. As we read in Proverbs 16:32, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

Even the number seven appears significant. As there were seven principle tribes to be driven out of the land after they crossed the Jordan, so the Bible implies that there are seven principal sins man must eradicate to inherit eternal life, "These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren" (Prov. 6:16-19).

The process would not be rapid. There would be defeats along the way. But while the Lord would not give them the land without their fighting for it, neither would he abandon them in the battle but would "drive out the enemy before them." However, it would not be a quick process. They must be ready to use the land they conquered, else it would lie waste and wild beasts would establish their homes on it. "I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply

against thee. By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land" (Exod. 23:29, 30). So it will be with the human race during the kingdom. Their battles against self and deeply entrenched habits will take many years. They, too, will meet defeats along the way. But, as the Lord did not abandon ancient Israel, so he will not abandon man in his struggle nor condemn him for repented shortcomings in his struggles.

This process is described in great detail in Job 33:23-28, "If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter [a mediator, NAS, NIV, RSV], one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness: then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom. His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth: he shall pray unto God, and he will be favorable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy: for he will render unto man his righteousness. He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light." To this the writer adds the comforting words, "Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living" (vs. 29, 30).

A Famine in Egypt

The biblical account of the famine in Egypt in the days of Joseph is well known. Seven years of prosperous crops were followed by seven years of drought. It was only by the interpretation of Pharaoh's dream by Joseph and his subsequent wise administration that both the people of Egypt and even those of surrounding countries survived. These contrasting years of plenty and of scarcity of food furnish a good illustration of the Gospel and Messianic ages in the plan of God.

As the Messianic age follows the Gospel age, so the years of famine followed the years of plenty. It is strange to our minds to think of the kingdom of Christ as a famine. Perhaps it may help if we redefine the word famine. Instead of thinking of it as a scarcity of food, we can define it as an abundance of need. It was a need that could have been avoided. As one commentator has well observed, "If all the Egyptians had done for themselves in the seven years of plenty as Joseph did for Pharaoh, they had not been now in these straits; but they regarded not the warning they had of the years of famine, concluding that tomorrow shall be as this day, next year as this, and much more abundant" (Matthew Henry's Commentary).

Because man has thus far failed to learn from the experiences of the present, he will need to rely on Jesus, the greater than Joseph, in the future age for his spiritual food and nourishment. It is worthy of note that the Israelites in Egypt were the only ones to receive food freely, showing the exemption of God's people from having to feel the need of the poverty caused by their own lack of foresight.

In Genesis 47:13-26 we read of the effects of this famine on the economy of Egypt. For the first several years of the famine the people purchased grain from the state. When their

money ran out, near the end of the drought, they gave their cattle to Joseph for more grain. After their flocks were depleted, they ceded their land to the state. Finally, in desperation, they even gave themselves, to become slaves and be relocated to wherever Joseph desired, paying for their food by indentured service. The Encyclopedia Britannica dates the earliest roots of Socialism to Plato's Republic in the fourth century B.C.; yet, Joseph introduced socialism over a thousand years earlier.

This process of the successive transfer of their fiscal assets and finally their own service to the state furnishes an apt illustration of the Messianic age. As man progresses up the "highway of holiness" (Isa. 35:8-10), he will yield more and more of his fealty to God until he finally comes to the point of full submission and consecration. Then he will, as the church of Christ today, become a "bond-slave" of Christ (see Rom. 6:1-23; Luke 17:7-10).

Without Price

A contrasting picture is found in Isaiah 55:1 and Revelation 22:17: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price;" "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."

In these texts the Messianic blessings are free, while the picture of Joseph shows them to be bought at great price. Which is true? Both! The Isaiah and Revelation references show that there is nothing that anyone can do to earn the divine blessing. Redemption is given by grace. The lessons will be available freely to all, but as the recipient learns and applies them, he must gradually yield all he has in thankful appreciation.

This is also shown in the story of Joseph and the famine in Egypt. It would be easy to imagine the people grumbling as they had to give up their possessions, and finally their very freedom, in order to live. A disgruntled spirit would be easy to understand. Their attitude, however, was far different. It is shown by their words in Genesis 47:25, "And they said, You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be slaves to Pharaoh" (RSV).

Nor was this change in economy in Egypt short lived. After the famine was over, the people became tenant farmers. The land was leased to the people for tilling and they were given seed to sow but there was a regular payment on the increase of the land of twenty percent (twice what God was later to ask of Israel when he instituted the tithe of ten percent). "Then Joseph said unto the people, Behold, I have bought you this day and your land for Pharaoh: lo, here is seed for you, and ye shall sow the land. And it shall come to pass in the increase, that ye shall give the fifth part unto Pharaoh, and four parts shall be your own, for seed of the field, and for your food, and for them of your households, and for food for your little ones" (vs. 23, 24).

Summary

Summarizing, then, what will the millennial kingdom of Christ be like? His kingdom will be like a legal battle, a "day of judgment," sorting out the jubilee claims of all humanity returning to their original inheritance. His kingdom will be like a protracted war as they learn to fight and dispossess long entrenched bad habits and control their own spirit. His kingdom will be like a famine in which they must turn over all they have, even their own selves, in return for the blessing of life forevermore. They will end up with the attitude, "You have saved my life; may it please you for us to be your servant for evermore" (See Gen. 47:25).

