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A WITNESS TO THE TRUTH

and a warning against the deception in the last days
foretold by Christ

"Take heed ye be not deceived"

AT THE TABLE OF THE LORD

CHRISTENDOM - AND OTHERS - ASTRAY

DAVID - A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

SIGNS OF HIS COMING AND OF THE END OF THE WORLD

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At the Table of the Lord

“The House of God”

As the mind meditates upon the Divine record of the building of the House of God during Solomon's reign, there appears much to instruct and to lift up. It is remembered that it was the desire of David's heart to build a house for God, but that he was prevented. Yet he worked diligently and assembled during his lifetime most of the material for this house. It was because of this yearning that God gave to him the wondrous promises which spoke of His Son, who would reign forever, and who would build the House of God.

Can we, in examining the building of Solomon's house, find help in our desire to be part of the House of God, which will endure forever? The record in I Kings 6 : 7 seems important :

“And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither : so that there was neither hammer nor axe, nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building.”

Let us visualise the preparation necessary for such an arrangement. What a painstaking and great amount of cutting, chipping and fitting would have to be done first, so that when the time came to assemble the stones to build the house, each would fit perfectly with its neighbour. Each would have an appointed place and would surely be marked or numbered according to a master plan ; each would conform precisely. How beautiful is this figure and how according to Divine wisdom ! Help is found in the Hebrew word used for “made ready”, that we may better appreciate it. It is “shalem”, meaning “complete”, “perfect”, “peace”. Does this not open up the beauty of the plan for His House now being prepared ? How that now, before the Son of David comes to assemble the house, those who will have a part in it are now being “shaledmed”, each member now being shaped, fitted to its fellow, and marked, so that perfect peace and harmony may be seen in the house. We must realise that not one stone can be out of line or loosely fitted, but all patterned after, and joined to the corner-stone, composing the House of which the Apostle Paul speaks in Ephesians chapter 2 : 19—22 :

“Now therefore ye are . . . fellow citizens with the saints and of the Household of God ; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone ; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple of the Lord : In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God, through the Spirit.”

This, brethren and sisters, is our hope—to be joined with our fellowcitizens who aspire to be saints, established upon our Lord Jesus, and growing into a sanctified habitation for our Father. How great is our need to be aware of this very holy calling and to remember, too, that now is the only time for being made ready. Do we not feel the chipping and shaping in each, as the Master builder works to remove the rough and uneven spots which prevent a close fitting together? The important question is, how do we respond to His working? Do we in our hearts acknowledge the great need for these corrective measures which so often hurt? Are we, too, shaping to one another and thereby to our Head? Or, are there flaws in us which resist the shaping process; is pride preventing the execution of God's work? If so, the stone will be discarded as unsuitable for the Divine Pattern. Paul has exhorted us to be “. . . perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (I Corinthians 1 : 10). Are we?

The Apostle John, on Patmos, saw in vision the heavenly Jerusalem as a city “descending out of heaven from God”, and that “the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones.” (Revelations 21).

That, brethren and sisters, is the goal towards which we are striving, to be ornaments to our Head, working for and reflecting His glory, and so shining forth in the House of God. Do let us examine ourselves. What is our adorning? Is it reflecting His glory now? It must be, if we hope to reflect so great glory when He assembles all the stones, for by then, it will be too late for any further altering in us.

“I will dwell”

As the work of building the house in Solomon's time progressed, the word of the Lord came to him as recorded in I Kings 6 : 12-13 :

“. . . If thou wilt walk in my statutes, and execute my judgments, and keep all my commandments to walk in them : then will I perform my word with thee, which I spake unto David thy father ; and I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel.”

These are the conditions whereby the Almighty is with His people : an obedience, a keeping of His commandments is required before He will dwell there.

The command to Moses was, “Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.” A sanctuary, we find in Hebrew, means a clean place, a holy place. Only in such a place could the Almighty dwell. Remembering the words of Paul in II Corinthians 6 : 16, “For ye are the temple of the living God”, are we making a sanctuary in our hearts that He may dwell there? Such a sanctuary must be holy, undefiled, with no darkness present, but

the flesh being constantly being put away. To such, the Almighty responds, "I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people." Leviticus 26 : 12.

The Glory of the Lord

Having completed the building of the house, the record is that, "the cloud filled the house of the Lord . . . for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord." (I Kings 8 : 10, 11). Here was evidence of the Almighty God of Israel dwelling in their midst. Why was it so ?

