

Faithbuilders Fellowship

Proclaiming Christ's Parousia
and the coming Millennial Kingdom
March 2006

The Firstborn of Every Creature

"Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Colossians 1:15-17).

This is the testimony of the Apostle Paul respecting our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Before the life of Jesus was transferred to the womb of Mary by our Heavenly Father, Jesus had existed for long ages. He was the first of God's creation from the beginning. Thus he was "the firstborn of every creature." Having this priority in being, it pleased God to use him as a master workman assisting God in the creation of all that followed.

The English translation of this passage in the common version says the remainder of creation was brought about "by him," that is, by Jesus. "For by him were all things created ... all things were created by him ... by him all things consist."

The Greek word rendered "by" in these three cases is *en, dia, en*, respectively. *En* is usually translated "in," *dia* is usually translated "through," and these renderings would better express the thought of the apostle. God was the creator of all things, but He worked "in" or "through" Jesus to accomplish His purposes. In other words, Jesus was a master craftsman at the side of his Heavenly Father, to accomplish whatever God directed Jesus to do.

God the Creator

That God is the Creator is testified many times in Scripture. The Bible opens with these familiar words, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). That first chapter continues, "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light ... And God made the firmament ... and God created great whales and every living creature that moveth ... And God made the beast of the earth ... [and] God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and fe-

male created he them." And the second chapter of Genesis, verse two, records "...And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made." And verse four concludes, "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that Jehovah God made the earth and the heavens."

The New Testament bears the same testimony that God is the Creator. "God ... created all things" (Ephesians 3:9).* "Meats, which God hath created" (1 Timothy 4:3). In Revelation 4:11 God is extolled, "Thou art worthy ... for thou hast created all things." In Revelation 10:6 an angel swears to God "who created heaven ... and the earth ... and the sea ... and the things which are therein." Mark 13:19 speaks of "the creation which God created."

Thus it is important to recognize that the role of Jesus in the creation was an assistant, helper, or workman on behalf of God. God is the architect, planner, director, while Jesus performed the work appointed him by God. Even today we use a similar distinction respecting architecture and building. The "builder" is usually considered to be the contractor, who hires various craftsmen to actually construct the structure he is developing. But the carpenter or brick layer is also a "builder" on a lower level.

1 Corinthians 8:6 expresses the distinction nicely. "To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things ... and one Lord Jesus Christ, **through** whom are all things." We used the word "through" here because the Greek word is *dia*, rendered "through" in most modern translations (Marshall's Interlinear, Kingdom Interlinear, NIV, NASB, Rotherham, Revised English Bible).

Proverbs Chapter Eight

A lovely passage of Scripture which since the earliest days of the Church has been applied to our Lord Jesus in his pre-human existence, is contained in Proverbs chapter eight. It is a description of wisdom, introduced in the opening chapter of this book, in verse 20. "Wisdom cries aloud in the open air, and raises her voice in public places." Wisdom is calling for the humble and meek who

will attend to heavenly wisdom. Wisdom's instruction and virtues are recorded chapter by chapter, through the ninth chapter.

The reader will find much benefit and interest in reading those nine chapters, recognizing in them that wisdom calls out through God's son, Jesus. Even during the days of his life on earth, Jesus was noted for his remarkable wisdom, as in Mark 6:2 and Luke 11:31.

More to the point is Paul's connection of Jesus to wisdom, as though to say Jesus was the personification of wisdom, to show unto men the wisdom of God. "Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24). "Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom ..." (1 Corinthians 1:30).

If we read Proverbs chapter eight with this thought in mind, that Jesus is the embodiment of the wisdom of God, the text tells us much about our Lord as he was with God before coming to earth by being born a babe at Bethlehem. Here is the passage from the Revised English Bible, beginning at verse 22. (The word "LORD" in all capital letters in most Bibles represents the word "Jehovah," which we frequently substitute when citing texts.) The last two verses, verses 30 and 31, are from the NASB version.

"Jehovah created me the first of his works long ago, before all else that he made. I was formed in earliest times, at the beginning, before earth itself. I was born when there was as yet no ocean, when there were no springs brimming with water. Before the mountains were settled in their place, before the hills I was born, when as yet he had made neither land nor streams nor the mass of the earth's soil.

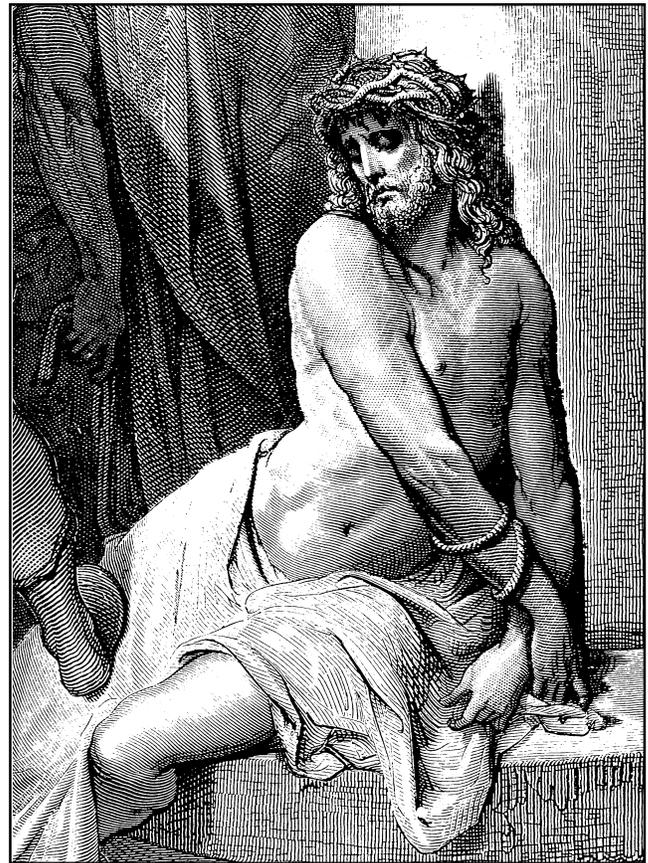
"When he set the heavens in place I was there, when he girdled the ocean with the horizon, when he fixed the canopy of clouds overhead and confined the springs of the deep, when he prescribed limits for the sea so that the waters do not transgress his command, when he made earth's foundations firm.