Will that kingdom be a utopia of peace and prosperity? No! But it will introduce such ideal conditions. Eternity will spread as the Garden of Eden before them as the Messianic age fades away into the brilliant sunlight of a "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13). The Messianic kingdom of Christ is a period of transition to those glorious eternal "ages to come" (Eph. 2:7). The darkness of the present will gradually yield to the incoming "sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2) and "at evening time it shall be light" (Zech. 14:7).

Harvests

The Purpose of Harvests

"The harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels."—Matthew 13:39

Samuel Stalder, Germany

It is important for a correct understanding of God's purposes with mankind to comprehend the times of harvest in the divine plan of the ages. That plan can be divided into three dispensations with the following nine sequential periods of time:

First Dispensation	Second Dispensation	Third Dispensation
The First age	Patriarchal age	Messianic age
	Jewish age	Little Season
	Jewish harvest	The ages to come
	Gospel age	
	Gospel harvest	

In this article we will consider the three harvest periods indicated in Scriptures: those of the Jewish and Gospel ages as well as the "Little Season." We will investigate the significance of a harvest and why God uses such a method in his dealings with mankind. We will also look at the connection between these harvests and how they differ from each other.

What is a Harvest?

A natural harvest is for the purpose of gathering in the crops. It is a time of great joy and blessings, though there is much work to do. Harvests are rather short time periods in God's plan with four distinct characteristics:

1. A change in God's dealings and his covenants;
2. A sifting and separating time in the gathering of "fruits;"
3. A time of special revelations from God;
4. A time with special blessings and joys.

A Change of Dealing

God changes his dealings with mankind to accomplish the fulfillment of his purpose. Before the patriarchal age, he dealt with a few individuals. The flood led into the patriarchal age and God began to deal most specifically with a family of patriarchs and their wives. He made covenants with them, most notably, the Abrahamic Covenant. Later he made the Law Covenant with the nation of Israel. This was the beginning of the

Jewish age. But God's plan continues and is still continuing, and at times God changes the way by which he deals with different groups of mankind.

At each of these remarkable changes God provided a harvest time to gather in a group of individuals from the past age who would begin the dealings under the new arrangements. The harvested ones are the "first fruits" or helpers of the new order and have a special purpose in God's plan. It is for this reason that they are especially mentioned in God's word. A Sifting Time

"The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved" (Jer. 8:20 NIV).

The first act in this work is to present the first fruits to the Lord: "Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest. And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it" (Lev. 23:10, 11). It was after this that the regular harvesting began.

This, however, is only typical. The antitypical firstfruits also require a separation. In Matthew 13:30, speaking of the harvest in the parable of the wheat and the tares, we read: "Let both grow together unto the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn" (NIV).

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary has an interesting explanation of this process: "The harvesting process began with the cutting of grain with a sickle (Deut. 16:9; Mark 4:29). Then it was gathered into sheaves. Next the grain was taken to the threshing floor, an important local site with a hard surface and often situated on higher ground. Various tools, such as metal-toothed sledges drawn by oxen, were used for threshing (Isa. 28:28; 41:15). Then the grain was winnowed, or tossed into the air, with a pitchfork. The wind carried off the chaff, but the heavier kernels and straw fell to the ground" (Matt. 3:12).

So it will be with the wheat and the tares. They will be gathered out of the field (the Christian world) where they have grown side by side with imitation Christians. Even after the gathering they will be subject to various experiences, processes similar to threshing and winnowing, before they will be fully separated, not only from the tares or weeds, but also from the unusable chaff which so naturally clings to the wheat.

Special Divine Revelations

"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers to the harvest field" (Luke 10:2 NIV).

The Lord is revealing himself to the workers by opening the plan of the incoming age to them. Many parables of the Lord concern the work of harvest. One of the most discussed is the parable of the "penny." "And when they came that were hired about the eleventh

hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee" (Matt. 20:9-14),

We are not now looking for a dispensational application of this parable. We are to observe the principle of the Lord, that he is constantly looking for workers and is revealing himself to them, so that they are called. The Lord let them understand that there is such a work to do. It is more than the wish to "evangelize" people of good will. It is consecration and cooperation with God himself and with the Lord of the harvest.

A Time of Joy and Blessings

"You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy, they rejoice before you as a people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder" (Isa. 9:3 NIV).

The harvest is a special time of blessings. In a natural harvest, the blessings are shown in the farmer's crop, and for the poor and afflicted receiving the leftovers or gleanings from the field. In the antitype there is a special blessing both in the work in the field and in the truths which the Lord reveals with his presence.

We have not extended the examples in the chart below to include the Little Season at the end of the Messianic age because we now know very little about the ages to come which will follow this Little Season.

Harvest Parallels

There are parallels between the Jewish and Gospel harvests. The first advent of our Lord Jesus Christ ended at the end of the Jewish age, in the Jewish harvest. His second advent, in the manner of a thief in the night, is at the end of the Gospel age, in the Gospel harvest. He came at the first advent to establish his church; he comes again the second time as their bridegroom. Other parallels relate to the time aspects. The Jewish harvest lasted for forty years. Many anticipated that this would also be the length of the Gospel harvest. However time has shown that the Gospel harvest continues until the fullness of the church is come in: "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits, that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (Rom. 11:25).

The Little Season

The Little Season is different. We miss the identification of the harvest workers of that time. Some have styled the Little Season as a harvest because it is, in fact, a short period of judgment. "And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his

prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev. 20:7-10).

