

The Sword AND Staff

"Preach the Word" (II Timothy 4:2) • "Feed the Flock" (I Peter 5:2)

The Series "Going on Unto Perfection" will be continued in forthcoming issues of this paper.

THREE RELIGIONS CONSIDERED IN RELATION TO THE SWORD



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WHEN WE HEAR a word, or a name, a distinctive mental picture usually flashes across our minds. This is likewise true in reference to things religious. The word "Christianity" is heard. Immediately the picture of a cross appears in our minds. With the words "Old Testament," two tables of stone are seen. We hear the word "Moslem," and, without any obscurity, this writer sees a sword. Perhaps this would be the mental image surfacing in the minds of most people, and this is not without reason.

Let us consider the Moslem religion, the Old Testament religion and Christianity in relation to the sword. From this perspective the Moslem religion and the religion of the Old Testament stand in sharp contrast with Christianity.

I. THE MOSLEM RELIGION

The Sword, Key of Heaven and of Hell

It is a matter of history and public record that the Mohammedan religion in its inception relied heavily upon the sword. Moslems when they had the upper hand gave those whom they opposed the options of (1) embracing their religion, (2) paying tribute money or (3) being devoured by the sword. Edward Gibbon, noted historian who wrote *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, quotes Mohammed in these volumes as saying, "The sword is the key of heaven and of hell: a drop of blood shed in the cause of God, a night spent in arms, is of more

avail than two months of fasting and prayer: whosoever falls in battle, his sins are forgiven: at the day of judgment his wounds shall be resplendent as vermillion, and odoriferous as musk; and the loss of his limbs shall be supplied by wings of angels and cherubim." These words are in chapter 50 of this classic work.

Koran Quotations

إِذْ يُوحِي رَبُّكَ إِلَى الْمَلَأِئِكَهٖ أَذًى مَّعَكُمْ فَذُكِّرُوا
الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا سَأُلْقَىٰ فِي قُلُوبِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الرُّعْبَ فَأَصْرَبُوا
فَوْقَ الْأَعْنَاقِ وَأَصْرَبُوا مِنْهُمْ كُلَّ بَنَانٍ ﴿٥٠﴾

Quotations from the *Koran (Quran)* fall in line with the spirit of this mode of thought. It has been said, "The eighth and ninth chapters of the Koran are the loudest and most vehement." Chapter 8:12 reads, "...Verily I am with you; wherefore confirm those who believe. I will cast a dread into the hearts of the unbelievers. Therefore strike off their heads, and strike off all the ends of their fingers." Chapter 8:67 reads, "It hath not been granted unto any prophet, that he should possess captives, until he hath made a great slaughter of the infidels in the earth." Then throughout chapter 9 Moslem believers are repeatedly summoned to go to war, thereby promoting their religion. As that chapter draws toward a conclusion, 9:123 reads, "O true believers, wage war against such of the infidels as are near you; and let them find severity in you: and know that God is with those who fear him."

Victory or Martyrdom

Earlier in this chapter, in urging them to go to war, the question is asked, "Do you expect any other should befall us, than one of two most excellent

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—THANK YOU—

Proverbially *SPEAKING...*

· *FAITH without love is not from above.*

Trust and obey and you will be on your way to that Great Eternal Day.

It helps to kneel if you would take a stand for that which is right.

If you would *try-umph* you must try and try and try again and again and again.

Read the Bible carefully and prayerfully to get the most out of it.

People under submission to the Holy Spirit submit themselves one to another (Ephesians 5:18,21).

Prayer changes things, first, because it changes us.

Jesus lived life in the flesh, not to prove that we could be perfect, but to become our Savior and so that we could know that he is a sympathetic high priest who has experienced life as we.

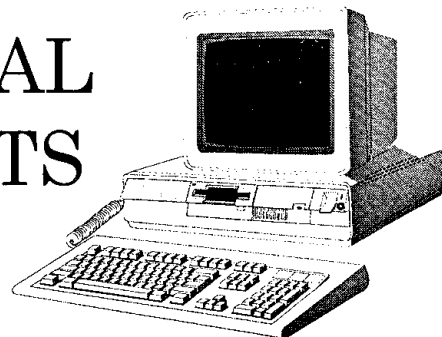
Prayer is the key to the morning and a lock to the night for Christians.

God wants us to be wholly holy (1 Thessalonians 5:23; 2 Corinthians 7:1).

It's hard to stumble when you are on your knees.

If we don't appreciate and love the truth, it will not be ours for long. □

EDITORIAL COMMENTS



SAFELY TAKING OFF AND LANDING

IT HAS BEEN SAID that the most dangerous part in flying an airplane is in taking off and landing. Once the aircraft is airborne the danger is minimized until the plane gets ready to come down. Therefore, undivided attention and care especially must be taken in taking off and landing.

Drawing from this illustration, here is a suggestion that we think would greatly augment your spiritual well being as a Christian (although the Bible is not specific about the details of this). The first thing in the morning upon awaking and arising, thoughtfully and prayerfully read a chapter (or more) in the Bible—and then pray. Through the Bible God is talking to us, and in praying we are talking to God. Then at the end of the day the last thing before retiring for sleep, again read a chapter from the Bible and pray. By doing this we will get our day focused and off to a good start, and at the end of the day bring it to a good conclusion. Bible reading and prayer, stationed there at the entrance and exit of our day, are like sentries guarding our spiritual well being. Another day has been successfully and safely lived as a Christian.

David wrote, "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice" (Psalms 55:17). Of Daniel it says that "he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God" (Daniel 6:10). Traditionally the Jews looked upon the third hour (9 o'clock), the sixth hour (12 o'clock) and the ninth hour (3 o'clock) as the "hour of prayer," and Christians in the early days of the church seem to have gone along with this line of thought (Acts 3:1; 10:9). Cornelius, of whom it says that he "prayed to God always," seems to have adapted this Jewish pattern (Acts 10:2-4,30). Paul said to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Thus by having a regular regimen of prayer, as well as praying when we are especially inclined to pray, we are doing this. The Bible is not specific in details by way of command.

In a larger context the apostle Paul wrote, "I exhort therefore that, *first of all*, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made..." (1 Timothy 2:1). Prayer should come first. Jesus first prayed before choosing the twelve apostles (Luke 6:12-16). He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane before his crucifixion. In most of his epistles Paul first mentions that he is praying for the people. It has been said, "Until a Christian has prayed, the most important thing that a Christian can do

is to pray.” This is in keeping with the words of our Lord when he said to “seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness...” (Matthew 6:33). We are doing this when we start the day with Bible reading and prayer.

Therefore, by being aware of these spiritual aerodynamics, and practicing what we have just written, we can enter the day with calm assurance. At the close of the day we can thank the Lord for a safe and successful flight. □

In The Morning

*I met God in the morning
When my day was at its best,
And His Presence came like sunrise
Like a glory in my breast.*

*All day long the Presence lingered;
All day long He stayed with me.
And we sailed with perfect calmness
O'er a very troubled sea.*

*Other ships were blown and battered,
Other ships were sore distressed;
But the winds that seemed to drive
them
Brought to me a peace and rest.*

*Then I thought of other mornings
With a keen remorse of mind,
When I, too, had loosed the moorings
With the Presence left behind.*

*So I think I know the secret,
Learned from many a troubled way.
You must seek God in the morning
If you want Him through the day.*

—Ralph Cushman

Was Simon the Sorcerer a Christian?