"Then I was beside Him, as a master workman; and I was daily His delight, Rejoicing always before Him, Rejoicing in the world, His earth, and having my delight in the sons of men."

Notice this poetic testimony about Jesus — he was created by God as "the first of his works," he was "born when as yet there was no ocean," he was beside God "as a master workman," rejoicing in the creation that he accomplished by God's side. How close this is to the description of Paul which heads this article.

The Beginning of the Creation of God

The aged apostle John was exiled to the isle of Patmos by the Emperor Domitian, according to several early Christian testimonies. It is there that John received his vision of Revelation and penned those prophecies for us. After chapter one, which is introductory to the book, John gives a series of messages to seven ecclesias in



Jesus, the "Firstborn of every Creature," who suffered for us

Asia Minor, which represent the one Church of God as it exists in seven time periods during the Gospel Age. The last message was to the Laodiceans, and is introduced in Revelation 3:14.

"And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God." John's statement is explicit, and accords with the testimony of Paul, and agrees with what we learned from Proverbs chapter eight. Jesus was the first one God created. "The beginning of the creation of God."

The text is clear and straight forward. Some Christians are disposed to doubt the text — including some who are translators. They look for a different rendering of this verse to avoid the evident meaning, and settle on the word "beginning." The Greek word is *archee*. The Apostle John used this word a total of 23 times in his writings, including the Gospel of John, the epistles of John, and Revelation. In every case it is rendered "beginning," and it is clear from the context that this is the meaning intended.

What John says here is consistent with what Paul says. Jesus was the beginning of God's creation, and as he was first, he was used by God to bring forth all the remainder. "All things came into being through him; and apart from him nothing came into being that has come into being" (John 1:3, 4, NASB).

In the Presence of God

In all the ages before Jesus came to earth, Jesus learned of God — the character, spirit and disposition of God. He grew to appreciate and reflect that same spirit.

In John 1:1, 2, John twice says that Jesus was “with God” at the beginning of creation, and in 1 John 1:2 says he was “with the Father.” The word “with” in all three cases is a translation of the Greek word *pros*. This is not the usual word for “with.” That would be *meta*, which is used in the New Testament more than 400 times.

Pros is also used widely in the New Testament, but is rarely rendered “with.” It implies more than simply being with. It implies direction — toward, to, unto — and suggests one looking to another. In this case Jesus was looking to God, learning from Him, becoming like Him in his character. The Revised English Bible says “The Word was in God’s presence” (John 1:1).

Jesus Chosen as our Redeemer

It was this one, the Son of God, who worked with God in his presence through all the wonders of creation, including the creation of mankind, that was the chief agent of God above all others. Though he was of spirit nature like the angels, he was chief above them of all God’s stewards.

This was the one whom God chose to send as our Redeemer. The choicest of all the heavenly sons of God would be honored with the mission. It would be a difficult mission. It would mean humility, suffering, a lifetime commitment of service for others, and it would end in a painful death.

Someone so noble as to accept and endure such difficulties would surely be highly honored, and God wished this honor to go to his beloved “only begotten son.” In giving this greatest treasure in sacrifice for the world, God would show His great love for mankind as He could show it in no other way. Suddenly, the experience of Abraham giving up his “only begotten son,” Isaac, takes on new meaning. It gives us a sense for the cost which it meant for God to give his son for us.

But at the same time, this would also afford His son Jesus to gain depths and riches to his character which only suffering can bring. “In the days of his flesh ... he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him ... though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8, 9).

That growth in character deepened with each painful circumstance which fastened his heart more firmly to the principles of God. “Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows” (Hebrews 1:9).

Since the resurrection of Jesus, and his ascension on high, “after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever,

sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool” (Hebrews 10:12, 13). Already many of the enemies of God have been pierced with the arrows of Truth, and converted to the fold of God. These have been called of God to join with Jesus in reigning over mankind during the Kingdom.

During the Millennium to follow, the whole world will come to know God, through His son Jesus. Then the arrows of Truth will pierce every heart, and draw them to Christ. Those who become obedient then may live forever, in a perfect society. The principles of God will be implanted in every heart. “They shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith Jehovah ... I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jeremiah 31:34).

Jesus Still Involved in Creation

From the time of Christ until the present, God is still drawing His people to follow Jesus and share his throne in the resurrection. This is a new kind of creation — making new creatures, with spiritual hopes, from those who will accept God’s gracious invitation. “If any man [or woman] be in Christ, he is a new creature” (2 Corinthians 5:17). “Put on the new man ... created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:10).

Thus Jesus, who was the “firstborn of every creature,” who served God as a master builder in the original creation, serves God even more gloriously in developing a new creation.

* The words “by Jesus Christ” are not in the original Greek manuscripts in this text, and so are omitted in most modern translations.

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The Fiery Furnace

“Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon” (Daniel 3:1).

Idolatry was pervasive in ancient times. Having established himself at the head of an empire, Nebuchadnezzar awed his subjects with an imposing image. The image was perhaps 3/4 the size of the statue of liberty in New York Harbor, but more costly, being “an image of gold” — evidently covered with a gold veneer which would be radiant in the daylight.

However, unlike the famous statue in New York Harbor which is a symbol of liberty for the human race, liberty acquired through the influence and respect of Christian principles, this image was explicitly intended as an object of pagan worship.

This would pose a problem of conscience for the three Hebrews who are the heroes of this chapter. As we will see, the experience also forms an illustration of the testing the Lord’s people have gone through in the few centuries since Reformation times.

The Plain of Dura

The Plain of Dura was the location, and we might envision an expansive plain far removed from the city — but such a location is unlikely. The ones commanded to worship at this image were the nobles of the empire. Both they and the king would be at Babylon, and the “Plain of Dura” should be nearby.

“Dur is the name for ‘wall,’ and the letter ‘a’ at the end of the word is the article ‘the’ in Aramaic. So translating this phrase directly, instead of leaving it as an unknown place name, indicates that Nebuchadnezzar set up his image on ‘the plain of the wall.’”¹ Two major walls surrounded Babylon, “an inner wall a mile long on each side ... Later Nebuchadnezzar added an outer wall several miles long that extended to the east bank of the Euphrates River and around the city. In Nebuchadnezzar’s time, Babylonian engineers and builders had not yet filled this area ... the open area served as a parade ground for the army ... this large open space between the two walls could properly be called the plain of the wall, or the plain of Dura”¹

The Golden Image

The dream of Nebuchadnezzar recorded in chapter two speaks of an image of four metals, which Daniel interpreted to mean four kingdoms. Babylon was the Head of Gold, and three more empires would follow before yielding to the Kingdom of Christ in the distant future. Possibly Nebuchadnezzar thought of this when making his image, but covered it only with gold as though to suggest, or hope, that his kingdom would endure.

