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God's Plan

God has a plan! The assurance of this today, when all human plans are failing, constitutes the only ray of light and hope there is in a world where security, peace, and happiness are almost completely blacked out by human selfishness and aggression. This ray of hope becomes a definite assurance for the future when we learn from the Scriptures that its success does not depend upon the goodwill and feeble efforts of the minority who still have faith in God but upon God's determination and ability to put it into operation irrespective of the selfish opposition of those who may wish to hinder it.

Most people are willing to agree that if the precepts of Christ, as taught in his Sermon on the Mount, were accepted by the world, lasting peace and happiness could be attained. But, say they, the problem is to get the world to accept these precepts. Human history teaches that selfish man is not likely suddenly to become altruistic and decide to adopt love instead of selfishness as a governing motive in his affairs. Flimsy, indeed, is the hope that, by the force of arms, nations may be induced to obey the Golden Rule and that in this manner a new world order of peace and happiness will arise out of the present debacle of human ambition and greed.

If, therefore, in God's plan we are to find a genuine hope for the future happiness of the human race,

that plan must include adequate arrangements whereby it can be put into operation effectively. Its success must not be jeopardized by the possibility of selfish human manipulation, nor by the cold indifference of the unbelieving masses. The Scriptures assure us that the plan of God is implemented by divinely provided ways and means of guaranteeing its workableness and final success in bringing to the world the “desire of all nations.”—Hag. 2:7; Zech. 4:6

GOD’S PURPOSES NEVER FAIL

The present tragic condition of world affairs does not mean even a temporary failure in the divine plan. It does mean a failure of what men have thought to be God’s plan, and this failure should impress upon us the necessity of re-examining the Scriptures to discover our mistakes of interpretation that have led to hopes and expectations which are now being shattered by the cold reality of facts.

That false and unwarranted hopes have been entertained with respect to the purpose and progress of Christianity in the world is now clearly apparent to all who do not close their eyes to reality. The accepted thought in orthodox circles has been that the world was steadily getting better, that civilization has been progressing to increasingly higher levels of goodwill among men, and that soon fear and poverty and war will be no more. In this optimistic outlook of orthodox churchianity, there was envisioned also the possibility of all the heathen being converted to Christianity, probably within the lifetime of the present generation.

These false hopes and claims of Christendom began to be shattered with the outbreak of the First World War in the year 1914. But a supreme effort was made to rally the forces of civilization and righteousness from the result of that breakdown of human efforts to keep the peace. That war came upon the world as a surprise, but philosophically it was claimed to be “a war to end wars” and to make the world “safe for democracy.”

Following the Armistice of 1918, there was much talk about returning to “normalcy,” but, as we all know, normalcy was never reached. After all conferences and negotiations failed, another bloody war began, and now it is recognized that there is no hope of the world returning to normal. The question today is not how to return to normal but what will be the nature of the new “normal.”

Meanwhile, during all these troublous years, instead of the people of the earth being brought in increasing numbers into the churches of Christendom, the reverse has been true. Even in so-called civilized lands, the increase in church membership has not kept pace with the increase of population. Atheism has been on the increase. A spirit of worldliness still grips most of the churches. The young are being turned out of our schools and colleges almost all of them without faith in God and the Bible. Missionary work has ebbed, and philosophies of every kind have flooded our own fair land.

We review these facts, not for the purpose of criticism, nor to imply that someone should have done better. This is no time for carping criticism of what others have been doing to make the world a better place in which to live. We wish merely to

emphasize that somewhere along the line of human endeavor, irrespective of the degree of sincerity manifested, men and women have made a mistake as to the purpose of God. Had God wanted the world converted in this generation, it would have been converted. Had God's protection been over the pre-1914 institutions of earth, they could not have been destroyed.—Isa. 55:8-11

Through the prophet, the Lord says: "My word . . . that goeth forth out of my mouth . . . shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." (Isa. 55:11) This means that irrespective of the distressing conditions throughout the world today, God's plans, whatever they may be, are steadily and successfully progressing. The apostle says that "known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." (Acts 15:18) This means that God knew what his plan would be for our time and that there has been no miscarriage of that plan.—Isa. 46:9,10; 14:24,27

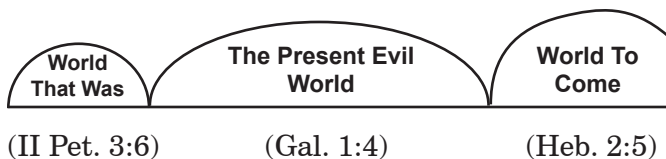
That God does have a plan is clearly shown by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 3:11, where, according to *The Emphatic Diaglott* translation, he speaks of a "plan of the ages," a plan which has for its central feature the redemptive work of Christ Jesus our Lord. That this plan embraces several ages is indicated in Ephesians 1:10, where Paul speaks of things that will be done "in the dispensation of the fullness of times," and in Ephesians 2:7, "that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace . . . toward us." The work the apostle outlines to be accomplished when

God's time comes to the full is said to be that of gathering "together in one all things in Christ." This means that at no previous time in the history of the human race should we expect to see "all" things in harmony with Christ.

