

“The Light of the World”

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” —Matthew 5:16

DARKNESS is used in the Bible as a symbol of separation from God and of a lack of knowledge concerning him and his purposes toward mankind. “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all,” the Apostle John wrote. (I John 1:5) Those who know God as he reveals himself through his Word, and who are endeavoring to do his will, are scripturally represented as walking “in the light.” All others are said to be walking “in darkness.”—I John 1:6,7

This symbolic darkness settled down upon mankind as a result of sin, our first parents being the original sinners. They chose to disobey God’s law, and by so doing brought death upon themselves and upon all their progeny. Paul wrote, “As by one man’s disobedience many [that is, the whole human race] were made sinners.” (Rom. 5:19) This means that “darkness” has covered the earth since the days of Eden. Indeed, it is referred to by the Prophet David as a nighttime experience concerning which he wrote, “Weeping may endure for a night,” and then added the reassuring promise, “Joy cometh in the morning.”—Ps. 30:5

But during this long and dreary night, when, for the most part, the people have been without God and without hope, he has had his witnesses in the earth, who, either by God’s hand upon them, or by their own faithful testimony concerning him, have been as lights in a dark place. At no time have these witnesses convinced any considerable number of people of the truth pertaining to God, but they frequently have served as guides to those who have sought after God in an earnest endeavor to find and serve him.—Acts 17:27

Going back to the time of the Flood, we find that then Noah was a witness for Jehovah, the Creator. The Apostle Peter informs us that Noah was a “preacher of righteousness.” (II Pet. 2:5) He did not reform the world of his day, but he was a light in that world because he bore witness concerning God and the purpose of God in connection with the coming Flood. Noah’s stand for God and for righteousness was vindicated by the coming of the Deluge.

During all those centuries prior to the first advent of Jesus, God demonstrated his keeping power in the lives of his witnesses in a miraculous manner, and this tended to increase the effectiveness of their testimony. Through the Prophet Isaiah the Lord promised, “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper,” and this was literally true in connection with all his faithful witnesses during those ancient times.—Isa. 54:17

The enemies of Joseph sold him as a slave into Egypt, but through the wonderful Providences of God he became the ruler of Egypt and the savior of his people. How wonderfully this demonstrated the power and the glory of Joseph’s God! There is no record that Joseph ever preached a long sermon about God. His life Of faith, and the occasional “word in season” by which he made known his faith, were more eloquent than any discoursing he could have done, especially since God openly vindicated his faith and rewarded his faithfulness.

Later when a pharaoh came to power in Egypt “who knew not Joseph,” the Israelites, then living in the land and greatly increased in number, were made slaves. In the providence of the Lord, Moses was raised up to deliver them. The name and glory of God were at stake as Moses and Aaron appeared before the king to demand the release of the Israelites.

Moses himself was powerless to accomplish the Lord’s design for his people, but he stood loyally on the side of the Lord, and in the name of the Lord demanded deliverance for the Israelites. We know the result. Plague after plague fell upon the Egyptians, and finally the death of their firstborn. Then the king demanded

that the Hebrew children leave the country, which they did.

But Pharaoh changed his mind, and sent his army to recapture the Israelites. Again the Lord intervened, opening up a passageway through the Red Sea for his people, and allowing the waters to close in on Egypt's army as they tried to follow. Then was heard that majestic song of deliverance, "I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation."—Exodus 15:1,2

This brilliant testimony of God's ability to fight for and deliver his people did not impress the Israelites sufficiently to enable them to put their full trust in him to go forward and possess the Promised Land. They rejected the report of the two faithful spies, Caleb and Joshua, and voted against trying to drive the Canaanites out of the land. Because of this God allowed them to wander in the wilderness for forty years.

