

In Samuel's older years, some of the prominent men of Israel came to him with the following request:

*"Thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Sam. 8:5).*

Here was Israel's same old trouble--they wanted to be like the nations around them. God had called them to be different. They were His "special" people. He said to them through Moses:

*"The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth...Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which I command thee this day, to do them...Thou shalt be blessed above all people" (Deut. 7:6,11,14).*

But, Israel wouldn't have it that way! How much like people today, who instead of being the people of God by carrying out His Word are consumed with the mania to be like their religious neighbors and thus compromise any peculiar tenets of the gospel. Congregations are infested with them! They are the ones holding "Israel" back!

## B. What Their Request Indicated.

Samuel thought they had rejected his leadership. But, God said, "No, they have rejected Mine." And He permitted them to have a king:

*"Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee (Samuel) for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them" (1 Sam. 8:7).*

God had loved Israel. He had fed them. He had led them. He had given them a land. He had given them victory. What more of a king could they have wanted? God never did forget this insult, and He ever afterward referred to it as a sin (1 Sam. 10:19; 1 Sam. 12:12; 1 Sam. 12:16-19; Hos. 13:9-11).

C. God, Realizing Ahead Of Time This Request That Would Come, Had Given Instructions Concerning Any King They Might Have.

Through Moses, God had said:

*"When thou art come unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me; thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother. But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the Lord hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way. Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold. And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel" (Deut. 17:14-20).*

## D. God Gave Them Their Wishes To Their Own Sorrow.

So often in Scripture, God gave disobedient people their wishes to their own regret later. Wishes uttered rashly in moments of temper or impatience have come true, much to the sorrow of those who wished them. They wanted a king. They were determined to have a king. God gave them a king, but not without telling them of some of the grievances that would come upon them because of their king:

*"He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horseman; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your olive-yards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day" (1 Sam. 8:11-18).*

But, the people didn't give heed to these words either (verses 19 and 20). They still wanted a king. Some people can't be told--they must be shown. If we may so speak, they got shown all right. It did cost them tremendously to support a king, his palace, his court, and his army. By the time that Solomon had gotten through with them (just the third king), they were calling for relief from such heavy taxation. Their kings led them into idolatry, which brought their national ruin at the punishing hand of God. Their wars (because they were a nation with a king and had assumed the usual role of a nation with a king) greatly weakened the nation time and time again.

How right God was! How wrong they were! Thus, with the coming of the kings came the end of the judges. When Samuel died, Israel had had its last judge.

# Israel's First Three Kings

Israel thought an earthly king would be a step forward; God told them it would be just the opposite. While the truth of God will always be manifested in time, yet the will of man must exert itself in the meantime. Just because God permitted them to have a king did not mean that He approved the idea. Sometimes, He permits some things to take place for punishing reasons. This was the case with their request for a king.

In this study of the first three kings of Israel, we are considering a period of their history that covered one hun-

dred years. Each of the three kings reigned forty years: Saul (Acts 13:21), David (II Sam. 5:4), and Solomon (I Kings 11:42). Let us look at each of their reigns.

### I. The Reign Of King Saul.

#### A. His Anointing.

When young Saul, a Benjamite, was out looking for his father's asses, he found himself as lost as the asses. He and the servant accompanying him went to the prophet Samuel in hopes that he would be able to direct them back to their home. Before they came, God informed Samuel that the one whom He had selected to be Israel's first king would be in his presence within a day. When Saul came in, God told Samuel that this was he (I Sam. 9:17), and he anointed him before he left (I Sam. 10:1).

#### B. Saul's Early Humility.

When Samuel spoke to him, Saul answered:

*"Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?" (I Sam. 9:21).*

When Saul's uncle asked him what Samuel had said to him when he called upon him, I Sam. 10:16 says:

*"He told us plainly that the asses were found. But of the matter of the kingdom, whereof Samuel spake, he told him not."*

When Samuel assembled all Israel together for the purpose of setting Saul over them as king, he did it by having them come before him by tribes. When they came, the tribe of Benjamin was taken. In the tribe of Benjamin, the family of Matri was taken. In the family of Matri, Kish's son Saul was taken. Now, let us read from I Sam. 10:21:

*"And when they sought him (Saul), he could not be found. Therefore they inquired of the Lord further, if the man should yet come thither. And the Lord answered, Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff. And they ran and fetched him thence: and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward."*

When he stood forth among the people, Samuel proclaimed him king, and the people all shouted that which has become famous in England concerning her kings:

*"God save the king" (I Sam. 10:24).*

When Saul went to his home, there were some wicked men (spoken of as "children of Belial") who looked down upon him. But, Saul was as meek as Moses:

*"But the children of Belial said, How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no presents. But he held his peace" (I Sam. 10:27).*

Later, when some advised putting these men to death, Saul refused their request (I Sam. 11:12,13). Had Saul always retained the spirit of humility before God and his meekness before men, his life would have been one of the most beautiful recorded in Holy Writ.

#### C. His First Battle.

The men of Gibeah appealed to Saul for help against the Ammonites. The Israelites were not minded to help them, but the Spirit of God came upon Saul, and the following is

recorded in Scripture:

*"The Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings, and his anger was kindled greatly. And he took a yoke of oxen, and hewed them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the coasts of Israel by the hands of the messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen. And the fear of the Lord fell on the people, and they came out with one consent" (I Sam. 11:6,7).*

Thus, Israel learned that Saul meant business. The Ammonites were sorely defeated by Saul and his men. In later battles with the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, and others, Saul was established as a man of great might.

#### D. His Disobedience.

On one occasion, Saul's three thousand men were faced with thirty thousand Philistine chariots and six thousand horsemen. In great fear, the Israelites hid themselves in caves, thickets, and rocks--just anywhere. Saul himself carried at Gilgal seven days according to an appointment he had made with Samuel. But, when he feared that Samuel was not going to come, he himself offered a burnt offering to God for deliverance from the Philistines. When he had finished his sacrifice, Samuel showed up and rebuked him. Saul tried to explain his action, but Samuel did not excuse Saul for disobeying God in offering this sacrifice:

*"Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee" (I Sam. 13:13,14).*

On another occasion, God commanded Saul to go smite the Amalekites. He told him to wipe them out with an utter destruction, sparing neither human nor beast. Saul marched against the Amalekites, slaughtering them with a great slaughter. But, instead of wiping out everything and everybody as he was told to do, he spared the best of the cattle and the sheep for sacrificial purposes, and he brought the king back alive. He returned under the thought that he had obeyed God. Suffice it to say, he came much nearer obeying God's commandment to destroy the Amalekites than much of religion today does of obeying God's commandments. But, what he failed to do was counted disobedience by God. When Samuel took him to task for his action, he defended himself as having destroyed everything but the king and the animals that they were going to sacrifice to God, to which Samuel replied:

*"Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king" (I Sam. 15:22,23).*

The next chapter tells of God's sending Samuel, unknown to Saul, to anoint the boy David as the next king.

#### E. His Rage Of Jealousy.

Without going into detail to narrate, the story of the young lad David killing the giant Goliath in the presence of Saul and his army is well known (I Sam. 17). After this, Saul set David over his men of war (I Sam. 18:5). All went well until one day when David was returning from the Philistines, the women of Israel in all the cities sang the praises of Saul and of David as follows:

*"Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (I Sam. 18:7).*

This didn't set well at all with Saul, for I Sam. 18:8,9 says:

*"And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day and forward."*

For thirteen chapters following, the story of his bitter animosity against David, at times even hunting him like a dog hunts a rabbit, is unfolded step by step. How cruel he was toward David, and how merciful David was toward him! Finally, with the battle going against him and with his sons already slain in the battle, Saul fell upon his own sword in a miserable suicide death. Thus came to an end the rule of Israel's first king.

## II. The Reign Of David.

### A. His Anointing.

I Sam. 16 tells of Samuel anointing the youngest son of Jesse to be the next king. At that time, David was but a sheep-keeping boy. The Scripture describes him as ruddy and of a beautiful countenance (I Sam. 16:12). Thus, when David played his harp before Saul to quiet him (I Sam. 16:14-23), and when he slew Goliath (I Sam. 17), he had already been anointed to succeed Saul, though we are sure he never breathed a word of it to Saul.

### B. David's Early Years As King.

Following the death of Saul, Saul's captain Abner sought to make Saul's son Ishbosheth king, and though this caused David considerable trouble at first, the whole threat was subdued, and David was the recognized king of Israel (II Sam. 2:1--5:10). The first seven years of his reign, he reigned at Hebron, a city south of Jerusalem. Later, he attacked and defeated the Jebusites, who still had the country where Jerusalem now stands. There is some indefiniteness about the origin of the name "Jerusalem", but it is possible that "Jerusalem" means "Salem of the Jebusites", its real form being "Jebusalem" with the "b" being changed to "r" for euphony's sake. It is thought that this "Salem" was the city of Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18). The location of Melchizedek's "Salem" fits. Thus, in David's time the city that came to be the central city of the Biblical record came into the picture. In these early years, he also signally defeated the Philistines, who had given Saul so much trouble (II Sam. 5:17-25).

### C. A Promise That Grew Out Of A Proposal.

After God had given David peace from his enemies, he proposed building a magnificent temple to God, but God rejected the idea of David being the builder inasmuch as He had used him as a man of war (I Chron. 22:7,8). Instead,

He said that David's son would be the builder (I Chron. 22:9,10). But, David, the man after God's own heart, was not to go without a blessing, and the blessing that God promised him upon this occasion far outshone that of building any temple. Notice these words of God to David:

*"I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel: and I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth. Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime, and as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the Lord telleth thee that he will make thee an house. And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: but my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever" (II Sam. 7:8-16).*

God never lost sight of this promise of establishing the throne of David. In Psalms, Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah, and elsewhere, we find remarkable references to it. The Bible shows that that promise is fulfilled in Christ, who was born of the lineage of David (Luke 1:30-33; Acts 2:29-36; and many others). Just as David ruled over God's Old Testament people, so Christ today rules over His New Testament people.

### D. David's Sin And His Troubles That Followed.

David's adulterous act with the wife of Uriah and his killing of her husband are well known to any reader of the Bible (II Sam. 11). As a drop of oil on a beautiful white garment, so was this sad event upon the unblemished life of David. Though God pardoned him, He pronounced this terrible sentence:

*"The sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife...Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun" (II Sam. 12:10-12).*

David's sin against Uriah had been both adultery and killing, and David was to see such take place right within his own house. And he saw it. His daughter Tamar was raped by his son Amnon (II Sam. 13:1-19). Because of this, David's son Absalom murdered Amnon (II Sam. 13:20-37). Absalom went in unto David's concubines (II Sam. 16:21,22) when he led in a rebellion against his father in an attempt to take his throne, which ended in the death of Absalom at the hands of Joab (II Sam. 15:1--18:17). What sorrow this death brought to David! The words of his weeping for him are well known:

*"O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"*  
(II Sam. 18:33).

Another case of anarchy against David, though not within his own family, was led by Sheba, and even though this case also ended successfully for David (II Sam. 20:1-22), we must not overlook the sorrow brought to him by these various rebellions.

### III. The Reign Of Solomon.

#### A. Solomon Chosen To Succeed David.

Solomon was not the oldest of David's sons and, therefore, was not naturally in line for the throne. But, for some reason, God chose him to be David's successor (I Chron. 22:7-10). With David's death near at hand, Adonijah, another of his sons, sought to become the next king (I Kings 1:5-7). With Amon and Absalom both dead, and with Chilibab probably dead also, Adonijah was likely David's oldest living son. But, his attempt at gaining the throne was foiled when Solomon's mother and the prophet Nathan obtained a decree from David himself that Solomon was to reign (I Kings 1:11-49). Though Solomon showed mercy to Adonijah (I Kings 1:50-53, he later executed him for further attempts to take the throne (I Kings 2:13-25).

#### B. His Famous Choice.

One night, God appeared to Solomon in a dream and told him to ask a special blessing. In response, Solomon said:

*"Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. And now, O Lord my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?"* (I Kings 3:6-9).

God was greatly pleased with his request, realizing that he might have asked for long life, riches, or the lives of his enemies (I Kings 3:10,11). Therefore, in addition to granting him wisdom, He promised to give him both riches and honor and length of life if he would live godly (I Kings 3:12-14). How wonderfully these promises were fulfilled to Solomon! In his own day, his fame went abroad, bringing the queen of Sheba to try him with hard questions. When she had heard his wisdom and had beheld the sumptuousness of his quarters, the number and manner and apparel of his servants, and the food upon his table, she had no more spirit in her and said to him:

*"It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard"* (I Kings 10:6,7).

The rest of the 10th chapter of I Kings tells of his great wisdom and riches in considerable detail, verse 23 stating:

*"So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom."*

Solomon attained the reputation of being the world's wisest man, but Jesus was greater than Solomon (Matt. 12:42). He was appaeled the finest that was humanly possible, yet Jesus said the lilies of the field that God clothed were more gorgeously arrayed than Solomon in all his glory (Matt. 6:28,29).

#### C. The Temple Built At Jerusalem.

One of Solomon's greatest achievements was the building of the temple in Jerusalem. God had given David the pattern for it, who in turn committed it to Solomon (I Chron. 28:11-19). Some of the materials for the temple were accumulated by David (I Chron. 22:14). The temple was made of costly stones with much cedar-work and lavish use of gold throughout. The famous cedars of Lebanon were purchased from the king of Tyre, who also supplied Solomon with skilled artisans (II Chron. 2). Altogether, it took seven years to complete the building (I Kings 6:38), and when completed, it was dedicated with the utmost solemnity by Solomon and Israel (I Kings 8). It was built on the extreme edge of Jerusalem on the hill Moriah, the very place where David had built an altar when God visited Jerusalem with a great plague because of David's sin in numbering Israel (II Chron. 3:1; I Chron. 21:14-27) and maybe on the same hill where Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac. About four hundred years after its erection, it was destroyed by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar (II Kings 25). There were two later temples erected upon the same spot--Zerubbabel's (in the period of the return from Babylonian captivity) and Herod's (the one in which Jesus taught). Herod's temple was destroyed by the Romans about forty years after Christ's crucifixion, even as Jesus had predicted (Matt. 24:1-28). Today, a Mohammedan temple occupies the ground formerly occupied by these temples.

#### D. Solomon Turned From God In His Old Age.

After a life of unprecedented prosperity, it is saddening to read that in his last years, Solomon's heart was led away from God. He who had been known for his wisdom certainly failed to employ it when he married so many women. Altogether, he had seven hundred wives or princesses and three hundred concubines (I Kings 11:3). Many of these wives were women of other nations whom God had expressly said should not be taken in marriage (I Kings 11:1,2). In giving that law (Deut. 7:3,4), God had forewarned that if they married outside of Israel, they would be turned to the idolatry of their wives. This is exactly what happened to Solomon:

*"It came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites"* (I Kings 11:4,5).

I Kings 11:7,8 says he built high places and altars for the gods of all his wives, for which God was angry with him and said to him:

*"Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not*

*kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son. Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to thy son for David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen" (I Kings 11:11-13).*

Our next study will show that this is exactly what happened.

Thus, the sun was setting on the golden age of Israel. Israel had reached its height of military power under David and its height of prosperity and happiness under Solomon. But, sin was going to usher in the reign of decline. Thus, came and thus went the first three kings of Israel--Saul, David, and Solomon.

## The Kingdom After it Divided

No sooner had God informed Solomon of His intention to wrest the main part of the kingdom from his son until He began to stir up trouble for Solomon himself. First, He stirred up Hadad of Edom (I Kings 11:14). Next, He stirred up Rezon, ruler in Syria (I Kings 11:23-25). The third and most influential of his adversaries was Jeroboam. He was one of Solomon's military captains. One day as he was going out of Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah met him and cut up Jeroboam's new garment into twelve pieces, giving him ten of them, saying:

*"Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee..." (I Kings 11:31).*

Thus assured of God's will to give him the kingdom, he lost no time, for he so strengthened himself against Solomon that Solomon sought to kill him, but he fled to Egypt to King Shishak, who received him kindly until after Solomon's death (I Kings 11:26-40). Jeroboam probably told Shishak of all the riches of Jerusalem's temple and whetted the selfish king's appetite to obtain the temple's treasures, for shortly after the division of the kingdom, while the first king of the southern kingdom was ruling, Shishak came against Jerusalem and took away the treasures of both the temple and the king's house (I Kings 14:25,26). Verse 26 especially says he took away all the shields of gold that Solomon had made. Here is something interesting. In 1938, archaeologists found the mummy of Shishak in a gold-covered sarcophagus--probably some of the very gold that Solomon had one-time possessed in Jerusalem!

After Solomon's death, Jeroboam and the congregation of Israelites came to Rehoboam and asked that the burden laid upon them by Solomon be lightened under his reign, and if it was, they would serve him (I Kings 12:1-4). Rehoboam conferred with some of the younger men, who advised him

to make the load even heavier (I Kings 12:10,11). When he accepted their advice, the majority of the tribes revolted and set up Jeroboam as their king, leaving Rehoboam only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (I Kings 12:16-24). Thus, the kingdom actually divided as God had foretold--the ten tribes of the north under Jeroboam and his successors being known as "Israel" and the two tribes of the south under Rehoboam and his successors as "Judah". This division took place almost one thousand years before the coming of Christ.

### I. The Ten Tribes Of The North.

#### A. Jeroboam's Introduction Of Calf-Worship.

There was one thing that bothered Jeroboam in particular. What about the annual feasts of all the Israelites at Jerusalem? He feared that those of his kingdom going to Jerusalem so often would have the tendency to reunite everything under the Jerusalem king (I Kings 12:26,27). Therefore, he made two calves of gold, placing one at Bethel for those in the southern part of his kingdom and one at Dan for those in the northern part, appealing to them on this wise:

*"It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (I Kings 12:28).*

Israel's inherent weakness toward idolatry ever since they had spent those four hundred years in idolatrous Egypt, where the calf especially was worshipped, demonstrated itself once more when the northern kingdom accepted these calves. But, this bold act on his part was not to go unrebuked by God. I Kings 13 tells of God sending an unnamed young prophet to Bethel to cry against Jeroboam's idolatry:

*"O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee" (I Kings 13:2).*

When Jeroboam heard this, he put forth his hand to take the young prophet, but his arm dried up so that he couldn't pull it back (I Kings 13:4). The altar also was split open, and the ashes upon it poured out from it. In the midst of such calamities, Jeroboam asked the young prophet to pray that his hand might be restored (I Kings 12:6), which he did. Refusing the king's reward and invitation to dine with him, he headed for home according to God's directions not to eat in the accursed place (I Kings 13:7-10).