The Little Season is a dividing period of evil and good. Gog and Magog symbolize the evil forces led by Satan. The "camp of the saints" are those who are "harvested" into the "ages to come."

Conclusion

Harvests are the overlapping periods of the ages. They are necessary to bring the faithful ones into the barn, that is to say, to gather the "firstfruits" to change God's dealings with humanity.

Harvests are essential for the progress of the divine program. They bring the pain of separation along with the compensating blessings of more truths becoming available. The harvest workers enjoy this time, although there is little time to rest and plenty of work to do.

We are now living in a harvest time and we can have a share in that blessed work. It is a joy for us to help in bringing "wheat" into the "barn" of the Lord.

Ages to Come

More to Follow

"Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."—2 Peter 3:13

An excerpt from "God of All Space" by A. O. Hudson, Bible Study Monthly, England

What of the far-distant future, when the human race is fully at one with God, evil has vanished without a trace, and death is a thing of the past. The Bible goes no further than the close of the Millennium, with which is associated the disappearance of evil and the entry of reconciled man into everlasting life.

Jesus alluded to that time in the words "come ye blessed of my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). This, says Paul, is when Christ, at the close of his Millennial work with mankind "shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, the Father, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

Of the state of humanity after that moment there is barely a hint, only that "the dwelling of God is with men . . . and there shall be no more death . . . behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:3-5). "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind" (Isa. 65:17). "In the coming ages," says Paul, God will "show the immeasurable riches of his grace" (Eph. 2:7). The unassailable principle which the Bible enunciates with clear and definite voice is that life goes on; life is endless. . . . The fact has to be faced that this planet earth, admirably adapted as it is for continued human life, is limited in size. The original divine commission at man's creation to "be fruitful and increase, fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28) has been measurably accomplished already, although the present fashionable forebodings about the earth's inability to support more than the three thousand millions it has at the moment are wide of the mark and quite inaccurate. Under the present social system, controlled by greed and characterized by ignorance, it may well be so, but under the beneficent and wise administration of the Messianic age the position will be very different. It has been reliably calculated that if full use were made of the available land surface and of usable solar energy reaching the earth, sufficient food could be produced for fifty times the present population, although the planet would be uncontrollably crowded long before that number was reached. But even so, if life is to go on into the unlimited future it is clear that man must either migrate from the earth or stop procreating.

Alternatives

The second alternative is sometimes thought to be unnatural, but is this really so? The same thing happens in everyday life. In the traditional life span of seventy years the

procreative period of a married pair does not exceed some twenty-five years; the family is complete and the process ceases. It might well be that in a communal or racial sense God has ordained things the same way. If, at a certain point in history, the original commission and power to "increase and fill the earth" will have achieved its purpose, and the power so to do comes to an end, the analogy with the individual family is exact. In such case the human family could be regarded as a unit of divine creation, complete within itself and settled in the home in space which has been created for it.

The alternative—successive migrations to other homes in space—if considered from the purely physical standpoint, bristles with difficulties. Isaac Asimov, in *Planets for Man* (1965) says that, assuming the necessary technical problems could be solved in the next hundred years, it would be necessary from the year A.D. 2100 onwards to send into space 900,000 persons every day in order to keep the population of this earth within maximum limits. How such a number could survive, either on the journey or upon arrival at destination, is not stated. In any case no space-ship has been designed or even imagined which could make such a journey. There are high hopes of reaching our neighbor planet, Mars, in the next few years, but this is as far as serious thinking goes. The colossal amount of materials which would have to be taken from the earth's resources to transport and support such emigrants on such a scale on their way to a planet outside the solar system, even if it were possible, would exhaust the earth's total supply in a very short time and leave the situation worse than before.

The problem, though, is not really a physical one. If it should transpire in the purpose of God that men from this earth are to commence a new life in some other spot in the far recesses of the universe, then it can be expected that divine power will call into action forces unknown to man and outside the range of his powers to do what he cannot do of himself. . . .

A Dying Sun

One apparently insurmountable objection to the idea that the earth will be the home of humanity to all eternity is the popular scientific view that the sun must one day cool down and in consequence all life be extinguished upon earth. A very complete process for the formation and eventual disintegration of stars has been worked out on the basis of observations and calculations from which it is believed in authoritative quarters that the sun has only about five billion years of useful life left to it. Having used up most of its hydrogen it will, in consequence of its reduced weight, enlarge in size and destroy the earth by its correspondingly temporarily enhanced heat; it will then slowly cool and the solar system become a frozen and lifeless waste. If all this is true, then there is obviously no eternal home for man upon earth. But no one can be sure that this is true. After all, no man has actually observed such processes taking place, for the time scale of the stars is too vast. In fact, observations of the past one hundred and fifty years, from which the stellar processes of twenty billion years have been deduced, are on the same time scale as if a man, knowing nothing of nature, should take a movie film of the plant life in his garden for just one quarter of a second and on the basis of that brief record form a

complete theory of the growth of plants from seed-sowing to flower and fruitage during a complete year.

The theory of a dying sun is not universally held. One school of investigators believes that in its journey through space the sun sweeps up hydrogen to replenish that which is consumed and converted to heat, as though the fire is being stoked up as fast as it burns.

