




CHRIST'S
KINGDOM
IS FUTURE

V O L U M E II

Introduction
of the King



W.E. BEST

CHRIST'S KINGDOM IS FUTURE

VOLUME II INTRODUCTION OF THE KING

by
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is Volume II of an extensive series on the subject of Christ's future Kingdom. Volume I covered the King's genealogy. Volume II covers the introduction of the King. Future volumes will be released periodically. The complete series will comprehensively cover all aspects of Christ's future Kingdom as revealed in the Scriptures from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21.

INTRODUCTION

There is one true and living God, one true concept of man's origin, one plan of deliverance from sin, one New Testament assembly which Jesus Christ is building, and one future kingdom of Jesus Christ. When the Holy Scriptures are handled correctly by a Christian whose mind is free from deception, he will readily admit that all conflicting views about theology, anthropology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology cannot be true. Hence, all the discussion about ecumenism is a sham, because it is a manifestation of deception.

Apart from the grace of the sovereign God, an obedient life to the revealed will of God, and a clear understanding of the whole counsel of God (all the major Biblical principles), one not only will misrepresent many Biblical principles but also will try to conceal his own lack of knowledge and character. Persons who think they cannot be deceived are the most reprehensibly deluded, because the most studious believer knows that no Christian is beyond seduction to some degree.

(See Rom. 16:17,18; I Cor. 3:18; Eph. 5:6; I John 3:7.) Thus, the greater knowledge one has of the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3), the less deceit he will experience. Conversely, one who has little knowledge is incapable of withstanding the deluder's craftiness, and he tries to defend his own fraudulence. No wonder Hosea said, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6).

Persons who are denominationally oriented cannot honestly make an objective examination of any Biblical subject. When a Biblical subject is examined from the viewpoints of the Reformed Faith, Baptist Faith, Methodist Faith, etc., those making the perusal have already admitted that they are viewing the subject through denominationally colored glasses. Scripture speaks of "one faith" (Eph. 4:5), and that one faith (system of truth) "has been once for all delivered [*paradotheise*, aorist passive participle of *paradidomi*, which means to deliver, entrust, hand down, pass on, or teach] to the saints" (Jude 3—translation). There is nothing superfluous in the sphere of God's objective truth, because it is God's gift once for all given to the saints, not to the unregenerate. Therefore, a Biblical subject must be studied not from the viewpoint of some "denominational faith" but by gathering all the Biblical data on the subject under investigation in order to view the subject in the light of the whole of Scripture rather than a few isolated passages.

The following things illustrate that every so-called "denominational faith" is built on a few excessively emphasized isolated passages of Scripture: (1) Those who teach baptismal regeneration have their "pig trail" of Scriptures which they think support their particular institutions (Mark 16:16; John 3:5; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Gal. 3:27; I Pet. 3:20,21). They are so deceived by their misinterpretation of these verses that they are unable to see that God's purpose in His eternal covenant of grace, redemption by the blood of Jesus Christ, and Divine quickening (regeneration) by the Holy Spirit must precede water in the Divine order. (2) Others, like those who believe in baptismal regeneration, isolate a few passages which they think teach that baptism in the Holy Spirit is for men today. This neopentecostalism is the result of John Wesley's experiential theology, which was followed by Charles Finney's experiential

methodology. Although there are only seven references in the New Testament to baptism in the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16; I Cor. 12:13), the unsuspecting are led by neopentecostal religiously-zealous people, without Biblical knowledge, to think the Bible is full of the subject of baptism in the Spirit. The seven references mentioned are divided into two sections. The first five point to Pentecost and the last two point backward to what happened at Pentecost. (3) Others take a few verses, like the “kingdom is at hand,” “the kingdom of God is come unto you,” “it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom,” “the kingdom of God is within you,” and “translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Matt. 3:2; 12:28; Luke 12:32; 17:21; Col. 1:13), and try to fit the whole subject of the kingdom into these few texts without explaining them within their own contexts. They deny a future kingdom and spiritualize these verses to mean either no future kingdom, a present realized kingdom, a kingdom in the heart, a present spiritual reign, gospel kingdom, etc. However, one cannot state too emphatically that a literal promise spiritualized is an interpretational hoax or breach of confidence.

Following Paul’s reference to the defection of some from the truth (II Tim. 1:13-18), he personally exhorted Timothy to be strong and to commit the things he had heard from Paul to the charge of faithful men, who shall be capable to teach others also (II Tim. 2:2). Since every Scripture is God-breathed, men who are responsible to instruct God’s sheep can never permit revelation apart from the written word. To do so would be a denial that the Bible is perfect and complete. The man of God is qualified to teach others because he has been permanently equipped (perfect passive participle of *exartidzo*, which means to furnish perfectly or to be perfectly equipped) (II Tim. 3:17). Having been permanently equipped, he must not do the following things: (1) He must not believe in God’s sovereignty and deny His unconditional covenant which is associated with His eternal purpose. (2) He must not hold to God-breathed Scripture and deny the authenticity of some of them. (3) He must not do wrong in order to have the opportunity of doing right. (4) He must not associate with those who reject the truth of God. (5) He must not be contemptible enough to profess one thing and believe and practice another. (6) He must not desire to embrace some passages but reject others that do not fit his organization. (7) He must not talk about loving the Lord and His word while giving little or no time to either.

People want a one minute answer to a question on Biblical principles that involves hundreds or thousands of hours of examination. A complex question can never be resolved with a simple answer, because every Biblical subject is composed of many interconnected thoughts and parts. This may be illustrated with an interrogator and a physician. The interrogator may ask the physician what causes blood to flow throughout the arteries and veins in the human body. The physician would answer that the heart, a muscular organ, by rhythmic contractions and relaxations keeps the blood circulating throughout body. The answer may seem simple until the interrogator asks a second question, what causes the heart to contract and relax? Many physicians would give a scientific explanation of life; however, the life principle cannot be explained apart from God, the Giver of life. When God is brought into any discussion, the subject becomes so complex that it includes His eternal purpose. Hence, one can understand that most people have a meager (lacking fullness or richness) understanding of Divine principles.

The richness and fullness of Divine principles can never be experientially known apart from a laborious study of God’s gold mine of eternal verities. The following is a brief list of important Biblical principles where understanding is lacking:

FIRST—The difference between the revealed and concealed things of God's will is known to few "professing believers." "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29 NASB). These are not two variant wills. That would be dualism (the theory that there are two basic principles), which contradicts the Biblical fact that God has one eternal purpose. God's will is like a giant globe of which man is capable of seeing only the hemisphere of what God has been pleased to reveal. Man has always quarreled with God over what He has not been pleased to reveal, even though nature itself proves that in the Divine administration secrecy and benevolence coexist. God has not been pleased to reveal the mystery of the new birth in the changed life of one He chose in Christ (Col. 1:27). God has not chosen to divulge the mystery of His breaking off some of the natural branches in order that the Gentiles shall be grafted in among them (Rom. 11:17-26). Our ignorance of many things does not mean we cannot be sure of some things. Beware of the idea that everything unknown to you should be considered the secret things of God when you are too lazy to search the things which have been revealed.

SECOND—God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are immensely misunderstood. Some basic things are absolutely essential in order that one may have the Biblical understanding of God and man: (1) Man "was" in a state of uprightness as he came from the sovereign God (Eccl. 7:29). Before the fall, man was straight with the will and law of God. God did not create him and then make him upright. He created him upright. Had Adam's uprightness been essential to his being, he would have lost his being in the fall. (2) Man "is" in a state of depravity because of his sin in Adam. How could Adam, who stood in created uprightness, fall? Do not make the mistake of failing to distinguish between Adam's state of created uprightness before the fall and his state of uncreated righteousness with which God clothed him subsequent to the fall. A frequently repeated question is, why did God make man capable of falling? Although God made the sun and moon incapable of falling, He did not create upright man incapable of falling because in passing from matter to life He passed from comparative to probable certainty. Since God cannot create God, He created human life with a will which man himself could exercise. In exercising his will to refuse God's command not to eat the forbidden fruit, man lost his uprightness and thereby became incapable of choosing that which is good. (3) God's elected ones among men "shall" actually be in a state of grace. All the elect are in grace electively by the Father and redemptively by the Son before they are actually in grace by the Spirit of regeneration. Thus, the "shall" is made sure by election and redemption. All the regenerated will repent, but we must not assume that since we cannot regenerate a person we are free from the responsibility to reach people indiscriminately with the gospel for the conversion of those the sovereign Spirit regenerates.

THIRD—The proper distinction between the present assembly which Jesus Christ is building and the future kingdom is made by few professing Christians. By not making this distinction, many are deceived and are deceiving others, thus robbing them of spiritual blessings. The kingdom was not designed to be the means of reaching the elect of God, but it was intended to be the completion and perfection of God's eternal purpose concerning the elect. In II Timothy 4:1—"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God, and Jesus Christ, who is going to judge the living and dead at His coming and His kingdom" (translation)—Paul mentioned four solemn events: (1) recognition of Christ as the present searcher of hearts, (2) judgment that is destined to come, (3) Christ's personal coming or appearance, and (4) Christ's future kingdom. "Then the king shall say to those on his right hand, come, you who have been blessed of my Father, come into possession of the kingdom which has been prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34—translation). We are commanded to eagerly make our calling and election sure (II

Pet. 1:10). “For in this way the entrance shall be richly provided for you into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (II Pet. 1:11—translation).

The success of God’s eternal purpose depends on His, not man’s, faithfulness. Man’s unfaithfulness never prevents the fulfillment of what God decreed. Therefore, the unfaithfulness of the first generation Jews did not prohibit the nation of Israel from entering Canaan (Num. 32:13; Josh. 12:1). Furthermore, the Jews’ rejection of Christ during His first advent did not nullify God’s promise that “all Israel shall be saved” (Rom. 11:26). Israel’s past and future are based on God’s election; therefore, election does not rest on Israel’s faithfulness but on God’s faithfulness.

The coming kingdom is for not only the Jews chosen in Christ but also the Gentiles who are likewise chosen in Christ. The chosen Gentiles, being wild by nature, are grafted into the olive tree; and they shall partake of the blessings of the kingdom with the chosen Jews. Nothing in history has satisfied the description of events accompanying Christ’s coming and kingdom, such as destroying Satan’s power, casting him into the bottomless pit, delivering creation from the bondage of corruption, restoring all things, every eye seeing Jesus Christ, and His knowledge covering the earth as the waters cover the sea.

THE KING'S BIRTH

The day of Jesus Christ's birth was the saddest day in history because God's chosen people, upon whom He had poured His blessings, refused Him: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11). The people who studied the prophets rejected the One the prophets predicted, "...Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Is. 7:14). Since the Jews, by whom and to whom the Old Testament Scriptures were given (Rom. 3:1,2), were so spiritually blind that they did not recognize the One of whom the Scriptures spoke, the attitude of mankind in general is not difficult to understand. "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not" (John 1:10). No wonder the so-called Christmas season is a time of debauchery and sinning. David prophesied of the greater David: "I made sackcloth also my garment; and I became a proverb to them. They that sit in the gate speak against me; and I was the song of the drunkards" (Ps. 69:11,12). Quotations from the New Testament establish the relation of this Psalm to the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 27:34; John 2:17; 15:25; Rom. 15:3).

People may have sight without insight. This is descriptive of many of the Jews to whom Isaiah must declare "...see ye indeed, but perceive not" (Is. 6:9). They exercised the power of observation but had no heart for what they saw. They had eyes, but not for spiritual vision. Everything was surface phenomenon because there was no internal ministry of the Spirit to fill them with holy awe. Surface sight is natural, but the ability "to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge..." is supernatural (Eph. 3:18,19). Hence, the two ways of looking at something are by sight and insight. One may look at the Bible and see nothing more than a book. He might consider it a waste of time and money for men to labor in translating the Hebrew and Greek to record some ancient history. That is sight without insight. Conversely, the person who looks at the Bible and sees it as the revelation of God's mind to His people, the Book of redemption, wisdom, and hope, has both sight and insight. The eye salve of spiritual illumination is necessary for insight (Rev. 3:18). "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things..." (Ps. 119:18).

The virgin birth of Jesus Christ has been more bitterly assailed throughout the ages than any other Bible truth. God anticipated the attacks by the critics and made this great truth foolproof. The virgin birth was the sign God promised the nation of Israel. Some argue that since the Hebrew word translated "virgin" of Isaiah 7:14 means a young woman, it has nothing to do with chastity. This argument is a falsification of fact. The Hebrew word *almah* means a young woman of marriageable age who was under the care of her parents and was hidden from the public (Gen. 24:43; Song of Sol. 1:3; Is. 7:14). It is the feminine of *elem*, which means something kept out of sight—a lad. The Septuagint uses *parthenos*, which means virgin (a female without sex experience) to translate *almah*. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit directed Matthew (Matt. 1:23) to use the word *parthenos* to describe the fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14. The Greek noun *parthenos* is used 14 times in the New Testament and speaks not only of chaste females but also of chaste males (II Cor. 11:2; Rev. 14:4). What would be a sign in some young woman giving birth to a child? The birth of which Isaiah spoke was one that would startle the world and give evidence of the

fulfillment of God's promise that Jesus Christ would be the "seed of the woman." Thus, the One who would come in human flesh would derive His human nature from a woman minus man (Gen. 3:15).

The male plays the active, initiatory role in natural, human generation. Therefore, in order for the human nature of Jesus Christ to be the "seed of the woman," the initiatory role was with the Spirit of God. In this manner, Mary was with child before she and Joseph came together (Matt. 1:18). Mary asked, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (Luke 1:34), "And the angel responding said to her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall fall upon you; for this reason also the Holy thing being begotten shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35—translation).

Human life has been brought into existence four ways: (1) by God in creation, as in the case of Adam; (2) by man minus woman, as in the case of Eve; (3) by man plus woman, as in the case of procreation; (4) by woman minus man, as in the case of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The latter was the only possible choice for the first advent of Jesus Christ. Woman was elected by God to fulfill the essential, passive role as the one through whom God would act to accomplish His gracious salvation for sinners.

The verb "begat" (*egennesen*) is used 38 times in Matthew 1:2-16, but there is a change in the inflected form in its use in verse 16: "And Jacob begat [*egennesen*] Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born [*egennethe*] Jesus, who is called Christ." The word *egennesen* is the aorist active indicative and *egennethe* is the aorist passive indicative of the root verb *gennaō*. Going from the active to the passive voice proves the virginity of Mary at the time Jesus Christ was born. Further confirmation of Mary's virginity is found in the words of the angel's message to Joseph: "...Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt..." (Matt. 2:13).

Joseph was represented as the guardian but not the father of Jesus Christ. Some "supposed" that Joseph was the father of Jesus Christ: "And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph..." (Luke 3:23). "As was supposed" is the translation of *hos enomidzeto*. The verb *enomidzeto* is the imperfect passive indicative of *nomidzo*, which means to suppose or assume. The verb *nomidzo* is used 15 times in the New Testament and has the meaning of supposition rather than actuality (Matt. 5:17; 10:34; 20:10; Luke 2:44; 3:23; Acts 7:25; 8:20; 14:19; 16:13,27; 17:29; 21:29; I Cor. 7:26,36; I Tim. 6:5). The Lord Jesus has neither a father on earth nor a mother in heaven.

Matthew spoke of Joseph as a husband (Matt. 1:19) and Mary as a wife (Matt. 1:20), but this can be accounted for under the Hebrew law of betrothal. The Hebrew law of betrothal constituted a binding legal contract between the persons concerned. Mary was espoused (*mnesteutheises*, aorist passive participle of *mnesteuo*, which means to ask in marriage or betroth) to Joseph (Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:27; 2:5). Marriage in Israel was a covenant of two parts: (1) a betrothal period and (2) the established marriage state. The betrothal period was so binding that sexual unfaithfulness during that time was the only thing that could break the agreement (Deut. 22:13-21). A divorce could be granted for sexual unfaithfulness during the betrothal period (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). Punishment by death of the guilty one rendered the living person either a widow or a widower.

Mary's joy was accompanied with both trial and submission. The trial came when Gabriel appeared to her and said, "...Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold,

thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS” (Luke 1:30,31). Mary’s submission to God is stated in Luke 1:38: “...Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.”

The angel appeared to Mary privately, but Mary would have to explain becoming pregnant during her betrothal period. Although she had assurance from the Lord and acquiesced in His word, Mary knew she would be exposed to severe criticism. In the eyes of those who did not understand, her character would be ruined. The religious Jews would demand the death penalty. Her friends would mourn over her. Her husband (one to whom she was espoused—the first part of the two part Jewish marriage contract) could ask for a divorce on the ground of fornication. However, Mary did not try to conceal the fact of her pregnancy. She ran to the fountainhead of law and judgment to report her condition. She went to the wife of the officiating priest, Zacharias (Luke 1:39-56). Mary brought extraordinary blessings with her when she came to Elisabeth. One was on the way who would be called the Son of the Highest.

Mary was representative of that humanity with which Jesus Christ would be identified. In Christ’s earthly life, He never identified Himself with the degradation of fallen mankind, but He identified Himself with that which was of God. All titles and designations which the Lord Jesus assumed indicate His identification with the elect as the subjects of Divine grace. One would blaspheme to say Christ was identified with fallen mankind, except in the atonement.

Mary’s pregnancy was as much a trial to Joseph, her espoused husband, as it was to her. Joseph was a righteous man; therefore, he knew the principles of chastity regarding love and marriage. He would not expose Mary to public ridicule; but as a righteous man, he must defend the principle of marriage fidelity. He was in a difficult position. Knowing the law, Joseph could make one of three choices. He could appeal to Deuteronomy 24:1 and say, “I have found some uncleanness in her.” He could present her case in the light of either Deuteronomy 22:13-24 or Deuteronomy 22:25-29. In Deuteronomy 22:13-24, there are two different instances of fornication, but the penalty for both is death. The first applies to the whore and the second to the virgin who became unfaithful during the betrothal period. In Deuteronomy 22:25-29, the fornicators were put to death. The first applies to the sin which was committed outside the betrothal period and the second to the girl who was the victim of rape.

Joseph chose to follow the course of having found some uncleanness in her and granting her a divorce (Deut. 24:1). The words “put her away” in Matthew 1:19 are the translation of the Greek word *apolusai*, aorist active infinitive of *apolo*, which means to loose, release, or divorce. However, while Joseph was thinking about divorcing Mary, the angel appeared to him and explained her pregnancy. What a glorious victory this was after such severe trial.

The virgin Mary “found with child of the Holy Ghost [Spirit]” (Matt. 1:18) is beyond natural understanding but not beyond apprehension by faith. According to nature, virginity is gone before conception; but Mary’s pregnancy by the Holy Spirit was a sign above nature that was predicted by Isaiah. The God of nature is not bound to the rules of what we call nature; therefore, there is no reason that this truth should seem incredible. As light passes through glass without destroying the glass, the Holy Spirit passed through the virgin Mary without destroying her virginity. This was a supernatural act of the sovereign God, and the power of the Doer is the reason the thing is done. “...God said, Let there be light: and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). “God said” is the Word in action. “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host

of them by the breath of his mouth....For he spake, and it was done...” (Ps. 33:6,9). “For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:37).

In the sense that Jesus Christ “knew no sin” (II Cor. 5:21), Joseph did not know experientially the sexual function of a husband until after the birth of Jesus Christ. “And he was not knowing her [imperfect active indicative of *ginosko*] until she gave birth to a son: and he called his name JESUS” (Matt. 1:25—translation). The Greek verb means to know, perceive, or understand. It is used as a euphemism (indirect or mild expression) of sexual relations.

The One born of the virgin Mary was named Jesus, the Savior of His people. To be Savior, He must be Emmanuel—God with us. Emmanuel indicates His vocation, which was to bring God to His people that they might be with Him forever. These names attributed to Jesus Christ indicate what He must be and do to save His people. Emmanuel is the name which portrays the hypostatic union of the Divine and human natures in one Person. The miracle of the virgin birth assures the elect of the new birth. Jesus Christ is the only accepted “once born” person. He is the unique Person who needed no second birth. Had He been peccable, as many religionists affirm, He would have needed the new birth. Jesus Christ’s conception and death were very much unlike those to whom and for whom He came into the world. The doctrine of the virgin birth places the initiative in the hands of the Godhead. It completely excludes human initiation thus protecting the human nature—the holy thing—from contamination with original sin.

THE KING'S MOTHER

Mary was the offspring of a nation chosen by God for a special purpose. Among the blessings that have come from the nation of Israel, the advent of the eternal Son of God through the virgin's womb was the highest (Rom. 9:4,5). God's purpose in Mary's life was to give us Emmanuel—"with us is God" (Matt. 1:23—translation). The manifestation of Jesus Christ in the flesh is the supreme point in the purpose of God.

The virgin Mary, like any other person that God elected to salvation, was a recipient and not a dispenser of grace. Mary acknowledged God as her Savior: "...My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour" (Luke 1:46,47). Although the word "salvation" is used variantly in Scripture—physically as well as spiritually—the rejoicing by Mary was the fruit of spiritual deliverance. She was the recipient of God's grace, manifested by her exalting the Lord and rejoicing in His salvation. Any person who rejoices in God his Savior is conscious that God has put away

his sins. The jailor rejoiced as soon as he was saved (Acts 16:30-34). Mary's joy was not superficial. It was not excited by the kindness shown by Elisabeth who said, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:42,43). Mary's joy was motivated by the Spirit of regeneration, which caused her to acquiesce in God her Savior and the trial that always accompanies salvation. David, from whom Mary descended, expressed his joy: "And my soul shall be joyful in the LORD: it shall rejoice in his salvation" (Ps. 35:9). The worship that God requires of us is that of a saved sinner, and He required nothing less of the virgin Mary.

The statement by Mary, "...my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour," of Luke 1:47 is used by the Roman Catholic Church as Mary's deliverance from every class of spiritual and temporal evil to which mortal man is subjected in his life on earth. They say the word "saviour" is used in a different sense than salvation from the guilt and power of sin. Roman apologists teach that with the exception of Mary, all other human beings contract original sin and therefore need redemption. They say the virgin Mary, in view of her becoming the mother of Jesus Christ, was preserved from contracting original sin. Therefore, according to the apologist, Christ did not purge the soul of Mary from sin by His blood but preserved it clean. Such teaching is made in the face of Paul's statement, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). A fact is expressed by a point action Greek verb, with the note of time not emphasized, in the statement "for all have sinned." The second aorist active indicative of *hamartano* gathers up the whole of mankind into one statement of timelessness. The virgin having brought a "bloody sacrifice" at her purification reveals that she knew her need of cleansing as much as any other woman. "And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him [Jesus] to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord...And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons" (Luke 2:22,24).

There is no doubt that Mary, in her hymn of praise of Luke 1:46-55, counted herself among those the Lord had brought into positional grace. The sacrifice that was brought to the temple was not for Jesus Christ. Those who believe Jesus Christ was peccable should say that it was, but that would be blasphemy. Jesus Christ cannot be connected with the “new creation” (the regenerated), but He is connected with the eternal generation—that which goes back to God.

Although Mary was the mother of Jesus Christ, she must not be deified. Such honor is a totally reprehensible sin. This honor has never been given to a created being. Some state that the worship of the virgin Mary grew up in a world wearied by the violence and passion of masculine strength, injustice, and tyranny; in a world trodden by armies, corrupted by lust, and dominated by ambition. The worship of the virgin was a living protest against war and sensuality. Many believe Mary was the symbol of strength and glory consistent with tenderness and gentleness. While this may have given some reason for going from one social extreme to another, it was turning from one form of evil to another more deadly. To make a god out of a creature, whether man, birds, fourfooted beasts, creeping things, or the virgin Mary, is the worst kind of crime. (See Rom. 1:19-25.) Mary was the mother of Jesus Christ; but no one can say that she is intrinsically the mother of God. God absolutely considered has no mother. Jesus Christ as the God-Man has no father.

Sin is attached to every descendant of Adam, but it is not connected with the God-Man. Mary was poor, yet rich. God was pleased that in connection with Jesus Christ there should be the humblest and smallest sacrifice. (See Lev. 1:14; 12:8.) God brought in His saving grace in a form that was insignificant to the world. Nothing could be greater proof of this than a baby lying in a manger and Christ’s circumcision as a sign of the covenant that prefigured His death. A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons offered in sacrifice to God reveal the humility of grace. Mary had been humbled by being “much graced.”

Mary was selected by God from among all other women to be the mother of Jesus Christ. “And the angel who has come to her, said, Hail, the one having been favored, the Lord is with you” (Luke 1:28—translation). “Having been favored” is the translation of a perfect passive participle of the verb *charitoo*, which means to bestow favor on, favor highly, or bless. It is used only in Luke 1:28 and Ephesians 1:6, and it speaks of what God does for all the elect. In both instances, it means to be brought into a relationship with God by means of grace. To ask why God singled out Mary is like asking why He chose Israel out from all other nations, Naaman from all other lepers, the widow of Sarepta from all other widows, and Saul of Tarsus from other Pharisees. These were not selected because they were better than others but because God chose to choose them. The reason for God’s choice is wrapped up in the good pleasure of His will, which He is not obligated to reveal.

The church of Rome has translated “highly favored” of Luke 1:28 as full of grace. However, Mary was highly favored but not full of grace. Mary is not a dispenser of grace, but she was the recipient of God’s favor. The perfect passive participle tells us that grace had been permanently bestowed on Mary. Therefore, her present state of favor was due to God’s eternal purpose. Since Mary was chosen by God, she was “endued with grace.” Like Mary who found favor with God (Luke 1:30), God will endear His own to Himself that they shall find favor with Him. God thinks highly of His people. We are His treasure (Ex. 19:5), portion (Deut. 32:9), rest (Ps. 132:14), crown of glory (Is. 62:3), joy (Is. 65:19), inheritance (Eph. 1:18), and habitation (Eph. 2:22).

Having chosen His people in Christ, God likewise highly favors us. There is no reason outside the “good pleasure of God’s will” why He has favored those who are His.

Jesus Christ, the incarnate One, is the only One “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The Greek word for “full” (*pleres*) means full, filled, abounding in, wholly occupied with, completely under the influence of, complete, or perfect. It is used of Jesus Christ to state that He was “full of the Holy Ghost” (Luke 4:1). Christ was not given the Spirit by measure (John 3:34). The word used with reference to a Christian cannot have the same degree of meaning as when it applies to Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is full of grace because He is the fountain—dispenser—of grace. The Christian is full of grace not in the sense of a fountain but as a vessel. When Christ dispenses grace, the fountain is not less full; but if the vessel could dispense grace, it would be less full each time grace is dispensed. We have received of Christ’s “fullness” (*pleromatos*, from *pleroma*, which is the ablative of source) (John 1:16). This speaks of the fullness of God in Christ (Col. 2:9). Christ’s fullness was not for Himself but for us. He did not need grace and truth: “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself” (John 5:26). This means that the Father, as head of the mediatorial economy, appointed the Son to hold and exercise independent power of conferring life. This is the characteristic property of Deity, which both Father and Son equally possess. Therefore, grace proceeds from the flowing fountain into the tabernacle of Christ’s flesh. From the tent of His flesh, it flows to the elect at God’s appointed time.

The fullness of the Godhead dwelling bodily in Jesus Christ is the reason the recipients of grace have received of His fullness. Fullness dwelling bodily in Christ signifies those perfections and qualities which fill up the Godhead to absolute perfection. Hence, there is not a portion of God dwelling in Christ, but the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Him. The adverb “bodily” means that which is real and substantial in contrast to types and shadows. Such fullness cannot dwell in peccable human nature, but it dwelt bodily in Christ’s impeccable human nature during His earthly ministry and presently dwells in His glorified bodily state.

