

# The Herald Of Christ's Kingdom

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Heroes of Faith

## In the Beginning

*By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed ... dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise.—Hebrews 11:8,9*

The same faith motivated all the godly heroes of the Old Testament who “wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions . . . were stoned . . . sawn asunder . . . slain with the sword . . . being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy” (Hebrews 11:33,37,38).

The godly lives of these men are examples to us of consecrated living. Thus they form “a cloud of witnesses” for our edification (Hebrews 12:1). Also, frequently the experiences of their lives form allegorical lessons about God’s plan which strengthen and unify our grasp of the truth.

In this issue we consider five of these individuals, and reflect upon some of the episodes which tested their faith. All of these individuals faced trials which imperiled their lives, and so tested their characters under the most severe distress. In some experiences they were victorious, in some they stumbled. But in all of them God provided life lessons valuable for them, and rich with instruction for us.

Three of these “Ancient Worthies”—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—are the patriarchs to whom God secured his covenant of promise to bless “all the families of the earth.” The article *Father of the Faithful* is an extensive treatment of Abraham’s lengthy history, noting the faith which prompted his obedience in the most trying test one can imagine. Because of this kind of faith, Paul terms him “the father of all them that believe” (Romans 4:11).

*A Man of Peace* considers Isaac's experiences in the land of the Philistines, and observes his example of peace under repeated provocation. *A Lesson in Retributive Justice*, from the life of Jacob, considers the consequences of our choices, and God's overruling providence through them. In Joseph we have a lovely picture of *Submission Under Injustice*, and a foregleam of the experiences our Lord would later endure. Finally, one of Judah's greatest leaders, King Hezekiah, for whose faith God delivered the Kingdom of Judah from domination by Assyria, is considered in the article *Like a Caged Bird*.

As we read of these episodes, let us resolve to inculcate into our hearts and conduct the nobility of faith exhibited in these faithful ones.

## Abraham

# Father of the Faithful

*Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son . . . in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore . . . and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.—Genesis 22:16-18*

Probably no one in the Old Testament is as broadly recognized as a better example of faith than Abraham. His willingness to sacrifice his dearly loved and long promised son, is so remarkable a testimony to his faith, it is a milestone along the stream of human history, perhaps unequalled until the appearance of our savior himself.

The narrative of Abraham's life consumes more than a quarter of the book of Genesis, from chapters 11 through 25, and covers more than 100 years of his life. There are three main segments in the narrative, interrupted by a thirteen year hiatus between chapters 16 and 17, and a longer gap between chapters 21 and 22.

### **Abraham's Family**

Chapter 11 details Abram's lineage and family members. Verse 26 says "Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran." Abram is listed first because of his prominence, but he was not the firstborn. Verse 32 says his father died at age 205, at which time Abram was 75 years old (Genesis 12:4), meaning he was born when Terah was 130. Thus his firstborn brother, Haran, was 60 years older than Abram. Haran's son was Lot, Abram's nephew. Twice later he is called Abram's "brother's son" (Genesis 12:5; 14:12), but once "his brother Lot" (Genesis 14:16), using the terms of family relationship loosely, as is customary in Semitic languages.

God's choice of Abram for his faith, even though he was not the firstborn, is consistent with his blessing of Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over his brothers, and Ephraim over Manasseh, so that we have this setting aside of the firstborn exemplified through five generations, as though to show that the new creation (often represented by the number five), which is the promised seed through whom God's covenants are fulfilled, is selected from those of faith and obedience, rather than simply natural lineage.

Haran had two daughters, Milcah who became the wife of Nahor, and Iscah. Josephus gives Haran's daughters as "Sarai and Milcah," and says both Nahor and Abram "married their nieces" (Antiquities 1,6,5), equating Sarai with Iscah. If so, then Abraham's explanation in Genesis 20:12 would mean Sarah was "the [grand]daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife." (His claim "she is my sister," Genesis 20:12, would then parallel the description of Lot as "his brother," Genesis 14:16.) This would also mean Lot was the brother of Sarah, which may explain

why he accompanied Abram out of Haran rather than remaining there with Nahor. (Perhaps Sarai, “princess,” was a second name for Iscah to accord more closely with her elder sister’s name Milcah, “queen.”)

## **Entering Canaan**

After Terah died, Abram departed from Haran, at age 75, and came to Sichem, or Shechem. There the Lord appeared to him and for the first time affirmed what before had been provisional, “unto thy seed will I give this land” (Genesis 12:7). Abram commemorated the occasion with an altar, and its attendant sacrifice. He subsequently pitched his tent between Bethel and Hai, built another altar, and “called upon the name of the Lord.” These locations appeared again many years later as Abraham’s descendants received the promised land under Joshua, who set his men “between Bethel and Ai” (Joshua 8:9) and later gathered Israel at Shechem to reaffirm their covenant with God (Joshua 24), just as God had reaffirmed his covenant with Abram there many years before.

Abram’s travels form a small microcosm of what would occur to the Israelites years later. Abram went into Egypt because of a famine (Genesis 12:10), just as the Israelites would go into Egypt because of a famine. Abram’s relationship with Sarah was veiled (Genesis 12:19), as Joseph’s relationship with his brothers was veiled. The Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house “with great plagues” (Genesis 12:17) resulting in Abram’s release with his family and “all that he had . . . very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold” (Genesis 13:1, 2), just as the Lord sent ten plagues upon Pharaoh and Egypt to release the Israelites with all their families, an abundance of cattle, and silver and gold spoiled from the Egyptians. Abram returned to the location “between Bethel and Hai” (Genesis 13:3), just as Israel under Joshua came to the same place.

## **Separated from Lot**

After his return to Canaan it became apparent that he and Lot would have to separate for the sake of peace between their entourages. Abram, the senior, gave Lot first choice, who chose according to natural advantage the fertile valley of Sodom, not considering the wickedness of the environment. Lot would have cause to regret that decision when he fled to the mountains devoid of his wealth, just as the Great Company will collectively realize their laxity and ill-considered choices when they are forced by circumstances to make a nobler stand for the right. In Revelation Sodom represents Christendom, and Sodom’s demise represents the impending demise of Christendom (Revelation 11:8; Jeremiah 50:40).

After Lot separated from Abram God appeared again to the man of faith. “Look . . . northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth” (Genesis 13:14-16). At this instance of Abram’s faith put into practice, accepting the less productive part of the land, the Lord was very near to him. What a rich reward for his principled position. So with us, when we take a stand for the right, contrary to our

natural preferences or interests, we find our hearts and sentiments very close to the Lord, and our minds at great peace.

In every choice of circumstance, in proportion to its weightiness, ought the Christian to consider chiefly the principles of righteousness, obedience, faith, trust, and sacrifice. Abram was a wealthy man. But his wealth was not his priority. His faith was his priority. As Jacob later preferred to flee a pauper, but with the riches of the Abrahamic covenant in his possession, so ought we to prefer, and rather choose, a more meager position or circumstance when it favors the spiritual interests of our calling. Our choices should always be regulated by our faith. All the more so should husbands and fathers make choices favorable to the spirit, and thus properly discharge their duty to their wives and children; all the more so should wives and mothers encourage their husbands and children, and teach their families, to value first the valuable things—the spiritual things. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). This was the command of our Lord, who himself followed this counsel scrupulously.

But more than simply a command, we should wish for this from our heart. Our affections should be so intertwined with our spiritual hopes, so graciously bestowed by God, we should wish so much for this very best blessing, the spiritual blessing, for ourselves and for our families, that we would disdain a choice for the earthly over the heavenly. Is our faith dim or vibrant? Is our belief in the Lord’s promises so sure, so near, “so intimately nigh,” that “e’en the sweetest earthly” gain would be dim by contrast?

## **The Dust of the Earth**

In this expression of God’s promise to Abram the focus is the land itself. This was appropriate to the occasion since the division of the land was the issue between Lot and Abram. The land of Canaan was promised to Abram’s natural seed, and the expression used to represent Abram’s seed in this case contains an earthly metaphor, “dust of the earth.”

On other occasions two other expressions were used, “stars of heaven” and “sand of the sea shore.” In every case the primary point was to express the great quantity of descendants Abram would have. But the use of each expression, to the patriarchs at least, seemed to connect with the subject at hand.

For example, in chapter 15 when Abram was concerned with the birth of a son who would turn out to be Isaac, God mentioned “the stars of heaven,” and Isaac represents the spiritual seed of Abram. When the promise was confirmed to Isaac the same expression was used (Genesis 26:4). When the expression was later confirmed to Jacob, who in contrast with Isaac represents the natural seed, the expression was “dust of the earth” as in Genesis 13:16 when the land was at issue (Genesis 28:14). At the sacrifice of Isaac, a picture of the ransom paid by our Lord, the all encompassing term “stars of the heaven and . . . sand which is upon the sea shore” was used (Genesis 22:17).

It seems “stars of heaven” applies to the spiritual seed, “sand of the sea” to mankind in the kingdom (Revelation 20:8), and “dust of the earth” to Israel, who inherits the land of promise. These three aspects also are represented in the women by whom Abraham fathered children, Sarah, Hagar and Keturah, and their children Isaac (church), Ishmael (Israel), and the six sons of Keturah (the world of mankind).

## **Four Kings from the East**

Genesis chapter 14 contains the earliest Scriptural record of armed conflict. Four kings from the east—Amraphel of Shinar, Arioch of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer of Elam, and Tidal “king of Goiim” (NIV)—are identified as a coalition of forces which made war with five kings of the Sodom Valley. These localities are probably the Sumer, Larsa, Elam and Gutium of antiquity. Because there are extant records of these areas from antiquity, it is naturally a fertile area for investigation to seek links between this Scriptural record and the scattered records of the ancients. A solid connection here should be of assistance to some in the Christian world whose faith in the Genesis account may waver.

The problem, however, is the briefness of the account in this passage on the one hand, and the scarcity of documentation from antiquity on the other, more especially the latter. At one time it was popular to connect Amraphel, king of Shinar, with Hammurabi, king of Babylon, but now it is generally conceded that Hammurabi was much later than Abraham. Eugene Merrill, in his 1987 book *Kingdom of Priests*, concludes “it is most prudent to say at this time that . . . the kings of the east cannot be identified” (page 37).

However, in a recent paper by Bro. James Parkinson, “Resolving Chronology of the 2nd Millennium BC,” which builds on his earlier “Chronological Studies” (1963), an identification is suggested which we believe is correct. Amraphel, king of Shinar, is the same as Ur-Nammu, king of Sumer.

Genesis 14:1,5 show Amraphel came west twice, fourteen years separated. On the second occasion he was defeated, and verse 17 suggests he was killed. “A date-formula is preserved concerning [Ur-Nammu’s] fourth year which proclaims that ‘he made straight the road from below to above,’ which can be understood to mean a march from the lower sea [Persian Gulf] to the upper sea [the Mediterranean, on the north Syrian coast]. Fourteen years later he apparently died in battle” (Parkinson, p. 2, citing *Cambridge Ancient History*, 3rd edition, p. 597). Ur-Nammu is sometimes written Nammu-Ur. Deleting the opening letter and the redundant letters leaves amur, and appending a common Sumerian syllable “pul” or “phel” results in amurphel, which is close to “Amraphel” of Genesis 14.

## **The Rescue of Lot**

Abram’s involvement with these four kings was to rescue Lot, who was captured by these kings along with the Sodomites. Abram had a contingent of 318 “trained servants” (Genesis 14:14), and allies in the Amorites Mamre, Eshcol and Aner (verses 13, 24). If each of these supplied as many men as Abram, there would have been 1272 soldiers in

this band which attacked the four kings from the east, giving some estimation of the size of armies in those early years. The attack was by night, with the element of surprise, and by God's providence was successful.

On the route back "the king of Sodom went out to meet [Abram] after his return" (Genesis 14:17). The king of Sodom and many of his men had avoided captivity earlier (Genesis 14:10), probably there were a number of others from the cities of the plain who were likewise not taken captive. If so, it may naturally be wondered why Abram did not request a contingent from them to reinforce his troops in his dangerous mission. Perhaps, in a practical way, time was so much of the essence there was no opportunity. But it is possible that the renowned wickedness of the Sodomites dissuaded Abram from seeking their assistance, placing his confidence in the Lord, while doing what he conscientiously could in practical terms by utilizing the assistance of his closer neighbors.

## **Melchizedek**

On Abram's victorious return, Melchizedek, king of Salem and "priest of the most high God," met Abram with supplies of food, "bread and wine." Paul recognized in Melchizedek a type of Christ, who also brings forth "bread and wine," his flesh and blood, to sustain us in a deeper sense.

The name of this king is a compound name, "Melchi" (king) and "zedek" (righteousness). Thus Paul interprets this name to be "King of Righteousness," and by profession he was "King of Salem," or "King of Peace," all of which are appropriate designations for Christ (Hebrews 7:2). Many years later another in Melchizedek's line of rulers over Salem (by that time Jerusalem) used the name "Adoni [lord]-zedek," but he was of a different character (Joshua 10:1-5), perhaps representing the antichrist, the corruption of Christ.