Seeing then that the plan of God embraces various ages, or periods of time, and that not until the "fullness of times" will that plan reach fruition in the reconciling of the world to God, through Christ, let us search the Scriptures to ascertain how God's plan in previous ages has been progressing toward its ultimate objective in the "fullness of times."

THREE WORLDS

In Peter's second epistle, chapter 3, we are told of three "worlds." In this prophecy the apostle uses the Greek word *kosmos*, meaning an order of things. The first of these, he tells us, came to an end at the time of the Flood; the second ends with the return of Christ; while the third, which is God's world, is "without end." (Eph. 3:21) Below is a brief chart of these three worlds, embracing, as they do, three long periods of time.



In keeping with the modern use of language we might speak of these three worlds as the world of yesterday, the world of today, and the world of tomorrow. The Bible uses the word "world" in the same way we do, not as referring to the planet

upon which we live, but to an order of things among men, and sometimes as an age, or period of time. Much of the misunderstanding of God's purpose for the sinner race has been occasioned by a failure to recognize this fact. For example, the biblical "end of the world" has been misunderstood to denote the burning up of the literal earth and all things upon it. This has deterred many from an investigation of the subject.

On account of this misunderstanding of what is meant by the end of the world, many have feared its approach and therefore have endeavored to project it far into the future. Others have looked upon it as a mere superstition of the Dark Ages, unworthy of being given any serious consideration. But when we realize that what the Bible speaks of as the end of the present world means just what we now see taking place and what the thinking people of our time refer to as the ending of a world, then the subject should take on an important, yea, a vital, meaning to all who are interested in what the world of tomorrow is to be.

The Bible uses the terms "fire," "earthquakes," "storms," etc., in the same pictorial manner in which they are used in current language to describe the catastrophic trouble that has come upon men and nations in this generation. Just as the Lord uses "wheat" and "tares" and "sheep" and "goats" to illustrate those who serve, pretend to serve, or oppose him, so he uses the terms "earth" and "heaven" to illustrate phases of organized society called "worlds."—Jer. 22:29

Peter speaks of the heavens and the earth which were before the Flood, indicating that they made

up the “world that then was”—the world of yesterday. That world came to an end at the time of the Flood, but the earth itself was not destroyed. Of the literal earth we read that it “abideth forever.” (Eccles. 1:4) In Isaiah 45:18 we are told that God did not create the earth in vain but “formed it to be inhabited.” This is a basic fact of truth which should be kept in mind as we trace, through the Scriptures, the outline of the divine plan. God’s plan does not involve the transfer of the human race to another sphere of life but its restoration to everlasting life upon the earth, man’s designed and original home.—Ps. 115:16; Isa. 65:21; Jer. 31:17; Deut. 11:21; Matt. 5:5

The first world, then, which began at the time of creation, ended at the Flood. The second world, according to the apostle, beginning after the Flood, comes to an end in the destruction wrought in the final phase of the great time of trouble, or day of the Lord (Jehovah). This day of Jehovah follows our Lord’s return, when conditions in this present evil world will be similar to what they were in the days of Noah.—Matt. 24:38,39; Luke 17:26,27; Gen. 6:11; II Pet. 3:6,7,10

In the days of Noah, we are told, the people were “eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage . . . and knew not” of the impending Flood that was to destroy the “world that then was.” Likewise, the Scriptures explain, the “day of the Lord” comes as a “thief in the night”—the people not being aware of the significance of events until the destructive troubles of that day bring about the overthrow of this “present evil world.”—Gal. 1:4; I Thess. 5:2; Luke 21:35

But the end of the world of today will not mean the end of the human race. No, thank God, it will mean but the beginning of a new world, the world of tomorrow—God’s world of tomorrow. One of the chief characteristics of the world of yesterday and the world of today is that they have been based upon selfishness, and Satan, the archenemy of God, has been their ruler. But with the ending of the world of today and the beginning of the world of tomorrow, Satan will be bound, and that new world will come under a new, a divine rulership.—Rev. 20:1-4; 21:1-5; II Pet. 3:13; Isa. 65:17; Obad. 21

SELFISHNESS VS. LOVE

Under the leadership of Satan, the spirit of selfishness, self-interest, became dominant at the very beginning of the world of yesterday. Sin and selfishness continued to dominate that first world, with the result that just before it ended, the earth “was filled with violence.” (Gen. 6:11) The same has been true of the world of today. We are already, in fact, witnessing the dissolution of the present world, and its destruction is being brought about by the violence of the great time of trouble foretold by the prophets.—Dan. 12:1

God’s world of tomorrow will be under the leadership of a new Ruler, Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. (Ps. 72:1-20; Rev. 19:16) His rulership will be upon the basis of love, rather than selfishness. This is the reason the apostle speaks of that world as one “wherein dwelleth righteousness.”—II Pet. 3:13

The satanic misrule of sin and selfishness has brought death, because the “wages of sin is death.”