WE HAVE received a question as to whether Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8:4-24 had actually become a Christian (in view of him trying to buy the power of the Holy Spirit). Was he a Christian or not? We believe that he was a Christian. It seems to be a matter of a new born Christian momentarily reverting back to his old way of thinking. His sincerity can be seen in his asking Peter to pray for him.

Why do we believe this? The Lord had plainly said in Mark 16:16, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved...” This makes one a Christian (Galatians 3: 26,27). In Acts 8 Philip preached the gospel to the people of Samaria. They before had been deceived into believing that Simon the Sorcerer was vested with the power of God. Now “when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the

name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12). Consequently, in keeping with Mark 16:16, they became Christians. They were saved. The next verse in Acts 8, following the record of the Samaritans believing and being baptized, says, “Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done” (Acts 8:13). He “believed also,” just like the others, and was baptized. This implies that his response, his conversion, was real, just like that of the others. However, seeing Philip actually having the miraculous power of God, which was also real, and the power being dispensed by the apostles, he momentarily reverted back to his old way of thinking. He became an erring Christian when he tried to buy the control of this power, and just like the new Christians in the church at Corinth, he made a mess of it. As an erring Christian, he was not told that he had to be baptized all over again. But Peter said, “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee” (Acts 8:22). And like the Corinthians, if he would do this, his state of salvation would be regained. “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of [regretted]: but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Corinthians 7:10). This verse was spoken of erring Christians. Although they, like Simon the Sorcerer, had messed up, they were “reinstated” upon repenting. Christians must always be ready to genuinely repent when they fall into error, casting themselves upon the mercy and grace of God, so that salvation will continue to be theirs. □

A Story about Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody

THERE IS A STORY about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to be done, and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody’s job. Everybody thought Anybody would do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn’t do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.—*Selected* □

Making Up for Lack of Ability

WHAT SOME PEOPLE LACK in ability, they make up for in determination and effort, and consequently many times they surpass those with more ability in their accomplishments. So, do not despair; press on in your work. □

THROW a stick into a pigpen, and the pigs that are hit will squeal.

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things; either victory or martyrdom?..." (9:52). What is he saying? Only one of two "most excellent things" could possibly happen to you while fighting. One, you would be victorious. Great! Two, you would be killed in battle, which he calls "martyrdom." Wonderful! Being killed in battle while fighting for your religion, you would be unquestionably ushered into heaven. And what waits for the true believer in heaven? That's another story that goes beyond the bounds of Christian thought (and would make us blush). It is a sensual heaven wherein youthful black-eyed maidens, among many other things, have been especially created to attend to the sexual pleasure and the continual delight of the true believer throughout eternity. Read chapters 55 and 56 of the *Koran*.

There seems to be different schools of thought among Moslems. Some are more radical than others. In the context of a modern, pluralistic society radical views are more inclined to be modified. But in our mental picture of the Moslem religion the icon of the sword is always there.

II. THE OLD TESTAMENT RELIGION

Represented By Two Tables of Stone

Our mental picture of the Old Testament is represented by two tables of stone upon which were Ten Commandments. Christians know that the Old Testament religion, which had its beginning at Mt. Sinai (Deuteronomy 5:1-3; Nehemiah 9:13,14; Hebrews 8:7-9; John 1:17) and lasted until Christ died on the cross (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 9:15-17), was not a permanent arrangement. It was all a part of God's progressive and unfolding revelation to man as He was getting him ready for the Savior. It involved the physical entity of the nation of Israel. Overall it was a "schoolmaster" to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). Its end in view was Christianity.

The Use of the Sword

Although two tables of stone fittingly represent the Old Testament religion, a sword would not be out of place. Any way that you look at it, that system was a "law of sin and death" (whether as a result of disobedience or the sword of conquest). In the unfolding of His plan, God called Abraham. He promised to make his descendents a great nation, and through the vehicle of this nation the Savior would come (Genesis 12:1-3; Acts 3:25,26; Galatians 3:8). Canaan was the Promised Land where all of this

would take place. God gave them this land, but as it turned out it would be theirs only as a result of conquest. God would lead them in this (Exodus 33:1-3; Joshua 3:10). And from a military viewpoint, He is repeatedly called "the LORD of hosts" throughout the Old Testament. In conjunction with this, Israel's part involved the sword.

A Twofold Accomplishment, God's Judgment Executed and Promises Fulfilled



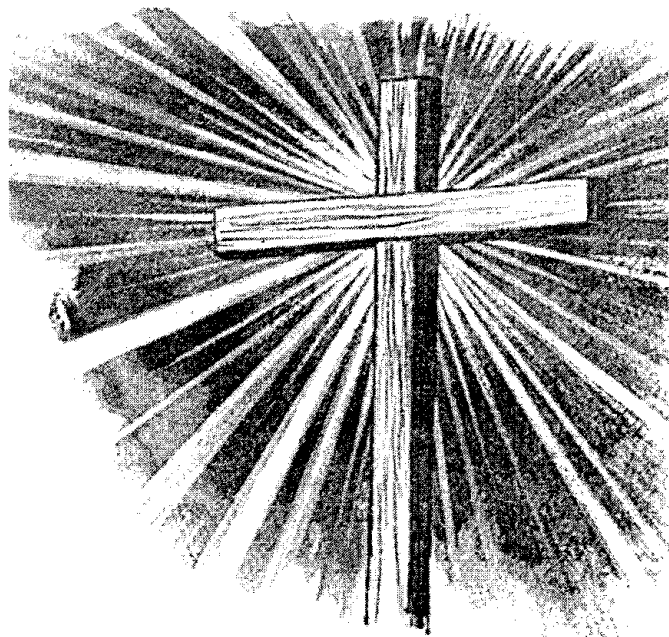
With the call of Abraham, God could have executed His plan earlier, but He had more than one thing in mind. Not only was the land of Canaan being given to Abraham and his descendants in connection with the purpose of the Old Testament in anticipation of the coming Savior, but in their conquest of this land they would be God's means of executing judgment upon its wicked and depraved inhabitants. In Genesis chapter 15 God reveals to Abraham that His promises to him would be "put on hold" because "the iniquity of the Amorites [Canaanites] is [was] not yet full" (15:13-16). After an interlude in Egypt his descendants would be given the Promised Land. By then the Canaanites would be ripe for judgment. God made us and we are accountable to Him. He is the judge of all the earth, sometimes now and ultimately in eternity, and sooner or/and later all will face Him in judgment. Sin is an awful thing (more than we realize) and must be dealt with. At this point in history, Israel became God's instrument of judgment in the conquest of Canaan (Deuteronomy 20:16-18; 18:12; 7:1,2,23,24; Leviticus 18:24,25; Joshua 10:40). At the same time, He was fulfilling His promise of giving this land to them (Exodus 33:1-3; 13:5; Deuteronomy 1:20,21).