Grace is followed by grace from Christ’s fullness—“grace for grace” (John 1:16). One must have grace to feel the need of, ask for, and use grace when it is given. One grace is followed by another. Hence, the grace of justification is followed by the grace of sanctification, and the grace of sanctification is followed by the grace of glorification. The world gives a little that it may give no more. It gives to make one feel obligated, because the spirit of the world is selfish. Conversely, Christ gives that He may continue to give: “...he giveth more [*meidzona*, accusative singular of *megas*, which means great, much, or extraordinary] grace...” (James 4:6).

Grace comes by degrees—grace on grace. There is grace at the beginning, but there is more to follow. One grace prepares for the next. The grace of eternal election prepared for the grace of redemption. God’s grace of redemption prepared for the grace of regeneration. His grace of regeneration prepares for the grace of Christian living. Grace expands the heart and gives one the capacity for receiving more grace. Therefore, one is not ready for the grace of glorification until he has been educated by the degrees of grace given in time.

Anyone who affirms that Mary is a co-redemptrix blasphemes. Scripture proves that Jesus Christ gave “...his life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28); “...he offered up himself” (Heb. 7:27); “...by

his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb. 9:12); “...he...put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb. 9:26); “...this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God” (Heb. 10:12). The Lord Jesus Christ alone satisfied the demands of the holy law of God. Furthermore, those who affirm that Mary is a mediatrix blaspheme: “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (I Tim. 2:5). To say that Mary is a mediatrix is to attribute such attributes as omnipresence and omniscience to her. How can millions gain an audience with Mary at the same time? In contrast, Christ has promised that He will hear all who come to Him. As every recipient of grace knows where the source of grace is, he also knows the One through whom he must go to reach that source. Christ showed by His statement to Mary in John 2:4 that her control of His actions ceased as soon as His public ministry began: “...Woman, what have I to do with thee....”

In Mary’s song of praise, she said, “all generations shall call me blessed” (Luke 1:48). This, however, does not justify the venerable title, “The Blessed Virgin Mary.” The Greek verb for “call me blessed” (from *makaridzo*) means “to count as blessed.” Mary was blessed “among” not “above” women (Luke 1:28). She was called “blessed” because of the fruit of her womb. She was saved by faith in Jesus Christ who was that fruit and not because she was the mother of Him who was called Jesus.

THE KING'S INCARNATION

The incarnation and virgin birth stand or fall together. “Unto us a child is born” has reference to the virgin birth; “unto us a son is given” refers to the incarnation (Is. 9:6). God saves man by identifying with him, and that identification has come through the virgin birth. Incarnation is the teaching that the second Person in the Trinity assumed human form in the Person of Jesus Christ. Virgin birth is the dogma that the conception and birth of Jesus Christ did not impair the virginity of Mary. The importance of this subject revolves around the degree to which the eternal Son of God identified Himself with man in the incarnation. A false conception of the extent of God’s identification with man would render both salvation and its consummation in the kingdom invalid (without foundation).

The distinctive characteristic of the incarnation is the hypostatic union of the Divine and human natures in one Person. “...Great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh...” (I Tim. 3:16). John identified the incarnate Word with the eternal God of creation (John 1:1; Gen. 1:1). The creating speech of the first chapter of John is equivalent with an aspect of the one God who was both with God and was God (John 1:1). An imperfect Greek verb (*en*, from *eimi*), which means “to be” or “to exist” is used three times in this verse to signify that Jesus Christ was in the beginning with God, and He was God. He is called the Word (*logos*), but the Word is not the same as the One with whom He was existing. He who is with God was God. Jesus Christ as *logos* could not be seen; as flesh, He could not be heard; but the Word becoming flesh (John 1:14) could be seen and heard. The three parts of John 1:1 teach the following things concerning the incarnate Word: (1) When the Word was—in the beginning. Since He existed in the beginning, He was before the beginning. The designation “Word” means He is eternal. (2) Where the Word was—with God. This denotes His personality. He is a Person in the Godhead; therefore, He is deity. (3) Who the Word was—God. He is the ever present I AM. The mystery of the first verse became more understandable to the elect in verse 14. He who was in the beginning was made flesh in time. He who was with God tabernacled among men. He who was God became veiled in human nature.

The Divine Son of God did not assume a human person but a human nature. The Divine Trinity was not modified by the incarnation. Only the second Person experienced a change from a one natured Person to a theanthropic Person having the Divine nature, a human nature, and a human body. Although the Person of Jesus Christ is theanthropic, His nature is not because that would make the infinite finite and the finite infinite. Therefore, the natures in Jesus Christ retained their own properties and attributes which prove the Divine nature was not humanized and the human nature was not deified.

The eternal Son of God did not in His incarnation identify Himself with either man’s unfallen (Adam’s nature before the fall) or fallen (Adam’s nature subsequent to the fall) nature. His human nature was called “the holy thing being begotten” (Luke 1:35—translation) and described as “...God having sent his Son in the likeness of sin of flesh” (Rom. 8:3—translation). Anyone who claims to accept the truth of the miraculous conception of Jesus Christ in the womb of the virgin Mary while at the same time insisting on the human doctrine of peccability (the teaching

that Christ had the capability of sinning) advocates that the Holy Spirit produced an unholy thing. Jesus Christ was holy not merely in conduct, but He was absolutely holy as to His human nature. He asked the religious Pharisees, “Who from among you convicts me concerning sin?” (John 8:46—translation). Since a noun rather than a verb is used in the question, it is not who from among you convicts me of “sinning” (sins of nature) but who from among you convicts me of “the nature of sin”? Christians do not demand further documentary evidence of a truth so explicitly stated and so implicitly believed by all who possess God-given faith. Although the Assumer and what He assumed cannot be the same, the holiness of the Assumer demanded that what He assumed be holy.

The Person of Jesus Christ must be distinguished from the person of man: (1) The Person of Christ was uncreated; the person of man was created. Therefore, Jesus Christ did not assume a sinful person any more than God made man deity. (2) Christ’s God-given name is “Jesus,” which means Savior; there are no saviors among men. Only a Divine Person could be called Savior; and yet, He is a Man having been attested by God: “Jesus Christ is the Nazarene, a man having been attested [perfect passive participle of *apodeiknumi*, which means attest, approve, or show forth] by [*apo*, ablative of agency] God” (Acts 2:22—translation). (3) Jesus Christ is God’s Man by incarnation; Adam was God’s man by creation. (4) Jesus Christ is God’s Man from heaven; Adam was God’s man from the earth. (5) Jesus Christ is the “only begotten”; therefore, He is the only one of His kind, the unique one. Adam was created, but he was not the only one of his kind. (6) The essential Divine nature in Jesus Christ cannot grow; the God-like nature in Christians grows. (7) Jesus Christ was not born a human person, but man is born a depraved human person. In the incarnation, He assumed a human nature, the weakness of which was not sinful. Hence, Luke was saying in Luke 1:35 that the Person coming through the womb of the virgin was, by the agency of the Holy Spirit, the eternal Son of God now living in a holy tabernacle which He had assumed. Mary experienced the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit to protect the holy nature Christ assumed from her depravity. Unlike man, Christ’s ego always pleased the Father.

All the wonders of the world must take a back seat since the mystery of the incarnation (I Tim. 3:16). The incomprehensible incarnation is not beyond the ability of one with God-given faith to embrace on the basis of the following Biblical facts: (1) Jesus Christ who made woman was made of a woman (Gal. 4:4). (2) Abraham’s birth preceded the birth of Jesus Christ; and yet, Christ existed before Abraham (John 8:56-58). (3) He who was the seed of David according to the flesh was David’s Lord (Matt. 22:43,44; Rom. 1:3,4). (4) He who had a Father in eternity had a mother but no father in time. (5) He who had neither beginning of days nor end of life had a beginning of days and an end of life on earth. (6) He whom the heavens could not contain was contained in the womb of the virgin (Luke 1:35). (7) Jesus Christ was the fruit of the womb but not of the loins (Luke 1:42).

The Mediator between God and man is the middle Person in the Godhead. Therefore, Jesus Christ mediates between the Father, the first Person in the Trinity, and men who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of regeneration, the third Person in the Trinity. While there is only one God, there are in the one Divine essence three distinct Persons. Each Person in the Godhead fulfills a separate department in the economy of human redemption. The second trinitarian Person did not begin at the incarnation, but the theanthropic personality of Jesus Christ did begin when the Father sent Him in the likeness of men. Hence, the name Jesus, which means “Jehovah is Savior,” proves that only a Divine Person can save (Acts 4:12; Mark 2:7); and yet, He is a Man attested by God (Acts 2:22).

The record proceeds from the God-given name of Jesus (Jehovah is Savior) of Matthew 1:21 to Emmanuel (with us is God) of verse 23—the name which the recipients of salvation call Him. Only the elect who have been saved experientially know the meaning of Emmanuel. The uniqueness of Christ's Person is displayed in His becoming the God-Man. Jesus Christ is equal with the Father, but He is different from the Father because He possesses a human nature. The Son of God was made in the likeness of man, but He was different from man because He possessed a Divine nature. During Christ's earthly ministry, He spoke as (1) God—"I and my Father are one" (John 10:30); (2) Man—"I thirst" (John 19:28)—God does not thirst; and (3) the God-Man—"Come unto me...I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

The prophecy concerning Jesus Christ who shall be called Immanuel is given by Isaiah (Is. 7:14). His prophecy of the incarnation came at a dark time in Israel's history. The prophet's unusual commission from the Lord was to preach to a people who would not hear him (Is. 6:9,10). Isaiah's first experience of his commission was his call to speak to King Ahaz. Ahaz was the son of the good King Jotham. A king may pass on the crown, but he cannot pass on a holy disposition. From the beginning of his reign, Ahaz reversed the policy of his father and threw himself into the arms of the heathen. He did not plunge into idolatry from want of good advice. Good instruction had come to Ahaz from both his father and God's prophet; but in spite of his instruction, Ahaz abused the house of God by cutting up its vessels and closing its door. He dishonored God's altar by making himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem, and he turned his back on the God of Israel by sacrificing to the gods of Damascus. To Ahaz, the worship by the chosen Jews was dull and monotonous. The one true God of Israel did not satisfy his depraved mind. Depraved hearts seek false inspiration. Idolaters are zealous in their digging descents to hell. Ahaz was so wicked that he sinned against God's providence: "...in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the LORD..." (II Chron. 28:22).

Isaiah was told to meet Ahaz "at the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field" (Is. 7:3). The prophet was instructed to go to the "end" of the aqueduct, to the very place where it poured its waters into Jerusalem. The waters were brought down from the "upper pool." The "pool" signifies blessing because water is a necessity (John 4:10-14). Water comes from the "upper pool" which symbolizes the source from which the purposed blessings of God are made available to the elect (I Pet. 1:18-20). Spiritual blessings are provided in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, and they are applied by the Holy Spirit. The "end" is the place where the blessings reach the recipients. The blessings do not reach the recipients in either the incarnation or the life of Jesus Christ, which constitute the preparation of the satisfaction which was made at the cross.

"The highway of the fuller's field" was a path clearly defined (Is. 7:3). It was raised up, and it led upward. It was the highway that ascended—the path that shines more and more to the perfect day (Prov. 4:18). Since the "conduit" was the way by which the water came down, the "highway" is the holy path which leads up to the source of all blessings: "The highway of the upright is to depart from evil..." (Prov. 16:17). It is the way of holiness (Is. 35:8). "The fuller's field" means the field of Him who washes the garments of the elect. "Garments" are the habits of believers who need cleansing (John 13:10). The life that has come down by the grace of the sovereign God leads upward by the path of practical holiness (II Tim. 2:19).

The spot on which the prophet stood with his son, Shear-jashub (the name means "the remnant shall return"), in his meeting with Ahaz symbolized the One who would be the only "conduit" of

blessing from the most high God. Judah was immortal until the fulfillment of the “sign” God would give His people. God’s sign would serve as a token or guarantee of something either present or future. The present tenses in the Hebrew further validate the certainty of the remote future as well as the near future of the prophecy as though it were already accomplished. Since the Hebrew has no “tenses” in the sense of the English language, the two “states” are expressed by the perfect and imperfect verbs. The perfect verb expresses any kind of completed action, and the imperfect verb denotes any incomplete action whether past, present, or future. Therefore, the sign of Isaiah 7:14 extends further than the circumstances of the time of its near historical setting.

Some think the “sign” of Isaiah 7:14 refers exclusively to some event in the time of the prophet, and others say it refers exclusively to Jesus Christ. However, the context proves that it is a prophecy with both near and remote fulfillments. Isaiah was granted a son subsequent to Shear-jashub. When he approached the “prophetess” (by association, a prophet’s wife), she conceived and gave birth to a son who was named Maher-shalal-hash-baz (the name means “haste in seizing the prey”), the near fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14. Now, the question is asked, how can the word “virgin” apply to Isaiah’s wife in Isaiah 8:3? First, let us seek to find the meaning of the word “virgin” of Isaiah 7:14. The Hebrew word is *almah*, which means a young woman of marriageable age who remains under the care of her parents hidden from the public (Gen. 24:43; Song of Sol. 1:3; 6:8; Is. 7:14). We must not suppose that the prophetess of Isaiah 8:3 was a virgin at the time Maher-shalal-hash-baz was born, but she was a virgin at the time the prophecy was given in Isaiah 7:14. However, there is another problem that must be solved. How could the prophetess of Isaiah 8:3 have been a virgin since Maher-shalal-hash-baz was the second son of Isaiah. The record does not state that she was the mother of Shear-jashub. Therefore, we must assume that the mother of Shear-jashub was dead, and Isaiah had married a young woman who was a virgin at the time of their marriage.

The close connection of the historical record of Isaiah 7-9 proves that the prophecy had reference to not only something in the prophet’s time but also to a higher fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The same Holy Spirit prophesied through Isaiah and Matthew. The great difference between the near and the remote fulfillments is that the mother of Maher-shalal-hash-baz was a virgin when she married Isaiah but not a virgin when her son was born; whereas Mary was virgin before and at the time Jesus Christ was born. Furthermore, deliverance from the threatened invasion during the time of Ahaz and universal deliverance in the remote future were predicted (Is. 8:5-10; 9:1-7). It has been said that most prophecies take their start from historical facts.

In view of the near and remote aspects of a prophecy, there is nothing in Scripture to refute the theory that the Immanuel of Isaiah 7:14 was also to be called Maher-shalal-hash-baz of Isaiah 8:3. Thus, he was a symbol or type of the incarnate Christ coming through the womb of the virgin Mary (Matt. 1:22, 23) and also of God’s wrath which shall come before the establishment of the kingdom (I Thess. 1:10). All we know about the sons of Isaiah is revealed in the meaning of their names. The prophet said, “Behold, I and the children whom the LORD hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth in mount Zion” (Is. 8:18). Therefore, the following prophetic lessons are taught in these names: (1) There was an ascending from Shear-jashub to Immanuel. (2) There was a descending from Immanuel to Maher-shalal-hash-baz. (3) There was another ascending from Maher-shalal-hash-baz to the Prince of Peace (Is. 9:6,7).

Jesus Christ is the Immanuel of Isaiah's prophecy. The name "Immanuel" is a compound word which denotes the same as *theanthropos* and has reference to the personal union of the human and the divine natures in Christ. Immanuel means "with us is God." In this name, the elect have a promise of God's presence. One might ask, was God not with the Old Testament prophets and patriarchs as well as with us? God was with them but not in the Incarnate Word. He was with them in types and shadows, but God was not with them in the hypostatic union.

"God" is the most important part in the compound word "Immanuel." Although it is the most important, it is the last part of the word. The two parties involved are God and us, the elect. In order for God and the elect to be brought together, God had to be made like the elect so the elect could be made like God. Therefore, the eternal Son took the form of a servant for the purpose of suffering and dying for His own (Phil. 2:5-8). Christ's great love for us is expressed in the Ephesian letter: "And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour" (Eph. 5:2). How humbling to learn that "with us is God." God who is above and the elect who are from beneath are brought together through Jesus Christ and His redemptive work: "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13).

There is no "with us" like that in the theanthropic Person. God was with Israel in His sacrifices on the altar of the tabernacle and temple, but God was with all the elect in His sacrifice on the altar of the cross. From that great "with us" all the others follow. The satisfaction of Christ's death has made His "with us" a reality in His resurrection, ascension, exaltation, life, and death; and it will be a reality to the end of the age and forever (Col. 3:1; Eph. 2:6; II Tim. 4:18; Ps. 23:4; Matt. 28:20; Rev. 21:3).

The name of our Savior is Jesus (the name means "Jehovah is Savior"), and the saved shall call Him Emmanuel (the name means "with us is God"). No greater honor can be received by poor and strengthless sinners than to be included in the name of Emmanuel. Inclusion of the elect in the name is one thing, but their being placed in the forefront of that name is humbling. Surely there is some reason why the order of the name is as it occurs. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved on the stones of the ephod and borne on the shoulders by the high priest as a memorial should tell us something about God's love for His own (Ex. 28:9-12). The onyx was a precious stone, and its meaning, "to shine with the luster of fire," is significant. As Aaron presented the names of his people before the Lord, our High Priest presents us before the Father. As God looked down on Aaron and saw the names of His people indelibly engraved in the shining onyx stones, He looked on His only begotten Son and saw His people as part of the name, Emmanuel. As the names of Aaron's people were borne in the forefront of his priestly garment, the elect are in the forefront of Christ's name, Emmanuel.

The elect are sheep who have gone astray (Is. 53:6). Jesus Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). Those who have gone astray did not seek Christ, but the Savior sought the sheep (Rom. 3:11; John 10:1-16). Separation from God began with man, but man's reconciliation must begin with God. Apart from the quickening Spirit of God, the elect have no more concern for the Person signified by the sign than King Ahaz had for the sign of the Person of Christ (Is. 7:10-16).

We often hear the question, what is in a name? Although names mean little to people in our generation, proper names in the Bible do have important spiritual connotations; but they have

specific signification when they apply to God. The supernatural nature of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ is displayed in some of the many names given to Him in Scripture. There is majesty in the name "God," independent being in "Jehovah," Savior in "Jesus," unction in "Christ," power and authority in "Lord," affinity (relationship) in "Emmanuel," intercession in "Mediator," help in "Advocate," and royalty in "King."

THE KING OF THE JEWS

Matthew portrayed Jesus Christ as King of the Jews. After interrogating Jesus Christ prior to His crucifixion, Pilate called Him “the King of the Jews” (John 18:39). When he brought Jesus Christ forth to the Jews for their decision to crucify Him, he said to the Jews, “Behold your King” (John 19:14). Furthermore, he wrote the title “JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS” on the cross (John 19:19). In His answer to Pilate, Jesus Christ told him the kingdom which is His is spiritual, and it is not out of this world’s system (John 18:36). He did not say it will not be “in” the world, but it is not made up “from” this world’s system. In answer to Pilate’s question, “Art thou a king then?” Christ affirmed that He is King: “...Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth...” (John 18:37).

The following things should be observed concerning Christ’s statement to Pilate in John 18:36— (1) He spoke of the kingdom as His. “My kingdom” denotes His covenanted kingdom. (2) His kingdom being not of this world means it is not of humanly devised order or arrangement. (3) If His kingdom were of this world, His servants would be fighting to prevent His crucifixion. Christ’s kingdom is of Divine origin, and its establishment is future. (4) His kingdom is not from this place, signifying that it is not related to this age but to the age to come. (5) As believers are not of this world but remain in the world, Christ’s kingdom is not out of this world’s system but it shall be in the renewed world system. (6) Jesus Christ was born King of the Jews, but we must distinguish the King *de jure* from the King *de facto*. (7) Distinction must be made between the kingdom on earth and God’s sovereign rule over the earth. The kingdom belongs to Christ as the Son of Man. Sovereignty is vested in Him as the Son of God. Conclusively, Jesus Christ was born King, and He recognized that He was born King. He confirmed it before He died, and Pilate inscribed that message on the cross.

As soon as the birth of the Lord Jesus was announced, the wise men from the east came to Jerusalem asking, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?” (Matt. 2:2). This is the first question in the New Testament, and the first question in the Old Testament is “Where art thou?” (Gen. 3:9). What made these men from the east wise? In the child, they recognized Christ the King. They worshipped Christ, not His mother. They came to give and not to get (Matt. 2:1-12). They knew something about Old Testament prophecy and believed it. Therefore, their wisdom came from the word of God and not from some dream or the figment of someone’s imagination.

The wise men had seen “his star” in the east, and they came to worship Him (Matt. 2:2). The New Testament opens and closes with the star of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ said of Himself that He is “the root [the Divine nature of Jesus Christ] and the offspring [the human nature of Jesus Christ] of David, and the bright and morning star” (Rev. 22:16). Hence, Christ’s star is connected with His first and second advents. This is not merely “a star” but “the star” of prophecy: “I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel...” (Num. 24:17).

The wise men evidenced their recognition of the deity of Jesus Christ, the King of the Jews, by bringing the gift of gold; His impeccable life, by bringing the gift of frankincense; and His going to the cross, by bringing the gift of myrrh. Thus, their spiritual wisdom led them to acknowledge that Jesus Christ came the first time to die, not to set up His kingdom. Suffering precedes glory. These men had been made wise by the grace of God.

The Lord Jesus is from the royal line of David. Matthew used the title “King” fourteen times and “son of David” nine times to refer to Christ. He employed the term “kingdom” fifty-five times, thirty-two of which are “kingdom of the heavens.” He also recorded twelve parables to depict the kingdom of the heavens.

The center and goal of all prophecy is the Lord Jesus Christ who was born King of the Jews. Union of the Divine and human natures in the King formed the foundation for a perfect kingdom. The reign of the Son of Man, in accordance with the Davidic covenant, and the union of His people with Himself in that rule alone will satisfy the cravings of a redeemed people. The kingdom will sweep away all the false hopes for a man-made utopia by fallible men. As the perfection of Christ’s human nature cannot be denied, the perfection of His work, which finds its completion in the kingdom, cannot be refuted. The past and present are only preparatory stages for the coming kingdom. This kingdom is the theme of the covenants and prophecy. It is the special honor given to Jesus Christ by the Father (Luke 19:12-15). The kingdom of the world shall become the kingdom of Jesus Christ (Rev. 11:15).

Prophecy is not only a light to Christians in a dark world but also a witness to God when it is fulfilled: “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place...” (II Pet. 1:19). “Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness” (II Pet. 3:17). Having been forewarned by prophecy, Christians are forearmed. Hence, knowing the truth beforehand, we are without excuse for failure to be on guard. A blessing is promised to believers who read, hear, and keep the words of prophecy (Rev. 1:3). As we do not understand everything about food before eating it, we do not have to understand everything about prophecy before we guard and proclaim it. Moreover, the fulfillment of prophecy will become, as it has in the past, a witness to God’s omniscience.

The King of the Jews was born during the reign of King Herod. Herod became disturbed because he feared his own kingdom would be challenged. His response may be illustrated by the Thessalonians’ reaction to Paul’s preaching. The unbelievers caused an uproar in the city “...saying that there is another king, Jesus” (Acts 17:7 NASB). According to Paul’s Epistles to the assembly in Thessalonica, Christ’s second coming as King was prominent in His teaching. Believers look upon the establishment of the kingdom as the overthrow and destruction of the wicked ones and their wickedness. Believers delight not in their ruin but in the clearing of God’s name and glory (II Thess. 1:3-12). Wicked rulers do not want their power challenged: “The kings of the earth set themselves, and their rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us” (Ps. 2:2,3). These words were partially fulfilled by Herod when the eternal Son was born King. There was another King, Jesus Christ. Herod had no problem summoning help from the priests and scribes to learn where the young child was located. Jesus Christ is hated and despised by rulers with the sword, religionists with their human traditions, and the multitudes with their lawless violence. They all have one thing in common. They care not what stars occupy the religious

heavens of the world, provided “His Star” is not among them. They will tolerate any kind of religious leader other than the holy, sovereign, and impeccable Christ of Christianity. All this will have its final consummation in the last days before the Prince of Peace establishes His kingdom.

Matthew recorded four historic prophecies in the second chapter. Each had some particular burden: (1) Micah’s burden was authority. He denounced the false rulers of his time; but by prophecy, he saw the true Ruler (Matt. 2:6). (2) Hosea’s burden was the unfaithfulness of Israel (Matt. 2:15). (3) Jeremiah’s burden was the judgment of a sinful nation (Matt. 2:18). (4) The last one refers to no particular prophet, but it is a summary of several prophets (Matt. 2:23).

Micah prophesied Divine wrath and Divine promise. He was contemporary with Isaiah and prophesied in the days of Jothan, Ahaz, and in the early years of Hezekiah, kings of Judah. The three divisions of his prophecy began with the call to “hear” (Micah 1:2; 3:1; 6:1). Micah’s name means “who is like God.” Being like God, the prophet denounced the sins of the rulers and gave a picture of Christ’s kingdom with Christ’s reign of universal peace. He is noted for his rapid transitions from threats to promises. He went from pronouncing the destruction of Jerusalem and captivity in Babylon to prophesying the reign of the Ruler in Israel (Micah 3:12; 4:7; 5:2). “All the chief priests and scribes” (Matt. 2:4) gathered together by Herod proclaimed Micah’s prophecy that Christ, the King of the Jews, should be born in Bethlehem of Judah: “But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2).

Bethlehem (the name means “house of bread”) was the birthplace of David, and it would be the birthplace of David’s Lord. Jesus Christ is David’s son as well as his Lord: “...I am the root and the offspring of David...” (Rev. 22:16). Although the Son of God came into the world centuries after the death of David, He was before David. In the days of the kingdom’s peril under King Saul, God gave Israel King David. He came from Bethlehem. Bethlehem has become a household name to all Christians. It is first mentioned in Genesis 35:19: “And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.” It is believed the city was built by Ephrathah, the father of Bethlehem, and called after both “Bethlehem Ephrathah” in the prophecy by Micah. David is described as “the son of that Ephrathite of Bethlehem-judah” (I Sam. 17:12). It was also the scene of Ruth’s romance with Boaz. Boaz purchased Ruth the Moabitess to be his wife: “And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephrathah, and be famous in Bethlehem” (Ruth 4:11).

The one who would come forth from Bethlehem is the same one “whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2). This is a description of Christ’s eternal generation. Here we have the prophecy of the unprecedented King of the Jews of Matthew 2:2. Micah spoke of a twofold going forth: (1) “from Bethlehem” and (2) “from everlasting.” This twofold going forth also speaks of the two natures of the King of the Jews—as God from eternity and as the God-Man from Bethlehem. Hence, the Person who came from Bethlehem Ephrathah is more than man; He is the theanthropic Person. The King came forth from little Bethlehem. His royalty is seen in the Divine nature and not in earthly circumstances.

The shepherd life of David depicted Jesus Christ as Shepherd: “He [God] chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds: From following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance” (Ps. 78:70-71). The shepherd life of David was his needed preparation for kingship over Israel. He would rule them for their good, defend them from their enemies, and conduct the affairs of the kingdom in the spirit of a shepherd. Micah saw the new King coming out of little Bethlehem in the implied character of a shepherd: “And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth” (Micah 5:4). The Lord Jesus is called the “good shepherd,” “the great shepherd,” and the “chief shepherd” (John 10:11; Heb. 13:20; I Pet. 5:4). He came to the sheepfold of Israel as “the good shepherd.” The prophet said, “He shall stand,” and “the good shepherd” stood against all the false shepherds who came into the sheepfold of Israel. The strength in which He stood as the “good shepherd” was His own intrinsic power. The “feeding” applies to all the duties of a shepherd, even to giving His life for His sheep. This is what Christ did “in the majesty of His God.” The Lord Jesus was majestic even in His humiliation. The prophet rejoiced to know that God passed by the pride of the city and brought forth the King from a place that was “little among the thousands of Judah.” The advent of Christ would not be according to human expectations. As the “chief shepherd,” He will consummate His work (Micah 5:5-15). Israel will yet be shepherded by her Messiah (Is. 11; 35; Dan. 7; 9; Joel 2; 3; Zech. 9; 14; Mal. 4).