It has been discovered in recent years that the vast stretches of "empty space" between the stars are not empty at all; they are full of free atoms, mainly of hydrogen. Because space is so big and the stars in it so relatively small the material composing the stars is only about one ten-thousandth part of all the substance there is in the universe. The remaining 99.99 per cent is distributed loosely throughout all space. The sun with its planets is travelling through space at a speed of 60,000 miles per hour so that it must inevitably collect a lot of that material in its course. Even the earth, much smaller, is known to be picking up a thousand tons of matter from outer space every day in its course around the sun. And if someone suggests that, even so, in the infinity of eternity even the vast store of matter must be used up and where is the next lot coming from, science is already well on the track of the answer.

A few generations ago it was almost universally believed that the entire universe was getting colder as the heat from the sun and stars was dissipated into space and that nothing could ever recover that lost heat. That belief was based on the so-called "mechanical" view of the universe which regarded it as a vast machine powered by heat; when the heat was all gone the universe would come to a stop, cold and still. The principle which gave rise to that theory was the then fairly new science of thermodynamics, treating of the relation and interaction between heat and energy, a science which dictates the capability of every kind of power generating device and every machine which needs power to drive it—since all power comes primarily from heat, through the agency of coal, oil, sunshine, and so on.

The chief apostle of this science was Nicholas Carnot (1796-1832) who was a good engineer but made no claim to being a theologian; he defined his thesis in terms now known as the "second law of thermodynamics," but he was talking about steam engines and not about stars. Nevertheless it became fashionable to say that the universe cannot go on forever because of the second law of thermodynamics. But the universe does not consist fundamentally of steam-engines; it consists fundamentally of stars, and today different counsels prevail.

The nature of the processes going on inside the stars is better understood. There seems to exist a very real possibility that the energy generated by the annihilation of matter in stars is, at a later stage and elsewhere in the universe, re-constituted into matter which can be transformed again into energy. Scientists are beginning to perceive the rudimentary principles of a driving force which maintains the universe in ceaseless action and reaction; the effect of which is to continue eternally the chemical interchanges between matter and energy upon which all life depends.

God, The Driving Force

That driving force is God. He is the source of the energy which powers all creation, which under certain conditions and at one time appears as matter and under other conditions at another time is manifested as active energy again. He is the source and sustainer of all life, which makes use of that matter and that energy to function in its appointed manner. The universe is not a dying creation but an eternal one because it is sustained by the eternal Creator, "in whose hand is the soul of every living thing and the breath of all mankind" (Job 12:10).

With that fact firmly established it matters nothing whether mankind is to find his eternal home on the earth or experience a later change of habitat from an old home due for dissolution to a new one beginning to flower. The power of the Most High is adequate for the transfer, and since, to the redeemed heaven is where God is, and God is everywhere, the geographical location, so to speak, of the "new heavens and new earth" which is the inheritance of perfected mankind is surely a minor issue.

The biblical pictures and foreviews of that consummation are expressed in terms of this earth as we know it but that is the only possible manner in which the glories of the future can be described to men who have never known anything else but this earth. No matter where man may find himself in the eternal future, it will always be a true picture. Man's outward physical perfection, adjusted and adapted to a perfect outward environment and allied with his inner mental and moral attunement to his Creator and his God, will ensure his absolute happiness and contentment in whatever place it pleases God that he should dwell. So man approaches, not the end, but a new beginning. Perhaps that is, after all, the mystery of creation, a succession of endings that are also beginnings. Life goes on, reaching always forward, ever finding something new and something greater and grander on the way. There may, after all, be a more profound truth than has ever been suspected enshrined in those words which God utters when the world of human insufficiency gives place to the divine rule of the future: "the former things are passed away; behold I make all things new."

A Divine Plan for the Ages

God's Eternal Purpose

***"According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."—
Ephesians 3:11***

A verse by verse study in Ephesians 1

Ephesus and Colosse geographically bracketed the early Christian church in Asia Minor, lying about 100 miles distant from each other. Colosse was part of a triumvirate of churches, together with Laodicea and Hierapolis. It is directly linked to Laodicea in Colossians 4:13-16. It is therefore noteworthy that the symbolic letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 are similarly bracketed by Ephesus and Laodicea.

The epistles to these two churches were written at about the same time, probably A.D. 58, and for much the same purpose, Paul confirming to them that God's call was open equally to Jews and Gentiles. Many phrases appear in common in the two epistles. (See box.)

Paul's central argument, particularly in Ephesians, is that there has been a change in God's manner of dealing with the human race; that, whereas his favor had been exclusive to Israel through a law covenant, it was now open to both Jew and Gentile through an administration of grace.

Greetings—Vs. 1, 2

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

As in all the epistles, with the exceptions of the three by John, the author immediately identifies himself and his audience. It is probable that the Greek *kai*, here translated "and," would be better translated "even," with the thought not only of further identifying his audience but with the added intention of an encouragement to that complete faithfulness which is the mark of any true "saint."

As is also common in the opening of the epistles, the apostle seeks to bestow "grace and peace" on his readers. Thayer's Lexicon says of the word "grace" that it is that influence which "turns them to Christ, . . . strengthens, keeps them in Christian faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to exercise of Christian virtues." The word translated "peace" comes from a primary root meaning "to join" and speaks of that full peace which comes from reconciliation with God. Both of these attributes come from God as the author of the plan, and the Lord Jesus Christ, as its executor.

