

Beauties of the Truth

A Forum for the Publication of Scriptural Viewpoints
Thought to be Harmonious with God's Plan of the Ages
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The Field of Blood

“One of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said ... What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver” (Matthew 26:14, 15).

The 30 pieces of silver given to Judas have some interesting history connected with it.

First, according to Exodus 21:32, thirty pieces of silver was the value of a slave. The Jewish priests knew this, so by choosing 30 pieces of silver as the betrayal price they were saying that Jesus was worth no more than a common slave. Had they decided on a higher price they would have indirectly been admitting that Jesus had some real value. Thus even the amount of money that they chose to give Judas was a slap in the face to Jesus.

THE PROPHECY FROM “JEREMIAH”

But there is another interesting connection to the 30 pieces of silver. Remember what was done with this money. After seeing that Jesus was going to be put to death, Judas brought the money back to the chief priests and elders, admitting that he had betrayed an innocent man. He threw it down in the Temple and went and hanged himself.

The chief priests then took the money and said that because it was “blood money” they could not put it into the temple treasury. Though they were careful not to desecrate the temple treasury, they were not so careful when desecrating their own service to God by using consecrated funds to pay for the betrayal of Jesus. They would also violate Jewish law in the way they treated Jesus. These actions did not bother them. But it bothered them to put blood money in the treasury.

So they bought a field, called the “potter’s field.” Matthew 27:8 says, “wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day.”

Then Matthew adds this: “Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, and they took the 30 pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; and gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord appointed me.”

If we go back to Jeremiah we do not find this prophecy there. However, we find it in Zechariah chapter 11. There

are at least two possible reasons why Matthew seems to be quoting the wrong prophet. Some manuscripts omit the name Jeremiah from the Matthew account and simply say “the prophet.” That was a common way for Matthew to relate back to an Old Testament prophecy.

A second explanation is given by Adam Clarke. “It was an ancient custom among the Jews ... to divide the Old Testament into three parts: the first beginning with the law was called The Law; the second beginning with the Psalms was called the Psalms; the third beginning with the prophet in question was called Jeremiah: thus, then, the writings of Zechariah and the other prophets being included in that division that began with Jeremiah, all quotations from it would go under the name of this prophet.” So here are two plausible explanations why Matthew says that the prophecy found in the book of Zechariah is from Jeremiah.

THE POTTER’S FIELD

But let us now look at the Zechariah prophecy itself. In the context of Zechariah chapter 11, it appears to be a prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of Babylon. When Matthew told us that purchasing the potter’s field was the fulfillment of this prophecy, he was indicating that the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of ancient Babylon was a picture of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, after the first advent.

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Thirty Pieces of Silver

With the context of Zechariah in mind, let us read Zechariah 11:12,13 (NAS). Verse 12 begins with the prophet Zechariah speaking to the leaders of Jerusalem. Notice the parallels to Jesus here. “And I said unto them, If it is good in your sight, give me my wages; but if not, never mind! So they weighed out 30 shekels of silver as my wages. Then the Lord said to me, Throw it to the potter, that magnificent price at which I was valued by them. So I took the 30 shekels of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the Lord.”

In this prophecy Zechariah pictures our Lord. He is here symbolically asking the leaders of Israel to pay him his wages, in other words to express how much they thought he was worth. They were the ones who determined that he was worth 30 pieces of silver.

Notice God’s sarcastic reaction to this valuation. He calls it “the magnificent price at which I was valued by them.” In Zechariah’s time their rejection of God’s prophet was a rejection of God, just as Israel’s rejection of Jesus was also a rejection of God. Thirty pieces of silver was not a magnificent sum. It was the value of a slave. It was a paltry valuation of a prophet of God, and even more so of our Lord Jesus.

So God told Zechariah to throw it to the potter. Their valuation was an insult and not worth keeping. The obvious fulfillment of that prophecy was when even Judas could not keep the money. Though he was a thief, his guilt ridden conscience saw the terrible injustice of this transaction and he then cast the money to the floor of the temple.