An Integral Part of the Nation

Throughout the history of ancient Israel the sword was an integral part of the nation (even in a religious context). The "man" who appeared to Joshua upon their entrance into the Promised Land typified this (Joshua 5:13-15). Joshua became the renowned military leader in the conquest of Canaan. The 12th chapter of Joshua is a summary of all the kings that were put to the sword. Repeatedly we are told that he smote them "with the edge of the sword" (Joshua 6:21; 8:24; 10:28,30,32,35,37,39; 11:11,12,14; etc.). During the period of the judges "the sword of the Lord and Gideon" was representative of the times (Judges 7:18,20). The time of the kingdoms is largely synonymous with the sword.

King David, reflecting the spirit of the Old Testament, said, "He [God] teacheth my hands to war..." (Psalms 18:34). The Old Testament religion embodied the wrath of God and judgment. It was the "law of sin and death."

Initially Israel was like a theocracy with God being their king (Psalms 44). At the same time they were the depository of God's ongoing revelation and the vehicle of bringing the Savior into the world. Later on as a kingdom with an earthly king, they became the physical antitype of the spiritual church of Christ that was to follow. But finally as a stiff-necked and apostate people, they would face the sword themselves in judgment and be carried away into captivity. The sword was ever present.



III. CHRISTIANITY

"Grace, Mercy, and Peace"

The law, or Old Testament religion, served its purpose. God emphatically got His point across. We see the awfulness of sin, and that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:9-23). Man needed a Savior. "For the wages of sin is death," but how wonderful is the rest of this verse, "**but** the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23)! And parallel with this verse is John 1:17, "For the law was given by Moses, **but** grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." (Here in these verses the sharp contrast between Christianity and the Old Testament religion is made by the simple word "but"). And how wonderful are the words of Paul and other New Testament writers addressed to Christians as follows: "Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:2; Jude 2)! How representative of Christianity!

"Jesus Christ, and Him Crucified"

Yes, and all of this is reflected in the cross. In reference to the preaching of the gospel, Paul declared, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2; 1:18-30; 15:1-4). Likewise Paul declared, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Galatians 6:14). Jesus summed it up by saying, "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27). Bearing one's cross represents the life lived for Christ. By no stretch of the imagination could a literal sword be representative of Christianity. In his sinless body on the cross Jesus bore our sins (1 Peter 2:22-24; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21).

"Swords into Plowshares"

A literal sword, very much evident in the context of the Moslem religion and the Old Testament, is not a part of New Testament Christianity. The prophecy in Isaiah 9:6 spoke of the coming of the "Prince of Peace," and the next verse continues by saying, "Of the increase of his government and peace, there shall be no end..." This is in line with Isaiah 2:2-4, where it seems to look forward to the establishment of the church in Jerusalem and the spread of the gospel from this point (Luke 24:46,47; Acts 1:8; Acts 2). Here Isaiah says that "out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem...and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." This is all in keeping with what the Lord told Peter, and what he said before Pilate. "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matthew 26:52). And before Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight..." (John 18:36). The Old Testament antitype of an earthly kingdom finds its fulfillment in the church of Christ.

"The Sword of the Spirit"

(Illustration Drawn from the Literal)

However, and consequently, Christians are engaged in a spiritual war, not a physical one. Thus, Paul is careful to say, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal [physical], but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds. Casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4-6). In Ephesians 6:11ff, he tells us to "put on the whole armour of God" in preparation for the day of battle.

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aration for battle. And he continues by saying, "For we wrestle [struggle] not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places..." It is a spiritual battle. In this connection it is interesting to note that "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" is the weapon that is wielded. And that one's feet is "shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." No physical violence is pictured here. It is the "good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:12), not a Moslem jihad.

"Love Your Enemies," Not Hate Them

Furthermore, what the Lord Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount really stands in sharp contrast with the Moslem and the Old Testament religion. Listen to him. "Ye have heard that it hath been said [the Old Testament], Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you: That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven..." (Matthew 5:43-48, also 38-42). Did Mohammed teach anything like this? This is a pretty big order that many do not practice, even professing Christians, but this is Christianity. This is what the Lord practiced (1 Peter 2:21-23; Luke 23:34).

Closing Statements

We hope that we have made our point in this short article in considering three religions in relation to the sword. So much more could be said. Oh the beauty, purity and perfection of Christianity. It has not been tried and found wanting, but still largely is wanting (and waiting) to be tried. It is God's completed and final revelation to man (Hebrews 1:1-3; Jude 3), a religion of love and peace. Would that all men were walking in its light. □

The Rearward

THE TERM "REReward" (modern spelling, "rear-ward") is used six times in the KJV (Numbers 10:25; Joshua 6:9,13; 1 Samuel 29:2; Isaiah 52:12; 58:8). It is an old English word that means rear-guard. That is the way it is translated in most of the later versions of Scripture—"rear guard."

The concept of a "rear guard" was important to the Israelites. There were soldiers who went before the people, assuring no enemies were ahead. There

were also soldiers who followed them, ensuring no enemy could come up on them unawares. The need of a "rear guard" is seen in the treachery of the Amalekites, who followed the Israelites in their flight from Egypt. It is written of them, "Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God" (Deuteronomy 25:17, 18). These treacherous and crafty people took advantage of those who did not keep up with the ranks. Some of them were tired and weary, and could not keep up with the footmen. For this reason, they fell prey to the Amalekites. For this reason, God pledged to "blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven" (25:19).

With this in mind, our text states, "the God of Israel will be your rereward," or "rear guard." Not only that, "the Lord will go before you," protecting from awaiting foes. Thus, the very graphic image is presented of the people of God sandwiched between Divine protection before and behind. He goes before as "the Breaker," breaking down hindering walls and gates (Micah 2:13). He also follows behind to guard them from crafty foes.

Isaiah 58:8 states this same truth in yet another way. "Then your light shall break forth like the morning. Your healing shall spring forth speedily, And your righteousness shall go before you; The glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard," (NKJV). This is a prophecy of the "day of salvation" in which we are privileged to live. It is one in which the powerful effects of the righteousness "which is of God by faith" (Philippians 3:9) goes before us. The "glory of the Lord," which is also found in the saints (2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 3:16), guards us from behind. That glory reveals our enemies, like the Lord looking at the Egyptians "through the pillar of fire and the cloud," thus troubling them (Exodus 14:24).

Herein is revealed the secret to perseverance: the Breaker before us, and the Rear Guard after us! The Lord goes before us, assuring that we will not be tempted above our ability (1 Corinthians 10:13). He also goes behind us, assuring that what we have left does not again come upon us. Those who perceive this truth will not be "anxious" about tomorrow (Matthew 6:34), and will be able to forget "the things that are behind" (Philippians 3:13). As long as the Lord is with us, we have no need to fear the future. Neither, indeed, is there cause to fear the repercussions of the past, if the Lord is for us.

The Amalekites attacked the rear ranks of Israel, preying on those who were "stragglers," and "tired and weary" (Deuteronomy 25:18). While we must exercise ourselves not to fall into those categories,

the best of us must admit there are times when our pace is too slow, and we have become "tired and weary." How is it that the devil did not overcome you in such times? What enabled you to recover and be strong again? It was the "Rereward," the "Rear guard" that kept you safe from the enemy!