Predestination—Verses 3 to 6

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

The blessing of which Paul speaks is that the "saints" are the objects both of God's foreknowledge and his predestination. This text finds its parallel in Romans 8:29: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." Foreknowledge and predestination are presented as a two-step process—"whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate." In the Ephesians text a distinction is shown between these two steps. The "saints," from "before the foundation of the world" are chosen "in him," as members of a foreordained "Christ," or anointed class. Their predestination is "unto" an object—in Ephesians, "unto" the adoption of sons, and in Romans, "to be conformed to the image of his son."

A rough analogy of this two-step process may be seen in a man contemplating the opening of a large business. He must prepare a business plan in which he visualizes, or foresees, the need for certain types of employees. Then he must predetermine what the job qualifications will be for each position to be filled. In like manner, God, in formulating his plan from "before the foundation of the world," saw the need of a Christ class. Having seen that need, he predetermined the conditions for those who would be of that body.

The expression "from before the foundation of the world" appears twice in the New Testament, here and in 1 Peter 1:19, 20: "But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you." It is to be distinguished from a similar expression, "from the foundation of the world." That term is used of Jesus in Revelation 13:8 and of his church in Revelation 17:8. The harmony between the two is simple. While God's plan for human redemption was laid out in his own mind from "before" he began actual dealings with his creation, it was not put into action until it became triggered by sin at "the foundation of the world."

Lest we should glory in our selection, Paul hastens to add that it is all for the accomplishment of the will of God and for his good pleasure and is only bestowed upon the "saints" as an act of grace.

Redemption, Forgiveness, Knowledge—Verses 7 to 9

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.

The riches of God's grace bring not only redemption, with its concomitant forgiveness of sins, but he, for his own good pleasure, has bestowed a special degree of knowledge upon his "saints"—revealing to them "the mystery of his will." This revelation is two-fold: "in all wisdom and prudence." In addressing the distinction between the two Greek words here used, Prof. W. E. Vine, in his Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, has this to say: "While *sophia* [wisdom] is the insight into the true nature of things, *phronesis* [prudence] is the ability to discern modes of action with a view to their results; while *sophia* is theoretical, *phronesis* is practical." As God blessed Bezaleel, the builder of Israel's tabernacle, not only with the spirit of wisdom but also that of workmanship (Ex. 31:2, 3), so he blesses the saints with both the information and ability to perform his will.

Once again Paul stresses that these revelations are not to the credit of the creature but according to God's "good pleasure, which he purposed in himself." This theme of God's "purposes," or plans, is the major subject of the first three chapters of Ephesians. Later in the epistle Paul speaks of this plan as God's "eternal purpose" (3:11). This plan was not only established in eternity past, "before the foundation of the world," but looks forward to eternity future. The Greek word translated "eternal" in this text is *aionian*, meaning "of the ages," thus permitting the legitimate translation of the text being that all things were done according to a "divine plan of the ages."

The Fullness of Times—Verses 10-12

That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

The expression "the dispensation of the fullness of times" can be understood properly in two ways. Ultimately it undoubtedly looks forward to the grand climax of God's plan—when all things both in heaven and earth are reconciled to him. This will be the answer to the prayer Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). It is only when this is fully accomplished that "God may be all in all" (1Cor. 15:28). It will be then that God will realize what he has always desired: "who will have all men to be saved, and come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4).

Yet, in another preliminary sense, they were already living in "the fullness of times." As Paul wrote in Galatians 4:4, "when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his son." Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was to die to reconcile all men to God, not the

Israelites only. The "saint" class that was to fill the heavenlies was to be open to both Jew and Gentile. The main object of the letter to the Ephesians was to assure his readers of this fact.

The opening of the door to the Gentiles with the conversion of Cornelius and the full consummation of God's plan form the brackets for the fulfillment of this prediction. What began with Cornelius will not find its completion until all people, the "things on earth," shall be as reconciled as is the church class, "the things in heaven."

That the ultimate reconciliation is Paul's main intention is indicated by the little word "also." This grand plan of at-one-ment has the important by-product of providing a spiritual inheritance that we "also" may obtain. It is this, Paul asserts, that God's plan of the ages predicts, "predestinates," because this was the counsel that God received from "his own will." Again Paul stresses that this is not to the glory of the church, but to the "praise of [God's] glory."

The New American Standard version gives a preferable translation to verse 12, "to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of his glory."

The Holy Spirit—Verses 13 and 14

In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

The author of the epistle acknowledges that these lofty goals are above the means of the earthly creature alone. He therefore assures them that the guarantee that they can be part of this elect class is that they were "sealed with the holy spirit of promise." Further, he indicates that their ultimate salvation would be the result of a four-step process. First there would be the hearing of the word of truth, which was the good news, or gospel, of salvation. Second, they must believe in it, not with mere mental acquiescence to its veracity, but with the conviction of a full acceptance manifested by a personal commitment, or consecration. Third, they would receive the holy spirit of God as an assurance of their acceptance. Fourth, they must maintain this gift by faithfulness until they would be delivered through death to life anew.

The word picture drawn for us in verse 14 is akin to the process of purchasing a home today. A down payment, or earnest, is laid down which binds the possession until the full amount is paid and then the property is delivered into the hands of the purchaser. In the verse under consideration the word "redemption," Greek *apolutrosis*, should be more properly translated "deliverance" (see Strong's Concordance, Vine's Dictionary, and Thayer's Lexicon).

The same apostle gives a parallel description of this process in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14: "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord,

because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Here the word "obtaining" is the same Greek word as "purchased" in the Ephesians text.