The chief priests called it “blood money” and bought the potter’s field with it. It is interesting that the potter’s field was a graveyard for strangers, including Gentiles. The paltry value these men placed on Jesus’ life was in reality so valuable that someday they would all be emptied. All the painful memories, all the emptiness and broken hearts that death has caused, will be fixed because of the priceless value of Jesus’ sacrifice!

Yes, it was blood money. To them it was “murder money.” But to God’s justice it was the merit that was able to pay the ransom for our race, a life for a life.

When ancient Israel rejected the prophets they were eventually punished by God when He sent Assyria and Babylon to take them captive. Israel at the first advent rejected the greatest prophet, the son of God, and was likewise punished when God sent the Romans to make their house desolate.

— Br. Tom Ruggirello

The Name of Jehovah

“And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am Jehovah” (Exodus 6:2).

My observation is that many avoid all forms of Jehovah/Yahweh/Yahavah in order to stay away from the Jehovah’s Witnesses sect. Often this may be so, as very often they lose arguments with Jehovah’s Witnesses. (Decades ago the local Baptist minister, in non-confrontational discussion, suggested that is likely why the American Standard Version had lost popularity.)

On the other hand, some Jehovah’s Witnesses repeat “Jehovah” frequently, perhaps thinking “that they shall be heard for their much speaking” (Matthew 6:7).

Just as we would properly speak our parents’ first names respectfully, we should speak the name of our God softly and reverently — and with consciousness of its meaning.

The meaning of “Ya-HaVaH” may be understood from the verb havah, meaning “to become,” with “ya” indicating a future tense (more properly, subsequent tense) in first person. Hence a meaning of “continuing existence,” or even “eternal existence.” Or if it is taken to be causative (hiphil), then “He causes to become.” YaH may be understood as “the one continuing” (or like ho erchomenos in the Revelation: “who was and who is and the coming one”), or as a contraction of YaHaVaH. To speak or write the name, without reverential consciousness of its real meaning, may be to “take the name of Jehovah thy God in vain; for Jehovah will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain [or, for vanity].”

— Br. James Parkinson



God Gave his name, Jehovah, to Moses at Mount Sinai

Claiming His Kingship

“Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass” (Matthew 21:5).

Why did Jesus ride into Jerusalem as King? Certainly, this had to be a confusing signal to the disciples. After seeing him ride in as king they may have thought that maybe all that talk about him coming to Jerusalem to die was some kind of parable. Like so many of the dark sayings of Jesus, maybe becoming King was the reality, maybe this was the beginning of his kingdom.

But no, after this mountaintop experience which probably created great expectations in the minds of the disciples, only a few days later their hearts lay crushed as Jesus hung on the cross. Why did Jesus do something that would cause such confusion in the minds of his followers?

Perhaps there are a number of reasons. He was certainly creating an event that would see a parallel at the end of the age. The parallel dispensations are a wonderful picture for us and they tell us a lot about what the Lord is doing now. But something else comes to mind from the book of Jeremiah, chapter 32.

This episode was at a time when Nebuchadnezzar’s army was coming against Jerusalem. Jeremiah had warned Israel over and over again about its idolatry and wicked ways, but only a small remnant repented. So Babylon was sent by God to punish Israel and take the tribes of Judah and Benjamin into captivity. But there was an interesting thing that the Lord wanted Jeremiah to do. If you read Jeremiah 32:6-10 you will see a wonderful picture.

There you will see that God told Jeremiah to buy some land that his cousin was going to offer him. The interesting question here is why would God want Jeremiah to purchase a piece of land just before the land was to be desolated and the people taken into captivity? It would seem like a lost cause and one from which Jeremiah would never profit. Well, God gives us the answer in verse 15. “Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land.”¹

Jeremiah’s purchase of the land was God’s way of saying that this captivity was only temporary, that Israel would once again inhabit this land. In other words, it was a promise of restitution.