The truth of the situation is proclaimed many different ways in Scripture. Jesus is the "Author and Finisher" of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). Some versions read "the Pioneer and Perfecter." Think of those roles as the "Breaker" and the "Rear Guard." The term "Beginning and the End" conveys the same meaning (Revelation 21:6). It is also seen in the expression, "THE First and THE Last" (Revelation 1:17). He is before us and behind us—leading us and following us. That is involved in beginning a good work in us, and bringing it to completion as well (Philippians 1:6). It is also described in the confident expression, "The LORD will perfect that which concerns me" (Psalms 138:8).

One of the grand articulations of the truth of the "rear guard" is found in the 23rd Psalm. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" (verse 6). Believe it!—**Banner of Truth** □

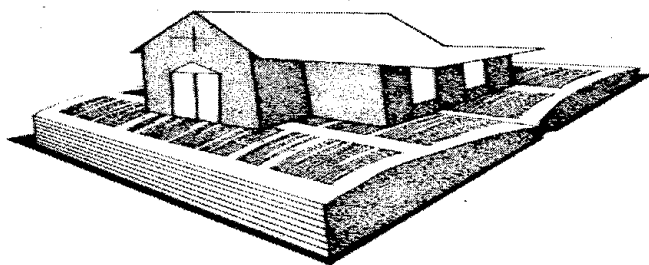


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THE WORD "KINGDOM" is found 125 times in the four Gospels but only 33 times in the rest of the New Testament. The word "church," on the other hand, is found just 3 times in the four Gospels contrasted to 105 times in the rest of the New Testament.

This may seem like a drastic change in subject matter from the Gospels to the rest of the New Testament. But a careful study shows that the subject has not changed. Rather, there is a change in terminology. The church of Jesus is the kingdom of God. This is, indeed, a bold assertion; but there is

considerable evidence of its truth in the epistles of the New Testament. (*For evidence in other New Testament books, see former and future articles.*)

The Gospel and the Church

One way to investigate the relationship between the kingdom and the church is to consider what the New Testament teaches about the "gospel."

What is the gospel? Good news. What good news? 1 Corinthians probably comes closer than any other text to giving a formal definition. "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you...which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again" (15:1-4). The historical basis of the gospel, upon which all else rests, is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

A few weeks after His resurrection, Jesus commanded his disciples: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:15,16). Their job was to preach the gospel to "every creature"—Jew and Gentile alike—in the process, baptizing those who believe the gospel. The importance of the book of Acts is that it records the history of the disciples obeying Jesus' command.

Paul speaks of "the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel" and also mentions, "the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:24,28). Since Jesus' death is the basis for the gospel, and since Jesus' death purchased the church, the church is thus part of the gospel. That is why, as Paul traveled the Roman Empire preaching the gospel, he gathered baptized disciples into churches. To exclude or minimize the church in the preaching of the gospel is to preach a different gospel than Paul preached. The church is bound to the gospel.

"Gospel of the Kingdom"

During Jesus' earthly ministry, He went about "preaching the gospel of the kingdom" (Matthew 4:23; 9:35). Mark adds that Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (1:14,15). The coming of the kingdom was the time for people to believe in the gospel. In fact, the gospel is "the gospel of the kingdom." Kingdom and gospel are inseparable, just as church and gospel are inseparable.

"The gospel of the kingdom" was not just a message preached during Jesus' earthly ministry. Predicting the destruction of Jerusalem, which would take place 40 years later, in 70 A.D., Jesus said, "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then

(Continued on Next Page)

Kingdom a Reality in the Epistles

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the end [of the temple in Jerusalem] will come" (Matthew 24:14). To put it another way, Jesus' command in Mark 16 ("preach the gospel to every creature") would be fulfilled before the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. This makes clear that "the gospel" which Jesus commanded them to preach in all the world was "the gospel of the kingdom."

One Gospel

There is a gospel that is inseparably bound to the kingdom of God. There is a gospel that is inseparably bound to the church of the Lord Jesus. Could these be two different gospels? Hardly! There is only one gospel—one true one. All other "gospels" are perverted and condemned:

"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:6-8). Christ has only one gospel. Therefore, the gospel connected to the kingdom and the gospel connected to the church is one and the same! The gospel that Jesus preached at the beginning of His ministry is the same gospel that He commanded to be preached after his ascension.

Any "kingdom gospel" today which is not the same gospel found in Acts and the epistles is declared by the Holy Spirit to be a "different gospel," a perversion of the gospel of Christ. Consider what Paul told the church at Rome: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Romans 1:16). There is one gospel for Jew and Gentile. Any "good news" for Jews that is different from "good news" for Gentiles is a different and perverted "good news." There is just one gospel for all nations.

To the brethren in Ephesus, Paul explained "that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs [with the Jews], of the same body [church], and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel" (3:6). Paul elsewhere clarified: "the church, which is His body" (1:22,23) and that there is "one body" (4:4). There is one church and one gospel. It is therefore correct to say that the gospel of the kingdom—the only gospel there is—places both Jews and Gentiles into the one and only church of our Lord.

Gospel Power in the Kingdom

In Mark 9:1, Jesus prophesied that the kingdom of God would come with *power* during the lifetime of His listeners. That power became a reality in sev-

eral ways, as discussed in the previous article. Examining that power in the epistles, the mind is drawn again to Romans 1:16: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation." The gospel is *the power of God*. Not man's power. The power of God.

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BIBLE QUESTIONS

(Random Questions Over the Bible)

1. Who do we read about in the Bible besides Sarah being buried in the cave of Machpelah before Mamre at Hebron?
2. What part of the body of an animal would the children of Israel not eat, although this was not a command, and why?
3. What special inheritance was given to Caleb and Joshua in the land of Canaan?
4. Which one of the twelve tribes of Israel is mentioned as having skilled left-handed men (and in what connection)?
5. What were the provisions for one day to feed those who ate at Solomon's "table"?
6. What was the extent of the Persian Empire in the book of Esther?
7. What book in the Bible refers to God 31 times with the designation "the Almighty" whereas this expression is found only 11 additional times throughout the rest of the Bible?
8. Where in the O.T. are some of the stars mentioned by name?
9. What ancient country in Psalms is called "the land of Ham"?
10. "A soft answer turneth away _____ : but grievous words stir up _____ ."—Proverbs
11. What prophet does Daniel mention in his book of prophecy who foretold the number of years that the Jews would be in Babylonian captivity?
12. From the viewpoint of humanity, about how much older was John the Baptist than Jesus?
13. What was Christ doing when the transfiguration took place?
14. When Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ in the transfiguration, what did they talk to him about?
15. Of whom was Jesus speaking when he said, "Go ye, and tell that FOX"?
16. Where did Jesus stay at night the final week before his crucifixion when he taught in the temple each day?
17. Under what two different circumstances did Paul use the saying, "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump"?
18. In what four books of the New Testament is the offering taken up by the Gentile churches for the poor Jewish Christians in Palestine mentioned?
19. Gentile churches from what four regions are mentioned as taking part in this offering?
20. Although the word "Belial" is found many times in the O.T., where is the only place it is found in the N.T.?