Perhaps help may be found in the other record, in II Chronicles 5 : 13—

"It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord, and when they lifted up their voice . . . and praised the Lord saying, For he is good : for his mercy endureth for ever : that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord."

In all the house there was but the one voiced raised, all united in praise and thanksgiving, "For he is good ; for his mercy endureth for ever." Is this why in the true house of God, His presence dwells and endures ? In the striving to be of that house is all our doing bringing praise and thanksgiving to the Creator, and is there working and growing together in unity, as one, pleasing to Him ? Do we acknowledge in our heart and show in our actions that He is good, and His mercy does endure for ever, recognising too, that apart from His mercy, none could have a part in that house ? Toward such He now responds to help and guide in the way of righteousness, and in the time soon to come, will unite unto His house. Oh, the joy such acceptance would bring ! Can we share it now, brethren and sisters, in the hope of sharing it throughout eternity.

"Hear Thou in Heaven"

Having seen the Glory of God fill the house as with a cloud, Solomon was moved to supplicate, "that thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which thou said, My name shall be there : that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place." I Kings 8 : 29. What a pleasing mind this must have been to God ; how supplicating, how beseeching. We, too must recognise that His eyes are always upon this house, and that He, knowing each need, will provide help to overcome. How important, too, to realise that He knows each thought, and each action. He looks upon each one for signs of growth in spirit. If truly we are aware of His scrutiny, how circumspect each of us must be to please Him above every other consideration.

Solomon's prayer continues, (verse 32) "Then hear thou in heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, condemning the wicked, to bring his way upon his head : and justifying the righteous, to give him according to his righteousness." Do we really seek His judgment, for a condemnation of the wicked ways, which are in each one ? How necessary so that correction might be made. Knowing, too, that the Almighty is unfailing in His condemnation of wrong and justification of the right, do we reflect the same in our own lives, or do we sometimes fail to condemn wrong or justify right, for personal reasons ?

Solomon's words in verse 36, show a most submissive plea, "Hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sins of thy servants . . . that thou teach them the good way wherein they should walk . . ." Surely as our sinful nature is recognised, and there is failure to walk in the way of righteousness, such a plea will ascend from the house of God. The Almighty is most merciful to those who seek Him from the heart, and He will indeed teach such to walk in the way of righteousness. What, brethren and sisters, is our response to this teaching ? Are we as teachable as He would have us to be, knowing it is for our good ? Or is there sometimes rebellion because the correction brings pain ? Is not this teaching part of the process of "making ready" to become lively stones ?

Can we, then, enter into the spirit of this prayer ? Solomon was filled with wonder at God's glory in the house. Must we not strive to bring our hearts even closer to the Creator, to the wonder of His great mercy and condescension in that direction ? Each brother or sister moved by such a desire is also knit together more intimately in the unity of mind and heart with each other, a condition which can be known only in the House of God.

The response of the Almighty at the time of Solomon's prayer is uplifting.

"I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication that thou hast made before me : I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there forever ; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually."

(I Kings 9 : 3)

Can we, with all this in our minds, echo with greater yearning and understanding David's words in the song of ascent : "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem . . . Peace be within thy walls . . . For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek thy good."

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Christendom — and others — Astray (3)

Last month, consideration was given to much scriptural evidence showing the wonderful fact that Abel understood and believed the same Gospel as Christ taught. The evidence was by no means fully examined. It was seen how much of the Gospel message was understood in Abel's continual offering of the "firstlings" of his flock; that in these were seen the "Firstborn from the dead," and the promise of salvation through His death and resurrection. In addition it was noted that Abel also offered "the fat thereof"; a phrase which would be entirely without meaning unless we could go to other parts of the Word and see what was signified by the "fat" in connection with the offerings made to God.

The Gospel meaning in the words: "And the fat thereof"

In these few apparently insignificant words, how much is revealed of Abel's faith in the Firstborn, the Messiah? Apart from what is recorded in other parts of the Word we could not know this. Reminding ourselves again that the principles of God's truth never vary, we can go to any part of the Word, and there discover His Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, to help us discern what is meant by the offering of the 'fat.'

The 'fat' in association with the inwards of the Peace offering and Sin offering was required to be burnt upon the Altar.

"And the priest shall burn it upon the altar.

