

CHRIST'S THOUSAND-YEAR KINGDOM - THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL -

“I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.”—Revelation 14:6

The word Gospel means glad tidings. The angel who announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds said, “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.” (Luke 2:10,11) This angel, even as the symbolic angel of our text, declares that the good tidings are for all people.

The Apostle Paul informs us that the Gospel was preached beforehand unto Abraham, when the promise was made to him that through his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. (Gen. 12:3; 22:18) Paul explains that the “seed” mentioned in this promise to Abraham was in reality Christ. (Gal. 3:8,16) So we see that in the original statement of the Gospel, which was made to Abraham, there was an assurance of blessings for all mankind. When the Seed came, and his birth was announced by the angel, the good tidings had not in any sense become restricted—it was still ‘glad tidings’ to ‘all people.’

Paul provides further, and very vital, information concerning God’s plan of salvation which the Bible describes by the word Gospel. He wrote, “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” To this he adds, “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs

according to the promise.” (Gal. 3:27,29) There is abundant scriptural testimony giving assurance that the faithful followers of the Master will be associated with him in the glory of his kingdom, and here Paul is explaining that they are also a part of the Seed promised to Abraham. This means that the true church, with Jesus as its Head, will be the channel of blessing to “all the families of the earth.”

An essential feature of the plan of God, through the Seed to bless all the nations, is the redemptive work of Jesus. It was necessary that Jesus die as man's Redeemer, otherwise the promised blessings of life could not flow out to mankind, for all were under condemnation to death through Adam. Because Jesus did die to redeem the world, Paul could write, “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”—I Cor. 15:22

Since the true followers of Jesus are to be associated with him as the channel of blessing to the world, the Scriptures reveal that the work of blessing will not begin until all these—that is, the number foreordained by God—have been called from the world and proved worthy. These are spoken of as the “called, and chosen, and faithful.” Peter speaks of them as those who make their “calling and election sure,” and thereby have an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.—Rev. 17:14; II Pet. 1:10,11

The first disciples, in becoming the followers of Jesus, did so in the belief that he was the promised Messiah, the great King who was to come and establish a world-wide kingdom. (Isa. 9:6,7) They were right in this, but wrong in their belief that the foretold kingdom was to be established immediately. Jesus corrected this viewpoint for them with a parable concerning a certain nobleman, who went into a “far country” to receive a kingdom, and then returned. (Luke 19:11,12) From this it is clear that

Christ did not expect to establish his kingdom until after he returned from that 'far country,' even heaven. This, of course, would be at his Second Advent.

Only after our Lord's return, therefore, should we expect a fulfillment of God's promises to bless "all the families of the earth" through the Seed of Abraham. Many students of the Bible have lost sight of this fact, and have adopted the restricted view that there will be no opportunity to accept Christ and be blessed after he returns. Instead of rejoicing in anticipation of the fulfillment of God's promises to bless the people under the rulership of Christ's kingdom, some have gone so far as to believe, and teach, that the earth will be a desolate wilderness during that thousand years when Christ and his saints are reigning over it.

Object of Christ's Return

Let us examine the testimony of the Apostle Peter as to the purpose of our Lord's return. It is recorded in Acts 3:19-21. Here Peter informs us that "times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord"—Jehovah. The expression, 'presence of the Lord,' translates Greek words which more literally mean from the 'face of the Lord.' The thought is identical with the one expressed in Numbers 6:25,26, where we read, "The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."

Peter's thought obviously is that the return of Christ will be an expression of God's good will toward the world, resulting in a 'refreshing' experience. Then Peter continues, explaining that God will "send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." In view of this inspired summary of the prophetic testimony concerning the great objective of Christ's Second Advent, why should anyone suppose

that he returns to destroy the earth, or to make it desolate for a thousand years?

Peter cites, and partially quotes, a revealing example of the prophetic testimony on this point: "Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you." Then Peter adds, "It shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people."—Acts 3:22,23

This is most revealing. Moses prophesied to the 'fathers'—those of Israel who lived contemporaneously with him—that the Lord would raise up a prophet to them whom they would have an opportunity to hear and believe; and Peter explains that this would be fulfilled by Jesus after he returned. This proves that the Israelites of Moses' day will be raised from the dead and given an opportunity to accept Christ during the time of his second visit to earth.