(NOTE: Answers found elsewhere in this issue of the paper)

READERS'

...Response

APOLOGY: Please accept our humble apology for slowness in getting correspondence answered. "We" have no staff of secretaries, etc. to handle such, and this is done by the "editor" as time allows. Be it known that you are sincerely appreciated. □

FLORIDA:

■ "[We] cannot tell you enough how much we appreciate your paper. It is so good to read from someone we feel will tell the truth in its fullest.

"We just gave [a copy to] a good friend of ours, who is very strict in his Christian faith, and he really appreciated your web site very much, too...

"This gift is but a small token for what we gain from the paper and sorry it has been this long getting to you...Thank you and keep up the good work for our Lord."

ALABAMA:

■ "I would like to receive *THE SWORD AND STAFF* publication. Please add me to your mailing..." (E-mail, Web Page response).

TENNESSEE:

■ "Thank you for this wonderful publication. It is so good to receive God's Word explained as He intended. We enjoy and delight in each issue, and share them with friends. Here is a small donation. God bless you."

SOUTH CAROLINA:

■ "Please find our check...to help in publishing *THE SWORD AND STAFF* which we appreciate receiving."

VIRGINIA:

■ "Please remove the enclosed name from *THE SWORD AND STAFF* mailing list."

PENNSYLVANIA:

■ "Thank you for the recent copy of *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. I will read it from cover to cover...You truly are serving God. Please continue with your work. *THE SWORD AND STAFF* is a great work, next to our Bibles, bringing the truth of God to everyone..."

OHIO:

■ "It has been a while since you have heard from me...I appreciate your paper and how you rightfully divide the Word of truth. Keep up the good work...The copies I get I share with others. They are enjoyed by many co-workers at work."

■ "Enclosed, please find our contribution for another fine year of *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. Thank you for the truth and wisdom in your publication brought about by your love for the Word of God. The apostle Paul admonished Timothy to "preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction" (II Tim. 4:2). We find this to be true in your ministry and are looking forward to another year of the same."

INDIANA:

■ "It is such a great joy of mine to read your publication from front to back...as soon as I receive it. God bless you in your ministry."

■ "Enclosed is a contribution to show my appreciation for your ministry and for *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. I really look forward to reading this awesome publication. It is truly a blessing to me and strengthens my Christian walk. I thank you and I pray God will bless you and yours in a mighty way."

MISSOURI:

■ "Would you please place me on your mailing list to receive your paper, *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. I used to receive it years ago, and moved and lost contact with you. It is a very good and worthwhile paper that I would very much like to receive again..." (E-mail)

OKLAHOMA:

■ "...When checking the mail I found a copy of your very fine publication. I really like it and your web site, too..." (E-mail).

TEXAS:

■ "I want to thank you for the wonderful *SWORD AND STAFF*. I always look forward to it, and the comfort and knowledge I get from it. Please continue the great work it does for all..."

■ "I have taken *THE SWORD AND STAFF* for many years, and no greater truth has been written. I want to thank you for each one...May God always bless you and the great work you do. My prayers are with you."

CALIFORNIA:

■ "Enclosed is my check...to help you get the paper out. We do so enjoy the paper. It contains items we need to combat all the isms attacking the Lord's church. Thank you..." (Continued on Next Page)

➔ Read about "MOHAMMED'S NOCTURNAL TRIP TO PARADISE AND THE MOHAMMEDAN CONCEPT OF HEAVEN" online at:
<http://jgibbons.8m.com/edby4-97.htm>

READERS'...Response

(Continued from Previous Page)

■ "Enclosed find a check to help in printing *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. I have been receiving your paper for many years, but have neglected to send any money and still the paper has come regular as clock-work.

"Enjoy the paper greatly and appreciate the articles and your position on subject matter. Keep up the good work."

OREGON:

■ "...I would like to compliment you on your web site and of course your periodical *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. I have enjoyed for years your paper and the ladies Bible study group here at the church...have been using your questions on the book of Acts as a study guide and have great praise for your work. Your articles are always thought provoking and, I might add, right on target. We have so much false teachings coming to us through so many avenues of print even within the brotherhood. I am so thankful for writers...who continue to preach and teach restoration principles. Keep up the good work and may God continue to bless your ministry."

UNITED STATES:

■ "Enjoy your web site very much. Keep up the good work" (E-mail, Web page response).

■ "I just found your web site. Very enlightening. I am a nursing home chaplain and will use this for my ministry" (E-mail, Web page response).

■ "I manage the web site for our church and wanted to use some of your stories on one of our pages, plus I wanted to put a link to *THE SWORD AND STAFF* on our site, too. I felt I should write and ask your permission to do this. If this is not all right with you, please let me know..." (E-mail).

■ "Please send me the other articles concerning the seventy weeks of Daniel, chapter nine.

"Finally, some common sense about this subject! I have almost hated the teaching that God calling out a people to himself among all the nations is something of an afterthought, a 'parentheses' in his ongoing (real) plans with Israel. As if the congregation of God in Christ is not the Israel of God. This one teaching about the parenthesis in time *may* be responsible for more heresy than any other Scriptural concept. It almost excuses Christians from being concerned about the spiritual welfare of the Jews because God is dealing with them in a special way anyway, and he'll get back to them (the object of his real desire—his real children) after he's done with us (his stepchildren). Thank you for not just parroting what everyone else seems to teach and resisting the lure of the incessant drumbeat of popular 'teaching.' I look forward to being able to read and study prophecy again without having to struggle through shoulder-high weeds." (E-mail, Web page response).

PUERTO RICO:

■ "Please send me 6 copies of the 'La Espada y el Cayado,' volume 7, 2001, number 1, 'Vamos Adelante a la Perfeccion' [Let Us Go on unto Perfection]

"It is simply stupendous, especially page 7 which explains regarding the Rapture. The message is stupendous and clear.

"There is not the slightest doubt that Jehovah God's Holy Spirit is with you..." (translated)

CUBA:

■ "...Understand how valuable it is for us to receive 'La Espada y el Cayado.' This permits us to have available extraordinary teachings and motives for reflecting in regards to the faith in order to fulfill what was commanded by the apostle Paul and what is the motto of your magazine, 'Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke. Exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine' (2 Tim. 4:2). But to that we add something more from the apostle Paul, very much used by your magazine and it is that we preach the word, but: 'speak thou the things which become sound doctrine' (Titus 2:1).

"It has been said, and very truly, that no opinion of man can substitute the Word of God expressed in the Bible. I believe that, and more yet when I observe the divisions caused by 'men's opinions.' Nevertheless, I also believe that there are men like you who adhere strictly to the model and teachings of Christ and the apostles for the wholesome life of the church of Christ (Rom. 16:16). On the other hand, your years of Christian practice have an unquestionable value.

"Because of all of the former we say that 'La Espada y el Cayado' is a blessing for everyone that has access to it. In our case the blessing is very well received and utilized..." (translated).

GUATEMALA:

■ "...I love God. But I admire you [plural] for the work 'La Espada y el Cayado.' It is a blessing to our lives, because of its content. To me, it is riches. Thank you, many thanks" (translated).

ARGENTINA:

■ "Thank you for sending me your material, *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. I like the articles and the other things, too.

"Could you send me the same magazine in Spanish, please? I hope you can do it.

"Thanks a lot" (E-mail).