It is the food of the offering made by fire for a sweet savour: all the fat in the Lord's.

It shall be a perpetual statute for your generations throughout all your dwellings, that ye eat neither fat nor blood."

(Lev. 3 vv. 16-17).

Here are some remarkable facts about the 'fat' in connection with the Peace Offering, which is also mentioned in connection with the Sin Offering.

All the offerings have their first significance in Christ. Such represent some aspect of His life and death in the taking away of sin and becoming 'our peace.' A careful reading of the Law will show that the 'fat' was associated with the 'inwards' which were to be burnt upon the altar. In the case of the Peace offering, the flesh was eaten, and that of the Sin offering burnt outside the camp. Whilst not going into the meaning of these Offerings fully it will be seen that whilst the flesh was consumed, the 'inwards' were accepted by God on the altar. The flesh of Christ was crucified. In a figure it was consumed, whilst His 'inward' man was accepted by God as the 'food' of His offering. The 'fat' was to represent this 'food' to Israel; the 'inward' man or resurrected body of the Messiah which would be accepted by God when His flesh was destroyed

'without the gate.' Israel was reminded in this way of His Body, as the blood also reminded them of His life. Neither were to be eaten for they belonged to God who would provide both in the One whom He would raise up.

Their being forbidden to eat of these symbols, the "fat" representing the Body, and the "blood" the "life" was to show them that these were only shadows of the One who was to come. These symbols over the four thousand years in which they were used were not to be regarded as an end in themselves, but rather were they to point forward to the One, who would make an offering for sin once and for all. Then all the offerings with the blood of bulls and goats, and the offerings with the fat would cease. Lest it should be thought that these sacrifices could "make the comers thereunto perfect" they were forbidden to eat those parts which signified His body and His blood. How easily might the symbols, the shadow, over succeeding generations have been mistaken for the substance. It was needful that all from the time of Abel should realise that the "blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin"; that they pointed forward to the Redeemer who would come; and who would then give symbols of His body and His life, which His brethren could eat and drink.

Abel must have been informed about these vital truths pointing to his redeemer, the Firstborn, the Messiah or Christ. It is marvellous that in such a brief reference to the offering including the 'fat' so much can be gleaned of Abel's faith in the Saviour. How he, too, would see the imperative need of being associated with these offerings in crucifying the flesh, and striving by renewing of the inward man day by day to make himself acceptable to God.

Certainly, the brief details given concerning Abel's offerings show that he understood and believed all the Gospel concerning redemption in Christ. But did he know about the Kingdom, the redemption of the world?

Abel would know of the promise given by God to his parents and would also understand the meaning of the promise. The words of the promise are few and need careful examination to show their expansive meaning. They are contained in what was spoken by God to the serpent after the transfiguration of Adam and Eve.

"I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel."

(Genesis 3 v. 15.)

What was it which God placed between the serpent and the woman, and also between the "seed of the serpent" and "the seed of the woman"? Etymology helps little for the meaning of the

word "Enmity" is simply "hatred". It does not seem reasonable to suggest God would place hatred between any of His creatures. Such an arbitrary act is alien to the divine character. For God to cause two classes of people—the "seed of the woman" and the "seed of the serpent"—to hate each other by some divine decree is a thought which cannot be entertained for one moment. Where etymology fails, the Word succeeds in supplying the necessary understanding. The Apostle Paul shows clearly what is meant by the "Enmity":

"For he is our peace . . .
Having abolished in his flesh the enmity even the law of
commandments contained in ordinances . . ."

(Ephesians 2 vv. 14-15).

This is a simple definition, easily understood. The "enmity" is the law of God as demonstrated in the ordinances. What did these ordinances or decrees of the law of God show from the beginning?

That sin merited death as seen in the slaying of the offerings, and since all sinned, all deserved to die. This basis of divine law, Christendom has certainly lost, and it would appear that "others" who had the Truth at one time no longer fully appreciate it. So glaringly true is this solemn fact, the Psalmist likens the whole of mankind as being carried away by a flood to destruction.

"Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and in the evening it is cut down and withereth.

For we are consumed by thine anger . . . For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told.

The days of our years are three score years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be four score years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it soon cut off, and we fly away."

(Psalm 90 vv. 5-10).

Indeed such an appreciation of how God regards sin, and by His law imposes death for sin, as seen in the ordinances, makes us all as sinners realise, that this law condemns us to death, and is an enemy to us. The Apostle Paul speaks of the matter in the same way:

"For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.