The height was 60 cubits, the breadth 6 cubits. Both numbers are consistent with the sexagesimal number system used by the Babylonians — that is, a base 60 system. (Today a base 10 system is customary, but we still divide an hour into 60 minutes, and a circle into 6 x 60 degrees, from the Babylonian system.)

These figures yield a ratio of height to width of 10 to 1, which would be a very narrow image relative to the height. “Yet the ancients depicted their gods exactly this way. The figurines of Baal that come mainly from Syria and Palestine are good examples ... so for Nebuchadnezzar to make a statue with these proportions would not have been unusual.”¹

Probably the image was a representation of Marduk, the national god of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar’s son and successor was also named for this god. The common version rendering of his name is “Evilmerodach” (2 Kings 25:27), but the transliteration from the Babylonian is usually given as Amel-Marduk.

60 x 6

These dimensions, when summed, yield the number 66 as a representation of this image. Students of prophecy will at once remember the use of a similar number, 666, in Revelation 13:18, the number of the “Beast” — which represents Papacy — which for so many centuries persecuted the saints of God. “It was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them ... he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God ... power was given unto him to continue 42 months” (Revelation 13:7, 6, 5).

This period of 42 months appears also in Revelation 11:2 as the period of persecution of the saints. Using 30 days per month, 42 months yields 1260 days — the exact number reported in Revelation 11:3 and 12:6. Applying the prophetic measure of a day for a year, so often attested in scripture, produces a period of 1260 years during which Papacy ruled over God’s people. Bible Students identify this period with Papacy’s rule from Rome between 539 and 1799.²

The rise of Papacy is depicted in Revelation 13:1-3. The “deadly wound” of verse three was the wound applied to Rome when the Vandals sacked Rome in 476 AD. A century and a half earlier, Constantine had moved the seat of the empire eastward to his new city Constantinople in Thrace, on the shores of the Bosphorus, which today separates Turkey from mainland Europe. Thus Rome would have faded from the scene as a world power, had it not been for the resurgence of the city as the bastion of Papacy. Thus was the wound “healed ... and all the world wondered [marvelled] after the beast [Papacy]” (Revelation 13:3).

Generally a “beast” represents a government, as in the vision of Daniel 7, mentioned in our February issue. Papacy is here called a “beast” because, although it was a religious system, it exercised political power, so much so



The Three Hebrews in a Fiery Furnace

that it was the ultimate authority for conferring the right of kings to rule, during the days of their power.

But another such “beast” would rise again. This is prophesied in Revelation 13:11, “I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon.” This power may have seemed more benign — like a lamb — but it spoke as a mighty kingdom, symbolized by a dragon. This was the English Church, formed by King Henry VIII for personal and political reasons (rather than religious reasons). He became the nominal head of the Church. Thus he united the power of State and Church together, as Papacy had done.

This Church of England was introduced in stages from 1529 to 1534 at the advice of two new advisors to the throne, Thomas Cranmer and Thomas Cromwell, who were sympathetic to the ideas then recently circulated by Martin Luther of Germany, in resistance to Papacy.

The laity in the churches would not distinguish much of a change in the services, except for the use of the English Bible. “In 1539, Henry reaffirmed his commitment to Catholic practice by passing into law the Six Articles. These articles affirmed the transubstantiation of the Eucharist (that is, that the Eucharist was mystically transformed into the body and blood of Christ), confession, private masses, celibate vows, and the sanctity of the Eucharistic cup. The only substantive change Henry made merely involved the head of the church. The English church, however, would radically change under Henry’s successor, Edward VI” (ruled 1547-1553).³

The new Church of England would rule spiritually wherever the British Empire expanded, and its most expansive years lay ahead of it. Much of the world would fall under its control, at least nominally, and thus this

second great system was very much like the original Beast, Papacy — namely, a religious system mixed with political control.

There is more to say regarding Chapter 13 of Revelation — we will cover it sometime later. For now it is sufficient to note that following Papacy, whose number is 666, would come other systems of spiritual control to which the Lord’s people would be expected to submit if they would be recognized as Christians with full rights of interchange in the spiritual marketplace (see Revelation 13:16, 17).

If Papacy is represented by the number 666, may not this second system, which formed an “image” of spiritual worship, be represented by the lesser number, 66? May not the image on the Plain of Dura represent this further persecuting force, which arose in the footsteps of the Reformation? In this case, just as we saw in our last issue that Daniel chapter two pictures Papacy in the iron-clay mixture of the feet, so Daniel chapter three represents the secondary persecuting forces which arose after the Reformation, but still exercised a broad and powerful influence against the saints.

The Three Hebrews

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were in a difficult situation. Nebuchadnezzar expected all the nobles and rulers to bow to this image in worship (compare Revelation 13:15). In about the year 594 BC, 11 years after the deportation of Daniel and these Hebrews to Babylon, there had been a rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar in his own city, Babylon, which he put down with difficulty, and evidently with customary retribution.⁴ The episode in Daniel chapter three may have been in part to secure his officials with oaths of allegiance, as represented in their obeisance to the image.⁵

The command for this obeisance is recorded in verse 2. It included the “princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.” Since Daniel 2:49 immediately precedes this episode with the notice of the promotion of the three Hebrews “over the affairs of the province of Babylon,” they were specifically included.

Daniel himself is not mentioned, and was presumably away on business of state at the time. This would have left his Hebrew companions deprived of his intervention. It also means Daniel escaped this particular test, but there would come another time, a generation later, when he alone would be singled out as a target of his enemies,⁶ and would withstand the test as nobly as his three friends did here. The prophet Ezekiel probably had been deported to Babylon by this time also, but he and the mass of Jewish refugees who came with him were not in responsible posts of government, and thus were not included in the command to bow to the image.