The burden of Hosea’s prophecy was Israel’s unfaithfulness. Hosea was contemporary with Amos, Isaiah, and Micah. His message was principally to Israel (the ten tribes of the northern kingdom). The subject matter of his message was spiritual adultery. The prophet learned the meaning of unfaithfulness through bitter experience. When he had suffered the worst agony that can come to the human heart—the infidelity of one’s mate—God said to him in effect, “Now, you know how I feel about Israel.”

Hosea’s prophecy “WHEN Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt” (Hos. 11:1) was quoted by Matthew: “Out of Egypt have I called my son” (Matt. 2:15). The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and told him to go into Egypt with the young child and Mary. Joseph fled into Egypt with his family that Hosea 11:1 might be fulfilled.

God loved Israel in Egypt and called Israel “his son” (Ex. 4:22). The Israelites were a highly favored people. God loved, redeemed, educated, guided, and fed them. Pharaoh treated the Israelites cruelly, but God heard their cry and came down to help them. Hosea looked forward as well as backward. He saw that his words had fuller meaning than could be fulfilled by the children of Israel. His prophecy carried a promise that had not been fulfilled. Like Abraham, he saw Christ’s day afar off and was glad. This may seem strange in the light of the context of the prophecy, but the Holy Spirit made no mistake when He inspired Matthew to quote this passage.

The King of the Jews identified Himself with Israel. Israel and Christ are both loved, but Christ is loved by nature and Israel by grace. Both were called “my son,” and both were called out of Egypt. However, Israel was in Egypt because of sin; but Jesus Christ, who knew no sin and in whom is no sin, was there to be identified with the sinners He would deliver. He is the King of the Jews. Before His death, Christ was asked, “Art thou a king then?” He replied, “...To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world...” (John 18:37). Christ’s kingship is of such character that it can be neither invalidated by His arrest nor destroyed by His death. The King

was untouchable by the wicked designs of men until the time He voluntarily laid down His life for the sheep (John 10:11,15,17,18).

God chose Jeremiah, a tenderhearted man, to deliver a stern message of judgment. He was contemporary with Ezekiel and ministered to the Jews in Jerusalem while Ezekiel ministered among the captives in Babylon. Matthew quoted Jeremiah 31:15 at the conclusion of the section describing the slaying of the children in Bethlehem: “In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not” (Matt. 2:18). The context of Jeremiah 31:15 gives a prophecy of the Israelites being driven from their land, but there was hope in their future restoration (Jer. 31:15-17). Jeremiah’s prophecy describes the massacre of the tribulation through which Israel shall pass before her final deliverance. Herod’s murder of all the male children from two years old and under is only a foretaste of that future tribulation. The foundation of Israel’s hope of the future is God’s unconditional covenant.

The twofold application of prophecy is common in Scripture. The baptism in the Spirit at Pentecost was the pledge, or foretaste, of the future fulfillment in the kingdom (Joel 2, Acts 2). Therefore, Bethlehem’s mourning over the murdered children was as though Rachel were repeating her lamentation. Rachel, however, represents the remnant that shall be saved by the coming Messiah.

Few attempts have been made to explain and little has been said about the slaughter of the children. Some have said it seems strange that, only a few days before, men had assembled around the newborn King, and now the whole province of Herod was strewn with the bodies of slaughtered male children from two years old and under. The question has been asked, why were innocent children slaughtered? The following answers have been suggested: The lot of the children was a blessed one because they were “safe”—not saved. The Father was plucking His innocent flowers. They died for Christ in order that He might die for them. Had they not died for Him, Christ would have been slain by Herod; and all of Adam’s descendants would have spent eternity in hell.

There is no Scripture to justify the idea of children being either “innocent” or “safe.” The word “innocent” may be used relatively to speak of someone free from a specific crime or wrong, but it cannot be used in the sense of being without sin. Indiscriminate universal death of persons of all ages proves that all persons come into the world sinful—in a state of depravity (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12). What about children destroyed in the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the night of the passover, etc.? Furthermore, the idea of children being “safe” until they reach the age of accountability is ridiculous. What is the difference between “safe” and “saved” if all who die in infancy go to heaven? There is no Scripture which says they go to heaven, not even the one recording the death of David’s son by Bathsheba: “...I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me” (II Sam. 12:23). “I shall go to him” means that David shall go to the “house appointed for all living” (Job 30:23), and “he shall not return to me” means he shall not return to me in the present, mortal state.

If children are “safe”—saved—until they reach the age of accountability, they lose their safeness and must be regenerated. What is the difference between being safe and being regenerated? Did God give “safe” children grace in Christ before the world began? If so, did they lose it at the age of accountability? (See II Tim. 1:9.) The hypothetical statement, “If the children had not died,

Christ would have died by the hands of Herod and all of Adam's race would have spent eternity in hell," contradicts the eternal purpose of God. This is not the first instance recorded in Scripture where children were slaughtered. (See Ezek. 9.)

In the last division of Matthew 2, Joseph was told to take the young child and His mother into the land of Israel because those who sought His life were dead. The statement "He shall be called a Nazarene" (Matt. 2:23) does not refer to any particular prophet; but it was the message of the prophets in general. "Nazarene" was a term of contempt: "...Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth..." (John 1:46; 7:52). A person is not to be judged by the place from which he comes or by the work he has been doing. Jesus Christ came from Nazareth, and He was the son of a carpenter. The whole of Galilee was a despised region. The Galileans were accused of being rude, illiterate, and devoid of culture. Hence, the appellation "Nazarene" describes the lowliness of the majestic Person of Jesus Christ who was born King of the Jews. Not only is Jesus Christ the Lamb that was slain but He shall also be the King, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, on David's throne.

THE KING'S FORERUNNERS

The two forerunners of the King are John the Baptist and Elijah. John the Baptist has already come and prepared the way for the King's first advent. Elijah shall come and prepare the way for His second advent. Scripture clearly indicates that John the Baptist was not Elijah, although he came in the spirit and power of Elijah. There are similarities between Elijah and John, especially Elijah's encounter with Ahab and Jezebel and John's confrontation with Herod and Herodias.

The necessity of understanding information conveyed in prophecy is emphasized by prophecy distinguishing the first forerunner from the second. Isaiah predicted the coming of the first forerunner: "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (Is. 40:3). Malachi foretold the second forerunner: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Mal. 4:5,6). The ministry of both Elijah and John is confined to Israel. John's coming was during Israel's wilderness condition, and Elijah's coming will precede the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. Since John did not restore all things, one must come who will.

The idea of a postponed kingdom is refuted by the prediction of two forerunners. Could a postponed kingdom mean that if the Jews had received the so-called offered kingdom at Christ's first advent, John would have fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi 4:5-6? God would have sent Elijah instead of John had He purposed to establish the kingdom at His first advent. Both forerunners were in God's purpose. Furthermore, the omniscient and omnipotent God is not so unsure of the outcome of His purpose that He gave a contingency. John was chosen by God to be a voice shouting in the desert "And saying, you repent: for the kingdom of the heavens has approached" (Matt. 3:2—translation). Repentance is a prerequisite to entering or seeing the kingdom (John 3:3-7). Prior to the dreadful day of the Lord, John preached the baptism of repentance to qualify the elect for the kingdom which will be established. John and Christ were killed at Christ's first advent. A martyred forerunner was an appropriate foreground for the King who would be crucified. On the other hand, Elijah's mission to restore all things will precede the dreadful day of the Lord (Matt. 17:11). This is the reason his name is associated with the mount of transfiguration scene which is a foretaste of the coming kingdom (Matt. 17:1-13).

The suggestion of a postponed kingdom casts reflection on the sovereign God who has infinite knowledge. Persons who think the destinies of men lie within themselves must be subjected to the overruling God who is higher than the highest. The sovereign God turns the heart of man wherever He wishes (Prov. 21:1). Do men think God's heart is in their hands to do with as they desire? Rising above human reason is a necessity for man, but it is impossible apart from grace which God alone can give. God who has infinite knowledge needs no backup plan. His understanding is infinite (Ps. 147:5). God sees future, present, and past all at once because He is "in one mind" (Job 23:13). Therefore, God's purpose is fixed and settled. God foresaw no chance of its failure at either Christ's first or second advent. The events at Christ's second coming are as certain as those at His first coming. Nothing in God's providence is by accident. Man alone

needs a contingent plan, but he cannot be sure the backup will be successful. No matter how many backups a spacecraft may have, its destruction is sure when God wills it.

A Scriptural view of the kingdom is impossible without a Biblical concept of prophecy. The importance of studying prophecy related to Christ's first advent reveals the necessity of acquiring knowledge of prophecies associated with His second advent. Prophetic Scriptures are part of the word of God entrusted to us. The book of Revelation is basically prophetic. It pronounces blessing on those who read, hear, and keep the words of its prophecy (Rev. 1:3).

The prophecy of Isaiah has two major divisions which correspond with the Old and New Testaments. The first thirty-nine of the sixty-six chapters agree with the thirty-nine Old Testament books; whereas the last twenty-seven are analogous to the twenty-seven New Testament books. The whole prophetic section is a record of the development of evil and the final overthrow of the wicked, who shall be excluded from the messianic kingdom.

Both Isaiah's last major division and the Gospel according to Matthew begin with the introduction of John the Baptist, the first forerunner of the King (Is. 40:3; Matt. 3:1-3). All four of the Gospel writers—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—quoted from Isaiah 40:3. Both Isaiah and Revelation conclude with the establishment of the kingdom and the reign of Jesus Christ.

With the close of Malachi's predictions, there was a silence for 400 years. No voice of a prophet was heard until John the Baptist came forth shouting in the desert. He stood in a unique place in human history. As the God-ordained clasp of two Testaments, John was content to be a "voice" declaring the object of all prophecy, the end of all sacrifices, and the hope of all the elect. Thus, the true Shepherd who stood at the door waiting to be admitted was introduced by John. He bowed low as Jesus of Nazareth passed through the door; and he shouted, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

John was the bright and shining light who must fade into insignificance in the light of Him who is the Light of the world (John 5:35; 8:12). He who spent thirty years preparing for one year of service became a martyr soon after he introduced Jesus Christ. Some think they can prepare in one year for thirty years of service. They can, if they are nothing more than the servants of men. However, God's servants cannot be too careful about the way they handle the Holy Scriptures. They are not like the schoolteacher who applied for a teaching position and stated in her interview that she had twenty years of experience. The principal asked her if she had twenty years of experience or one year of experience that had been repeated twenty times. Continuous study is necessary for growth.

John the Baptist became a terror to Israel. His preaching was like a succession of lightning flashes. His proclamation of the kingdom passed into a denunciation of his hearers, warning them of wrath about to come (Matt. 3:3,7). He called his congregation of Pharisees and Sadducees an offspring of snakes and demanded fruit from them to prove their repentance (Matt. 3:8).

That congregation of hypocrites to whom John preached boasted of their religious heritage as the seed of Abraham. Therefore, John demanded that they prove their spiritual descent from Abraham. Similarly, people today boast of certain religious ties. Since John was independent of the offspring of snakes, he boldly renounced them. Every man of God should be so independent

of religious connections that he will speak the word of God uncompromisingly. At the same time, he should be cognizant that he must give account before God. Hierarchies of religious denominations often support religionists while seeking to hinder men of God from boldly proclaiming the word of God. John the Baptist stated his belief in the absolute sovereignty of God: "...God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matt. 3:9). John's message was declared in order that those persons to whom God granted repentance might be qualified for entrance into the kingdom of the heavens. He warned his listeners that "already the ax is being laid at the root of the trees" (Matt. 3:10—translation). Every person who does not bring forth fruit as proof of his repentance shall be judged and cast into the fire, regardless of his ancestry.

John's imprisonment and death prove that instead of a present kingdom, suffering is the portion that God's providence has assigned to every Christian. The forerunner was rejected and slain (Matt. 14:1-12). Likewise, the apostle Paul was stoned, and men supposing him to be dead dragged him out of the city. However, he was not dead. He continued proclaiming the gospel, confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and reminding them that they must go through much tribulation to enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:19-22). Their entrance into the kingdom was future. If the assembly of Christ and the kingdom were synonymous, Christians would be entering that which they have already entered. Christians are subjects of the assembly Christ is building and heirs of the kingdom.

John's confrontation with Herod resulted in his martyrdom. A martyred forerunner was an appropriate foreground for the crucified, not reigning, King. The state put John to death, and the religious leaders by their traditions perverted the word of God preached by John. The brevity of John's ministry proved Israel's unfitness for the kingdom.

John the Baptist was appointed by God to preach in the desert of Judea to prepare for the beginning of Christ's public ministry. He prepared the people for the Messiah and introduced Him to Israel. John's commission was stated in the angel's words to Zacharias prior to John's conception: "And he shall go before him [Jesus Christ] in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn [*epistrephai*, aorist active infinitive of *epistrepho*, which means to turn back, to cause to return, or to bring back] the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready [*hetoimasai*, aorist active infinitive of *hetoimadzo*, which means to prepare or make ready] a people prepared [*kateskeuasmemon*, perfect passive participle of *kataskeuadzo*, which means having been prepared] for the Lord" (Luke 1:17). John the Baptist was commissioned to prepare those already prepared by the Lord. He could prepare no one who had not been previously prepared by God. The preparation of one's heart by God prior to his preparation by the gospel emphasizes the distinction between regeneration and conversion.

Paul's record of his regeneration and his testimony of his conversion experience (Acts 9:3-6; 22:6-10; 26:12-18) illustrates that John the Baptist's preaching was not to regenerate anyone, and his baptizing those who repented and brought forth fruits of their repentance was not for the purpose of regenerating anyone. In Paul's third account of his having been quickened by God and his conversion experience, he stated that God had sent him to the Gentiles: "To open their eyes, and to turn [*epistrephai*, aorist active infinitive of *epistrepho*, which means to turn back, to cause to return, or to bring back] them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:18). Paul, like John the Baptist, was sent to prepare a people God

had already prepared for Himself. God's man cannot help people to be ready who have not first been made ready by God. This is the same principle set forth in Jeremiah 31:18-19 concerning Ephraim: "...turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented...."

Isaiah prophesied, "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (Is. 40:3). Matthew referred to the first forerunner of Jesus Christ as a "voice" without saying anything about the announcement of his birth by an angel, his priestly descent, or the thirty years of preparation for such a brief ministry (Matt. 3:3). When John the Baptist was asked who he was, "He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias" (John 1:23).

The prophet of the Highest asserted that he was only a voice. The voice of the messenger was for a fleeting second, but the content of his message was eternal. The truth that has been voiced and not the voice of a highly trained orator should be remembered. The "voice" for God is a witness of Christ, not a witness of nature, reason, philosophy, science, politics, or religion. A mere voice is insufficient for religionists, but it is enough for the elect of God. The "voice" declared, "...Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). True humility is manifested in John's statement, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness."

John the Baptist had nothing about his person to attract anyone. His raiment of camel's hair, leather girdle, and diet of locusts and wild honey manifested the austerity of his life. He was a self-disciplined man who lived in solitude. He received in solitude the spiritual strength that would enable his candle to shine more brightly when he came forth to preach. Solitude has its place in the Christian life, but one must not remain in seclusion. It is a good school, but the world is the arena in which the good fight of faith must be fought. Privacy is best for communion with God, but society is where the message learned in seclusion with God is to be proclaimed.

John the Baptist, like Elijah, was prepared for his ministry while alone with God. Elijah had a solitary grandeur that was all his own. He was called a Tishbite, but no one knows the location of Tishbe. The prophet's earnestness in preaching was demonstrated in his message on Mount Carmel (I Kings 18). The preparation for that preaching must not be overlooked. The Lord told Elijah to hide himself by the brook Cherith that was before Jordan (I Kings 17:3). The person who takes a high place before men must take a low place before God. Time in secret must exceed time in public. After preparation in solitude with God, the Lord told the prophet to "Go, shew thyself unto Ahab..." (I Kings 18:1). John the Baptist is spoken of as going before Jesus Christ "in the spirit and power of Elias" (Luke 1:17). Matthew gave no information about the previous history of John the Baptist. He assumed the Jews to whom he wrote understood from the prophecies of Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 who he was. The early life of John was as obscure as the Christ of whom he was a forerunner.

Elijah went forth to meet King Ahab. On his way, he came in contact with Obadiah, Ahab's governor, who was a good man employed by the wicked king. Obadiah did not extend the Christian cordiality that might be expected. The governor's greeting was one of cold formality. This should not be surprising because Obadiah's mission was in keeping with the place from which he had come. Serving Ahab was doubtless not his correct ministry. Some today would consider it another form of ministry. His service to Ahab was not the result of solitude with God.

Although Elijah was providentially forced to own Ahab as his king, he would not own him as his master. Subjection to “the powers that be” and cooperating with them differ (Rom. 13:1-7). The missions of Elijah and Obadiah were different. Obadiah was sent by Ahab to find grass for the livestock, but Elijah was sent by God to call the nation of Israel back to God.

The nation of Israel had been without a voice for God for four hundred years when John the Baptist came. Hence, the spiritual condition of Israel was so degenerated that the prophet of the Highest preached in the desert of Judea. The Pharisees and Sadducees continued with the old forms of Judaism, but there was no spiritual power in their forms. John the Baptist, like the one in whose spirit and power he had come, was sent forth to call some out of Israel back to God by “saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of the heavens has approached” (Matt. 3:2—translation).

Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal and of the groves who feasted at the table of Jezebel. The altars of Baal and Jehovah cannot stand side by side. False religion is always attractive to the natural man, whether it is the false religion of Elijah’s day or of the twentieth century. Many want to worship God and Baal simultaneously. However, things that are contradictory cannot be reconciled. Free grace can never be reconciled with free will. If man’s will is sovereign, God is not. Since God alone is sovereign, free will is heretical. When the Pharisees and Sadducees, the greatest enemies of Messiah, came to John’s baptism, he identified them with vipers, the most dangerous of serpents: “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come” (Matt. 3:7). Both the message of John the Baptist during the transitional period and the message of the apostles after the transitional period refute the belief by religious liberals that the spirit of the New Testament differs from that of the Old Testament. The statements by the Psalmist are as true today as the day they were penned: “...thou hatest all workers of iniquity” (Ps. 5:5). “Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end.... God is angry with the wicked every day” (Ps. 7:9,11).

The appearance of Elijah in the transfiguration scene does not invalidate his future coming as Christ’s forerunner (Matt. 17:1-13). Christ had reason for likening John the Baptist to Elijah. He called John “Elias” because he had come “in the spirit and power of Elias.” Three passages of Scripture that mention John the Baptist connected with Elijah should be considered in their chronological order: (1) Gabriel did not say that John the Baptist shall be Elijah himself but “...he shall go before him [the Lord] in the spirit and power of Elias...” (Luke 1:17). (2) During the time of John’s ministry, the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask John who he was. When asked if he was Elijah, John replied, “I am not” (John 1:21). (3) After the death of John the Baptist, Jesus Christ gave the disciples a preview on the mount of transfiguration of the coming kingdom. The transfiguration scene was both a reality and a figure of Christ’s future advent. Elijah, who had been seen, disappeared. This brought the question, “...Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come” (Matt. 17:10)? The scribes held that Elijah would be a forerunner of the Messiah before “...the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD” (Mal. 4:5). The disciples, on the other hand, saw Elijah coming subsequent to Jesus Christ. Elijah’s departure from them caused the disciples to question the scribes. The answer to their question is found in the fact that the scribes taught correctly. Christ answered the disciples, “...Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist” (Matt. 17:11-13).

John the Baptist was called Elijah by Jesus Christ because he had qualities like Elijah. The Lord had sent Gabriel to announce that he would come "...in the spirit and power of Elias." Elijah had turned the hearts of some to the Lord and had preached repentance and judgment in difficult and dark days. Conditions were the same when John preached repentance and pointed out the Lamb of God, who was rejected by the nation of Israel. John's message was not destined to "restore all things," but Elijah was destined to be successful: "...Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things" (Matt. 17:11). The nation of Israel will not receive the message of repentance, which is prerequisite to the kingdom, until she is made willing in the day of God's power (Ps. 110:3). That day will not come until the coming of Elijah, the forerunner of Christ's second advent. John came in the spirit and power of Elijah but was rejected and killed. Christ was also rejected and killed. Elijah shall also be killed (Rev. 11). However, Christ will not be rejected by Israel when He comes the second time. The nation will repent and receive the Lord Jesus as her Messiah: "All the land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem: and it shall be lifted up, and inhabited in her place, from Benjamin's gate unto the place of the first gate, unto the corner gate, and from the tower of Hananeel unto the king's winepresses. And men shall dwell in it, and there shall be no more utter destruction; but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited" (Zech. 14:10,11).

John the Baptist was not Elijah. When asked if he was Elijah, John said, "I am not" (John 1:21). His reply does not contradict Matthew 11:11-14 or Matthew 17:1-13. The word "come" in Matthew 17:11—"...Elias truly shall first come..."—is *erchetai*, a futuristic present middle indicative of the Greek verb *erchomai*, which means to come. The verb is connected with the words "and shall restore all things [*kai apokatastesei panta*]" (translation). The verb *apokatastesei* is a future active indicative of *apokathistemi*, which means to restore a thing to its former place or state. Hence, the futuristic present verb indicates a future ministry of Elijah. Following the futuristic present verb for "come," Christ used a predictive future verb for "restore."

Christ's statement—"But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them" (Matt. 17:12)—does not contradict what had been said. What about Elijah having already come? The verb "come" (*elthen*) is the aorist active indicative of *erchomai*, which is used culminatively. The culminative use of the aorist emphasizes the end of the action. The other aorist verbs "knew him not," "done unto him," and "whatsoever they listed" are used constatively. The constative action is viewed in its entirety. All the verbs point to the past when Christ spoke to the disciples who were unfamiliar with the double fulfillment of prophecy. In verse 13, they understood that Christ was speaking about John the Baptist who had fulfilled his role in prophecy.

All things were not restored by John the Baptist, but they will be restored by one who shall come. Therefore, the prophecy of Malachi 4:5-6 has not been fulfilled, and this proves John the Baptist was not Elijah. At the time Christ spoke these words to His disciples, John the Baptist had already come and died a martyr's death. Elijah is called "the prophet" (I Kings 18:36), but John is designated "more than a prophet" (Matt. 11:9). Therefore, John is not Elijah. Christ talked about John the Baptist and Elijah in Matthew 17:11-13 when He referred to Elijah. One had already come, but the other was yet to come. If John the Baptist was Elijah, one is forced to believe in reincarnation (the soul coming back in another body).

BAPTISM OF THE KING

Jesus Christ came from Galilee to Jordan to be baptized by John the Baptist. But on His arrival, John tried to hinder Him, because he saw nothing in Jesus Christ to necessitate His receiving the baptism of repentance: “Then Jesus comes from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by [*hupo*, ablative of agency] him. But he was trying to hinder Him, saying, I have need to be baptized by you, and you are coming to me?” (Matt. 3:13,14—translation). John was administering the baptism of repentance, demanding that the recipients first prove by their lives that they had repented of their sins. He realized that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, did not fit that category. He had no sin of which to repent. Therefore, John tried to prevent Christ’s being baptized with his baptism.

There is no Biblical substantiation for the opinion that Christ was confessing the sins of Israel in the same sense that Moses and Daniel did (Ex. 32; Dan. 9). Others say He was setting an example for us. Some who believe Christ was setting an example for us actually link Jesus Christ with the baptism of repentance. That concept certainly will not stand the test of Scripture.

It can be said that Jesus Christ was baptized for the following reasons:

1. He was baptized to manifest His dying to natural relationships, such as to parents and vocation. Jesus Christ was more than the Son of Mary. He is the eternal Son of God; therefore, He died to His relationship with Mary. He had been a carpenter, but He also died to that relationship.
2. Baptism, Christ’s first public act in the flesh at the beginning of His public ministry, announced His last act in His flesh and blood.
3. Christ’s baptism verified for John that Christ was the Son of God (John 1:32-34). John was progressively learning about Jesus Christ.
4. Christ’s baptism authenticated John’s message concerning the One coming.
5. His baptism distinguished John’s relationship and Jesus Christ’s relationship to sinners. John had been sent from God with the message of repentance, but Jesus Christ had been sent by God the Father to bring salvation (Luke 19:10).

John and Jesus Christ are distinguished as witnesses. John was a light sent from God to bear witness concerning the Light in order that all may believe through Jesus Christ. John was not that Light (John 1:6-9). The Lord Jesus included John’s name as a witness in John 5:32-37 when He said His own works and the Father bear witness of Him. John was a burning and shining lamp. He was a flickering light in which the Pharisees were willing to rejoice for an hour (John 5:35). Since John was a flickering lamp, he was willing to decrease in order that Christ might increase (John 3:30). As a star loses its brightness in the light of the rising sun, the light John was giving would diminish in the rising of the light of Jesus Christ who is the Light of the world. Christ’s

statement that the Pharisees were willing to rejoice in John's light for an hour explains the light shining in the darkness and men unable to comprehend the Light. No one can suppress the Light sent from God. God's light will accomplish the purpose for which He has sent it. In contrast to John, the flickering light, Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, "became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we observed His glory, the glory of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14—translation).

The missions of John and Christ are distinct. In answer to John's trying to prevent His being baptized, Jesus Christ said to him, "permit it at the present time: For thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he permitted him. And having been immersed, Jesus went up immediately from the water: and, behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God coming down as a dove, and coming upon Him. And behold a voice from the heavens, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I take delight" (Matt. 3:15-17—translation). John could not assist Jesus Christ in fulfilling all righteousness. Furthermore, John waited until sinners came to him and proved by their lifestyle that they had repented before he would baptize them. But Jesus Christ in His incarnation came down where sinners are.

The adverb "thus" (*houtos*) can refer either to what precedes it, as in Matthew 5:19 and 6:30, or to what follows it, as in Matthew 3:15, Matthew 6:9, and Acts 7:6. This adverb is used the following ways in Scripture: like, in this way, thus, so, like this, or in like manner. Therefore, its meaning must be considered in the light of its context. In Matthew 3:15, it points to something that would follow Christ's baptism.

The pronoun "us" (*hemin*) in Matthew 3:15 is plural. Does it apply to John, to future sinners—as taught by those who believe in baptismal regeneration, or to the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Grammatically, it could refer to Jesus Christ and John, called the Baptizer. But theologically, it cannot refer to John. Man cannot assist God in the fulfillment of righteousness. Righteousness was fulfilled by One—Jesus Christ—not two—John and Christ. By the obedience of Jesus Christ, not the obedience of Christ and another, men are made righteous (Rom. 5:16-21). The righteousness which Christ fulfilled was accomplished not at His baptism but at Calvary. His baptism was only a picture of that which He would accomplish at the close of His public ministry. Therefore, it was righteousness which could not be accomplished by Christ and John or by Christ and sinners in their act of obedience to baptism. But it was accomplished by the Persons in the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ, in whom dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9), gave Himself for us (Gal. 1:4). He was crucified for us (Gal. 2:20). He offered one sacrifice forever (Heb. 10:10-14). Jesus Christ offered Himself through the Holy Spirit (Heb. 9:14). The Father laid on Jesus Christ all the sins of the elect (Is. 53:6).

How could the Lord Jesus Christ, the impeccable Savior, submit to John's baptism? It has been said that Christ saw His sheep struggling under judgment. Christ saw the ones the Father had given to Him in the covenant of redemption struggling in their depravity, and He must go in to rescue them. He must become identified with them, taking their place in judgment in order that they might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Hence, Christ's baptism was a portrayal of that which would take place at Calvary. The One who knew no sin was made a sin offering for the elect, and this was symbolized in His baptism.