In Romans 11:25-32, Paul reveals that the Israelites who refused to accept Christ at his First Advent will have mercy shown to them after "the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." This expression refers to the work of God during the present age of calling out from the world those who will be associated with Jesus as the Seed through which all the families of the earth are to be blessed. (Gen. 22:18) In Revelation 14:1, these are represented as being on Mount Sion with Jesus, and Paul says, that "there shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob."

In verse 32, Paul explains that God has counted all the Israelites in unbelief in order that he might have mercy upon all. How wonderful this is! Our restricted viewpoint would cause us to say that God cannot show mercy to unbelievers following Christ's Second Advent, but Paul believed and taught otherwise. No wonder he added, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how

unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"—vs. 33

Paul's inspired declaration that when Jesus returned he would show mercy to the Jews who rejected him at his First Advent is supported by Jesus, and by the Prophet Ezekiel. Those who have any doubt of this should make a careful study of Ezekiel 16:48-63; Matthew 10:15; 11:22,24; Mark 6:11, and Luke 10:12,14. In these passages the fact is revealed that Sodom and Gomorrah, as well as those who opposed Jesus, are to be restored to life, and that it will be favorable for them in the judgment day.

Their resurrection is described as a returning to their "former estate," and Jesus says that it will be "more tolerable" for those wicked cities of the past than it will be for those who disbelieved and opposed him. Jesus explained the principle which will apply here, saying, "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." (Luke 12:48) The people of Sodom and Gomorrah were not highly favored of the Lord in their day, and they were given no information concerning the Divine will. On the other hand, God had sent his prophets to Israel, and finally the Messiah himself, so their sin of unbelief was against greater light, hence warranted a greater degree of punishment.

But the point is that both groups are to be dealt with in the judgment day, following the return of Christ, and it will be tolerable for both, but more tolerable for one man than the other. Only by distorting the Word of God can anyone get a different thought out of these inspired declarations by Ezekiel and Jesus. They show clearly that favor will be shown to sinners following Christ's return.

Learning Righteousness

The Scriptures clearly teach that the world's judgment day follows the return of Christ; and the Prophet Isaiah wrote, "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." (Isa. 26:9)

The word judgment as used in the Bible is by no means limited to the pronouncement of sentence. It includes the thought of trial, or probation, and sometimes of corrective discipline.

In the next verse, Isaiah wrote, "Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the LORD." (vs. 10) It is certain from this text that the Day of Judgment is a time when favor will be shown, even to the wicked. That favor will be the opportunity, based upon a comprehensive understanding of the issues involved, of learning and practicing righteousness.

This favor will be shown to the people in what the prophet describes as the "land of uprightness." This is a poetic description of conditions throughout the earth during the thousand years of Christ's reign, which will also be the judgment day of a thousand years. Isaiah says that the 'wicked' will not, even then, learn righteousness. This is a reference to those who at heart are willfully wicked. They are the ones referred to by Peter who, during the 'times of restitution,' refuse to obey 'that prophet' and are destroyed from among the people.—Acts 3:23

We are not to conclude that there will be no evil in the world during the thousand years of Christ's reign. Paul wrote that Christ must reign until all enemies of God and of righteousness are put down. He explained that death is the last enemy to be destroyed. (I Cor. 15:25,26) Not until the close of the thousand years will the earth be completely freed from evil. It will be then that no one will need to say to his neighbor, "Know the LORD," for all shall know him. And it will be then that there shall be no more sickness and death.—Jer. 31:31-34; Rev. 21:4

Kingdom—Judgment—Resurrection

From the scripture texts already examined, it is clear that the kingdom of Christ, the judgment day, and the resurrection day promised by God, are all the same period of time.

These terms are descriptive, each in its own way, of the one great work to be accomplished during that thousand-year age in the Divine plan.