Musical Instruments

At the auspicious moment, a herald declared that at the sound of various musical instruments, all in attendance must “fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up” (verse 4). The instruments are itemized — cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer. Of these six items, three have names which are drawn from the Greek language. “The Greek instruments in these verses are: the ‘harp’ (*qithros* from the Greek *kitharis*), the ‘psaltery’ (*pesanterin* from the Greek *psalterion*), and the ‘dulcimer’ (*sumponeyah* from the Greek *symphonia*).”⁷

This has led some critics to suppose these words evidence that the book was written during the Grecian Empire. However, these charges have been soundly answered. “The presence of Greek words has long been demonstrated by ‘an avalanche of evidence’ to have

Greek Language Influence In Instrument Names

NAME	ARAMAIC	GREEK
Harp	<i>qithros</i>	<i>kitharis</i>
Psaltery	<i>pesanterin</i>	<i>psalterion</i>
Dulcimer	<i>sumponeyah</i>	<i>symphonia</i>

entered into ‘the Semitic milieu long before the sixth century bc.’ ”⁷ Indeed, if the book was composed at the time charged by the critics, the presence of only three words of Grecian influence would be inexplicable, for after the conquests of Alexander the Great, Greek became the “lingua franca” of the ancient near east.

Much of the book of Daniel was written in Aramaic, which was the “lingua franca” of the ancient middle east during the time of the Babylonian empire. The Aramaic portions include all of the book from Daniel 2:4 onward, except for Daniel 7:28 and 8:1. The non Aramaic portions are in Hebrew, and the two languages are related. Studies of the Aramaic lead some researchers to affirm that the book could not postdate 300 BC, and that the Aramaic “appears to be of Eastern type.”⁸ These conclusions are consistent with Daniel’s authorship in the 6th century BC in Babylon.

The Threat

The command of the herald was complete with an announcement of the penalty for non-compliance. “Whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace” (verse 6).

Babylon was built with millions of burned bricks, and it is likely the furnace mentioned was used for the firing of large amounts of brick. Some describe these as large bee-hive shaped kilns with an opening at the top, and a side door for inserting and withdrawing the bricks. The three Hebrews would have been familiar with the furnace, and knew the king did not threaten in vain.

Naturally the crowd complied — except for the three Hebrews. Perhaps in so large a crowd they might have escaped the attention of the King. But “certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews” (verse 8). Probably the advancement of these foreigners, Jews, over the native Chaldeans, disposed them to jealousy and abetted their desire to mark the offenders. Indeed, this is the form and spirit of accusation. It is not a casual observation or remark, but a motivated, often public, and spirited attack launched on a pretext which appears suitable to sway minds and carry the hour. In this there is no trace of the godly qualities of love, kindness, or mercy.

When the charge was brought to the king, he was angry. Probably this was enhanced by knowing he had wonderfully advanced these very Hebrews, a favor which they seemed to despise by their refusal to obey. Yet at the same time there was something which probably passed for mercy, as Nebuchadnezzar considered it. Rather than condemn them immediately, he allowed them an other opportunity, perhaps out of his respect for the conscientious service they had rendered in the past.

The three Hebrews declined the opportunity without hesitation. They declared they were not anxious about the issue, but firm in their decision. If it pleased God to deliver them from punishment, they knew He could. But if He chose to let them suffer further for their faith, they would die for their conscience.

To Nebuchadnezzar this was an added insult, and that in full view of the gathered nobles of state. He was “full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego” (verse 19). They were consigned to the furnace, which was heated seven times hotter than usual. So urgent was the decree, and so hot the furnace, that the men who cast the Hebrews into the fire were themselves killed by the heat.

But as the king gazed through the opening, amazed, he saw not only three, but four persons walking in the flame, uninjured, “and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God” (verse 25). Clearly an angel of God was protecting them, and he had materialized a form calculated to deepen the impression upon the observers that a messenger from God was protecting the Hebrews.

They were called out of the fire. Not so much as a hair of their heads was singed, not even the smell of smoke lingered upon them. What would he do now? A man of more vile character might have remanded them to prison or some other punishment. But Nebuchadnezzar — even in the presence of so many nobles — instead decreed the Truth, implicitly recognizing that he had erred.

Do we as well? When Truth comes to us clearly, explicitly, from either experience or the Word of God, do we receive it with honesty? The Pharisees did not. The Herodians did not. The Sadducees did not. When Christ raised Lazarus from the dead, they conspired to rid themselves of the menace, and even of the evidence. “From that day forth they took counsel for to put [Jesus] to death ... [and] consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death, because that by reason of him many of the Jews ... believed on Jesus” (John 11:53, 12:10, 11).

Nebuchadnezzar was not a converted man. But he was an honest man. He commended the Hebrews for their stand, and decreed publicly that no one in his realm “speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego,” on peril of death, “because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort.” Notice — “no other God” — not even Marduk, whose image he had raised.

The King then put substance to his commendation, and “promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in the province of Babylon” (verse 30), evidently even higher than they had been at the end of chapter two. Surely, if these men of noble spirit stood for conscience at the peril of their lives, they would be trustworthy.

A Remarkable Experience

It was a remarkable experience. But remember, this was placed on record for our edification and emulation. We should exercise our conscience as these men exercised theirs — not mindful of earthly gain or prospects or even life, when conscience toward God is at issue.

Remember that this episode, refusing to bow before the image, is a type, or picture, or illustration, picked up in Revelation chapter 13, of the refusal of the saints of God to bow to sectarian worship which they see to be against the true worship of God. If we follow these precepts, we will have honor from the King of Heaven. Then we shall be promoted during the Millennium to reign with Christ over all the world (Revelation 20:6).

(1) *Daniel*, by William Shea, pages 70-72.

(2) See “Studies in the Scriptures,” Volume 3, *Thy Kingdom Come*, pages 68 to 82.

(3) www.wsu.edu/~dee/REFORM/ENGLAND.HTM

(4) “In the tenth year the king of Akkad [Babylon] was in his own land; from the month of Kislev to the month of Tebet there was rebellion in Akkad ... with arms he slew many of his own army.” (*Chronicles of Chaldean Kings*, Donald Wiseman, 1961).

(5) This interesting connection is from William Shea, in *Daniel*, referenced in footnote (1). *Daniel* does not give us the year of the image episode, so the connection is not sure, but it is feasible.