About one hundred fifty years later, there was a king of David's line, Josiah by name, who led in a mighty campaign to eradicate idolatry and who fulfilled the young prophet's prediction of what would happen to the priests who ministered before the idolatrous altar at Bethel:

*"The altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam...had made, both that altar and the high place he (Josiah) brake down, and burned the high place, and stamped it small to powder, and burned the grove. And as Josiah turned himself, he spied the sepulchres that were there in the mount, and sent, and took the bones out of the sepulchres, and burned them upon the altar, and polluted it, according to the word of the Lord which the man of God proclaimed" (II Kings 23:15,16).*

The calf-worship that Jeroboam introduced never departed from the northern tribes. Of the kings who succeeded to the northern kingdom's throne, the Bible expressly recorded that they didn't depart from the sin of Jeroboam, who made Israel sin (I Kings 15:25,26; 15:34; 16:25,26; etc.).

### B. Jezebel's Introduction Of Baal-Worship.

If Ahab, the seventh ruler of the north, ever might have been a good ruler, all hope of such was demolished when he married Jezebel, a ruthless, unscrupulous, domineering daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, who was a devotee of Baal-worship (a shameless, wicked religion already described in the study, "The Conquest Under Joshua"). When she came into the life of Israel, she brought Baalism with her, the result of which is set forth in I Kings 16:32,33:

*"And he (Ahab) reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria (the capital of the northern kingdom). And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him."*

In addition to bringing Baal-worship in, she killed off many of the prophets of God (I Kings 18:4).

In the midst of such corruption, the prophet Elijah was raised up to tell Ahab that a terrible drouth was to come upon the land (I Kings 17:1). Having so prophesied, he took refuge by the brook Cherith, where he was fed by the ravens as long as there was water in the brook (I Kings 17:3-7). After the water there failed, he fled to far-away Zarephath, where a widow and her son took care of him from the flour barrel and oil supply that were miraculously replenished (I Kings 17:9-16). After three rainless years, Elijah showed up. When Ahab saw him, he said:

*"Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" (I Kings 18:17).*

Elijah corrected him, saying:

*"I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim" (I Kings 18:18).*

Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a contest on Mt. Carmel to prove who was the true God. The contest ended in favor of the true God, who answered by fire (I Kings 18:20-39). After this, Elijah killed all the prophets down at the brook Kishon (I Kings 18:40), which enraged Jezebel when she learned of it so that she set out to take the life of Elijah (I Kings 19:1,2), who in fright fled for his life.

Ahab died in fulfillment of remarkable predictions uttered by the prophets Elijah and Micaiah. Elijah's prediction said to Ahab, who had taken Naboth's vineyard after having him killed:

*"In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine" (I Kings 21:19).*

Micaiah's prediction foretold the battle in which Ahab would meet his death (I Kings 22:1-28). I Kings 22:29-38 contains the fulfillment of both prophets' predictions.

It was Jehu, though--not Elijah--who was raised up of

God to destroy Baalism itself out of Israel. At the anointing of Jehu to be king, this prophecy was made:

*"Thou shalt smite the house of Ahab, thy master, that I may avenge the blood of all the servants of the Lord, at the hand of Jezebel. For the whole house of Ahab shall perish...And I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah: and the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel, and there shall be none to bury her" (II Kings 9:7-10).*

At this time, Ahab's son Joram (Jehoram) was still ruling, but God led Jehu against him in a chariot-battle that resulted in Joram's death (II Kings 9:16-26). Jehu rode on into the city where Jezebel was, who painted her face in an attempt to seduce Jehu, but when she looked out the window at Jehu, he was not to be bought off. He asked who in there was on his side, and two or three trembling eunuchs responded, to whom he then gave orders to throw Jezebel down. She was thrown down, her blood splattering on the wall, and they drove over and over her body until her body was mangled and torn. The dogs then came and ate everything but the skull, feet, and hands (II Kings 9:30-37). Thus, the Baal-worshipping king (Joram) was gone, and so was Jezebel, the instigator of Baalism in Israel. But, there were seventy sons of Ahab left plus many Baal-worshippers throughout Israel. Jehu next came against the city of Samaria, where all seventy of Ahab's sons were cared for. The only way that Jehu promised to spare Samaria was for them to bring the heads of Ahab's sons to him at Jezreel within one day. Though they were very reluctant to do this, there was nothing else to do. Thus was exterminated the entire house of Ahab (II Kings 10:1-11). His last job was to exterminate the Baal-worshippers. To accomplish this, he feigned himself a convert to Baal. He said to all the people:

*"Ahab served Baal a little; but Jehu shall serve him much. Now therefore call unto me all the prophets of Baal, all his servants, and all his priests; let none be wanting: for I have a great sacrifice to do to Baal; whosoever shall be wanting, he shall not live" (II Kings 10:18,19).*

All the worshippers of Baal met--there was none that came not to the assembly. Jehu had given orders to his men that every Baal-worshipper was to be slain in the midst of their worship service, warning them that if any of them escaped, the guard's life who let him escape would have to pay with his own life (II Kings 10:23,24). At the word of Jehu, here is what happened:

*"They smote them with the edge of the sword; and the guard and the captains cast them out, and went to the city of the house of Baal. And they brought forth the images out of the house of Baal, and burned them. And they brake down the house of Baal, and made it a draught house unto this day. Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel" (II Kings 10:25-28).*

Though Jehu himself retained Jeroboam's golden calves throughout his reign, God promised that his seed should rule in Israel for four generations for exterminating Baal-worship (II Kings 10:29,30).

### C. Israel's Last Years.

After the death of Jeroboam II, there was only one king (Menahem) of Israel who died a natural death. During those

fifty some years (from Jeroboam II's death until the fall of the northern kingdom), there were four assassinations of the kings. Zachariah was assassinated after reigning but six months, Shallum after reigning but one month, Pekahiah after reigning but two years, and Pekah after reigning twenty years. Such was a sign of the spirit of anarchy that kept weakening the kingdom. These same years were also marked by the constant rising to world-power of Assyria. The prophets Hosea and Amos prophesied the fall of the northern tribes because of their sins (Hos. 10:1-11:6 and Amos 3:9; 5:1,2). But, they gave no heed. As a result, during the reign of Pekah, Tiglath-pileser of Assyria came against the northern tribes and carried some of the people back to Assyria as captives (II Kings 15:27). In the reign of Israel's next king (Hoshea), another Assyrian king, Shalmaneser, came against them, and the entire northern tribes became tributary to Assyria (II Kings 17:3), but when King Hoshea sent to Egypt for help against Shalmaneser and refused to send any tribute to Assyria as he was supposed to do, Shalmaneser marched into the land of Israel once more, and though it was a long, bitter struggle, after three years, the entire northern kingdom was crushed by Assyrians (II Kings 17:4-6). Shalmaneser himself died during those three years of siege, but his successor Sargon carried the work to completion, and into Assyrian captivity and finally dispersion, the ten northern tribes went about two hundred years after the crowning of its first king.

### D. A Run-Down Of All Their Kings.

	REIGNED	CHARACTER
Jeroboam	22 years	Bad
Nadab	2 years	Bad
Baasha	24 years	Bad
Elah	2 years	Bad
Zimri	Seven days	Bad
Omri	12 years	Extra Bad
Ahab	22 years	The Worst
Ahaziah	2 years	Bad
Joram	12 years	Mostly Bad
Jehu	28 years	Mostly Bad
Jehoahaz	17 years	Bad
Joash	16 years	Bad
Jeroboam II	41 years	Bad
Zechariah	Six months	Bad
Shallum	One month	Bad
Menahem	10 years	Bad
Pekahiah	2 years	Bad
Pekah	20 years	Bad
Hoshea	9 years	Bad

## II. The Two Tribes Of The South.

### A. Their In-And-Out Relationship With Idolatry.

Many of the kings of the south were also idolatrous, though not usually so much so as the northern kings. There were a few kings who ascended the throne of the southern kingdom who led in great revivals of the religion of the true God in opposition to idolatry.

In Rehoboam's day, idolatry was seen throughout the kingdom (I Kings 14:21-24), which was perpetuated by his

son Abijah (I Kings 15:1-3). Asa, the next king and son of Abijah, led in a wonderful revival of the worship of God and against idolatry (II Chron. 15). The revival was continued and completed under Asa's son Jehoshaphat, who also sent princes, priests, and Levites throughout his kingdom to teach the people the law of God (II Chron. 17:1-9). The next king married a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel (that wicked couple of the northern kingdom), and as a result, idolatry swept into the south once more (II Chron. 21:5,6). His son Ahaziah followed the same idolatry (II Chron. 22:1-4) as did the usurper Athaliah, who followed Ahaziah to the throne. Joash was a godly king as long as the priest Jehoiada lived. During his reign, great reforms took place after Athaliah had been executed (II Chron. 24:1-14), but he fell away in his latter years (II Chron. 24:17-19). Amaziah, the next king, was a relatively good king (II Chron. 25:1,2). Uzziah was a very good king (II Chron. 26:3-5), though he erred in seeking to offer incense, not being a priest, for which he was smitten with leprosy until the day of his death (II Chron. 26:16-21). Jotham, Uzziah's son, was a good king, though the people were corrupt (II Chron. 27:1,2). Ahaz, his son, returned to the idolatry of the northern kingdom and the surrounding nations (II Chron. 28:1-4). Hezekiah, who followed Ahaz to the throne, was one of the best kings the southern kingdom ever had. II Chron. 29:3-31:21 tells of the great revival that he prosecuted during his reign. Isaiah lived in his day and worked with him in this great reform. Shortly after the fall of the northern kingdom, the southern kingdom would also have fallen to Assyria had it not been for Hezekiah's great faith in God to whom he prayed for deliverance, which brought about the destruction of the king of Assyria's mighty army by death-angel means (II Chron. 32:1-22). At the first of Manasseh's reign, he was the opposite of his father Hezekiah, reverting to idolatry (II Chron. 33:1-10), but when the Lord delivered him into the hand of his enemies, he repented and returned to the Lord, who caused him to be restored to his throne in Jerusalem after which he was a godly king (II Chron. 33:11-16). Amon, his son, was an idolatrous ruler (II Chron. 33:21-23). Josiah, Amon's son, was a king possibly as good as Hezekiah had been. His great reformation is recorded in II Chron. 34:3-35:19). His good kingship greatly aided the prophesying of the prophet Jeremiah, who led in a great lamentation for him when he met his untimely death (II Chron. 35:25). Well might Jeremiah have lamented his passing, for none of the succeeding kings of Judah was favorable to his prophesying, which included the wicked kings Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. The kingdom fell in Zedekiah's reign.

### B. A Run-Down Of All Their Kings.

	REIGNED	CHARACTER
Rehoboam	17 years	Bad
Abijah	3 years	Mostly Bad
Asa	41 years	Good
Jehoshaphat	25 years	Good
Jehoram	8 years	Bad
Ahaziah	1 year	Bad
Athaliah	6 years	Extra Bad
Joash	40 years	Mostly Good
Amaziah	29 years	Good

Uzziah	52 years	Good
Jotham	16 years	Good
Ahaz	16 years	Bad
Hezekiah	29 years	Good
Manasseh	55 years	Bad and Good
Amon	2 years	Bad
Josiah	31 years	Good
Jehoahaz	Three months	Bad
Jehoiakim	11 years	Bad
Jehoiachin	Three months	Bad
Zedekiah	11 years	Bad

### C. A Great Number Of Prophets Were Raised Up In An Attempt To Save The Southern Kingdom.

The following prophets prophesied to the southern kingdom before its fall: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Micah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. In many ways, the most remarkable of these to study with reference to the fall of the kingdom is Jeremiah. From his fifty-two chapters, one can see the terrible idolatry and its fruit of sinfulness that led to its destruction as well as the actual fall of the kingdom that came about exactly as he predicted. Throughout his book, he charged Judah with a double sin--forsaking the true God and serving idols. (Jer. 1:16; 2:13; 2:26-28; etc.). In his book, the true God is vividly contrasted with the futility of idols (Jer. 10:3-10). He held the southern kingdom even more in guilt than the northern, for the south should have profited from the bitter experiences of the north, but it didn't (Jer. 3:6-11). Though his life was endangered so often, and he even despaired of life at times, he faithfully predicted the fall of Judah to the Babylonians (Jer. 25:1-11; 32:1-5).

### D. The Fall Of The Southern Kingdom.

After the death of Josiah, the strength of the southern tribes disintegrated. Josiah's successor Jehoahaz was defeated by the king of Egypt, who carried him to Egypt a captive and set Jehoiakim over the southern kingdom (II Chron. 36:2-4). Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came against Jehoiakim and took him and some of the temple vessels back to Babylon (II Chron. 36:5-7). After ruling but one year, his successor Jehoiachin was deposed and carried to Babylon with more of the temple vessels (II Chron. 36:9,10). Zedekiah, his successor, was a weak, vacillating ruler, who hardly knew at times whether he was coming or going. Jeremiah urged him to yield peacefully to Nebuchadnezzar, and God would spare the south from terrible destruction (Jer. 27:12-15), but he listened to other counselors who told him to rebel against Babylon, for which Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem, destroying it and its temple, killing Zedekiah's sons before his eyes before putting his eyes out, and carrying the most of the people of the southern kingdom to a long night of bitter captivity in Babylon (II Kings 25:1-21). This was the judgment of God (He even called Nebuchadnezzar "my servants"--Jer. 25:9) upon the southern tribes for their idolatry and their refusal to hearken to the warnings of His prophets.

Thus came to an end the southern kingdom after about four hundred some years of existence.

Surely, by this time, the Israelites saw how foolish it was to reject God as their king and to ask Samuel to set a

king over them like the other nations! Israel flourished awhile under her kings (just like the other empires), but she fell into disintegration and defeat (just like the other mighty empires). When will men begin to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God? When will men begin to realize that godliness is profitable for all things and that the way of the transgressor is hard?

## The Restoration Period

When the southern kingdom went into Babylonian captivity, the people became slaves in Babylon. Daniel especially, but also his three friends, through the special providence of God were given special places of authority under the Babylonian kings Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. When Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians (as predicted by Daniel at Beshazzar's drunken feast - Dan. 5:22-28), Daniel enjoyed the same kind of prominence under Darius, the Mede, and Cyrus, the Persian. Generally speaking, the first six chapters of Daniel tell of Daniel under the Babylonian kings and the last six chapters of him under the Medes and Persians.

With the enthronement of the latter kings, the enslavement that had been upon the Israelites came to an end. One of the factors that no doubt entered in to bring about this more pleasant condition was that in the Jews' own Scriptures, more than one hundred fifty years before the coming of Cyrus to the throne, God had told how He was going to raise up Cyrus (even calling him by name) to perform His good pleasure (Isa. 44:24-28; 45:1-4,13). This, of course, would please Cyrus greatly and at the same time cause him to reverence the God of the Jews. He was most cordial to the Jews and was greatly blest of God for it. Thus, the latter years of the Jews' exile from home were much more pleasant than their early years in Babylon.

In this study, with the above thoughts as a background, we are to consider the period of returning from the land of exile.

### I. The Captivity Forever Cured The Jews Of Their Idolatry.

#### A. The Fact Of It.

As we have seen in former studies, the Hebrews' enslavement in Egypt got idolatry into them, which kept cropping out at every opportunity. What an up-and-down, in-and-out relationship they had with idolatry during the days of the judges and the kings! It was because of idolatry, as we have before studied, that they were taken from their land and the north carried to Assyria and later dispersed and the south to Babylon. It is a fact of history that when they returned to Jerusalem from Babylon, the Jews were never again an idolatrous people. A scribe of Jesus' day well stated the attitude of the Jews ever after the Baby-



lonian captivity when he approved Jesus' words concerning the first commandment of all:

*"Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he" (Mark 12:32).*

In apostolic times, idolatry plagued the Gentile world, and the apostles had to deal with it wherever they went (Acts 14:11-16; 15:19,20; 17:16). But, as odd as it may seem, the Jews of the apostles' times were so married to the law of Moses, which their fathers constantly turned from in the days of Old Testament history, that the apostles' problem with the Jews of their day was to get them to accept Christ and Christianity in place of their former Mosaic religion. Even to this day, the worshipping of images is so foreign to the Jews even though it has been more than two thousand years since their forefathers returned from Babylonian captivity.

## B. What Cured Them Of Their Idolatry.

Prior to the fall of the southern kingdom, the people listened to false prophets instead of to God's true prophets. God's prophets were all foretelling the doom to come upon the nation because of idolatry, but the false prophets were all prophesying peace and prosperity for the future. This is why the people all spoke well of the false prophets (Luke 6:26). They rebuked the true prophet because he didn't prophesy unto them "smooth things" (Isa. 30:9,10). With every prophet of God prophesying so certainly concerning the coming destruction, though the people did not accept their prophesyings, they could not forget them. They even mocked the prophets, all of which helped them to remember exactly what the prophets had predicted. The prophets had one retreat--the future. They said a time would come when they would know that Jehovah--not Baal, not Moloch, nor any other idol--was God. Listen to the effective way that Ezekiel stated it:

*"I will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places. And your altars shall be desolate, and your images shall be broken: and I will cast down your slain men before your idols. And I will lay the dead carcasses of the children of Israel before their idols; and I will scatter your bones round about your altars. In all your dwellingplaces the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate; that your altars may be laid waste and made desolate, and your idols may be broken and cease, and your images may be cut down, and your works may be abolished. And the slain shall fall in the midst of you, and YE SHALL KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD" (Eze. 6:3-7).*

Continuing his quotation about those who would escape the sword in the day of slaughter upon Jerusalem, Ezekiel said:

*"Yet will I leave a remnant, that ye may have some that shall escape the sword among the nations, when ye shall be scattered through the countries. And they that escape of you shall remember me among the nations whither they shall be carried captives, because I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me, and with their eyes, which go a whoring after their idols: and they shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations. And THEY SHALL KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD, and that I have not said in vain that I would do this evil unto them" (Eze. 6:8-10).*

When the "smooth words" of their false prophets failed

them and the messages of the true prophets came to pass, they were all too willing to acknowledge that Jehovah was the one and only God. Though it took a most bitter chastisement to bring them to their senses, the chastisement brought results. When people won't learn any other way, God will teach them with a chastening hand, but oh how bitter!