Now you might ask, “What has this got to do with Jesus riding into Jerusalem and being proclaimed King?” Perhaps Jesus was doing the same thing. Riding into Jerusalem as a king did not have much impact on society at the first advent. After all, he would be dead in a few days so what kind of king could he have been back then?

But Jesus was doing what Jeremiah did when he purchased land for the future time that Israel would return from captivity. Jesus was pointing forward to the time that he would be king of a kingdom far greater than Israel. He was expressing confidence that the future prospect of his

kingship was a certainty. We might say that this was his reach into the future.

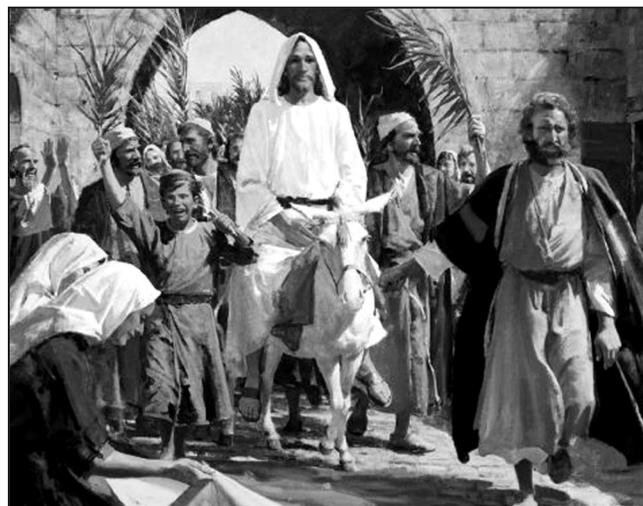
We are so grateful for his work of paying the price of redemption, and someday soon, of beginning the work of removing the effects of the curse from all hearts as he stands as the legitimate king of the earth. May we live our lives in such a way that expresses our unshakeable confidence in the coming kingdom.

(1) Editor’s observation — The price Jeremiah paid was 17 shekels of silver. This value further connects what Jeremiah did, with what Jesus did. The 17 shekels paid by Jeremiah was the price to redeem the land. The land of Israel elsewhere symbolizes the hope of life from the dead. For example, in Jeremiah 31:15,16, Rachel weeping for her children “because they were not” is literally about the Israelites being removed from their land into captivity, but applied by Matthew to refer to the death of the infants soon after the birth of Jesus (Matthew 2:18). Being taken away from the land in Jeremiah’s day pictures the captivity of death in Jesus’ day. Thus land in one case is parallel to life in the other.

The same is indicated in the Jubilee type. When the Israelites returned to their lost land in the year of Jubilee, this represents mankind returning to life during the Millennium.

Thus the 17 shekels Jeremiah paid to redeem the land indicates the price of ransom paid by Jesus to provide life for mankind. Seventeen is a reasonable picture for the price of redemption. Jesus, the perfect one, represented by the number seven, redeemed the earth, represented by the number 10. In Jeremiah 32:9, the price of seventeen shekels is expressed in the margin as “seven shekels and 10 pieces of silver;” so the breakdown of 17 into 7 and 10 is inherent in the text, and accords with the thought that the symbolic meaning of “seventeen” pertains to the breakdown into seven (the perfect one) and 10 (earthly).

The age of Joseph when he was rejected by his brethren, picturing the time Jesus was killed by his fellow countrymen, thus providing the ransom on calvary’s cross, was also seventeen (Genesis 37:22), supporting the thought that this number pertains to the ransom. The 153 fish of John 21:11, representing those redeemed from the earth with the gospel “net” during the Gospel Age, is consistent with this, as 153 is the sum of all whole numbers from 1 up to 17. (Genesis 7:11, 8:4 are also consistent with this, as the number appears there marking events that represent the beginning of the Gospel Age, and the harvest of the Gospel Age, the first age of redemption).



Jesus riding in Jerusalem as King

Elijah at Mount Horeb

“And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God” (1 Kings 19:8).