(6) The episode is recorded in chapter six, after the Persians had taken Babylon. *Daniel* was consigned to the den of lions.

(7) Evidences Relating to the Date of the Book of *Daniel*, David Conklin, 2004, www.tektonics.org/guest/danielblast.html.

(8) Same reference as note 7, but sections 24, 25.

The Value of a Tender Conscience

Exhortation from the Pen of Pastor Charles Russell.

Blemishes are the weakness and imperfections of the flesh. Spots are not those wrong-doings of which we are unconscious, but those which we seem to recognize as contrary to the will of God.

It is the duty of the new creature to detect the imperfections, errors and shortcomings of the flesh, and to go immediately to the throne of heavenly grace with them, to obtain mercy and forgiveness. Only those with tender consciences will keep their garments unspotted. The failure to do this seems to be the reason why many fail to make their “calling and election sure.” They are not particular about these little things; they are careless of opportunities, etc. Thus their robes become spotted and quite unfit for the marriage ceremony.

The Scriptures show us that this class will go through a time of great trouble, during which they will do what they failed to do at the proper time — “wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:14). By this process of purification, they will come up and will bear palm branches instead of wearing crowns of glory. Instead of being members of the temple class, they will be servants in the temple.

The robe of Christ’s righteousness, the figurative expression which means the imputation of the merit of Christ to those who are accepted as members of his body, is not only styled “the wedding garment” (Matthew 22:11-14), but is also beautifully pictured as the bridal robe (Psalms 45:13, 14). There we read that the bride will be brought before the great King in garments of needlework. Thus we get the thought that while this robe is provided for us when first we become members of the family of God and of the prospective bride of Christ, nevertheless, there is an individual work for each to accomplish.

This special work is represented as embroidery. The design we as Christians are to trace with painstaking zeal; for it requires great skill, close attention. This robe of Christ’s righteousness, which is represented as being ours in the sight of God, will continue to be ours throughout the everlasting future. It will no longer be ours by imputation, but by right of possession. By that time we shall have made our characters, by the grace and assistance of the Lord, copies of the character of God’s dear Son, our Redeemer. Then we shall no longer need the imputation of Christ’s merit to cover our blemishes; for the new body which we shall receive in the resurrection will be without spot or wrinkle — without blemish. It will be perfect.

(Extracted from the article “The Church’s Part in the Sin-Offering,” March 1, 1913, Reprint Page 5197)

Abraham to Exodus

Part II, continued from previous issue

In our last issue we noted that Galatians 3:17 seems clear that 430 years lapsed between the Abrahamic Covenant to the Law Covenant.

We also noted that this 430 year period divides into two equal periods, 215 years from the Abrahamic Covenant to the time Jacob and his family moved to Egypt, and 215 years more to the Exodus. These twin periods represent the Jewish and Gospel Ages, which in many respects are parallel to each other.

We also considered Exodus 12:40, 41, which speaks of this 430 year period and would have been the source for Paul's comment in Galatians 3:17.

We then considered the other view sometimes proposed about the 430 years, namely that these years were all spent in Egypt, rather than dating from the Covenant with Abraham when he entered Canaan at age 75 (Genesis 12:4-7). We observed that the genealogy from Levi to Moses would not allow so long a period in Egypt — Levi, Kohath, Amram, Moses — and even moreso on his mother's side, as Jochebed, mother of Moses, was a daughter of Levi. Here we pick up the thread of thought again.

Missing Generations?

There is no way around this problem, save one. If one supposes Israel was in Egypt for a lengthy period, on the order of 430 years, then one can only suppose that there are missing generations, not listed in scripture, between Levi and Moses. This is the answer given by some. Is it credible?

Consider the line Levi - Kohath - Amram - Moses. It is clear that Kohath was the actual son of Levi, since he came into Egypt with Levi (Genesis 46:11). It is also apparent from Exodus 6:20 that Amram was the actual father of Moses. So if there are missing generations, they could only be between Kohath and Amram. But this is rendered highly unlikely by the way Exodus 6:18 is expressed. It lists four sons of Kohath (Amram, Izhar, Hebron, Uzziel), which matches the list given in 1 Chronicles 6:18. Then the text in Exodus cites the years of Kohath's life, namely 133 years, which implies the sons just listed are his actual sons, born during his lifetime, rather than later tribal divisions of his descendants.

Similarly for Jochebed we have a specific and unique affirmation about her parentage. "And Amram took him Jochebed his father's sister to wife" (Exodus 6:20). "And the name of Amram's wife was Jochebed, the daughter of Levi, whom her mother bare to Levi in Egypt" (Numbers 26:59). Thus it seems clear, in the genealogy leading to Moses, both through his father and mother, that the record gives actual parentage. In this case, a long sojourn in Egypt is not possible.

But in this case, what is the meaning of Exodus 12:40? Apparently it counts the "sojourn of the children of Israel" as beginning with their forefather Abraham. This is similar to the approach of Hebrews 7:10, which says Levi, before he was born, paid tithes to Melchizedek, "for he was yet in the loins of his father [Abraham], when Melchizedek met him."

Genesis 15:13

Another relevant passage is Genesis 15:13-16. These texts refer to the Israelites serving another nation (Egypt), and verse 16 says "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again." This would be correctly fulfilled by the four generations listed above: Levi - Kohath - Amram - Moses.

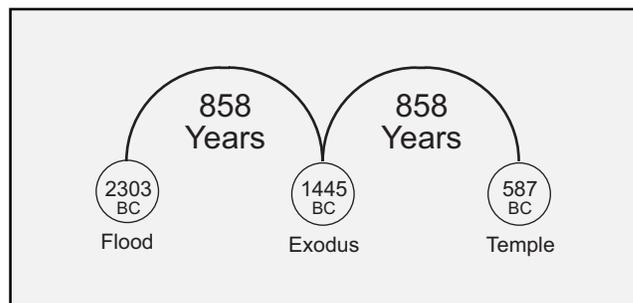
Verses 13 and 14 read: "And he [God] said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance."

This period of 400 years evidently began with the affliction of Isaac, the "seed" of Abraham. His affliction by Ishmael at the weaning of Isaac is noted both in the Old and New Testaments as a significant event. In the Old Testament this led to the casting out of Ishmael and his mother Hagar, and in the New Testament Paul says this affliction represented the affliction of Christians by Jewish leaders during his day. (See Genesis 21:8-10, Galatians 4:29).