Paul's Prayer for the Ephesians—Verses 15-23

Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Note that their faith was a constant joy to the apostle. He reciprocated with prayers, not only of thanksgiving, but intercessory prayers for their faithfulness. The "knowledge" which he prays will come as a result of God giving wisdom and revelation is more than intellectual assurance. Two Greek words translated knowledge in the New Testament are *oida* from *eido*, and *ginosko*, from *gnosis*. The former is intellectual information, the latter includes experience and heart reliance. This distinction is clearly shown in a statement by Jesus in John 8:55, "ye have not known [from *gnosis*], but I know [*oida*] him." It is this deep experiential and personal knowledge of God which Paul desires for his Ephesian brethren.

It is the same knowledge which the apostle desired for himself in Philippians 3:9-11: "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."

Paul closes his prayer with his desire for the complete unification of the body with its head. Not only is the body incomplete without a head, the head is incomplete without a body. "Christ," as the anointed, was never designed to be an individual, but a composite of Jesus, the head, and the church, the body. In the last verse of our chapter the church is described as the fullness of Christ. In the companion letter to Colossians he expresses the same thought this way, "In him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Most translators concur that "Godhead" should be translated "Deity," or that which possesses God's attributes. A permissible translation, of the Colossians text might read, "In the anointed, dwells the complete number who form the body of Christ."

This is the ultimate oneness of the church. This is that oneness for which Jesus prayed in John 17:11, "that they may be one, as we are." In a still larger sense, when humanity is brought to its full perfection, there will be a still further expansion of that oneness for when the race is brought back to full harmony with God we read that he "may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). This will be the full realization of God's plan which Paul foresaw as the climax of God's plan of the ages, that "he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him."

July-August 1997

NEWS AND VIEWS

Around the World

Israel

Israeli Cabinet member Natan Sharansky was interviewed on CNN and explained patiently the accusation that an Israeli settlement is being built in "disputed" territory. He pointed out that this was (a) not a settlement but a housing development, (b) on a completely barren hilltop, (c) between two existing Jewish neighborhoods, (d) on Jerusalem land 100 percent owned by Jews, and (e) which every government of Israel, Labor and Likud, had declared unequivocally part of Jerusalem.

Washington Post, 3/21/97

Israel's parliament voted to strengthen the Orthodox establishment's grip on Jewish religious life. The bill would grant Orthodox rabbinical courts exclusive jurisdiction over those seeking to convert to Judaism. If the bill takes effect, the bill would reverse a ruling that gave hope of official recognition for Jews converted by Reform and Conservative denominations. The struggle over who is a Jew drove a searing wedge between Israelis and Diaspora Jews in the 1980s. Senior leaders of the Reform and Conservative movements representing 3 of the 3.5 million American Jews, threatened to withhold support from the Israeli government. The fundamentalist Jews of the ultra-Orthodox political parties argue that Reform and conservative rabbis are not in fact Jewish but purveyors of a kind of religious fraud. "Whoever doesn't accept the one true Judaism, then let him not be a Jew," said David Tal, a member of parliament. The Jewish Agency, which is dedicated to bringing Jews to Israel, stands to lose tens of millions of dollars in revenue if American Jews boycott. Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, chancellor of the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary, said there is great anger among American Jews over Israeli leaders who "want to demean and denigrate the religious convictions of Conservative Jews, but say their money is kosher."

Washington Post, 4/2/97

Israeli fast-food outlets adapted their menus for the first time during Passover in order to accommodate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. "It's very worthwhile for us to create special items for Passover," said Amit Sendik, a spokesperson for Burger King. Pizza Hut's pan pizza was made with unleavened dough and barbecue sauce at KFC replaced the normal breading on chicken. McDonald's rolled its Chicken McNuggets in matzo meal.

Bloomberg News Service, Jerusalem, 4/26/97

Metal has been manufactured in Israel for the first time, according to German automaker Volkswagen AG. A new \$530 million magnesium plant was dedicated in Israel near the Dead Sea. It is the first major German investment in Israel. Only four other countries—U.S., Russia, Norway and China—produce magnesium. Plans are moving ahead for an expansion of the plant which would make it the third largest magnesium producer in the world. Other plants are being considered in southern Israel which could lead to the production of other advanced metals.

Business Wire, 4/28/97

The proposed \$5 billion canal connecting the Red Sea to the Dead Sea, would be a grand peace project forever linking Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian territories. It would use hydropower to desalinate water and revive the Dead Sea. In his 1902 novel, *Altneuland* (Old New Land), Theodore Herzl envisioned a hydropower canal from the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea. However, a study completed in September by Harz Engineering of Chicago suggests that the Red–Dead route would be preferable. The canal, when complete, could deliver 50 percent of Israel's current usage. The canal's runoff could create artificial lakes, spur construction of hotels and gradually raise the Dead Sea by about 50 feet.

US News and World Report, 12/9/96

Russian arms brokers agreed to sell anti-aircraft missiles to Iran. The *Washington Times* reported that 50 hand-held "Igla" missiles were sold to Hezbollah terrorists in southern Lebanon, where they could be used to attack Israeli aircraft. It is also offering two missile defense systems. In the last two years, Iran has purchased three submarines and several squadrons of MIG fighters from Russia.