Melchizedek is not mentioned again until Psalms 110:4, where it was said to David, prophetically of Christ, "thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." It is noteworthy that David, to whom this promise was expressed, was the first Jewish king to obtain Jerusalem. As king he was "Melchi," and the faithful priest of his day was Zadok, or (replacing the vowels) "Zedek." Together they filled the two offices which later would be combined in the true "Melchi-zedek," Christ.

The nobility of Abram is further shown in Genesis 14 by his refusal to be personally enriched by the spoils of Sodom which he retrieved in battle. "I will not take from a thread even to a shoe latchet . . . lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich." He allowed this for his confederates, but would not accept it for himself (Genesis 14:22-24).

## **A Covenant Sacrifice**

Genesis 15 records God's reassurance to Abram that he would have an heir "out of thine own bowels," implying that to date he was childless. God affirmed that his seed would be numerous as the stars of heaven, and in token of this promise condescended to the custom of the times to seal his covenant with Abram. He instructed Abram to take particular

animals for sacrifice, which were divided (except for the birds, comparatively small), and the pieces laid on the ground.

It was customary for the contracting parties to walk between these pieces, but as this was a one-sided promise by God to Abram, God was here the unilateral agent, the divine presence being represented by “a burning lamp that passed between those pieces” (Genesis 15:17). Further, God affirmed to Abram that the promised land would extend from the River of Egypt (not the Nile, but the Wadi El Arish in the Sinai Peninsula) to the Euphrates (as a northern border), encompassing ten peoples, who probably represent the world of mankind who will be blessed through the Abrahamic seed.

The animals were to be three years of age, excepting the birds, “a turtledove and a young pigeon,” probably both in their first year. If the ages have a meaning, the specification of “three” may be symbolic of atonement (3 days in the grave, 30 pieces of silver, 300 pence worth of ointment, 3000 persons saved at Pentecost, all connect “three” with the atonement provided in Jesus).

The sum of the ages, 11, may also be meaningful. This number appears in passages related to the sojourn of the church during the Gospel age. The goat-hair curtain, often thought to represent the saints’ participation in sacrifice with their lord, was of 11 strips, five in one panel joined to six in another (Exodus 26:9, five showing our status as new creatures, six showing we are still in the sinful flesh.) Samson, who pictures the Gospel age church, was betrayed through the contribution of 1,100 shekels of silver by each Philistine lord (Judges 16:5), and the same amount appears in the story about Dan which also pertains to the Gospel age (Judges 17:2). Deuteronomy 1:2 says the journey from Sinai to the border of Canaan, picturing the Gospel age journey of the saints, was a journey of about 11 days.

In Genesis 15:13 God specifies that the affliction of his seed would not terminate until 400 years. Taken on a the scale of a prophetic year, this would encompass 144,000 days, a numerical connection to the spiritual “seed of Abraham” developed during the Gospel age. As Isaac’s affliction began with Ishmael, so the affliction of the saints began with persecution from the Jews who did not embrace Messiah (Galatians 4:29). As the literal period of affliction ended with the plagues of Exodus, so the Gospel age affliction of the saints ends with the plagues of Revelation.

During the Gospel age the divine presence is represented in Christ, with eyes “as a flame of fire,” passing among the seven candlesticks, just as a “burning lamp” passed between the pieces of Abram’s sacrifice (Revelation 1:13, 14; Genesis 15:17). The smoking furnace which accompanied the lamp pictures the trials of the Egyptian bondage to the natural seed (Deuteronomy 4:20; 1 Kings 8:51; Jeremiah 11:4), and the trials of the Gospel age to the spiritual seed.



## **From Ishmael to Isaac**

Genesis 16 narrates the birth of Ishmael, in Abram's and Sarai's endeavor to cooperate with the divine program. The procedure they used, though altogether unfitting today, was an accepted custom of that time and culture. Hagar's lack of humility in the arrangement upset her mistress, causing Hagar to flee, but an angel directed Hagar to "submit thyself under her hands." She returned (verse 9), and soon Ishmael was born. Abram was 86.

A thirteen year gap in the record follows, and Abram is next 99 years old when he is instructed to be circumcised, with the wonderful news that subsequently a child would be born to him through his wife Sarai. Their names were changed to Abraham and Sarah by the addition in each of the letter he, the fifth letter of their alphabet, the letter which appears twice in the tetragrammaton YHWH which is frequently rendered Jehovah. It is as though God is inbreathing life to this couple to fulfill his divine purposes, and representing this great blessing by drawing from his own name to change theirs. The changed names betoken the life-giving spirit infused into them; that the letter he is an aspirate, or breathing out, gives even a physical connection to this thought. "Abraham" means father of a multitude, and "Sarah" a lady of rank and nobility.

The precious child arrived a year later. He was named Isaac, "laughter," a name chosen by God (Genesis 17:19) in honor of the joy of this triumph. "God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me" (Genesis 21:6), said Sarah.

Meanwhile the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot's deliverance, his wife's death, and the unseemly births of Moab and Ammon, intervene (chapter 19). Even after Lot's deliverance by Abram more than 13 years earlier, Lot continued with Sodom in spite of its wickedness. Perhaps some status accrued to him by virtue of his uncle's rescue of the Sodomites, augmenting the attraction which induced him toward Sodom originally. But none of these advantages made his wrong choice right. Do we sometimes continue in unholy surroundings which could be avoided? Lot should have left the area. Now he was forced to, with almost literally nothing but the shirt on his back, and the loss of his wife. As a righteous man his soul had been "vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked" (2 Peter 2:7), but he had not stirred himself to leave (cf. Songs of Solomon 3:5, NASB).

## **A Move in Location**

Genesis 18:1 shows Abraham was "in the plains of Mamre," which Genesis 13:18 says "is in Hebron," when they received the news a son would be born. Hebron, the burying place of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is intimately associated with the Abrahamic covenant, and it is noteworthy that the annunciation came at this location. Centuries later, when Mary and Elizabeth rejoiced over the children they would bear in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant (Luke 1:71,72), they were in "the hill country . . . into a city of Judah" (Luke 1:39), which Joshua 20:7 and 21:11 locate as the area of Hebron.

But Genesis 20:1 shows Abraham moved from there before Isaac was born and traveled south to Gerar, in the northern Negeb. His motive for this move is unclear, but Abraham

and Sarah used the same story they had used in Egypt, calling Sarah Abraham's sister (verse 5). Abimelech ("father-king," probably a title rather than a name), the king of Gerar, took Sarah, but in a dream was warned in strict terms, "thou art a dead man . . . for she is a man's wife" (Genesis 20:3). The dream shook Abimelech, who protested his innocence through ignorance, and had not touched Sarah. In a second dream Abimelech was told to restore Sarah to Abraham and he could live by having Abraham pray for him; otherwise Abimelech and "all that are thine" would surely die. Abimelech reported the dream to his people who were all anxious to rectify the situation.

Abimelech "took sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and women servants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife. But now the news comes that Nahor has eight sons by Milcah, and four others by a concubine, 12 sons total. Could this be another representation of natural Israel, part of the family of faith, but distinct from the spiritual seed?

### **The Death of Sarah and Abraham**

Genesis 23:1 records the death of Sarah at age 127, evidently making her the only woman in the Old Testament whose age at death is directly supplied. At this time Isaac would have been 37, three years before his marriage to Rebecca.

Before the birth of Isaac Abraham had moved southward, and Genesis 21:34 says "Abraham sojourned in the Philistines' land many days." It was there that Isaac had grown to maturity, perhaps representing that the seed of blessing is developed under foreign circumstances.

Genesis 23:2, however, says Sarah died in Hebron, and "Abraham came to mourn" for her. Abraham purchased a burial site for 400 shekels of silver, after declining to accept it as a gift. The purchase was probably insisted on as a token of Abraham's faith that God would give him the land in due time, but that due time would not come until the end of the predicted 400 years (Genesis 15:13).

Some time after Sarah's passing, "again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah." As Sarah, who bore the promised child, represented the spiritual part of the Abrahamic covenant, so Keturah, who bore six children (an earthly number), probably represents the earthly part of the Abrahamic covenant. Her children may have been born earlier, while she was a concubine, but when her status improved to wife, the status of her sons was elevated accordingly. Perhaps this represents that mankind has existed for many years, but are granted new status in the kingdom when the earthly blessings promised under the Abrahamic covenant are due of fulfillment toward "all the families of the earth."

Abraham “died in a good old age,” at 175 years (Genesis 25:8). He was 100 at the birth of Isaac, and he lived in the promised land for 100 years before he died. He now awaits his resurrection, not many years hence, at the crescendo of Israel’s trials. The enmity the Arabs presently feel to the Jews will no doubt dissipate rapidly when Father Abraham explains to them the blessings God has for each. Meanwhile, let us emulate the faith of Abraham, “the father of all them that believe” (Romans 4:11).

Isaac

## A Man of Peace

*Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.—  
Matthew 5:9,10*

David Rice

The account of Isaac is much briefer than that of Abraham, the main narrative appearing in one chapter, Genesis 26. Isaac was 40 when he married. His wife Rebekah was barren for some time, as Sarah her mother-in-law had been, and as Rachel her daughter-in-law would be. Thus in all three generations the children of favor were born in direct answer to prayers to God.

His twin sons were born when Isaac was 60, after being married 20 years, and Abraham would have lived to see his grandsons grow to the age of 15. Isaac would have been 75 years old when Abraham died. Thus Isaac became the patriarch of the community at the same age his father Abraham was when Terah died and Abraham entered Canaan, a hundred years earlier. This is one of several parallels between the two.

“There was a famine in the land” (Genesis 26:1), as there was in Abraham’s day, and as there would be later in Jacob’s day. Both Abraham and Jacob went to Egypt for relief, but in this case “The LORD appeared unto [Isaac], and said, Go not down into Egypt” (Genesis 26:2). However, Isaac did seek relief in Gerar, and of its leader “Abimelech king of the Philistines.” This was a long generation after Abraham had gone to Gerar, and this Abimelech—a title rather than a name—would have been a different Abimelech than the one Abraham dealt with.

When Abraham went to Gerar he called Sarah his sister, and Isaac used the same tactic, for the same reason, fearful that he might be killed for his wife who “was fair to look upon” (Genesis 26:7). In fact Rebekah was his first cousin, once removed, and his wife. In the loose meaning of “sister” in the language of his day Isaac’s claim may have been technically correct, but it was not forthright.

When Abimelech recognized the truth, he mildly reproved Isaac, as his predecessor had Abraham, and decreed that anyone transgressing upon Rebekah would be killed (Genesis 26:11). If Rebekah represents the church, as she did in Genesis 24 when being called to be the bride of Isaac, then perhaps this shows that their true relationship is not apparent to the world. The world recognizes that the Lord’s people have a familial relationship in the “household of faith,” but do not grasp the true grandeur of their position. Those who transgress upon the church do so with jeopardy, and those systems which persecute the saints will be “killed” in the trouble which ends this age (Daniel 7:11; Revelation 19:2).

## **The Covenant Reaffirmed**

When Isaac journeyed south to Gerar, God appeared to him and affirmed his covenant with him. This also is a parallel with Abraham, for God first affirmed the covenant to him (as no longer provisional) when Abraham journeyed southward out of Haran. All this time, of course, the promised land was foreign land, with foreign inhabitants. Just so when our Lord journeyed “south,” representing the earthly sphere, it was the first step in the program which would result in the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, blessing “all the nations of the earth” (Genesis 26:4).

## **Isaac Prospered Greatly**

While in Gerar, “Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him. And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great: for he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants. (Genesis 26:14)

This is the first time the Bible introduces the concept of sowing. We generally think of the patriarchs as nomadic, and herding, but here it is clear they also sowed crops, and did very well at it. It reminds us of the opening parable of Matthew 13, the parable of the sower, showing the work of our Lord sowing the seed of the gospel. As Isaac reaped “an hundredfold,” so the increase of the most zealous is represented in that parable as “an hundredfold” (Matthew 13:8). Christ used the same term respecting the spiritual gain of sacrificing saints. “He shall receive an hundredfold now in this time . . . and in the world to come eternal life” (Mark 10:30).

Isaac was heir to the riches of Abraham, and now year by year growing richer and richer, his entourage must have grown to considerable size. Abraham had 318 men of fighting age in his retinue, and conservatively estimating for women and children, his entourage may have numbered more than 1000. Isaac was heir of this, and was augmenting that beside.

This disturbed Abimelech, who asked Isaac to leave the area, complaining “thou art much mightier than we” (Genesis 26:16). So the rapid growth of Christ’s retinue alarmed the Roman world, and the forces of Christianity proved mightier than the forces of paganism, as symbolically portrayed in Revelation 12:7-9.