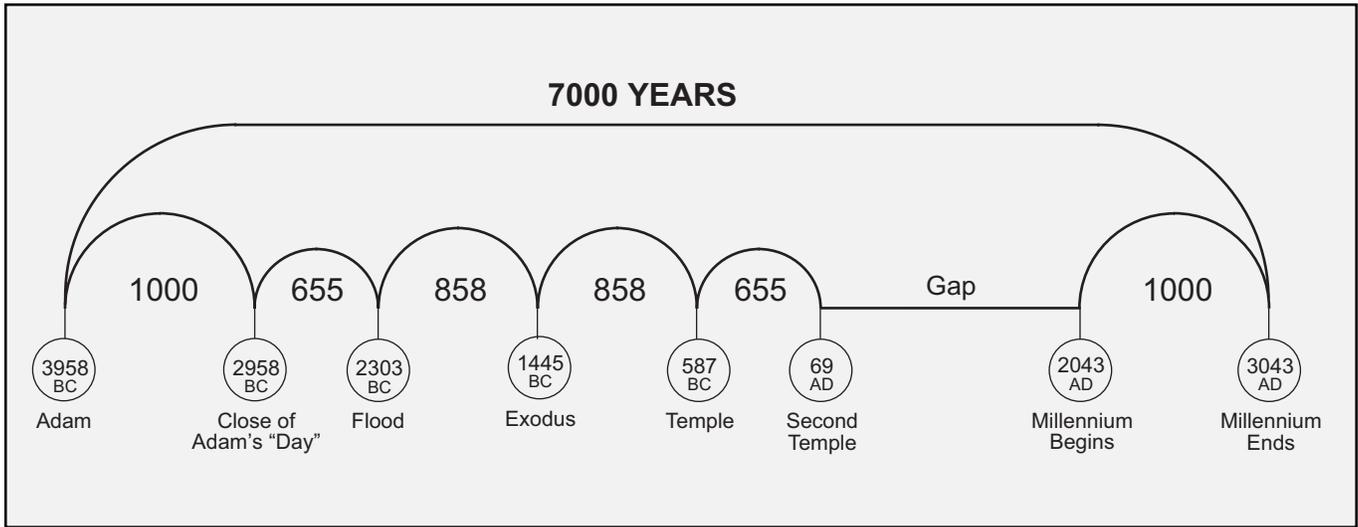
Isaac was born 25 years into the 430 year period. Thus at his birth, only 405 years remained until the Exodus. If he was weaned at the age of five — later than is customary today — then 400 years would remain. This would exactly match the 400 years of Genesis 15:13.*

Expanded Symmetry

In the January issue appeared the following diagram, showing that from the Flood to the Exodus was 858 years, and from the Exodus to the end of the nation of Judah was another period of 858 years.



We said we would augment this diagram backward and forward in an expanded symmetry, which we do in the diagram at the top of the next page.



The period of time from the end of Adam’s thousand year day of judgment, to the beginning of the flood, was 655 years. If we append the same length of time on the right side of the chart, we arrive at the date 69 AD. This was the end of Israel’s 40 years of probation, from our Lord’s baptism in 29 AD. The autumn of the year 69 AD began the Jewish Year in which the Romans took Jerusalem and burned their temple again — as Nebuchadnezzar had done 655 years earlier.

The symmetry of the chart speaks for itself — the same periods of time on each side of the Exodus. But there is more than a simple symmetry of time periods. The episodes touched at the ends of these periods have a common thread — each has a typical meaning about the end of 6000 years, at the threshold of the Millennium.

2958 BC — the end of Adam’s thousand year “day.” That period is a small picture of the entire 6000 years during which the Adamic curse operates upon the race which came from Adam, which closes at 2043 AD.

2303 BC — the beginning of the flood, which Jesus said was a picture of the judgments which would end this age and inaugurate the kingdom of Christ (Matthew 24:38, 39), which will commence in 2043 AD.

1445 BC — the Exodus date. At this time the midnight angel slew all the firstborn of Egypt, representing the seventh plague of Revelation 16, during which the powers of this world receive their final judgment. That “midnight” hour is fulfilled in 2043 AD.

587 BC — the first burning of the Temple at Jerusalem. This fulfilled the prophecies of Jeremiah and Isaiah about the Temple, which were fulfilled a second time in the Roman burning of the Temple. Both burnings are typical of the judgments against Christendom which climax in 2043 AD. (Isaiah 66:6, Jeremiah 7:4, 21:10).

69 AD, autumn — end of Israel’s 40 years of probation, followed by the burning of the Temple at Jerusalem. This judgment on Judaism fulfilled Jesus predictions of judgment in Matthew 24, which also apply to the judgments in our day, which come to a head about the year 2043 AD.

Thus the dates which are tied together by symmetry, are also connected topically. This kind of harmony is further evidence of intelligent design in the time periods between these various critical events in God’s unfolding Plan of the Ages.

But what of the obvious asymmetry in the chart — the gap in time between 69 AD and 2043 AD? More on this in a future issue.

*It is possible that the 400 years of Genesis 15:13 was intended as a round figure, which approximates the 405 years from the birth of Isaac until the Exodus. In either case, there is an engaging picture in these points. The 400 years, if multiplied by the prophetic year of Revelation, which is 360 days per year, yields the number 144,000. This is the figure Revelation gives as the number of overcomers who will constitute the “Bride” class for Christ.

Corrections

We always appreciate careful readers. Some inform us of typographical errors. This is useful, so that these can be corrected for future uses. In the January issue two errors of substance were reported by one reader.

On page 6, second column we cited a website source that “about 5,000 [New Testament] manuscripts have survived ... the oldest is dated around 350 AD.” Bro. James Parkinson, who has spent years studying New Testament manuscripts, clarifies:

“Our oldest manuscript is probably close to AD 125 at the latest (Thiede even claims one or two for about AD 65). I personally have had several leaves of the epistles of Paul from around AD 200. The number of straight New Testament manuscripts is currently about 3,400. The number 5,000 probably included lectionaries, which (as commentaries) I think should be excluded.”

On page 7, second column, we cited the reign of Julian the Apostate, successor of Constantine, as from 332-363 AD. He was born in 332, but reigned from 361-363 AD.