From one standpoint it will be like a kingdom reign, in that it will result in the reestablishment of God's will in the hearts of the human race, of all, that is, who obey the laws of that kingdom. It is for this that we have been taught to pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

From another standpoint, the work of that thousand years will be one of trial, judgment, and discipline. With each individual a final verdict will be rendered, denoting worthiness, or unworthiness, of eternal life. The Scriptures teach that Jesus will be the Judge supreme during that time, as well as the great King.—Ps 72:8; Acts 17:31

Besides this, the people are to be raised from the dead and given an opportunity to live forever. Thus the word resurrection is also to give us a still more comprehensive understanding of the manner in which "all the families of the earth" are to be blessed through the Seed of Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 22:18; Gal. 3:8,16,27-29) Paul affirmed that there "shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust."—Acts 24:15

This threefold work of The Christ, the promised Seed of blessing, is what Peter describes as "times of restitution of all things." (Acts 3:19-21) And as Peter so clearly sets forth, it follows the return of Christ. It is then that God's will is to be restored by the rulership of Christ. Righteousness is to be restored by the educational and disciplinary processes of the Lord's judgments. And everlasting life is to be given to those who qualify for it by obedience to the will of God, and by demonstrating their love for righteousness.

Satan To Be Bound

The work of the millennium is brought to our attention in the 20th chapter of Revelation. In the opening verses we are assured that Satan, the Devil, will be bound at

the beginning of the thousand years—"that he should deceive the nations no more." By some this has been misconstrued to mean that Satan is bound by virtue of the fact that the nations are all dead, hence there will be no one for him to deceive.

What this interpretation really means is that the nations will be bound rather than the Devil—bound, that is, in the great prison house of death. The Devil, according to this distortion of scriptural meaning, will be roaming up and down in a desolate earth for a thousand years, "bound" because his subjects will all be dead.

The principal passage used in an effort to prove the theory that during the thousand years of Christ's kingdom and judgment day the whole earth will be empty and desolate is Jeremiah 4:23-27. The basis of the 'proof' is the fact that some of the language used in this passage is similar to that used in Genesis to describe the earth previous to the creation of man. This is taken to mean that during the millennium the earth will again be "void," or empty.

However, this passage of scripture is not even remotely related to the thousand years of Christ's reign. It is part of Jeremiah's prophecy of doom which was coming upon natural Israel, forewarning the people that they were to be removed from their land, and that their cities and land would lie desolate. This prophecy was fulfilled during the seventy years of their captivity in Babylon. This same desolation was also foretold in Leviticus 26:31-35, where similar language is used.

This true interpretation of Jeremiah's prophecy is borne out by the fact that the Hebrew word *erets*, which is translated "earth" in verse 23, is translated "land" in verse 27. The prophecy does not, therefore, relate at all to a desolation of the entire earth, but merely to the 'land' of Israel.

The Bottomless Pit

Revelation 20:2,3 speaks of Satan being cast into a "bottomless pit." According to the untenable interpretation that

Satan is bound by virtue of the fact that there will be no one to deceive, this would mean that the 'bottomless pit' is a desolated, uninhabited earth. But do the Scriptures substantiate this notion? We do not think so.

This bottomless pit is also referred to in Revelation 11:7 and 17:8. By no stretch of the imagination can it be interpreted in these instances as referring to the earth emptied of all human inhabitants. Both of these speak of a "beast" that comes out of the bottomless pit to resume activities among humans dwelling on the earth. In the second instance a harlot woman is seen riding on the 'beast.'

It is generally agreed among students of the Bible that this beast is symbolic of a corrupt government which once ruled Europe, whose rulership became eclipsed for a time. Regardless of how definitely we might be able to identify this evil power, it is obvious that while it is in the bottomless pit, nations continue to exist on this earth. So, just as millions lived on the earth during the time this beast was in the bottomless pit, the human race will live throughout the thousand years that the Devil is in the same bottomless pit. Just as the bottomless pit symbolizes a condition in which the beast was restrained of its power to rule, so it also is symbolic of a similar restraint which will be imposed upon Satan, that he may deceive the nations no more until after the thousand years of Christ's reign.

In ancient times, prisoners were frequently held in custody by chains. Sometimes they were chained to heavy iron balls, sometimes to guards. So the Lord informs us that Satan is to be bound with a 'great chain.' Satan is a spirit being, so in his case we must think of the chain merely as symbolic of the Divine power which will hold the fallen Lucifer in restraint during the thousand years when he is not permitted to deceive the people.