## **Always a Man of Peace**

Isaac was a man of peace, and left as requested. He pitched his tent in an uninhabited valley and dwelt there. This was an area formerly visited by his father Abraham, and the wells he had dug had been blocked up by the Philistines out of envy. Isaac redug these wells “and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them,” and besides this dug in the valley a new well of “springing water” (Genesis 26:18,19).

But this success also led to jealous strife. “The herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac’s herdmen, saying, The water is ours: and he called the name of the well Esek [contention]; because they strove with him” (Genesis 26:20). Peacefully, Isaac withdrew “and they digged another well, and strove for that also: and he called the name of it Sitnah [hatred]” (Genesis 26:21). Peacefully, Isaac withdrew again. “He removed from thence, and digged another well; and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth [room] . . . for now the LORD hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful” (Genesis 26:22).

Isaac had sufficient men to demand his rights, but as Abraham before him, when strife rose between his men and Lot’s men, he separated peacefully, leaving the temporal benefits to others. In this he followed the principles Christ would advocate, who said when enemies persecute you in one place, flee to another. Probably these various difficulties picture the difficulties the saints have had during the age. Papacy, represented by the Philistines, extended its reach over every fountain of spiritual refreshment it could. But there would come a time when the truth could not be contained, and could not be dominated.

If the first contention had its fulfillment in the rise of the false church, in the Pergamos period of the church, then the second episode, “hatred,” would fit the Thyatira period of bitter persecution. Following this would come the Reformation, which allowed the church “room” to expand and multiply.

But the true saints progressed further, even as Isaac “went up from thence to Beersheba,” where God reaffirmed his covenant on Isaac’s leaving the Philistine area, just as he had when Isaac entered the Philistine area (Genesis 26:23, 24). Isaac offered sacrifice in honor of the occasion, and “there Isaac’s servants digged a well” (verse 25), which may represent the increasing light of truth, the “pearl of great price” in the parable of Matthew 13:46.

At this juncture his nemesis the Philistines, headed by Abimelech, appeared again, having sought Isaac out in order to make a covenant of peace with him (out of fear for Isaac’s growing power). Isaac received them graciously. “He made them a feast . . . and they departed from him in peace” (verses 30, 31). So the organized opposition to the saints measurably eased after the “time, times and half a time” of prophecy, which closed during the sixth church.

Immediately afterward, Isaac’s servants reported “we have found water!” (Genesis 26:32). Thus we, at the end of the age, now enjoy the sweet bounties of the water of life unhindered. “And he called it Shebah [oath], therefore the name of the city is Beersheba [well of the oath] unto this day.” Thus is God’s oath of care secured to the promised seed by the water of present truth which seals the saints.

Let us emulate the spirit of Isaac and the spirit of our Master who left us a legacy of peace (John 14:27).

Jacob

## A Lesson in Retributive Justice

*Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints . . . for thy judgments are made manifest—Revelation 15:3,4*

David Stein

Have you ever been deceived? Do you remember how you reacted? Most of us probably would react with a little irritation even though we might not show it. A common reaction in the world is a desire to get even, to turn the tables. In fact, there is a saying under such circumstances: don't get angry, get even. This always leads to a string of such deceptions, everyone trying to even a score which never gets settled. Of course such a reaction is not proper for the consecrated. As Christians we have a standard of behavior quite in contrast to the way the world acts. The Lord has very graciously recorded admonitions for us to maintain a proper balance in the face of deception. He says, "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

The lesson here is the principle of retributive justice. Jesus alluded to the retributive nature of judgment when he said, "Judge not that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matthew 7:1,2).

In the book of Genesis there is a string of deceptions that occur during the life of Jacob. They are remarkable for the lessons they teach along the lines of retributive justice. Compensation occurs for each deception, each injustice, and it usually occurs in a striking parallel to the offense, showing the fulfillment of Paul's principle of reaping what you sow. For us the character lessons are invaluable.

God is a strict bookkeeper when it comes to justice and injustice and the scales of his justice must eventually balance. This is true even if it takes action into the Millennium. (Notice this particularly in 1 Timothy 5:24,25.)

The string of events recorded during the life of Jacob is a lesson to us along the lines of retributive justice. We are being trained to be associate judges with Christ, therefore we can learn much from these providentially overruled dramas.

Our study centers around the family of Jacob. Let's first review his background and early experiences to pick up the thread of time.

In Genesis 25:22,23 we read a description of Jacob's prenatal life. The enmity between Jacob and Esau are foretold. Thus Rebekah knows something about her children's future. We are not told who she tells about this prophecy, if anyone.

In Genesis 25:24-28 the account acquaints us with the personality of the two boys. Esau is the firstborn. His name, which means rough, is given for his rough, hairy appearance at birth. Jacob, whose name means supplanter, is born holding onto the heel of his brother! The character sketch which follows describes Esau as the hunter and outdoorsman, while Jacob is a shepherd with a more domesticated demeanor.

## **The Purchase of the Birthright**

This brings us to a pivotal moment in the life of both which precipitates a series of events that stretch for many decades afterward. In Genesis 25:29-34 we have the account of the selling of Esau's birthright to Jacob. Let us first take note that there was nothing in this transaction that violated justice. Esau comes upon his brother after what apparently was an unfruitful hunting mission. He is tired and very hungry. Jacob is boiling some stew. Esau gets one sniff of the delicious broth and immediately asks for some. The canny Jacob sees an opportunity. He asks Esau to sell him his birthright for a bowl of the stew. Esau, who clearly did not appreciate that birthright, quickly agrees. It becomes what is called today a "done deal."

Jacob acts most appropriately. Scripture says that Esau despised his birthright (Genesis 25:34). Paul places the matter of Esau's priorities very clearly: "... no immoral person, no one worldly-minded like Esau. He sold his birthright for a single meal, and you know that although he wanted afterwards to claim the blessing, he was rejected; though he begged for it to the point of tears, he found no way open for second thoughts" (Hebrews 12:16,17, New English).

Since Jacob now was the legitimate owner of the birthright, he could expect to receive the blessings which were to flow from it. These would include the special blessing from his father, Isaac, a double portion of the family inheritance, and the right to lead the family in worship as patriarch priest of the family. Since he should have been a godly man, as a worshiper of Jehovah, he should have had faith to await the outworking of all of this by God.

Here is where Jacob, and particularly his mother Rebekah, take a wrong turn.

## **The Deception of Isaac**

We read in Genesis 27 that Isaac, now in his old age, had decided to give the firstborn blessing to his eldest son. He sends Esau out to bring him some venison in preparation for the act. Rebekah overhears this. A just course of action would have been to bring Jacob before Isaac, describe the prophecy that was given to her before the birth of the children, and recount to Isaac the sale of the birthright and Jacob's rightful claim to it. This is not the course of action she chooses.

Instead she goes to Jacob and tells him what his father plans to do and plots to get the blessing by deception. Though Jacob is the key player in this trickery, Rebekah is the brains behind it. Note the following in Genesis 27:



Rebekah overhears the request (eavesdropping maybe?.....verse 6  
Rebekah formulates the deceptive plan.....verse 8  
Rebekah twice tells Jacob to obey her in this.....verses 8,13  
Rebekah says if it fails, any curse be on her.....verse 13  
Rebekah cooks up the meal of goat meat (not venison).....verse 9  
Rebekah puts Esau's clothes and goat's skin on Jacob.....verse 16

In fact, Jacob seems a bit reluctant about the whole affair (Genesis 27:11,12).  
Nevertheless, he joins in with the deception, even to the point of lying three times to his  
father:

Genesis 27:19—I am Esau thy firstborn  
Genesis 27:20—the Lord brought it to me  
Genesis 27:24—I am

The ruse is effective and he gets the blessing he seeks (Genesis 27:28,29). Almost  
immediately thereafter, Esau returns and the deception is exposed (Genesis 27:30, 36,  
37).

Did God approve of this deception? There is no word of disapproval recorded in  
Scripture. But we can hardly imagine God approved lying. So though the birthright was  
legitimately Jacob's, he should not have deceived his father to obtain it. An injustice was  
done which would have to be rectified, and rectified it was.

For Rebekah, who masterminded the whole affair, we but take note that in instructing her  
beloved son Jacob to flee from the wrath of his brother, she evidently never sees him  
again, dying before his return.

For Jacob, justice comes back to him in a most appropriate and ironic way. To see this we  
must move to Genesis chapter 29.

## **The First Deception of Jacob**

Jacob fled to his uncle Laban. While there he fell in love with Rachel and asked for her  
hand in marriage. Laban thinks this is a good idea and asks Jacob for seven years labor in  
exchange for her hand in marriage. Jacob works the seven years and it comes time for his  
wedding. The marriage feast is done and Jacob goes into his new bride in the evening.  
However, in the morning he makes an astonishing discovery. Laban has switched his  
daughters! What a deception has been played upon Jacob!

However, when we think this through, we find some amazing parallels to the deception  
which Jacob perpetrated upon his father. Laban exchanged Leah (the firstborn) for  
Rachel (the younger) in reverse parallel to what Jacob did to Isaac (the younger for the  
firstborn). Put another way, Jacob, who took the firstborn position of his brother, now  
suffers due to the firstborn position of his beloved's sister! In each case there was a

firstborn swap. The retributive justice toward Jacob is striking in this parallel. Of course, Laban has not played fairly either.

Perhaps this should have been a warning to Jacob to not deceive further. But he seems not to have paid attention because we have another deception in Genesis chapter 30.

### **The First Deception of Laban**

After Jacob's 14 years of service he transacts a new arrangement with Laban. In payment for his continued service over his father-in-law's flocks, Jacob will take all of the oddly colored (speckled and spotted and brown) as his own. Laban, who was a shepherd himself, knew what numbers of these odd colored animals could be expected to be produced and agreed to surrender that apparently smaller number to Jacob. However, Jacob had discovered some means to change the ratios of normal colored animals to oddly colored animals. After some time, Jacob's flocks begin to outnumber Laban's.

There is an interesting connection here that we might make with Laban's deception and the possible payback to it. Laban deceived Jacob with respect to Rachel and Leah. Jacob deceived Laban back by getting, among all other animals, his ewes and rams. (Compare Genesis 31:38 and 32:14.) What is ironic is that in Hebrew the name Rachel means ewe and Leah is a twist on the word for ram. Thus for Laban's having deceived Jacob by substituting Leah for Rachel, Laban is now repaid by losing his ewes and rams (his Rachels and Leahs). Here again, the payback contains a hint of the original offense.

### **The Second Deception of Laban and its Tragic Consequences**

Evidently Rachel still felt she had a score to settle with her father for swapping her sister Leah for her on her wedding night. When Jacob leaves Laban's house, Rachel steals her father's teraphim ("images" in the KJV). While these may have been religious idols, it is more probable that they were representations or icons of the family wealth and prosperity. Three days later Laban discovers the loss and chases after Jacob, catching him on the tenth day. When Laban tells Jacob what the problem is, he is sympathetic. He understands how important these were to Laban and the callousness of someone to steal them. So, unaware that Rachel is the thief, he unwittingly curses his wife, saying, "With whomever you find your gods, let that person not live" (Genesis 31:32).

Then he allows Laban to search his camp. Meanwhile, Rachel has hidden the teraphim in her saddlebag and then sat upon it. When Laban reaches her tent she says: "Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise up before thee; for the custom of women is upon me. And he searched, but found not the images" (Genesis. 31:35).

There are two items that have ironic and tragic recompense. First, Jacob in ignorance pronounces judgment upon her, that being the curse of death. Second, she hides the teraphim from her father under the deception of being in the monthly "custom of women." How ironic it is that she dies in childbirth as recorded just four chapters later. The parallels here are quite intense inasmuch as childbirth involves the cessation of the

monthly cycle, and death reminds us of Jacob's unwitting curse of his wife. Once again a parallel between the deception and the recompense describes the retributive character of justice.

## **The Second Deception of Jacob**

The Bible now records a second deception of Jacob. Why a second? We must assume that justice is not yet served. The first deception was a minor inconvenience. No lies, just omissions. The second deception involved damaging lies and caused real suffering.

Jacob's sons, jealous of Joseph, sell Joseph into slavery in Egypt. In order to thoroughly deceive Jacob about their deed, they take Joseph's coat of many colors and dip it into a goat's blood. Then they take it to Jacob and say "We found this. Do you recognize it?" Jacob does and draws the wrong conclusion—he is deceived! (See Genesis 37:33-35.)

Once again the retributive character of justice is seen in several items paralleling previous experiences. First consider the twin themes of goat and garment. In this scene we have the garment of Joseph, his coat. Does this not call to mind the garments of Esau (goodly raiment, Genesis 27:15) used by Jacob and his mother to deceive Isaac? Secondly, the goat's blood used to mimic the blood of a slain Joseph bring to mind the goat's skin used of Rebekah to deceive Isaac into thinking Jacob was Esau. One can take the goat theme one step further by noting the following: the word for goat in Hebrew is *seir* which coincidentally is also the name of the location where Esau settled (Genesis 33:16). And to make the connection even more, it is also the word for hairy, descriptive of Esau's hair, thus giving us a double pun of reminder. (See Strong's numbers 8163 and 8165.)