## II. God Did Return The South To Its Land.

### A. The Prophets Had Predicted This Return.

The people in Old Testament times were just as wicked-hearted and as guilty of misrepresenting God's prophets as people today are of gospel preachers. They hated God's men and hesitated not to slander them most villainously. They looked upon the prophets as old sore-heads, who had nothing but a message of doom. But, in this, they were not altogether accurate. Amid the prophets' utterances of God's coming wrath, they included predictions of an actual return to their homeland, and when once they had been carried away, it was as difficult for them to believe they would ever be returned to their land as it had been for them to believe that they would ever be carried out of it. Such was unbelief then, and it is the same today. People down cannot grasp God's promises of goodness--discouragement prevails. People who are enjoying smooth sailing cannot be moved by warning preaching--they do not look for judgment upon them.

Actually, God's prophets had a message of condemnation for those who were reprobate in their evil, but a message of ultimate consolation for those who, though evil now, would in time be corrected to repentance. In this connection, Jeremiah had a vision of two baskets of figs after Nebuchadnezzar had carried some already away to Babylon, God showed Jeremiah two baskets of figs. One basket had very good figs in it, but the other one figs that were too bad to be eaten. God explained the vision as representing the two classes referred to above:

*"Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good. For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up. And I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart. And as the evil figs, which cannot be eaten, they are so evil; surely thus saith the Lord, So will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, that remain in the land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt; and I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them. And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence among them, till they be consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and to their fathers" (Jer. 24:5-10).*

Jeremiah predicted that the years of the Jews in Babylon would be seventy (Jer. 29: 10). As proof of his sincerity in the message that he preached that the righteous would be restored to Palestine after seventy years, Jeremiah bought a field (Jer. 32:6-15). By this, they could see that he believed in the restoration of the Jews to their land.

### B. Four Bible Books Tell Of Their Return And Their Return-Activities.

The historical books of Ezra and Nehemiah and the prophetic books of Haggai and Zechariah all enlighten us concerning the return of the Jews to their land and their re-establishment in it. The opening verses of Zechariah contain a lot of important truth as he delivered them to the people of his day:

*"The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers (the ones whom He punished with captivity)... Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Turn ye (the people of Zechariah's day) unto me...and I will turn unto you...Be not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets (like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others) have cried, saying... Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings (the message of the former prophets); but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the Lord. Your fathers, where are they? (punished as God had predicted) and the prophets (the false prophets), do they live for ever? (they were gone too as Jeremiah had predicted) But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? (yes, they came true) and they returned and said, Like as the Lord of host thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and accordings to our doings, so hath he dealt with us" (Zech. 1:2-6).*

The above referred to four books tell of the return of about fifty thousand under Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple, then of the return of about two thousand under Ezra almost eighty years after Zerubbabel's return, to revive the spiritual life of the people, and finally of the return of Nehemiah and his workmen to rebuild the wall around the city of Jerusalem.

When Jesus was born among the Jewish people in Palestine, they had been back in their homeland for about five hundred years.

### C. Why God Returned Them To Their Land.

Surely, His purpose in returning them to their land was at least two-fold. One was in consideration of His promise of goodness to the house of David, which, of course, embraced the Messianic in its actual fulfillment. The other was that people might know that His goodness was as great upon penitent as His wrath had been upon the impenitent. Let us look at these two reasons briefly.

As long as God could consistently be good to the tribe of Judah (David's tribe) and the city of Jerusalem (David's capital city where God had recorded His name), He certainly tried. When the prophet Ahijah cut up Jeroboam's garment and promised him the most of the kingdom, he did not give him all the tribes. Notice the reason:

*"But he (Solomon through his son) shall have one tribe for my servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel" (1 Kings 11:32).*

He further stated, which we here quote for the sake of emphasis:

*"I will take the kingdom out of his (Solomon's) son's hand; and will give it unto thee, even ten tribes. And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light always before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name*

*there...I will for this (Solomon's idolatry) afflict the seed of David (the southern kingdom), but not for ever" (1 Kings 11:35,36,38).*

According to prophecies already uttered, Bethlehem (the birthplace of the Christ) had already been pointed out (Mic. 5:2), and the prominence of Jerusalem in relation to the new covenant had already been pointed out (Isa. 2:2,3) and many others). All of these transpirings were to come to pass in fulfillment of God's special promises to David. For instance, in the angel's announcing the birth of the Savior to the Judean shepherds, they said He had been born that day "in the city of David" (Luke 2:11). This One, the angel Gabriel had said, would be given "the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:32).

Now, let us consider the other motive for restoring them to their land. When God spoke to the wicked of the way He was going to punish them, He meant it, and He wanted them to know it. Everything that He threatened them with concerning the coming of Nebuchadnezzar and the pillaging he gave their city and the sorrowful results to follow upon them surely came true. This was because they had deserved such treatment. Jonah well realized the great mercy of God (Jonah 4:2). But, let us consider the other side of God—that of mercy upon the penitent. David praised the multitude of His tender mercies (Psa. 51:1). Even interspersed within the ten commandments was a direct statement of God's mercy (Exo. 20:6). God had punished the generation of idolaters with Babylonian captivity. However, with the new generation free from the idolatry of their parents, God was going to deal differently with them. In speaking of this very question, Ezekiel said:

*"What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel...The soul that sinneth, it shall die...If he (a father) beget a son, that seeth all his father's sins which he hath done, and considereth, and doeth not such like, that hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel...he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live" (Eze. 18:2-17).*

Thus, God wanted it to be known that He was as willing to show His goodness to those who were obedient as He was to show His wrath to those who were disobedient.

### III. The Mosaic Ordinances Were Reinstated In Their Religious Life.

#### A. It Had Been A Long Time Since They Had Had A Pure Religion.

Israel's greatest greatness was in those days when they walked according to God's revealed law. God had given them laws concerning sacrifices, the priesthood, feasts, marriage, tithing, presenting the firstborn, morality, honesty, sabbath-keeping, defilement, and countless other matters of their private and national life. But, with kings who were idolaters so much of the time, it is no wonder that the law of God through Moses had been forgotten. With the law of Moses pushed aside, it is no wonder that its precepts were not kept. With the people deported to far-away lands as they were, without a temple and without a place for their priests to function, there were many Mosaic rites that could not be

observed by them during their years in Babylonian captivity. So, altogether, it had been a long time since they had had a pure religion. Just as there has been a "Dark Ages" since the giving of the New Testament, so did they have their "Dark Ages" during Old Testament times. Observing, then, what they of the restoration period did with reference to the law of God under which they were to live can give us today divine enlightenment as to what we should do with reference to the law of God under which we are to live.

*B. They Returned To The Plan Of God Given For Them Through Moses.*

They rebuilt their temple. They put back into it the vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had taken out. They kept the feast of Passover as it had been instituted. They set up the altar and offered Scriptural sacrifices upon it. They had priests as God had ordained through Moses. They began to keep the feast of Tabernacles as God had ordained. They put away their foreign wives and the children born of them. The observance of the sabbath was reinstated. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell of this great return to God's plan for them.

*C. This Reinstatement Of The Mosaic Ordinances Was In Keeping With God's Intention In Giving Them.*

Just because it had been about one thousand years since the law of Moses had been given from Mt. Sinai was no reason for its obedience not being reinstated and thereafter obeyed. Many would so argue today, feeling that God would not expect us to abide by a law delivered almost nineteen hundred years ago. But, it is not a matter of how long ago God delivered a law, but are we still in the same dispensation as that for which the law was given. The Mosaic dispensation began at Mt. Sinai about fifteen hundred years before Christ, and it continued until the death of Christ. The laws for that entire dispensation of time were given at the first of the dispensation, but those who lived at the end of that dispensation were as much expected to carry out those laws as those who lived when they were actually given. This is true of any dispensation. When God gives a commandment, it is in effect until He repeals it or supercedes it with another. So many today do not realize this. Therefore, they continue doing whatever they have been doing, or whatever their parents did, or whatever the rest of the people do and "hope" that it is pleasing to God, supposing that it is, but not being definitely sure that it is. At the same time, they do not see the need of returning to the New Testament plan of salvation, the Bible description of a Christian life and Christian home, and the divine pattern for the church found in the Scriptures. In fact, they not only question whether such is necessary, but they resist all attempts at being reformed in their religious practices by that which is to be found in the Bible. They will either say the Bible is out-of-date, or that it has been translated so many times we can't be sure of it, or that there are so many different ways of interpreting the Bible, or that the thing God is interested in is the condition of the heart and not particularly a rigid adherence to precepts. Needless to say, such thinking paralyzes any attempt to return to the primitive pattern of Christianity.

But, except for the objection of numerous translations

almost everyone of the objections are such as could have been raised in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. People could have said their law was out-of-date. The objection of numerous times of translation of our New Testament is not well founded, for our English versions represent but one translation--from the original Greek into our English (no more!). In Ezra's day, they could have charged their law with difficulty of interpretation. The fact is, the Old Testament law is far more complicated than the New Testament. In Nehemiah's day, they could have argued that all that God was interested in was the heart-condition. But, the great reforms of Ezra's and Nehemiah's days--all God-approved--are the Bible's replies to people's loose thinking of today!

The truth is, when God gives a law, it is divinely in force until God removes it. In Jesus' day, he referred lepers whom He cleansed to the law of Moses for how to become ceremonially clean (Matt. 8:4; Luke 17:14). The third from the last verse in the Old Testament says:

*"Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel with the statutes and judgments" (Mal. 4:4).*

In conclusion, let us notice that they had been punished with deportation to Babylon because of not keeping the law of God under which they were to live, and they were returned to their land and blest by keeping the law. May each of us get the lesson that God has for us in the restoration period of Old Testament history!

## The Prophets Foresaw the Messianic Age

Though the matter of predicting the future was far from being the only business of the Old Testament prophets, yet it is an undeniable fact that prediction was one of their important missions as far as we of the present day are concerned.

According to Edersheim and other authorities on the customs and beliefs of the Jews, the Jews even of Jesus' day were looking for an "age" to come. It would, of course, be when their Messiah would come. They had formed their conceptions of what that age would be like from the predictions made of it in the writings of their prophets. We who live almost two thousand years this side of Christ are in a much better position to understand the exact meaning of their prophets' predictions than they were. Therefore, instead of conceiving of the Messianic age as a time when the Messiah came, set up His throne in Jerusalem as the king of the Jews, and reigned victorious over the rest of

the world as a Jewish monarch under whom the Jews enjoy freedom from their enemies who so long oppressed them, we find (if we conceive of the Messianic age as beginning with the time when the Messiah came and began fulfilling those predictions) the Messianic predictions breaking down into those predictions relative to His first coming and earthly life, which was followed by the present dispensation that began on the day of Pentecost in 30 A.D., which in turn will be followed by the endless ages of eternity.

Before actually dealing with the Old Testament predictions themselves, it will be important for us to consider the fact that many times, the Old Testament prophets spoke of the future in the language and religious phraseology of their day. For instance, in Malachi's day, the Jews were offering God polluted offerings or sacrifices upon the altar. In contrast to their contemptible action, Malachi looked toward the Messianic age and made the following prediction:

*"From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts" (Mal. 1:11).*

Now, the Catholics, who have incense ever burning in their cathedrals and church buildings, try to make much of this verse, saying that Malachi was predicting the Catholic religion. They delight to point out that they alone of the religious bodies believe in incense-burning. But, Malachi was predicting no such thing. He was employing the religious language of that time in speaking of a future time. How do we know? Several ways, but principally because the New Testament itself has legislated against some of the very rites which that passage predicted. I would have you notice in the passage from Malachi that the prophet not only predicted incense, but also a "pure offering". This offering, which was predicted to be a "pure" one, was in contrast to the corrupt offerings being offered by the Jews of his day (Mal. 1:8,13,14). He was talking of animal sacrifices, yet we know there is to be no animal sacrifices in Christianity. To offer God an animal sacrifice today would be sinful, for it would mean that Jesus' sacrifice is not sufficient to atone for sin. To do so would be to fall from grace (Gal. 5:4), for animal sacrifice was an integral part of Mosaic justification. Notice two other examples of such predictions. Rom. 10:15 quotes from Nah. 1:15, a verse which also spoke of keeping "solemn feasts" and performing "vows", which were Mosaic and not Christian as ordinances. Zech. 14:16-21 is a classic passage upon this subject. In looking to the Messianic age, it spoke of keeping "the feast of tabernacles" every year as well as "bowls before the altar" in which they would come and make "sacrifices" to the Lord.

Space is not available to discuss the above principle as we would desire, but it is an important principle to keep in mind as we study through the predictions of these men. Let us now go to the three-fold break-down of their predictions as they relate to the Messiah and His reign.

### I. They Foresaw His Coming To Earth.

#### A. They Foresaw The Fact Of His Coming.

It has been pointed out that there are more than three hundred predictions in the Old Testament of the first coming of Christ. Isaiah predicted so many things about Christ that he is commonly referred to as the "gospel prophet". The Old Testament abounds with predictions that created an expectancy for One to come. To cite an example, let us notice the familiar Isa. 9:6,7 passage:

*"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."*

There are many indications that the Jews of Jesus' day looked for the Christ to come. When John the Baptist began his revolutionary ministry, they wondered if he claimed to be the Christ. He said that he wasn't (John 1:19-25). Jesus Himself urged the Jews to search their Scriptures, affirming that those Scriptures testified of Him (John 5:39). It is noteworthy that even the Samaritans, who also had portions of the Old Testament, likewise shared in the belief that there was a Messiah coming (John 4:25).

#### B. They Foresaw The Time Of His Coming.

Daniel spoke of seventy prophetic weeks to come to pass in Jewish history, part of which had to do with the coming of the Messiah. Not always, but a few times in prophecy, a day stands for a year (Eze. 4:6). Since a prediction is surely to be understood in the light of its fulfillment, there is no doubt but what each week of Daniel's "seventy weeks" prophecy represented seven years, for that is exactly how it figures out. In Ezra's day, the king of Persia gave commandment for Jerusalem (which was then in a state of ruin) to be rebuilt. His decree was in the year 457 B.C. This was the starting place for the seventy weeks:

*"Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks" (Dan. 9:25).*

Sixty-nine weeks altogether from 457 B.C. until the coming of the Messiah! Sixty-nine weeks would have four hundred eighty-three days in them. Figuring a year per day, that would be four hundred eighty-three years. Four hundred eighty-three years after 457 B.C. brings one to 26 A.D. This was the very year when Jesus was baptized and began His public ministry! What a remarkable prophecy! It is no wonder that Jesus upbraided the Jews for not knowing what time it was prophetically.

#### C. They Foresaw The Place Of His Birth.

When the wise men came to Jerusalem seeking the Christ-child, the scribes told them He was to be born in Bethlehem, according to the prophet Micah (Mic. 5:2; Matt. 2:1-6). Years later, the Jewish people were for the most part ignorant of the fact that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, for they rejected Him because He was from Galilee, saying:

*"Shall Christ (or the Messiah) come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem,*

where David was?" (John 7:41,42).

## D. They Foresaw Many Events Of His Life.

In the back of nearly any study Bible, you can find a table of Old Testament predictions fulfilled in the life of Christ. We refer you to such listings. Lest we become too lengthy here, we content ourselves with a consideration of two chapters containing abundant references to the crucifixion--Psa. 22 and Isa. 53. Psa. 22 contains the following easily recognized predictions:

*"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?...I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted in the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him...They pierced my hands and my feet...They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture."*

Notice the following excerpts from Isa. 53:

*"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him...Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows...He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth...He was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."*

With the Old Testament so clear upon these things, it is no wonder that we read as we do in Luke 24:25-27:

*"Then he (Jesus) said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."*

He did the same thing to the apostles (Luke 24:44-47). Philip began with Isa. 53:7,8 and preached "Jesus" unto the eunuch (Acts 8:32-35).

In closing out this portion of our study, let us remark that these Old Testament predictions were like a picture of the Messiah sent on ahead of Him by which He would be identifiable. An excellent illustration of this happened several years ago when I arrived by train at Hampton, Virginia to preach. I had never been there before, but THE VOICE OF EVANGELISM had preceded me there. When I saw an elderly gentleman looking at a picture of me in THE VOICE, which he had in his hand, and then looking at me to see if I was the right one, I thought of the Old Testament picture of Jesus sent on ahead of time.

## II. The Prophets Foresaw The Christian Dispensation.

### A. They Foresaw The Coronation Of The Messiah.

When Jesus ascended to God, He went up in a cloud (Acts 1:9). Daniel foresaw His ascension and His coronation as King upon His arrival where God was:

*"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 (God), and they (evidently angels) brought him (the Son of man) near before him (God). And there was given him (the Son of man) 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).*

With the Messiah established as the king of the kingdom whose approach had been preached by John the Baptist, Jesus, the apostles, and the seventy before the cross, everything was set for the beginning of the present dispensation.

### B. They Foresaw The Day Of Pentecost.

The day of Pentecost in 30 A.D. (the same year that Jesus died and was resurrected) marked the beginning of the present dispensation. On that day, the apostles received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which they had been promised by Jesus (Acts 1:4,5), which equipped them for their apostolic work. When this unusual occurrence took place, some of the people did not understand exactly what had happened. Peter explained that it was a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy which had said that before the great day of judgment that God would send upon men would come, God would first pour out His Spirit. Concerning the Holy Spirit baptism of Pentecost, Peter said:

*"This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams..." (Acts 2:16,17).*

Zech. 12:10-14 foretold a great mourning among the Jews because of having crucified the Messiah, telling how God would pour the spirit of grace upon them. The verses that immediately follow (Zech. 13:1-6) begin:

*"In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness."*

Surely, this (like the Joel 2:28-32 prophecy) began to be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when Peter preached forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus, whom they had put to death.