Reigning with Christ

Revelation 20:4 tells us of those who live and reign with Christ a thousand years being brought forth from death in the “first resurrection” for this purpose. These are the ones who suffer and die with Jesus in order that they might live and reign with him. They are “beheaded” for the witness of Jesus; that is, they accept the headship of Christ in their lives, and thus become members of his mystical body.

These are the ones referred to by Paul as being “baptized into Christ,” and thus becoming associated with him as the promised Seed of Abraham through which all the families of the earth are to be blessed. (Gal. 3:27-29) Yes, all true Christians who gladly suffer and die with Christ may rejoice in the hope of reigning in his kingdom. When the disciples marveled at the miracles performed by Jesus, he told them that they would do even greater works—a reference, no doubt, to their future privileges when glorified with Christ and reigning with him in his thousand-year kingdom.

“The Rest of the Dead”

The first sentence in Revelation 20:5 reads, “The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.” This is a strange interruption in the train of thought introduced in verse 4 which, in speaking of Christ's joint-heirs, concludes with the statement, “They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” Without the interruption pertaining to the rest of the dead not living, the conclusion of verse 4, together with verse 5 would read, “They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years; this is the first resurrection.” Verse 5 as it stands reads, “The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.”

This is a flat contradiction, for it says that the first resurrection consists of the ‘rest of the dead’ not living. God's inspired Word contains no contradictions, so it is obvious

that an interpolation has crept into verse 5 of this chapter. This is further proved by the fact that the expression, 'The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished,' is not found in the oldest Greek manuscript—Codex Sinaiticus, the Vatican 1106, or the Syriac manuscripts. This means that these words were added by some zealous but misguided copyist during the Dark Ages, possibly to substantiate the claim that the kingdom of Christ was then established and reigning.

Perhaps some were then wondering why, if Christ was reigning, the dead were not being raised. The statement that the rest of the dead would not live until the thousand years were finished may first have merely been penned in the margin of a manuscript as an observation, and at a later time copied into the text. But regardless of how it happened, these words are an interpolation, and are now so recognized by eminent Bible scholars, and in fact by all unbiased students of the Word.

To recognize such interpolations is not higher criticism of the Scriptures, no more than is the effort to secure correct translations of the original texts. How richly many students of the Bible have been blessed by recognizing that the Hebrew and Greek words translated hell in the Bible do not mean eternal torture!

It is equally important to discover interpolations of the sacred texts in order not to be misguided by them. Indeed, not to recognize these interpolations when they are so clearly established as such would tend to bring one into the position of adding to the Word of God. This would be especially true if the interpolation in question is used as the principal supporting text of a basic doctrine to which one may have subscribed.

Contrary to the thoughts expressed in this particular interpolation, the very purpose of the thousand-year reign of Christ is to restore the dead to life. As we have seen, Christ returns to usher in "times of restitution of all things, which

God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” (Acts. 3:19-23) How strange it is that just a few uninspired words added to Revelation 20:5 during the Dark Ages should be used to contradict the testimony of all God’s holy prophets!

Kings and Priests

Verse 6 of Revelation 20 reiterates the blessedness of those who are raised to life in the first resurrection, and tells us again that they reign with Christ a thousand years. It speaks of them as being both “kings and priests.” Revelation 5:9,10 explains that these are redeemed from among men, and that their reign is on the earth.

Kings exercise authority over subjects, and priests are those who serve and bless the people. How aimless and useless would be the work of these kings and priests during the thousand years of their reign on the earth if not a single human being was alive over whom to reign, and no one anywhere to be the recipient of the blessings of life they were prepared to dispense! It seems to us that to reign over the earth at such a time would place these kings and priests in a similar “bound” situation as this same false reasoning has explained would be the position of Satan.

But the Revelator explains that at the conclusion of the thousand years when Satan is released, the people on the earth are in number as the “sand of the sea.” (Rev. 20:8) There is nothing in the narrative to indicate these are raised from the dead just at that time in order to give the Devil someone on whom to practice his deceptions. It is clear, rather, that this multitude of humans are those who have been brought forth from death and dealt with during the millennium. It is these who are referred to as coming forth from “death and hell.”—vs. 13

The Three-Phase Work

The first eleven verses of Revelation, chapter 20, describe the work of the millennium from the standpoint of the kingdom reign of Christ in which he subdues and destroys all

enemies of God and man. It is appropriate that the binding of Satan should be shown in this picture, and also his release and destruction at the close of the thousand years.