For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me."

(Romans 7 vv. 10-11).

These words express the heartfelt feelings of all coming to a knowledge of the Gospel. Ideas of an after-life may have been entertained ; but on coming to God the stunning fact is discovered that we are “dead” because of sin. It takes the mind some considerable time to adjust itself ; to realise that the law of God is right in requiring our death because of sin. With the Apostle we discover to our dismay that the “commandment which was ordained to life” we “found to be unto death.” True the Law foreshadowed a Redeemer who would bring life ; but its ordinances spoke of death for sin. As long as that Law remained all were condemned to die. The Law was indeed the “Enmity” condemning all, and requiring the death of all.

Now the Words of the Promise in Eden can be understood as it is realised that it was this Law, of the “Enmity”, which was placed between the serpent, and the woman, and later between their two “seeds.”

The serpent had denied this law that sin would bring death. Eve now knew how false was the serpent’s teaching ; and how dreadfully true were the words of God. The present consequences of her sin, and her husband’s sin spoke only of one thing—of death. Now she must uphold that Law which would separate her from the serpent. She knew in herself God’s Law was true. She knew the serpent’s teaching was basely seductive and false. In view of the frightening consequences of sin caused by the serpent’s subtlety, a barrier would now exist between the woman and the serpent, which could scarcely be expressed in words. The basis of that barrier was the Law, the “Enmity” which spoke of death because of sin, rejected by the serpent at such great cost to the woman and her husband. She would, however, see in the loss to the serpent of its stateliness, and being reduced to grovelling in the dust, a further token of divine judgment. Her true understanding of God’s Law and in consequence her new-found opposition to the serpent, would be helped by her natural revulsion to the serpent, now a loathsome crawling creature. Truly the Law of God, the “Enmity” had been placed by God between the serpent and the woman.

The “Enmity” between the Two “Seeds”

The Word of God shows that from God’s point of view there are only two classes upon the earth—the “seed of the woman” and the “seed of the serpent” ; and that between these two classes, God has placed the same barrier, the Law or “Enmity”. Again it is not an artificial hatred God has placed between these two opposing groups. Those who are the “seed of the woman” belong to the One born of woman—the Son of God. These acknowledge the justice of God’s Law requiring death because of sin. The “seed of the serpent” deny this. They believe they have a ‘right’ to the

present life and also an absolute 'right' to a future life. Even if they profess they are "miserable sinners" and say "there is no health in us", they resent any idea they merit death. So they are opposed to God like the serpent in the beginning. Hence they are "the seed of the serpent."

Between these two groups there has been mercifully placed by God—His Law or "Enmity". If this had not been the case the "seed of the woman" would soon have become part of the "seed of the serpent". Separation of the two by the Law or "Enmity" was vital to the preservation of the Truth. The "seed of the woman", whether it be Christ first, or those belonging to Him, have always acknowledged the justice of God's condemnation of all to death. The "seed of the serpent" will have none of this. Christendom rejects the idea of death as a correct punishment as monstrous. In so doing Christendom identifies its millions with the "seed of the serpent". "Others" who once had the Truth have lost the profound conviction that Christ, as the "seed of the woman" deserved to die, and that in consequence all are worthy of death.

There does arise a hostility between those who are the "seed of the woman" and those who are the "seed of the serpent". The serpent seed feel condemned as those belonging to the woman's seed endeavour to uphold the Law ; especially as when the woman's seed separate from the serpent's seed, refusing to have fellowship with them. The ways of the two seeds are so vastly different there cannot be any bond between them ; any basis for social intercourse or pleasure. The way of the woman's seed is "toward" the Law of God : the way of the serpent's seed is "untoward", away from that Law. The division between the two seeds, caused by the "Enmity" or the Law is complete, as stated in the Proverbs :

"An unjust man is an abomination to the just—and he that is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked."

(Proverbs 29 v. 27).

The Gospel in the Promise given in Eden

With a clear understanding of the "Enmity" it will now be possible to examine the Promise given in Eden which would be understood by Adam and Eve, and in which Abel would rejoice. The brevity of this Promise has already been noted in the words spoken by God to the serpent :

"I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed ; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

(Genesis 3 v. 15).

The glorious theme of the Gospel is contained in the last eleven words !