### C. They Foresaw The Making Of A New Covenant.

As early as Jeremiah's day, God was revealing the fact of His going to make a new covenant. This covenant, incidentally, which God actually made with both Jews and Gentiles was predicted in the language of the times; that is, as if God would make this covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Notice Jeremiah's prediction:

*"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord:*

for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more" (Jer. 31:31-34).

That this was a prophecy of the New Testament, see Heb. 8:8-12.

#### D. The Conversion Of The Gentiles.

Anytime that you read in the Old Testament prophets about the Gentiles worshipping Jehovah acceptably, you know that you are reading a prediction of the new covenant times, for not until Christ commissioned the apostles to carry the gospel to all nations do we find God accepting the Gentiles. The Old Testament prophets frequently foresaw the acceptance of the Gentiles, though the prejudice of the Jews' minds kept them from grasping that divine truth.

Again speaking in the religious language of the Jews, Zech. 8:22,23 vividly predicted Gentile conversions:

"Many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you."

It is a remarkable fact that we Gentiles today worship the God who was the God of the Jews only in Zechariah's day. Besides other plain statements of Gentile acceptance (which we shall cite in a later study), there are a couple of interesting kinds of references to that fact. Hosea had a daughter Loruhamah (which meant "not received mercy") and a son Loammi (which meant "not my people"). These, in the historical setting of Hosea's day meant that God would disclaim the idolatrous Israelites and show them mercy no longer. But, in time, their names were to be changed to Ruhamah ("received mercy") and Ammi ("my people"). In Rom. 9:22-26, Paul makes an argument on Hosea's children to show that even the Gentiles are now the people of God:

"What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As he saith also in Osee (Hosea), I will call them my people (Ammi), which were not my people (Loammi); and her beloved (Ruhamah), which was not beloved (Loruhamah). And it shall come to pass that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living of God."

Zerubbabel's temple (the one built during the restoration period to replace Solomon's temple which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar) was rebuilt by those who had remained in Palestine during the captivity and by those who came from far-away Babylon. In the days of the prophet Zechariah, Zerubbabel's temple was built. Zechariah made this Messianic prediction:

"Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH (a title often used by the prophets for the coming Messiah); and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord" (Zech. 6:12).

Just as the Jews in far-away Babylon came back to help build Zerubbabel's temple, even so Zechariah continued by making a prediction concerning the Messianic age when the spiritual temple would be built under the Messiah:

"And they that are afar off shall come and build in the temple of the Lord" (verse 14).

Eph. 2:11-13 makes it evident that those "afar off" were the Gentiles.

#### E. They Foresaw The New Testament System of Justification.

Over and over again, the New Testament preachers preached and wrote that we are justified through faith in Christ (an obedient acceptance and following of Him) rather than through the law of Moses (Acts 13:38; Rom. 3:28; and many others). It is noteworthy that the inspired apostles found the New Testament way of righteousness, or justification, foretold in the law and the prophets:

"Now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, BEING WITNESSED IN THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS" (Rom. 3:21).

There are many ways in which the law and the prophets predicted the New Testament system of justification, but one prophet so often quoted as having forecast the way of faith was Habakkuk. In 2:4 of his book, he had said that the just shall live by faith. Notice the following times in the New Testament where Hab. 2:4 is quoted: Gal. 3:11; Rom. 1:16,17; and Heb. 10:38.

### III. They Even Foresaw Eternity.

It is sometimes thought, and erroneously so, that every prediction of the Old Testament prophets was fulfilled by the time that Jesus arose from the tomb. But, that is not so. We have already shown that the prophets predicted Jesus' coronation, the day of Pentecost, and the conversion of the Gentiles. We could show abundantly that they also had much to say about the coming kingdom (This we shall show in a later lesson). All these things took place after Jesus' resurrection. But, the truth of the matter is, the Old Testament prophets take us right down into eternity itself with their predictions. Since the Messianic age to the Jews began when the Messiah was born and was to continue on thereafter, the passages we shall be citing from the Old Testament relative to eternity would, therefore, be among those which they classified Messianic. Let us look at but a few of them.

#### A. Joel Prophesied The Day Of The Lord.

The expression, "the day of the Lord," signifies a time of divine judgment or human crisis brought on by God. It seems to have this idea: "Man has had his day to do as he pleases, but when God takes over, it is the day of the Lord to do as He pleases with him who has resisted His will." Do not conclude, however, that every time you read about the day of the Lord in the prophets, you are reading of the return of Christ and final judgment. It doesn't always mean that--not even in the book of Joel (a book significant for its frequent use of the expression, "the day of the Lord"). But, I am confident that Joel 2:31 is talking of the same day of the Lord as II Pet. 3:10 talks about; that is, the return of Christ and the day of final judgment. I have had

people try to say that the day of the Lord referred to in Joel 2:31 was the day of Pentecost in 30 A.D. But, that cannot be. The entire section of Joel 2:28-31 should be considered together. Open your Bible to it. Notice that God would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh *before* the great and terrible day of the Lord would come. If that day of the Lord was the day of Pentecost, was the Holy Spirit poured out *before* the day of Pentecost? Then, the day of the Lord in Joel 2:31 *was not* the day of Pentecost. Furthermore, Bible students take the expression "all flesh" upon whom God would pour His Spirit to mean both Jews and Gentiles. But, His Spirit was to come upon the Gentiles *before* that great and terrible day would come. If space allowed, we could dig further into this passage to bring out similar thoughts as above to show that that day was not the day of Pentecost. Furthermore, it was a *wonderful* day when God poured out His Spirit on the day of Pentecost, but Joel 2:31 is predicting another kind of a day altogether--a "terrible" day. Furthermore, the darkening of the sun and the moon being turned into blood which are to precede the great and terrible day of the Lord of Joel 2:31 are perfectly parallel with New Testament prophecies as to what is to happen prior to Jesus' second coming (Luke 21:25-27; Matt. 24:29,30; and others). In all honesty to the text, I believe we must conclude that Joel 2:31 prophesies the wind-up of human affairs connected with the return of Christ. What a grand prophecy, then, Joel 2:28-32 is--a prophecy that spans the entire Christian dispensation from the standpoint of time, beginning with a prediction of the coming of the Holy Spirit that opened this dispensation and taking us clear down to the day of the Lord that will end it!

## B. Daniel Prophesied The Resurrection.

Dan. 12:2,3 makes the following important prediction that should not be overlooked:

*"Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."*

This has not taken place yet. This is still future. But, Daniel the prophet foresaw it.

## C. Isaiah Closed His Book Prophesying Of Eternity.

The last three verses of Isaiah read:

*"For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord. And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh!" (Isa. 66:22-24).*

This is the passage that Peter refers to in II Pet. 3:13 when he says that according to His promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth. Notice once again that in speaking of new moons and sabbaths, Isaiah is employing Mosaic terminology. Finally, outside of the city of Jerusalem lay the Valley of Gehenna, where the garbage of the city was dumped which was constantly fed upon by the

worms (the live garbage) and where the fire was constantly burning (the burnable garbage). Jesus employed the word "gehenna" in the Greek to tell of the awful end to which all the wicked would come. Our word "hell" is a translation of that Greek word "gehenna". Furthermore, Jesus made direct reference to this last part of Isaiah when He preached what is recorded in Mark 9:43-48. So, Isaiah ends telling of the new heavens and the new earth in which the righteous will dwell eternally, who will continue their worship of God, and who will be free from all who have corrupted themselves with sin and who will suffer for it in the Gehenna-fires of hell.

Possibly only one who has the field of the Old Testament Prophets as one of his regular teaching assignments can fully appreciate the difficulty of trying to decide what material to include in such a brief treatise and what to leave out. There are so many other things that I would like to have introduced and discussed, but my space is gone, and I must quit. May this which has been included prove to be a great help in your further study of God's Word in this important field!

# The Messiah is Born

The One who was born in Bethlehem almost two thousand years ago has brought such tremendous changes that the world's calendar of dates is laid out from the time of His birth. Prior to the system of our present calendar, everything was dated from the founding of the city of Rome. Some five hundred years after the birth of Jesus, Dionysius fixed the date of Jesus' birth as seven hundred fifty-four years after the founding of Rome. This dating system was followed for many years before it was found that Dionysius had made an error in his figuring of four years. Therefore, instead of changing the date on every legal document by four years, which would have been a tremendous and costly job, it was decided to leave the calendar as it was. Thus, though it seems odd, according to our calendar, Jesus was born in 4 B.C. and died in 30 A.D.

The story of how Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem with reference to taxation and how Jesus was born to them there is a story so well known and so well loved. We would that all who treasure the story of Messiah's birth would so accept Him and live for Him that they could truthfully sing: "Jesus is all the world to me--my life, my joy, my all!" Among the many important things that can be profitably discussed concerning His birth, we have chosen the following ones.

## I. He Was Born Of A Virgin.

### A. There Are Those Who Deny His Virgin-Birth.

Various polls of what people, particularly religious leaders, think religiously have indicated a startling number

who do not accept the fact of Jesus' virgin-birth. This is due not to any historical facts recently brought to light, but is only a part of that growing trend commonly called "modernism" or "liberalism" which is seeking to remould the Bible story to coincide with modern thinking, rejecting the idea not only of a miraculous begetting such as Jesus had, but of all miracles recorded in the Bible. We can as yet be thankful that the common man still believes in an Inspired Bible and the virgin-birth of Jesus, but if the common man does not wake up and put religious leaders on the spot as to what they actually believe about the virgin-birth of Jesus and the other miracles of the Bible, as well as the inspiration of the Bible itself, the trend toward liberalism will continue, and those of coming generations will not have the same faith in the Bible that is commonly held, and rightly so, today.

### B. The Bible Teaches The Virgin-Birth.

When hearing or reading the liberals' denials of Jesus' virgin-birth, one needs to remember that he is hearing or reading that which is directly different from what the Bible says. This is disbelief. This was the devil's first attack upon the human race, when he denied to Eve what God had said to Adam and her. This disbelief is what the Bible condemns to an eternal hell prepared by God for those who accept it instead of His Word. Let us notice the clarity of the Bible upon the unique and virgin-birth of Jesus.

The virgin-birth simply means that Jesus was born of a woman who had never known man even at the time of His birth. If she was a virgin at the time of His birth, how then did she come to be with child? The Bible's answer is that her child was not begotten by a human being, but by the Holy Spirit of God. Notice how clearly this is set forth in the conversation between Mary and the angel Gabriel prior to the begetting when Gabriel was first telling Mary of the good news:

*"And the angel said unto her, 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. 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. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:30-35).*

Being not as yet married, but seeing that Mary was with child, Joseph was minded to put her away. He was stopped from so acting by the angel, who told him that the child was not begotten by any man:

*"Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done (Matthew adds), that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet (Isa. 7:14), saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel; which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matt. 1:20-23).*

### C. The Importance Of His Virgin-Birth.

We believe that Jesus was more than a mere man because He was begotten by God. We, therefore, accept Him as the Son of God, the only-begotten Son of God. Apart from His deity, He would have no power to save us from our sins. We, therefore, necessarily surrender everything when we surrender His deity, and we surrender His deity when we surrender His virgin-birth, for as we have seen in the quotations above, He is called the Son of God *because* He was begotten by the power of the Highest. Turn from any teacher or preacher as a foe of the deity of Jesus who denies or casts doubt upon the virgin-birth of Jesus. This will be true of many ministers in the larger Protestant bodies even as it is a growing trend among the leadership of the Disciples of Christ.

## II. He Became A Part Of An Humble Household In Galilee.

### A. The Facts Of The Case.

Jesus was a very poor individual all His life. As has been pointed out before, He was born in a lowly carpenter family. The place of His birth was a borrowed stable, and His first bed was a manger. During His ministry, He had no place to call His own. His chief followers were humble fishermen with little or no formal education. He rode into Jerusalem upon a borrowed beast. By the time of His dying breath, His clothes (His only known earthly possessions) had been claimed by the soldiers who put Him to death, and His place of burial was in a borrowed tomb.

But, in addition to these well known facts, there is another striking indication of the extreme poverty of His parents. The law of Moses required that a mother be cleansed of her ceremonial uncleanness brought on by birth by offering prescribed sacrifices as follows:

*"When the days of her purifying are fulfilled, for a son, or for a daughter, she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtledove, for a sin offering" (Lev. 12:6).*

The law made provision for those financially unable to sacrifice a lamb as follows:

*"If she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt offering, and other for a sin offering" (Lev. 12:8).*

The poverty of Jesus' parents is shown in the fact that they had to offer the "poor people's sacrifice" (Luke 2:22-24).

### B. The Significance Of These Facts.

Choosing such humble parentage for Jesus was surely not without design on God's part. Such would keep men from ascribing His greatness to human causes. Had He been born among the prominent of earth, men would have ascribed His greatness to His "start", "pulls," or other natural causes. But, Jesus had none of these in His favor. In fact, some even rejected Him because of His humble surroundings, feeling that He could not be great coming from such earthly lowliness. The people of Nazareth said:

*"Is this not the carpenter's son?" (Matt. 13:55).*



Nathanael questioned Philip's statement that they had found the Messiah in Jesus of Nazareth by asking:

*"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46).*

The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem confidently rejected Jesus, saying:

*"Search and look; for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet" (John 7:52).*

Another possible design in choosing humble parentage for Jesus was that in so doing, God both honored the honest and meek of the earth and gave them hope of ultimate divine exaltation through the Messiah born among them.

### III. His Birth Was Welcomed.

#### A. By The Angels.

Speaking of Christ, Heb. 1:6 says:

*"And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him."*

A sample of the joy of the angels over the birth of the Christ-child is seen in Luke 2:13,14 after one of them had announced the birth to the shepherds. That passage reads:

*"And suddenly there was with the angel (who had done the announcing) a multitude of the heavenly host (angels), praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."*

#### B. By Judean Shepherds.

The same night that Jesus was born, the following took place:

*"There were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger" (Luke 2:8-12).*

When the shepherds learned of His birth, they went into Bethlehem immediately and found the Christ-child. They, therefore, became Jesus' first visitors. There are two noteworthy things about their being Jesus' first visitors: first, they were Jews--this was only right as they had been God's covenant-people through whom the Messiah was to come; and, secondly, they were the working class of people--this again indicated God's concern for and intention to help those who were not too good to work with their hands and who had little hope of earthly prominence. In both these first visitors and in the poverty of Jesus' parents, we find a rather forecast of the truth stated in Jas. 2:5:

*"Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?"*

#### C. By The Wise Men From Afar.

These men--maybe three in number, maybe more; at least, a plural number--came from the east following a star that was to take them to the place of the Jews' newly-born

king. God must have revealed to them the fact of His birth and assigned the star to direct them to His whereabouts, for in no other way would they have known of the birth of one who was to become a king, and in no other way would they have known the meaning of the star. As they got into the land of the Jews, God withdrew the star, so they resorted to Jerusalem, the most natural place to make inquiry. No one there knew of the birth, but the scribes who knew the law and the prophets said that Bethlehem was the place where the Messiah was to be born. So, to Bethlehem they headed, and as they left Jerusalem, the star re-appeared to them. It is evident that this was not a star operating in its customary path, for the Bible represents it as fulfilling a special purpose. Furthermore, it must have been a star of exceedingly low altitude. Jerusalem and Bethlehem were but a very few miles apart--only six miles. Had this star been of customary height for stars, they could have looked up into the sky at Jerusalem at some star, have gone to Bethlehem and there looked up at it again, and it would have appeared in the same position as it had at Jerusalem. Only one low enough--exceedingly low for a star--could have led them to the place where the baby was. Upon their arrival, they fell down and worshipped Him and presented to Him the costly gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These gifts were evidently God's provision for the humble family for their sojourn into Egypt for the baby's safety which He was going to call upon them to make. The foregoing details of the visit of the wise men are recorded in Matt. 2:1-11.

The visit of the wise men is not without significance. They were not Jews as the shepherds had been. But, the Messiah was not to be a Savior merely for the Jews, but for all peoples. Thus, God led both Jews and Gentiles to the Christ-child. Furthermore, God has not excluded the rich and prominent of the earth from salvation through Christ. Therefore, it was but fitting that He should bring the rich (who could present costly gifts of adoration) as well as the poor shepherds (who brought no gift) to visit the infant Messiah.

### IV. Opposition Set In Early.

#### A. The Prophet Simeon's Prediction.

When His parents took Jesus to the temple at the age of forty days, an aged prophet Simeon was there, who took Him into his arms and blest Him. Then, having blest both Joseph and Mary, he turned to Mary and said:

*"Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:34,35).*

"Spoken against!" said Simeon. Yes, and more than mere speaking! With these words, he foretold the opposition that the child would experience. It is noteworthy that though Simeon had been talking to both Joseph and Mary, it was to Mary alone that he said a sword would pierce through her own soul also. The reason for that was that there is every indication that Joseph was dead at the time of the crucifixion--surely the time when a sword, so to speak, pierced Mary's heart. One of the clearest indications that Joseph was not living at the time of the crucifixion is that Jesus

committed His mother to the care of John at the cross. And John 19:27 says that he took her into his own home from that hour.

### B. The Wrath Of Herod.

The beginning of the opposition foreseen by Simeon was close at hand. Herod had hypocritically told the wise men of his desire to go and worship the baby. But, God told the wise men not to return to Herod with information of Jesus' whereabouts. When enough time had passed that Herod was convinced the wise men were not returning to him, king-like he felt the need to kill the one whom he supposed would become his successor if permitted to live. Having neither name nor address of the baby, he hastily issued a decree for all male children two years old and under in the Bethlehem area to be killed. Such crying as was heard throughout all the region around Bethlehem! Herod probably felt assured that he had gotten the baby, not realizing that God had warned Joseph to take Him into Egypt until Herod himself had died. Matt. 2:13-18 tells of the above events.

Yes, the Christ-child was hated from the beginning, but not by those who realized their lostness and desired salvation through Him, not by those who were all too glad to turn from their sins to something better to be brought to them by the Messiah. He was hated by one who thought only of himself, who wanted to have his own way, and who was not willing to bow down before Him. Such were Jesus' opposers throughout His days. Such were those who led in His crucifixion. And such are those today who persecute people "for the Son of man's sake".