Jesus Christ was born under the law which He Himself gave (Gal. 4:4). He had already submitted to circumcision (Luke 2:21) and had been to the temple at the age of twelve (Luke 2:46). Hence, in nothing was He distinguished from the other children of His people until He was publicly identified in His baptism. His relationship with the other children of His people was not one of personal sinfulness, but it involved humiliation under the law. Christ's baptism in Jordan is a portrayal of His being released from the judgment which He would bear at Calvary for all the elect. God laid on Him the iniquities of all of those the Father gave to the Son.

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (II Cor. 5:21). What is the meaning of this verse? (1) It cannot be sin in the abstract, or sin as such. Since He did not have any sins of His own, His being made sin must be in some figurative sense. (2) It cannot be that He was a sinner, because He knew no sin. (3) It cannot be that He was guilty, because that would have disqualified Him as the Savior. (4) It does mean He was a sin offering, or God treated Him as though He were a sinner, because our sins were judicially imputed to Him. Therefore, He in reality bore those sins in His own body on the tree (I Pet. 2:24). The word for sin, even in Hebrew, can mean sin or sin offering. Jesus Christ was a sin offering. He did not become a sinner, but He was judicially treated as a sinner. The sins were not His. They were legally ours, and He paid for them at Calvary.

Where did Christ's identification with sin take place? It occurred the same place where He fulfilled all righteousness. It did not come to pass at His baptism but at Calvary when He suffered on behalf of those the Father gave to Him. Peter confirmed that Jesus Christ fulfilled all righteousness at Calvary when he spoke to the Jews about their having killed the Prince of life. Peter called the Jews' attention to the lame man who had been healed (Acts 3:12). He told them the power with which he had been healed was that of the holy and righteous One they had denied and killed (Acts 3:13-16). He added, “And now, brethren, I have known that you acted on the basis of ignorance, as also your rulers. But the things, which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He thus fulfilled” (Acts 3:17,18—translation). Thus, Peter proved that righteousness was fulfilled only figuratively at Christ's baptism. It was actually fulfilled at Calvary. In His baptism, Jesus Christ identified Himself with the work He came to accomplish at His first advent. His first act in His public ministry foretold His last on account of His elect.

Immediately after His baptism, the Spirit drove Christ into the wilderness to be tested by the Devil (Mark 1:12). Christ's trial in the desert is recorded in Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, and Luke 4:1-13. Mark's account is very concise, and Luke's account is very similar to Matthew's account.

Three prepositions in Matthew 4:1 must be understood in order to properly translate and interpret this portion of Scripture. “Then Jesus was led up [*anechthe*, aorist passive indicative of *anago*, a compound word made up of the preposition *ana* and the verb *ago*, which means I go up] by [*hupo*, ablative of agency] the Spirit into [*eis*, accusative of extent] the desert to be tried [*peirasthenai*, aorist passive infinitive of *peiradzo*], by [*hupo*, ablative of agency] the Devil” (translation). The passive voice for “tried” would not be used unless Christ was led by the Spirit into the desert for reasons other than testing.

Satan's testing of Jesus Christ is related to the kingdom. The Lord Jesus was born King. He was preserved when Herod wanted to kill all the male children. He was baptized, and then He was

driven into the wilderness to be tested to prove He is the One who was, is, and will always be the King of kings and Lord of lords. All three offices of Jesus Christ—Prophet, Priest, and King—are in Him simultaneously. But they are not exercised in sequence. He was the good Shepherd; He is the great Shepherd; and He shall be the chief Shepherd. Thus, there is order in His exercising the offices of Prophet, Priest, and King.

In Matthew 4:3-4, Satan's first test of Jesus Christ is recorded: "And having come, the one testing said to Him, since you are the Son of God, speak in order that these stones may become loaves. And He answered and said, it has been written, Man shall not live because of bread alone, but because of every word proceeding out of the mouth of God" (translation). This first test destroys tradition and proves we must be guided by Divine principles.

Matthew 4:5-7 records the second test: "Then the Devil takes Him into the holy city, and made Him stand on the highest point of the temple, And says to Him, since you are the Son of God, cast yourself down: for it has been written, to His angels He shall give a charge concerning you and on their hands they shall bear you up lest you may strike your foot against a stone. Jesus said to him, again it has been written, you shall not put the Lord your God to an all-out-test" (translation). This second test proves the end never justifies the means.

Matthew 4:8-11 records the third test: "Again, the Devil takes Him to a very exceedingly high mountain, and shows Him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory; And said to Him, I will give all these things to you, having fallen down you may worship me. Then Jesus says to him, depart Satan: for it has been written, you shall worship the Lord your God, and you shall serve Him only. Then the Devil leaves Him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to Him" (translation). This third test demolishes sensationalism.

Imagine the Devil, who knew who Christ was, telling Christ, the eternal Son of God, he would give Him authority and glory if Christ would worship before him! There was no weakness in Jesus Christ to respond to Satan's proposal. The testing was not for Christ's benefit but for the tester and the world. If Jesus Christ could have concurred with Satan's suggestion that Christ worship before him, Satan would have been promoted. He and the Lord of glory would have exchanged places. Satan would have become the Lord of glory, and Jesus Christ would have become the god of this age. At his beginning, Satan was Lucifer, the archangel who represented Christ. He was a bright and shining one, but he aspired to exalt himself above God (Is. 14; Ezek. 28). Thus, Lucifer fell and became Satan.

The word "temptation" should not be used in reference to Jesus Christ. Most denominations today teach that Christ could be tempted, could have sinned, but did not sin. Some say that since Jesus Christ had taken our flesh on Himself, He could be tempted with the possibility of falling; otherwise, it could not be considered a real temptation. They say that Christ's Deity insured His victory. They assert that sinlessness does not preclude temptation, or Adam could not have fallen. Their conclusion is that no one is so holy as to be free from temptation; moreover, it is the yielding of one's will to Satan's suggestion that constitutes sin. However, Scripture teaches that the word "temptation" can never apply to the absolutely holy Savior, because He is not only incapable of evil but also untemptable with evil (James 1:13-15).

There are five steps to an overt act of sin: (1) The first step in an act of sin involves allurements. Allurement is attraction by the offer of something attractive or desirable. We may be allured to

something morally good or bad. However, since there was no weakness within Jesus Christ, He could not be allured. (2) The second step in an act of sin is illumination. The one tempted or allured knows that having what he desires, or what has been offered to him, involves crossing a standing precept into forbidden territory. (3) The third step in an act of sin is rationalization. The person who has been allured desires something and is enlightened that he must cross a principle and step into forbidden territory to secure his desired object. Then, he begins rationalizing with his human reasoning because he will do his best to justify by rationalization what he wants to do. He will ignore Divine principle and follow his human reasoning. (4) The fourth step in an act of sin is to aspire after the offer by the tempter. (5) The fifth step in an act of sin is to surrender to an overt—open to view or knowledge, no longer concealed, or no longer secret—act of sin. Jesus Christ, the impeccable Savior, could not succumb to any of these steps in an act of sin, because He did not have a sinful nature to enable Him to yield to Satan's propositions.

One cannot deny that Satan offered something to Christ in the desert. Neither can one deny that the eternal Son was aware of every detail of Satan's offer. He is the eternal Son of God. But it must be denied that Christ wanted anything that was offered. He could not want it because there was nothing in His holy nature to desire it.

NOTE: The book **CHRIST COULD NOT BE TEMPTED** by W. E. Best presents a more comprehensive study of this subject.

THE GREATNESS OF JOHN

The universal question by the people in the entire hill country of Judea concerning John was, “What then will this child turn out to be?” (Luke 1:66 NASB). From the time it was learned that Elisabeth was pregnant, there is no doubt that the people who were close to Zacharias and Elisabeth were wondering what part their child would play in helping to bring about a change for the better in their uncultivated spiritual desert. Surely God must have something in store for them after so long a period of national spiritual drought. The answer to the people’s question was “the hand of the Lord was certainly with him” (Luke 1:66 NASB).

There was something unusual about the child in the womb of Elisabeth. The record states that when Mary was told “...that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35), she went to her cousin Elisabeth. Mary had been told that Elisabeth was with child in her old age, and she wanted to tell Elisabeth about her pregnancy. When they met, Elisabeth was occupied with

Mary’s child rather than her own. Furthermore, Zacharias was filled with thoughts of Christ rather than John. What a lesson for Christian parents! “...When Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb...” (Luke 1:41). Some are foolish enough to say that the fetus leaped in her womb as a result of reflex motility caused by the cardiovascular system. Contrary to this scientific explanation, the Biblical record states that Elisabeth exclaimed, “For, consider, as soon as the outcry of the greeting came into my ears, the baby [*brephos*, which means baby or infant] leaped for extreme joy in my womb” (Luke 1:44—translation). Can the explanation be limited to the fact that Elisabeth was filled with the Spirit (Luke 1:41)? Can science interpret this Biblical fact? Can science explain the virgin birth?

Although the baby who would be called John when he was born (Luke 1:13) leaped for joy in the womb of Elisabeth (Luke 1:41), the major attention was directed to the baby in the womb of Mary. Thus, before the births of either the forerunner or the Savior, the unborn forerunner must decrease in order that the unborn Savior might increase. This same principle was carried out in the life and ministry of John the Baptist.

John was a man who would rather anger a king than fail to expose his sins. Herod Antipas the tetrarch was a person of lesser importance than the primary king. He had inherited only one-fourth of the inheritance of Herod the Great. John was continually saying to Herod that it was not lawful for him to have his brother’s wife (Matt. 14:4; Mark 6:14-29). Faithful rebukes that do not profit provoke one to anger. John was faithful to God and to Biblical principles. He preferred being without a head to having a conscience with offense before God.

Since sinners are bold to sin, we must be bold to denounce sin. What one loves becomes an X-ray of his heart. The prophet’s voice was not silenced by his executioner. John troubled Herod more after his beheading. Herod heard John pleasurably before he beheaded him; but afterwards, it was through Herod’s conscience that he heard John. Conscience starts judgment in time that continues throughout eternity (Rom. 2:14-16).

The following are Herod's steps to misery: (1) He was subjected to John's preaching (Mark 6:20). He heard him, heard him often, and heard him with pleasure. (2) He took his brother's wife. (3) He arrested and imprisoned John. (4) He had permanent knowledge of John's righteous character. (5) He was grieved because of his oaths. (6) He acknowledged that he beheaded John (Mark 6:16).

John the Baptist stood for the Lord against the hopeless apostasy of his day. The terms "man in Christ" and "man of God" are not synonymous. In the sense of I Timothy 6:11-12, a man must be in Christ in order to be a man of God: "But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on [*epilabou*, aorist middle imperative of *epilambano*, take hold of for yourself] eternal life, whereunto thou are also called [to which you were called]...." Taking hold of eternal life for oneself is not a reward following the struggle; but according to the aorist imperative Greek verb, it is something to be done at once. Hence, the man of God is seen standing for the Lord against the hopeless apostasy described in II Timothy. The eternal life which the man of God is to take hold of for himself is not only quantitative (endless) but also qualitative (the spiritual strength to fight).

John the Baptizer had his shortcomings, but they did not distract from his message concerning the kingdom. The dark shadow cast over his soul because of his imprisonment was not unusual among God's privileged servants. Scripture furnishes many examples of depression, disappointment, and other manifestations of the flesh. God never hides the failures of His servants, whether it is Abraham's lying, Moses' anger, Elijah's discouragement, Jeremiah's disappointment, or Peter's cursing (invoking a curse on himself). John, like Elijah, was a man of like passions as all of us. He manifested his shortcomings by sending two of his disciples to Jesus Christ with the question, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another [*heteros*, one of a different kind]?" (Matt. 11:3).

Some believe the question posed by John's disciples arose not from doubt but to give the disciples an opportunity to hear from Christ's own lips the evidence of John's Divine mission. Impatience is what we really see in John's question. John did not doubt Christ's Messiahship, but he could not dismiss the thought of Christ as the avenger of sin and the Judge of all (Matt. 3:11,12). A noteworthy observation is that Jesus Christ did not refute John's messianic hope, but He confirmed His messianic character by appealing to His miracles. This fortified John's faith in Christ as the Messiah. A new beatitude was introduced to the report sent back to John in prison: "...blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended [aorist passive subjunctive—the mood of possibility—of *skandalidzo*, which means to cause to stumble or to be shocked; to cause to falter or err] in me" (Matt. 11:6). (See John 16:1; Rom. 14:21.) Blessings are forfeited by failure to acknowledge Christ's authority. John was on the winning side despite the fact that he was destined to be beheaded. He should take refuge in the truth that God's most noble servants are bitterly tested. The fires are heated seven times hotter for them (Dan. 3:19). Hence, they are often made to cry, "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name" (Dan. 9:19).

After John's disciples departed, the Lord Jesus began His discourse on the greatness of John the Baptizer by asking the three following questions: (1) "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed [*kalomos*, a reed or cane] shaken with the wind?" (Matt. 11:7—translation). Christ's approval did not endorse a timid, vacillating, unstable man. John did not bend with the winds of

either religion or politics. His commission from God was all he needed to give him stability of purpose. (2) “But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft [*malakos*, soft to the touch or delicate] raiment?” (Matt. 11:8). Persons who wear soft garments are without stamina. They do not have the constitution to withstand opposition or to endure in times of hardship. That type of person could not stand against Herod and his unlawful wife. (3) “But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea I say unto you, and more than a prophet” (Matt. 11:9). John was more than a prophet. He was also the subject of prophecy.

The Biblical answer to John’s greatness was stated by the Lord Himself: “Truly I am telling you, among them that are born of women there has not appeared a greater than John the Baptist; but the one of least importance in the kingdom of the heavens is greater than he” (Matt. 11:11—translation). The greatest man born of women became a martyr after thirty years of training and only one year of service. The Savior’s commendation of John for his greatness did not include amiability, friendliness, and agreeableness with all and everything regardless of principles in order to attract crowds. Jesus Christ said the most gracious things about His people in their absence. Unlike Christ, men often say their most gracious things about people in their hearing because they seek personal advantage: “...their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage [*opheleia*, means profit or advantage]” (Jude 16).

Christ’s commendation of John the Baptist included one of the most controversial passages in the Bible—Matthew 11:11-15. Some assume that the “least” (*mikros*, one who is low or humble in dignity) in the kingdom (Matt. 11:11) means the most degraded sinner in whose heart the kingdom is established is greater than John the Baptist. They allege that John was the herald to usher in the messianic age and the advent of the kingdom. They think he could not enjoy the benefits of the kingdom because he was destined to die. Therefore, they conclude that John must be pronounced as one blessed less than those in their desperate need violently striving to be recipients of what Christ would bestow (Matt. 11:12; Luke 16:16).

Many students of Scripture contend that John proclaimed a spiritual kingdom that is being taken by the forceful. They state that the Baptizer was less than the least in the kingdom. John was great, but there is a greatness that goes beyond what he could ever hope to experience. Their opinion is that the forerunner stood on the borders of the kingdom, but he was unable to enter. They say this mystified the disciples, but that Christ gave the answer in Matthew 18:1-3. They claim this does not mean that John the Baptizer was unsaved; but it does mean that he could not enjoy the kingdom that Christ established at His first advent.

No one violently strives to enter the kingdom. People violently strive to enter that which pertains to either the flesh or the world. The Greek word for “violent” in Matthew 11:12 is *biastai*, nominative plural of *biastes*, which means one who uses violence or is forceful. Since this is the only place this noun is used, one cannot go elsewhere in Scripture for its explanation. According to the context, Christ was speaking to the multitudes (Matt. 11:7). How can persons who claim to believe in salvation by grace say forceful or violent unregenerate men take “the kingdom of salvation” by force? The Bible says, “...There is none that seeketh after God” (Rom. 3:11). Furthermore, anyone who understands the Biblical teaching of regeneration knows that the sinner is passive in the new birth (John 3:8).

Many who advocate that the kingdom is present declare that they believe in depravity, unconditional election, and irresistible grace; but they manifest their inconsistency by saying the spiritual kingdom requires earnest labor and the highest degree of exertion in order to enter. This teaching denies that life precedes any activity toward God. Hence, their exegesis of Matthew 11:12 would be amusing were it not damaging to interpretation. Therefore, such teaching must not go unnoticed, and it must be exposed. Is everyone pressing into the kingdom? Whether “every man” is interpreted to mean without distinction or without exception does not matter in this instance, because the unregenerate are not with utmost effort pressing to get into what is unscripturally called the kingdom of grace.

In Matthew 11:12, the Greek verb *biadzo* is used the same way as the noun *biastai*—“...the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence....” Since the inflected form *biadzetai* can be either present middle indicative or present passive indicative, much discussion has ensued over the verb *biadzo*, which means to overpower by force, to be carried by storm, or to inflict violence on. Some teach that it is used in the middle voice; therefore, the kingdom is presently pressing forward. Since the kingdom has been preached, they assume that men rush to it. Thus, they conclude that believers “seize” (present active indicative of *arpadzo*, which means to seize or carry away by force) the kingdom and make it their own. This brings up a valid question, which they are obligated to answer. How can believers seize that which they claim already belongs to them in salvation? Thus, they contradict their teaching that the kingdom is salvation. They fail to understand that the Christian’s spiritual experience is from Egypt through the wilderness into Canaan and then the kingdom.

The inflected form *biadzetai* in Matthew 11:12 must be the present passive indicative of *biadzo*. Since it is the passive voice, the verse means the kingdom was suffering from the violent efforts of national Israel, as violent (*biastai*, nominative plural of *biastes*, which means violent, strong, or forceful) ones seized (present active indicative of *arpadzo*, which means to seize or carry away by force) it. The latter verb is used by John to describe the Jews who wanted to take (present active infinitive of *arpadzo*) Christ and make Him King (John 6:15). He who was born King could not be made King by men (Matt. 2:2).

The forceful religionists about whom Christ spoke wanted a kingdom on their terms. They rejected not only the rightful King but also the prerequisite to the kingdom—repentance. Christ gave a parable to correct the erroneous idea that a kingdom would be set up at His first advent (Luke 19:11-27). He foretold what the forceful Jews would say: “We do not want this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14 NASB). Furthermore, the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the baptism of repentance: “...the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him” (Luke 7:30). Many forceful religionists today want not only a preacher but a “church” on their terms. Thus, the same sins of religionists are repeated over and over.

Those who believe the kingdom was established at Christ’s first advent allege that John the Baptist was the Elijah who was to come (Matt. 11:13,14). They say he was not literally Elijah, but his coming in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17) fulfilled Malachi 4:5-6. Contrary to their declaration, “And if ye will receive” of Matthew 11:14 introduces a first class condition where assumption is factual. Thus, some were willing to accept John the Baptist as the fulfillment of Malachi 4:5-6, but Israel as a nation was destined to reject both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ—forerunner and King. Since John the Baptist, Christ’s first forerunner, was

beheaded and Jesus Christ was crucified as the King of the Jews, Elijah is yet to come as the second forerunner of the coming King. Christ went on to show that Israel failed to qualify for the kingdom's establishment at His first coming (Matt. 11:16-19).

John was not ignorant of the kingdom he proclaimed. He was specially prepared and sent forth to preach the kingdom of prophecy. Many religionists assume the disciples had the wrong concept of the kingdom. However, the supposition that religionists today know more about the nature of the kingdom than Christ's disciples is folly. Jesus Christ's sending men forth to preach what they did not understand would be incredible, but that would be true if some of the modern ideas of the kingdom espoused by men were factual. Since the Scriptures are consistent, only prejudiced men judge the disciples under a misconceived theory of the kingdom of Christ. Hence, truth suffers more from its supposed friends than from its enemies.

JOHN'S MESSAGE OF REPENTANCE

The first forerunner of Jesus Christ, named John the Baptist, was the last Old Testament prophet and the first New Testament prophet. He marks the transition from the old covenant to the new covenant. The law, the prophets, and 400 years without a voice from God preceded him. "Baptist" was not John's surname. This noun is an apposition. The two nouns "John" and "Baptist" are used like "George Washington" and "President" of the United States. John was called Baptist because he was the baptizer.

John, who was filled with the Holy Spirit before his birth, grew and developed in the wilderness (desert) of Judea, a spiritually uncultivated place. Israel's sins had caused its lack of cultivation (Jer. 2:31-37; 25:8,9). This desert was in the Jordan valley, which connects with the Dead Sea; hence, the Jordan valley is associated with death. In her history, Israel had passed dry shod through the Jordan River. Years later, in the presence of John's preaching, they must repent, bring forth fruits fitting of repentance, and be baptized in the Jordan River to signify their having died to sin. John's twofold message was repentance and the kingdom of the heavens.

There are incorrect views of repentance: (1) Remorse of conscience over sins is a wrong view of repentance. A person may regret the sins he has committed, but the repentance needs to be repented of (II Cor. 7:10). (2) A simple change of mind is an erroneous belief concerning repentance. It is more than a simple change of mind. A person may change his mind but will soon change it again. (3) Doing something which is designed to expiate sin is a false concept of repentance.

The correct view of repentance is as follows: (1) It is a radical soul transformation. (2) This radical soul transformation is the gift of God (Acts 5:31; 11:18; II Tim. 2:25). (3) This radical soul transformation, which is God's gift, is the fruit of regeneration. Every person for whom Christ died will come to repentance (II Pet. 3:9).

Two Greek verbs for repentance are used in the New Testament. The first is the compound word *metamelomai*, which means regret, be sorry, or change of mind (Matt. 21:30,32; 27:3; II Cor. 7:8; Heb. 7:21). This word signifies a change of mind, but a change of mind can fall short of being a radical soul transformation as taught within the context of II Corinthians 7. The second, which is the stronger Greek word for repentance is *metanoeo*, which means repent, have a change of heart, turn from one's sin, or change of way caused by an abhorrence of one's sins. It is used 34 times in the New Testament. This repentance is exemplified in the Old Testament by Ezekiel's reference to God's taking away the stony heart and giving a heart of flesh (a new heart) (Ezek. 36:26).

The nature of repentance is described as turning away from evil (Acts 3:26) and turning to God (Acts 20:21; 26:20). God gives time for the elect to repent (Rom. 2:4). A Biblical example of the character of repentance is Paul's statement to the Thessalonian Christians in I Thessalonians 1:9-10. Paul reversed the order to turning to God from evil. There are two kinds of repentance. There

is the initial repentance which can also be called a conversion experience. This happens only once. After the initial repentance, there is a continual repentant spirit (Rev. 2:4,5).

Repentance is an action that keeps on acting. As John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ, repentance is the forerunner of faith. Although repentance and faith are inseparable in the Biblical order, repentance always precedes faith (Acts 20:21). As the person with God-given faith not only believes but continues believing, the one to whom God has granted repentance not only repents but continues repenting in preparation for each act of faith. The word faith (*pistis*) is used three basic ways in Scripture: (1) personal faith that God gives to each person He regenerates, (2) Jesus Christ Himself, and (3) the system of truth. Conclusively, repentance is the forerunner of saving faith (justifying faith before one's consciousness, Christ being the object of this saving faith). It is the forerunner of every act of faith in the Christian life, and a repentant spirit prepares the individual for accepting and embracing the system of truth (Phil. 1:27; Jude 3).

The following are signs of repentance: (1) True inward sorrow for sins is a sign of repentance (II Cor. 7:10). Every person who has had a true conversion experience can relate with this. (2) Hatred of one's sins evidences repentance (Ezek. 36:31). (3) The prompting of grace to turn from sins denotes repentance (Ezek. 18:30). (4) Turning to God and asking for forgiveness is a sign of repentance (Hos. 5:15). (5) The change must be genuine, and it must be demonstrated in order to depict repentance (Matt. 3:7,8). (6) Initial repentance is manifested in obedience to baptism, which is an answer of a good conscience toward God (I Pet. 3:21). (7) The subsequent spirit of repentance to the initial repentance is expressed by the crucifixion of the flesh (Gal. 2:20). An apostate cannot repent.

John's message to the masses in general and his message to the Pharisees and Sadducees differed. His announcement in the desert of Judea to the masses in general was "you repent for the kingdom of the heavens has approached" (Matt. 3:2—translation). In contrast, when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Offspring of snakes, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" (Matt. 3:7—translation). God's strongest language is against religionists. The Pharisees were hypocrites. Like the liberals and modernists who misinterpret the Scriptures, these Pharisees misinterpreted the law of God. The Sadducees denied the resurrection and the angels; hence, they denied the supernatural (Acts 23:6). At the beginning of his ministry, John was popular, and the people came to him as his fame spread abroad. His popularity among the Jews who knew the Old Testament Scriptures is understandable. They knew Isaiah had prophesied a forerunner of the Lord, and they also realized their spiritual drouth in being without a prophet for 400 years.

Of the three major views held by religionists pertaining to the subject of repentance, the first for consideration is baptismal regeneration. This view maintains that repentance and confession are worthless unless they are accompanied with baptism. Contrary to this teaching, baptism is not for the purpose of repentance. Those who hold this view say baptism is for the purpose of remission of sins: "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). However, the preposition "for" comes from the Greek preposition *eis*, the accusative of cause, which means "because of" the remission of sins. The correct interpretation of Greek prepositions can be determined only by the context in which they are used. Paul spoke of Jews who had already been delivered by blood who "were all baptized unto [*eis*, accusative of

reference] Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (I Cor. 10:2). Those Jews were baptized with reference to their relation to Moses. We are baptized with reference to our relation to Christ: “For as many of you as have been baptized into [*eis*, accusative of reference] Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27). It does not signify that we are baptized in order to be saved. John the Baptist demanded that those he baptized first produce fruits worthy of repentance (Matt. 3:8). They must prove by their works that they had repented before he would baptize them.

The second of the major views held by religionists on the subject of repentance is that of covenant theology. Those who hold this view maintain that there is a class of Scriptures which makes baptism and salvation look identical (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mark 16:16), and there is another class that makes them look separate (Matt. 3:7,8; Luke 3:12-14; Acts 10:44-48; 11:15). They affirm that the Scriptural teaching is that baptism is the outward part of repentance showing submission to Christ in the name of Christ (Acts 2:38) on the ground of authority (Matt. 18:5,20). This assumption is that baptism for the remission of sins is the result of submission because Jesus Christ commanded it. The covenant theologians believe in infant baptism. To substantiate that belief, they say the Jews were baptized on dry ground, and fathers, mothers, and children passed through the Red Sea on dry ground. They believe the children being in covenant relationship with the parents are saved unless after they are grown they forsake, and then their names can be taken out of the book of life.

The third view is that there is no repentance or baptism for the assembly of Christ today. This view is held by some dispensational premillennialists. Their opinion is that sign gifts, including water baptism, were associated with Israel; and when Israel was temporarily laid aside, these ended (I Cor. 1:22; 13:8; Eph. 4:5). They contend that “church truth” was given only by Paul in the Pauline Epistles. Their observation is that the Bible teaches Christ’s body had its historical beginning at Acts 13:9-13. They give the following reasons for their conviction: (1) Saul was separated to the work to which God called him. (2) Saul, his Hebrew name, was changed to Paul, his Gentile name. (3) Prior to this time, Saul’s name was associated with Barnabas, but now Paul is associated with his company. Paul is now in command. (4) Prior to this time, Saul had preached only to Jews, and that is his confirmation; but now, the good news is given by Paul to the Gentiles. (5) Sergius Paulus was saved by faith alone. He did not repent nor was he water baptized, as required under the kingdom gospel. (6) Prior to this time the only means of salvation was through the nation of Israel; but now, a Gentile was saved in spite of the Jews. (7) This age is a part of that hidden mystery, mystery of the gospel, given to us by God through Paul, the apostle of this age. Apollos knew only the baptism of John until he sat under the teaching of two tentmakers and was instructed more perfectly in the way of the Lord. After 1900 years, believers still know only the baptism of John and are unwilling to submit to the tentmaker, Paul.