(Rom. 6:23) The Messianic reign of righteousness and love will bring life, for he must reign until all enemies are put under his feet, the “last enemy” to be destroyed being “death.”—I Cor. 15:25,26

When we keep before us the fact of these three worlds and their varying characteristics, we can readily see that whatever the Bible might say about them would seem to be contradictory unless we apply its various statements to the period of time to which they belong. For example, of the present time the prophet says, “Now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.” But of the world of tomorrow we read that then “shall the righteous flourish,” and “all the wicked will he [God] destroy.”—Mal. 3:15; Ps. 72:7; Acts 3:23; Ps. 145:20

This method of studying the Bible dispensationally seems, in part, to be what the Apostle Paul refers to when he instructs Timothy to be studious in applying himself toward “rightly dividing the word of truth.” (II Tim. 2:15) If in our study of the Bible we endeavor to apply its various prophecies and promises to the world or age in which they belong, we will find a simplicity, harmony, and beauty in its teaching which we did not realize existed. The Bible itself is harmonious, and all that remains in order to understand it is for us to get in harmony with it.—John 7:17; Luke 11:9,10; Jer. 29:13

While the first two “worlds” mentioned by the Apostle Peter (II Pet. 3:6,7) have been under the control of Satan, the “prince of this world” (John 14:30), and full divine rulership in the affairs of men is reserved for God’s world of tomorrow, yet

this does not mean that God has not been interested in mankind during all this time. On the contrary, throughout the ages he has been steadily carrying forward the preparatory phases of his plan, thus getting ready to take over the reins of government and to bless “all families of the earth” in his own due time—the “dispensation of the fullness of times.”—Gen. 12:3; Eph. 1:10

The work that God has been doing during the time that Satan has ruled over the masses of the people has actually been developing through progressive periods, or ages. God’s Word—his promises and instructions to his people—has contributed largely to the accomplishment of his work in the earth during all these various ages, and he has had a special work for each dispensation of his grace. There is nothing in the Scriptures to indicate that any important changes were made in God’s methods of dealing with his people during the first world, the world of yesterday.

During that time important promises were given. In Genesis 3:15 we are told that the “seed” of the woman would one day “bruise” the serpent’s head. Through Enoch God promised that the Lord would come with myriads of his saints. (Jude 14) In his dealings with Noah certain illustrations were provided which are of great value to us today in connection with the ending of the present world. However, it is not until after the Flood that God’s plans begin to open up with any great degree of clarity, although in the light of the divine plan as we can now view it as a whole, what happened before the Flood is very meaningful.

THE PATRIARCHAL AGE

The first period of time following the Flood may be called the Patriarchal Age, not because that particular expression is to be found in the Bible, but because the Bible clearly indicates that during this period God dealt exclusively with a few individuals who were known as the patriarchs, or fathers of Israel, until the death of Jacob and the founding of the nation of Israel in his twelve sons.

The work or plan of God during the Patriarchal Age was not the evangelization of the people. He spoke to Abraham and made wonderful promises to him. God told him, in fact, that it was his purpose to bless all the families of the earth. This reveals God's interest in all humanity, but the people in general were not given an opportunity during that age to receive the promised blessings. In Isaiah 51:2 we are told that God called Abraham alone.—Gen. 12:1

It was during the Patriarchal Age that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of their wickedness, yet God made no effort to bring about the repentance of these wicked people. We know this from what Jesus tells us in the New Testament. The Master, who conducted a powerful ministry in certain cities of his day, said that if the same mighty works had been done in Sodom and Gomorrah those cities would not have been destroyed, because they would have repented. Obviously, God must have been able to give the people of those wicked cities an effective witness had that been his plan; but he did not do it. Rather, he destroyed them without giving them an opportunity to repent. Also, Jesus promised a

“more tolerable” time for them than those favored cities that refused to recognize him and his mighty works.

On the other hand, we must conclude that these people were included in God’s promise that he would bless “all” the families of the earth through the seed of Abraham, hence the only harmonious view we can take of the situation is that God plans to raise the Sodomites from the dead in order to bless them. This is exactly what the Prophet Ezekiel forecasts in the 16th chapter of his prophecy, from the 44th verse onward to the end of the chapter.

THE PROMISED SEED

The promise God made to Abraham during the Patriarchal Age was later confirmed by a divine oath. (Gen. 22:16-18; Heb. 6:13-18) It was a wonderful promise, in which God reveals his purpose to bless all the families of the earth. It was confirmed to Isaac and to Jacob, and at Jacob’s death, to his twelve sons, who constituted the nucleus of the nation of Israel. Abraham did not understand the full significance of this promise. He did not realize, for example, that the seed of blessing was to be a spiritual seed.