Alive and Remain

“The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Afterward, we which are alive and remain shall be caught up ...” (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

Most Bible Students believe that the Return of Christ, so long anticipated by the Christian world, has already occurred.

As explained in our last issue, in the article “The Gospel Age Harvest,” the harvest is the ending period¹ of the age (Matthew 13:39, NASB). We are in that harvest period today. The chief reaper in this Harvest is our Lord Jesus, who has returned to superintend this work from above. He is depicted as the chief reaper in the symbols of Revelation 14:14. “Behold, a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown [as the new king of Earth], and in his hand a sharp sickle ... and he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped” (verses 14, 15).

The chief work of the Harvest is to gather the saints to their heavenly home. In this process they are first separated from the tares, which means coming out of the Church systems of Christendom, to be nourished on Present Truth — the Divine Plan of the Ages. The Bible Student Movement has been teaching this and doing this for more than a century, since the days of Pastor Charles Russell.

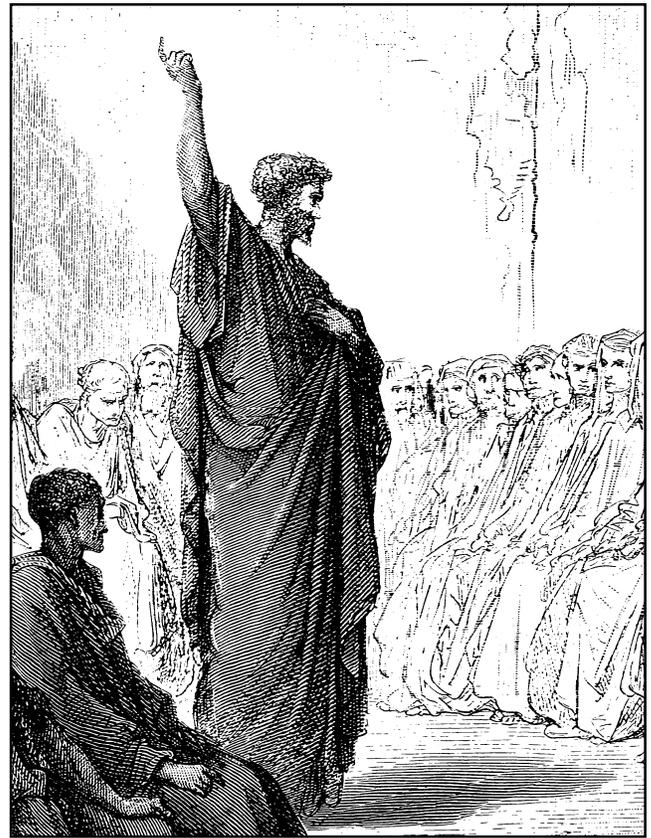
According to prophecy — Daniel 12:12 — the return of Christ was due in the year 1874. As we get deeper into our series on Daniel, we will explain the particulars, but we have already referred to them in issues past.

The Dead in Christ

But if Christ has returned to superintend the harvest work, then according to the text in Thessalonians at the head of this article, the “dead in Christ” have been raised to their reward. For that text clearly says that when Christ returns, “the dead in Christ shall rise first.” Bible Students often refer to this as the “raising of the sleeping saints,” because those saints “slept in death” for many years, waiting until Christ’s return for their resurrection.

For example, when the Apostle Paul was near the close of his life, he wrote to his beloved Timothy, “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me [for the future] a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day [the day of Christ’s return]: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Meantime, Paul, Peter, all the apostles, and all the consecrated² ones of past centuries, slept peacefully in



The Apostle Paul preaching to the Thessalonians

death, waiting ... waiting ... until, when our Lord returned, they were resurrected from the dead as glorious, spiritual, immortal beings, in blessed association with Christ, and even ushered into the presence of God in His heavenly home.

All of this proceeded without any visible evidence to mankind on earth, for as the angels and Jesus and God are all invisible spirit beings, so the Church, raised to glory, are invisible to the natural eye. The saints do not bring their old fleshly bodies into heaven. They do not pop up from the ground and fly to heaven. No, the bodies the saints are raised with are spirit bodies of a vastly superior kind and quality.

There are “terrestrial” bodies, that is earthly, human bodies. We have these now, and the world will continue to have them during the Millennium. When they are resurrected in the Kingdom, they will still have human bodies, as Lazarus had when he was raised to life after being dead for four days.

But there are also “celestial bodies,” spiritual bodies, heavenly bodies, of an entirely different order. These are for the saints in the resurrection. “It is sown a natural body: it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body ... as we have borne the image of the earthy [in this life], we shall also bear the image of the heavenly [in the resurrection] ... flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:40-50).

Thus the raising of the sleeping saints proceeded quietly, noiselessly, silently, as far as we are concerned, though with great triumph, rejoicing, and glory in the heavenly courts. What a blessed reunion when the apostles saw our Lord Jesus again! All the suffering, sacrifice, and heartaches of the past melted into divine joy, leaving only the deepened, ripened features of Christian character, so well fitted to their new spiritual bodies.

Alive and Remain

While the saints rejoice above, we who are “alive and remain” continue here below. But when we die our change will come immediately. We will be raised “in the twinkling of an eye.” No waiting time is necessary, because Christ has already returned. If we have been “faithful unto death” (Revelation 2:10), we are changed to spirit beings at the time we die.

Some suppose that we do not die, but merely are taken bodily into heaven. But the scriptures declare otherwise. We must die here, before we are resurrected there. The Apostle Paul makes this point very strongly in 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52, but the point is missed in the common rendering because of some confusion regarding the Greek text.

“Behold, I shew you a mystery: we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.” This is the common rendering. But the better manuscripts change the position of the word “not,” as follows. “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall all fall asleep, but we shall not all be changed, in a moment ...” (1 Corinthians 15:51, 52).³

This rendering also clarifies the word “sleep” as meaning “fall asleep,” which means to die. All of the Lord’s people will “fall asleep” in death. Stephen, the first Christian martyr after Christ, “kneeling down and ... fell asleep. And Saul was consenting unto his death” (Acts 7:60, 8:1).

But not all of them are “changed” in a moment — those who die after the Lord’s return *are* changed at the moment of death, but those who died through the age *waited* until the end of the age before being raised.

1 Corinthians 15:51, 52

Common Version — “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment ...”