## **The Deception of Judah**

This account is found in Genesis chapter 38. We are told that Judah had three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah. Er, the oldest, married a girl named Tamar, but because of his wickedness, he died by the hand of Jehovah before leaving offspring. So in the patriarchal tradition, Tamar is married off to the next son to raise up seed for him. But Onan appears to have no better character than his brother and because of his callousness, he also is slain by Jehovah.

Now the third son, Shelah, is promised to Tamar. But Judah is fearful that he too will die, so he tries to deceive Tamar by saying that Shelah is too young yet to marry and she should wait a while. However, time marches by and Judah makes no wedding plans. Judah is only trying to preserve the life of his youngest son, but his deception is an injustice to Tamar.

Eventually this intention of Judah becomes clear to Tamar, so she takes action to get justice for herself. She puts off her widow garments, covers herself with a vail, and poses as a harlot on a road she knows Judah will pass over. Judah, newly widowed, propositions her and sleeps with her, promising to pay her one goat. As a pledge for

payment he leaves some personal attire (a signet, a bracelet and his staff). Curiously, Judah never recognizes her during this encounter.

The result of this encounter is that Tamar is later found to be pregnant. Judah, the patriarch judge of his family, confronts her with her apparent sin. She confronts Judah right back with his property and says “Recognize these?” He does! And he sees what she has done and declares her righteous. She obtained the justice she was seeking.

Thus was Judah deceived in recompense for his deception of Tamar and the story again presents us several intriguing parallels. First we note that Judah lost two sons in connection with Tamar. He gains back two sons from Tamar (twin boys, Pharez and Zarah). Tamar got her family and Judah regained two sons. It is also of interest that we again see the twin themes of goat and garments, the price of a goat for the encounter with Tamar and the items of Judah’s personal attire as a pledge.

### **The Final Deceptions—Genesis 42-45**

We now move some 13 years later in the narrative and the scene changes to Egypt. Joseph has risen to extraordinary political power in Egypt having become the second in command. His brothers come in the midst of famine looking for food. Joseph recognizes them but they do not recognize him. It is ironic that the brothers address themselves to Joseph as “your slaves” in view of the fact that they once sold him as a slave (Genesis 42:10).

Joseph by this time is a mature and wise ruler and he does not allow his emotions to push him into any brash actions. So he does not reveal himself to them in order to ascertain their true heart motives. They remain deceived as to Joseph’s true identity.

First he accuses them of being spies. They deny it and identify themselves as sons of one man. Joseph then proposes a test: they are to bring the youngest brother as proof of their claims. However, they are to spend three days in jail first, fitting because afterward this brings to their minds their treatment of Joseph (Genesis 42:21,22). At the end of that time Joseph keeps Simeon hostage in prison while he dispatches the brothers to their home to fetch Benjamin.

The choice of Simeon is quite appropriate insofar as justice is concerned. Call to mind the account of the selling of Joseph to the Ishmaelites. All of the brothers, except Reuben and Judah, were in favor of the idea of murdering Joseph. Reuben was clearly against it and plotted a way to save Joseph from his brothers. We surmise that Judah suggesting the selling of Joseph to spare his life. Under patriarchal tradition, the eldest brother leads. We are told that Reuben was absent during much of the narrative. Who then was the ringleader in the plot to murder Joseph? The likely choice would be the next oldest brother, none other than Simeon! Thus was he recompensed for his action.

Now Joseph did one other thing to the brothers that was undoubtedly calculated to trouble them a bit more. The brothers came to purchase food in the midst of famine. As the nine

remaining brothers make their trek back home (Benjamin didn't come, Simeon is in jail, and Joseph is, of course, in Egypt), they discover that the money they used to pay for the food has been returned (Genesis 42:27,28). This discovery fills them with dread and uncertainty. They ask, "What is this that God hath done unto us?"

There is a fascinating connection of this money return with the original sale of Joseph. Joseph was sold for 20 pieces of silver, the going rate for an adolescent slave. (The price for an adult slave was 30 pieces of silver.) The brothers of Jacob got their money returned twice. The first occasion was with the nine brothers. The second occasion was when the brothers returned with Benjamin. They again purchased food and again had the money returned covertly by Joseph. On this second occasion there were 11 brothers. So the total money value returned to the brothers amounted to 9+11 measures, or 20 measures! The connection with the first sale is intense. 20 pieces of silver = 20 measures of silver. They get the silver a second time but now under very different circumstances. They learn what it means to feel helpless, to be the victims of injustice. As they deceived they are deceived.

Joseph finally ends this whole string of deception, the attitude of tit for tat, by the simple medium of forgiveness! Joseph could have demanded great compensation from his brothers. But he applied the principle, "Love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8, NIV).

The lessons for us in this are straightforward. We must develop a strong sense of justice, of what is right and what is wrong. And we must appreciate the principle of retributive justice and its rightness. All of our dealings with our brethren must be just and honest, and we must strictly avoid any compromise of these principles, recognizing that retributive experiences will be the result (1 Thessalonians 4:6, 7; Galatians 6:7).

## Joseph

# Submission Under Injustice

*Joseph was sold for a servant, whose feet they . . . laid in iron . . . the word of the LORD tried him. The king . . . loosed him . . . he made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance. The LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favor. — Psalms 105:17-21; Genesis 39:21*

Few characters in the Scriptures so endear themselves to us as Joseph. Called from an early age to be the Lord's agent for preserving the life of his family, and of the surrounding world, he endured the jealousy of his brethren in ways so treacherous it would severely embitter most people. But through faith in the Most High, and in the intimations of a grand purpose of God to be worked through his perseverance, his trials served to temper a lovely character, and he became a type of the very savior himself.

The story of Joseph consumes most of the last 14 chapters of Genesis, from chapter 37 onward. Genesis 37:2 begins, "These are the generations of Jacob," or as in the NIV translation, "This is the account of Jacob." The phrase actually refers to the preceding narrative. It is a closing expression which ends the previous passage and for this reason some modern translations show a clear break between this expression and the succeeding story about Joseph.

This kind of phrase is used 11 times in Genesis, and is a terminating expression rather than an opening expression (Genesis 1:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2). It appears in Genesis 37:2 for the last time because the preceding 36 chapters form a different literary segment of Genesis than the remainder. The first 11 accounts were evidently transcribed by Moses from cuneiform records, and bear the telltale signs of tablet narratives, whereas the story of Joseph would have been recorded in Egypt, probably on papyrus scrolls customary for that culture, a different medium with different literary forms.

If so, then the language of the tablet narratives would have differed from the language of the Joseph story, and this is reflected in the account as it has come down to us. "The presence of Babylonian words in the first eleven chapters is a further testimony that the contents of the earliest narratives and genealogies were written during the lifetime of the early patriarchs of Genesis, for they used that language. The presence of Egyptian words and Egyptian environment in the last fourteen chapters of Genesis, adds its irresistible testimony that those chapters were written in Egypt" (*New Discoveries in Babylonia About Genesis*, P. J. Wiseman, p. 147).

## Young Joseph

The narrative begins when Joseph was age 17, and was sold by his brothers and taken to Egypt. Later, when Jacob was reunited with his son in Egypt, he gave his age as 130

years, and ultimately died at age 147—thus he was with Joseph for 17 years at the beginning, and 17 years at the end. It is customary to recognize in the experiences of Joseph an allegory about Jesus, and perhaps these equal periods reflect the fact that as Jesus was always with the Father from the beginning of his creation by God, so when reunited after his resurrection he would from thereon be with the Father.

The meaning of the number itself, 17, probably comes from its parts, 7 and 10, showing the perfect one (Jesus, 7) who gave himself for the world (10, an earthly number). Probably the same symbolism is shown by the number 70 (as in Numbers 7:13, and the total bullocks in Numbers 29:13-32), 7+10 having the same symbolism as 7x10. Yet a third way of representing this is in the 153 fishes of John 21:11 (153 is the sum of the whole numbers through 17)—the fishes representing those redeemed from earth through the gospel call opened by the offering of Jesus.

By this young age the animosities of his brethren had already turned against him, as reflected in the closing expression of verse 2, “Joseph brought their father a bad report about them” (NIV). Why the ill will against Joseph? Verses 3 and 4 explain that Israel loved Joseph more than the others, and showed this by his gift of “a coat of many colors.” In a tomb drawing in Egypt from about this period, some of the Semitic visitors (identified by their beards) are dressed in specially colorful garments, which may be some indication of the appearance of Jacob’s gift to Joseph (Pharaohs and Kings, David Rohl, p. 292).

Joseph then had two dreams, which moved his brothers to even more jealousy. The first was about him and his brothers gathering sheaves in the field, when their sheaves made obeisance to Joseph’s. In the second, the sun, moon, and 11 stars made obeisance to Joseph. The sun of course represented Jacob, the moon evidently the matriarch Leah (Joseph’s real mother had already died), and the 11 stars Jacob’s brothers. If in the dream the “obeisance” was rendered to a star representing Joseph, then it is interesting to note that early “natural Israel” was pictured with a sun, moon, and 12 stars, just as early “spiritual Israel” is so represented in Revelation 12:1.

Even Jacob reacted to this dream when Joseph told it—“his father rebuked him” (verse 10)—but though Joseph’s brethren “envied him,” his father Jacob, who also had had dreams from God, “observed the saying” (verse 11).

## **Hebron, Shechem and Dothan**

Joseph’s ten brothers (Benjamin would have been too young) were off shepherding the sheep, and Jacob sent Joseph to inquire about their welfare. “Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem? come, and I will send thee unto them. And he said to him, Here am I . . . So he sent them out of the vale of Hebron, and he came to Shechem” (verses 12-14).

Hebron is where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are buried, and thus is identified with God’s covenant promise to these patriarchs. Sending Joseph out of Hebron is as to say in the picture, Jesus’ mission to Israel was in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. Indeed,

Malachi's prophecy of the first advent says, "I [God] will send my messenger . . . even the messenger of the covenant" (Malachi 3:1). The covenant Malachi means is the Abrahamic covenant, judging by the words of the angel in Luke 1:68-73, "God . . . hath raised up an horn of salvation . . . to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swore to our father Abraham." When Mary, pregnant with Jesus, visited Elizabeth, it was in "the hill country . . . a city of Judah" (Luke 1:39), which is the area of Hebron (Joshua 21:11).

Shechem, by contrast, represents the Law covenant. It was there that Joshua gathered the Israelites, and "called for the elders of Israel, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers" (Joshua 24:1), to recall the Lord's providences, and reaffirm to them the covenant God made with them through Moses. "So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the Lord . . . Behold this stone shall be a witness unto us" (Joshua 24:25-27).

Joseph's brothers were expected to be nourishing their flocks at Shechem, representing that the leaders of Israel should have been tending their pastoral duties by nourishing Israel with the precepts of the Law when Jesus came. Had they been so doing faithfully, presumably they, and Israel, would have recognized Jesus as the perfect one, the Messiah. But when Joseph arrived at Shechem his brothers were no where to be found.

As Joseph pondered the matter, "a certain man found him, and behold, he was wandering in the field: and the man asked him . . . What seekest thou? And he said, I seek my brethren: tell me . . . where they feed their flocks" (verses 15,16). The man was not of Jacob's family, and probably represents the Gentiles who took note of our Lord's ministry, and inquired of his purpose. But Jesus had come particularly for Israel, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24).

The man replied he had overheard them say "let us go to Dothan," so Joseph went there and indeed did find them. Dothan is a contracted term meaning "two cisterns" (see McClintock and Strong), and reminds us of Israel's condition when Jesus arrived. "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13). Probably it was in one of the cisterns that gave the place its name that Joseph was briefly detained. "The pit [cistern] was empty, there was no water in it" (verse 24).

Israel was at this place of dry cisterns when Jesus arrived. Thus Jesus sprang up "as a root out of a dry ground" (Isaiah 53:2, compare Deuteronomy 32:24; Isaiah 44:3; Zechariah 9:11). Israel is even yet at Dothan symbolically. Dothan reappears in Scripture in 2 Kings 6:13 as the location of Elisha when he delivered Israel from their enemies, picturing the Ancient Worthies delivering Israel from their enemies in the troubles which will turn Israel to the Lord.



## **Joseph Taken**

When his brothers saw Joseph approach, they said “come now . . . let us slay him” (verse 20), just as the leaders of Israel said in the parable of the vineyard, “this is the heir . . . come, let us kill him” (Matthew 21:38). Reuben prevailed on his brethren not to shed blood however, and Joseph was stripped of his coat of many colors and placed in the dry pit. So Israel at the first advent denied Jesus the dignity of his office, and wished to bring him down to their own “dry” level. A teacher of the people they might tolerate, but one who threatened their position they would not. Pride was at the root, and as with Cain, they would not conquer it.