Associated Press, 4/16/97

Israeli prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu noted that Israel today has a per capita income equivalent to Great Britain's. In a dramatic assertion, he claimed that Israel has the potential to have the highest per capita income in the world. He noted that the old ideas of economies of scale, proximity to markets, no longer matter, but what counts is "conceptual thinkers." Israel's computer programmers and medical specialists are rated among the finest in the world.

Middle East Quarterly, Philadelphia, Jan. 1997

In Israel, elites affiliated with the Labor Party already control the media, and have been using them in an attempt to bring down their opponent, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, ever since his unexpected victory last year. The top brass of the police, like most people in high positions in Israel, are Labor appointees, with close ties to its ruling elites. The hatred for Mr. Netanyahu among these elites is far beyond political rivalry. It

is fueled by the fear that he is an outsider who owes little to the establishment in Israel, and may threaten the order by which immense political spoils are distributed. Billions in taxpayers' money were spent to bail out communal settlements, industrial conglomerates and a sick fund associated with Labor, and billions more on bailing out the banks after the collapse of a scheme to artificially inflate their stock prices. Top managers of Israeli government-owned banks earn as much as \$60,000 a month and receive millions in perks, bonuses and pensions. Labor affiliated groups own 40% of all pension funds. The banks also totally control financial markets and most of large Israeli conglomerates. Mr. Netanyahu's push for privatization threatens the very structure of the Labor party arrangements built up during the past 30 years.

Israel Center for Social and Economic Progress, 4/22/97

Jonathon Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, recently spoke out concerning the Jewish peoples' regathering to Israel without a vibrant biblical faith. The physical return has set the stage for Israelis to adopt a secular world view concerning their identity, calling and future, he says. This in turn has played into the hands of their enemies by disinvesting Israel of her God-given birthright, the land. The media constantly pushes the idea that Israel has grabbed land as part of its greater Israel philosophy. Israel is being forced back to pre-1967 borders all in the name of having no option. Dr. Sacks said that "whether those who built the state of Israel were religious or secular, whether they were driven by love of the land or fear of anti-Semitism, something larger than any individual was at work." He concludes, "That is why Zionism was only half a return. It was the first time in history Jews contemplated a return to the land that was not also a return to the faith. And that is why we face a crisis today."

Christian Action for Israel Newsletter, Dec. 1996

World Economics

The International Monetary Fund published a report which provides one of the most glowing accounts of global economic prospects in decades. "There are few signs of the tensions and imbalances that usually foreshadow significant downturns in the business cycle," the report read. One large effect of globalization has been the impact on capital markets. Global money can move in and out of countries rapidly in response to policy changes, placing much greater pressure on governments to get policies right.

World Economic Outlook [published semi-annually]

Romania is receiving an influx of capital because of its political reform. Over \$160 million has been committed by three funds for investment in the country. The major event in Romania was November's election of Emil Constantinescu. It was the first time in Romanian history that the head of state was changed by democratic process rather than death, execution or *coup d'etat*. Romania is extremely rich in natural resources.

Pensions & Investments, April 15, 1997

Government

Children in North Korea are dying of starvation, according to the United Nations' World Food Program. Most schools are unheated and freezing and only about 20 percent of the children are present. The country is facing a whopping grain shortfall of 2.1 million tons. Most North Koreans now get rations of only 100 grams of rice per day. That is a small handful. According to U.S. intelligence reports, more than 100,000 could die this summer. "Is the rest of the world willing to let millions of North Koreans starve to death?" asks Catherine Bertini of the Food Program. Many countries are hesitant to help because of the corrupt regime now ruling. Recent charges made against North Korea by Japan that it had kidnapped a young Japanese girl 20 years ago, has caused significant delay in sending any food aid. U.S. Defense Secretary William Cohen linked food aid to the progress of political talks. Humanitarians accuse both Japan and the United States of playing politics with innocent lives. On the other hand, North Korean government officials are using "famine politics" to hang on to their Stalinist system of government.

Newsweek, 4/21/97

Turkey is preparing for war against Iraq. Soldiers, weapons and ammunition have been stockpiled along the border, according to the Turkish newspaper *Radikal*. Field hospitals have been set up, air force jets and helicopters have been flying reconnaissance flights into Iraqi air space. Turkey is concerned about the desire of the Kurds to set up an autonomous state.

Bloomberg News Service, 4/28/97

Zaire's president Mobutu siphoned off a fortune worth over \$4 billion during the reign of communism in his country. The Mobutu story is about the venality and corruption of one of Africa's most eccentric dictators and his quest for personal enrichment and the plundering of the nation. In an investigation by an international news agency, Mr. Mobutu was found to have misappropriated and wasted funds. Financial institutions continued to give aid to the country, but most of it found its way into the pockets of Mr. Mobutu. A World Bank report containing data for the period 1980–87 showed that Mr. Mobutu spent \$94 million while only receiving \$15 million. Political institutions supplied him with another \$172 million. The World Bank study showed further that \$209 million of the state's expenditures in 1989 were for "other goods and services." Mr. Erwin Blumenthal, senior German banker, said, "There is no, I repeat no, chance on the horizon for Zaire's numerous creditors to get their money back . . . Mobutu and his government show no concern about the question of paying off loans." Now, as the cancer-stricken president tries to stay in power a little longer, uncertainty surrounds the fate of the entire dynasty and the country.