But even so, he miraculously cared for them. He provided manna from heaven, and water gushed out from a rock to refresh them. He provided them with a tabernacle as a center of worship. During all that time, as Moses reminded the Israelites, "Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years." (Deut. 8:4) Moses knew that it was the Lord who cared for his people during their wilderness journey, but he feared lest they forget, and reminded them that it was Jehovah "who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint."—Deut. 8:15

It was of course the Lord who did these things for Israel, and thus, through his dealings with them and despite their own lack of faith, they were being used as his witnesses. And this continued to be true as, under the leadership of Joshua, and by another miracle, he enabled them to cross over the River Jordan and possess the Promised Land.

Crumbling Walls

Immediately upon entering Canaan the Israelites were confronted with the fortified and walled city of Jericho. No progress could be made in possessing the land until this city was conquered, but they were incapable of doing this in their own wisdom and by their own strength. And then it was as "Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand." Joshua challenged this "man," asking, "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?"—Joshua 5:13-15

The man with the drawn sword identified himself as the "captain of the host of the Lord"—the Lord's angelic hosts. As a messenger of the Lord this "man" outlined to Joshua the strategy to be employed in capturing Jericho. Joshua followed these instructions, and the walls of the city crumbled before them—"So the Lord was with Joshua; and his fame was noised throughout all the country."—Joshua 6:27

Another outstanding victory which brought glory to the Lord was Gideon's defeat of the Midianites by his little band of three hundred. Again it was the Lord who gained the victory. When Gideon's three hundred, carrying out the instructions of their leader, broke the earthen vessels, letting the light of their torches shine out in the darkness, and blew their trumpets and shouted, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon," "the Lord set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host [of Midianites]: and the host fled."—Judges 7:20-22

Jehovah Is God

Through the Prophet Elijah, God also manifested his glory in a very outstanding manner. Through the influence of Jezebel, King Ahab's wife, Israel had been led into the idolatrous worship of Baal. By the Lord's direction Elijah arranged for a test to be made on Mt. Carmel that it might be demonstrated whether or not Jehovah or Baal was the true and living God. It was agreed that the one who would cause fire to come down

from heaven and consume a sacrifice offered to him would be the true God.

There was a tremendous gathering on and around Mt. Carmel that day. Elijah insisted that the priests of Baal give their demonstration first, which they did, but they got no results. All day they agonized and cried unto Baal, but Baal did not respond. Elijah taunted them saying, "Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awakened."—I Kings 18:27

The priests of Baal continued their agonizing cries to their god until the time of the "evening sacrifice." Then Elijah invited the people to draw near to watch the test he would make. He prepared an altar and placed a sacrifice upon it. Then, in order to demonstrate that no trickery was being practiced, he dug a trench around the altar and filled it with water, drenching the altar and the sacrifice with water. Then Elijah prayed:

"Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again."—I Kings 18:36,37

In response to this eloquent prayer asking that God vindicate his own name before his people, fire came down and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, "The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God."—I Kings 18:38,39

Assyrian Army Destroyed

During the reign of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, in a campaign of aggression, demanded that Jerusalem be surrendered to him. He sent a messenger to Hezekiah asking for his surrender, but the demand was not granted. The messenger was sent again, with the following message:

"Let not thy God in whom thou trusteth deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed; as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph, and the children of Eden which were in Thelasar? Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivah?"—II Kings 19:10-13

Here was a direct challenge to the ability of Israel's God to thwart the design of Sennacherib to capture and enslave Jerusalem. Upon the advice of the Prophet Isaiah, King Hezekiah prayed earnestly to Jehovah, saying:

"O Lord God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. ... Lord, bow down thine ear, and hear: open, Lord, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God. Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands. And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. Now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art Lord God, even thou only."—II Kings 19:15-19

The Lord replied to this prayer through the Prophet Isaiah, assuring the prophet and the king that he would indeed defend Jerusalem, "for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake." And he did. We read, "It came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh."—II Kings 19:34-36

God's Glory in Babylon

Because his chosen people were not faithful to him, the Lord allowed them to be taken captive to Babylon. Among them, however, were a faithful few whom, as individuals, he used as his witnesses during the period of their captivity. Notable among these were Daniel and his three young friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The "prince of the eunuchs" under whom they first served changed their names to Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.—Dan. 1:6,7

Daniel first came into prominence before the king when by the Lord's help he was able to recall Nebuchadnezzar's dream for him and interpret its meaning, after the "magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans" had failed in their attempt to do so. This was a most effective witness for Jehovah, causing the king to acknowledge to Daniel, "Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets."—Dan. 2:47

Daniel was then made ruler over the entire province of Babylon, "and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon." Daniel, in turn, remembered his three young friends, and requested that they be appointed his assistants. This request was granted.