Corrected Version — “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall **all fall asleep** [all of the consecrated will die], but we shall **not all be changed**, in a moment ...” (RVIC2000, using Sinaitic and Alexandrian manuscripts).

Yes, we all die. We do not float into heaven with our bodies. Those who died long ago waited in the sleep of death until the end of the age. When Christ returned they were “raised.” Those who die now, and are faithful, are “changed” — Paul’s word to describe the momentary resurrection into glory at the time of death.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

We return to the Thessalonians text. In these six verses, Paul is comforting the brethren about those who had already died. Naturally, the brethren grieved over them. But Paul did not want them to “sorrow ... as others which have no hope.”

He then explains in verse 14 something that we need to notice carefully. “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.” Who was it that raised Jesus from the dead? It was God, of course, his Heavenly Father. As Paul says in Hebrews 13:20, “God ... brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus.”

So, Paul says, if we know that God brought Jesus from the dead, we can be sure that the dead in Christ “God [will] bring with” Jesus. What does this mean, “bring with Jesus”? It does not mean they come with Jesus when he returns, for Jesus has to return first, before the saints are raised. “I will come again, and receive you unto myself” (John 14:3).

What it means is that as God brought Jesus from the dead (almost 2000 years ago), so God will bring the sleeping saints from the dead “with” Jesus. The word “with” in this case means they share the same experience with Jesus — namely being raised to spiritual life. But notice, it is not at the same time with Christ, but separated by more than 1800 years. For Jesus was raised in the year 33 ad, and the sleeping saints are raised after the Lord’s return in 1874.

Sun — “With”

The Greek word for “with” in this text is *sun*. Notice how it is used — “with” in the same experience, but not necessarily at the same time.

Here is another example of this word with the same meaning. “He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also *with* Jesus” (2 Corinthians 4:14). We put the word “with” in italics for emphasis. In some versions it is rendered “by,” drawing from a Greek word *dia*, which means by, or through. But the better Greek manuscripts have the word *sun* rather than *dia*.⁴ God raised up Jesus from the grave in 33 AD. He raises “us,” his elect Church, from the dead “with” Jesus — in the same experience — but at a much later time.

Colossians 2:13 is another example. “When you were dead in your transgressions ... He made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions.” The comparison is a little different — Paul compares the resurrection of Christ with our being “made

Sun, “With” — Same Experience, But Not at the Same Time

1 Thessalonians 4:14 — The dead in Christ are brought from the dead “with” Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:14 — We are raised from the dead “with” Christ.

Colossians 2:13 — We are enlivened together “with” Christ.

1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17 — The dead in Christ rise first, afterward those who remain are caught up “with” them.

alive” by our justification when we come into Christ. But the vital point is that “with” means a similar experience, but not the same time. Christ was enlivened in 33 AD at his resurrection. We all are enlivened in Christ when we individually accept him, consecrate our lives to him, and receive redemption through his blood.

The Reason for this Emphasis

The reason we emphasize this meaning of “with” (*sun*), is because of its use in the Thessalonians passage a little farther down. We will reach it soon. Now we resume our citation at 1 Thessalonians 4:15.

“For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain *into* the *presence* of the Lord shall not *precede* them which are asleep [in death].” We made three of these words italic, to point out to the reader the changes made in these three words. In the common version they are rendered “unto,” “coming,” and “prevent.” The change from “prevent” to “precede” is simply a clearer way of expressing the meaning. The first two are corrections of the translation.

For those first two words, the Greek words are *eis* and *parousia*. The first means “into,” the second means “presence.” The Kingdom Interlinear word for word (very literal) translation, says: “we the living ones, being left around into the presence of the Lord, not not [for emphasis] we should come ahead of the ones having slept.”

Notice — some are “alive and remain *into the presence*” of Christ. These will not precede the sleeping saints, but the reverse. “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise *first*” (verse 16).

We will not here take time for a detailed explanation of the various symbols — “shout, voice, trump.” We merely notice that Paul picks up these symbols from other scrip-

tures. For example, “shout” and “trumpet” may be drawn from Psalms 47:5, “God is gone up with a shout, Jehovah with the sound of a trumpet.” God does not speak to us verbally, nor play physical instruments. These were symbols used by the Psalmist about the majesty and drama of the occasion. The symbols Trumpet and Voice appear in Matthew 24:31, “And he shall send his angels with a trumpet, and a great voice” to gather the elect (rendering from the margin of the common version).

What we observe in particular is that the sleeping saints are raised before those who are “alive and remain.” This is natural enough, for the living ones need to complete their lives before their change comes.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 then says, “Afterward,⁵ we which are alive and remain shall be caught up *with* them.” It is here that we need to recall the meaning of the word “with” (*sun*). It means the same experience, but it does not mean the same time. The living saints are raised some time later, as each of them individually falls asleep in death.

Where are we “caught up” to? We are taken “into a meeting of the Lord, into” heaven. The word “into” is from the Greek *eis* in both cases. Then Paul adds, “so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (verses 17, 18).

Thus Paul concludes his comforting words to the brethren, encouraging them that in their sorrow, they recognize the glorious hope of reunion with the departed ones, after the return of Christ. But in leaving this blessed message of comfort, Paul also leaves us with clearer information about our very day. For we all are living “in the days of the Son of Man” (Luke 17:26).

(1) The word “end” is the Greek word *sunteleia*, which means a period of time in which events proceed to a culmination. The culmination is still ahead of us, but we are already in the ending period of the age.

(2) See the lead article in the February issue on “Consecration.”

(3) RVIC2000 version, being the Revised Version (American Edition), Improved and Corrected from manuscripts discovered and published to AD 1999. Available from James Parkinson, at the following email address: Jim77parkinson@juno.com. Both the Sinaitic and Alexandrian manuscripts are cited in support of this reading.

(4) Nearly all modern translations have “with,” as they use the better manuscripts.

(5) The common version uses the word “then.” In English, this word can have three different meanings — (a) at that time, (b) a logical then, “if this, then that,” (c) afterward. Fortunately the Greek language has three different words to express these meanings — *tote*, *ara*, *epeita*. The last of these is used in this text, *epeita*, afterward.

In the Next Issue ...

- *The Parousia of Christ*
- *Daniel, Chapter Four*
- *Exodus to Solomon*