Neither did Abraham understand clearly that there were two parts of the covenant which God made with him, one part providing for the development of the “seed” and the other for dispensing the promised blessings through that seed. Abraham doubtless thought that the miracle child, Isaac, was to be the promised seed, and he had so much faith in God’s ability to fulfill his promises that he believed

Isaac would be raised from the dead if he offered him up in sacrifice as God commanded.—Heb. 11:17-19

In Hebrews 11:13,39 and Acts 7:5 the apostle tells us that Abraham died without the promise having been fulfilled to him; yet while he lived he “looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” (Heb. 11:10) A city, to Abraham, was the center of a government, or a kingdom; so what he actually expected from God was that God would establish upon the earth a kingdom in which Abraham’s descendants would occupy a prominent position. The promise made to Abraham was, indeed, one of the Old Testament promises of the coming Messianic kingdom.

Abraham, as well as the other patriarchs of that age, will have a very prominent part in the earthly phase of the Messianic kingdom; and God’s promises to them and their obedient faith in those promises had much to do with their preparation for that part. In addition to this, God’s promises to, and his dealings with, the patriarchs constitute a very important role in the clearer unfolding of his plans to his people of a later age. Viewed thus, we can see that while God made no attempt to convert the world during the Patriarchal Age, yet he did perform a very important work in connection with his plan. God’s work during that age, as always, was a grand success.

THE JEWISH AGE

The Jewish Age, the next period in God’s plan, began with the death of Jacob and ended with the first advent of Jesus. The title “Jewish Age” is used

to denote this period of time because it suggests the manner in which God continued the preparatory work for the ultimate establishment of his kingdom and the consequent blessing of all peoples. During that time God dealt with a nation, the Jewish nation, and with none other. Through the prophet he declared to them, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.”—Amos 3:2

God gave Israel his Law. He sent his prophets to them. Through their priesthood he instituted the tabernacle services, which, according to the New Testament, foreshadowed the “good things to come.” (Heb. 9:11,23; 10:1) God’s promise to this nation was that if they were loyal to him he would make them a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Exod. 19:5,6) This meant that through them God would dispense his promised blessings to all the families of the earth.

But Israel as a whole did not qualify for this high and honorable position in the divine plan. (Rom. 11:7) When their Messiah came to them they rejected him and as a result were cast off from this special position of divine favor. But God’s work during the Jewish Age was not a failure. Paul tells us that the Law served as a “schoolmaster,” to bring the Jews to Christ. (Gal. 3:24) The failure of the Jews to keep the perfect Law of God and thereby to gain life proved the necessity for the redemptive work of Christ. All nations will eventually learn the same great lesson, namely, the need of a Redeemer.

God accomplished other important things during the Jewish Age. His dealings with Israel and their successes and failures serve as valuable examples and guides to spiritual Israel of this age. The

hundreds of promises made to Israel through the prophets constitute an outline of many of the important features of the divine plan and thus serve to guide the followers of the Master in their preparation for joint-heirship with him in the Messianic kingdom. In other ways, too, the Jewish Age work of God fills an important place in the divine plan for human rehabilitation. God's work during the Jewish Age was not a failure but accomplished its divinely intended purpose.

The Jewish Age came to an end at the first advent of Jesus. During his ministry and for a period of three and one-half years thereafter, divine favor continued with the Jews; and in keeping with this arrangement, Jesus confined his ministry, as well as the ministry of his disciples, to the nation of Israel until after his resurrection from the dead. Jesus said to his disciples: "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."—Matt. 10:5,6

THE GOSPEL AGE

Following Jesus' resurrection he told his disciples to extend the ministry to all nations, but even then, they were to begin at Jerusalem. (Luke 24:45-49; Matt. 28:19,20) According to a prophecy given by Daniel (Dan. 9:24-27), in which he speaks of the Messiah being "cut off" in the midst of a "week," there were to be three and one-half years of favor shown to Israel following the death of Jesus, hence the command, "beginning at Jerusalem." A "week" in prophetic time represents seven years, on the basis of a year for a day.—Num. 14:33,34; Ezek. 4:6; Dan. 12:11,12; Rev. 11:2,3

So it was that, “beginning at Jerusalem,” the work of the Gospel Age began. This age continues until the second presence of Christ, which is also the beginning of God’s world of tomorrow. The term “Gospel Age” is chosen to identify this period of time between the first and second advents of Christ because the Scriptures show that the work of God during this time is accomplished by a proclamation of the Gospel, or “good news,” of the kingdom.