PHILIPPINES:

■ "Our sincere appreciation for continuously providing us copy of *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. My husband and I receive it regularly. It sure helps us in our study of God's Word. Again, thank you and may you always be filled with the love of the Lord!" (E-mail)

GHANA:

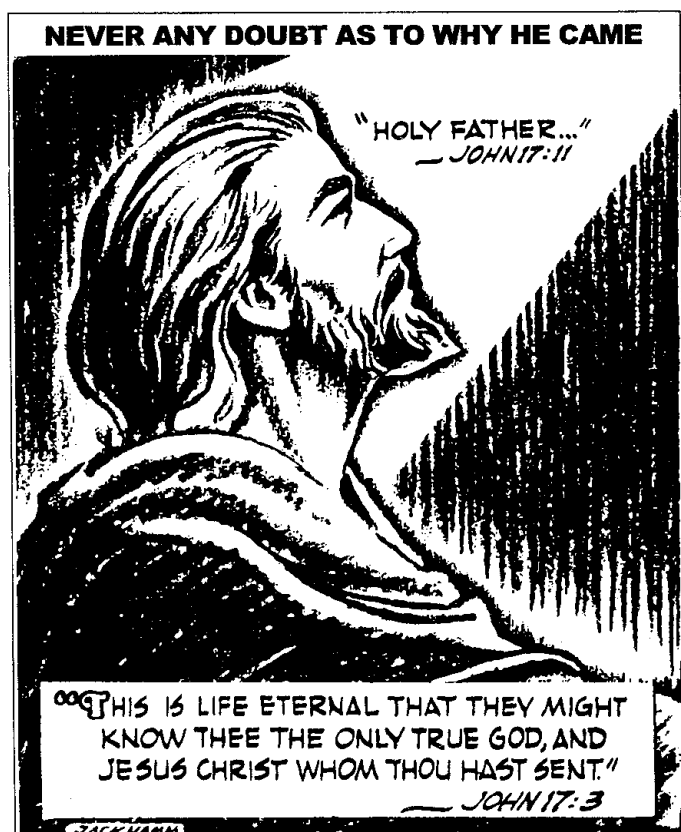
■ "May the Lord bless you and be with you, brother, I want to congratulate you for your ardent efforts in proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ..." □

Kingdom a Reality in the Epistles

(Continued from Page 8)

The apostles were told that the kingdom would come with power in their lifetime. It came with power! The power to save men from sin. The power to turn lives away from wickedness. It was not the power of a sword. It was not the power of a theocratic world government. It was/is the power of a message of love touching men's hearts and changing them from the inside out.

Since there is only one gospel, it is correct to restate Paul's words this way, "the gospel of the kingdom is the power of God to salvation." The kingdom is about salvation from sins. There is power in the kingdom today! This is not a dead message. Nor is this the power of Jesus to *force* people to obey Him. This is the power of Jesus to *draw* sinners to Himself—a power to save souls eternally.



The Hope of the Gospel

Paul spoke to the Colossians of "the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel" (1:5). The gospel of the kingdom tells about our hope in heaven. Repeat: "in heaven." In addition, Ephesians 4:4 clarifies that there is just "one hope." Thus, the one hope of the gospel of the kingdom (the only gospel there is) is that which is "laid up for you in heaven." Paul told Timothy that Christ "has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10). The gospel of the kingdom has revealed immortality.

The Holy Spirit has said that there is "one hope." Not two hopes—"one hope." Paul spoke to Titus of the "hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began" (1:2). Our hope is not something to last for a century or a millennium. Our hope in Christ is for all eternity. That is the one hope of the Christian. The hope of the gospel of the kingdom is eternal life, nothing less.

Present and Future

Some of the confusion on the question of the kingdom of God is that the kingdom has two phases. Texts just referred to speak of the future hope of the gospel. Other texts speak of the kingdom as being future. For example, Paul wrote, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 15:50). Obviously, this is speaking of the kingdom as something in the future, after the resurrection.

Paul also wrote (2 Timothy 4:18): "And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom." Also, 2 Peter 1:11 says: "for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Such texts clearly speak of the kingdom as something future. Note, however, that the future kingdom referred to in each case is both *heavenly* and *eternal* (neither earthly nor millennial). These texts thus agree with the prophecy of Daniel, "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed...it shall stand forever" (2:44).

What then, are we to make of the texts quoted earlier, (and others to follow), which give us to understand that the kingdom is present here and now? If we take all that Scripture has to say on the subject, and not just select verses, we must conclude that the kingdom is here in one sense and future in another sense! It is somewhat like the nature of Jesus. On this earth He was both human and divine. Some would make Him only human and others would make him only divine, each using their proof-texts. These people miss the truth. Jesus was both.

And so it is with the kingdom. If we take just some texts, we can say the kingdom has not arrived yet, that it is in the future. If we select other texts, we can ignore or even deny that the kingdom of God is in the future. But, if we take *all* that Scripture has to say on the subject, we must conclude that the kingdom is here in one sense and future in another sense. It may be thought of as two phases of the same kingdom. Call it "two phases," or whatever you want to call it, neither truth can be denied.

We Are IN the Kingdom

One of the most direct statements of the present reality of the kingdom of God is Paul's declaration to the Colossians: "Giving thanks to the Father who

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Kingdom a Reality in the Epistles

(Continued from Previous Page)

has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us [past tense] from the power of darkness and conveyed us [past tense] into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood" (Colossians 1:12-14). Conveyed us into the kingdom. Accomplished fact.

Notice that the kingdom has to do with the battle between darkness and light, the battle between Satan and Jesus. It has to do with redemption, blood, and forgiveness of sins. A totally spiritual message. All of this is related to the saints being in the kingdom *now*. Christ has already delivered us from Satan's kingdom of darkness into His kingdom of light. Praise His holy name!

Not a Materialistic Kingdom

Remember when Jesus fed the 5,000? The multitude wanted to make him king. Jesus refused and rebuked them for their materialism: "you seek Me...because you ate of the loaves and were filled (John 6:26). Paul addressed the same materialism in Rome because of the attitude of some in eating meat even if it caused their brother to stumble: "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (14:17). Thus, in correcting them, Paul explained the nature of the kingdom of God here and now—not filling the belly, but rather striving to live at peace with the brethren. God's kingdom is not a forced peace; it's a peace from the heart.

Remember what Jesus told Pilate? "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight" (John 18:36). Paul addressed the same issue when he explained: "We do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments...bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Jesus' kingdom has nothing to do with physical fighting. Jesus' kingdom does not make captives of men; it makes captives of *thoughts*!

The kingdoms of the world advance by force of arms. God's kingdom advances by force of arguments. Yes, read the text again: "casting down arguments." People say, "There are two things I don't argue about: politics and religion." Whatever the case may be with politics, Christian soldiers are in the business of combating false arguments, in the business of leading people to think as God thinks, in the business of challenging people to surrender their thought patterns to Christ.

"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age...having girded your waist with truth...And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:11-17). "Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war!" A war of words. Our only sword is "the word of God." It is a spiritual war for the advancement of a spiritual kingdom—a battle for the hearts and minds of men, women and youth.