But Nebuchadnezzar soon forgot what he had confessed concerning Jehovah being the "God of gods and a Lord of kings." He wanted to be recognized as supreme ruler, and his gods worshiped in the realm, so he had a great image erected symbolizing his authority as civil ruler, and his right to demand that the people worship his gods. He commanded that all officials of the realm, at a given signal, bow down and worship this image. Those who refused to obey were to be cast into a fiery furnace. Apparently Daniel, because he "sat in the gate of the king," was exempt from this command.

But his three friends were not. Enemies, jealous of the position to which these Hebrews had been appointed, reported that they had not obeyed the king's command to fall down before his golden image. In a rage Nebuchadnezzar summoned the three Hebrews before him, demanding to know if the report were true. They assured him that it was. Then he indicated his willingness to give them another chance, but made it plain that if they still defied his edict they would surely be cast into the fiery furnace. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, saying:

"O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us . . . out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."—Dan. 3:16-18

We all remember the outcome. The three Hebrews were cast into the fiery furnace—a furnace in which the fire was burning so furiously that the king's servants who hurled them into it inhaled the flames and died. But the three Hebrews were protected by divine power.

Then the king, probably a little uncertain as to whether or not he had acted wisely, after the flames subsided somewhat, peered into the fiery furnace, and discovered not only were the three Hebrews alive, but there was a fourth person with them, "like the Son of God." (Dan. 3:25) Only the cords which bound them had been burned, and as a result of this, the king saw them walking about in the fire. Then he called them forth from the flames, and said:

"Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God. Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort."—Dan. 3:28,29

So we might go on recalling these thrilling incidents in which the Lord glorified himself in the eyes, not only of Israel, but frequently of the surrounding nations also, by the wonderful manner in which he fought for his people and delivered his faithful servants. They were witnesses of the great Jehovah, not so much because they explained his glorious characteristics to the people, but because he manifested his love to them on account of their unwavering faithfulness to him.

“Ye Are My Witnesses”

Jehovah himself sums up this viewpoint for us very clearly and beautifully, saying:

“Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by my name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters [as in the passage of the Red Sea], I will be with thee; and through the rivers [as in the crossing of Jordan], they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Savior; I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee.” “I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no savior. I have declared, and have saved, and I have showed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore, ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God.”—Isa. 43:1-3,11,12

In the intervening verses of this revealing chapter the Lord indicates that his future dealings with his people Israel would also witness to his glory. Verses 6 and 7 read; “I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.”

This is apparently a reference to the regathering of scattered Israel as it is being accomplished at the present time. There are many prophecies which show that this would take place at the end of the present age. We will quote one of these for confirmation:

“Behold, the days come saith the Lord, that it shall no more be said, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers. Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the Lord, and they shall fish them; and after will I send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them.”—Jer. 16:14-16

The fact that the natural seed of Abraham are now going back to the Promised Land in unbelief, motivated, not by their love for God but by their desire for security, does not disprove the beginning of the fulfillment of these wonderful prophecies. It should be noted that their present exodus from the nations is likened to their exodus from Egypt. At that time the motive was to escape from slavery, and it was because of their lack of faith and their rebellion against their God that they were allowed to wander in the wilderness for forty years.

That we should expect to see them go to Palestine in unbelief is clearly indicated by the prophecy of Ezekiel 20:33-37, which reads:

“As I live, saith the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you: and I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face. ... And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.”