As already noted, during the Patriarchal Age God carried on his work by selecting and dealing with certain individual patriarchs. During the Jewish Age his work was accomplished by dealing with the Jewish nation; but during the Gospel Age God does not limit his favor either to certain outstanding individuals, as he did in the Patriarchal Age, or to a single nation, as he did during the Jewish Age, but has commissioned all who are his people to proclaim the glad tidings of the kingdom throughout all the nations; and those who have responded to that message have been the ones upon whom God has bestowed his favor, by inviting them to participate in his plan of the ages.

What then has been the objective of God’s work during the Gospel Age? This question is answered for us in Acts 15:13-18. Here we are told that God visited the Gentiles “to take out of them a people for his name.” The Jews, as a nation, were to be this people, and a few of them did accept Christ, and as many as did, to them “gave he power to become the sons of God.” (John 1:12) But in the divine plan this “people for his name” was to consist of 144,000—a sizable number from some

standpoints, but compared with the total of humanity, or even of professed Christians, it is, indeed, but a “little flock.”—Luke 12:32

In Romans 11:17-24, the apostle explains that Gentiles are able to come into the special privileges of this Gospel Age because the Jews, as “natural branches,” were broken off on account of their unbelief. This means that when these “people for his name” are selected from among the Gentiles they really take the places of the Jewish cast-offs in the original Israelitish program—the natural, fleshly house of Israel losing this particular place of special favor. This is the reason why, in Revelation 7:4-8 and 14:1-3, we find the entire company of 144,000 represented under the Israelitish picture.

Note specially that here this “little flock” who are with the “Lamb” on Mount Zion are said to have the name of the Lamb’s Father written in their foreheads. Thus are they shown to be “a people for his name,” that is, to bear his name. In Revelation 19:7 this same company is pictured as becoming the “wife” of the Lamb, and in this way, also, they partake of the family name of their Heavenly Father (see also Rev. 21:2 and 22:17).

GOD’S RULING HOUSE

In the light of the general testimony of God’s Word, this “people for his name,” gathered from among all nations by means of the Gospel, is in reality God’s ruling house. In Micah 4:1-4 we are told of the establishment of the divine kingdom throughout all the earth, and this kingdom (symbolized in the prophecy as a “mountain”) is

shown to be made up of the “Lord’s house.” All the hereditary ruling houses of this present evil world have, in reality, been family arrangements, through which, from generation to generation, the rulers inherited their “right” to rule.

So God tells us that his kingdom is to be in the hands of a ruling house, which also is to be a family arrangement. The members of this family receive their right to rule by inheritance and because they are a part of the family. It is not an earthly family, however, but a divine family. It is God’s own family. The chief one in it is his “only begotten” and beloved Son, Christ Jesus. In addition to Jesus, those who follow in his steps are inducted into the divine family, becoming sons of God.—Col. 1:18; John 1:12; I John 3:1,2

The apostle explains further that if we are sons, then we are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” (Rom. 8:16,17) All of these joint-heirs are promised a place in God’s ruling house, and the very purpose of this Gospel Age is the selection and preparation of those who, as members of this royal family of heaven, are to live and reign with Christ a thousand years.—Rev. 20:4; Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:26,27; I Cor. 6:2,3

With the work of the Gospel Age complete, nothing stands in the way of the establishment of God’s new world of tomorrow. Toward the close of the world of today, Christ’s second advent takes place, first of all (so far as the world is concerned) “like a thief in the night.” Christ comes first to receive his bride. (John 14:3; Rev. 19:7; 21:2) When his bride, or church, is united with him in heavenly glory, then will be fulfilled the promise

of Revelation 22:17, where we read that the “Spirit and the bride say, Come, . . . Take the water of life freely.”

FIRST AGE IN NEW WORLD

The first thousand years of the new world might be referred to as the Millennial, or Messianic, Age. It will be during this thousand years that the church, gathered out from the world during this Gospel Age, will reign with Jesus for the purpose of dispensing God’s promised blessings to “all families of the earth.” (Gen. 12:1-3; Gal. 3:16,27-29; Rev. 5:10; Matt. 19:28) It will be during the Messianic Age that the great plan of God will reach its glorious and victorious conclusion.—Eph. 1:10

But before the Millennial Age can be ushered in, the world must go through “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.” (Dan. 12:1) There is every reason to believe that we are now living in this time and that the present distress of the world is a part of the “time of trouble” with which this age comes to an end.

Because church people generally have supposed that God intended that the world was to be converted during this Gospel Age, the present destruction of civilization is bewildering to them and tends to destroy faith in God and in Christianity. (Jer. 8:15) But when we realize that the work of this age has been merely that of gathering out from the world those who are to reign with Christ in the next age, then the present apparent failure of Christianity is understandable.