Jesus Seated at God's Right Hand

Jesus' death is central to the gospel message. So is His resurrection. But it does not end there. Central to the gospel, also, is Jesus' ascension into heaven to sit on the right hand of the Father! Hebrews 8:4 states bluntly: "if He [Jesus] were on earth, He would not be a priest." If not a priest, not a savior (see 7:23-28). If not a savior, there is no salvation, no gospel, no good news.

Scripture frequently emphasizes Jesus' position in heaven following His ascension. Mark 16:19 records of Jesus: "He was received up into heaven; and sat down at the right hand of God." Ten days later Peter proclaimed in Jerusalem: "This Jesus God has raised up...Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God" (Acts 2:32,33).

The epistles also emphasize the fact. Paul told the Ephesians (1:20): "which He [God] worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand." He told the Colossians (3:1): "where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God." The Holy Spirit told the Hebrews (1:3): "when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." This great truth had been foretold one thousand years earlier:

"The LORD said to my Lord,
'Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'
The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength
out of Zion.
Rule in the midst of Your enemies!"

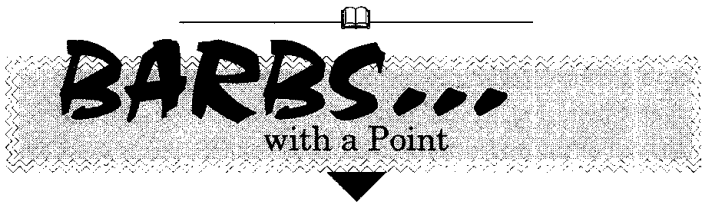
(Psalms 110:1,2).

During Jesus' earthly ministry, He quoted the first verse of this prophecy to show that the Messiah is not only David's son, but also David's Lord (Matthew 22:41-46). Peter quoted the same verse on the day of Pentecost, as he was reaching the great climax of his sermon: "The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus,

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A Remover of Stains and Many Other Things

SOMEONE TOLD me just recently that beer will remove grass stains from summer clothes. Well, I'm sure this is right. In fact, the same brew will also remove the summer clothes. It will remove the spring and winter ones too. Not only from the many who guzzle it, but from their wives and children. Booze has been known to remove the furniture from the house and food from the table. It will remove smiles from the faces of children and happiness from the home. As I think about it, nothing can beat it as a remover.—*Selected* □



ONLY FOOLS try to fool God.

Let your speech be better than silence, or be silent.

If a train has no track to run on, it is going nowhere (even if it is streamlined).

Faith without works is like a man without any arms or legs.

If your Christianity is not working in the work-a-day world, it is not working in you.

If you are not right with God, you are not right no matter what you do.

It is a tragedy and a shame when people have families, but they don't have family values.

You do not help a person by trying to cover up for him or to excuse him in his sins.

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31), not as they have done unto you (Proverbs 24:29; 20:22).

When you leave God out, a lot of other things rush in to fill the vacuum (and they usually aren't good).

It is strange that some people are against the execution of criminals (capital punishment), but are for the killing of innocent babies in their mother's womb.

The Bible does not condemn talking too little, but it does condemn talking too much.

Nothing works like work when it comes to getting the Lord's work done; shortcut methods only result in shortcut results.

To throw out the baby with the bath water is to miss the whole purpose of the bath.

If we dilly-dally around with compromise and compromisers, it won't be long until we compromise and are compromisers (if we aren't already).

If you let your brain be a depository of everything that comes along, pretty soon it will be a cesspool.

Doing nothing because of indecision and patience are not the same thing.

Sometimes people who make mountains out of mole hills don't and won't climb the real ones (it takes more effort and consecration).

A person clothed with Christ will be decently clothed otherwise.

When people have not been taught the fear of the Lord as a child, it is hard for them to see the need of practicing it as an adult.

The way that most people look at it, the kingdom of heaven has no boundaries.

To blame others for your problems many times is not to understand the nature of your problems and hinders the prospects of a solution.

If we think big and act small, there may be no results at all.

Being a Christian is more about being than doing, but with life the primary evidence of being is seen in what is done.

People who are "high strung" need to be careful to keep their lives in tune.

The impatient person may (and can) impetuously get things done (and undone) faster.

Weak people drink strong drink. □

A Piece of Clay

I took a piece of plastic clay,
And idly fashioned it one day;
And, as my fingers pressed it still,
It moved and yielded to my will.
I came again, when days were passed;
The bit of clay was hard at last.
The form I gave it, still it bore,
But I could change that form no more.

I took a piece of living clay,
And deftly formed it day by day,
And molded, with my power and art,
A young child's soft and yielding heart.
It came again, when years were gone;
It was a man I looked upon.
He still that early impress bore,
But I could change it never more.

—Anonymous

SIN will take you farther than you ever wanted to go, keep you longer than you ever wanted to stay, and cost you more than you ever wanted to pay.

Kingdom a Reality in the Epistles

(Continued from Page 8)

whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:34-36). Jesus sitting on the right hand of God is used as proof that He is now Lord.

Jesus IS Lord

"Lord" is "ruler." And that is what verse 2 of Psalm 110 says, "Rule in the midst of Your enemies!" Is Jesus ruling now? The inspired apostle says, "Yes." "Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him (1 Peter 3:21,22). "Having been made." Past tense. Angels and authorities and powers are now subject to Him. Jesus said as much before His ascension: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18).

Paul enlarges on the implications of Jesus being seated on the right hand of God: "Which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion" (Ephesians 1:20-21). The word "dominion" is a derivative of the word "Lord." It could be translated "lordship." Far above all lordship or lords. The book of Revelation is reserved for a future study, but it is irresistible at this point to quote 17:14: "the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings." Jesus is now seated at God's right hand, far above all lords.

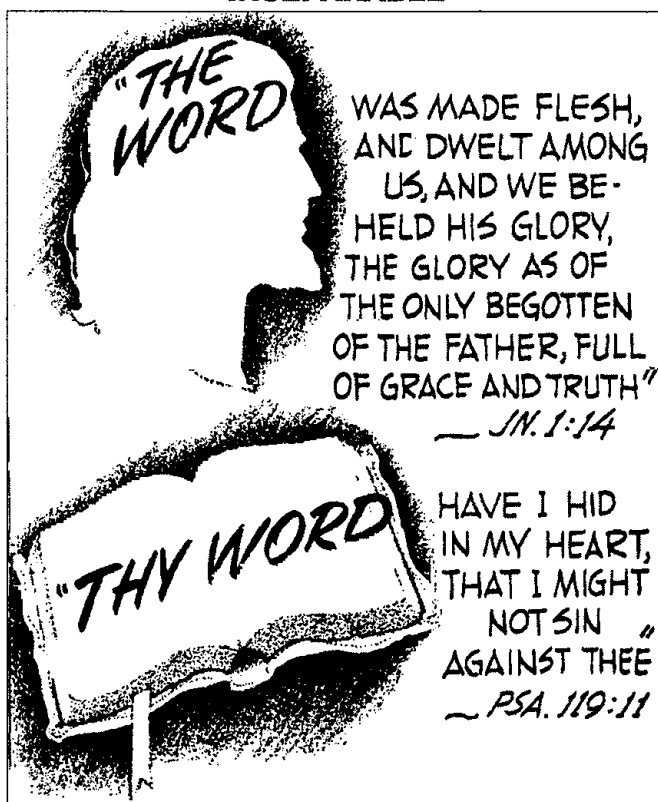
Psalm 110:1,2 shows that Jesus has enemies that are not yet overcome. "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool...Rule in the midst of Your enemies!" "Till." Thus, while Jesus is seated at God's right hand, He still has unconquered enemies. Then, 1 Corinthians 15:25 says: "He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet." Both 1 Corinthians 15 and Psalms 110 speak of Jesus overcoming all His enemies. Until He completely overcomes them, the former text says He is seated at God's right hand and is ruling, the latter says he is reigning. Conclusion? Sitting on God's right hand is the equivalent of ruling and reigning. Jesus has been ruling and reigning since His ascension!