Several important facts appear in this prophecy of Israel's return to the Promised Land. One is that God rules over them in his “fury” in order to accomplish it. This language does not describe the voluntary returning of a people motivated by love for their God. They are first brought into “the wilderness of the people.” This

expression indicates that for a time the returned exiles would be in the same confusion and unbelief as the world around them. God pleads with them "face to face." He would not need to plead with them if they were wholeheartedly for him and had accepted Jesus as their Redeemer.

After they are caused to pass under Jehovah's "rod" of punishment they are finally brought "into the bond of the covenant." This shows that when they are first restored to Palestine they are not in covenant relationship with their God. Jeremiah 31:31-34 informs us that the time is coming when the Lord will make "a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah." But this will not be until they have been brought "under the rod" of discipline, and after their eyes have been opened to behold the glory of the Lord.

The prophecy of Ezekiel, in chapters 38 and 39, gives us a clue as to when this will take place. Evidently Israel is to become much more firmly established and prosperous in the Promised Land than at present, sufficiently so to attract aggressor hordes from the north and other quarters to mount an attack against them. It will be in this attack that God will again fight for his people as he did in the days of old.

The prophecy states that Jehovah will plead against the leader of Israel's enemies "with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone."—Ezek. 38:22

The result of this will be the opening of the eyes of the nations to the glory of God. And not only so, but Ezekiel 39:7 declares, "So will I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel; and I will not let them pollute my holy name any more: and the nations shall know that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel."

Thus, as God brought glory to his name by the wonderful manner in which he dealt with Israel in the past, it will yet be so again. In this way they will continue to be his witnesses, not because they are diligent in making known the virtues of his character, but because, as in the past, he will protect and deliver them, and will forgive, their transgressions. Along this line the Lord further declares to Israel:

"Thou hast brought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities. I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins."—Isa. 43:24,25

The Apostle Paul enlarges upon this thought when, in forecasting the return of Israel to covenant relationship with God after "the fulness of the Gentiles be come in," he says:

"And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the Gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes. For the gifts and callings of God are without repentance. For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet now have obtained mercy through their unbelief: even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief: that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"—Rom. 11:26-33

So, after many centuries of patient waiting, during which the Lord has chastised Israel in their exile among the nations, he will bring them back to himself, and enter into covenant relationship with them. Paul informs us that this will also mean "life from the dead." Yes, all Israel, the living and the dead, will again be used by the Lord as a means of revealing his glory to them and to all the nations. So again they are to be his witnesses, even though, as the Lord explains, one of their contributions to this end was their sins, calling for the exercise of his mercy and love.

Witnesses of Jesus

During the Gospel Age the light of God's glory has been manifested in quite a different manner. When in our text Jesus said, "Ye are the light of the world," he was speaking to his disciples. The era during which God miraculously manifested his hand in the protection and blessing of his chosen people, and in the punishment of their enemies, was rapidly drawing to a close. In a few short years God's typical people were to hear those fateful words, "Your house is left unto you desolate." Then the light of God was to shine out through other channels, and by different means.

In this new arrangement Jesus was the Leader, the Captain, the Forerunner. He declared of himself, "I am the Light of the world." (John 8:12) But Jesus knew that he would not personally remain in the world, and that the work of God entrusted to him would be continued by his representatives his ambassadors. In Revelation 20:4 they are referred to as those who are "beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God."

This language describes martyrdom, or the giving up of life in the service of Jesus and the Word of God. During the Gospel Age faithfulness leads to death; and we are encouraged by the promise, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."—Rev. 2:10

In the beginning of the age, and continuing through the lifetime of the apostles, miracles were employed which demonstrated the glory of God. Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead. The apostles did the same, but they themselves died, and the onlooker was given no evidence of divine overruling or care in their lives. True, Jesus was raised from the dead, but few aside from the disciples believed it. The Holy Spirit was poured out upon the waiting disciples at Pentecost, but their enemies refused to accept what they saw and heard as evidence of God's hand in their affairs. Instead they charged that the disciples were intoxicated.