As a matter of fact, Jesus himself strongly implied that when the time came for his second

advent there would be very little faith left in the earth. (Luke 18:8) Paul prophesied that in “the last days” perilous times would come, and that men would be “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.” (II Tim. 3:4) In the Parable of the Wheat and Tares Jesus made it plain that large portions of his professed followers would be mere imitation Christians and that in the end of the age these denominational bundles would be destroyed.

This burning of the tares at the end of the age is what constitutes, in part, the great time of trouble with which the age comes to an end. But this does not mean that the work of the age has been a failure. God’s work in this age, even as in all previous ages, has been a wondrous success. All his true “wheat” are finally gathered into the heavenly garner, and then they will “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” (Matt. 13:43) To whatever extent, therefore, we may see what professes to be Christianity being dissolved, let us remember that nothing can happen but by divine permission and that what might appear to us to be a calamity is but a preparation for the establishment of real Christianity during the thousand-year kingdom reign.

THE EDENIC PARADISE

Let us now trace the development of the plan of God from a slightly different viewpoint. We have taken note of the great importance of the time element in the divine arrangements—how God’s plan has developed from one age to another—and now we will examine the divine program as it relates to different planes of being, or spheres of life. When, in Ephesians 1:10, the apostle describes

the completion of the divine plan in the “dispensation of the fullness of times,” he declares that then all things will be gathered together under Christ, both those which are in “heaven,” and those which are on “earth.”

In the Scriptures we find that two salvations are mentioned, one a heavenly and the other an earthly. A failure to take this fact into consideration when we study the Bible results in many apparent contradictions. Most of the promises of the Old Testament and some in the New Testament describe earthly blessings, while most of the New Testament promises and those in the Old Testament which speak prophetically of the church outline a heavenly hope. It is necessary that we make the proper time application of these promises if we are to see the harmony that exists between them.

We emphasize that Adam was created to live on the earth, and that the earth was created to be man’s home. (Isa. 45:18; Ps. 115:16) Nothing was said to Adam about going to heaven. He was told that if he disobeyed God’s law he would die. The reverse would also have been true—if he did not disobey he would not die. Had Adam not transgressed the divine law the command to multiply and fill the earth and subdue it would have been carried out apart from sin, sickness, and death.

In this event Adam and his children would have continued to live on the earth without the fear of death. When the command to fill the earth had been fully complied with, this particular function of the human race would have providentially ceased, and the earth would have remained filled with a perfect

and happy human family, enjoying God's full favor throughout the endless ages of eternity. But it did not turn out this way, for Adam disobeyed the divine law, and the foretold sentence of death fell upon him. But this does not mean that God's purpose in creating man had failed.

It was through Adam's transgression that the whole human race has been born into the condition of sin and death, instead of perfection and life. Paul explains that by one man's disobedience, sin entered into the world and death as a result of sin, so death has passed upon all, because all have sinned. (Rom. 5:12,19) Adam's fall brought on the sentence of death as soon as he sinned, and it was under this condition that he brought forth his children. Hence they too were in the way of death, because the stream could not rise above its source.

THE CORRESPONDING PRICE

Let us remember that when Adam sinned nothing was said to him about going either to heaven or to hell when he died. He was told that he would have to die, and this meant simply that he had lost the privilege of living and enjoying that perfect garden home of Eden—that earthly paradise. Adam's sin thus meant the loss of paradise. God's plan of salvation, therefore, is necessarily one which provides for the restoration of paradise. But how is this to be accomplished? The Scriptures answer that it is accomplished through the redemptive work of Christ.

One of the scriptural terms used in connection with the work of redemption is that of "ransom." Paul tells us that the "man" Christ Jesus gave

himself a “ransom” for all. (I Tim. 2:5,6) In this passage the Greek word translated “ransom” is *antilutron*, which means “corresponding price.” The man Jesus, who died as the Redeemer on Calvary’s cross, was an exact corresponding price for the perfect man Adam, who sinned. Of Jesus it is said that he was “made flesh,” and that the purpose of this was “for the suffering of death, . . . that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”—John 1:14; Heb. 2:9

When the first advent of Jesus occurred, the principal feature of the plan carried out by him at that time was the laying down of his life for the sins of the whole world. John the Baptist said of Jesus, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”—John 1:29

Had there not been an additional preparatory feature of the divine plan to be developed, the work of God following the death and resurrection of Jesus would have been that of restoring fallen man to his lost estate—paradise. The message to believers then would have been, “Come, . . . Take the water of life freely.” (Rev. 22:17) Through Jesus, provision had been made for setting aside the sentence of death which passed upon Adam and, through him, upon all mankind; so the next seemingly logical step would have been to begin the work of restoration.

But this was not the work that was started by the apostles at Pentecost. True, Jesus did heal a few of the sick of his day and raised a few of the dead, but this was merely to illustrate his future work. (John 2:11) The Apostle Paul explains that the gifts of the Spirit which were given to the Early

Church and by which a limited number of miracles were performed were to “cease,” or pass away. (I Cor. 12:31; 13:1-3,8; 14:18-20,22) Some since have claimed the ability to perform miracles in Christ’s name, but the dead have not been raised, and only a pitifully small proportion of the sick have even claimed to have been miraculously healed, and these claims are of doubtful authenticity.