Beginning with verse 12, the judgment aspect of the Millennial Age is brought to our attention. It is not that the narrative beginning in this verse is descriptive of a work that follows the thousand years of Christ's reign. Rather, it is a description of further details pertaining to the work of Christ during the same thousand years, that is, the judgment work.

The last three verses of the chapter remind us that during this same thousand years the dead are to be restored to life. Here also, and appropriately, we are assured that "death and hell" are to be destroyed. That is why, in the 4th verse of the next chapter, the Revelator tells us that as a result of Christ's reign "there shall be no more death."

The Judgment Work

Having examined somewhat the kingdom aspect of the millennium as presented in this chapter, let us note how clearly it sets forth the work of judgment. We read, "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." (vs. 12) In the preceding verse John tells us that he saw a great white throne—symbolic of kingdom authority—and that the symbolic heavens and earth fled away from the face of him who sat upon the throne.

John, therefore, sees the dead stand before God, in contrast to the symbolic heavens and earth, Satan's empire, which do not stand, but flee away. The fact that the dead stand before God suggests that he is dealing with them. Obviously the reference is to those who have been dead and are now awakened to life, and are standing before the face of him who sitteth upon the throne. We have already noted that 'times of refreshing' will come from the 'face of the Lord.'—Acts 3:19-21

The beauty of this picture of the judgment-day work has been marred by the false notion that the 'books' which are opened contain the records of the past deeds of the dead. It is claimed by some that those who come forth in the first resurrection will spend a thousand years poring over these books to discover if any of the rest of the dead may be worthy of life. Discovering that there are no more worthy ones, the rest of the dead will then be awakened, told that they are not worthy to live, and then destroyed.

But what is written in these books that are opened? This is important to know because the judgment of the people is to be on the basis of what is written in the books. We believe that Jesus clearly indicated the contents of the judgment-day books when he said, "If any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."—John 12:47,48

Here Jesus is plainly stating that his teachings, his interpretations of the will and law of God, will be the basis of judgment during the judgment day. It is undoubtedly the revealing of these teachings to the people that is symbolized by books being opened. Certainly, the true teachings of Christ have been to the vast majority throughout the ages like a sealed book.—Isa. 29:18

The works of the people are mentioned separately from the things written in the books. They are to be judged by the things written in the books 'according to their works.' That is, their works are to be compared with what is written in the books. And it will not be their past works, but according as their "work shall be."—Rev. 22:12

A book of life will then be opened. Obviously the thought is that as the restored dead bring their works into line with the will of God as revealed by the opened books, their names will be placed in the book of life. This, indeed, is the

very purpose of the judgment-day work; namely, to give the world an opportunity to know and do the will of God as expressed through Christ, and thus prove worthy to live forever.—John 12:50

No purpose would be served in examining the past works of the world of mankind, for the Lord knows that none are worthy of life. Jesus came to give his life as man's Redeemer, but the truth concerning the Divine plan of redemption has become terribly confused, so that very few indeed have really had a fair opportunity to hear and believe. Besides, there are countless millions who have not heard even a confused message of the Gospel. But Paul wrote that it is the will of God that all shall be "saved" and come to a knowledge of the Truth.—I Tim. 2:4-6

Here the word 'saved' simply denotes an awakening from the sleep of death in order that those who are dead might have an opportunity to learn the truth concerning Jesus. They will learn this from the books which will then be opened. Paul states it in plain language in this passage, saying, "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified [or made known] in due time"—that is, when the books are opened.

Those Who Have Done Evil

John 5:28,29 is another judgment-day passage of scripture. It reads, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation [*Revised Version*, judgment]."

A correct understanding of this passage is indicated in the 24th verse of the same chapter. Here Jesus says, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." Here the Greek word translated

condemnation is *krisis*. It is the same word that is mistranslated 'damnation' in verse 29. Its true meaning is judgment.

Jesus explains that those who believe in the present life will not come into the future judgment of unbelievers. Of course not, for they will be associated with him in that future work of judgment. They enter into life now by faith, and actually in the first resurrection. That is why Jesus speaks of them as being resurrected to life.