Those who project the preceding arguments believe there were kingdom apostles, those called by Jesus Christ during His public ministry, and there were church apostles. They assume that the apostles commissioned to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel in Matthew 10 were kingdom apostles, but apostles subsequent to them, including Paul, were church apostles.

Does Acts 13:9-13 record the beginning of the assembly of Jesus Christ? Some Greek scholars, who are prejudiced in their interpretation, think the body of Christ had its historical beginning in this portion of Scripture at the time Saul was called Paul. However, there is nothing in this portion of Scripture to indicate that this is the beginning of the assembly of Jesus Christ. The beginning of Paul’s first missionary tour is recorded in Acts 13. As certain prophets and teachers

in the assembly at Antioch ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them” (Acts 13:2). Thus, Saul was sent on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-15:39). The prophets are distinguished from the teachers by the enclitic particle (*kai*), used as a coordinating conjunction. The three prophets were Barnabas, Simeon, and Lucius. The two teachers were Manaen and Saul, whose name was called Paul.

The following things should be observed in answer to the arguments given by those who claim that there is no repentance or baptism for the assembly of Jesus Christ today.

FIRST—When did the apostles become members of the assembly? Did they become members at Pentecost? Did they become members when Jesus Christ called them to Himself? According to Ephesians 2:20, written by Paul by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostles were the foundation of the assembly of Jesus Christ. Paul had just stated to the Ephesian saints that through Jesus Christ both saved Jews and saved Gentiles have access by one Spirit to the Father (Eph. 2:18). They were fellow citizens with the saints and were members of the family of God, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:19,20). A foundation is a very important part of the house itself. Since the apostles called together by Christ constituted the foundation of the assembly, the assembly did not begin on the day of Pentecost. Neither did it begin in Acts 13:9-13 when Saul’s name was called Paul. The assembly (*ekklesia*) which Jesus Christ is building was begun with the apostles in Matthew 16. This is the universal aspect of the assembly. The universal aspect of the assembly is demonstrated in local assemblies where two or three are gathered together in Christ’s name agreeing (Matt. 18). Both universal and local aspects of the assembly (*ekklesia*) are given in Matthew’s Gospel, not in Acts or the Epistles. The apostles were the first to be set in the assembly (I Cor. 12:28).

SECOND—Is there a distinction between “kingdom apostles” and “church apostles”? There is no distinction between them. Paul was not one of the twelve apostles. He was one born out of due season (I Cor. 15:8,9). There are only a few other apostles named in the Scriptures.

THIRD—What is the significance of Saul’s name being called Paul? The statement “Then Saul (who also is called Paul)” does not indicate that this name was given him for the first time. As a Jew, his name was Saul, and as a Roman citizen, his name was Paul. He undoubtedly had both names. He was no longer called by his Hebrew name, which means “requested,” but he would now be called Paul, which means “little.” Paul was a Hebrew by birth; he was a Roman by citizenship; he was a Greek by culture. God chose this man to be His minister to the Gentiles. He would come in contact with the Jews. When he first began his ministry, he spoke many times to the Jews. However, his primary ministry was to the Gentiles; therefore, he was called by his Gentile name. The record of two names being given to an individual is not uncommon in Scripture—John Mark (Acts 12:12), Simeon Niger (Acts 13:1), Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7), Barsabas Justus (Acts 1:23), etc. Sometimes a new name is equivalent to a new dignity. For instance, when Peter was called by the Lord, his name was Cephas, which means a stone; but it was changed to Peter to signify dignity.

FOURTH—What is the meaning of “Paul’s gospel”? Was Paul’s gospel different from other names of the gospel? Many compound names are used in the Old Testament to describe Jehovah. The numerous compound names are necessary because no one name can describe the infinite God. There are also many names ascribed to Jesus Christ throughout the Scriptures. The same

thing can be said concerning the gospel. The gospel, like God Himself, can never be adequately described by names.

There are not different gospels. The one message of the unmerited favor of God is given the following designations:

1. "The gospel of God" signifies its source. The message was settled in heaven before the foundation of the world (Rom. 1:1).
2. "The gospel of Christ" denotes its subject (II Cor. 10:14).
3. "The gospel of the grace of God" directs attention to its unmerited favor (Acts 20:24).
4. "The gospel of your salvation" specifies its purpose (Eph. 1:13).
5. "The gospel of peace" evidences its inner protection and assurance in warfare (Eph. 6:15).
6. "This gospel of the kingdom" points to its hope and prospect (Matt. 4:23; Acts 20:25).
7. "The everlasting gospel" directs attention to its unchangeableness (Rev. 14:6).
8. "My [Paul's] gospel" identifies its human channel (Rom. 2:16; 16:25; II Tim. 2:8). It was Paul's by inspiration and revelation plus commitment (Gal. 1:12; II Tim. 3:16).
9. "The gospel which was preached of me [Paul]" names the message he preached (Gal. 1:11; 2:2).
10. "Our gospel" shows its commitment to the recipients of grace, because it has been revealed to us by the Holy Spirit (II Cor. 4:3; I Thess. 1:5; II Thess. 2:14). Paul included himself with the assemblies when he called the message "our gospel." We could not understand the gospel if it were not revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. The message has come to us in the sense that all truth is made known by God (Matt. 16:17; II Cor. 4:3,6; Eph. 1:17-23; I John 2:20,27).
11. "The mystery of the gospel" signifies that what was set forth in types and shadows in the Old Testament has been made plain since the advent of Jesus Christ (Eph. 6:19).

The gospel is the message of the unmerited favor of God, whether it is preached in the Old Testament, the New Testament, presently, or during the tribulation period when God will save the nation of Israel. The one message is that of the infinite indescribable God. It was good news in the Old Testament through types and shadows of Him who would come and what He would do when He came.

The nature of the good news is the same in every age. The gospel was not one thing in one age and something else in a different age. That would be like saying election is one thing in one age and something else in another age. God has one purpose. It had been kept silent for long ages, from eternity to Christ's first advent: "Now to the one who is able to strengthen you on the basis of my gospel, and the proclamation of Jesus Christ; on the basis of the revelation of the mystery that has been kept silent in times eternal, But now has been made plain, through prophetic

writings, according to the mandate of the eternal God having been made to all nations for obedience to the faith” (Rom. 16:25,26—translation). Since the advent of Jesus Christ, the God-Man Mediator, it has been made plain. That which was set forth in types and shadows in the Old Testament has been made plain in the New Testament. Although it has been made plain, there are many things about the gospel we do not comprehend any more than we can comprehend the Person of Jesus Christ and the hypostatic union, both of which are mysteries. Furthermore, salvation is a mystery. Although we are recipients of God’s work of grace, there are many things about it that are inexplicable. It has been made plain to a point, but we do not fully comprehend its aspects. It will take all eternity to understand the Godhead, the Person of Christ, the mystery of the gospel, and the mystery of Israel who shall be saved. But it has been made plain in the sense that we are no longer living under the shadows, because the substance has appeared. He gave Himself an offering for us, and we understand that. This is the good tidings we are commissioned to make known to the whole world (Matt. 28:19,20).

The gospel, called by many names, was committed to Paul. He said he committed it to Timothy to commit to faithful men that they might commit it to the assemblies of Christ, which are universities of God for the edification of the elect that we might make known the wisdom of God to evil and good forces in the heavenlies. Paul discussed the awesome responsibility of the assembly in Ephesians 3:1-21.

There are two major divisions in Ephesians 3; each begins with the expression “for this cause [reason]” (Eph. 3:1,14). The first refers back to Paul’s statements in regard to the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles having been broken down (Eph. 2:11-22). Paul, who was a prisoner on behalf of the Gentiles, was writing for the spiritual benefit of the Ephesians (Eph. 3:1). They had heard of the administration of the grace of God which had been given to Paul for them (Eph. 3:2). The revelation that made known the mystery in Ephesians 3:3 and the explanation of the mystery is recorded in Galatians 1:10-16. Paul explained the mystery which in other generations was not made known to men. A Biblical mystery is not something incomprehensible, but it is a secret that God alone can make known to the elect. It is a secret that unless one has the grace of God he cannot understand (Eph. 3:5). God revealed this mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God, by the Spirit to His apostles and prophets (Eph. 3:9).

The mystery is that the assembly is constituted of both saved Jews and saved Gentiles, since the middle wall of partition has been broken down (Eph. 2:14). The former inexplicability of how the saved Gentiles could come along and receive the same blessings on the promises that the saved Jews were experiencing was now made known. The assembly age itself was not mysterious to the prophets of old. David saw three periods of time (Ps. 110). The present is the period of time when Jesus Christ is seated at the Father’s right hand making intercession for His own, saving to the uttermost, and preserving all who come to Him. The truth that the Gentiles would be fellow heirs and fellow body members in the same body—the assembly, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ through the gospel was not formerly known (Eph. 3:6).

God made Paul a minister of God according to the gift of God having been given to him by the activity of God’s power. Men are not made ministers by schools but by God. Being made a minister by God to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ produced humility in Paul. He declared that he was the very least of all saints (Eph. 3:8). Who can place a value on God’s riches? The purpose for bringing to light the administration of the mystery which from the

beginning of the ages had been hidden in God was in order that the diversified wisdom of God shall be made known now through the assembly to the rulers and to the authorities in the heavenlies. Most assembly members do not realize the value of the assembly.

Let us get a glimpse of the impact of the assembly making known the diversified wisdom of God to rulers and authorities in the heavenlies. We are told to "...be strong.... Put on the complete armor of God, for you to be able to stand against stratagems of the Devil, because our conflict is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies" (Eph. 6:10-12—translation). This is our conflict against evil forces in the heavenlies. We make known the varied wisdom of God not only to evil but also to good powers in the heavenlies. There are good (elect) and bad (nonelect) angels. The angelic host of good angels are presently desiring (present active indicative of *epithumeo*) to look into (aorist active infinitive of *parakupto*, which means look into, stoop, or bend over) our salvation (I Pet. 1:12). We can see this typified in the cherubim who were bending over the mercy seat which covered the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies in the tabernacle. The cherubim were fashioned as though they were looking down into the ark of the covenant searching diligently. This salvation was not revealed to the angels but to us.

God is making His diversified wisdom known to elect and nonelect angels through the assembly of Jesus Christ. The gospel has been committed to people who have been born of the Spirit of God and initiated by Him into the family of God. The assembly becomes an institute for the edification of God's people in time, and the institute to teach evil and good forces what is truth. Good angels desire to find out more about our redemption, because there is no redemption for them. We have something and know something that the angels do not fully comprehend. The reason is obvious. Salvation must be experienced in order to comprehend it.

The second division of Ephesians 3 begins with "for this cause [reason]" (Eph. 3:14). This looks back to the recognition that the assembly to whom the gospel has been revealed is the university of God. This cognizance produces humility in God's people. We are more concerned about that part of ourselves that is spiritual rather than the part that is flesh. We desire to be rooted, having been fully established, in order that we may be fully able to comprehend "with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph. 3:18,19). God is able to do far beyond all that we are asking or thinking, according to the power operating in us. Therefore, all glory in the assembly of Jesus Christ to all generations of the ages of ages belongs to Him (Eph. 3:20,21).

THE BAPTISMAL FORMULA

Is John's baptism, which was the baptism of repentance, for the assembly of Jesus Christ today? What is the baptismal formula for the New Testament assembly today? If there were no repentance for this dispensation of grace, there would be no reference to repentance subsequent to the time the assembly began. Since there are recorded instances of repentance subsequent to the beginning of the assembly, the concept of no repentance for this dispensation of grace is destroyed. If there is no spirit of repentance, God did not give repentance; and those who claim there is no repentance for this age are in error.

John's baptism was the baptism of repentance, because it identified baptism with repentance. He said, "I am now baptizing you in [*en*, locative of sphere] water because of [*eis*, accusative of cause] your repentance..." (Matt. 3:11—translation). John had warned the Jews that a physical descent from Abraham and an outward conformity to the Jewish ceremonies would not suffice to justify them before God.

God's gift of repentance is more than a change of mind. It is also an act of the will. John's baptism because of (*eis*) repentance was not in the name of the Godhead, as we are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit. It was not in the name of the Lord Jesus, but it was through faith in their Messiah who was about to be manifested. It was not without some knowledge of the Holy Spirit, because John preached that the Messiah would baptize them in the Holy Spirit.

Not until the Acts of the Apostles do we find the statement about being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5). Three Greek prepositions are used to express "in" the name. The preposition *eipi*, the dative of reference, which means "on" is used in Acts 2:38. It means be baptized on the confession of which the name implies. The preposition *eis*, the accusative of reference, which means "with reference to" is used in Acts 8:16 and 19:5. It means baptized with reference to the authority of Jesus Christ, which denotes that the one being baptized is united with Jesus Christ. The preposition *en*, the locative of sphere, which means "the sphere" in which true baptism is accomplished is used in Acts 10:48.

In the great commission, the name in which believers are to be baptized is the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). In Acts, believers were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus, and the Lord. Nevertheless, it was baptism, because all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Jesus Christ (Col. 2:9). All that is known about the Father and the Holy Spirit is known through Jesus Christ and His redemptive work. The disciples of Acts 19:5 were baptized because they had never been baptized in the manner prescribed by the Lord Jesus in the great commission.

Was John's baptism Christian baptism? Was Apollos' baptism, which was only John's baptism, Christian baptism? Was Apollos baptized with Christian baptism with a number of people in Corinth who believed? Apollos was a native of Alexandria (Acts 18:24). Alexandria was noted for its library. One-third of the population was Jewish. Apollos was a learned man, powerful in

the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord and was boiling with enthusiasm in the Spirit, speaking and teaching accurately concerning Jesus Christ. But he lacked information pertaining to the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. Aquila and Priscilla, having heard him, took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately. When Apollos passed through Achaia, he assisted ones who had believed through grace. There is no operative faith except through grace. Faith does not operate and bring grace to an individual, but one believes through grace.

Although Apollos needed further instruction in Acts 18, there is no record of his being rebaptized in Acts 19. Furthermore, the apostles had received only the baptism of John. There is no record of the Lord's disciples being rebaptized at Pentecost, as some believe. The message at Pentecost was "repent" with reference to initial repentance, but the disciples had already experienced initial repentance. John's baptism was sufficient for them. It was the only baptism the Lord Jesus had. He was baptized with John's baptism, but for a different purpose. He was not baptized with reference to His repentance, because He had no sin of which to repent. But He was baptized because that was the beginning of His public ministry when He was made known (John 1:29-34).

John's baptism was from God and not from man: "The baptism of John, from where [*pothen*, an interrogative adverb] was it? from [*ek*, ablative of source] heaven, or from men? And they were reasoning [imperfect middle indicative of *dialogidzomai*] among themselves saying if we may say from heaven he will say to us, why then did you not believe him? But if we may say from men, we fear the crowd. For all regard John as a prophet" (Matt. 21:25,26—translation). They answered Christ by saying, "We have not known [perfect active indicative of *oida*, which means have known, perceived, or understood], and he said to them, neither am I telling you by what authority I am doing these things" (Matt. 21:27—translation). Christ would not repeat the truth He had already displayed by submitting to John's baptism. He would not tell them explicitly what He had demonstrated implicitly by His submission to John's baptism. If they had acknowledged John as a prophet, they would have not only accepted his message, but would have also submitted to his baptism. They did not accept him as a prophet; therefore, they did not accept his message. Because of that, they did not submit themselves to baptism. Therefore, they rejected the counsel of God.

All the people having heard John were submitting themselves to baptism, having acknowledged God's justice (Luke 7:29). "But the Pharisees and the lawyers set aside God's plan as being for the purpose of themselves, not having been baptized by him" (Luke 7:30—translation). Those who submitted to baptism were acknowledging God's justice. Those who set aside baptism were rejecting the truth of God; therefore, they were not acknowledging God's justice.

The baptismal formula for Christians cannot be baptism with reference to Moses (I Cor. 10:1,2). The Israelites were baptized with reference "to [*eis*, accusative of reference]" (I Cor. 10:2) their relation to Moses. Galatians 3:27 is a companion passage for us—"For all of you who were baptized with reference to [*eis*, accusative of reference] Christ put on [*enedusasthe*, aorist middle indicative of *enduo*] Christ for yourselves" (translation). We have nothing to do with our getting into Christ; but we do participate in the action of putting on Christ in our daily lives; and this is proved by the middle voice of *enduo*.

The formula for baptism was given by the Head of the assembly, Jesus Christ Himself: "Go into the world preaching the gospel, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and

of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19—translation). There is no contradiction between baptism into the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ as taught in Acts. We have access to the Father by the Son through the agency of the Holy Spirit. One who denies any one Person in the Godhead does not have access to the Father. The Father chose us, the Son redeemed us, and the Holy Spirit quickened us. All the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Jesus Christ.

JOEL'S PROPHECY OF BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT AND FIRE

Baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire was prophesied by both Joel and John the Baptist (Joel 2:28-30; Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16). The Hebrew word for Spirit is found 388 times in the Old Testament. The Greek word for Spirit is used 378 times in the New Testament. The Holy Spirit was the Agent in the reconstruction of the chaotic state of creation. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1). The earth became without form and void, and darkness was on the deep. The Spirit moved on the chaotic state of creation (Gen. 1:2). The Holy Spirit had a part in the beginning of man (Gen. 2:7). He did not always strive with man through the ministry of the word (Gen. 6:3). Before Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came on judges, craftsmen, prophets, and civil leaders in the Old Testament for their empowerment for a particular mission (Num. 24:2; Judg. 3:10; 6:34; etc.), and then He departed from them (I Sam. 16:14). At Pentecost, the assembly was baptized in the Holy Spirit. Five of the seven references to baptism in the Spirit were prophetic (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5). The other two are historical (Acts 11:16; I Cor. 12:13). Subsequent to Pentecost, the New Testament speaks of being born of the Spirit (John 3:5-8), having been baptized in the Spirit (I Cor. 12:13), having been sealed with the Spirit (Eph. 1:13), being filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), and having been anointed with the Spirit (I John 2:20,27; II Cor. 1:21).

The word "fire" is used more than 375 times in the Bible, and about 76 of those are in the New Testament. The Hebrew word is *esh*. It is used in the context of either God's revelation of Himself to man or man's approach to God in worship. In order to properly interpret this word in Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16, some of its uses in the Old Testament should be considered.

When Adam and Eve fell, the sword like fire protected the way into the garden so that in order to get back into the garden of Eden they must go through fire (Gen. 3:24). Fire symbolizes separation of life in the separation of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden by the flaming sword. The climax of God's covenant with Abraham was by a lamp of fire (Gen. 15:17). God appeared to Moses in a blazing flame of fire (Ex. 3:2,4). The Lord descended on Mount Sinai in fire (Ex. 19:18). Ezekiel's vision was dominated by fire (Ezek. 1:26,27). The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire is a symbol of God's judgment on those cities (Gen. 18;19). Korah, with 250 followers, was consumed by fire (Num. 16:32-35). God destroyed Nadab and Abihu with fire because they offered strange fire (Lev. 10:1,2). Fire symbolizes cleansing (Is. 6:1-9; Mal. 3:2). Conclusively, in the Old Testament, fire symbolizes separation, judgment, destruction, and cleansing.

To one person fire means death, and to another it means life. Fire refers to God's revelation of Himself and man's approach to God by means of a sacrifice. Where fire and blood are mentioned together one thinks of sacrifice which is blessing. This is demonstrated in the offerings of Leviticus 1-5. But where there is fire without blood there is a curse.

The New Testament Greek word for fire is *pur*. It is used a few times in a literal sense (Matt. 17:15; Luke 22:55; Acts 28:5). It is used symbolically of the Spirit (Acts 2:3), of the judgment seat of Jesus Christ where our works will be tried so as by fire (I Cor. 3:13-15), of God as a

consuming fire (Heb. 12:29), and of the Lord Jesus as He judges the assemblies (Rev. 1:14). The word denotes judgment in many of the approximately 76 references. Since John was predicting blessing when he said Jesus Christ would baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire, how could judgment be a blessing? This will be considered later in our discussion.

The prophecy of Joel, some of which was quoted by Peter at Pentecost, may be divided in the following manner: (1) Joel foretold the day of the Lord (chap. 1). (2) In view of the day of the Lord, Joel exhorted and consoled the people (chap. 2). (3) Although the bondage of God's people may be long and grievous, it shall not be everlasting (chap. 3).

The day of the Lord, which will be associated with fire, is described in Joel 1:1-10 and foreshadowed in verse 15. National calamity came on Israel. The memory of God's judgment should be transmitted to all posterity and written for the generations to come (Ps. 102:18). Israel should let their woes be warnings, their sufferings be standing sermons, and their corrections be instructions for future generations. Paul gave the same kind of instruction to the Corinthian saints when he drew from Old Testament analogies. A record should be kept of God's great works, whether they were for blessings or punishments, as a list for the benefit of posterity, not with vain affection of wit but with holy gravity.

The insects listed in Joel 1:4 were instruments of Divine judgment. Joel was calling Israel to repentance in order to avert a more serious judgment. The palmerworm derives its name in the Hebrew from shaving, because it shaves the fruit from the earth. The locust derives its name in Hebrew from multitude. It crops the tops of plants. The cankerworm derives its name in Hebrew from licking. It feeds on flowers and fruit. The caterpillar derives its name from wasting, because it utterly consumes fruit, branches, and all. Joel was calling the people to repentance in order to avert a more serious judgment by means of hostile armies, of which the insects he mentioned were only types. Each invasion was with more intense destruction. What one insect left, the next devoured until all was destroyed. This is more than history. It is prophecy, a type of another more terrible invasion which had its partial fulfillment in the day of Joel and will have its complete fulfillment in the day of the Lord.

Instruction to the people in view of their judgmental circumstances was to lament like a virgin (1:8), be ashamed (1:11), and gird yourselves (1:13). Joel was calling them to repentance. The Lord's ministers and the land mourned (1:9,10). The land lies under the curse of barrenness, even at its best. Creation is groaning because of the curse, waiting for the time the curse will be lifted (Rom. 8:20-22). The offerings were no longer being made (1:13). The priests should sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather in the house of God, and cry to the Lord (1:14). The place where they were to assemble was "into the house of the LORD your God." He was their God by virtue of the covenant. He is ours by virtue of the eternal covenant of grace. The object of this day was for repentance and confession of sins. There must be humiliation in order for a person to have proper reflection on the things of the Lord. Private mourning and humiliation are not enough under public calamities. A time should be appointed to come to the appointed place that the fast should be made known. There was no example of fasting before Moses. Neither the Savior nor the apostles instituted any particular fast. True fasting results when believers become so consumed with holy business that everything else is laid aside.

There is a lesson in this for us today. The person with God-given faith embraces Christ; his praying embraces the sovereignty of God; and his fasting denies himself. Because of the

desolated condition of the institutional assembly, which is lying in spiritual waste today inflicted by many spiritual foes, we have spiritual drought. As in the days of the prophecy of Amos (Amos 8:11), there is a famine for the word of God in all its purity. The call goes forth to repent, but people will not repent. This repentance must begin with the leaders. Because of famine for the word of God and the worship of God, the judgment of God came in Joel's time. America cannot continue the way she is going without experiencing the judgment of God.

The day of the Lord was interpreted in Joel 1:15. Joel prophesied that it would come as a destruction. The day of the Lord would be associated with fire (Joel 1:19,20). The Spirit took the opportunity afforded by an unparalleled scarcity of things in Joel's time to awaken the people in respect to the day of the Lord. National calamity came on Israel, which foreshadows the great and terrible day in which God's power shall be manifested in judgment.

The blowing of the trumpet is linked with the day of the Lord (Joel 2:1). The priests' duty was to blow the trumpet. There were two trumpets blown in Israel (Num. 10). The trumpets come in with striking fitness after the instruction respecting the movement of the cloud. They were made of one piece of silver, but they served a dual purpose. One was blown to assemble the people, and the other was blown for an alarm to alert the Israelites for journeying.

The trumpet must give a distinct message. This ancient custom of the Old Testament to give a distinct message is for us today. The man of God must give a certain message in order that the people of God may prepare themselves for battle: "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" (I Cor. 14:8). Shall we permit men to advance into judgment without being warned? Should we remain quiet and not give a distinct sound? People must be exposed to truth whether or not they heed it. Sounding the alarm is not a warning concerning what has already taken place but the warning pertaining to that which was about to take place. This follows the description of the dread army which was to overrun the land.

The day of the Lord is accompanied with darkness, gloominess, clouds, thick darkness, and fire (Joel 2:2,3). Joel was giving a prophecy of the end time when fire will devour before the people; a flame will burn behind them; and behind them there will be a desolate wilderness. Nothing shall escape them (Joel 2:3). "The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining" (Joel 2:10).

Darkness is the emblem of intense sorrow, but light is the emblem of joy. The image describes the universality of darkness. Darkness will grow darker. In this instance, instead of the mountain tops catching the gladdening rays of the early morning sun and the light spreading from one height to another until the whole earth is arrayed in light, all will become darkness. Apostasy will continue to escalate until the end time. The greatness of Israel's sin brought judgment, and it will bring a terrible time of judgment which she has not seen, even in the years of her captivity.

The day of the Lord is described as "great and very terrible; and who can abide it?" (Joel 2:11). In view of the coming day and God's intervention, Israel should repent. An event too clear to miss is the appeal to the nation to repent before the judgment of God fell (Joel 2:12-17). There is a turning with the brain without turning with the heart. However, alteration is required of not only the mind but also the affections of the heart. Without a change in the affections of the heart, repentance is not genuine. Christians know that when the Lord appeals to us to repent, repentance is needed; and we escape chastisement only by running to God.

Repentance is represented in Scripture as renewing from decay, refining from dross, recovering from a malady, cleansing from soil, rising from a fall, or turning. Some rend neither their hearts nor their garments. Others rend their garments and not their hearts, and some rend their hearts and garments. Inward sorrow and outward expression must both be manifested. Inward sorrow is manifested by what we consistently do. When the heart is made clean, the garment is also made white. A rent heart is followed by a rent veil and a rent heaven (Matt. 27:51; Is. 64:1).

The nation was also called to fast. Fasting is self-denial. Feeding the flesh will increase corruption (Jer. 5:7,8). Abstinence subdues the flesh. This is what Paul had in mind when he said he buffeted his body to keep it in subjection (I Cor. 9:27). Fasting days and soul fattening days are not the same.

The nation was called to weeping and mourning. Peter never looked as good as when he wept bitter tears in repentance. A Christian out of the will of God never looks better than when he is weeping bitter tears of repentance. King David illustrates this in Psalms 6 and 51. Repentance includes fasting and mourning. What is a humbling day without a humble heart? Sorrow for sin must not be light and sudden but heavy and piercing. Israel must rend their hearts and not their garments (Joel 2:13).

The appeal was heeded. The priests, the ministers of the Lord, led out in the turning. They wept between the porch and the altar. The porch denotes fellowship with God, and the altar proclaims accomplished redemption. Israel repented and manifested repentance. The Lord blessed her (Joel 2:18,19), emancipated her (Joel 2:20), prospered her (Joel 2:21-27), judged the Gentile nations (Joel 3:1-8), and promised kingdom blessings (Joel 3:17-21).

God promised repentant Israel former and latter rain (Joel 2:23). Charismatics claim that the former rain refers to the original outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, and the latter rain denotes the charismatic revival of the last days. Contrary to their opinion, this verse and James 5:7-8 are linked: "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." Hence, the rain ties with the outpouring of the Spirit predicted by Joel, and the latter rain designates an event which will immediately precede Christ's second coming.