The disciples of Jesus were not promised health and everlasting life on the earth. They were told, rather, that if they desired to be true disciples of Christ they must expect to suffer and die with him. “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me,” was the way the Master stated the matter to those who were desirous of learning the terms of discipleship.—Matt. 16:24

Naturally one would suppose that if, as the Scriptures reveal, Jesus took the sinner’s place in death, those who believe on him would not need to die. That will be true in God’s world of tomorrow, but during this Gospel Age another phase of the divine plan of salvation is being developed, and that a most important one.

What is that phase of the plan? It is the call and selection of the church of Christ, preparing its members to share with him in the work of giving life to mankind during the Messianic Age. This is described by the Apostle as a “heavenly calling.” (Heb. 3:1; Phil. 3:14) Jesus alluded to it in his statement to the rich young ruler when he said to him that if he followed him into death, he would have “treasure in heaven.”—Luke 18:18-22

A PLACE PREPARED

Jesus also referred to the heavenly hope of his footstep followers when he made the promise to them: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go, . . . I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:2,3) Peter refers to the heavenly hope of the church in the statement, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature."—II Pet. 1:4

Paul encourages Christians to set their affections on "things above." These things above, he tells us, are "where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." (Col. 3:1,2) This indicates that the reward of the church is to be the same as the reward of Jesus. This is also emphasized by the apostle, when he said, "If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."—Rom. 6:5

In this latter text is the explanation of why the followers of Jesus in this age do not have everlasting human life restored to them—it is because they are invited to die with Jesus. In other words, the sacrificial work of the divine plan was not finished on Calvary. This is made plain by Paul in Romans 12:1, where we read, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, your reasonable service."

In Colossians 1:24 Paul speaks of filling up "that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ." Other passages represent the church in a role of

sacrifice, laying down life itself in doing the will of God. It is this sacrificial work of Christians that the apostle speaks of as being “planted together” in the “likeness” of Christ’s death. Jesus did not die under condemnation, as a sinner. He died sacrificially, as a willing offering for sin. His death provided for the legal cancellation of Adam’s sin and, through Adam, the hereditary sins of all mankind.

JUSTIFIED THROUGH CHRIST

How, then, some may ask, could the followers of Jesus die in the same way that he died? Are they not members of the fallen race, under condemnation to death, the same as all mankind? They were such, but the Scriptures tell us that, following the resurrection of Jesus, he appeared in the presence of God for us. (Heb. 9:24) This means that the merit of his sacrifice releases from condemnation all his consecrated followers, so that their death is no longer looked upon by God as one of condemnation but one of sacrifice.

In Romans 6:10,11 Paul tells Christians that they may “reckon” themselves to be “dead indeed unto sin,” just as Jesus “died unto sin”—that is, as a sin offering. This doesn’t mean that the sacrificial work of the church is needed to provide redemption for mankind. This was all accomplished by Jesus. What it does mean is that God accepts the sacrifices of the church as though they were the sacrifices of perfect human beings and that through these sacrifices the church is prepared to work with Jesus in the Messianic Age as the dispensers of life to all mankind.

Those who compose the true church of Christ—whose names are “written in heaven”—have been called out of the world and assured that through the blood of Christ their imperfect works are acceptable to God. Upon the basis of their willingness to sacrifice earthly life, they are promised a heavenly reward. Thus they travel along the narrow way of sacrifice that leads to glory, honor, and immortality.—Matt. 10:39; Rom. 2:7

It is to the church alone that the hope of immortality is given. Adam was not immortal, because to be immortal means to be deathproof. Man will not be immortal when restored to perfection at the end of the Messianic Age, but all true, faithful Christians of this Gospel Age will finally be exalted to immortality. They will be made like Jesus is now, an exalted, heavenly being; and they shall see him as he is, and be with him in the kingdom, and reign with him a thousand years.—I John 3:2; Rev. 2:26,27; 5:10; 20:4,6

PARADISE RESTORED

When the work of this Gospel Age is complete and all true Christians are united with Jesus in the heavenly phase of the kingdom, then will begin the work of restoring mankind to life upon the earth.

The Apostle Peter speaks of this work of the Messianic Age as being that of “restitution,” and he tells us that it was spoken by the mouth of all God’s holy prophets since the world began. (Acts 3:20,21) It is these testimonies of the holy prophets

that describe the earthly blessings of life that will come to mankind following the second coming of Christ. The fulfillment of these earthly promises must wait until the completion of the church of this Gospel Age, who are gathered to Christ on the heavenly plane—the place prepared for them by Jesus.—John 14:1-3

This Gospel Age work completed, then will follow the work of gathering mankind in general under Christ, not on the spiritual plane, but on the earthly. Thus will be gathered in one all things under Christ, “both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.” (Eph. 1:10) The gathering of the church which started in the beginning of the Gospel Age is to be completed and the whole church united with Christ in glory, just prior to the beginning of the Messianic Age; hence we are told that in this “dispensation of the fullness of times” both the heavenly and earthly gathering unto Christ will be accomplished.