The "seed of the woman" was promised who would remedy the evil brought about by the serpent. This seed would "bruise" crush, or destroy the serpent in the head.

Throughout the Scriptures, Christ is spoken of as the promised "seed". In a particular sense he was the "seed of the woman," born of a virgin, and having God as His Father. It would be impossible to know all that is contained in the few cryptic words that he would "bruise the serpent in the head," unless help were possible from other parts of the divine record. The fact that this help is available to us that we might understand these words is proof that in the beginning God would be no less helpful to those who were His.

Christ was of our nature, the serpent nature, in which all the promptings of the serpent were experienced. Unlike any other man, Christ never gave way to the serpent impulses. He was without sin. Those who say He never experienced such temptations; that His flesh was 'clean', reduce the great overcoming by Christ to a theatrical act. Yea, something rather worse; for if He said He overcame, when there was nothing to overcome He would be an imposter.

How did He overcome? By "bruising the serpent in the head." Let us go with Him into the wilderness. There He experienced sore temptations from His serpent-nature.

Forty days without food made Him desperately hungry. The power He had could change the stones into bread! This Holy power, however, must not be used merely to satisfy fleshly desires. What a temptation! As hunger gripped Him, how His mind would long to do that which was forbidden. Could the pressing thought be crushed? Could the serpent-idea now so strongly in His mind, His head, be "bruised"? The only power which could do this was the Word. Jesus sought its help and gave the serpent an overwhelming blow in the head, when He said:

"It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God."

(Luke 4 v. 4)

His other temptations in the wilderness, and those throughout His life, were dealt with in the same way.

Finally, as the end of His work is reached, He found that the serpent-nature had lost none of its power. When He would do good, evil was present with Him. The final act in dealing with this law in His members, this serpent power was to kill it. We know it was His Father's will that He should do this. Naturally, He shrank from the ordeal, but submitted with the words, "Not my will but thine be done." By His death upon the cross, he dealt the serpent a final and crushing blow in the head; for on the third day

He was raised and His nature changed to His Father's divine nature, in which sin and death had no more dominion over Him.

Christendom have long been astray from this vital teaching of the Gospel, that Christ's glorious work in destroying the serpent in Himself provided the way of saving others. Some Christadelphians have joined Christendom by their denial of His work in overcoming a sin-stricken, a serpent-stricken nature. Most Christadelphians fail to understand in what way it was right that Christ Himself should be condemned to death. Usually they say like Christendom it was that He might be a "sacrifice for us." But God would not do something unjust for the benefit of others. His condemnation of His Son to death must have been just, otherwise God is made to be the worker of evil that good might come. This difficulty, an insuperable one to most Christadelphians especially of the more lax sects, will be discussed later when the death of Christ is examined more particularly, especially with regard to the aspect that in His death He was condemned, for as the Apostle Paul says :

"Cursed (condemned) is every one that hangeth on a tree."
(Galatians 3 v. 13).

The work of Christ as the "seed of the woman" bruising the serpent in the head, dealing a crushing blow to its power within Himself must have been understood by Adam and Eve and their children ; for God would never give any promise which was not understood. His angels or messengers would make clear to early believers all the meaning of the Promise in Eden, in the same way as the whole of the Word of God does for us today.

"And thou shall bruise his heel."

The "seed of the serpent" was to be responsible for the "bruising in the heel" of the "seed of the woman", the Christ.

The "heel" is used many times in the Scriptures as a symbol of the flesh. Speaking of Judas, Christ says in the Psalms :

"Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me."

Judas betrayed Christ. His heel, his flesh was so opposed to Him that Judas betrayed Christ to death. When Christ Himself, as the "seed of the woman" was "bruised in the heel" His flesh was crushed. He was killed on the cross. The Promise in Eden makes it clear that although this was required to fulfil the work of redemption, those directly responsible were the "seed of the serpent."

In His searching words of condemnation Christ showed that those who opposed Him and finally killed Him were in truth the "seed of the serpent." He denounced the scribes and Pharisees in these words :

"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"

(Matthew 23 v. 33).

All those who belong to the "seed of the serpent" are opposed to Christ. Christendom although professing to serve Christ denies Him in most of the things they do and teach. Any who depart from the One Gospel join the serpent brood. The time is at hand when divine retribution will come upon all who say "Lord, Lord," but do not the things commanded by Him. The fate which overtook the "seed of the serpent" who were responsible for Christ's death should be a warning to all who tamper with divine requirements set forth in the One Gospel. As the Apostle Paul says such will be "accursed."