JOHN'S PROPHECY OF BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT AND FIRE

The law and the prophets were “until” John the Baptist (Luke 16:16). His prediction of Christ’s baptizing in the Holy Spirit and fire, like the Old Testament prophecies, made no distinction between Christ’s first and second advents. The Holy Spirit led him to speak of the partial near fulfillment at Pentecost and the complete remote fulfillment at Christ’s second advent. John’s question to Christ from prison by his disciples, “Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?” (Matt. 11:3), shows he did not understand the time lapse between Christ’s two advents. Furthermore, the disciples having come together were questioning the Lord saying, “Are you at this time restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6—translation). The Lord replied, “It is not yours to know times or seasons which the Father placed in His own authority” (Acts 1:7—translation). The Lord’s reply does not contradict the future establishment of the kingdom.

John and the disciples understood the nature of the kingdom, but they were ignorant concerning the time of its establishment. The time of the kingdom’s establishment remains a secret with the Father (Matt. 24:36). The Son Himself, because of His subordination to the Father, said He did not know the time (Mark 13:32). This does not indicate that He does not know all things. But He spoke in subordination to the Father. He was the perfect One and always did the will of His Father. Conclusively, the disciples knew nothing of a kingdom already set up. It was not set up at the first advent of Jesus Christ. Surely the apostles would have known if Christ had already established the kingdom. Subsequent to Pentecost, the apostles did not preach that the kingdom had been established. Jesus Christ did not correct the disciples pertaining to their view of the kingdom. Restoring the kingdom to Israel could mean nothing else than the kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament.

In Matthew 3:11, John the Baptist addressed the Pharisees and Sadducees when he said, “I am baptizing you in water because of your repentance: but the One coming after me is stronger than I, of whom I am not worthy to be carrying His sandals; He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire” (translation). They were the ones going out to be baptized by him (Matt. 3:7). In Luke 3:7, Luke stated, “Then he was saying to the crowds going out to be baptized by [*hupo*, ablative of agency] him, offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from [*apo*, ablative of separation] the coming wrath?” (translation). In both Matthew and Luke, the context of each passage proves John’s prediction of Christ’s baptizing in the Holy Spirit and fire was addressed primarily to the Israelites. He was warning them of coming judgment. The ax was already being laid at the root of the tree, and God was about to speak to them of judgment in his message (Matt. 3:10; Luke 3:9). God will manifest His wrath on all the unregenerate. John’s prophecy of Christ’s baptizing in the Spirit and fire was a blessing to the regenerate but a curse to the unregenerate. In like manner, our proclamation of truth is a savor of life to those the Holy Spirit regenerates, but it is a savor of death to the unregenerate (II Cor. 2:14-16).

John’s prediction of Christ’s baptizing in the Holy Spirit and fire should be considered from each of the synoptic Gospels. Matthew included fire in his account: “I am baptizing you in water because of your repentance, but the One coming after me is stronger than I, of whom I am not worthy to be carrying His sandals: He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matt. 3:11—

translation). Mark's short account of John's prophecy eliminated fire: "I baptized you in water; but He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8—translation). Luke included fire in his Gospel: "John answered, saying to all, I indeed baptize you in water; but someone stronger than I is coming, of whom I am not worthy to untie His sandals: He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire" (Luke 3:16—translation). John omitted fire: "And I had not known Him: but the One having sent me to baptize in water, that One said to me, on whomever you may see the Spirit coming down, and remaining on Him, this is the One baptizing in the Holy Spirit" (John 1:33—translation). Luke, who also wrote Acts, did not include the word fire in Acts 1:5—"John indeed baptized in water; but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days after these" (translation).

Luke's account of this subject is more detailed than Matthew's. It is recorded in Luke 3:7-18. Both Matthew and Luke make reference to the fan in Christ's hand (Matt. 3:12; Luke 3:17). Four references are made to judgment by both writers: (1) The ax, which destroys, is a means of judgment. (2) The shovel is an element of judgment because as the winnowing shovel does its work, the chaff is blown away by the wind. (3) Fire, which indicates destruction, is a means of judgment. Matthew calls it unquenchable fire in Matthew 3:12. (4) Wrath is also a means of judgment. Both Matthew and Luke use the word fire three times (Matt. 3:10,11,12; Luke 3:9,16,17). It is clear that fire has reference to judgment. The first reference to fire is connected with judging the unfruitful trees; the second, with the blessing of judging by believers in the future; and the third, with final judgment at the great white throne.

Baptism in the Spirit and fire cannot be regeneration—the new birth. Some believe that baptism in the Spirit is one thing and fire cleanses like the Holy Spirit. But that would be redundant. It would be equivalent to saying baptized in the Holy Spirit and baptized in the Holy Spirit. The baptism of those at Pentecost was an added blessing to already regenerated persons. The Lord Jesus had breathed on the apostles. He said to them, "Peace to you: as my Father has sent me, I also am sending you. And saying this, He breathed on them, saying, Receive at once the Holy Spirit" (John 20:21,22—translation). His breathing on them was a foretaste of Pentecost, which was a foretaste of the kingdom. Every child of God has the guarantee of what Christ promised to partially take place in the near future (Eph. 1:13) and completely take place in the remote future (Acts 2:17). Baptism in the Holy Spirit was designated for the uniting of Jews and non-Jews into the assembly that Jesus Christ has already established and of which the apostles were the foundation. Hence, the infant assembly was empowered at Pentecost for the proclamation of the gospel.

At the beginning of the history of the assembly, the early disciples had extraordinary as well as ordinary power. As a result, they had extraordinary and ordinary gifts. The extraordinary power and gifts continued until the completion of the word of God. Some argue that since Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, this extraordinary power and gifts continue. Jesus Christ is eternally the same because He is God, and God does not change. However, He does change His methods. His present method is through ordinary officers with ordinary God-given gifts.

PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE PROPHECIES OF JOEL AND JOHN

Baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire cannot find its fulfillment at Pentecost. Why did Luke include the word fire in his Gospel (Luke 3:16) and omit it in Acts 1:5? In his account in Luke, he was speaking of Pentecost as a partial fulfillment, pointing to the remote complete fulfillment. Whereas in Acts, he spoke only of Pentecost, at which time there was baptism in the Holy Spirit but no fire. Many use Acts 2:3—"And there appeared to them tongues being distributed as fire, and it sat on each of them" (translation)—as a proof text to substantiate their opinion that this is the fulfillment of the fire mentioned in Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16. However, the statement describing the phenomena at Pentecost, "like as of fire," of Acts 2:3 is not the same as the word "fire" in the accounts of Matthew and Luke in their Gospels. This was similar to fire but not actually the fire in John's prediction.

The infant assembly was baptized in the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This was predicted in Acts 1:5 where the word fire is omitted. The aorist passive indicative of the verb *baptidzo* used in I Corinthians 12:13 signifies that the baptism in the Spirit took place in the past at Pentecost. The indicative is the mood of reality; therefore, it actually took place at that time. The ones assembled with one accord in one place of Acts 2:1-4 were the 120 disciples of the Lord waiting in the upper room for the partial fulfillment of the promise by John which is recorded in Acts 1:5. (See Acts 1:12-15.) Since Christians were baptized, this baptism could not be regeneration. There is a difference between being born of the Spirit and being baptized in the sphere of the Spirit. We are born of the Spirit, and those born of the Spirit were all baptized in that infant assembly. Therefore, our baptism in the Spirit was in that baptism.

The feast of Pentecost, which is called the feast of weeks in Deuteronomy 16:9-16 and II Chronicles 8:13, is described in Leviticus 23:16-22. This feast was observed by Israel fifty days after the feast of passover when the children of Israel brought a sheaf of the firstfruits (Lev. 23:10). The sheaf foreshadowed Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. The sheaf, like Christ, needed no preparation. He was absolutely holy. The feast of weeks harmonizes with what took place at Pentecost.

The three parts to baptism in the Spirit at Pentecost were foreshadowed in the feast of weeks—Pentecost—to which there were three parts. "And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleanings of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger: I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 23:22). In this verse, note the three parts of Pentecost foreshadowed: (1) "Ye" refers to the Jews who are associated with the "harvest." (2) The "poor" designates the non-Jews who are connected with the "corners of thy field." (3) The "stranger" calls attention to non-Jews who are related to the "gleaning of thy harvest."

This feast was partially fulfilled in the three parts of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came on Jews—Acts 2, Samaritans—Acts 8, and Gentiles—Acts 10, but not on "all flesh [mankind]" (Joel 2:28). (1) Acts 2—The Jews assembled in the upper room in Jerusalem were baptized in the Holy Spirit to correspond with "ye" in Leviticus 23:22. (2) Acts 8—The Samaritans in Samaria

were baptized in the Holy Spirit in answer to the “poor” in Leviticus 23:22. These were not full-blooded Jews. (3) Acts 10—The Gentiles in the end of the earth (Acts 1:8) were baptized in the Holy Spirit to correspond with the “strangers”—non-Jews—in Leviticus 23:22. These were the three parts of Pentecost when these three groups received a foretaste of that which shall be completely fulfilled in the future.

Baptism in the Spirit at Pentecost empowered the infant assembly, which is made up of Jews and Gentiles between whom the middle wall of partition is broken down, for witnessing during the assembly age: “but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8 NASB). Jesus Christ is the cornerstone (Matt. 16:18), and the apostles became the foundation of the assembly (Eph. 2:20). The age of the assembly, which began with Christ and His apostles, experienced a foretaste of what John predicted for Israel (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16).

Jesus Christ, not the Holy Spirit, is the Agent in baptism in the Spirit. There are only seven references to baptism in the Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16; I Cor. 12:13). The first five references are prophetic, and the last two are historical. Five look forward to the day of Pentecost, and two are historical of what took place at Pentecost. There is no such thing as any individual being baptized in, with, or by the Holy Spirit today. Let us consider the last historical reference: “For indeed in one Spirit we were all baptized [*ebaptisthemen*, aorist passive indicative of *baptidzo*] into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free; and we were all made to drink one Spirit” (I Cor. 12:13—translation). The indicative mood is the mood of reality, and the passive voice means the Lord Jesus was the Agent of this baptism. Is that not what John said? “...He [Jesus Christ] shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matt. 3:11b—translation). The Holy Spirit is the sphere into which Jesus Christ baptized the infant assembly. The passive voice signifies that the infant assembly did not participate in it. It is historical. It has been fulfilled. Born again people have been baptized by Jesus Christ into the sphere of the Holy Spirit.

The baptism at Pentecost was collective. It included Christ’s body, that is, His assembly. There is not one reference to an individual being baptized in the Holy Spirit. The assembly as a whole was baptized in the sphere of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This was not the Holy Spirit being poured out on all flesh in the kingdom. That is future. The disciples knew nothing of a kingdom having been set up. Israel as a nation did not enter the events of Pentecost. They knew the nature of the kingdom but not the time of its establishment. Pentecost was a foretaste of what will yet be experienced by God’s people as a whole. The Holy Spirit led Luke to include fire in John’s prediction in Luke 3:16 and to omit it from Acts 1:5 when he predicted what would take place in a few days. He made no reference to fire in the latter reference, because what fire represents would not be fulfilled in a few days. The terrible “day of the Lord” would not take place at Pentecost. Pentecost would be only a partial fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy.

The present work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is recorded in Ephesians 5:18—“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.” Being filled with the Spirit means being continually controlled by means of the Spirit. There is no baptism in the Spirit since Pentecost. The elect are born of the Spirit (John 3:8), sealed with the Spirit (Eph. 1:13), possess the guarantee of our inheritance (Eph. 1:14), and have the Spirit as our guide (Rom. 8:14) and as our teacher (I John 2:20,27). As all the elect who constitute the assembly

died with Christ at Calvary, we were all baptized by Christ into one body at Pentecost. As we were legally in Christ before regeneration, we were legally in the body before we were born of the Spirit.

The reverse of the Holy Spirit being poured out on all flesh at Pentecost is demonstrated throughout Acts, and it has been demonstrated for nearly 2,000 years. When the Holy Spirit is poured out on all flesh, the glory of God shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. Men will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and there will be no more war, confusion, or chaos. Hence, the very opposite of all flesh being immersed in the sphere of the Spirit is proved by what followed Pentecost. Christians are persecuted; there are wars; there are apostates; etc.; and many prophecies have not yet been fulfilled.

The apostle Paul told believers that they possessed the earnest of the Spirit (II Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13). Believers are presently able to realize through the personal indwelling agency of the Holy Spirit as an earnest what this same Spirit will perform in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. God's final outpouring is not to be confined to the saints who have the earnest, because it extends to the Jewish remnant, to the Gentiles, and to all the earth of which Pentecost was a publicly manifested pledge. It is sad when men rashly antedate the Spirit, making baptism in the Spirit present when it is future. A person is incorrect to take a prophecy, apply it to his personal life, and claim its fulfillment in himself. One is incorrect to refer to this dispensation as the dispensation of the Spirit. It is the age of grace when the Holy Spirit is operating and calling out a people for Jesus Christ.

Miracles to confirm the word have ceased. If truth were perpetuated today in the assemblies of Christ by miracles without any intermission, the baptism in the Spirit would have failed in its significance as a pledge of its future fulfillment. To falsely assign such signs proceeding from the Holy Spirit vilifies the mighty Agent through whom the covenant shall be fulfilled. The miracles at Pentecost were God-given signs of the kingdom as a pledge, and the baptism in the Spirit was an earnest of that which is yet to come.

Israel's rejection was crystallized in the first part of Acts. Therefore, signs and wonders have been withdrawn until the coming kingdom. Since Joel does not refer to the assembly of Christ, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost could not be the complete fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. The kingdom and the gospel were first proclaimed to the Jews, but they rejected the spiritual requirements of the kingdom—repentance and faith—and even crucified the King in fulfillment of prophecy. This crucifixion was ordained by God for the purpose of redemption and to effect a worldwide proclamation of the gospel for the conversion of the elect.

Peter did not identify the events. He identified the power, as the Lord had predicted in Acts 1:8. Baptism in the Spirit at Pentecost was designed for the bestowal of supernatural power. The infant assembly was baptized into the realm of the Spirit—the sphere of power—to accomplish the purpose for which Christ appointed the assembly. The Spirit who formerly dwelt with His people dwells in us since Pentecost.

Another proof that the Holy Spirit did not come on all flesh at Pentecost is Joel's term "afterward [after this]" of Joel 2:28. After what? After God's statement that He has received Israel back: "And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed" (Joel 2:27). The outpouring of the Spirit in those

days will extend to all flesh. It cannot be restricted to Israel who shall be born in a day before the establishment of the kingdom, but it will include everyone in the kingdom. “All flesh” includes elect Jews and Gentiles—the body of Christ which is now being built (Matt. 16:18). We will all be in the kingdom, and the baptism in the Spirit will be universally experienced. Baptism in the Spirit at Pentecost was an additional blessing to what the recipients already possessed. When the Spirit is poured out universally, it will be another added blessing to God’s people. The experience at that time will be greater than the experience at Pentecost.

COMPLETE FULFILLMENT OF THE PROPHECIES OF JOEL AND JOHN

The kingdom is connected with baptism in the Spirit in complete fulfillment of the prophecy given by Joel and John the Baptist in Joel 2:28-30 and in Matthew 3:11. To avoid misunderstanding, it is proper to say that the Spirit works in regeneration and sanctification during this dispensation, but this is not His final work. On the promises of physical blessings, another outpouring of the Spirit will follow. Did Joel imply that physical prosperity must precede spiritual fullness? To Joel these are the tokens that God has returned to His people, Israel. The drought and famine were signs of God's anger and judgment. But now there were physical proofs that God had taken Israel back, and this is ascribed to the unconditional covenant that God made with Israel. God has not turned His back on the covenant. It is unconditional. God has not forgotten His people (Rom. 11:1). They shall eat in plenty, be satisfied, and praise the Lord their God who will deal wondrously with them; and God's people shall know that God is in the midst of Israel and that He is the Lord their God (Joel 2:26,27).

Joel climbed higher than he had ever climbed when he looked into the future and gave the prophecy recorded in Joel 2:28. "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions." In this verse, note the following: (1) Joel predicted the time of the Spirit's outpouring—"afterward," after God has received Israel back (v. 27). (2) He predicted the Author—God, "I will pour." (3) He predicted the extent—"all flesh." (4) He predicted the effect—"prophesy," "dream dreams," "see visions," etc. This prophecy was not fulfilled during the ministry of Christ, at Calvary, or at Pentecost; but it shall be fulfilled when the kingdom is established. Hence, the baptism in the Spirit at Pentecost was only a pledge, or foretaste, of the future fulfillment which will take place at the time the Holy Spirit is poured out on "all flesh." "All flesh" includes more than was realized at Pentecost or will ever be realized until its fulfillment in the kingdom.

The blessings in the kingdom will be greater in degree than the blessings of Pentecost. Among the future blessings is the experience of fire. The fire that is included in the record of John's prediction in Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16 will then be the blessing of God's people. As the assembly of Jesus Christ does not presently use the keys of the kingdom, so does she not presently experience the blessing of fire.

The baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire of Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16 cannot be divided into a blessing and a curse. It does not make sense to divide John's promise into both a blessing and a curse. All of God's people will inherit the kingdom together, experience the universal outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and take part in the blessing of judging with Jesus Christ. Fire is referred to three times in both Matthew 3 and Luke 3. Matthew 3:10, Matthew 3:12, Luke 3:9, and Luke 3:17 all refer to God's judgment. But in Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16, John was promising a blessing to the people of God. This was a blessing for those who would be baptized in the sphere of the Spirit; and being thus baptized, the fire represents God's judgment in which we shall participate. Jesus Christ will reign as King, and we will reign with Him as kings and priests, serving under Him. We will be like Christ; and we will be associated with Him as associate kings

and priests, performing similar offices under our great King and Lord. All this is wrapped up in blessing, not a curse.

Fire is used two ways in Scripture. It is used in the sense of purification, or cleansing, and it is also used in the sense of judgment. Fire denotes judging and executing judgment in reference after reference in both Old and New Testaments (Deut. 4:24; II Thess. 1:8; Heb. 12:29; etc.). Those in the kingdom will join with Jesus Christ in executing judgment. Paul reminded the Corinthians that the saints shall judge the world and angels (I Cor. 6:2,3). God promised the assembly of Jesus Christ that those who overcome and keep His works shall have power over the nations (Rev. 2:26).

Joel's prophecy will be completely fulfilled in the future baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire. Pentecost was not the kingdom. The assembly of Christ and not Israel was being dealt with at Pentecost. It is a sad fact that many religionists have transferred to themselves Scriptures that belong to a future age. Those in the kingdom will join with Christ in executing judgment on the unregenerate, which will be a blessing to the regenerate. This judgment will take place when the kingdom is in its time stage. The time stage will be the 1,000 years preceding the eternal state of the kingdom. All who have the earnest of the Spirit have some understanding of what the Lord Jesus Christ will do when His Spirit shall be poured out on all flesh. There will be people in their flesh and blood bodies in the first phase of the kingdom. People will die during this millennium. But in the eternal phase of the kingdom, everyone will be in his flesh and bone body; therefore, there will be no death. Flesh and blood shall not inherit the eternal phase of the kingdom. The first aspect of the kingdom shall be purged before the eternal aspect begins (Matt. 13).

The physical phenomena of the sun being turned to darkness and the moon turned to blood will precede the great and terrible day of the Lord (Joel 2:31). But these did not accompany the baptism in the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Peter knew that Pentecost was not the terrible day of the Lord but was only a partial fulfillment of the prediction by Joel and John. He explained the terrible day of the Lord in his second Epistle, not in Acts. "Looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of the heavens being set on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements burning are being melted, but according to His promise, we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (II Pet. 3:12,13—translation).

Baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire cannot be Israel as a nation entering into the events of Joel's prophecy. Although Peter quoted from Joel's prophecy and said, "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16), he did not identify the baptism in the Spirit at Pentecost as "all of that." Pentecost was only a partial fulfillment of the events of Joel's prophecy. Both Joel and John prophesied the conclusion in the absolute fulfillment. All the Old Testament prophets prophesied in that manner. The complete fulfillment of Joel's prophecy will not take place until the reality of the day of the Lord. In that day, all sham and hypocrisy will be manifested. Only that which is of God will stand. Joel's prophecy is timely in our apostate days, reminding us that the coming of the Lord is approaching.

The day of the Lord signifies judgment. It is used in a local sense. It was experienced by the people of Joel's time, and it will be experienced in a final sense. It was the Lord's judgment on Israel, Judah, and Jerusalem at that time, but it will also be God's judgment on Israel, Judah, and Jerusalem in a final sense. Joel combined both the historical and prophetic, both the near and

the remote. This is a remarkable feature that we find again and again throughout Old Testament Scripture.

The kingdom will not be established without a period of violence and war: “Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision” (Joel 3:14). How utterly vain are the expectations of collective humanity unified and deified in the person of the antichrist (Rev. 13). The Spirit predicts the formation of a mighty confederation under the auspices of this last head of depraved humanity (Rev. 17:12). The formation of this confederacy is still future. Whatever confederations have existed in the past were only partial fulfillments looking forward to the last great array in the kingdom of the earth against the Messiah (Rev. 19). The period of violence and war against antichrist is described in Revelation 19, II Thessalonians 2, Isaiah 63, and many other prophecies. This last great war will create the greatest devastation of any preceding it. God will execute justice on the ungodly. The wicked must fill up the measure of their sin, and this will have taken place before the Lord returns (Joel 3:1-16).

Vengeance belongs to God: “...Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord” (Rom. 12:19b). “For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people” (Heb. 10:30). Christians long for the day of absolute justice under Jesus Christ. The time for absolute justice on earth will not be executed until the time the assembly has been perfected. Then we shall use the keys of authority given to the perfected assembly to participate in judgment. God’s vengeance will become ours in the Lord Jesus Christ, our King, the King of the Jews.

The Hebrew word for vengeance is *nagam*, which means a rendering of justice, retribution, punishment, or satisfaction. The Hebrew root word with its derivations is used 70 times in the Old Testament. Although theologically important, it is greatly misunderstood. In modern thinking, vengeance and revenge, coming from either God or man, are ideas that appear to have no ethical validity. Those with this thinking have no concept of God’s holy character. Understood in the light of God’s whole counsel, vengeance is understood to be a necessary aspect of the history of redemption. There are a few cases in the Old Testament where vengeance is executed by man. Although the Hebrew word *nagam* is not used in Genesis 9:6, this verse teaches capital punishment: “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.” Other passages warn men not to take vengeance into their own hands. These are not contradictory. A classic use of the Hebrew word *nagam* is the Lord’s statement in Deuteronomy 32:35 and 41—“To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence....I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me.” God cannot be true to His holy character and justice if He does not punish in justice. The prophet Isaiah stressed the day of the Lord’s vengeance. We will rejoice when we see God’s absolute justice executed: “The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth” (Ps. 58:10,11). Does this teach that Christians must hate their enemies? We, like David, hate those who hate the Lord: “Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies” (Ps. 139:21,22). Christ was not rejecting the teaching of just punishment in His sermon on the mount in Matthew 5-7, but He was showing that just punishment awaits the time for it. Psalm 50 brings this into focus by showing that men curse the Lord while He remains silent.

However, the time is coming when His silence will be broken. He will roar out of Zion (Joel 3:16). He will speak in vengeance and execute absolute justice. We await this day of reckoning, which will not occur until the assembly of Jesus Christ has been perfected.

Since man's examination of himself and others cannot be absolutely perfect because he cannot discern motives, Paul said, "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who both will bring to light the hidden things of the darkness, and will make known the counsels of the hearts: and then praise shall be to each one from God" (I Cor. 4:5—translation). A distinction is made between the exhortation not to judge in I Corinthians 4:5 and the exhortation to judge in I Corinthians 5:12-13 with the use of "before the time" in the first reference. A just judgment must be made now on the basis of one's fruits, works, words, and lifestyle (Matt. 7). Christians must judge themselves and offending members in the local assembly (I Cor. 5:12; 11:31).

The Greek word for judge in I Corinthians 4:5 is a present active imperative of *krino*, which means to judge, pronounce judgment, preside over with the power of giving judicial decision, or examine. Since it is an imperative, it is a command. This judgment, or examination, goes beyond fruit that is seen. It descends into the soul. Therefore, it is not viewed externally. The context of verse 5 proves the Lord alone can examine and render judgment on the things that are hidden. All the things in our lives that we have successfully hidden from others will on this day be brought to light, and we will stand fully revealed before the Lord. Since Paul was incompetent to judge either himself or his service, the Corinthians could neither examine nor make a just judgment of Paul's motive and service.

The time for judging in the sense of I Corinthians 4:5 will be subsequent to our being judged at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, where we will be rewarded according to our individual performances in time (I Cor. 3:13-15; II Cor. 5:10). There, the counsels (plural of *boule*, which means purpose, design, determination by implication, secret thoughts of the mind, or the mediation of the mind) of the hearts of others will have been brought to light. Every born again person will receive praise (*epainos*, which means approval, commendation, recognition, or reward) from God. This is the judgment of God's people; it is not the general judgment at the great white throne.

The perfected collective body of Jesus Christ shall be given the keys to the kingdom. This authority will be executed perfectly under the perfect King, Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, the Son of David. Being perfected and having the keys of Christ's kingdom, we shall render absolute justice, and God's vengeance will become ours because we will be concerned only about His vengeance. Righteous judgment by us is impossible before that time. But we shall at that time render absolute justice in our judgments when we execute our examination (I Cor. 6:2; Rev. 2:26,27). Jesus Christ promised His disciples the blessing of rendering absolute justice in their examination. Peter's question, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" (Matt. 19:27), was answered by Christ's promise to the disciples that they would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel: "And Jesus said to them, truly I am saying to you, the ones having followed me in the regeneration [*paliggenesia*, which means rebirth, new birth, new age, or next world] when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of His glory, you shall sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28—translation).

Some say the word for regeneration refers to the new birth. They are correct pertaining to its use in Titus 3:5. But in Matthew 19:28, the Lord was talking to already regenerated disciples; therefore, it refers to the new age—the messianic restoration. The time element is explicitly stated. It has to do with the future, when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of His glory. At that time, the apostles will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. The names of the twelve apostles will be inscribed in the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14). Hence, the twelve apostles will have a part in that which is future. Furthermore, they had a part in the foundation of the assembly (Eph. 2:19,20).

Those who have forsaken all for the name of Jesus Christ “shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life in its fullness” (Matt. 19:29—translation). The regeneration—messianic restoration of all things—of Acts 3:19-21 is not one single act. It includes the glorification of the bodies of Christians who make up the *ekklesia*—the body of Christ. It also involves Israel’s future restoration when God will deal with them nationally. The judgments that will take place during the millennium before the eternal state of the kingdom are also included in this restoration. Those who will participate in this judging will include the Jewish branches that have been broken off, the assembly that has been grafted in, and the restored natural branches (Rom. 11).

With these truths in mind, any person who spiritualizes the kingdom in order to bring about the teaching of amillennialism concerning the Lord’s future is dishonest in dealing with the Scriptures. One cannot isolate one text and try to make all other texts fit it. He must consider all the passages relative to the subject. He is then in a position to arrive at a correct conclusion when all the various Scriptures pertaining to the subject harmonize.

There is no doubt about the spirituality of the literal kingdom. Jesus Christ had a material body while He walked among men. He was also filled with the Spirit. There was none more spiritual than He who has the Spirit without measure. When the Holy Spirit is poured out on all flesh in the kingdom, the kingdom will be very much a spiritual kingdom. When the King—Jesus Christ—pours out His Spirit on all flesh and the Spirit exerts His mighty energy in every direction, extending even to the material creation, surely the kingdom will be preeminently spiritual. This kingdom will not be of this unspiritual world. The literal/spiritual kingdom will be on a renovated earth on which Jesus Christ will reign, and we shall rule and reign with Him.