EARTHLY PRINCES

First to be restored to earthly perfection and life will be the faithful servants of the past. They were the fathers of Israel but will become the children of The Christ and will be made “princes in all the earth.” (Ps. 45:16) Jesus said that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets would be looked up to as the instructors of the people during that kingdom period. (Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:28-30) These will be the earthly representatives of the divine Christ and will have committed to them the task of administering the laws of that new kingdom.

These earthly representatives of the divine Christ will be backed up by miracle-working power so that there will be no opportunity to successfully avoid the laws then imposed—which will be the laws of Christ. We are told that it shall then come to pass that “every soul, which will not hear [obey] that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.” (Acts 3:23) Those who do conform to the laws of the Messianic kingdom will not need to die. They will be restored to the perfection that was lost by father Adam and upon the basis of that earthly perfection will have the opportunity of living upon the earth forever. This is what is meant by the term “restitution,” as used by the Apostle Peter, and the term “regeneration,” as used by the Master.—Matt. 19:28

In the hundreds of biblical promises pertaining to the blessings of restitution which are soon to come to the world, we have an outline of the many ways in which it will result in the happiness of the people and in the solving of their problems. We are told that the knowledge of God will fill the whole earth as the waters cover the sea. (Isa. 11:9) We are told that the Lord will turn to the people a pure message enabling all mankind to “call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent.”—Zeph. 3:9

We are told also that then the law of God will be written in the hearts of the people. (Jer. 31:33,34) This is descriptive of one of the ways in which man will be restored to the perfection which he lost when Adam transgressed God’s law in Eden.

This writing of the divine law in the hearts of the people will require assistance from God. Miracle-working power will then be available to aid

those who need help and who put themselves under the jurisdiction of kingdom regulations.

Of that time we are told that the people “will learn righteousness.” (Isa. 26:9) They will also learn to know the Lord, whom to know aright is life eternal. (John 17:3) Satan will be bound during that time, and all evil influences will be restrained. (Rev. 20:1,2) The way back to life will be made so plain that “the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.”—Isa. 35:8,9

How different that will be from conditions now encountered by Christians! These latter are walking in the “narrow way,” which is hard to find, and those who find it and walk in it are tempted and tried at almost every step of the way. (Matt. 7:13,14) God, of course, helps them, and their reward is exceeding great. But when the restitution “highway” is opened up, the trials of this age will have ended, and mankind will be given every necessary help that they may return quickly and completely to perfection and everlasting life on the earth.

This, then, is God’s plan for the world of tomorrow. The long years of preparation are now nearly completed. “Michael,” the King in God’s world of tomorrow, has already stood up, and his return to take unto himself his bride and to assume his kingly authority over the nations is resulting in “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.” (Dan. 12:1) This trouble, while distressing, is preparing the world to accept their new King, his presence not yet being recognized and acknowledged by them. But when his glory shall be revealed, “all flesh shall see it together.”—Isa. 40:5

From Jerusalem “the increase of his government and peace” will gradually extend until it embraces all nations, bringing them joy, peace, and everlasting life. (Isa. 9:6,7) When the nations of earth become more fully humbled than they are today, they will say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.” When they are thus taught of the Lord’s ways, they will “beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”—Mic. 4:1-4; Isa. 2:2-4

Yes, God has a plan, and throughout the ages it has been progressing steadily to completion. Now we are at the threshold of the “dispensation of the fullness of times,” when the grand finale of the divine plan will be enacted for the blessing of all nations with peace and happiness and everlasting life. That finale of the divine plan will be God’s answer to the Christian’s prayer, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”—Matt. 6:10

If we know of God’s plan and what it will soon mean to a distressed world, it is our privilege to tell others about it. It is the real message of the Gospel, the “good news” that is centered in the redemptive work of Christ. As we have opportunity, let us tell the people that there has been no failure of God’s plan anywhere along the line but that it is proceeding according to his purpose and to a glorious consummation. His work in the world of yesterday did not fail. His work in the

world of today has not failed. His work in the world of tomorrow will not fail.—Isa. 42:4; 55:10,11; 53:10

Because God's plan is soon to be completed in his world of tomorrow, the whole earth will soon become a paradise, and all that was lost in Eden and purchased by the death of Jesus will be restored to the people. Thus will God wipe away tears from off all faces, and death will be swallowed up in victory.—Rev. 21:1-5; I Cor. 15:54

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