Somehow, God did not see fit to have either the exact place or the birthdate of Jesus preserved for our knowledge. Encyclopedias do not claim that December 25 is the actual day when Jesus was born. Catholicism has so fixed upon that day, and the Protestant world has followed. Catholics also have commercialized upon a spot at Bethlehem which they tell visitors marks the place of the birth, but no one knows where the actual spot is, and little does it really matter. Since, therefore, we know not the place nor the day of Jesus' birth, and since He has asked to be remembered specifically for what He did for mankind upon the cross rather than His sleeping in a manger like any other baby sleeps, those seeking to follow the Bible pattern for things have gotten little excited over a Christmas started by the Catholics and adopted so largely by a Protestant world that goes all-out for a few days at the end of the year to reverence Jesus in *their* way, but neglect to remember and reverence Him in the special way that He ordained when He instituted the Lord's supper, which He instituted to be observed every week! As a song writer has called to our attention the fact that we do not worship the cross, but the *Christ* of the cross, so we need to remember that we do not worship the birth of Christ, but the Christ who was born.

The Psalmist has said that the man who is blessed delights in the law of the Lord and meditates upon it day and night.

# The Genealogy of Jesus

As dry as the genealogical tables of Jesus' ancestry may seem, they are nevertheless very important. They have but little purpose to the one who merely *reads* the Bible, but they are of great worth to the one who *studies* it. Coming to an acceptance of Jesus as the Christ from the Gentile line of humanity, the ancestry of Jesus possibly did not mean as much to us at the time of our conversions to Him as it would if we had been Jews instead of Gentiles. The Jews realized that God had selected a particular family line through which the Messiah was to be born. He would be a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah. But, Judah had many descendants. Hundreds of years after Judah, God told David (a descendant of Judah) that the Messiah would come through Him. But, after the days of David, God made no more particular promises to anybody of David's line until about the time when the Messiah was to be born when He dispatched the angel Gabriel to the would-be parents of John the Baptist and Jesus.

The genealogy of Jesus is recorded two times in the Bible. Matthew opens his book with a seventeen-verse treatment of it (Matt. 1:1-17), and Luke gives his genealogy in Luke 3:23-38 right after he recorded the baptism of Jesus. Since Matthew wrote his gospel account to convince the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah, it was very fitting that he open with that which would be in every Jew's mind concerning anyone purporting to be the Messiah: "Is he of the right tribe and family?" The account in Luke, given at the time of the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, also seems to be given at a fitting time since that is the time when one would become interested in Him and what He was about to do. The further material of this study will be a treatment of Jesus' genealogy.

## I. A Consideration Of The Two Genealogical Tables.

A. *One Is Historical In Order; The Other Is History In Reverse.*

It is Matthew's account that tells us:

"Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren; and Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram..." (Matt. 1:2-16)

Notice that this listing is one generation after another just as history unfolded itself. But, Luke's account begins with Jesus and reverses history generation by generation until the very beginning of time:

"Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli, which was the son of Matthat, which was the son of Levi, which was the son of Melchi, which was the son of Janna, which was the son of Joseph..." (Luke 3:23-38).

B. *Matthew Traces Jesus' Ancestry Merely From Abra-*

ham; Luke Traces His Ancestry Clear Back To Adam.

Since Matthew wrote to the Hebrews, he began where Hebrew history began--with Abraham. God having made special promises to Abraham and many hundreds of years later to David, the Jews all looked for the Messiah to be a descendant of both Abraham and David. How significant, then, that Matthew should open his gospel account with these words:

*"The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1).*

Then, he proceeded to give the family tree generation by generation from Abraham on down, of course, tracing the line through David. But, Luke, writing to a Greek by the name of Theophilus traced Jesus' ancestry all the way back to Adam (Luke 3:23-28).

*C. Matthew Traces The Line Through Joseph While Luke Traces It Through Mary.*

Notice Matthew's table beginning with David:

*"David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias (Uriah); and Solomon begat Roboam (Rehoboam); and Roboam begat Abia (Abijah); and Abia begat Asa; and Asa begat Josaphat (Jehoshaphat); and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias (Uzziah); and Ozias begat Joatham (Jotham); and Joatham begat Achaz (Ahaz); and Achaz begat Ezekias (Hezekiah); and Ezekias begat Manasses (Manasseh); and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias (Josiah); and Josias begat Jechonias (Jechoniah or Jehoiachin) and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon; and after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salthiel (Shealtiel); and Salthiel begat Zerubbabel (Zerubbabel)" (Matt. 1:6-12).*

The names by which they were known in the Old Testament have been given in parenthesis. These men were all kings, descendants of David. Matthew traces the line through Joseph (Jesus' foster-father) to prove His legal right to the throne of David. Luke's record, however, traces Jesus' actual blood-line through His mother. Mary's genealogy in Luke, in accord with Jewish custom, was in her husband's name. Joseph was actually the son-in-law of "Heli", the Jews having but one way to say both "son" and "son-in-law". Therefore, we take it that Joseph was properly the "son-in-law" of Luke's "Heli", for we know that Joseph's father was "Jacob" (Matt. 1:16). Furthermore, the Jewish Targums record that Mary's father's name was Heli. Therefore, Luke gives us Jesus' blood-line through His mother Mary, and Matthew gives us His father's genealogy to prove His legal right to the throne of David.

*D. Matthew's Omissions And Groupings.*

It is a fact that Matthew makes certain omissions in his table. For instance, Matt. 1:8 says that Joram begat Uzziah. Actually, according to Old Testament history, Joram begat Ahaziah, and Ahaziah begat Joash, and Joash begat Amaziah, and Amaziah begat Uzziah. Notice, then, that Matthew omitted three men from his table. There are also a few other omissions in his table. There evidently was some reason for his making these omissions, which we shall give later.

We notice also that he divides his table of names into three groups: (1) from Abraham to David. (2) from David to

the carrying away to Babylon, and (3) from the carrying away to Babylon to Jesus (Matt. 1:17). The Holy Spirit led him to group these names into these groupings. This was evidently to aid the memories of his readers who would want to commit this table to memory to use to convince others (that was when printing was unknown and people had to rely much upon memory). The omissions, mentioned above, must have been purposely made in order to shorten the names in each group to fourteen (Matt. 1:17). The names omitted were of such a nature that every Jew knew that Uzziah was a descendant of Joram even though the intervening between the two men were not listed by Matthew

## II. Noticeable People In Jesus' Ancestry.

In studying the genealogical tables of Jesus, there are additional truths for us besides the fact that He descended from Abraham through David. Let us consider some of the people through whom God ran the chosen line.

### A. Good People.

Seth, Enoch, Noah, and Shem were all godly men. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have all been discussed in former studies. But, good Joseph, whom we might have expected to be an ancestor of Christ, is missing. Instead, the line ran through his brother Judah. Boaz and Ruth were both wonderful people. David, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Uzziah, Hezekiah, Josiah, and Zerubbabel were all considered among the good kings of the south. His parents, Mary and Joseph, were the finest of earth.

### B. Bad People.

But, not everybody in Jesus' ancestry was good. Lamech was the first recorded polygamist (Gen. 4:19). He also was a murderer (Gen. 4:23). Terah was an idol-worshipper (Josh. 24:2), but so was almost everybody else of his time. Matt. 1:3 tells of Judah begetting Pharez and Zarah. These were twins, and they were born of harlotry (Gen. 38:6-30). Matt. 1:5 tells that Boaz's mother was Rahab. She had been a one-time harlot of Jericho. David had several sons, but the line went through Solomon, who was born of Bathsheba, the woman whom he took from Uriah (which fact was even included in Matthew's table) (1:6). Solomon himself, though good at first, turned out to be extremely far from God in his older age (1 Kings 11:4). Rehoboam, Abijah, Joram, Ahaz, Manasseh, Amon, and Jechoniah were all considered wicked kings.

No doubt, the inclusion of such people in Jesus' genealogy is to give hope to the sinful through the Christ. To say the least, the mercy and condescension of God are evident in the genealogy of Jesus.

### C. Obscure People.

Many of these names, especially those of the four hundred years between the two testaments, are either partly or completely obscure as far as our knowing anything about them is concerned. Yet, they are listed, for they are necessary ancestral links in tracing the genealogy. Some of them were no doubt godly, and some were probably ungodly. But, none of them probably realized they were those through whom the Messiah would come.

### D. Outsiders Brought In.

It is noticeable that there are at least two Gentiles (among the women, which would not nullify the bloodstream that ran through their husbands) in Jesus' genealogy. Ruth was a Moabitess, but a mighty fine one, who desired to have the God of her mother-in-law Naomi (the true God) to be her God (Ruth 1:16). She married Boaz, one of the fine men of Israel. Rahab was the other outsider. But, though she had been a harlot, she believed that the God of the Israelites was surely the true God, for so she spoke to the spies whom she hid (Josh. 2:1-11). Realizing that God had delivered her town Jericho into the hands of the Israelites, she asked for mercy for herself and her household (Josh. 2:12,13), which was granted (Josh. 6:22,23). Heb. 11 and Jas. 2 both speak favorably of Rahab, who became a part of Israel, marrying a man by the name of Salmon.

The inclusion of these two outsiders who came to believe in Israel's God and who desired to be a part of God's people indicated God's willingness to receive even Gentiles through the Messiah.

By way of conclusion, let us say that if the Messiah was to be the descendant of Abraham through David (and He was), and if Jesus of Nazareth was not the true Messiah, there would be absolutely no way of identifying the ancestry of the true Messiah should He yet be to come, for since 70 A.D. when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and its temple, the long-preserved Jewish ancestry tables have been destroyed, and there would be no way to check His ancestry. This is one of the many convincing arguments for the Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth!

## The Forerunning Ministry of John

The gospel of John opens its account of John the Baptist by saying:

*"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John" (John 1:6).*

No better introduction could have been made of him. All the other gospel writers referred to him as "John the Baptist", which was necessary to distinguish him from John the apostle. But, the fourth gospel account, written by John the apostle, needed not to append the words "the Baptist" to John's name for distinguishing purposes as did the other writers. John was called "John the Baptist" because he baptized--not because there was any religious party by that name to which he belonged. Neither did John found a religion to bear his name.

Jesus and John were relatives. According to some versions' rendering of Luke 1:36, their mothers were cousins. The Revised Version renders the word "kinswoman" rather than "cousin", which would still leave Jesus and John related. Both of their births were announced by the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:11-19 and Luke 1:26-31). Jesus' parents

were from Nazareth, which was up north near the Sea of Galilee (Luke 1:26,27). John's parents lived in the south-land of Judea (Luke 1:39,40). It is hard to tell whether the two chosen boys got to see each other very often during their boyhood days. They probably got to see each other at least every year at Passover time, for Jesus' parents always went to Jerusalem every year at that time (Luke 2:41), for Jerusalem would not be too far from John's home, and John's parents no doubt went to Jerusalem also each year at that time.

### I. The Unusualness Of John.

#### A. Ways In Which He Was Unusual.

John stayed out in the wilderness and did his preaching. Instead of going where the people were, they came out where he was. He was not finely dressed, but had camel's hair clothing with a leather girdle about his loins, and his diet was nothing lavish--locusts and wild honey (Matt. 3:4). While Jesus was often to be found dining in the homes of people, John remained out in the wilderness, for which he was accused of having a demon (Matt. 11:18). You know, whatever a preacher does, some people are going to criticize it. John was no exception.

#### B. His Ministry Greatly Resembled That Of Elijah.

Gabriel had told his father that John would go before the Messiah in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). The ministry of Elijah paralleled that of John in that both of them were bitterly outspoken against prevailing sin, and both of them were hermit-type of men who chose the wilderness to the city. Although he fulfilled the prophecies about an Elijah who was to come (Mal. 4:5 and Matt. 17:10-13), he did not personally realize it (John 1:19-21). As far as God revealed to him, he was merely the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of the voice of one crying in the wilderness to prepare the way for the Messiah (Luke 3:3-6 and John 1:22,23).

#### C. He Needed No Miracle Power.

We have no record of John's performing any miracles. We have reason to believe that he performed none. Those who knew well of his ministry and were completely favorable to him give us the following statement:

*"John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man (Jesus) were true" (John 10:41).*

We might wonder why God did not empower John to work miracles. Somebody has suggested that John was so different that he himself was a sign. But, possibly it is better to point out that John was telling them of that which was going to come to pass very shortly. Therefore, the proof of his ministry would be evident when those things came to pass.

### II. John's Message.

#### A. He Preached That The Kingdom Was At Hand.

Matt. 3:1,2 says:

*"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

This was the kingdom that Daniel, hundreds of years

before, had prophesied would be set up in the days of the kings of the fourth worldwide kingdom (Dan. 2:31-44). John did not live to proclaim the kingdom as an established fact, but he did live in those final days before it was set up. He said that it was "at hand".

As odd as it may seem, there are some who say the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are two different things. But, if one will get out his concordance, he will find that Matthew's account employs the term "kingdom of heaven" while the other accounts employ the term "kingdom of God" in recording the same incidents. For instance, compare Matt. 13:11 ("kingdom of heaven") with Mark 4:11 ("kingdom of God"); compare also Matt. 13:31 ("kingdom of heaven") with Mark 4:30 ("kingdom of God").

### B. He Told Of The One Coming After Him.

This is why John is referred to as the "forerunner" of Christ. Many times did he tell of the One coming after him. This was his chief mission. A sample of his utterances upon this point is found in Matt. 3:11,12.

*"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

Jesus said that John was a prophet, but more than a prophet (Matt. 11:9). The next verse tells in what sense John was more than a prophet--he was a special prophet to be the forerunner of Christ. John was sent before the Christ to get people ready for His coming as much as a highway crew is sent out to build a super highway. Isaiah had prophesied of him and his work as follows:

*"The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:4-6).*

After Jesus had come and was ready to begin His public ministry, John said to the people:

*"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me" (John 1:29,30).*

### C. He Preached Repentance.

God sent prophets only when there was a need for prophets. Therefore, the message of repentance was always characteristic of the prophets' preaching. John was no exception. He spoke to them in no uncertain terms as follows:

*"Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand...The axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Matt. 3:2,10).*

Not only did he tell them to repent, but when asked what to do by way of bearing the fruit of repentance, John was quick to tell them exactly what they had to do (Luke 3:10-14). There was nothing indefinite about John's preaching. All got the point--a few of them too well!

## III. The Response To His Ministry.

### A. His Preaching Met With Unusual Success.

Matt. 3:5,6 says:

*"Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins."*

The above passage surely shows the impact that John's ministry made upon many people. The powerful way that he brought the truth of God to bear upon their consciences brought many to his baptism, and it is noteworthy that they came and confessed their sins. Surely, people have been brought under deep conviction when they acknowledge what they have been doing. In Ephesus, they did the same thing when Paul preached (Acts 19:18,19). That every preacher had such a definite message against sin and the courage to deliver it so pointedly that men everywhere would come out into the open for God, realizing that their sins had been uncovered! The floodtides of conversion and revival would be as high today as in the days of the apostles.

Some even wondered whether John was the Messiah at first (Luke 3:15). This gave John the opportunity to say that he wasn't, but that the Messiah was on His way.

### B. But, The Leaders Did Not Receive Him.

In contrast to the mass of the people, Luke 7:29,30 says of the leaders:

*"And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized of him. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him."*

Jesus had something to say about the leaders and their response to John's preaching:

*"Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him" (Matt. 21:31,32).*

When John beheld some of them in the crowd, he said:

*"O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matt. 3:7-9).*

John spared no words of bitter denunciation in addressing those hypocritical leaders of the day. In this, he was like Jesus (John 8:44 and Matt. 23:27-33) and like Paul (Acts 13:9,10).

## IV. John's Last Months.

### A. He Was Imprisoned.

A man sent of God, as John was, should have been received by all. When he preached righteousness, all should have agreed and cooperated with him. But, "this vile world is no friend of grace," and John found it out. For rebuking Herod's sin of taking and having his brother's wife, he was imprisoned (Matt. 14:3,4). Instead of imprisoning him, Herod would have killed him, but he feared the people who looked

upon John as a prophet (Matt. 14:5). The place of his imprisonment is not mentioned in the Bible, but it would likely have been either at Tiberias on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee or at Machaerus east of the Dead Sea. Herod had residences at both places.

### B. Oddly, Herod Conferred With Him Often.

It would seem that Herod would have nothing to do with John. But, the contrary was true. Mark 6:20 reports of John's prison-life:

*"Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly."*

In this, John was like Paul, who while imprisoned was sent for often by Felix (Acts 24:24-26).

### C. John's Doubt.

John had preached that the kingdom was at hand. He had also foretold the coming of Jesus. But, Jesus was not coming into His kingdom in the way that John had looked for. The gloom of prison-life no doubt had its toll upon his thoughts also. One day, therefore, he sent two of his disciples to Jesus with the following question:

*"Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" (Matt. 11:3).*

Some have tried to soften these words as if they meant something else besides a doubt on John's part. But, such is not necessary. Abraham, David, Peter, and other characters of the Bible did some things that were not right, yet the Bible does not shield them. It is not necessary, therefore, to put John on a pedestal above the possibility of sin. Furthermore, the reply that Jesus sent back to John closed with these significant words:

*"And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me" (Matt. 11:6).*

If the apostles did not grasp the spiritual nature of the kingdom until Pentecost, but conceived of an earthly Jewish kingdom prior to that time, it is not surprizing if John also shared such thoughts about the kingdom--he knew only such things about the kingdom as God revealed to him, and we have no record of God revealing anything to him about the kingdom except that its coming was near.

But, lest the people should be quick to discount John and his ministry as a result of his doubt, Jesus preached a magnificent defense of the work of John. If space permitted us, we would print Jesus' words concerning John, but since it doesn't, we shall tell you where they are found--Matt. 11:7-19.

### D. His Prison Death.

John was not slated for execution. He was not confined in Death Row. But, the way it turned out, he might as well have been. The story of his wife's bitter hatred for John is well known and how that she grabbed an opportunity to get John beheaded when Herod had foolishly offered her daughter anything she requested up to half of his kingdom (Mark 6:17-28). So, from the time John was imprisoned until the day of his death, he never knew what a day of liberty was. But, he had done his work well even though he did not get to serve long.