Psalms 110 used the word "rule." 1 Corinthians further narrowed "rule" by using the word "reign." A president does not reign. A prime minister does not reign. A king reigns. And a king does not reign unless he has a kingdom to reign over. In the Greek, the words "reign," "king" and "kingdom" all come from the same root: "*basil...*" So, since Jesus is reigning, by definition he has a kingdom—*now!*

God's Holy Nation Now

Does God have a favorite nation today? Is it America? Is it Israel? Or, is no nation special to Him today? The Spirit has the answer for us.

INSEPARABLE



Addressing Christians in what today is Turkey, Peter wrote: "You *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people" (1 Peter 2:9). Tremendous! Christians are special! All Christians are the people of God! Christians make up a holy nation! In verse 11, Peter calls them "sojourners and pilgrims." Why? Because Christians are *not* first of all Americans, or Cubans, or Germans, or Arabs. Christians are sojourners and pilgrims in these nations. Christians *first* of all belong to the holy nation of God.

What type of nation is the nation of God? Is it a democracy? Is it a commonwealth? Is it a republic? None of these. God's nation is a kingdom! The church of Christ is not a democracy, much less a club or association. The church is a kingdom—the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven. We are now God's people, God's nation, God's kingdom. The kingdom of God is present here and now. If we are in Christ, we are in His kingdom. □

Note by author: *This is the fifth article regarding prophecies of the Messianic kingdom and their fulfillment. Look for more in future issues.*

(Scripture in the preceding article is taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.)

WEB SITE: <http://JGibbons.8m.com>

“With the Wrong Crowd”

“I GOT in with the wrong crowd,” may be an effort to explain away our personal responsibility for sins or may express the situation accurately.

What you are is the main factor determining the kind of friends you have. If the crowd is wrong, it is also true that you must have already been wrong to become involved with such people.

It may be that you began a friendship with a group that you did not know well. How can you tell if a group is the wrong crowd?

1. One of the first indications can be found in the things they think are funny. If their idea of humor is a dirty joke or discourtesy to older people, it is a sure sign that we are with the wrong crowd. There is nothing really funny about destroying property or reputations.

2. The “wrong crowd” is also marked by impure speech. “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth” (Ephesians 4:29).

3. Lack of reverence and respect for worship and Bible classes. Do your friends encourage you to be reverent, courteous and faithful in worship and Bible classe?

4. A sloppy, droopy, daredevil, reckless spirit is always found in the “wrong crowd.” In the wrong crowd every effort is made to impress others with the fact that here are persons that will do as they like, regardless of others, right or wrong.

5. Your friends are the wrong crowd if they make it harder for you to be what God wants you to be! Do you find your interest in spiritual things decreasing with them? If so, do something about it NOW! Surround yourself with Christian friends and allow their encouragement to bless you. Don't wait until you get so deeply involved that all you can do is blame “the wrong crowd” for disaster in your life. Decide NOW!

“Be not deceived: evil companionships corrupt good morals” (I Corinthians 15:33).—*Selected* □

IF I WERE THE DEVIL

I WOULD gain control of the most powerful nation in the world.

I would delude their minds into thinking that they had come from man's effort, instead of God's blessings.

I would promote an attitude of loving things and using people, instead of the other way around.

I would dupe entire states into relying on gambling for their state revenue.

I would convince people that character is not an issue when it comes to leadership.

I would make it legal to take the life of unborn babies.

I would make it socially acceptable to take one's own life, and invent machines to make it convenient.

I would cheapen human life as much as possible, so that the lives of animals are valued more than human beings.

I would take God out of the schools, where even the mention of His name was grounds for a lawsuit.

I would come up with drugs that sedate the mind and target the young, and I would get sports heroes to advertise them.

I would get control of the media, so that every night I could pollute the mind of every family member for my agenda.

I would attack the family, the backbone of any nation.

I would make divorce acceptable and easy, even fashionable, because if The family crumbles, so does the nation.

I would compel people to express their most depraved fantasies on canvas and movie screens, and I would call it art.

I would convince the world that people are born homosexuals, and that their lifestyles should be accepted and marveled.

I would convince the people that right and wrong are determined by a few who call themselves authorities, and refer to their agenda as politically correct.

I would persuade people that the church is irrelevant and out of date, and the Bible is for the naïve.

I would dull the minds of Christians, and make them believe that prayer is not important, and that faithfulness and obedience are optional.

So, I guess I would leave things pretty much the way they are.—*Selected* □

A Smile Costs Nothing

A SMILE costs nothing, but creates much. It enriches those who receive it without impoverishing those who give. It happens in a flash and the memory of it sometimes lasts forever. None are so rich they can get along without it and none so poor but both are richer for its benefits. It creates happiness in the home, fosters good will in a business and is the counter-sign of friends.

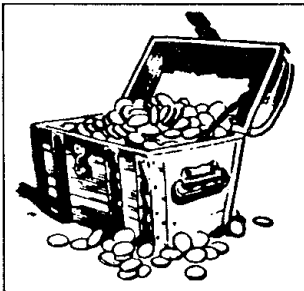
It is rest to the weary, daylight to the discouraged, sunshine to the sad and nature's best antidote for trouble. Yet it cannot be bought, begged, borrowed or stolen for it is something that is no earthly good to anybody until it is given away. Nobody needs a smile so much as those who have none left to give. □

Answers to: BIBLE QUESTIONS

1. Genesis 23:19,20; 25:7-10; 49:1, 29-32; 2. Genesis 32:24-32; 3. Genesis 35:22; 49:4; 4. Judges 20:14-16; I Chronicles 12:2; 5. I Kings 4:22,23; 10:5; 6. Esther 1:1; 7. Job; 8. Job 9:9; 38:31; Amos 5:8; 9. Psalms 105:23,27; 106:22 (78:51); 10. Proverbs 15:1; 11. Daniel 9:2; 12. Luke 1:36; 13. Luke 9:28-30; 14. Luke 9:28-31; 15. Luke 13:31,32; 16. Luke 21:37,38; 22:39; 17. (1) I Corinthians 5:6 (read the context); (2) Galatians 5:9 (read the context); 18. Acts (24:17); Romans (15:25-31); I Corinthians (16:1-4); II Corinthians (chapter 8 and 9); 19. (1) Macedonia (II Cor. 8:1-5; 9:1,20); (2) Achaia (II Cor. 1:1,2; I Cor. 16:2); (3) Galatia (I Cor. 16:1; Acts 20:40; (4) Asia (Acts 20:4; II Cor. 8:23); 20. II Corinthians 6:15. □

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