THE KINGDOM PROPHESED

The thoughts of God about the future are called prophecy. God's thoughts contain the purpose of His heart. His thoughts are as high above the thoughts of man as the heavens are above the earth (Is. 55:8,9). Man's capability of thinking is one of the characteristics in which he has been made in the likeness of God. This characteristic distinguishes him from the lower creation. Let us be kind to the evolutionist and admit that he has more intelligence than the monkeys from whom he thinks he evolved. We must admit that he thinks; but contrary to his knowledge, that ability is the result of creation and not evolution. Christians are thankful that God's thoughts have become our thoughts. Christians have the mind of Christ; hence, we cannot ignore Divine principles (I Cor. 2:16). Therefore, we enjoy His thoughts about creation, Christ's incarnation, Christ's substitutionary death, Christ's resurrection, our regeneration, and the prophecy concerning Christ's glorious second coming to establish His kingdom in the renewed creation subsequent to the fall. Without man's ability to think, God could not communicate with His own.

Prophecy is a study which leads the believer to return in his thinking to the beginning as well as the ending of things. Since God is the first and the last, His first thoughts are simultaneous with His last thoughts. Hence, it is no surprise when one reaches the last book of the Bible—the Revelation of Jesus Christ—that he finds himself once again contemplating the first book of the Bible—Genesis. In the study of Revelation, the first is seen from the last; moreover, as one progresses in the study of that book, he learns that the last was seen from the first. Revelation is Genesis enlarged and glorified.

God sees future, present, and past all at once because He is in one mind: "But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth" (Job 23:13). Since God is in one mind, He can have no new thoughts. Whatever God thinks He has ever thought because He does not think successively: "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Is. 46:10). His purpose was settled before the foundation of the world; therefore, whatever God predestined from the beginning shall be effected in the end. A perfect plan failing in its execution would be contrary to Deity. God's omniscience and omnipotence are perfect. What God's omniscience planned, His omnipotence executes.

Prophecy is proof of God's infinite knowledge: "Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite" (Ps. 147:5). God knows everything as present because there is no time with Him. This is the reason some of the prophecies concerning things to come are presented as present, and sometimes future things are described as having been fulfilled (Is. 9:6; 53:4; Ps. 22:18). There was a time, from man's perspective, when nothing other than God existed. We must not lose sight of the truth that God was before and is above what man calls time. Creation was once future, or else one must conclude that it is eternal. To say that creation is eternal is to deny the Creator. The denial of God as Creator is to deny the Bible, man's existence, and salvation. God, who purposed to create, knew all things from the beginning; otherwise, there was a time when He was ignorant. Prophecy, therefore, is proof of His infinite knowledge.

Prophecy is a classification. Since there was order in God's work of creation, vividly described in Genesis, one would be foolish to deny order in the consummation of His work. Hence, numbering in the book of Revelation is not mere numbering; it is classification. The book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is clearly stated to be prophetic. This refutes the historical premillennial and the amillennial view that it is historical. One must beware of giving the book any classification other than prophetic. Both the prologue and the epilogue of Revelation classify it as prophecy (Rev. 1:3; 22:7,10,18,19). Three times, in Revelation 1:1, 22:6-7, and 22:16-17, John affirmed that this prophecy contains Divine predictions and not human imaginations. The Old Testament closed with the announcement of Christ's first advent (Mal. 4:2), and the New Testament concludes with the prophecy of His second advent (Rev. 22:20).

What would we do without classification in science? Classification is the assignment of things to groups within a system of categories distinguished by structure and origin. As there are many sciences in the natural world, there are sciences such as theology, anthropology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology in the study of the Bible. To correctly handle the word of truth, one must assign all Scripture that pertains to God to theology. Assigning anthropology to Scripture that belongs to God humanizes God, and that is heresy. Designating Scripture that relates to man to theology deifies man, and that too is heresy. These two examples should illustrate the importance of proper classification of Scripture. Since there have always been heretical movements that emphasize certain Biblical statements, one must never oppose an extreme view of a Biblical subject by going to the opposite view. A person must search for truth which is usually found between two extremes.

Amillennialists attack all premillennialists by classifying them with cults that embrace premillennialism. According to their logic, premillennialists can classify amillennialists with Roman Catholics, because they are amillennial. The future kingdom is not a re-exalted Judaism with carnal ordinances.

Prophecy must be viewed from a higher basis than mere prediction of the future. Above all, it must be considered a revelation of God's eternal purpose. Even though prophecy is a declaration of something future, which is a message of hope, it must be contemplated from the foundational truth of God's will and purpose. History, which is executed prophecy, flows from God's purpose. Prophecy, therefore, must be embraced as God's predetermined counsel which finds its culmination in the predestined King and His kingdom. The kingdom is the consummation of God's purpose in redemption. It is self-evident that prophecy is intended to reveal the Divine purpose relating to redemption. An example of prophecy and the manner in which prophecy shall be ultimately fulfilled is recorded in Deuteronomy 32. Prophecy is an essential part of the system of revelation. It not only reveals but also systematizes truths.

As heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, Christians are invited by the prophets and apostles to study God's purpose in order to have some comprehension of what we have in Christ (Rom. 8:14-32; Eph. 1:1-14; II Pet. 1:19-21; 3:1-18). There are two kinds of evidence in the hearts and minds of God's people. The first source of evidence comes from faith, which is God's gift to His people; the second source is derived from historical evidence which includes the fulfillment of prophecy. Our Lord stressed the importance of prophetic study by showing that all Scripture speaks of Himself (Luke 24:25-27).

Classification is necessary in the study of prophecy. There are fulfilled, partially fulfilled, and unfulfilled prophecies.

Fulfilled Prophecies

There are fulfilled prophecies. The prophets saw the future perspective. They did not always understand their predictions, but that is only an unimpeachable evidence of the inspiration of the Bible (I Pet. 1:10-13). If prophecy can be understood only after its fulfillment, how can it be a lamp shining in a dark place for our guidance?

Let us consider a few prophecies regarding Israel that have been fulfilled. Christ was prophesied to be born of a virgin (Is. 7:14). After Ahaz had forsaken Jehovah and set up the altar of a strange god in the temple, God renewed the hopes of Israel by giving a sign, the range of which would extend beyond the time of Ahaz. Christ was born of a virgin (Matt. 1:18-23).

The present tense used in Old Testament prophecy often proves the certainty of a future event. That which was prophecy to Isaiah was proclaimed as history. The Old Testament saints, who could only expect blessing, spoke as though the fulfillment of prophecy were already enjoyed. Thus their faith, which elevated them to the realm of the spiritual, made them partakers of God's excellencies (Heb. 11:1-3).

Israel's rejection of Christ was foretold (Is. 53:1-3). Both Christ and Paul quoted from Isaiah's prophecy (John 12:37,38; Rom. 10:16). When the Lord Jesus said, "Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see..." (John 12:39,40), He did not infuse any evil principle in them. But He left them to the unrestrained operations of their own depraved hearts.

The decree of God deals not with innocent but depraved men; therefore, it is not unjust to either aggravate their depravity with the truth of the gospel or condemn them because of their sin of rejection. Isaiah said, "...we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Is. 53:3). Christ said, "And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40). There is no free will in this text. The will of the sinner is not free but depraved. Once a person commits himself to the heresy that the will of God is to be subordinated to his depraved will, he will remain a religious heretic unless God's will turns him and makes his will subservient to God's superior will. Some religionists have gone so far as to say that God's making some but not others willing renders God meaner than the Devil. Such persons have no understanding of their complicity and solidarity in depravity. They are in danger of being treated as the apostate Jews during the first advent of Jesus Christ: "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matt. 23:38).

The nation of Israel has been broken off in order that the Gentiles might be grafted into the root (Rom. 11:11-29). The Acts of the Apostles closes with the record of God turning from the Jews to the Gentiles (Acts 28:25-31). The removal taught by Moses and the prophets was designed for punishment, but it was not to be perpetual. Israel's restoration was not fulfilled in the remnant that returned from Babylon. Her return from Babylon was preparatory for Christ's first advent; whereas the restoration recorded in Romans 11:25-26 is identified with Christ's second advent.

Partially Fulfilled Prophecies

There are partially fulfilled prophecies. The prophets often predicted the advent of Christ without discriminating between the first and second advents. The reason is very simple; both advents are absolutely necessary for perfected redemption. The first is preparatory for the second. There could be no second without the first, and the first is the guarantee of the second. The first advent was in humiliation; the second shall be in glory. We must not forget that the prophets unite the two as essential to the complete salvation of man. Therefore, each advent has its appropriate sphere of action; the glory of the second is the perfection subsequent to the suffering of the first.

Chapters 2 and 3 of Joel are partially fulfilled prophecy. The Holy Spirit was not poured out on all flesh at Pentecost (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:16). Men are erroneous to antedate this period and ascribe to themselves what belongs to a future age. The miraculous signs of Joel 2:30-31 were not fulfilled at Pentecost. Hence, Joel's prophecy was only partially fulfilled at Pentecost. (This was discussed at length in an earlier chapter.)

Malachi 3:1-6 is a partially fulfilled prophecy: "BEHOLD, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in...." This refers to Christ's first advent. "...Behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts" refers to His second advent. The refining, punishing, and restoring to power and prosperity were not realized at the first advent. The restoration of Israel will not take place until the day of God's power (Ps. 110:3).

Unfulfilled Prophecies

There are unfulfilled prophecies. The center and goal of all prophecy is Jesus Christ. Old Testament Scripture gives the preparation for the manifestation of the King. The Gospels and Acts unveil the birth, life, death, and resurrection of the King. Since His ascension, the Epistles demonstrate that the King is in hiding. The Revelation enthrones the King in His kingdom.

Jesus Christ shall sit on the throne of His father David (Luke 1:32,33; Acts 2:30). There is only one throne of David, and it is in Jerusalem, not in heaven. Christ is not presently on David's throne (Rev. 3:21). David was a prophet, and he knew God's promise to him. God made a vow that He would make one of David's descendants a king, and Jesus Christ is that true King (Luke 1:30-33). As Divine, Christ is the root of David; and as Man, He is the offspring of David (Rev. 22:16). Jesus Christ is David's descendant and David's Lord.

The kingdom of Jesus Christ shall be established at Christ's second advent (II Tim. 4:1). The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountain (Is. 2:1-5). Isaiah's prophecy looks beyond the present conditions of sin and suffering in the earth. The earth, not heaven, is in view.

THE KINGDOM DEFINED

Many formal statements have been made concerning the kingdom, but there is only one true definition: The Kingdom of God will be when the Son of man openly exercises His power and visibly brings all things into subjection to His righteous reign on the earth. Biblical ignorance, denominational prejudice, and fanaticism have obscured the true meaning of the kingdom. Every professing Christian must confess that what God said is true, but what the expositor of Scripture says may or may not be true. The only way to determine the authenticity of the exegete is to compare what he says with the Divine record of truth.

The purport of the kingdom can be determined only by a thorough investigation of all the Biblical data on the subject. Its definition should not be determined by a few isolated passages from the Bible. Christians have only one key to unlock the true interpretation of the kingdom. Since Christians possess the Divine unction (I John 2:20,27), they must correlate all the information from the first prophecy to the fulfillment of the prophecy in the establishment of the kingdom. The kingdom of Christ is one of the great themes of Biblical prophecy. It was the leading subject of the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, and the apostles. Should someone object to this fact, this is the answer: There can be no kingdom without the King. Furthermore, kingship is subsequent to saviorhood.

A correct understanding of the kingdom is necessary to properly teach the Scriptures. The kingdom of God is the object of the covenants. Through the truth of the new covenant, operating in this age, the elect are being called to become heirs of the kingdom. Therefore, the assembly is a preparatory stage for the coming kingdom. The kingdom is a special honor given by the Father to Jesus Christ as the Son of Man. Much of Holy Scripture is given to the subject of the kingdom, because it is the perfection of all of Christ's work and honor.

There is little agreement among many expositors concerning the connotation of the kingdom. The Greek word for "kingdom" is *basileia*, which basically means a ruling. Some say the kingdom of God cannot be divorced from the present and personal activity of God. They state that if kingdom means a future realm over which a king rules, the spiritual kingdom would be excluded. Thus, they conclude that the kingdom cannot be something that has come and has not come. Those who embrace the present spiritual kingdom in the assembly fail to differentiate sovereignty from kingship. God has ever been the sovereign Lord and Ruler over all nations, but He was not the theocratic King of any nation until God called elected Israel. Furthermore, while God ruled Israel as her theocratic King, He did not cease exercising His sovereignty. Therefore, the kingdom which Christ ascended to receive—the future kingdom—belongs to Him as the Son of Man, the Son of David. While the ascended Son of Man is not presently reigning over the future kingdom as the Son of God, He is the sovereign Ruler over the universe. In His Divine capacity, He is reigning over all; but this reign is not the reign of promise as the Son of Man. The reign of promise will be an externally visible manifestation of the God-Man in the kingdom He has gone to receive.

Serious defects exist in a system which requires many different interpretations of the kingdom, such as the kingdom being defined as (1) the spiritual reign in the assembly (Matt. 3:2), (2) praying for the advancement of the gospel (Matt. 6:10), (3) the effects of the gospel (Matt. 13:24), (4) the new dispensation (Matt. 13:44), (5) every man that is acquainted with the gospel (Matt. 13:51-53), (6) the assembly on earth (Matt. 16:19), (7) those who readily become Christians (Matt. 21:31), (8) reception as sons of God (Matt. 25:34), and (9) heaven where God's reign shall be fully established (Matt. 26:29). The kingdom cannot be Scripturally interpreted to infer all these things.

Chiliasm is the theological doctrine that Jesus Christ will set up a theocratic kingdom on earth for a thousand years. The word "chiliasm" comes from the Greek word *chilioi*, which means a thousand. It is used ten times in the New Testament (II Pet. 3:8; Rev. 11:3; 12:6; 14:20; 20:2,3,4,5,6,7). The word "millennium," a Latin word which means the same thing, has taken its place. One is mistaken to think Christ's reign will be consummated at the conclusion of the millennium. He is the King of the ages.

Opponents to millennialism stress that outside of Revelation 20 there is no reference to a millennium. To the surprise of many premillennialists, these opponents are correct to say Christ's reign cannot be limited to a period of one thousand years. Jesus Christ is called the King of the ages: "Now unto the King eternal [*aionon*, genitive masculine plural of *aion*, which means ages], immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (I Tim. 1:17). The Scriptures nowhere declare that Christ's reign is restricted to a thousand years. On the contrary, the Bible speaks of His reign continuing forever: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32,33).

Most premillennialists make the mistake of placing emphasis on the millennium rather than the kingdom. While there are only six references to the millennium in Revelation 20:1-7, there are many references in the Scriptures to the King and His kingdom. The idea that Christ will establish a kingdom to last a short period of one thousand years should be denounced. Scripture often speaks of the coming kingdom of Jesus Christ, which is associated with His second advent. The millennium is the period which serves as the transition between the age of the assembly and the eternal state.

Christians are waiting for not only the redemption of the body but also the renewal of the earth: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope. Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" (Rom. 8:18-24). Since the whole creation is now under the curse, the animate and inanimate world is subject to vanity. Amillennialists ask, Where does Scripture say there will be a millennium? The millennium is not mentioned, but reference is made to the lifting of the curse in Christ's

kingdom. There will be a change in the material world when Christ comes. The main idea is transition, not extinction. The verb “perished” of II Peter 3:6 refers to the people on earth who perished, not to the earth itself. Peter, speaking of the old world, said, “Through which the world at that time perished, being deluged by water” (translation). The Greek verb translated “shall be dissolved” of II Peter 3:12 describes deliverance rather than annihilation. Since this Greek verb *luo* is used for loose, release, or set free, earth’s present condition shall give place to a better condition. Groaning and travailing, which occur in the material world, will give place to glorying and triumphing in the kingdom.

The kingdom will be filled with righteousness. Every blessing of the Christian is the fruit of Christ’s redemptive work. We often hear the question, Is Divine healing in the atonement? Some answer in the affirmative and others in the negative. The affirmative Biblical answer demands explanation. By the merit of Jesus Christ, every good and perfect gift comes from the Father (James 1:17). The resurrection of the body of the believer is included in the atonement, but it is not yet ours. The request for healing may or may not be presently granted. Restoration to health is subject to the will of God. Christians await the glorification of our bodies. We will be perfected spiritually and physically in the kingdom.

The kingdom will involve the whole world. It will encompass eternity and not the millennium only. Abraham shall become heir of the world (Rom. 4:13). The promise to Abraham, according to amillennialists, was not given on the natural but the supernatural plane. They say that whatever may be involved in the numerous seed is in the supernatural and never in the natural sphere. They ridicule what they call the segmentary and fragmentary interpretation of the Bible.

The kingdom argument for the supernatural is commendable. This argument begins by showing that God promised Abraham the humanly impossible. Isaac was supernaturally conceived by Abraham’s dead loins and Sarah’s dead womb. The promises made to Abraham were made through Christ (Gal. 3:16-29). All the saved have been supernaturally born (John 1:12,13; 3:8). These constitute Abraham’s spiritual seed. There is no argument with these Scriptural facts, but the theory of no future kingdom breaks down when it states that the promise to Abraham did not include the earth. The land promise, they say, was conditional; but every condition has been violated.

Truth reveals whether amillennialists or millennialists are fragmentary and segmentary in Biblical interpretation. Amillennialists, who embrace the doctrine of free grace, teach that God’s covenant with reference to soteriology (salvation) is unconditional. On the other hand, they state that the covenant with reference to eschatology (last things) is conditional. This is dividing God’s eternal purpose into contradictory segments, thus reducing the purpose of God into incomplete parts. Millennialists who adopt the doctrine of free grace espouse the unconditional covenant of God with reference to soteriology and eschatology. Thus, they do not divide God’s purpose into incomplete segments.

God’s purpose clearly shows that He intends to set up a visible kingdom on this earth (Gen. 1:26-28). Man’s power to govern, however, was lost by the fall. Immediately after the fall of man, God revealed His purpose to not only save His elect but also give us eternal rest in the kingdom. This purpose was gradually unfolded. God’s plan was revealed in the meaning of the names of the men from Adam to Noah: (1) Adam—man, (2) Seth—appointed, (3) Enos—mortal, (4) Cainan—fixed or objective mercy, (5) Mahalaleel—the praise of God, (6) Jared—shall descend,

(7) Enoch—dedicated, under God’s discipline, (8) Methuselah—longsuffering, (9) Lamech—brought low or overthrown, and (10) Noah—rest (Gen. 5). When these names are connected as a chain of historical events, they reveal that man appointed to die stands before objective mercy, praises God, descends, and becomes dedicated. God is longsuffering for the elect’s sake, and when the lawless have been brought low, rest will be experienced in the kingdom. The Divine purpose becomes more detailed, specific, and certain in Abraham. God revealed more of the particulars of His purpose in salvation by distinguishing Abraham from others of the human race. He made a covenant with him concerning the seed and the land and confirmed it with an oath.

Jesus Christ, the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16), is the appointed heir of all things (Heb. 1:2). Christians, the spiritual seed of Abraham (Rom. 4:13-25), are joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). Amillennialists question the attractiveness of Christ’s reigning on David’s throne. They fail to distinguish Christ’s absolute sovereignty, which is His eternally as the Son of God, from His kingship, which is given to Him by promise as the Son of Man. They ignore the truth that those who inherit the eternal kingdom will not be in flesh and blood, but they will be in flesh and bones, like Jesus Christ (Luke 24:39). Furthermore, they represent the kingdom as a material kingdom on the earth which is under the curse. In contrast to their representation, the curse will be lifted. The new heavens will not be on a sin cursed earth but on a renewed earth (II Pet. 3:10-13).

Biblical millennialists do not believe the reign of Jesus Christ will be limited to one city, but He shall reign over the renewed world—the new heaven and the new earth. Absolute authority is Christ’s eternally, and He will not relinquish that authority over all things to reign as King over a limited area. His absolute authority over all things as Son of God will be visibly recognized in His kingship as Son of Man. When one argues that the patriarchs waited for the kingdom, we offer no objection, if this does not mean that the kingdom will be either Christ’s assembly or a period of only a thousand years. The hope of both the Old Testament patriarchs and the New Testament saints is the coming kingdom: “And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect” (Heb. 11:39,40).

Christians have no doubt that Luke 19:11-27 refers to the actual coming again of Jesus Christ. This passage clearly shows that the visible kingdom will not appear until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ will receive the kingdom, not the assembly, from the Father. Hence, He will return with the kingdom for its establishment on the earth (II Tim. 4:1; Rev. 11:15; 5:10).

In Luke 19:11-27, three things should be observed: (1) The kingdom for which the Jews looked would not immediately appear (v.11)—the word “appear” describes a positive appearance. (2) The period between the ascension and second coming of Christ is one in which servants wait and have responsibilities (II Thess. 3:10). (3) Having received the kingdom from the Father, Christ shall return in power and glory. He will not receive the kingdom from men on earth. The Old and New Testaments are occupied with three great facts: Christ is coming; He has come; and He will come again. This age is the time of Christ’s personal absence from the earth.

Arminianism and amillennialism are both refuted in Luke 19. In the first ten verses, Jesus Christ presented Himself as “the Son of Man,” which signifies the Mediator who must stand between God and the elect (I Tim. 2:5). In Luke 19:10, Christ’s purpose for coming into the world is expressed—“For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” His purpose

could not be frustrated. Modern minds have been conditioned by false teaching to think of the cross as a redemption which does less than it was purposed to accomplish. Contrarily, everything God purposed shall be accomplished. We are definitely told who seeks whom. Sinners do not seek God (Rom. 3:11), but the Son of Man seeks and saves those for whom He died (John 10:11-16). The Arminian erroneously places man before God. In the case of Zacchaeus, the Guest became the Host when Christ said, "...today I must abide at thy house" (Luke 19:5). Later, Christ said to Zacchaeus, "This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham" (Luke 19:9). Hence, he had been freely elected to salvation. Although Zacchaeus was a Roman tax-collector, he became Abraham's spiritual seed by regeneration. Therefore, Zacchaeus became an heir of the eschatological kingdom that Christ explained in the parable of the nobleman in the verses that followed (Luke 19:11-27).

Jesus Christ has gone to receive for Himself a kingdom and to return. Amillennialists deny a future kingdom on earth. They teach that Jesus Christ received the kingdom in heaven and is presently reigning as King over the whole human race on earth. Concisely stated, Amillennialists believe the kingdom is heavenly rather than earthly, is spiritual rather than political, is present rather than future, and has been inaugurated in the first rather than awaiting the second advent; and the kingdom's King is in heaven rather than coming to earth to reign. They also equate the kingdom with the assembly. Conversely, Jesus Christ has gone to receive the kingdom in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy: "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Dan. 7:13-14). When He receives the kingdom, the Son of Man will return to earth, thus uniting heaven and earth. At that time, the will of God will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

The kingdom was not established at Christ's first advent. He has gone to receive it. There is an interesting parallel in the career of King David, the greater ancestor of Jesus Christ. When David was chosen and anointed king of Israel, he did not immediately occupy the throne (I Sam. 16:1,13). He was a fugitive while Saul usurped the throne for a time (I Sam. 15:28). However, during the time David was a fugitive, many loyally gathered themselves to him (I Sam. 22:1,2). When Saul's rule was ended by defeat and death, the kingdom of David, who was a type of Christ, was established over Israel. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the prophecy given to King David. Christ was chosen, anointed, and has been exalted to be the messianic King (Acts 2:36). He has gone to the right hand of the Father to receive the kingdom. In the course of His absence from the earth, Satan is the usurper because he is the god of this age (Eph. 2:1-3). However, Christ's elect are being gathered together in Him as heirs of the kingdom (Acts 15:13-17; James 2:5). Satan's rule shall be ended by final defeat and death when Christ returns to establish His kingdom (Rev. 19:11-16).

The kingdom will not be established in power and glory until Jesus Christ returns. Since the kingdom is heavenly, it must be received from the Father, not from men. "Thine is the kingdom" (Matt. 6:13) proves that the Father must give it. "Thy kingdom come" of Matthew 6:10 refers to one distinctive future kingdom. There are not two or more, one within the other, or one that precedes the other. Since believers are to pray for the coming of the kingdom, it does not presently exist.

Christians are responsible to be employed until Christ returns. The rights of Jesus Christ were denied Him by men while He was on the earth, but He had gone to a place where all rights are granted Him. These rights must be maintained by Christians in testimony on the earth. The testimony of Christ is the doctrine of Christ (II John 9-11). Believers should faithfully contend for the faith throughout the absence of Christ (Jude 3). The character of Christ's testimony in the continuance of His absence is given in Luke 19:28-40. Although Christ is exalted above all heavens as to His place on high, He is the lowly One as to His testimony on the earth (Phil. 2:5-11). Therefore, the Lord selects lowly persons to bear the testimony of the lowly One (I Cor. 1:26-31). Working and watching are the two duties of Christ's servants (Mark 13:32-37). Christ's absence is represented as lasting a day and a night. The day and night describe the two duties He gives all Christians—working in the day and watching in the night.

Matthew's account of the parable of a man delivering the talents to his servants before traveling into a far country (Matt. 25:14-30) is similar to Luke's record of a certain nobleman delivering a pound to each of ten servants before going into a far country (Luke 19:11-27). The important difference between them is the unequal distribution of the talents in Matthew and the equal distribution of the pounds (minas) in Luke. Matthew stressed the sovereignty of God who divides to every man severally as He pleases (I Cor. 4:7; 12:11). Whereas, Luke portrayed the responsibility of the recipients, each of whom received one pound. Matthew, like Luke, spoke of the prolonged absence of the distributor of the gifts. The absence of Jesus Christ is portrayed as a night season (Matt. 14:22-33).

After the miracle of feeding the multitude with five loaves and two fish, Christ constrained His disciples to go to the "other side" (Matt. 14:22). The disciples in the ship symbolize Christ's people in the world as they face the sea of mankind, the darkness of depravity, and the wind of false doctrine. The faith and obedience of the disciples were tested (Matt. 14:24,28); nevertheless, Christ returned to bring His disciples to their desired haven (Matt. 14:25-33).

The King shall return with His kingdom. When the nobleman "...returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him..." (Luke 19:15). Who can deny this refers to the coming of Christ? This parable distinguishes the servants from the citizens. The citizens rejected and crucified Christ. Israel rejected the Messiah. They sent a message after His return to the Father, saying, "...We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). Israel's continual refusal of Christ is seen throughout the Acts of the Apostles (chapters 2,3,7,13,15,28). The servants were called to the returned nobleman—Christ. These ten servants could not be the apostles. There were twelve apostles at the beginning, and there were eleven after the apostasy and death of Judas.

The ten servants suggest the idea of responsibility. The lethargic Thessalonian Christians who were misled to believe the resurrection had already taken place had ceased working. Therefore, Paul reminded them "that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (II Thess. 3:10). Christians must awaken from apathy and assume the responsibility of redeeming the time, because the days are evil (Eph. 5:14-16). Between Christ's ascension and His coming again, we expectantly wait and look for His coming again. The pound given to each of the servants does not signify special grace. Special grace was wrought in their hearts and not merely delivered to them. It is never taken from one to whom it is given (Rom. 11:29). (Study Rom. 8:28-31.) The pound refers to the witness of God that makes every man inexcusable (Rom. 1:19-28; Ps. 19:1-14).