While Joseph was in the pit, the brothers sat down to eat. Joseph must have cried out to his brothers, imploring them to listen to him. Years later they would remember “when he besought us . . . we would not hear” (Genesis 42:21). So while the leaders of Israel were in fellowship together in their own arrangements, they ignored the pleas of Jesus toward reformation of heart.

Soon a band variously referred to as Ishmaelites and Midianites came by, and the brothers (excepting Reuben) sold Joseph for 20 pieces of silver. As Judah urged, “let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother” (verse 27). Likewise the Jews in Jesus’ day, though responsible for his death, did not directly take his life, but turned him over to others—the Romans.

When Reuben learned what had occurred, he was distraught. Perhaps as the firstborn he felt a special responsibility. Though Reuben generally did not shine for his character, in this episode he was at least superior to his brethren. Perhaps he represents ones such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea who were disciples of Jesus, “but secretly for fear of the Jews” (John 19:38), who “had not consented to the counsel and deed of them” (Luke 23:51). In at least one other picture Reuben is frequently thought to represent a noble class—Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh who obtained an inheritance on the east of Jordan picture the Church, Great Company, and Ancient Worthies respectively, who receive their inheritance before the world in general.

Joseph’s brothers stained his coat of many colors with blood and presented it to Jacob, deceptively inquiring whether he recognized it as Joseph’s. Of course he did. What resulted from Messiah’s advent was the blood of atonement, presently employed in the redemption of the saints.

## **Descent from Judah**

The story of Joseph is interrupted by chapter 38, which records the unusual descent from Judah, and particularly the birth of Pharez who was a progenitor of our Lord. Probably it is intruded into the narrative at this point because these episodes occurred while Joseph was in Egypt. But the story it tells is fitting at this time symbolically also, as it is allegorical of the development of the true seed of blessing, Christ and his church.

Normally the genealogy of the promised seed, and the birthright blessing, would both pass to the eldest son, which was Reuben. But because of Reuben's indiscretion (Genesis 35:22; 49:4) he was passed by, the birthright going to the favored son Joseph, and the genealogy of the promised seed passing to Judah (skipping Simeon and Levi probably for the reason mentioned in Genesis 49:5-7).

The birthright blessing of a double portion was fulfilled in Joseph by his two sons each becoming recognized as a full tribe among the nation. As the recipient of the birthright blessing it is fitting that Joseph is a type of Christ. But from Judah was to descend the promised seed, and the development of that promised seed of blessing is pictured in the descendants of Judah in chapter 38.

Judah took to wife the daughter of his Canaanite friend Shuah, who bore him three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah. We suggest these three sons all represent Israel, at different times and circumstances. Of Israel was to come the promised seed of blessing in due course. But Israel proved rebellious, and it was necessary for God to destroy their kingdom, and raze their temple, at the time of Nebuchadnezzar. This is "Er"—which means "enemy"—and Er "was wicked in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD slew him" (Genesis 38:7; Psalm 107:10-12).

It was now for Onan to raise up seed in the name of his fallen brother, but when the time was come, he refused to cooperate and wasted the opportunity (verse 9). "And the thing which he did displeased the LORD: wherefore he slew him also" (verse 10). Onan represents Israel at the first advent, who had the opportunity to raise up seed for the nation at the advent of Messiah . . . an opportunity it refused. Onan means "strong," and rebellious Israel at the first advent was indeed strong. So strong in fact, that in the revolt of 66 to 73 A.D. they were victorious over the Roman army until reinforcements, and a methodical tactical campaign, finally reduced them. When Jerusalem was taken, again the temple was razed to the ground, and the polity of Israel shattered.

Who, then, would prove to be the seed of blessing? Shelah was young and immature, and could not yet be given to Er's wife Tamar. So she waited . . . and waited . . . and finally decided to take the initiative independently. In this well known but indelicate episode, Tamar bore by Judah directly, and conceived twins. It reminds us of the twins in the womb of Rebecca, and has a similar meaning. One represented Israel after the flesh. The other represented those of faith, both Jewish and Gentile, who embraced Christ and became part of the promised seed. "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29).

When Esau and Jacob ("supplanter") were born, Jacob was holding the heel of his brother, suggesting his later overtaking of the firstborn blessing. With Tamar's twins, Pharez and Zerah, the same point is pictured differently. Zerah was the first to put forth his hand from the womb, and the midwife tied to it a scarlet thread to mark him as the firstborn. But his hand was withdrawn, and his brother Pharez, meaning "a breach" or breaking forth, was born first. Through the line of Pharez came our Lord, and Pharez

represented the spiritual seed. His brother Zerah, the would-be firstborn whose position was overtaken, represented Israel, as did Esau.

Judah's third son Shelah at last did have a son, named after his older brother (1 Chronicles 4:21), so he did raise up "seed" to his fallen elder brother. This may represent that Israel will finally produce a seed which will be a blessing during the kingdom, namely natural Israel restored, obedient, and compliant. Shelah became the father of "them that wrought fine linen" (1 Chronicles 4:21), perhaps showing that Israel will help the world gain a standing of righteousness. But the Israelites miss the honor of becoming the promised seed, part of the body of Christ. The name Shelah means "request or petition," and represents the Israelites turned back to God when they receive the "spirit of supplication" and are restored to favor with God.

The mother of Er, Onan, and Shelah was a Canaanite, consistent with Ezekiel 16:3 which says of Israel "thy mother [was] an Hittite." Tamar, the mother of Pharez, means "palm," a symbol elsewhere used to describe the bride of Christ (Song of Solomon 7:7).

## **The Story of Joseph Resumed**

Joseph's story resumes in chapter 40. He is now in Egypt, serving Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, "captain of the guard," or as the margin has it, "chief of the executioners" (Genesis 37:36). If the Egyptians represent the Romans, Potiphar may represent Pilate. As Joseph served him well, so Jesus "witnessed a good confession" before Pilate (1 Timothy 6:13). As "Joseph found grace in his sight" (Genesis 39:4), so Pilate was favorably impressed with Jesus.

Joseph was condemned to prison for attempting to seduce his master's wife. Of course it was a false charge—she attempted to seduce him, and failed. During Jesus' forty days in the wilderness, the devil attempted to seduce Jesus, with power, offering him all the kingdoms of this world—and what else had he come to do but save the world?—and Jesus successfully resisted. But just as with Joseph, Jesus was condemned for the very charge he had successfully resisted. Jesus was indeed "king of the Jews," but as he explained to Pilate, "my kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). On one occasion, "when Jesus therefore perceived that they would . . . take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone" (John 6:15).

The prison of Joseph represented the prison house of death into which Jesus descended at his crucifixion. While in prison Joseph encountered two people who had troubling dreams, the butler (cup bearer) and the baker. In the butler's dream there was a vine with three branches which budded, blossomed, and bore fruit. "And Pharaoh's cup was in my hand: and I took the grapes, and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand" (Genesis 40:11). Joseph gave the interpretation—the three branches were three raised from prison and made Pharaoh's cup bearer again.

The baker was encouraged with such a pleasant meaning, and gave his dream also. He had on his head three white baskets, and in the top one various breads for Pharaoh, which

the birds ate up out of the basket. Joseph's interpretation—the three baskets were three days, and within three days the baker would lose his head, be hanged on a tree, and the birds would pluck his flesh. And so it all happened.

The dreams represent things pertaining to Jesus when he was in the grave. On the third day there would be a dramatic change, as with the butler—he would be restored to life, seated again at the right hand of God, and bear the cup of the “wine” of atonement “which cheereth God and man” (Judges 9:13). But on the third day the baker would find quite a different result. The producer of bread would not be restored. “The bread that I will give is my flesh” (John 6:51), said Jesus, and his flesh is never to be restored. When he died on the tree, it was gone for good.

## **The Rest of the Story**

In the succeeding chapters are a variety of pictures, some overlapping, each with a particular focus. At the end of two full years Joseph was lifted from prison, made second only to Pharaoh in the kingdom, given a bride, and ruled Egypt for its blessing, just as Jesus was raised to the right hand of God, receives a bride, and rules the world in the kingdom for its blessing.

The seven years of plenty and seven years of famine represent the Gospel and Millennial ages—in the first mankind considers themselves self-sufficient, but they will come to recognize their need, and then have it supplied, in the kingdom. Meanwhile one part out of five of the produce of Egypt is saved during the first seven years to provide for the lean years ahead —just as in the Gospel age the saints are called out of this world now to provide nourishment for the world in the kingdom. The number five, as in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, represents the new creation.

At last his brethren appeared before him, men changed by the experience of years, now repentant of their evil deed. So now, in the end of this age, Israel begins to recognize its need of assistance. Now, even in the presence of their brother and master, they do not recognize him, but he knows them. He is testing them by trying experiences, before it is timely to reveal himself to them.

Israel is now passing through very trying circumstances. It is learning, as a nation, what it is like to be unjustly accused, when all it wishes is to have peace with the neighbors, who, though they will not admit it, have been richly blessed by Israel's presence. Surely this is part of the preparation of the hearts of the Israelites, mellowing them, to receive with chastened humility their Messiah who came 2000 years ago to bring them peace, but was in every way accused unjustly, though his very presence with them brought rich blessings which they spurned.

When Joseph at last revealed himself to them, there was a great weeping at the reunion, “and the Egyptians . . . heard” (Genesis 45:2). It calls to mind the prophecy of Zechariah 12:10, which remarks on the great weeping at the reunion of the Israelites with their brother and Messiah.

## Patience, Purity, Forgiveness

There is nothing in the long record respecting Joseph which speaks of any flaw. Of course, as all sons of Adam, he was imperfect, but the absence in the record of any sin or slip makes him a good representation of our Lord, who was actually “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26). There is no record of murmuring or complaint—even in the face of such intense unjust treatment and accusation. Instead, only faithful application to whatever duty was at hand, which earned him the respect of all his associates. Probably during his dark experiences he clung to the testimony of his early dreams that some good would come, and patiently waited for God’s due time. What a blessing he will have in the kingdom, as one of the “princes in all the earth,” when he sees that his life record served as a picture of Christ, and an inspiration to so many.

In his trial with Potiphar’s wife he showed great moral purity, and gave us an example of how to deal with temptations of the flesh. He refused to become corrupted, and fled from the tempter. “Flee fornication . . . flee from idolatry . . . flee these things . . . flee youthful lusts, but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (1 Corinthians 6:18; 10:14; 1 Timothy 6:10-11; 2 Timothy 2:22). If we flee sin, and submit ourselves to God, and “resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

And, perhaps most endearing of all, Joseph is renown for his forgiving spirit, so kind that even his brethren could not quite believe it. But Joseph assured them he considered the experience as overruled by God for the preservation of life. What an excellent picture of Christ, who even more so suffered unjustly, surely more than we can appreciate, by a hateful generation. But he accepted it without a complaining spirit, and offers to the wondering world, and to his Jewish brethren as they will see in due time, full forgiveness of sins, secured by his own sacrifice.

What an example to us, to have a patient, forgiving spirit, ready to relax personal grievances, to acknowledge them as known and overruled of the Lord for a higher good. We can embrace this attitude in our heart now, even in otherwise bitter circumstances. If our enemies are not yet prepared to receive tokens of forgiveness, in due course they will, and our present spirit, and their later experience, will bear rich fruitage.

## Hezekiah

# Like a Caged Bird

*Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD, even thou only.—Isaiah 37:20*

Tom Ruggirello

The phrase, “Like a Caged Bird,” is taken from a six-sided clay tablet called the “Taylor Cylinder.” Presently found in the British Museum, it is one of the most perfect archaeological specimens of its kind ever found. Its historical and biblical significance is immense. It contains 487 lines of closely written, but very legible, cuneiform text. It records eight military expeditions of Sennacherib, king of Assyria. The one of great interest to Bible Students is his siege against Jerusalem, during the reign of King Hezekiah.

The following is a translation of lines 11-21 from the center column of that tablet. Sennacherib writes:

11. I fixed upon him. And of Hezekiah (king of the)
12. Jews, who had not submitted to my yoke,
13. forty-six of his fenced cities, and the strongholds and the smaller cities
14. which were round about them and which were without number,
15. by the battering rams, and by the attack of engines
16. and by the assaults of foot soldiers, and ...
17. I besieged, I captured 200,150 people, small and great, male and female,
18. horses, and mules, and asses, and camels, and men,
19. and sheep innumerable from their midst I brought out, and
20. I reckoned (them) as spoil. Hezekiah himself like a caged bird within Jerusalem,
21. his royal city I shut in ...

Much of what was written here we find confirmed by Scripture. In 2 Kings 18:13 we are told that in the 14th year of Hezekiah Sennacherib came up against all the fenced cities of Judah and took them. Then in verse 17 of that chapter we read of Sennacherib’s siege of Jerusalem.