The world-wide "bruising of the serpent in the head"

In the words of the Promise it is clear the serpent power is to be completely destroyed. This was to be accomplished by One—the "seed of the woman," who would, as we have seen, first do this in Himself. Could there be One more fitting, or better equipped to remove the serpent power in all the earth, than the One who first learned to control Himself by subduing all serpent promptings? Having "learned obedience by the things which He suffered," He became like His Father, longsuffering, patient, kind; and yet resolute in justice so that He would not wince at the destruction of the wicked. It will be remembered He said :

"Those mine enemies that would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither and slay them before me."

(Luke 19 v. 27).

It is with the compassionate but righteous exercise of the power given to Him by His Father, that He is to return to "bruise the serpent in the head" in all the earth. Those who rebel against His "everlasting gospel" will be destroyed. That many will do so is seen from the fact that in that day "the slain of the Lord shall be from one end of the earth to the other." These drastic measures have only one object in view. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. The "bruising of the serpent in the head" in all the world is that the gospel of the Kingdom of God might be fulfilled. When the wicked have been removed the "meek shall inherit the earth." Then "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." The reign of serpent power nationally

and internationally will have ended. In consequence the Kingdom of God will be established, and there shall be “abundance of peace, so long as the moon endureth.”

From the precious promise given by God in Eden, Abel would like Abraham rejoice to see this day of Christ, and indeed would see and be glad.

Abel, then, understood the means of salvation in Christ through Him becoming the “Firstborn from the dead.” He would know the Edenic promise foretelling how the disastrous effects of the serpent teaching were to be removed in all the earth. His belief can be summed up in the glorious word—the “Gospel”—the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God, which include in their full meaning the salvation of the faithful and the redemption of the whole world from the power of sin.

(. . . to be continued)

DAVID — “a man after God’s own heart”

Few brethren of Christ have earned such a tribute of the Spirit as was given to David. To the Gentile mind this is a puzzle for he sinned more than once in a grievous way. Often the finger of scorn is pointed at David, especially by the agnostic, who seems to see in David an example of great evil rather than good ; and since he is held up by the Scriptures as a godly man proof seems to be sufficient that the Scriptures are unreliable if not false.

Wherein lies the merit of David ? If he is described as having a heart like God Himself then there certainly must be considerable merit in this brother, although he sinned greatly.

“Satan . . . provoked David to number Israel”

(I Chronicles 21 v. 1).

These words present a difficulty. Who was the “Satan” at the time who succeeded in tempting David to do a great wrong ?

It is well known that the word “Satan” is a Hebrew word meaning ‘adversary’ or ‘opponent’. It can be used to described an ‘adversary’ to that which is evil (Numbers 22 v. 22), or as is more frequently the case an ‘adversary’ to that which is good.

From the corresponding record in Samuel it is evident that there had been a decline in faith in the nation of Israel ; so much so that :

“The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go number, Israel and Judah.”

(2 Samuel 24 v. 1).

From a superficial reading of this verse it would appear that not only was the Lord angry with Israel, but that it was He who in consequence provoked David to number Israel. God would never provoke any to sin. Neither would He blame one who sinned unless he, himself, were responsible. Who was the "He" who moved David to number Israel? Without going into the grammar of the original which would allow of a more acceptable translation, the Truth will not permit the thoughts that God was the One provoking David to sin. Here is a case where the doubtful rules of grammar must be settled in favour of the requirements of the Truth, by the Spirit of Truth. Comparison with the record in Chronicles settles this beyond question. The "He" who provoked David is there seen to be the 'Satan' or 'adversary'. This is so clear that certain Bibles have a marginal note that the "He" in 2 Samuel 24 v. 1 should be "Satan".

"The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel"

God would not be angry with Israel without a cause. Here it will be noted that God was angry with the nation and not only with David. The reason is not stated immediately, but from what transpired it is easy to deduce.

The numbering of Israel obviously took place against the will of God for Joab remonstrated against the King, saying :

"Why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel?"

(I Chronicles 21 v. 3).

The record clearly says there was an 'adversary'—a 'Satan' urging David to number Israel, to find out the strength of Israel as it appeared by the greatness of her armies.