Soon after the apostles fell asleep in death, all miraculous demonstrations of divine protection and love ceased, and the Lord's people throughout the age since have been called upon to walk entirely by faith. They have been witnesses of Jesus, not because divine favor has been manifested toward them, but because they have been faithful in proclaiming the "Gospel of Christ," which, as Paul asserts, is "the power of God unto salvation."—Rom. 1:16

The Commission given to these by Jesus was that they should be his witnesses in all the world by preaching the Gospel. (Matt. 28:19; Acts 1:8) In the ages past when the Lord's people were called his witnesses it was because God revealed his glory by the miraculous manner in which he dealt with them. In the Gospel Age those who witness for Jesus do so by proclaiming the marvelous plan for human salvation which Jesus was sent into the world to execute. In proclaiming this Gospel they tell not only of the mighty miracle of Jesus' resurrection, but also of the miracle of the resurrection of those who will live and reign with him.

Furthermore, the full Gospel message calls for a declaration of that great future miracle which will be necessary for the awakening of all the dead, and the restoration of the willing and obedient to full perfection of life as human beings on the earth. In proclaiming the facts concerning these miracles the witnesses of Jesus are strengthened by their knowledge of what occurred in the past; for they know that the God who delivered Israel from Egypt, who escorted them safely through the Red Sea and across Jordan to victory in Canaan, who sent an angel and destroyed an Assyrian army in one night, and who delivered the three Hebrews from the fiery furnace is abundantly able to fulfill all his good promises pertaining to the deliverance of all mankind from sin and death.

Only a handful of these witnesses for Jesus ever actually saw him, but they believe the testimony of those who affirm the fact that he was raised from the dead. They also believe and proclaim the testimony of Paul that when Jesus was raised from the dead he was highly exalted above angels, principalities, and powers, and above every name that is named, to the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Eph. 1:18-23) They also accept and preach the further testimony of Paul which declares that ultimately "every knee shall bow, and every

tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”—Phil. 2:9-11

These witnesses of Jesus are glad to occupy this place, as his ambassadors, in the arrangements of Jehovah, because they delight to obey the divine command to honor the Son even as they honor the Father. Indeed, they realize that they cannot honor the Father at all, except as they do so through the Son. (John 5:23) They know that to honor and worship the resurrected and glorified Jesus, and to serve as his witnesses, does not detract from the glory of God, for they realize that it was the Father’s power that exalted his Son to this high position, at his own right hand.

So as “witnesses of Jesus, and for the Word of God,” these go forth with a song of praise upon their lips, praise to God for his love in sending Jesus to be the Redeemer and Savior of the world; praise for divine wisdom which designed such a loving plan of salvation; Praise for divine justice which, while it could not clear the guilty, made provision to wash away their sins by the blood of the Redeemer; and praise for the power of God by which every feature of his glorious purpose is implemented and made sure.

These do not go about shouting, Praise the Lord! No, but they do praise and honor Jehovah by making known his loving plan as it is centered in Christ Jesus, the Redeemer. They rejoice that the Spirit of God has authorized them to be witnesses thus of Jesus, and that they are authorized to explain the plan of God as it relates to those who are invited to be joint-heirs with Jesus in the spiritual phase of his kingdom, as well as to proclaim the glorious hope of “restitution” for all mankind during the thousand years of Christ’s reign.

The World Not Converted

But this glorious testimony which has been given throughout the age by the witnesses of Jesus has not converted the world, nor will it now convert the world. It was not God’s plan that it should—his will being that the chief accomplishment of this witness work would be the reaching and development of those who would join the witness class and prove worthy to live and reign with Christ.

Incidentally, of course, others have heard, and to some extent have been blessed. Thus have they been in a measure prepared for the blessings of the kingdom which will reach the world during the Millennium. Millions have heard the message, but have paid no attention to it, yet it has been a witness even to these. Jesus said that “this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end [of the Gospel Age] come.”—Matt. 24:14

Jesus likened his individual witnesses to candles shining in the dark. We know that a candle does not project its light any great distance into the darkness. It is of benefit only to those who are close to it. So the light of the Gospel shining through Jesus’ witnesses is a guide and a great blessing to those who, by belief and devotion, draw near to it and to the Lord whom it represents, but the outside world sees only an indistinct glimmer.