As we bring this study to a close, there are several miscellaneous items which we wish to consider. John had disciples. We read of them several times. We do not know what they did or what was the purpose of his having disciples. We do know that he had taught them how to pray (Luke 11:1). They, like John, engaged in fasting often (Matt. 9:14). When they heard of how many Jesus and His disciples were baptizing, they became jealous and reported the matter to John, supposing he would share their feelings. But, John shared none of their selfishness. John willingly accepted the role of Christ's forerunner and gladly said to his disciples:

*"He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).*

When we get as far into the book of Acts as the eighteenth and nineteenth chapters, we are surprized to find a preacher still practicing the baptism of John. Aquila and Priscilla took him home and straightened him out. Thereafter, Apollos went forth in the fulness of the gospel, and when Paul came to Ephesus and found twelve men who had been baptized with John's baptism, Acts 19:4,5 says:

*"John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."*

So, the time came when the validity of John's baptism had passed. This was surely at the cross or possibly even sometime before.

We would also like to share some chronological thoughts with you. John was six months older than Jesus (Luke 1:36). He had been preaching and baptizing sometime before Jesus came to be baptized (Luke 3:21). Jesus was baptized when he was thirty or thereabout (Luke 3:23). The Jews did not look upon one as of age until he was thirty. Probably, then, John had not begun his ministry until he was thirty. Therefore, it is usually thought that John had possibly been preaching six months or less before the time of Jesus' baptism. John was not imprisoned until nearly a year after Jesus' baptism, for following His baptism, Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness of temptation, he made a trip north to Galilee, and was there a brief time before going to Jerusalem to begin His Early Judean Ministry, which lasted eight months, and which was brought to a close by Jesus hearing that John had been imprisoned. From the best that can be figured out, John was in prison about another year before he was beheaded. If we have rightly concluded, John was about thirty when he began to preach; he preached and baptized about a year and a half; he was then a prisoner for another year; he died about a year before Jesus did, which would have meant he was about thirty-two years old when he died.

Jesus paid one of the greatest personal tributes to the character of John when He said that of all those born of woman, not a greater had arisen than John (Matt. 11:11). But, John lived and died before the kingdom was established. He got to be no part of it in its earthly phase. Yet, according to Jesus, the very least in the kingdom is greater than John (Matt. 11:11). All the foregoing reduces very simply to the following--men are made great by being in the kingdom, the least in it being greater than the greatest man out of it.

## Jesus' Baptism and Temptations

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all three record the baptism and the temptations of Jesus. John, who usually passed over what the others covered thoroughly and instead dwelt upon those matters which the others did not include, made but passing mention of one incident connected with Jesus' baptism. With these important matters which we shall discuss in this study, Jesus was soon to enter upon His public ministry and become an important public figure throughout Palestine and surrounding regions.

### I. His Baptism.

#### A. He Walked A Great Distance To Be Baptized.

Throughout most of John the Baptist's ministry, he baptized in the Jordan River--probably the lower portion of the Jordan as it flowed along Judea before emptying into the Dead Sea. He was from Judea himself; when he baptized, he did so in the Jordan; the people of Jerusalem came out to his baptism; Jesus' ministry followed John's preparation, and He began with an Early Judean Ministry--all these point toward John beginning His baptizing in the Jordan as it touched the land of Judea. Jesus is thought to have been baptized in the lower Jordan, for it was not until after His baptism do we read of John baptizing near Bethabara and at a still later date of AEnon. Mark 1:9 shows that He came from Nazareth of Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized. This would have been a distance of from sixty-five to eighty miles, depending upon the exact location of His baptism. But, God was commanding baptism of the Jewish people through the preaching of John, and though Jesus had no sins to confess and to be forgiven of, yet He walked this distance in order to be obedient to this commandment of the Father. If the baptism of John was important in his day--and it was--the baptism that Jesus has authorized is likewise important in our day, and if Jesus took such measures to be baptized in His day, people today should do the same thing.

#### B. He Was Baptized At The Height Of John's Judean Ministry.

Luke 3:21 says that when all the people had been baptized, Jesus came to be baptized. We might wonder at first why Jesus delayed His baptism. We would think He would have presented Himself for baptism at the first. But, there was a reason for His waiting as He did. In order for John to fulfill His role as forerunner, it was necessary for him to have somewhat of a ministry before Jesus came onto the scene. John must tell them of the One who was going to come after him. When the stage was set, Jesus came and was baptized, God pointed out to John that this was indeed the One, and thereafter John told the people that Jesus was the One of whom he had been telling them. Thus, this gives people today no grounds for delaying their baptism.

#### C. He Was Baptized "In" The Jordan--Not Beside It.

A famous painting depicts Jesus standing on the shore along the river with John pouring water out of a shell upon His head. How misrepresenting this picture is! Mark's account is very good to use in correcting this picture. Mark 1:9 says that He was baptized "in Jordan"--this is different from being alongside the Jordan, as the artist has pictured. Furthermore, the next verse (Mark 1:10) shows that following His baptism, He came up out of the river--something He could not have done if He merely stood on the bank as the picture indicates. John was not a "sprinkler"--he was an "immerser". John 3:23 shows that at one time, he purposely baptized at AEnon because there was much water there. If he merely sprinkled or poured, anywhere he might have been, he could have gotten sufficient water for sprinkling or pouring, but since baptism has always been immersion, there would have been many places where not enough water was available for that.

#### D. He Prayed As He Came Up Out Of The Water.

Luke's gospel account is a fine one to study when studying the matter of prayer. It is noticeable that Luke's account alone records the fact that when Jesus was coming up out of the water, He was praying (Luke 3:21). We are not told what He was praying, but what a fitting example Jesus has left for all being baptized! As He was arising to face the devil's temptations and to begin His ministry for God, how appropriate it was for Him to call upon the name of the Father, and as people emerge from the waters of baptism to face the temptations that Satan will be sure to throw at them and as they begin their Christian lives, how appropriate it is to call upon God for strength and grace!

#### E. He Was Anointed As The Messiah At His Baptism.

The word "Messiah" (which is a Hebrew word) and the word "Christ" (which is a Greek word) mean "anointed". Nearly everyone who knows anything at all about the baptism of Jesus recalls that the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus at the time of His baptism, but it is surprising to find how many people are ignorant of the purpose of the Spirit's descent upon Him. Peter preached that God had anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power (Acts 10:38), and shortly after His baptism, as He spoke in the synagogue at Nazareth, He claimed to have already been anointed with the Spirit (Luke 4:17,18,21). All the evidence points to the descent of the Spirit upon Him at the time of His baptism as the time when He was anointed. How fitting if He was to show Himself to the people as the Messiah (or the anointed one) that that anointing should take place before He began to show Himself to the people!

#### F. The Descent Of The Spirit Was Also A Sign To John.

John, being a relative of Jesus, doubtlessly knew Him well. But, John did not depend upon his past association with Jesus for the absolute knowledge that Jesus was the One of whom he had been preaching. His original hesitancy to baptize Jesus (Matt. 3:14) would indicate his thoughts concerning Jesus, but God wanted him to have a definite sign of Jesus' Sonship which he could proclaim to the people. The gospel of John records the following words concerning the above:

*"And I (John the Baptist) knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God" (John 1:31-34).*

No doubt, the purpose of the Holy Spirit's descending in the form of a dove was for John's sake. The Spirit could come upon Jesus without a bodily form just as He enters the life of everyone becoming a Christian without a bodily form, but a bodily form was necessary if John was going to "see" the Spirit descending and abiding upon Jesus.

#### G. God Claimed Jesus As His Son At His Baptism.

God was pleased with Jesus, for He was His Son and was obedient, and He wanted John and anybody else who may have been present at Jesus' baptism to know it. The Scriptures do not tell us whether people were present at His baptism or not. But, it was at His baptism that the voice came from heaven:

*"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17).*

Mark's account gives what Jesus received from the message:

*"Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11).*

#### H. False Conclusions To Draw.

One might say, "Jesus wasn't baptized until He was thirty years old, so I am going to wait until I am thirty before being baptized." That would be a dangerous conclusion to draw. There was a reason why Jesus wasn't baptized before He was thirty. John, the first to administer divine baptism, wasn't baptizing when Jesus was twelve, eighteen, or even twenty-five. Jesus was about thirty years old when John began baptizing. Therefore, it is evident why Jesus wasn't baptized younger. Those who hear the gospel and believe are to be baptized (Mark 16:15,16) regardless of their age. Whenever one is old enough to hear and believe, he had better not tarry his decision to be baptized.

There are those who contend that one must be baptized in running water before he is Scripturally baptized. As their example, they cite the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River. But, were we to cite the three thousand baptized on the day of Pentecost as an example of those who were not baptized in running water, then no one could say that Scriptural baptism must take place in running water. Three thousand were baptized on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41), and the Jews' day ended at 6:00 in the evening. It was mid-morning when the preaching and exciting activities of the day began on Pentecost (Acts 2:15). From one to three hours would certainly have to be allowed for the sermon, the inquiring as to what must be done, the exhortation, the decisions, the good confessions taken, etc. that went into getting everything ready for the baptisms. Combining the fact that there is no living stream in the Jerusalem area with the fact that they were all baptized that very day points to but one conclusion--they were baptized in the man-made pools in Jerusalem, of which there were several. There was

no other place for them to be baptized. In the light of the above facts, it would be impossible for one to prove that the three thousand baptized on Pentecost were baptized in running water.

## II. His Temptations.

### A. The Wilderness Of Temptation.

Following His baptism, the Scripture says:

*"And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness" (Mark 1:12).*

Supposing that we have rightfully concluded upon the place of Jesus' baptism, it would not be too hard to conclude on the location of the above wilderness. To the north and west of the Dead Sea, close to where the Jordan empties into that sea, there is a wilderness well situated to be the wilderness where Jesus was tempted.

### B. The Purpose Of Jesus' Temptations.

As far as the devil was concerned, the purpose of the temptations was to get Jesus to sin and thereby overthrow the plan of God to save the world through His Son. But, God too had a purpose in having Jesus tempted, for we notice that it was the Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness for the express purpose of being tempted (Matt. 4:1). Having been put to the severe trials of temptation, He is qualified through experience to sympathize with us, to be a merciful high priest toward us, and to intercede to God for us (Heb. 2:17,18 and Heb. 4:15,16). Heb. 2:18 says:

*"For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour (help) them that are tempted."*

### C. The Devil Threw The Hardest Temptations Possible At Jesus.

We are not told why Jesus was fasting forty days (Matt. 4:2). It could have been a voluntary act upon Jesus' part as He contemplated and prayed concerning the ministry He was soon to begin. Or it could have been that He was expressly forbidden by the Holy Spirit to eat until He had given Him permission. Anyway, the first temptation listed by both gospel writers who record the temptations individually is the one concerning eating. With the words of the Father, "Thou art my Son," still ringing in His ears, how convenient it was for the devil to suggest:

*"IF THOU BE THE SON OF GOD, command that these stones be made bread" (Matt. 4:3).*

Those smooth, brown stones, which looked so much like the hard-crusted bread of Palestine, made one who had not eaten for more than a month ravenously hungry. Jesus was the Son of God, and He didn't have to turn stones into bread in order to be God's Son, but He wasn't going to disobey the Father and follow the suggestion of the devil. When the devil failed on this temptation, he turned to other temptations. "Jump off the pinnacle of the temple--God will let you come down so easily that you won't even bruise a heel," the devil suggested. That would be an easy way for Jesus to obtain followers, but the suggestion came from the devil. God had a different method of revealing Jesus' deity to the people than that of empty show. Then, from an exceedingly high mountain, Jesus was able to look out over the world below. All He saw was offered Him by the devil



if He would follow the devil's plans instead of God's. God's way for Jesus to have a people was to die (John 12:32,33), but Jesus turned down the way that most people accept from the hand of the devil. All these temptations were temptations for Jesus--bitter temptations. The devil knew of no harder ones, or he would have used them on Jesus.

*D. Temptation Is Not A Sign Of Personal Wickedness Unless One Brings The Temptation Upon Himself.*

Jesus never committed a sin (I John 3:5), yet He was tempted (Heb. 4:15). Therefore, temptation is one thing, and sin is another. Yet, Jesus was not responsible for His temptations. A corrupt heart did not bring on any of His temptations. James tells us that people are tempted when they are drawn away of their *own* lust and enticed (Jas. 1:14). In such a case, the temptation itself is held up to divine condemnation, for they have been responsible for it. While Jesus was tempted, yet did not sin, let us not suppose that this in anyway gives us a license to court temptation. Rather, we are to pray for divine leadership away from temptation (Matt. 6:13).

*E. Jesus Successfully Resisted The Devil Each Time.*

Jesus well knew the nature of sin (acceptance of the devil's will and rejection of God's). Jesus knew what God had said, and He knew when the devil was trying to get Him to do something else. He knew the tragedy that would befall Himself and the entire world were He to give in to the devil's temptations. While it was momentarily hard to resist, yet it would be eternally disastrous to yield--which is true of every temptation. Therefore, each time the devil made a suggestion, Jesus recognized it as from the devil and reaffirmed His loyalty to the will of God by quoting some appropriate instruction of God from the Scriptures which yielding to the devil would have violated (Matt. 4:4,7,10). The Scripture tells us to do exactly what Jesus did:

*"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (Jas. 1:7).*

This is what Jesus did, and the devil left Him.

*F. But, This Was Not The Last Time That Jesus Was Tempted.*

Luke 4:13 says:

*"And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season."*

These words prepare us to look for other times of temptation in Jesus' life. The devil doesn't leave once and for all. We may successfully resist him, and he leave, but he will come back stronger than ever, or he may come back with some temptation altogether different. As we study through the life of Jesus, we can see other times when He suffered temptation, such as His struggles in Gethsemane when there was the temptation to avoid the cross (Luke 22:42). Another good definition of temptation is when the human will is seeking to exert itself against the divine will. This was happening to Jesus in Gethsemane.

*G. God Sent Strength To Jesus After His Victory.*

The devil tries to get people to think they *must* sin.

But, Jesus did not believe the devil. Oh that we human beings were more like Jesus in this respect! It may have seemed to Jesus' body that He was about to die without bread, but when He refused to use His miracle-power to satisfy Himself, God sent angels to minister to Him (Matt. 4:11). The same thing happened in Gethsemane. When He was successfully resisting His temptations, an angel came and strengthened Him (Luke 22:43). In our temptations, if we will draw nigh to God, He will draw nigh to us (Jas. 4:8) even as He did to Jesus.

When these temptations were past, Jesus emerged from the wilderness, headed north where He was pointed out by John (John 1:29) and obtained His first followers (John 1:30ff), went to the wedding feast at Cana where He performed His first miracle (John 2:1-11), from where He went to Jerusalem for the Passover at which He set out in earnest upon His ministry.

## The Ministry of Jesus

As I begin the writing of this lesson concerning the ministry of Jesus, I feel much like John did when he brought his account of that ministry to a close. Jesus' life and ministry were so eventful that it is impossible to do more than merely touch some of the highpoints of them. To put it in the words of John:

*"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" (John 21:25).*

The adult life of Jesus, treated for us by four different writers in the New Testament, has properly caused the best of earth to appreciate Him. The teachings of Jesus have challenged the world's greatest minds to give themselves to a thorough study of what they contain and to proclaim them to others. I am personally happy to have been taught about Jesus from my childhood, and to borrow the words of Paul that He has counted me faithful, putting me into His ministry (I Tim. 1:12). To borrow the words of Peter, I have tasted and have seen that the Lord is gracious (I Pet. 2:4), and I have thanked God that it has been and as yet remains my privilege to teach others about Christ.

**I. The Length And Location Of His Ministry.**

*A. The Length.*

John wrote his gospel account many years after the other three writers wrote theirs. We are indebted to his account for many things not included in the other three accounts. One of these things for which we are especially indebted to John's account is the marking of time so many times by which we are able to ascertain how long Jesus' ministry was.

His ministry was somewhat longer than three years in length--possibly not more than three and one half years. Here is the way it is figured. We count the passovers during Jesus' ministry, which were one year apart. Each passover, then, that we read of during His ministry means another year. All we have to do, then, is to count up the number of passovers. John 2:13 tells us of a passover. Let us start our figuring with it. John 5:1 tells us of another feast at Jerusalem, which is usually taken to be another passover feast (with which we are in complete agreement--see the parenthetic discussion at the end of this section offered in proof of this being another passover feast. This feast, then, would mark the end of one year of ministry. John 6:4 tells us of the next passover, which would mark the end of two years of ministry. John 11:55 tells us of another passover (the one at which He was crucified), which would mark the end of three years of ministry. We know that in addition to the above three years, His baptism, forty days of temptation, His appearance at Bethabara where He was pointed out by John the Baptist as the Lamb of God, His turning the water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana, a few days' stay in Capernaum, and a return trip to Jerusalem all took place before the first passover in the above count. Then, after His resurrection, He remained on earth forty more days before He ascended. It is not usually thought that what took place before the passover of John 2:13 and the forty days after His resurrection would not exceed six months, but they do add up to several weeks and months of time. Thus, it is usually calculated that Jesus' ministry was around three and one half years in length.

Material offered in proof that the feast of John 5:1 was the passover: Harvest of their crops began around passover time. After the passover of John 2:13, Jesus and His disciples remained in Jerusalem and Judea, teaching, performing miracles, and baptizing until He had made and baptized more disciples than John the Baptist had done--which was no small accomplishment in itself. When He left Judea for Galilee, He went through Samaria. At Jacob's well on the trip, we have a statement from Jesus that indicates it was but four months until the next harvest (John 4:35). That would mean He had spent eight months in Judea. The other accounts of His life indicate that He was going to Galilee to conduct a ministry because John the Baptist had just been imprisoned. It is not likely that upon arriving in Galilee to begin His Galilean Ministry, He immediately turned around and went back to Jerusalem for the only other feast that John 5:1 might have been besides the passover--the feast of dedication, which was a feast not even commanded in the Old Testament and that came three months before the passover. Students of the life of Christ are almost unanimous in ascribing at least the first of Jesus' three Galilean tours to the months prior to the feast of John 5:1, which if right would indicate that the feast of John 5:1 was actually the passover.

#### B. The Location Of Jesus' Ministry.

At first thought, it seems strange that One now so well known as Jesus confined His own preaching to a small land not more than one hundred fifty miles long and about fifty miles wide--the land of Palestine. The only time He

ever was out of Palestine was when He went to Egypt to escape the wrath of King Herod, but He was only an infant then--not a teacher. The reason why Jesus confined His teaching to so small a geographical area was that He, as well as John the Baptist, was sent only to the Israelites (Matt. 15:24), and the Israelites lived within the narrow confines of Palestine in Jesus' day. The worldwide preaching was reserved for a later time at which time Jesus was no longer upon the earth.