Financial Times, 5/12/97

In Zaire, President Mobutu Sese Seko is looking to the country's most prominent cleric for his salvation. A possible role for Catholic archbishop Laurent Monsengwo is

expected. Mobutu is almost certain to depart as president and wants to go with dignity. Waiving the rules forbidding churchmen from playing politics would require the Pope's blessing. Many believe the bishop could play a significant role in the transition of power, perhaps as mediator. Moderate politicians have admitted that the previous opposition to the archbishop was a mistake. The fact that he is considering re-entering the political situation in Zaire is evidence that the approaching crisis could be so apocalyptic that it is worth the church's involvement.

Financial Times, 5/14/97

Indonesia has sentenced five more people to prison for seven to 13 years for inciting workers to strike. A small group known as the People's Democratic Party have been jailed for "undemocratic" activities. Worker strikes in Indonesia are considered as attempts to undermine the government. Workers have been jailed under the charge of "sowing hatred against the government."

Singapore News Service, 4/28/97

Christendom

The ashes of 24 dead people were shot into space in April, in search for a final resting place somewhere near heaven. The exploration of space and science has some people intrigued about spiritual exploration as well. The decline of mainstream Protestantism, sweeping changes in Catholicism since Vatican II, the rise of global fundamentalism, and the emergence of psychoactive drugs as an adjunct to religious experience are evidence of a growing impatience among religious faithful. "We aren't certain about what it takes to achieve spiritual enlightenment," says philosopher Zolatan Domotor, "but we are certain that in the whole of human history, the number of people who have achieved it is small."

Philadelphia Inquirer, 4/27/97

Despite what the Bible says about stealing, a Church of England priest suggested that it is no sin to shoplift, as long as the victim is a big supermarket. The Rev. John Papworth drew a distinction between stealing from individuals and small merchants—which he termed wrong—and stealing from giant corporations. "With these institutions, all you are confronted with are these boardroom barons sitting around the boardroom plotting how to take the maximum amount of money out of people's pockets for the minimum in return," Papworth said on BBC radio. The Church of England distanced itself from Papworth.

Washington Post, 3/15/97

The Vatican has established diplomatic relations with Libya. A Vatican spokesman said the Vatican "expects positive international reactions, considering that the diplomatic ties have been made both to favor the life of the local church and to contribute to international detente."

Washington Post, 3/11/97

Islam

Kabul, Afghanistan has been so thoroughly violated that it is no exaggeration to say that the capital, along with the country, is damaged beyond repair. A militia built around students of Islam now controls two-thirds of the country. The group, called the Taliban, has taken over most of the country without serious resistance. The Taliban have enforced rules proscribing employment and public appearances by unveiled women, and requiring beards on all men. The population feels helpless and intimidated. Trucks mounted with loudspeakers now ferry religious police around Kabul, advertising new "Islamic" rules and looking for violators. The Taliban arrested and tried a group of women for trying on Western clothes at a party. The Taliban have now moved beyond repressing women to tolerating drug trafficking.

Wall Street Journal, 3/27/97

A group of Algerian villagers, including 17 women and three small children were butchered by Islamic fundamentalist militants. Many of the victims had their throats cut. Elsewhere, 93 people were hacked to death. The fundamentalists appear to be intensifying killings before parliamentary elections in June. They seek to establish a state based on Islamic law.

Associated Press, 4/24/97

Social News

Violent crime has ebbed slightly in the last two years in America. The number of criminals in the high-crime years of 18–34 has declined to its lowest level in years. Cities across the nation have passed laws against acts such as public drunkenness and urination, graffiti, vandalism, loud music, disorderly conduct and aggressive panhandling. Quality-of-life laws are proving to make a big impact in the fight against crime. James Q. Wilson and George Kelling, in the early 80's advanced their "broken windows" theory. They found that "serious crime flourishes in areas where disorderly behavior goes unchecked." Kelling wrote, "For years we have labored under an ideology that to prevent crime we have to change society—with economic and racial justice, more homes and jobs. We are beginning to understand in order to have racial and economic justice we must have stability on the streets." Groups of business owners and homeowners that conducted a quality-of-life effort in New York found significant reductions in seven major felony crimes. "Setting standards of behavior and providing reasonable consequences for their violation can help people break through self-destructive patterns and begin the recovery process. Conversely, a lack of standards and consequences can enable continuing self-destruction," the group study said.

Investor's Business Daily and New York City Police Dept.

Science

Scientists are being told that the golden age of science is ending: there is nothing left of note to discover. Mr. John Horgan writes that scientists have answered all the big questions. All they can look forward to is working on the details. The late Richard Feynman, Nobel winning physicist, said in 1965 that the age in which we live has seen the excitement move out of science. In Mr. Horgan's view, the problem is that the best minds in science have run out of things to discover. "The smartest people in the world are working away on things that don't have any connection with reality," he says.

The End of Science, by John Horgan.

Most U.S. scientists do not believe in a god, but 40 percent do, the same percentage as did in 1916. In 1916, researcher James Leuba shocked the nation with his survey that found only 40 percent of scientists believed in a supreme being. He predicted that such ungodliness would spread as education improved. The 1996 survey showed that as many as 40 percent of scientists still believe in God. There were, however, notable differences among scientific disciplines. The 1996 survey showed that mathematicians are most inclined to believe in God (44.6%). And although biologists showed the highest rate of disbelief for doubt in the 1916 survey, that ranking is now give to physicists and astronomers.

Reuters News Service, 4/3/97