But the others, Jesus said, will come forth from death to a 'resurrection of judgment.' It is then that they will enter into judgment. Their coming forth from the tomb will be simply an awakening from the sleep of death. If they are fully restored to perfection in that time of restitution and live forever, it will be because, when enlightened, they conform their lives to the things written in the books.

This is best understood by remembering the basic meaning of the Greek word *krisis*, which in the *Revised Version* is translated judgment. Actually, it has the same meaning as our English word crisis. We know what is meant by a crisis in one's life. It is a time of testing and possible change. It will be so with the unbelieving world when they are awakened from the sleep of death. If in that crisis time they turn to the Lord, instead of away from him, they will be restored to full human perfection and live forever, as Adam would have lived had he not transgressed Divine law. If they refuse to hear and obey they will be destroyed in the "second death," for their names will not be entered in the book of life.—Acts 3:23; Rev. 20:14,15

The "Sheep" and "Goats"

Jesus' parable of the Sheep and the Goats is very revealing. (Matt. 25:31-46) He identifies the time when the parable applies as being when the Son of Man comes, and sits on the throne of his glory with all his holy angels. Here the saints of the present age are shown with Jesus as "angels" or "messengers," as the word is in the Greek text. Paul

wrote "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" (I Cor. 6:2) These are the ones who will sit with Jesus in his throne. (Rev. 3:21) They are the ones who "appear" with Christ in "glory."—Col. 3:4

This means that the "sheep" of the parable are not the believers of the present age. No, just as the parable states, it is all nations that are gathered before the judgment throne, and it is from all nations that the two classes represented by the sheep and the goats are developed. Are these all asleep in death while they are being separated? It does not appear so, for the parable indicates that the 'sheep' are very active visiting the sick, etc. In other words, they are alive and demonstrating their love for righteousness—their harmony with the Divine law of love.

These symbolic sheep have restored to them the "kingdom prepared . . . from the foundation of the world." This is the dominion over the earth that was given to our first parents. They forfeited it through sin. It was redeemed by Christ, and in the judgment day it will be restored to all of Adam's race who pass the tests of belief and obedience then placed upon them. They also will be rewarded with life everlasting.

"The Accepted Time"

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." (II Cor. 6:2) This text is often used to prove that there will no probation after death, as though Paul wrote that the present life is the only day of salvation. Actually, Paul did not use the word 'now' as a reference to one's present life span, but to the present age in the Divine plan. In this text he quotes from Isaiah 49:8,9, where the Lord says, "In an acceptable time have I heard thee: . . .and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth; . . . That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves."

Paul is simply saying that now is the time when the Lord is preserving and helping those whom he will later give as a covenant of the people, and who will then establish the earth, and restore the desolate heritages, and call forth the prisoners of death. This is just another way in which the Scriptures reveal that the followers of Jesus in this age who are willing to suffer and die with him will have the opportunity of living and reigning with him.

Now is the time, in other words, when God will accept the sacrifices of those who are willing to die with Jesus. And now is the time when those who prove worthy will attain to the "great salvation," the prize of the "high calling of God in Christ Jesus." It does not mean that this is the only age in which salvation will be offered to the people. To the contrary, those who are sacrificing and suffering now are thus being prepared to join with Christ in extending the blessings of restitution to the whole world of mankind during the thousand years of the kingdom.

Yes, there will be times of restitution when "death and hell" are to give up their dead. Jesus said that the "gates of hell" will not prevail against this church. Those gates will be opened and the prisoners of death will be brought forth—paroled for a time until they prove their worthiness of a permanent release from death. It is thus that those "baptized into Christ," and thereby becoming with him the Seed of Abraham, will bless all the families of the earth.

This is the meaning of the Gospel, the good news that was first preached to Abraham. (Gen. 12:3) This is what the angel meant who announced the birth of Jesus, declaring him to be "a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." This is the meaning of the 'everlasting Gospel' referred to in our text. This is the "gospel of Christ" of which Paul said he was not ashamed. (Rom. 1:16) It is a Gospel of which every true lover of God and of righteousness can be truly thankful and enthusiastic. Let us proclaim it to all who have a hearing ear!