The returned King commanded all the servants to be called before Him in judgment. The first person who came was faithful to exercise his responsibility. He recognized that God is sovereign and had granted him the ability to be fruitful (Luke 19:16,17). (Study Acts 9:5,6; I Cor. 15:10.) The second person was not as faithful as the first; therefore, the commendation given to the first person was omitted for this second person (Luke 19:18,19). Rewards are according to the degree of faithfulness. "And another came, saying, Lord, behold here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin" (Luke 19:20). Lordship was acknowledged, but this is understood in the light of the confession of Christ's lordship by the unsaved (Phil. 2:9-11; Matt. 7:21-23). He was an Arminian in his concept of theology. He said, "For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man..." (Luke 19:21). Austere means severe, hard, harsh, cruel, and uncompassionate. A recipient of grace would not bring such accusations against the God of unmerited favor, who said His yoke is easy and His burden is light. The returned King used the false servant's own statement to condemn him. You will observe that the returned King will first deal with the faithful servants and finally with the wicked. No time element is mentioned here because the emphasis is placed on the difference between true and false servants. The Son of Man will openly exercise His power and visibly bring all things into subjection to His righteous reign on the earth in the eschatological kingdom.

Adam's dominion over the earth proves God's purpose to reign through the Son of Man on earth (Gen. 1:26-28). The reign of Jesus Christ as the Son of Man points backward to Adam's failure in the garden and forward to Jesus Christ, through whom the forfeited blessings are restored. Man was made a little lower than the angels, and he was the undisputed ruler of the lower world (Gen. 1:28; Ps. 8:4-9). In the capacity of ruler, Adam wore God's image; he represented God on the earth. Adam's dominion was universal as far as the lower creation was concerned. However, that dominion was lost in the fall. The dominion that was lost in Adam shall be restored in Jesus Christ, the second Adam. Psalm 8 is applied directly to Jesus Christ in Hebrews 2:6-7. Hence, Christ's reign will be universal. As the land and the creatures on it were to participate in the sabbath rest, how much more shall their antitype (Rom. 8:18-24)? Christ's visible reign must not be enfeebled by making it to mean nothing more than His reign in the heart. The writer of Hebrews teaches us that Psalm 8 is not yet fulfilled in the preeminent Man, Jesus Christ, the Son of David: "...But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:8,9).

The extent of Adam's fall will be regained by Jesus Christ, the second Adam. As the second Adam, Jesus Christ will overthrow the empire of Satan and regain the dominion Adam lost. Therefore, His redemption carries as far as the consequences of the fall have reached. Since the curse will be annulled, its extent must be ascertained. Man is literally depraved (Rom. 5:12). The lower creation is literally under the curse. Hence, there was a literal Eden, serpent, fall, and curse. The sorrowful parturition of the woman, the toil and corruption of man, and the thorns and thistles of earth are literal.

By His redemption, Jesus Christ conquered the consequences of the fall and regained what Adam lost. Therefore, man is literally renewed by the work of the triune God. Regeneration is from the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit. All the departments of the lower creation involved in the consequences of the first man's shameful defeat must exhibit the fruits of the second Man's magnificent victory. Romans 8 advocates the deliverance of the whole visible creation. This does not indicate progressing from the material to the spiritual and then regressing

to the material. It signifies proceeding from the promise to its fulfillment. A kingdom of rule apart from the renewed creation would be inconsistent.

A doxology by Paul in I Timothy 1:17 concluded his glorious testimony of saving grace: "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen." The Greek reads *to de basilei ton aionon*—"Now, to the King of the ages" (translation). He was filled with adoration for his Savior and King. The Greek word *aionon* is a genitive plural of *aion*, which means a period of time of significant character, an era, an age, or eternity. Since the word is plural, one would not say eternities but ages. It is another way of expressing the fact that Christ's kingdom shall not have an end: "*ouk estai telos* [there shall be no end]" (Luke 1:33). This is the testimony of the Old and New Testament prophecies: "And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Dan. 7:14). "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

Christians in the early assemblies waited for Jesus Christ, the King of the ages (Rom. 8:23; I Cor. 1:7; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 9:28). The double compound Greek verb *apekdechomai*, used in these verses, means to wait tirelessly, expectantly, and eagerly for Christ. Their hope was not in the betterment of society but in the coming of the King of the ages. Their hope was not soteriological. They were already saved. A visible church/kingdom was not the hope of these Christians. That would be a source of untold error and disaster in "church" history. They waited for Christ, the King of the ages, and His eschatological kingdom.

THE KINGDOM HAS APPROACHED

There is little concurrence among scholars and Bible students concerning “the kingdom of the heavens has approached” (Matt. 3:2—translation). Hence, there is little agreement among them concerning eschatology (*eschatos*), which means the study of last things. One’s view of the kingdom of Matthew 3:2 determines what he believes concerning the manner and time of Christ’s second advent, the assembly of Christ and her mission in the world, and the purpose of the gospel. Therefore, the Biblical view of the kingdom is an absolute necessity for a Scriptural concept of other vital subjects.

True eschatology is always concerned with the expectation of Jesus Christ, the One who has been revealed to the heart of man in regeneration and will appear the second time to consummate man’s salvation by the redemption of the body (Heb. 9:28; Rom. 8:18-23). Christ’s first advent was for the purpose of putting away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. His second advent will be to consummate His work. Hence, the two advents give the key to true eschatology.

The Christian with the correct concept of last things is not disturbed by all the wild speculations of those who prostitute the subject for the basest purposes. The promises of God do not offer a framework of ideas to satisfy the curiosities of men. God’s promises are characterized by a message that penetrates to the root of man’s existence. Therefore, when God’s promises of the future find lodgment in the hearts of the elect, they compel us to have our eyes on the future, because the One who is coming has already entered our lives.

There is much discussion over the following statement in the King James translation of the Bible: “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7). The Greek verb in those verses is *eggiken*, perfect active indicative of *eggidzo*, which means to come near, approach, or draw nigh. When we observe the basic English meaning of these three verbs, we can better determine the definition of *eggidzo*. “Come” means to come toward or away from something, to pass from one point to one nearer. “Draw” means to pull, drag, draw, or move toward. “Approach” means to come or go near or nearer in either place or time. The occurrence of *eggidzo* in its perfect active indicative form in each reference where it is used proves that the kingdom has not arrived, but it has approached or come near.

Since the word is used more than forty times in the New Testament, its meaning must be determined by the context. The perfect tense signifies that the kingdom of Old Testament prophecy has approached: “...Repent for the kingdom of the heavens has approached” (Matt. 3:2—translation). Out of the more than forty times the verb *eggidzo* is used, there are fourteen times when it is used as a perfect active indicative verb (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; 26:45,46; Mark 1:15; 14:42; Luke 10:9,11; 21:8,20; Rom. 13:12; James 5:8; I Pet. 4:7). The following paragraphs consider these references:

1. The first two perfect active indicative forms of *eggidzo* refer to preaching by John the Baptist and Jesus Christ: “the kingdom of the heavens has approached [*eggidzo*]” (Matt. 3:2; 4:17—translation). The third is Christ’s commission to the twelve disciples to preach the same truth to

the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:7). These first three references refer to the same thing.

2. Both Matthew and Mark use the perfect active indicative form of *eggidzo* in their record of Christ's rebuke to His disciples who slept while He prayed in Gethsemane. "Then He comes to His disciples, and says to them, continue sleeping now and continue taking your rest: behold, the hour has approached [*eggidzo*], and the Son of Man is about to be betrayed [*paradidotai*, futuristic present passive indicative of *paradidomi*] into the hands of sinners. Be arising, let us be going: behold, the one betraying me has approached [*eggidzo*]" (Matt. 26:45,46—translation). (See Mark 14:42.) When Christ rebuked the disciples, His hour of death had not arrived, but it had approached. Furthermore, Judas had not yet arrived, but he approached.

3. After John the Baptist was imprisoned, Jesus Christ went to Galilee and preached "the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand [*eggidzo*—has approached]: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:14,15).

4. In Christ's instruction to the twelve disciples sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, He told them to say, "the kingdom of God is come [*eggidzo*—has approached] nigh unto you" (Luke 10:9,11).

5. In answer to the ones who questioned Him concerning His statement about the destruction of the temple, Christ warned them not to be deceived by antichrists who say "the time draweth near [*eggidzo*—has approached]" (Luke 21:8). He then described the time of its destruction: "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh [*eggidzo*—has approached]" (Luke 21:20). Jerusalem had not at that time been destroyed, but the desolation had approached.

6. Paul sought to awaken the Roman Christians from their lethargy by reminding them that the perfection of their salvation, when their bodies would be glorified like the body of the Lord Jesus, was nearer than when they first believed. He told them, "The night is advanced, the day has approached [*eggidzo*]..." (Rom. 13:12—translation). The day of which Paul spoke was the day of coming salvation—the glorification of the body: "So Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him" (Heb. 9:28—translation).

7. In light of the truth that "the coming of the Lord has approached [*eggidzo*]" (James 5:8—translation), James exhorted Christians to be longsuffering and to establish our hearts.

8. Peter reminded us that "the termination of all things has approached [*eggidzo*]..." (I Pet. 4:7—translation). If all things had terminated, Peter would not have continued the verse with the exhortation, "be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer." In conclusion, the kingdom has not arrived any more than any of the other events mentioned in these verses.

The amillennialist humanly reasons that to the millennialist "near" becomes distant, "quickly" means ages hence, and "at hand" signifies afar off. In contrast to the amillennial human reasoning, nearness is not permanent, but it is a continual approaching or coming without pause. The Lord's soon return is to be understood in the sense of Christian hope, called the blessed hope, the expectation which does not calculate the time and hour but looks at time in the same

way our Lord views time: "...one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (II Pet. 3:8). The estimate of nearness given by God in measuring prophetic periods includes a purposed indefiniteness in order to produce watchfulness, piety, service, and diligent study of Scripture on our part until we depart to be with Him or He comes for us. What Christian can object to the prophecy expressed in the blessed hope?

Two passages that have caused debate concerning the time of the Kingdom's establishment are Matthew 12:28 and Luke 11:20. Since both synoptic writers were referring to the same thing, Matthew alone will be considered in this discussion. In answer to the Pharisees' charge that Jesus Christ was casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, Christ said, "But if [since—first class conditional particle] I am casting out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God came [aorist active indicative of *phthano*, which means to precede, be close at hand, arrive, or come] to [*epi*, accusative of extent, which can be used with the genitive, dative, locative, instrumental, or accusative cases, meaning upon, over, or to] you" (Matt. 12:28—translation). Those who believe the kingdom was established at Christ's first advent say "the kingdom of God has already come on you." However, the kingdom had no more come on the unrepentant Pharisees than it was "within them" (Luke 17:21). Jewish national repentance is required before the kingdom will come on them (Ps. 110: Rom. 11).

The preposition *epi* used with the accusative plural pronoun *humas* in Matthew 12:28 carries the thought of a movement toward its object rather than having actually arrived (already come on them). Thus, the kingdom of Old Testament prophecy had moved near enough for the Jews to behold the Person of the King, but their unregenerate hearts prevented them from recognizing Him. Christ told them in a parable: "But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). The kingdom was within reach of only the repentant who became heirs of the kingdom (James 2:5).

There is no reference to the kingdom approaching subsequent to Christ's ascension. This does not indicate that the kingdom was offered to the Jews, because the kingdom of Old Testament prophecy was impossible before Calvary. Jesus Christ must die before He reigns; therefore, suffering precedes glory. The Jews rejected the Savior, not the kingdom. If the Jews were able to defeat God's purpose at Christ's incarnation, what hope do we have in His second coming? The intervening period between the advents of Jesus Christ is preparatory for the establishment of His kingdom. This includes the gathering and preparation of the elect.

The Jews' concept that their national choice by God assured them of entrance into the kingdom was incorrect. Entrance into the kingdom is not on the basis of natural but spiritual descent. Isaiah's unusual commission emphasized the inability of these people to understand. God told Isaiah to "Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" (Is. 6:9,10). Nevertheless, Isaiah must declare the information God gave. A teacher who withholds any information he has been assigned to teach would not fulfill his duty toward his unconcerned students. Furthermore, no prophet, apostle, or pastor/teacher has the right to keep back any of God's counsel regardless of the attitude of his audience. God's servant must keep one thing in mind throughout the course of his ministry—his faithfulness in proclaiming the whole counsel of God is pleasing to God whether the message is received or rejected.

In II Corinthians 2:14, Paul testified that he was always being led in triumph (present active participle of *thriambeuo*, which means to lead or cause to triumph) in Christ as he proclaimed the truth of the gospel. The wording of Paul's thanks is noteworthy: "Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place." He avoided any reference to himself as a victor because the victory was Christ's who was leading him. What a lesson for "servants" who want to take credit for their "victories."

Following his thanks for Christ's victory in which he shared, Paul stated the purpose for his thanks: "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?" (II Cor. 2:15,16). True servants of God are a sweet savor to Jesus Christ in not only those who are being saved but also in those who are perishing. The truth of the gospel is a fragrant odor (*osme*) to those who are ordained to eternal life, but the same fragrant odor on the children of death causes them to stink more abominably. Hence, what is spiritual nourishment and joy to the elect is so unpalatable to the nonelect that it produces hatred in them. That which became light to Israel was darkness that could be felt by the Egyptians (Ex. 10:21-23). When God makes manifest the fragrant odor of Christ's knowledge by His servants, it becomes light to the believing but darkness to the perishing.

The weakness of both Isaiah and Paul was manifested, but God dealt with their discouragement. Isaiah said, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips..." (Is. 6:5). Paul said, "...when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother..." (II Cor. 2:12,13). God encouraged Isaiah by revealing to him that somewhere down the corridor of time some of the Jews would surely respond to the gospel of the kingdom: "But yet in it [the land] shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof" (Is. 6:13). A living seed buried in the ground does not perish; likewise, Israel shall never perish though she is buried among the nations of the world (Rom. 11). Jehovah shall have His tithe. God encouraged Paul by letting him know that the success of the gospel was not his to achieve.

The Lord's turning from the Jews to the Gentiles to take out of them a people for Himself as His assembly was in the purpose of God. Some of the Old Testament saints had a clear view of the age of Christ's assembly that would intervene between the two advents of Jesus Christ. David spoke of the time of Christ's priesthood: "The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Ps. 110:4). The King and His kingdom are set forth in Psalm 110:1-3. No verse is more misapplied than Psalm 110:1—"THE LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." Christ applied this to Himself (Matt. 22:44). The eternal God said something to His eternal Son, whom David called his Lord. Therefore, the Psalm cannot be both by and about David. The promise is not that Christ's enemies shall be converted but that they shall be made His footstool. At the time David's Lord shall come back into the world, men will be united against Him; but the Messiah shall rule in the midst of His enemies. When He returns, His people (the Jews) will be willing in the day of God's power.

Reference to Christ's priesthood after the order of Melchizedek is made in Psalm 110:4. Christ's priesthood is administered at the Father's right hand. Between the time Christ took His seat at the

Father's right hand (Ps. 110:1) and the time He "shall strike through kings in the day of His wrath" (Ps. 110:5), God is visiting the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name (Acts 15:14; Rom. 11). David then described His Lord's warfare and victory (Ps. 110:5-7). The day of Christ's wrath is not the day of grace. When the "fulness of the Gentiles" is completed, Jesus Christ shall return to build again the tabernacle of David (Rom. 11:25; Acts 15:16,17). The kingdom that approached in the Person of the King at His first advent will be established by the Son of Man when He comes the second time.

THE KINGDOM PREPARED FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD

God's predetermined intention will be successfully accomplished. The Sovereign of the universe does not undertake the accomplishment of a determined intention without His knowledge embracing all things relating to it. His understanding is infinite (Ps. 147:5). Hence, the whole creation was once future, or it was from eternity. Since creation had a beginning, it is not eternal. God's eternal knowledge of all things proves He knew what would be created before His act of creation. Likewise, prophecy is proof of God's infinite knowledge. If God does not know future things, He is ignorant. Prophecy is derived from God's foreknowledge. Therefore, He "...calleth those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:17).

God, in His perfect knowledge, saw the failure of human responsibility. Man has failed in every age: Adam in the garden failed in human responsibility. Noah with the sword of authority failed to govern himself. Israel broke the law that was given to her. The priesthood offered strange fire. Failure was written over kingship in Israel. Nebuchadnezzar's power caused him to be lifted up with pride. Local assemblies have proved to be no exception. On the other hand, there is no failure with God (Is. 6:13; Ezek. 16:60-63; II Tim. 2:19; Rom. 8:28-30). Therefore, God shall accomplish His eternal purpose concerning all things, including the kingdom under the righteous reign of Jesus Christ on earth.

God's truth, describing what He intends to perform, should be the highest priority in the life of every Christian. As the wisdom of this world cannot be understood without studying its philosophers, the wisdom of God on any Biblical subject cannot be acquired without considering what the Lord has said (II Tim. 2:7,15). Since the eschatological kingdom is one of the great subjects of the Bible, the truth concerning it is found only in Holy Scripture. Scripture does not describe it to mean one thing in one dispensation and something entirely different in a subsequent age. It is unchangeably the same in all Biblical prophecy until its fulfillment at Christ's second advent.

Some have likened the truth of the kingdom to a seed-germ that changes to a living plant and finally to the fully developed grain in its covering (Mark 4:26-29). Thus, they liken prophecy of the kingdom to the seed-germ, the assembly of Jesus Christ to the living plant, and kingdom of glory to the full corn in the ear. Every student of Scripture admits that there is progress in doctrinal revelation, but this progress by the Spirit through the apostles was only a clarification of Old Testament truths by means of their fulfillment. The progress of doctrine in the assembly and in the New Testament must be distinguished. When the last book of the New Testament was written, any further revelation of God's mind and purpose ceased. That which has been "once delivered (aorist passive participle of *paradidomi*, which means to give over into the hands of another or to deliver something to one to keep)" (Jude 3) will have nothing added to it. Progress of doctrine in the assembly, however, has to do with man's apprehension of the truth of God revealed in both the Old and New Testaments—the original truth of both Testaments.

The following examples prove that original truth which portrays certain events that will transpire, prophecies that will be fulfilled, and promises that will be experienced cannot be a

mere germ which will sprout into something entirely different: (1) The prophecies concerning the virgin birth of Christ, His impeccable life, vicarious death, resurrection out from among the dead, and coming the second time to establish His kingdom could not be a microbe that would germinate into another thing. (2) The promises concerning the new heart in regeneration and the hope of the glorified body could not be a micro-organism capable of evolving into a divergent substance. (3) All prophecies concerning the eschatological kingdom will not develop into the assembly, Christ's reign in the heart, or His present reign from heaven. Biblical doctrine is given to God's people for their spiritual growth, not that doctrine may be molded into things never intended by God.

The future kingdom of Biblical prophecy is the consummation of God's purpose. Christ said to those blessed by the Father, "...Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). Those "blessed" (perfect passive participle of *eulogeo*, which means having been blessed) by the Father and the kingdom "prepared" (perfect passive participle of *hetoimadzo*, which means having been prepared) are both perfect passive participles. The perfect tense looks not only to the beginning but to the consummation of the action. Hence, the perfect tense is used consummatively, which means the completed action is emphasized. God never starts something He does not complete. The main verb is "inherit," an aorist active imperative of *kleronomeo*, which means to obtain by inheritance or to receive possession of. All recipients of God's grace are heirs of the future kingdom (James 2:5), but not until the Son of Man comes in His glory will the King command them to inherit the kingdom (Matt. 25:31-34).

(1)The King, (2) the heirs, and (3) the kingdom—these great truths are revealed in Matthew 25:34. "Then the King shall say to those on his right hand, Come you who have been blessed of my Father, come into possession of the kingdom which has been prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (translation). The names of the elect written in the book of life, the slain Lamb—Revelation 13:8, and the kingdom—Matthew 25:34, are all "from the foundation of the world [*apo kataboles kosmou*]". The same preposition (*apo*) is used in both verses. The Lamb "slain" (*esphagmenou*, perfect passive participle of *sphadzo*, which means having been slain) and the kingdom "prepared" (*hetoimasmenen*, perfect passive participle of *hetoimadzo*, which means having been prepared) took place before the foundation of the world. Furthermore, the names written in the Lamb's book of life are included in Jesus Christ who was slain before the foundation of the world. The verb "written" of Luke 10:20—"...because your names are written in heaven"—is a perfect passive indicative of the Greek verb *eggrapho*, which means "it stands written."

The King was foreordained "before the foundation of the world [*pro kataboles kosmou*]" to be the Savior of the elect (I Pet. 1:20). Christ could become the King of His promised kingdom only through His blood. Apart from His vicarious atonement, He could never say, "Come, you who have been blessed of my Father, Come into possession of the kingdom which has been prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34—translation). The Father's eternally chosen Servant (Is. 42:1), Jesus Christ, as Mediator assumed the position of the willing Servant. Therefore, the foreordained (perfect passive participle of *proginosko*, which means to determine beforehand or to foreordain) Savior by His election was the foreappointed King (I Pet. 1:20). His suffering must precede His glory (I Pet. 1:11). The time when Christ shall sit on the throne of His glory is predicted in Matthew 25:31-34.

The Greek words for “foreordained” in reference to the Savior, “blessed” concerning the blessed by the Father, and “prepared” relating to the preparedness of the kingdom are all perfect passive participles. The perfect tense emphasizes the completed action of Christ’s Saviorhood, work of grace in the elect, and establishment of the kingdom. Christ’s Kingship, His preparation for it in His suffering and death, and its culmination when He shall sit on His throne must all be viewed as parts of the whole from God’s perspective. Those blessed by the Father’s election, their preparation by the application of Christ’s redemptive work in regeneration and subsequent progressive sanctification, and their ultimate perfection in glorification must also be viewed as parts of the whole. Moreover, the completion of the kingdom according to God’s eternal purpose, its preparation by Christ’s redemptive work, the salvation of the elect who shall inherit it, and its ultimate establishment must also be viewed as three parts of the whole.

The heirs of the kingdom were chosen in Christ “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). The heirs of the kingdom are not presently in the kingdom, but they are destined to be in it. Heirs of the kingdom are the elect gathered out of all nations. In their aggregate form, they will constitute a holy nation. The context of Matthew 25:34 speaks of the judgment of the living nations immediately preceding the establishment of the kingdom. Therefore, the living “sheep” are the subjects of the living nations. However, entrance into the transitional period of the kingdom will not be restricted to sheep in their mortal bodies. Heirs of the kingdom will include both sheep living in mortal bodies of flesh and blood and glorified sheep (Is. 61:4-11; 62:1-5; 65:20-22; II Thess. 1:5-10; 2:1; Rev. 19:1-11; 21:24).

All of God’s sheep shall inherit the kingdom. The “sheep,” a term used by Jesus Christ in His judgment of the living nations, include sheep from the nation of Israel, the Gentile nations, and those from among both Jews and Gentiles who constitute the assembly: (1) Christ’s command to the twelve apostles in Matthew 10:5-6 proves God has some sheep from among the Jews: “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.” (2) Christ’s speaking to the Jews about sheep other than themselves proves God has sheep who are not of Israel: “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (John 10:16). (3) Christ’s judgment of the living nations (Matt. 25:31-46) subsequent to His judgment of Israel and prior to establishing His kingdom proves God has sheep from among both Jews and Gentiles who constitute the assembly: “...he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left” (Matt. 25:32,33).

The term “sheep” (*probata*, plural of *probaton*) is of great significance when it refers to God’s elect. It is used seventeen times in John 10. It refers to the elect from among Jews and “other sheep” who were not from among the Jews (John 10:16). Two Greek words in John 10:16 must be understood. Although they are different, both are translated by the word “fold.” (1) The first, *aules*, which means an enclosure by a wall or a sheepfold, is used for “other sheep” not of the Jewish fold. To the Jews, this fold held all the flock of God. As far as they were concerned all outside the confines of Judaism were nothing but dogs (Ps. 22:16,20; Matt. 15:27; Phil. 3:2). (2) The second Greek word, *poimne*, which means a flock, was used to speak of all sheep constituting “one fold [flock].” This is incorrectly translated in some translations of the Bible. “One fold [flock]” signifies that Christ’s flock of sheep extends beyond the confines of the Jewish fold.

The great commission given to the eleven disciples in Matthew 28:19 extends to all nations: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations....” Caiaphas, the high priest, did not know the truth that he spoke: “...he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad” (John 11:51,52). God has His sheep (elect) that He will call out “of nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues” (Rev. 7:9). This stands in contrast to Christ’s commission in Matthew 10:1-7 to the twelve disciples to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

There are some goats inside of Judaism: “...For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel” (Rom. 9:6). There are some sheep outside the fold of Judaism: “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold...” (John 10:16). “Other sheep I have” of John 10:16 includes all nations and all ages. The Greek verb translated “I have” is a present active indicative of *echo*, which means “to have or to possess.” Even before Christ’s death for them and the Holy Spirit’s regeneration of them, Christ could say, “I have them.” They were His by covenant relationship. They had been given to Him by God the Father’s election (John 6:37; 17:2,6,11,12,24; 18:9). Thus, God’s sheep have been eternally Christ’s sheep. They were His at the time He spoke, and they will be His forever.

There are saved sheep, and there are lost sheep. When Jesus Christ gave His life for the lost sheep (John 10:11,15,18), He absolutely and perfectly purchased salvation for them. The love that moved the Lord Jesus to die for the lost sheep in Israel was the same love that moved Him to say: “And I have other sheep, which are not from this sheepfold; it is necessary for me to bring them also, and they shall hear my voice; and they shall become one flock with one shepherd” (John 10:16—translation). In John 10:16, the Greek word translated “must” is *dei*, which means His bringing other sheep is binding, necessary, proper, or inevitable. Therefore, as Jesus Christ “must [*dei*]...be lifted up” (John 3:14), it is inevitable (*dei*) (John 10:16) that those for whom He died become saved sheep. The Greek word for “bring” is *agagein*, aorist active infinitive of *ago*, which means to bring or to lead. Hence, “it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing [*agogonta*, second aorist active participle of *ago*] many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Heb. 2:10).

The lost sheep from among the Jews being saved during the dispensation of grace become part of the body of Christ, the assembly: “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom. 11:5). “What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded” (Rom. 11:7). “...blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in” (Rom. 11:25). However, God will once again deal with national Israel (Rom. 11:26,27; Rev. 7:4-8). Furthermore, the lost sheep among the Gentiles who are being saved during the present assembly age become part of the constituted body of Christ. But some Gentiles will be saved after the completion of the assembly (Rev. 7:9; Matt. 25:31-33). Make no mistake, all the sheep, regardless of their race or nationality, will inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. Some will enter the millennium in their natural bodies and others in their glorified bodies, but all shall enter the eternal kingdom in bodies of flesh and bones.

The aforementioned things about Israel, the assembly, and the Gentiles are reprehensible to those who deny a future kingdom. However, the view of the present church/kingdom and no future kingdom should be even more reprehensible to those who believe the Scriptural teaching concerning the future kingdom. Matthew 25:31-34 proves, beyond successful contradiction, that the sheep’s inheritance of the kingdom will be associated with Christ’s coming as the Son of

Man. There is not the slightest hint of Christ's kingdom until He sits on the throne of His glory. The kingdom will not be given to the sheep as they are saved one by one but to them when they will be gathered together as a flock.

The means by which the kingdom can be obtained and the kingdom itself are distinct. The following are preparatory prerequisites for entrance into the kingdom: (1) The new birth is a necessity. "...Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). "...Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). (2) Denial of self is a requirement. "...Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34). (3) Perseverance is a demand. "...No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). The new birth produces both the denial of self and perseverance.

The kingdom was predetermined by God (Matt. 25:34). The kingdom, like the King and the heirs, was not an afterthought with God. It was His forethought. When God created the heavens and the earth, He had in mind the new heaven and the new earth (Gen. 1:1; Rev. 21:1). This concludes Volume II in which we have considered the introduction of the King. This series will continue in Volume III with the next aspect of our study of Christ's future Kingdom.