When later the visitation of God came because of the trespass, a plague of pestilence lasting three days, God would not cause the innocent to perish along with the guilty. The Lord of all the earth will always do right. Seventy thousand perished! Then 70,000 must have been guilty in drawing away from a complete trust in God to deliver by "many or few", and became like the nations who trusted in an arm of flesh. This was why the "numbering" was such a serious sin.

These 70,000 must have been of considerable influence in determining the policy of the nation. Maybe among them were some princes and 'men of renown'. Be that as it may, they must have exerted considerable pressure upon David to number Israel. They were a "Satan" to him, an "adversary" who sorely provoked him to do that which was wrong; and David through weakness yielded to their sinful demands.

“I have sinned greatly”

(I Chronicles 21 v. 8).

As soon as David became aware that God was displeased, he confessed his sin—without any reservations or attempt to blame others in mitigation of his offence. David clothed himself in sack-cloth. The elders of Israel did likewise, doubtless inspired by David’s contrition. This expressed sincerely how David felt—thoroughly ashamed before God. He was not afraid to acknowledge this before the elders and the people. The plea of David to God at this time is magnanimous in its confession of wrong and desire to accept full responsibility for it :

“And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered ? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed ; but as for these sheep, what have they done ? let thine hand, I pray thee, O Lord my God, be on me, and on my father’s house ; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued.”

(I Chronicles 21 v. 17).

David made no excuse for his sin neither did he try to minimise it. Rather was he willing to accept the whole of the blame and the evil consequences which had fallen so seriously upon his brethren. He made no appeal at the time, saying that his heart was right and he only meant to do good for Israel. David’s heart was right, as the heart of every brother must be who has the Spirit of Truth. This does not prevent, however, a fall, a sin, with the grievous consequences which follow. David all through his probation was “a man after God’s own heart.” He had a godly heart, but through weakness he fell, and suffered the hardship of the transgressor.

If a brother’s heart becomes hard or evil then that will determine his character, and his position sooner or later will be revealed as hopeless. A brother accused of wrong should not in his defence appeal to his accusers to examine all that was in his heart at the time of the alleged transgression. None can surpass the quality of David’s heart—a heart like unto that of the Almighty’s. Yet through weakness he sinned, but this was not really a revelation of his heart ; but rather an expression of his flesh.

If then a brother would rise to the nobility of David, he will have his heart in the Truth, in God ; and should he fall through weakness, then like David he will acknowledge it freely and without any attempt to pass some of the blame on to others. It was this readiness on the part of David to acknowledge his sin in a fulsome way that contributed to his greatness as a brother of Christ, and earned for him the description of being “a man after God’s own heart.”

“ The Signs of His Coming and of the end of the world ”

1958

The Gentile calendar begins another year. The year 1957 with all the happiness people wished for each other has passed ; but it has yielded little real happiness. On the contrary, fear has mounted the world over as the hostility has grown between the two armed camps into which the present world is divided. There can be no era of peace until He comes who is the Prince of Peace. Meanwhile, looking back over the past year the Signs of His coming have become more pointed, beckoning the watchful mind that His advent is near.

Israel remains in spite of all threats by the Arab nations.

From this land the Signs can be viewed as the prophets and the Lord Jesus saw them.

To the north is the latter-day Assyrian. During the past year much grown in stature and power. Her achievements in the dreadful threat of Inter-Continental missiles is clear for all the world to see by the launching of two satellites. The King of the North has taken his station and is becoming equipped to over-run the land. In furtherance of this requirement, Russia has successfully wooed Syria, thus isolating Turkey and giving herself a jumping-off ground immediately to the North of Israel.

This has made the Western world fearful, and compelled them to take feverish steps to consolidate their alliance. America as the dominant power, along with Britain, have been forced to take their place south of the land. Oil, and Middle East defence have been the natural reasons. God's requirements are the over-riding reasons. Thus, the King of the South has become entrenched in his allotted station. The attempts of the President of America to gain the support of the King of Saudi Arabia and other Arab States including Egypt are all powerful signs of getting ready for the finale to Gentile times.

This is the general picture of 1957 in retrospect. During the year it has been intensified in its significance by troubles in many parts of the earth, both in the international field as well as in the nations themselves.

A new year is of little significance in the divine Calendar. Indeed this calendar does not commence with January. The great fact to remember is that the “set time” for His coming has been determined by God ; and at that time He will come and will not tarry. Conditions in the world show that this cannot be long delayed.

Shall we be ready ?