## II. The Claims And Miracles Of Jesus.

### A. His Claims.

A study of the claims of Jesus properly relates to a study of His deity. The Christ, who was later to be preached by the apostles for men's acceptance as the Son of God come down from heaven, was during His ministry manifesting Himself in various ways as true deity. Had Jesus not made the claims of being deity in the flesh, disbelievers would have hopped onto that fact and would have said that surely He wasn't the Son of God, for He didn't so represent Himself. But, He *did* represent Himself as God in the flesh. Let us notice some of His claims.

He claimed to be the Messiah when in conversation with the Samaritan woman (John 4:25,26). Beginning with John 5:17, Jesus spoke of God as His Father and Himself as God's Son a good many times in just a matter of verses. The Jews who listened realized that He was not merely claiming to be a child of God as we are (in a spiritual sense), but that He was claiming to be the Son of God in the sense of being deity (John 5:18). He claimed to be the living bread which came down from heaven to give everlasting life to those who would believe upon Him (John 6:47-51). He claimed to have been from above, and that all who believed not upon Him would die in their sins (John 8:23,24). He claimed to have existed even before the time of Abraham (John 8:58). He claimed to be the Son of God to the man born blind whom He healed (John 9:35-37). He claimed that He could keep from dying, and that having died He would raise Himself (John 10:17,18). These are but a few of Jesus' claims found in the earlier chapters of the book of John. There are many more. (Note: For a fuller treatment of the subject of Jesus' claims, see the chapter on "The Deity of Jesus" in the author's book, "52 Simple, Stimulating Studies".)

Many people come with high-sounding claims, but if they are false, the world soon knows about it. But, with Jesus, nobody yet has been able to prove Jesus' claims to be false. Were they false, they would, of course, remove Him from the realm of the truthful. In such a state of being false, we would not worship Him, for He would not be deity.

We understand that a man has to do more than merely make claims. But, at this stage in our study, let us take notice of the fact that Jesus *did* make His claims of being deity. In the next section, we shall take up the argument for His deity from His claims.

### B. His Miracles.

To those who accept the Bible as the Word of God and are at all familiar with its contents, there is no question

as to whether Jesus performed miracles. Some of the most beloved Bible stories for children are the miraculous healings performed by Jesus. But, Jesus' miracles were not limited to physical healings. In addition to demonstrating His power over the human body by His healings, He demonstrated His power over death by raising people from the dead; He demonstrated His power over the weather by quieting the storm; He demonstrated His power over the laws of nature by walking upon the water; He demonstrated His power over animal life by the two miraculous catches of fishes; He demonstrated His power over the vegetable world by cursing the fig tree; and there were many other realms over which Jesus showed Himself Master by His miracles.

Some have argued that Jesus' miracles did not prove Him to be deity, for Moses, Elijah, and the apostles performed miracles. That these men performed miracles, we grant, but to say that Jesus' miracles had no connection with His deity, we cannot grant. Here is why. Miracles testified that a person was what he claimed to be--they were credentials. The apostles' miracles proved them to be apostles, for that's what they claimed to be. In the same way, Jesus' miracles proved Him to be the Son of God, for that is what He claimed to be. In other words, Jesus' claims and miracles combine to demonstrate His deity. His claims alone would prove nothing about His deity, nor would His miracles apart from His claims prove Him to be deity any more than the apostles' miracles would prove them to be deity. But, His miracles backing up His claim to be the Son of God form a combination to prove Him deity.

*"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:30,31).*

### III. The Teaching Of Jesus.

#### A. He Was A Master Teacher.

He knew His subject. Being God in the flesh, He naturally possessed the truth of God. In fact, He was the truth, and He came to teach the truth. He was the light, and He came to enlighten men. He was the Savior, and He came to speak words of salvation. He had a message to deliver--thus, He met the first qualification of a teacher.

He knew His hearers. Some of them were sincere--to them, the great body of His teaching recorded for us was taught. But, some of them were hypocritical. He had many run-ins, particularly with the Pharisees, before they were willing to call it quits. In these discussions, He ever proved Himself master of the situation. When the Herodians came to trap Him in His talk, they asked Him what appeared to be an innocent question (about paying tribute to Caesar), but Jesus was able to see the trap they were laying for Him, and He promptly answered them in a way that they were not able to take hold of (Matt. 22:15-22). The Sadducees and the Pharisees met with the same treatment that same day when they tried to ensnare Him (Matt. 22:23-40). But, Jesus could also drive His insincere hearers into a corner. He didn't answer every question asked Him. Sometimes, He would reply to an enemy's question with a question of His own. For instance, when asked by what authority He had cleansed the temple, He replied with the

proposition that if they would tell Him whether John's baptism was of God or of men, He would answer their question. They feared to answer, for if they said John's baptism was of God, He would have asked them why they didn't believe John, and if they said it was of men, the people would have been against them, for they held John to be a prophet (Matt. 21:23-27).

He knew how to present His material. The common people heard Him gladly (Mark 12:37). For the most part, He employed the simplest of words and a common type of illustration that they could understand and appreciate. Yet, when He felt it imperative either to withhold a full comprehension of some subject until later or to humble the learned class, He would couch His words in expressions that accomplished His end (John 2:18-22 and numerous others). He employed the same kind of technique in conversing with Nicodemus (the kingdom hadn't come yet when they talked; neither had the Spirit been given; the baptism that brings one into the kingdom of God had not yet been instituted). There was no way for Nicodemus to understand fully what Jesus was saying, but he could not help knowing that Jesus knew what He was talking about while he himself scratched his head in bewilderment. Especially is Jesus remembered for His parables. Such simple matters of life as fishermen casting a net into the sea, a woman putting leaven into meal, a merchant seeking pearls, and others became vehicles for teaching great and lasting truths by the Master Teacher.

#### B. The Effect And Lastingness Of Jesus' Teachings.

Jesus' teachings were different. He spoke with authority, for He was sent from God with a message, and the people were quick to recognize that He spoke with authority (Matt. 7:28). His words did not always go along with the way people were thinking and living. This fact resulted in great changes in the thinking and lives of those who believed Him and great opposition from those who didn't.

How revolutionary to hear one teach love for his enemies instead of hatred and self-retaliation (Matt. 5:43-48). How unusual to read His beatitudes as they pronounce blessing upon those whom the world would pronounce unfortunate (Matt. 5:3-12 and Luke 6:20-23). How uncompromising His demands that men forsake all to follow Him (Matt. 16:24,25). He didn't come to give men what they wanted in their carnal state. Rather, He told them what they needed. They believed Him, and thus Christianity got off to a significant beginning.

Today, almost two thousand years later, the teachings of Jesus are the best known teachings in the world. We who live in the Western Hemisphere (far from the land of Jesus' ministry); we who are of Gentile origin (instead of Jewish as He was); we who speak a different language than He spoke--even we confess His teachings to be right, and we confess that we--not they--are wrong in any way that we may not be living up to them.

#### C. What Jesus Taught About The Kingdom.

In this study on "The Plan of God", it is necessary that we see each lesson as it relates to the general unfolding of that plan. While Jesus did not stay on earth to

preach the actual arrival of the kingdom, yet He belonged to that class of men who before the cross (John, the twelve, and the seventy) joined in proclaiming both the coming of the kingdom and some things about it. Here are some of the things He taught His hearers concerning the kingdom.

The Jews of His day looked for an earthly kingdom. So did the apostles (Acts 1:6). They talked of chief seats in the kingdom and disputed among themselves from time to time as to who would be the greatest in it. But, in contrast to their thoughts, Jesus taught that the kingdom would not be of this world (John 18:36), for it would be within them (Luke 17:20,21).

He taught that the kingdom would include Gentiles and exclude many of the Jews (Matt. 8:11,12 and Matt. 21:33-43). This, though according to the Old Testament, was not according to either the Jews or the apostles' way of thinking.

He taught that the kingdom would soon come (Matt. 4:17), assuring them that God would give it to them (Luke 12:32). He taught His followers to pray for its coming (Luke 11:2), even promising them that it would come during their generation (Mark 9:1). He promised Peter the keys to it (Matt. 16:19).

His parable of the sower (Matt. 13:3-8, 18-23) predicted the several ways that the preaching of the kingdom would be received--some paying no attention to the preaching, others being greatly interested in it until persecution arose concerning it, others allowing earthly interests to crowd it out, and still others receiving the news of it graciously and being faithful to it.

He taught that one must be more than merely religious to enter it (Matt. 7:21). He taught that genuine conversion was necessary (Matt. 18:3)--even a birth of a spiritual nature and life (John 3:5)--before one could enter it.

He taught that the greatest in the kingdom would be those who served the most (Matt. 20:20-28)--not those who gave the orders.

In two parables (the parable of the hidden treasure and the parable of the pearl merchant), He taught that the kingdom was so valuable that men should invest everything earthly in order to obtain it (Matt. 13:44-46). He further taught that men should seek the kingdom even before they would food to eat or clothing to wear (Matt. 6:25-33).

In conclusion, let us notice that Jesus demanded His hearers to be more than good listeners. He demanded that they do what He taught them:

*"Every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it" (Matt. 7:26,27).*

He further declared the impossibility of remaining neutral toward Him. He plainly told His hearers:

*"He that is not with me is against me" (Matt. 21:30).*

And the words of Jesus, through the Bible, come ringing down through the centuries to us today, ever clear in their

instructions, ever calling us to Him, ever warning us not to disregard them. Let us, then, be good disciples of His teachings and good followers of what He teaches.

## Jesus as Judged by Others

In our last study, we considered, among other things, some of the claims of Jesus. In this study, we want to consider what *others* said about Him. Naturally, we can cover but a limited amount of the abundant material available upon the subject.

### I. His Enemies Criticized Him Most Severely.

#### A. They Charged Him With Breaking The Sabbath Many Times.

At a feast at Jerusalem, Jesus healed a lame man at the pool of Bethesda. It was on the sabbath day. Therefore, the Jews sought to slay Him as a sabbath-breaker (John 5:15,16). On their way home from that feast, His disciples were condemned by the Pharisees as sabbath-breakers (Matt. 12:1,2). After His arrival at Capernaum, He healed a man in the synagogue who had a withered hand. Again He enraged the Pharisees by this action on the sabbath (Matt. 12:9-14). When he healed a woman in a synagogue on the sabbath who had been in a bent position for eighteen years, He infuriated the ruler of the synagogue, who took the position that since there were six other days in the week when such healings could take place, they should not be performed on the sabbath (Luke 13:14). While such healings could have been performed on other days, Jesus did not hesitate to perform them on the sabbath. On this synagogue-ruler, He employed the rebuttal that none of His enemies could ever meet:

*"Doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?" (Luke 13:15).*

Of course, sabbath-breaking was a false charge. Jesus did not break the sabbath. It was merely a charge they brought against Him, and they brought it against Him because they hated Him, and they thought they had something on Him.

#### B. He Was Charged With Casting Out Demons by Beelzebub.

They could not deny the fact that He cast out demons. Since they couldn't deny it, they tried to smear Jesus by stating that He was in "cahoots" with the devil in His casting them out. When this charge was made in Galilee, Jesus dealt with the reprobate hearts of His accusers in which He gave the extended teaching concerning the unpardonable sin (Matt. 12:22-37). This charge was made several times after various healings of demoniacs.

#### C. He Was Criticized For Associating With Sinners.

The Pharisees were a self-righteous lot. They had no mercy for the "down-and-outer", though they themselves were merely outwardly righteous (Matt. 23:27,28). Jesus, in His attempt to help the lost, oftentimes befriended those who were far from God. For instance, He attended a feast in the home of Matthew which was attended by many publicans and sinners. He was criticized for this (Matt. 9:10,11). A Pharisee criticized Him for allowing a sinful woman to anoint Him (Luke 7:37-39). When He went home with Zacchaeus, they murmured against Him for going to be the guest of a sinner (Luke 19:5-7). In each case of this criticism, Jesus connected His association with them with His coming to save them. Here was another ill charge against Jesus.

## D. His Disciples Were Criticized For Breaking The Traditions Of The Elders.

One of the traditions of the elders was to wash religiously when coming from the marketplace and always before eating. I presume that Jesus and His apostles customarily washed their hands before eating--not from a religious standpoint, but from a health standpoint as we today do. But, at least upon one occasion, they didn't, and the scribes and Pharisees quickly approached Jesus about it (Matt. 15:1,2). In a discussion that was not too pleasant for the enemies, Jesus exposed their inner defilement, which was a sin, but to eat with unwashed hands was not a sin.

## E. Even John's Disciples Criticized Jesus Concerning Fasting.

John's disciples seemed to assume a jealous attitude toward Jesus because of His spectacular success in teaching and baptizing (John 3:25,26). While John rebuked their feeling, there remained at least a tinge of feeling against Jesus, for in Matt. 9:14, they came to Jesus about the fact that His disciples did not fast, though both they and the Pharisees did. Jesus replied by telling them it was not time for His disciples to fast--He was with them. But, after He would be gone, then they would fast when it would be in order (Matt. 9:15).

## F. He Was Condemned For Forgiving Sin.

One time when a sick man was brought to Jesus, He called forth the condemnation of the scribes upon Him by pronouncing the man's sins forgiven. They counted this an act of blasphemy (Matt. 9:2,3). It would have been had Jesus not been the Son of God. Jesus purposely used this approach in performing that miracle so as to bring out the fact of His authority even in the realm of forgiving sins (Matt. 9:5,6).

## G. He Was Likewise Condemned For Claiming To Be The Son Of God.

When He was defending one of His sabbath-healings, He claimed that God was His Father. This the Jews took to be an out-right case of blasphemy, which made Him worthy of death, and they told Him so (John 5:18). And it would have been unjustifiable blasphemy had Jesus not been indeed the Son of God! When the stage was all set in the wicked hearts of men to crucify Jesus, Jesus boldly made the claim of being the Son of God when on trial before the Jewish leaders. They jumped at the opportunity,

the high priest indignantly rending his clothes and stating that such self-stated blasphemy made any further witnesses against Him unnecessary (Matt. 26:63-65).

## H. There Was The General Charge of Deceiving The People Heard At Various Times.

At the feast of tabernacles, there was a division among the people over Jesus. While some affirmed His goodness, there were others who said He was deceiving the people (John 7:12). The Pharisees sent soldiers to take Jesus at that very feast. When the soldiers neared the place where Jesus was, He was engaged in teaching the people, so they paused and listened awhile first. They were so impressed with His teaching that they returned without Him. When they reported to the Pharisees that no man ever so spake as Jesus, they were immediately charged with being deceived (John 7:47). The chief priests and Pharisees called Jesus "that deceiver" when talking to Pilate (Matt. 27:63).

## I. A Few Times, He Was Even Criticized By Friends.

In His closing days, when being anointed with very costly ointment by Mary in the home of Simon the leper, His apostles criticized Him for allowing what they considered to be an extravagant, unjustifiable waste of such expensive ointment (Matt. 26:6-9). Jesus was criticized by both Martha and Mary for not coming sooner when they sent word to Him that their brother Lazarus was sick (John 11:21,32). Though Jesus had righteous purposes in mind in both of the above cases, yet even being as good as Jesus did not lift Him above the criticism of even friends at times.

## II. Trustworthy Voices Testified Of His Deity.

### A. Gabriel To Mary.

In promising the birth of Jesus to Mary, the angel Gabriel said:

*"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest" (Luke 1:32).*

### B. The Angel Of The Lord To The Shepherds.

When shepherds watched their flocks the night that Jesus was born, the angel of the Lord came down with this message:

*"Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).*

### C. The Prophet Simeon.

The aged prophet Simeon of Jerusalem had been promised by God that he would not die until he had seen the Christ. When the parents of Jesus brought Him into the temple at the age of forty days, Simeon took the child into arms, blest God, and said:

*"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel!" (Luke 2:29-32).*

### D. John The Baptist.

We have several important utterances from the lips of John:

"He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:11,12); "John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before...This is the Son of God" (John 1:29,30,34).

#### E. God.

Two different times, God spoke from heaven claiming Jesus to be His Son. At the time of His baptism, and later at the time of the transfiguration, He said:

"This is my beloved Son" (Matt. 3:17 and Matt. 17:5).

#### F. Simon Peter.

Up near Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked His disciples a very frank question as to who they thought He was. Promptly, Peter answered:

"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16).

#### G. The Centurion Of The Crucifixion.

The Roman centurion, who was in charge of the crucifixion of Jesus, would surely not be charged with prejudice in favor of Jesus. He had no doubt been in charge of many crucifixions of criminals. But, there was something about the crucifixion of Jesus that was different. Here was one to be crucified who had so many claiming Him to be sent of God, though Pilate had succumbed to the pressure of the envious leaders to sentence Him to death. He heard the tauntings of the hilarious crowd at Jesus' death. He could read Pilate's inscription that Jesus was the King of the Jews. Everything seemed to be going in favor of the crowd until about high-noon when darkness settled down upon the scene. Then, at three o'clock, when Jesus died, nature went into convulsions of protest. There was an earthquake; rocks tumbled into ravines below; stones were rolled away from the tombs. This had never happened before when a crucifixion took place. Matt. 27:54 says:

"Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God."

In closing this section, we might marvel at the fact that Jesus' own brothers did not believe on Him (John 7:5). Maybe His parents had concealed His unusual birth from them. Maybe they accepted the attitude of their townspeople of Nazareth, who rejected Him. But, remember this--after the resurrection, they were convinced and were numbered among those who met with the apostles for prayer as they awaited the beginning of Christianity (Acts 1:13,14). James, one of His brethren, became a prominent leader of early Christianity in Jerusalem, Paul even referring to him as an apostle (Gal. 1:19; Acts 15:13; Acts 21:17,18).

### III. Many Declared His Innocence.

#### A. Jesus' Challenge To His Enemies.

In the midst of a heated debate with some implacable Jews, He said:

"Which of you convinceth ('convicteth'--R.V.) me of sin?" (John 8:46).

What purely human being would dare offer people--especially enemies--the opportunity to point out wherein he had sinned? Jesus did.