There is an interesting observation to be made about the clay cylinder. Concerning Jerusalem, Sennacherib wrote that he had it “shut in.” Notice what he does not say. He never claims to have taken the city; just that he surrounded it and had Hezekiah shut in like a caged bird. The implication of Sennacherib’s tablet is that Jerusalem posed no special problems to his army. Never does he mention that in the siege his entire army was destroyed. It is the biblical record, which reveals that important detail. In 2 Kings 19:35

we are told that while the Assyrian army was encamped around Jerusalem the angel of the Lord slew 185,000 Assyrian men. The next morning, after the destruction of his army, Sennacherib fled back to Nineveh his capital city.

The Bible goes on to tell us that after his return to Nineveh, while worshipping in the temple of his heathen god, he was murdered by his two sons. It is certainly an indictment against his god, that even while praying to him, Sennacherib was not safe from his own children. What a contrast to the security of Jerusalem. While surrounded by an immense army, Hezekiah prayed safely in the temple of God. It is a lesson that transcends the ages. God's people dwell under the shadow of the Almighty, and though outward enemies may seem overwhelming at times, his watch care over them is unfailing.

The boasting words of Sennacherib's clay tablet were true. He had Jerusalem "shut in" and Hezekiah trapped like a "caged bird," but he failed to tell the entire story. What a different conclusion we must draw when we know the facts of what actually transpired.

## **Devoted King Hezekiah**

Hezekiah was a fascinating figure in the history of Israel. He began to reign 14 years before Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem. When he became king, he was like a man on a mission. His goal was to undo all the sins of his father Ahaz. In 2 Chronicles 29:3 we are shown a glimpse into the heart of Hezekiah. It was in the first month of his reign that he repaired the temple and cleansed it from the idolatrous things that Ahaz had brought in. He then gathered the Levites and prepared them to resume the temple services. His stated desire was to make a covenant with the Lord and turn away God's wrath from Israel.

Following the preparation of the temple and the Levites, Hezekiah brought the rulers of the city to the temple. Through the priests he offered seven each of bullocks, rams, lambs, and he-goats, as a sin offering for Israel and the sanctuary. Following this series of sacrifices we are told that they sang praises with gladness, and bowed their heads in worship.

After this remarkable scene Hezekiah instructed all the people to bring in their offerings to the Lord. Their response was inspiring. They brought in 70 bullocks, 100 rams, 200 lambs, 600 oxen, and 3,000 sheep. In fact, there were so many animals brought by the people that there were not enough priests to offer them all. As a result, the Levites were called upon to assist.

What a stirring moment in the history of Israel! All these events were brought about because one man wanted to reinstate the worship of God. There is a simple lesson here, which suggests that the Lord can do wonderful things through people who honor him. At times, we as Christians may doubt that the Lord can use us to be a blessing to others. It is at such times that this lesson makes a meaningful point. We should never allow ourselves to believe that we are incapable of serving the Lord, or of helping his people see the right course for their lives. God's greatest power is often manifested through the humblest vessels.

## The Passover Reinstated

In 2 Chronicles 30 we are told that all of Hezekiah's work in the temple happened around the time of the Passover. However, since the priesthood had not yet been properly sanctified, Hezekiah announced that the Passover would be observed on the following month. It had been determined that this change was allowed in the Mosaic Law. Letters were then sent to all of Israel announcing the reinstatement of the Passover. These letters went also to the 10-tribe kingdom of the north with admonitions to return to the God of their fathers. Though many northerners laughed and scorned the letters, there were those who humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem for the Passover observance.

The participation of these northern brethren however created a problem for Hezekiah. Since they had not been properly cleansed, their participation in the Passover was a violation of the Law. As a result, Hezekiah prayed that the Lord would pardon them for this sin (2 Chronicles 30:18). The Lord hearkened to Hezekiah and forgave them. In this experience we see again the pure heart of Hezekiah. He was determined to reestablish the worship of God, and reunite all of Israel.

His desire to help the Israelites in the north was one of the impressive qualities of Hezekiah. After Solomon's death, some 250 years earlier, there had been a division between the ten tribes of the north and the two tribes of Benjamin and Judah. Ever since that time they had lived under separate governments and different kings. In the north, idolatry was prevalent for a much longer time than in Judah. During the reign of Hezekiah's father Ahaz, northern Israel had even formed a union with Syria and attacked Judah. History thus records a time when Israelites were striking out against their own brethren. Hezekiah could very easily have harbored bitterness toward the northern kingdom, but here his thoughts were just the opposite. He wanted them to come back to the Lord for their own blessing and because it was the right thing to do. The principle we see manifested through the conduct of Hezekiah is very clear. Jesus gave it to us in Matthew 5:44 when he said, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."

But the lesson strikes even closer to home because these were Hezekiah's brethren. The ten tribes had been allured into thinking that serving Baal was better than serving God. But in reality, it only meant the removal of God's protective care and made them vulnerable before their enemies. As Hezekiah did for his brethren, we see that the greatest thing we can do for our brethren is to encourage them to sanctify themselves and to re-devote themselves to the Lord. We can do that best by living sanctified lives ourselves, and then, by words of encouragement.

Today's world also has attractions that can draw us away from the true worship of God. Idolatry takes on many modern forms. The spirit of Hezekiah teaches us to stay focused on the Lord and his service, and endeavor to help and encourage the brethren. It is a noble goal, one that we should each take to heart, and most clearly reflects the character of the one we serve.



## A Double Seven-day Celebration

Looking back to Hezekiah's reinstatement of the Passover, we see another extraordinary event. The seven-day Passover celebration was such a great blessing that the whole assembly took counsel to keep another seven-day feast (2 Chronicles 30:23). In verse 26 we read "there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon . . . there was not the like in Jerusalem." The chapter ends at verse 27 with the words: "Then the priests the Levites arose and blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven."

It had been a long time since Israel's prayers had been heard in heaven. The reason, of course, was not because heaven wasn't listening, but because Israel had not been praying. Now, through the influence of Hezekiah, it was finally praying again. Following this joyous time in Jerusalem all the people that were present went out to all the cities of Judah and broke down the statues and the groves that had been erected in their idolatry. This spirit of reformation went even to the north, to the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, until they had utterly destroyed all the idols.

In examining this inspiring story we ask, is it possible that the Lord intended the work of Hezekiah to be a picture of a greater work yet to be done? As we focus on his work, one parallel comes to mind. In Hezekiah we may be given an illustration of the work of the Ancient Worthies, and the great joy that will follow when the new covenant is inaugurated.

Remember the words we read in 2 Chronicles 29:10 that Hezekiah's desire was to make a "covenant" with the Lord. He wanted to renew the law covenant, which had been God's avenue of blessing to Israel. The law covenant was still there, but it had been lost sight of by Israel. Hezekiah's desire to reestablish it pictures the establishment of the new covenant. The new covenant is based on the old law covenant, which likewise has been largely lost sight of by Israel. The reason Hezekiah wanted to renew the covenant was to avert God's wrath from Israel. So, in our day, and in a much larger sense, Israel has just experienced the severest punishment of her existence, in the double of disfavor (Isaiah. 40:1,2). Chronologically, Israel's period of disfavor is over, and we have witnessed wonderful signs which prove it. Soon a new covenant will be inaugurated and the relationship between God and Israel can take on an even grander meaning than before. Then her warfare will be fully accomplished and Israel will be greatly blessed. Then she will no longer be negligent of her worship and responsibility to God.

Hezekiah's work of conversion began first with the rulers of Jerusalem. They were the first to bring their offerings to the Lord. This might picture the work of the Ancient Worthies in converting Jews then present in the land of Israel. By reestablishing the priesthood and temple sacrifices Hezekiah pictured the work of pointing Israel to Jesus, as the true Messiah. The Ancient Worthies will teach Israel about the work of the antitypical priesthood of the Gospel age, and their role as the great mediator between God and man. Because of the presence of the mediator, Israel's prayers will again be heard in heaven.

Picture the conditions described in Hezekiah's day. "There was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon . . . there was not the like in Jerusalem." How beautifully that illustrates the joy that Israel will experience when they obey the voice of the Ancient Worthies and turn away from their human philosophies, renewing their covenant with God. Joy can be a difficult thing to describe, but it is described in the actions of the people when, after one week of observing the feast of Passover, they wanted to extend it for an additional week.

## **The Kingdom Celebration of the Passover**

This Passover celebration reinstated by Hezekiah is a picture of Israel's recognition of the antitypical Passover Lamb. The fact that Israel celebrated a month later than the normal time indicates to us that this is a picture which follows the Gospel age. It is the celebration of Jesus as the antitypical lamb by Israel and the world. In addition, it indicates a remembrance of the spiritual journey of the church during the Gospel age and its deliverance as the spiritual first born.

This picture is substantiated by the actions allowed under the law in Numbers 9:10-12. When an Israelite could not partake of the Passover because of being on a journey, or for being unclean through contact with death, he was allowed to observe it in the following month. Being on a journey pictures being estranged from God. Being unclean through contact with death corresponds to the Adamic curse. These have both prevented mankind from worshipping God in an acceptable manner. Observing the Passover on the following month, then, is a picture of the time when the world will be able to worship properly, after the close of the Gospel age.

One of the thrilling aspects of the Hezekiah story was his desire to unite all of Israel. This seems to represent the call for every Israelite in the world to come and take part in the earthly government set up through the Ancient Worthies. The response to Hezekiah's letters and proclamations was mixed. Many came and shared in the work and the joy, others only mocked. Likewise, there will be a similar response during the initial stages of the kingdom. After the Ancient Worthies are established as leaders of Israel many more Jews will return and share in their ground-breaking work. Others, too deeply entrenched in whatever form of idolatry they have set up, will only mock. Some might say: "Those are the old ways. Religion has never served my needs. I have other gods." Whatever the excuse, some Jews will not claim their heritage, and because of that they will miss out on a great blessing.

## **Restoring the Worship of Jehovah**

The eventual result of Hezekiah's work was that the people went out and tore down all the idols and everything associated with idolatry. In that we see a wonderful picture of how the kingdom will spread! The joy that begins in Jerusalem, with those able to see the vision, will spread like wildfire. All modern forms of idolatry will be torn down one by one as the knowledge of the Lord spreads. What a prospect lays before us as we see pictured the vindication of God's name and his worship restored to our race.

The result of the worship in Jerusalem was that the people brought their own offerings to the temple. So many animals were brought that the priests could not keep up, and the Levites were called upon to assist. These sacrifices are similar to the after-atonement-day sacrifices that we see in the tabernacle. They picture the response from all over the world to the kingdom work. There will be an overflowing response from mankind, shown by the multitude of offerings brought to the temple. By their example, the Ancient Worthies will show the way to make a consecration pleasing to the Lord, just as Hezekiah himself led the way by offering 1,000 bullocks and 7,000 sheep of his own (2Chronicles 30:24).

We find another connection to the future work of the Ancient Worthies in 2 Chronicles 30:17-20. Many of the northern Israelites had participated in the feast of Passover without being properly cleansed. Hezekiah then prayed for them and the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah and forgave them. This may indicate that there will be many whose heart's desire will be to know the Lord, and yet they will be so backward in their understanding of how to serve or properly approach him, that they will make mistakes. Here we see a picture of the Ancient Worthies showing them that God will forgive their mistakes. They will explain the legality of their forgiveness and how Jesus and the church will operate as a mediator during the age. Perfection will not be required, but heart intent will be of primary concern.

In 2 Chronicles 31:4 Hezekiah had commanded that the people should start giving their tithes again to support the work of the priesthood. Soon after the command was broadcast there came in an abundance of the first fruits of corn, wine, oil, and honey. The people also brought in their tithes of oxen and sheep. In verse 6 the amount of their offerings is described as being piled up—"heaps, heaps" (Rotherham). So many tithes had been brought that special storage chambers had to be built just to hold them all. What a lesson of free will giving this teaches. In this generous response of the people we see a picture of the world's change of heart.

After coming to an appreciation of the Lord, mankind will give in full abundance. They will finally learn the principle that one receives by giving, not by hoarding. The human spirit will become generous. It will place a real importance on the things of the Lord, and give the best that they have. How we look forward to the time when the Lord's things will be given top priority in the world. Then the great artists, the great musicians, the great craftsmen will freely give their talents to the Lord. All the willing and obedient will ask themselves, "What can I give to the Lord for all his goodness toward me? How can I show my appreciation for the resurrection, for the love of the human family and for the goodness of the earth?" What a time of change this will mark for the world, when its continual giving to God will be so abundant.

## Sennacherib's Invasion

The next chapter in this story takes an interesting turn. We've come back to the story of Sennacherib, now in the 14th year of Hezekiah. Many years after the restitution of Israel's worship we see the testing of Hezekiah along very different lines. In 2 Chronicles 32:1 we are told of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah. As a result, Hezekiah went about

making preparations for war. He shut up all the water supplies so that the Assyrian army would not benefit from them. This was the time that Hezekiah's tunnel was constructed so that Jerusalem would have a water supply, but those outside the walls would not. The walls of Jerusalem were built up and fortified and many weapons of war were prepared. In 2 Chronicles 32:6-8 Hezekiah also tried to mentally prepare his soldiers. It says that "[he] spake comfortably to them saying, be strong and courageous. Be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more for us than with him: With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah."