Someone has said that the light of the Gospel as it shines through the witnesses of Jesus is like a lighthouse in the ocean: it is not put there to light up the ocean, but to guide the mariner. So the truth has not enlightened the world during the Gospel Age, although it has been the only light in the world. This light, however, has been a guide to the Lord’s own people, enabling them to find and to walk in the “narrow way” which leads to “glory and honor and immortality.”

“As the Sun”

Through Jesus’ witnesses, then, the Gospel is preached “until the end comes”—the end of the age, that is. Jesus’ Parable of the Wheat and the Tares also brings us down to the end of the age. The witnesses of Jesus are in this parable called “children of the kingdom,” and when the work of harvest is fully consummated these “children of the kingdom” are said to “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”—Matt. 13:43

This shining forth as the sun will be in association with Jesus, the foretold “Sun of Righteousness” who is to

arise with "healing in his wings" to enlighten and bless the whole world of mankind. (Mal. 4:2) The witnesses of Jesus will, together, as the church triumphant, become a part of that "Sun of Righteousness," and together with Jesus will cause the knowledge of the glory of God to fill the whole earth, "as the waters cover the sea."—Isa. 11:9; 40:5

Thus we see that when Jesus said to that handful of disciples to whom he preached his Sermon on the Mount, "Ye are the light of the world," he meant that ultimately they would be more, yea, much more than merely a light "in" the world. It is in the latter, limited manner that they have thus far let their light shine. This has not been due to lack of zeal or enthusiasm on their part, but because of human limitations.

Not only so, but just as Jesus explained, the darkness of this world hateth the light, and therefore those who dwell in darkness usually turn away from the light even when they see it. Satan is largely responsible for this, for, as the god of this world, he has blinded the minds of those who believe not, "lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."—II Cor. 4:4

But when the "Sun of Righteousness" arises, and the "children of the kingdom" shine forth with him, Satan will be bound, that he may "deceive the nations no more." (Rev. 20:1-3) With the "prince of darkness" thus prevented from interfering with the shining forth of light from that glorious "Sun," all the world will have a full opportunity to become acquainted with Jehovah, the true God, and with his beloved Son who died for them that they might live. Then will be testified to all that great truth that Jesus gave himself a ransom for all.—I Tim. 2:4-6

The work of enlightening all mankind will require a thousand Years, the thousand years of Christ's kingdom. First the living generation will have turned to them the, "pure language" mentioned by the Prophet Zephaniah. (Zeph. 3:8,9) This will be immediately after the "fire of God's jealousy" has destroyed the symbolic earth in the great "time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation."—Dan. 12:1

Many who go through that "fire" will be quite ignorant of the true God, hence the necessity of having the pure message of truth given to them in order that they might have an opportunity to know and serve God properly, "with one consent." But that will be only the beginning. There will then come the awakening of the teeming millions who have died. As each generation of these hear the voice of the Lord calling them forth from the tomb they also will need to be enlightened, and so, although the "Sun" will be shining throughout the Millennium, it will not be until near the close that the darkness of the long night of sin and death will have been fully banished from the minds of all the people.

The prophet Zechariah gives us a beautiful illustration of this. He speaks of the thousand years of Christ's reign—that thousand years during which the "Sun of Righteousness" will be shining—as a "day," and he says "it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light."—Zech. 14:7

"And it shall be in that day," the prophet continues, "that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem." (vs. 8) This "river" is shown in Revelation 22:1,2 to flow from the "throne of God and of the Lamb." On either side of the river are the trees of life, bearing all needed life-giving fruit, and "the leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations." It will be then that the "Spirit and the bride" shall say, "Come, ... take the water of life freely."—Rev. 22:17

Thus in this beautiful combination of symbols the future work of the present witnesses of Jesus is portrayed. Now our message to all who fully believe is to take up their cross and follow Jesus into death. Then, as through them the light concerning God's plan is revealed to all mankind, the invitation will be, "Come, ... take the water of life freely."

Dawn Bible Students Association

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