#### B. God Declared His Pleasure With Jesus.

At the same time He affirmed Jesus' sonship, He affirmed His pleasure with Him:

"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17 and Matt. 17:5).

#### C. John The Baptist.

When Jesus came to John to be baptized, John was instant to reply:

"I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" (Matt. 3:14).

#### D. Judas.

Judas, who had turned against Jesus for so paltry an amount of money as thirty pieces of silver found himself self-condemned after he had done the deed. He came back to the chief priests and elders with the money they had given him to betray Him to them. Notice his affirmation of Jesus' innocence in talking to them:

"I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood" (Matt. 27:4).

#### E. Pilate.

When the Jews were insistent that Jesus be crucified, Pilate, the governor before whom Jesus was being tried, said:

"Why, what evil hath he done?" (Matt. 27:23).

When he saw that they were determined to have Jesus crucified, Pilate washed his hands in their presence, stating the following words affirming His innocence:

"I am innocent of the blood of this just person" (Matt. 27:24).

#### F. Pilate's Wife.

Pilate's wife was of much the same opinion. When Jesus stood before her husband, she sent the following message to him:

"Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him" (Matt. 27:19).

#### G. Herod.

Pilate had sent Jesus to Herod for an examination. After due examination of Him, Herod returned Him to Pilate stating that he found nothing worthy of death in Him (Luke 23:15).

#### H. One Of The Thieves.

One of the thieves crucified with Jesus was railing on Jesus with the same sort of words as the enemies at the foot of the cross. The other thief took up in Jesus' behalf stating:

"Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive

*the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss" (Luke 23:40,41).*

The title of this study has been "Jesus as Judged by Others". It might well be renamed, "How Jesus was Judged and Misjudged," for it is evident that some gave Him a fair judgment while others did not judge Him at all--they mis-judged Him!

## The Heart of the Gospel

When Jesus was ready to return to heaven and to send His apostles forth with their message to preach, He said to them:

*"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).*

Notice what they were to preach--the gospel! Yet, crowds every Sunday morning are crowding into church buildings across the land only to hear something that is not the gospel. In fact, few of them would be able to give you a Scriptural definition or explanation of the gospel. I have noticed that wherever the preacher preaches something instead of the gospel that the sermon occupies but a few minutes (possibly fifteen to twenty) of an elaborate Sunday morning service, and there will be no evening service and no evangelistic meetings. But, wherever the people know and love the gospel, you will find sermons (not sermonettes), and preaching will be considered important enough to have a night preaching service and evangelistic meetings from time to time.

The Bible shows that there is only one gospel, and it warns preachers about preaching anything other than the gospel. Listen to Paul's letter to the Galatians:

*"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:6-9).*

In view of this, every preacher ought to be sure that he is preaching the gospel, and people should not be pleased to sit Sunday after Sunday and listen to something that is not the gospel of Christ.

Why is it so important that nothing but the gospel be preached? Paul answers this question for us in Rom. 1:16:

*"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."*

Yes, it is the power of God to save those who believe! Paul could never be ashamed of that which was his means of salvation, and neither can any Christian. That is why

Paul told men about Christ wherever he was, and he didn't compromise that gospel when addressing the Jews who didn't believe it and when he stood before heathen kings who knew nothing about it. We sing that fine old song, "Faith of our fathers living still... We will be true to thee till death." We cannot be true to that faith if we preach something else. Neither are those who pose as Christians true to it if they do not tell it to others and live it before their fellowmen. Yet, how many preachers are evidently ashamed of the old-time gospel, and how many church people too!

There are many things that converge and combine to make or form the gospel, but when Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he emphasized three facts concerning Jesus. Notice that he identifies his message to them as the gospel:

*"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel" (I Cor. 15:1).*

Then he proceeded to point out certain important facts about the gospel:

*"...the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I have preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain" (verses 1 and 2).*

Then in verses 3 and 4, he came to the point concerning what he had preached to them. That was the gospel. Listen to those verses:

*"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures."*

Following this, he listed quite a number who witnessed Jesus after His resurrection, concluding with himself as the final witness (verses 5-8). Notice that he briefly summarized the gospel as: (1) the death, (2) the burial, and (3) the resurrection of Christ. The word "gospel" means "good news". The gospel of Christ may be briefly summarized as the "good news" that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised again. We have been pleased to call these facts the heart of the "good news"--not that it is all of the "good news", for there is that part of the gospel which man must obey in order to be saved (II Thess. 1:8), and there are also other things that Christ has done and will do that relate to our salvation (such as His heavenly intercession for us today, His coming again for us, etc.). But, what Jesus did for mankind when He died on the cross, was buried, and was raised from dead form the very basis upon which man's hope of the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life is built.

We are, therefore, devoting this study to those three central facts of the gospel.

### I. His Death.

#### A. God Planned Jesus' Death.

Before the world began, God had ordained that Jesus redeem us from sin by dying for us (I Pet. 1:18-20). In this sense, Jesus was spoken of as "slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). When Peter preached on Pentecost, he said of Jesus:

*"Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23).*

God foreknew and had determined ahead of time that Jesus would die. Jesus did not die because men overpowered Him. He submitted to death as a part of the plan of God--He laid His life down of Himself (John 10:17,18); He could have prayed for angels to deliver Him from the hands of men (Matt. 26:51-53); and His death was an act of obedience (Phil. 2:8). But, even though God had willed the death of Jesus, He held those men guilty of killing Him who hated Him, cruelly mistreated Him, unjustly condemned Him, and finally nailed Him to the tree, for they did it as an act of hatred and envy and not to fulfill the will of God.

#### *B. Jesus Bore Our Sins In His Death.*

Isa. 53 is an unmistakable prediction of the death of Jesus. We know from two reasons: (1) Acts 8:32-35 quotes from it with reference to Jesus; and (2) The statements in it could be fulfilled only by Jesus. There is a verse in it that tells of the universal sinfulness of man and of God laying those sins upon Jesus:

*"All we like sheep have gone astray (universal wickedness); we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him (Jesus) the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6).*

Verses 4, 5, 8, 10, 11, and 12 of that same chapter all six contain the idea of His bearing our sins. Many New Testament passages teach the same thing (Matt. 20:28; Matt. 26:28; Rom. 3:25; Rom. 4:25; Rom. 5:6,8; I Cor. 15:3; II Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; I Tim. 2:6; Heb. 2:9; Heb. 9:28; I Pet. 2:24; and I Pet. 3:18).

There is no more important truth in the Bible than that which we are now considering. We, therefore, feel it would be altogether in order to quote in full at least two of the above New Testament passages:

*"Who (Christ) his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" (I Pet. 2:24); "Christ also hath once suffered for us, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (I Pet. 3:18).*

#### *C. His Death Was Even For Those Who Lived Under The Old Testament.*

We who live on this side of the cross certainly partake of the benefits of Calvary. But, according to New Testament teaching, so do those who lived before Calvary. Heb. 9:15 plainly states that Jesus' death was likewise "for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament". How will the benefits of Jesus' blood be appropriated to their cases? Let us use the people of Isaiah's day for an illustration here. In the first verses of Isa. 1, he upbraided them so severely because of their sins. In verses 16 through 20 of that chapter, he called them to repentance. In the midst of that section is found the well known verse, Isa. 1:18:

*"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."*

There was a promise of cleansing given them, but Heb.

10:1-4 shows that the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament could not take away their sin. Therefore, any forgiveness that they were promised had to be realized through the blood of Jesus, the only cleansing power known in the Bible. After telling of the great heroes of faith of the Old Testament, the eleventh chapter of Hebrews closes by showing they all died in faith that the promises would be fulfilled, but that they were not perfected before our perfection, which has come through Christ (Heb. 11:39,40). If they heeded God's commandments and warnings, they will be saved through the blood of Christ just as we today will be saved through His blood if we heed the commandments and warnings that He has given to us.

#### *D. Baptism And The Lord's Supper Both Commemorate Christ's Death, And Both Connect Us With The Benefits Of That Death.*

Rom. 6:3 shows that when we were baptized, we were baptized into Christ's death, which would mean that we participated in the benefits of His death in baptism. I Cor. 10:16 shows that the Lord's supper is a communion of both the body and the blood of Christ, which would likewise mean that we participate in the benefits of Christ's death in the Lord's supper. As long then as baptism is Scripturally performed, it will be a memorial of His death, and every time the saints of God gather to observe the Lord's supper, they are commemorating the death of Jesus Christ (Luke 22:19 and I Cor. 11:26). It is pitiful the way the religious world today is minimizing the importance of both baptism and the Lord's supper, but we could rightly expect the devil to attack anything that would bring people into vital connection with the sin-cleansing blood.

## II. His Burial.

#### *A. Jesus Was Buried In Joseph Of Arimathea's Tomb.*

Matt. 27:57-60; Mark 15:42-46; Luke 23:50-53; and John 19:38-42 all tell us of the burying of Jesus' body at the close of the same day on which He was crucified. A study of those passages and verses that precede them will show that Jesus was buried between the hours of 3:00 and 6:00 p.m. A closer study would favor a burial probably between 5:00 and 5:30 that afternoon. He died at 3:00. Several matters transpired after 3:00 and the actual burial, which must be allowed for. On the other hand, after the women beheld where He was buried, enough time must be allowed for them to return and prepare spices and ointments before the sabbath's arrival actually kept them from taking them to the tomb before the sabbath.

"Born in somebody's manger...buried in a borrowed tomb." That was Jesus, who though He was rich prior to His incarnation surely became the poorest of the poor for us (II Cor. 8:9). We know nothing of Joseph of Arimathea except what we read in the foregoing passages connected with the burial of Jesus. From them, we learn that he was rich; he was from Arimathea, referred to as a city of the Jews, but of its location we know nothing for certain; he was a counsellor (a member of the Sanhedrin); he was a man of good character who looked for the kingdom of God and had believed in Jesus but he did not always manifest it as boldly as he should have. Somehow, he had a newly-made tomb very near the place where Jesus was crucified. Here, with the help of Nicodemus (the one who came to



Jesus by night), he hastily buried Jesus with costly spices wrapped around the body with bands of linen and a napkin about the head, which was a customary Jewish burial.

### B. His Burial Was A Fulfillment Of Prophecy.

The death and resurrection of Jesus were both predicted in the Old Testament (I Cor. 15:3,4), but so was His burial. That fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, which tells so many things about the crucifixion, contains this prediction of His burial:

*"He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death" (Isa. 53:9).*

How well we see it fulfilled as they buried Him in the tomb of rich Joseph of Arimathea.

### C. Baptism Symbolizes His Burial.

When people were baptized in Bible's times, they were immersed or buried in water. All must admit that the primitive form of baptism was immersion. Such is the meaning of the word, and such was the practice of the early church. Ever since the Catholic Council of Ravenna in 1311 A.D., many have accepted the substitutes of sprinkling and pouring for immersion. Such are wrong because they violate the divine form given us in the Bible, but they are also wrong because they destroy that which divinely symbolizes one of the central facts of the gospel--the burial of Jesus. Of baptism, the Scripture says:

*"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4).*

## III. His Resurrection.

### A. The Resurrection Of Jesus Is A Fact Of History.

Early on the morning following the sabbath, the women came to the tomb with the spices they had prepared just before the sabbath began. When they came to the sepulchre, they were amazed to find the stone rolled away from the door. Luke 24:3 goes on to say:

*"And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus".*

And we might say, nobody else has found the dead body of Jesus either. Why? Because He arose from the dead. That day, He began His resurrection appearances that were to carry Him through forty days upon the earth prior to His ascension (Acts 1:3).

Three facts are evident: (1) Jesus died; (2) He was buried; and (3) when the women arrived at the tomb, His body was gone. How could His body have gotten out of the tomb? The disciples *couldn't* have stolen it, for there was a guard of soldiers stationed at the tomb to see that such didn't happen (Matt. 27: 62-66). The enemies *wouldn't* have removed it to some other place without producing it on the day of Pentecost to deny Peter's preaching that He had arisen (Acts 2:24-31). Remember that Peter preached these words right in Jerusalem, where Jesus had been crucified and buried, and he preached to them just a few days after this took place. Suffice it to say that Christianity *did* begin in Jerusalem at that very time, and it was begun by the preaching of a resurrected Christ. Those who accepted it

were in a position to know whether it was a fact, and if it had not been true, such numbers would not have accepted it under those conditions. If the disciples of Jesus couldn't have stolen the body from the tomb, and if the enemies wouldn't have stolen it and have kept quiet about it, there is only one other way that His body could have gotten out of the tomb, and that is the way that it got out of the tomb--He arose from the dead!

### B. Jesus' Resurrection Was A Bodily Resurrection.

Modernists talk of the resurrection of Jesus, but they have a "spiritual" resurrection in mind--not a bodily resurrection. Yes, Jesus still lives, they say, but He lives in the sense that His ideals live on in His followers. But, such talk is not according to the Bible. The Bible talks about no resurrection of Jesus except a *bodily* resurrection. The women entered into the tomb and found not the body of Jesus (Luke 24:3). When the disciples first saw Jesus, they thought they were seeing a "spirit". Jesus told them to handle Him and see for themselves that He was in the body, pointing out that a spirit would not have flesh and bones as He had (Luke 24:36-39). When Peter preached on Pentecost, he showed that David's body was still in the tomb, but Christ's wasn't (Acts 2:29-32). Furthermore, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, His enemies asked Him for a sign of His authority. He told them to destroy this temple, and in three days He would raise it up. John 2:21,22 continues by recording:

*"He spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said."*

In view of this, it would be wise for those who attend services where they are not sure whether the preacher is a modernist or not to ask him on "Easter" morning whether he believes in a physical or a spiritual resurrection of Jesus. If he gives an evading sort of answer, further questions will reveal his liberal thinking, especially if he resents being questioned further.

### C. The Resurrection Was The Crowning Proof Of Jesus' Deity.

There are many lines of evidence establishing the deity of Jesus. Any of them should be sufficient to establish that fact. Yet, God did not limit Jesus to any one line of evidence. We refer to the resurrection, however, as the *crowning* proof of His deity because it convinced many who had not been convinced previously, and Jesus Himself laid great emphasis upon it when asked for a special sign. When the Pharisees asked Him for a sign, He said:

*"An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas (Jonah): for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:39,40).*

We have already referred to the time when He gave them the sign of His rebuilding the temple in three days (John 2:18-21).

Jesus properly upbraided His disciples for their unbelief and hardness of heart (Mark 16:14). He had told them He

was going to die, and at the same time He had told them He was going to rise the third day (Matt. 16:21). If they had entertained any doubts about whether Jesus was actually the Christ or not, they had an excellent way to test it most assuredly. They should have given Him the benefit of the doubt until the fourth or fifth day after His crucifixion. If He then was still in the tomb, they could have gone back to their homes assured that He had not been the Christ, for He had told them He would arise within three days' time. How unjust of them to have entertained such doubts before the prophecy had run its prescribed course!

#### *D. Our Coming Deliverance Over Death Has Been Assured By Jesus' Resurrection From The Dead.*

It was not possible for death to hold Jesus (Acts 2:24). Men of themselves did not overpower Jesus to put Him to death—they couldn't! He laid His life down of Himself, and He took it up again of Himself (John 10:17,18). When Jesus comes again, He will raise us from the grave (I Thess. 4:16). Had He not raised Himself from the dead, thus triumphing over death, He could not raise us in the last day. Our hope and faith in the resurrected life rest completely upon the fact that Jesus actually overcame death in His resurrection. I Pet. 1:3-5 is very emphatic upon this point:

*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."*

When Jesus appeared to the apostle John upon the Isle of Patmos years after they had walked together upon the earth, He introduced Himself in the following way:

*"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell, hades ("" - R.V.) and of death" (Rev. 1:18).*

He was dead, but He is alive forevermore, and as a result of His having overcome death in His resurrection, He has the keys of hades and death, and when He comes the second time, He will use those keys. Those now in hades who have died, He will release with the resurrection, and those living, He will keep from dying. Why? Because He has the keys of (power or authority over) hades and death!

#### *E. The First Day Of The Week Came Into Prominence Immediately Following The Resurrection.*

Prior to Jesus' coming, the seventh day of the week (the sabbath) was one day that stood out above all days. What did the first day of the week mean at that time? The second? The third? The fourth? Etc.? Nothing. They had no special significance. But, with the passing of the law at the cross, the sabbath as a holy day was past. As we read in those documents from early Christianity, we are brought to consider the fact that for some reason, the first day of the week had come into prominence. At Troas, for instance, we see the brethren coming together upon the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7). When Paul wrote the Corinthian church, he ordered them to lay together their benevolent money upon the first day of the week when they

were assembled together in their public service (I Cor. 16:1,2).

In seeking for a suitable answer as to what might have given prominence to the first day of the week, there is one prominent fact—that was the day upon which Jesus had arisen from the dead (Mark 16:9). Early Christian writers stated why they held the first day of the week significant. Eusebius, the so-called father of church history, said that it was on account of Jesus' resurrection having taken place that day (Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapter 27). Justin Martyr, a name very familiar to all students of early Christianity, wrote: "Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because Jesus Christ, our Saviour, on the same day rose from the dead" (Apology, Chapter 67).

In bringing this study upon the gospel to a close, I can think of no concluding thought better than that wonderful accumulation of choice thoughts relative to the gospel found in II Tim. 1:8-10).

*"Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."*

## The Significance of the Ascension

The forty days between the resurrection and the ascension were spent doing two things: (1) establishing the fact of His resurrection that His apostles might be confirmed in their belief that He was actually the Son of God (this was the purpose of His numerous appearances); and (2) further instructing them concerning the coming kingdom and what they were to do as apostles of it. These few days probably passed all too rapidly for the apostles, and the many recollections of them must have attended them throughout all the days of their lives. Though they did not get to see Jesus come out of the tomb on the morning of His resurrection, they did get to behold Him as He ascended to heaven from Bethany near the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem (Luke 24:50,51 and Acts 1:9,12).

Every important event in Jesus' life in some way related to His work of redeeming humanity. The ascension is no exception. A study of it will indeed prove rewarding.

### **I. In His Ascension, He Discarded His Robe Of Humanity.**

#### *A. In His Incarnation, He Took On The Body Of A Man.*

John 1:14 says:

*"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."*