In Hezekiah's words we see the battle cry for all of the Lord's people, no matter where or when their battles are fought. Fear can have a paralyzing effect. When it paralyzes one of the Lord's people, the reason is usually because of an inability to see God's invisible hand. Fear is a weapon that the adversary has used for thousands of years. We see it being used here against Israel. In 2 Kings 18 and 19 we have an account of the psychological battle waged by Sennacherib.

Before besieging Jerusalem Sennacherib sent three emissaries to weaken the mental resolve of Hezekiah and Judah. When they arrived, Hezekiah sent his representatives out to meet them. Rabshakeh, one of the Assyrian emissaries, asked Hezekiah's men where their confidence came from. Did it come from their friendship with Egypt? Egypt, he said, was but a bruised reed, so weak that it could not help. To shake them further he said that if their trust was in the Lord, then that was ill founded as well, since it was God himself who had sent Sennacherib to destroy them. Israel, he claimed, would not stand against the great king of Assyria. No one had ever stood against him.

Hezekiah's men were shaken by Rabshakeh's menacing tirade. They asked the Assyrian to speak to them in the Syrian language so that the Hebrew soldiers standing on the walls would not understand their words. But instead, seeing that his fear tactic was taking hold, he shouted in Hebrew so all the surrounding men of Judah could clearly hear him. His words are recorded in 2 Kings 18:28-35. As we read these verses one can almost feel the power with which he spoke. He admonished them not to be deceived by Hezekiah for no one would be able to deliver them from the Assyrian army. If they would make an agreement with Assyria their lives would be spared and the city would not be destroyed. He goes on in the rest of the chapter to list all the areas that Assyria had conquered and how none of those gods were able to deliver the people.

This was an overwhelming display of intimidation. Who could deny the power of Assyria? Who could argue against the military conquests all around them? Jerusalem was like an island now, "a remnant," as Hezekiah would call it. The observable facts seemed to fly in the face of Judah's faith in God.

Hezekiah's representatives came to him with rent clothes. They were afraid. Hezekiah himself rent his clothes and put on sackcloth as a symbol of mourning. He went into the temple to pray to the Lord. He sent word to Isaiah the prophet. In return, Isaiah sent a

message back that they should not be afraid of the blasphemous words of the Assyrians, that the Lord would deliver Jerusalem.

But the onslaught of intimidating words continued. In 2 Kings 19:10-13 Rabshakeh sent a letter to Hezekiah with similar boasting and threatening words. Hezekiah took this letter and went into the temple to lay it before the Lord. What an example we see in Hezekiah! When his enemies terrified him, he went to the Lord for help. He told God just how he felt and how he greatly feared the enemy.

## **God Answered Their Prayers**

Again the Lord sent word through Isaiah that Hezekiah had been heard. In fact, God said that he would put hooks in Sennacherib's nose and a bridle in his lips and lead him back to where he came from. It was at this point, with the approach of the Assyrian army, that the angel of the Lord slew 185,000 men.

There is a phrase in the account found in 2 Chronicles 32 that gives us a completely different slant of what happened that day than we get from reading the words of Sennacherib's clay cylinder. In verse 21 we are told that Sennacherib "returned with shame of face to his own land." Remember how the cylinder read? He said, I took great spoil and Hezekiah was like a caged bird in Jerusalem. The truth is that all his boastings were more pride than reality. His mighty army had not put even one scratch on the walls of Jerusalem, because it was God's city, and those within it believed in his might. Faith will always be the correct response to any attack, any trial, or any experience, no matter how overwhelming or impossible the circumstances might seem.

In looking at this siege of Jerusalem we again ask the question, could this experience be symbolic of some future event? Remember in our previous picture of Hezekiah's restoration, we saw the kingdom work of the Ancient Worthies in restoring true worship to Israel and then to the world. Since Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem happened years later, after the restitution work of Hezekiah had prospered in the land, the attack of Assyria might picture the little season when Satan will be loosed out of his prison and go out to deceive the nations once again.

That is what Sennacherib's representatives tried to do. They tried to deceive the people into believing that Hezekiah was lying to them, that, in fact, the only way for them to sit under their own vine and fig tree was to make an agreement with him and give presents to Sennacherib. He would then lead them out of Israel, into a land of milk and honey, where they would live and not die. It follows the pattern of Satan's great lies. Satan's tactics of deceit, fear, and intimidation will be used all over again in the little season.

In Revelation 20:8 we are told that those who follow him will be as the sand of the sea. It is remarkable that any will follow Satan after having experienced the great restitution work of the kingdom. But as we see in the distorted history of Sennacherib, "pride goeth before destruction" (Proverbs 16:18). Given the same circumstances as experienced by Sennacherib, it might be observed that a sincere person would have seen the display of

God's power and be humbled, not humiliated by it. He would repent, and believe. But as an evil-hearted man, Sennacherib only cared about covering up his humiliating experience.

In Revelation 20:9 we are told that in the little season, Satan's host will surround the camp of the saints, the beloved city. In our picture we see that is just what Sennacherib did. In both cases we see the miraculous destruction of Jerusalem's enemy. The lesson is powerful. No one can stand against the Lord. No one can intimidate the Lord, and no one can do those things to anyone who truly believes in him.

## **A Song of Degrees**

The story of Hezekiah does not end here. In 2Kings 20 we find out that during the siege of Jerusalem Hezekiah was very sick with a severe boil. Isaiah came and told him to get his house in order because this sickness was unto death. Hezekiah then prayed with tears to the Lord, and again his prayer was heard. In 2 Kings 20:6 God assured Hezekiah that he would extend his life by 15 years. Hezekiah asked for a sign that this would happen. The sign he requested was that the shadow of the sun should go backwards ten degrees. After the miraculous sign was given and Hezekiah healed, he expressed his heartfelt appreciation to the Lord. At the end of Isaiah 38:20 he says, "So we will play my songs on stringed instruments all the days of our life at the house of the LORD."

In these last words of Hezekiah we are given a clue that takes us to another part of the Bible. What songs could he be referring to? In the Book of Psalms there are 15 psalms that are subtitled "A Song of Degrees." These consist of Psalms 120 to 134. In appendix 67 of the Companion Bible the thought is presented that these 15 chapters correspond to the 15 years that Hezekiah's life was extended. It contends that these are the chapters that Hezekiah was referring to when he said that they would sing his songs. These chapters then were written to commemorate the Lord's deliverance of Jerusalem and the extension of his own life.

The word for degrees in those subtitles is the same Hebrew word for the ten degrees that the shadow went back on the sundial. We find that in those 15 psalms there are three repetitive themes. The 15 chapters seem to be divided into five sets of three chapters each. The three themes follow each of the three chapters in the divisions.

The first theme is distress from the deceit and scorning of others. The second theme is trust in the Lord as expressed by God's people. The third theme is the blessings and peace that come to his people as a result of their trust. Distress, trust, and peace: these form a universal theme of spiritual development. The words of these chapters parallel the personal experiences of Hezekiah.

In Psalm 124:6-8 (part of the songs of degrees) Hezekiah makes a clear allusion to Sennacherib's contention that he was a caged bird. He writes, "Blessed be the LORD, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the

snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken and we are escaped. Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.”

The wonderful lesson in all this is that, as in the days of old, the Lord can break any trap that God’s people find themselves in. He can truly set them free from whatever ensnares them. He did it for his ancient people, he does it for his church, and he will do it for his human family.

# NEWS AND VIEWS

## Pastoral Bible Institute News

### What Say the Scriptures About Hell?

This newly reprinted PBI booklet has been placed in selected copies of this issue of The Herald. Samples of our other newly reprinted booklet, Why Does God Permit Evil?, were placed in most of the September-October issues. Please contact us if you would like to use these or our other publications in witness opportunities in your area.

### Bible Students' Publications

Subscribers who reside in the U.S. and Canada will find a catalog of various Bible Student publications, an order sheet, and a PBI-addressed envelope in the plastic sleeve protecting this issue of The Herald. We will be happy to accept orders for anything listed in this catalog, including those items we do not normally stock.

## World News

### Religious

Attending religious services helps low-income kids do better in school, suggests a study by sociologists Mark Regnerus of Calvin College and Glen Elder Jr. of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In a nationwide survey, the professors found that students from poor neighborhoods who attended services found role models in the congregation who inspired them to do well. Religious communities did not have as much influence over more affluent kids.

—Time, 8/27/2001

Afghanistan's hard-line Taliban ruler has banned international aid organizations from using the Internet in a country that has no proper postal service and few working telephones. Mullah Mohammed Omar's edict said the only Internet connection in Afghanistan would be in the southern city of Kandahar, where most of the senior Taliban leaders are based. Aid groups working in Afghanistan depend heavily on the Internet to communicate with each other and with their headquarters. The country has been devastated by decades of war and natural disasters. The Taliban rule about 95 percent of Afghanistan and impose a harsh brand of Islam. The Internet ban was the latest blow to aid groups working in the South Asian nation. Three weeks ago, the Taliban arrested foreign employees of a Christian aid organization, including two Americans, accusing them of preaching Christianity.



—Associated Press, 8/26/2001

Nepal's constitution, drafted in 1990 following the establishment of democracy there, bars discrimination based on sex, religion and race. However, discrimination based on caste was not included. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba declared the practice illegal in an Aug. 16 speech to parliament. Hinduism's caste hierarchy continues to be a powerful force in Nepal, as in neighboring India, where discrimination persists despite India's 1950 constitutional ban on caste-based discrimination. More than 80 per cent of Nepal's 23 million people practice Hinduism, the official religion of this Himalayan country where the king is believed to be the reincarnation of the god Vishnu. While there is no official data, Dalits [considered to be lowest in the Hindu caste system] are believed to make up between 15 and 20 per cent of the population. They have been banned from temples for centuries. In May last year, a Dalit woman was severely beaten by villagers in Pyuthan, 240 kilometers west of Katmandu, after attempting to fetch water from a well used by her higher-caste neighbors.

—Associated Press, 8/26/2001

## Social

Africa's largest hospital says AIDS patients are overwhelming it as the disease ravages the country's population. Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital lacks enough beds (3,300) and staff to deal with the flood of patients. An estimated 4.7 million south Africans are infected with the virus that causes AIDS, according to the South African Department of Health. That's more than 10% of the total population. Admissions to the hospital have risen by nearly 40% over the past five years. Most alarmingly, death rates go up with admissions.

—Wall Street Journal, 8/16/2001

A German hospital said it had successfully treated a heart patient using adult stem cells, a first for the medical world. Ten weeks after the ground-breaking treatment the strength of the 46-year old man's heart had significantly increased, the Heinrich-Heine university in the western city of Duesseldorf said. The ethics of modern biotech research using stem cells from human embryos has triggered a heated debate around the world. At the heart of the issue is whether it is ethical for scientists to harvest stem cells—master cells that can develop into a variety of cells in the human body—from early stage human embryos for research, or whether life begins at conception and the cells should not be touched. Harvesting the cells destroys the embryo. Advocates of their use pin their hopes on studies that show stem cells may be useful in the development of new treatments for such ailments as heart disease, diabetes, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. Those who argue against it say destroying human embryos is ending one human life to benefit another.

—Reuters, 8/24/2001

Scientists at Harvard University and two Boston-area hospitals said that they have made preliminary progress toward finding a gene responsible for unusual longevity in certain siblings. In the report, the scientists outline strong evidence that an important longevity gene may be located in a small stretch of chromosome four, one of the 46 that decide heredity. If the finding—the result of years of painstaking analysis of the genetic material of 137 centenarians or near-centenarians and their siblings—is correct, the gene is one of fewer than 500 located on the chromosome segment. Conventional wisdom that diet, exercise, avoidance of smoking and other good habits prolong life is certainly true for most of us, says Dr. Tom Perls, Harvard scientist. But he says his findings suggest that there may be a “genetic booster rocket” that propels a very small percentage of humanity from the 80-year-old stage to centenarian status.

—Wall Street Journal, 8/27/2001

Among the world’s 6,800 languages, half to 90 percent could become extinct by the end of the century, linguists predict. One reason is because half of all languages are spoken by fewer than 2,500 people each, according to the Worldwatch Institute, a private organization that monitors global trends. Languages need at least 100,000 speakers to survive the ages, says UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. War and genocide, fatal natural disasters, the adoption of more dominant languages such as Chinese and Russian, and government bans on language contribute to their demise. Eight countries account for more than half of all languages: Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Nigeria, India, Mexico, Cameroon, Australia, and Brazil. Linguists believe 3,400 to 6,120 languages could become extinct by 2100. Some languages come back from the dead, so to speak. Hebrew evolved in the last century from a written language into Israel’s national tongue, spoken by 5 million people.

—Associated Press, 6/19/2001

## Financial

An old scam that promises to pay Americans millions to help Nigerian “officials” smuggle cash and valuables out of the African nation is multiplying again, thanks to the Internet. The scam usually works like this: The victim gets a “confidential” letter or e-mail from someone outside the United States. The writer claims to be someone—a government official or deposed leader, or the wife or child of a former military leader, for instance—who is trying to get millions of dollars in cash, gold and/or valuables out of the country. The real scam is to get the victim to willingly send thousands of dollars supposedly to pay taxes, legal fees and money transfer charges needed to get the money out of Nigeria. Victims are simply led on, believing that if they send one more check to pay one last fee, the money will be released. Officials say the crime is rarely reported because the scheme hooks the victim into a potentially illegal transaction. Anyone who receives an offer to participate in [such a] scheme should forward the correspondence to the Secret Service at e-mail address 419.fcd@uss.treas.gov or fax to 202.406.5031.

—Los Angeles Times, 8/26/2001

International arms sales rose 8 percent to \$36.9 billion in 2000 according to an U.S. Congressional Research Service report. The U.S. is the world's biggest arms dealer, and U.S. manufacturers sold about half of the total. Russia was the second largest seller of weapons, with \$7.7 billion in sales in 2000. France sold \$4.1 billion, and Germany sold \$1.1 billion. Developing countries are the largest market for weapons. The U.S. sold 68 percent of its weapons to developing countries.

—New York Times, 8/20/2001

A growing number of religion-based investment schemes in the US are tricking people into putting in money. The North American Securities Administrators' Association said that faith-based scams were becoming larger and more sophisticated. The process involves using someone's religion to gain their trust and their money. During the past three years, such scams have taken at least 90,000 investors for nearly \$2 billion. The founder of the Greater Ministries International Church was recently sentenced to 27 years in prison for fraud and conspiracy for swindling investors out of \$580 million over six years. The organization had promised thousands of investors that divine intervention would double their cash inputs.

—Financial Times, 8/8/2001

## Civil

Critics view genetically modified foods as potential health hazards, arguing that not enough research has been done to determine whether they are really safe. But such food could be the answer to feeding the world's hungry, according to the UN's 11th annual Human Development Report. Crops altered to produce higher yields could revolutionize farming in Africa, Latin America and across the underdeveloped world, and the prolonged debate in the U.S. and Europe over safety "ignores the concerns of the developing world," the report says. The report ranks 162 countries based on income, education, life expectancy and health care. Norway ranks first and the U.S. is in sixth place as the world's best country in which to live. But if you are poor, you live longer in Sweden and Japan, according to the report.

—Wall Street Journal, 7/10/2001

Vandals raided a Jewish cemetery in the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk, painting swastikas and epithets on the tombstones of 31 graves, police said. The vandalism is being investigated said Irina Uzhetskaya, a police spokeswoman in Krasnoyarsk, 2,100 miles east of Moscow. Several shots were fired at tombstones of the same cemetery about two years ago, according to the Russian news agency ITAR-Tass. Concerns about anti-Semitism in Russia have risen in recent years, with repeated cases of bombings and vandalism at synagogues and Jewish cemeteries, as well as attacks on Jews.

—Associated Press, 8/22/2001

The number of state prisoners in the US fell during the second half of 2000, the first decline since 1972, the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics said in a report. At the end of 2000, there were 6,243 fewer people in state prisons than after the first six months of the year. The total number of people in state and federal prison rose 1.3 percent last year, the smallest annual increase since 1972. At the end of 2000, one in every 143 US residents was incarcerated, either in state or federal prison or in a local jail, the report said.

—Bloomberg News, 8/12/2001

“The reality in the German Democratic Republic is that people of a different skin color, of a different faith, or of a different nationality cannot feel safe anywhere in this country,” said Paul Spiegel, chairman of the Central Council of German Jews. He said that it is “open season” on minorities and foreigners in Germany's streets. Spiegel blames all German political bodies for their minimizing the seriousness of the threat posed by rising xenophobic violence, a threat, he says, which is greater than any posed by Nazism since the end of World War II. Xenophobic violence in Germany has increased during the past year after a drop through the 1990s. There were 16,000 hate crimes committed in 2000, as opposed to 10,000 in 1999.

—Arutz 7, 8/22/2001

## Israel

The Islamic Jihad terrorist organization is running camps in PA-controlled Gaza for 8- to 12-year-old children. Channel 2 TV reports that the “Paradise Camps” train the children in military tactics and weapons operations, instilling the concepts of the significance of being a suicide bomber and dying as a martyr. Israel has called for the end of Arab and Moslem incitement against Israelis since the Oslo accords were first signed, almost eight years ago.

—Arutz 7, 7/22/2001

While diplomats and Middle East experts wonder how peace negotiations can ever resume after the colossal failure of the Oslo process, security experts everywhere are fascinated by the extraordinary Israeli success in minimizing their casualties. The constant, dramatic coverage of shootings and bombings is contradicted by statistics: In the 10 months since the outbreak of violence, a total of 136 Israeli civilians and soldiers have been killed—many fewer than the number who died in road accidents over the same period, and an amazingly small number considering the sheer magnitude of the violence. Physical damage to Israeli public infrastructures and private property has been insignificant and, more importantly, not one of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank or Gaza have been evacuated. Israel's ability to keep damage to a minimum explains why world attention is ... [focused] on Israel's security system, which immediately went into action once Yasser Arafat's men started shooting.

—Los Angeles Times editorial, 8/6/2001

Dr. George Carey, the archbishop of Canterbury, issued an impassioned plea to the dwindling number of Christians in the Holy Land not to leave the country. “We want to urge you to stay put,” Carey said in a message to the Christians of the area. Speaking in a press conference at the American Colony Hotel in Jerusalem, Carey, who is the spiritual head of some 75 million members of the Anglican communion around the world, said he and his fellow churchmen had been “shocked and disturbed” at the situation facing the churches in the West Bank, Jerusalem, and Gaza, but he made what appeared to be a deliberate effort to remain balanced and avoid appearing overly critical of Israel. On a previous visit, he had singled out Israel, criticizing its building projects in the territories.

—Jerusalem Post, 7/31/2001

The number of tourists coming to Israel in June of this year was 97,400, a 55% drop compared to June of last year. People in transit totaled 3,500, an 89% increase. From October 2000 until June 2001, the number of air tourists fell 46% compared to the year before, from 186,000 to 101,000. In the first 6 months of 2001, 690,000 tourists came (including 12,500 in transit), 53% less than in the first half of 2000.

—Arutz 7, 7/26/2001

Arab allies of the United States are pressing Syria and the Palestinians against launching war against Israel, a new report says. The research division of Israel’s Foreign Ministry said the Arab effort to prevent a Middle East war is being led by Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The report said these countries have pressured the Palestinian Authority and Syria to halt preparations for any war against Israel. The three U.S. allies are said to fear that the current escalation in Middle East tension could result in a regional war that would damage their interests. The report said Egypt, Jordan and the Saudis have warned of war against Israel while pressing Syrian President Bashar Assad and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to lower the tension. The result, the report said, is that even Syria and the Palestinians have concluded that war is not in their interest. Instead, Syria and the Palestinians are expected to continue low-intensity conflict against Israel. The Foreign Ministry report agrees with military assessments that dismiss the prospect of an imminent regional war. The assessments, however, have warned that the current Arab-Israeli fighting could spin out of control as the current Arab political front against Israel turns into a military coalition.

—MENL, 8/3/2001

## Book Review

A reader suggested that we consider videos in our reviews since not all are inclined to take the time to read the books reviewed in this column. Our hesitation has always been that the superficial treatment given most subjects in a 60- to 90-minute video cannot compare to what can be documented in a 400-page book. However, knowing the time constraints of many who are active in the Lord's service, we believe the suggestion is a good one and from time to time we will identify and review worthwhile productions or producers.

Vision Video, a Christian film distributor, made its debut in 1980 when the firm released a film on the Czech pre-Reformation figure Jan Hus. This film still ranks today as one of the finest Christian films and provides an excellent background on this important reformer who planted seeds 100 years before Martin Luther. Condemned for his uncompromising belief in the final authority of the Bible over the church, Hus was burned at the stake in 1415.

Today this firm distributes over 150 selections with a heavy emphasis on both producing and distributing factual treatises of the lives of historical figures important in Christian history. The selections do not represent any single time period, tradition or denominational emphasis. Some are full-length theatrical feature films while others are educational productions. In some cases more than one video on a single subject is offered (e.g., Martin Luther).

Of special interest to Bible Students are "Wycliffe: The Morningstar," a profile of the first translation of the Bible into English by one who underwent great risk to provide the common people with the Scriptures, and "The Midnight Cry," a profile of William Miller whose work laid a foundation for the early truth movement. Also worthwhile are some modern profiles such as the one on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German clergyman of great distinction who actively opposed Hitler and the Nazis at great personal risk. His convictions eventually cost him his life at the hands of the Gestapo.

Those interested can obtain a catalog from Gateway Films by writing to PO Box 540, Worcester PA 19490, by visiting [www.visionvideo.com](http://www.visionvideo.com), or calling toll-free 1-800-523-0226. Special discounts are given to orders entered through the web site.

—Len Griehs [with special thanks to Norm Pedlar]

## Short Features

# Victorious Faith

O for a faith that will not shrink,  
Though pressed by every foe;  
That will not tremble on the brink  
Of any earthly woe.

That will not murmur nor complain  
Beneath the chastening rod,  
But in the hour of grief or pain  
Will lean upon its God.

A faith that shines more bright and clear  
When tempests rage without;  
That when in danger knows no fear,  
In darkness feels no doubt.

That bears unmoved the world's dread  
frown,  
Nor heeds its scornful smile;  
That seas of trouble cannot drown,  
Nor Satan's arts beguile.

A faith that keeps the narrow way,  
'Till life's last hour is fled,  
And with a pure and steady ray  
Illumes a dying bed.

Lord, lead me to a faith like this,  
Through trial though it be;  
For O! the rest of faith is bliss,  
The bliss of rest in thee.

## Earnest Watchfulness

I want a principle within of jealous godly fear;  
A sensibility of sin, a pain to feel it near;  
I want the first approach to feel of pride of fond desire;  
To catch the wand'ring of my will, and quench the kindling fire.

From thee that I no more may part, no more thy goodness grieve,  
The filial awe, the loving heart, the tender conscience give.  
Quick as the apple of an eye, O God, my conscience make;  
Awake my soul when sin is nigh, and keep it still awake.

If to the right or left I stray, that moment, Lord, reprove;  
And let thy goodness chase away all hindrance to thy love.  
O! may the least omission pain my well instructed soul,  
And send me to the blood again, which makes and keeps me whole.

—Hymns of Dawn, #130

## Mercy

The quality of mercy is not strain'd.  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;  
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.  
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes  
The throned monarch better than his crown.  
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,  
The attribute to awe and majesty  
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;  
But mercy is above this sceptred sway.  
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings.  
It is an attribute of God himself;  
And earthly power doth then show likest God's  
When mercy seasons justice. . . .  
Though justice be thy plea, consider this,  
That, in the course of justice, none of us  
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy;  
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render  
The deeds of mercy.

—William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act IV, Scene 1



# Triumphant Faith

Triumphant Zion, lift thy head  
From dust and darkness and the dead!  
Though humbled long, awake at length,  
And gird thee with thy saviour's strength.

Put all thy beauteous garments on,  
And let thine excellence be known.  
Decked in the robe of righteousness,  
The world thy glory shall confess.

No more shall foes unclean invade,  
And fill thy hallowed courts with dread.  
No more shall sin's defiling host  
Their vict'ry, and thy sorrows, boast.

God, from on high, has heard thy prayer;  
His hand thy ruins shall repair;  
Nor will thy watchful Monarch cease  
To guard thee in eternal peace.

Yea, soon astonished men shall see  
The laurels of thy victory;  
And thou, with grace and glory crowned,  
May'st lavish blessings all around.

# Faith in our Father

Our Father knows what things we need  
Each step along the way,  
His eye of love does never sleep,  
He watches night and day.

He knows sometimes, like ripening grain  
We need the sunshine bright,  
Again He sends the peace that comes  
With shadows of the night.

Sometimes our pride would fain unfurl  
Ambition's flaunting sail,  
Ah! then He knows we need to walk  
Humiliations's vale.

Sometimes He takes our eager hands  
And folds them on our breast,  
He gently lays our work aside,  
He knows we need to rest.

Sometimes we need companionship,  
Sometimes, "the wilderness,"  
How sweet to feel He'll know and give  
The state that most will bless!

Then let us leave it all with Him,  
Assured that, come what may,  
Our Father knows just what we need  
Upon our pilgrim-way.

(Poems of the Way)