Elijah the prophet lived during a time when Israel had strayed from the proper worship of Jehovah. Ever since the kingdom of Israel divided in the days of Rehoboam and Jeroboam, the northern kingdom had begun worshipping Jehovah in an illicit form, depicting Jehovah in two calves of gold. This was a deliberate policy of Jeroboam to avoid his subjects from going to Jerusalem where the Temple of Solomon was the center of worship (1 Kings 12:28). In doing so, Jeroboam caused Israel to violate the second commandment of the 10 that Moses received from God at Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:4).

The kings that followed Jeroboam continued this policy for more than half a century, until the time of Ahab, when a further corruption was introduced. Ahab introduced Baal worship through the influence of his wife Jezebel, and thus violated the first of the 10 commandments, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). Such was the apostasy in the days of Elijah.

These lamentable circumstances prompted Elijah the prophet to step forward with this declaration. “As Jehovah God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word” (1 Kings 17:1). This punishment on Israel was in keeping with Moses’ warnings centuries earlier: “Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived ... and serve other gods, and worship them. And then Jehovah’s wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit” (Deuteronomy 11:16, 17).

This defection in natural Israel represents a defection in spiritual Israel during the Gospel Age. Literal Jezebel induced Ahab to idolatry then, and spiritual “Jezebel,” the apostate church, induced spiritual idolatry during the dark ages (Revelation 2:20). Ahab, husband of Jezebel, represents the political powers that supported Papacy, and faithful Elijah, outcast and fugitive, represented the faithful church depicted as fleeing to the wilderness for safety (Revelation 12:6). The drought of rain in Elijah’s day lasted 3½ years (Luke 4:25), and the drought of truth while the true church was afflicted endured for 3½ prophetic times. That is, 3½ x 360 years, or 1260 years total, from 539 to 1799 (see Volume Three of “Studies in the Scriptures,” Chapter Three, “Days of Waiting for the Kingdom,” specially page 64, bottom paragraph).

END OF THE DROUGHT

After 3½ years, Elijah appeared to Ahab and proposed a contest between himself, as a prophet of Jehovah, and the priests of Baal. In that contest God miraculously consumed the sacrifice Elijah had arranged on his altar, the Israelites were persuaded, the servants of Baal were overwhelmed,

and subsequently a great rain ensued. These events pictured the experiences closing the 1260 years of Papal authority. Papacy was put under strictures and taxes by the French government, the rebellious Pope was laid in arms, he died as a prisoner in France in 1799, and Napoleon refused to allow the election of a successor. The Protestant ethic flourished, Bible societies sprang up, Bibles in common languages were distributed by the millions, and the rains of blessing and truth became prodigious. The “two witnesses” — the Old and New Testaments — symbolically came to life again and ascended to great prominence in the ecclesiastical heavens (Revelation 11:11, 12).



Elijah, fed on his way to Mount Horeb

Things looked good for Elijah, until Jezebel heard of his success and threatened his life anew. Elijah needed to flee again, and this time went southward as far as Mount Horeb — another name for the older designation Mount Sinai.¹ Elijah’s flight represents that the Church class had other troubling experiences in store after the end of the 1260 years of Papal authority. Perhaps this was fulfilled by the restoration of old monarchies in Europe, sympathetic to Papacy, after the Napoleonic Wars. The Pope no longer officiated at national conclaves. But the “image” of Gentile power was still a mixture of iron (governments) and clay (papacy) until World War I and the world changing events of 1914.

TWO FEEDINGS AND FORTY DAYS

1 Kings 19:1-12 narrates Elijah’s flight. Discouraged, despondent, Elijah was near ready to yield to the wrath of his enemies. He rested under a juniper tree, and “As he ... slept ... an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat” (verse 5). He ate of the baked bread, drank of the cruse of water, and then laid down to rest again. This first angelic feeding of Elijah seems to represent a “feeding” of the saints with spiritual nourishment in the early 1800s, and this was just the time that the Adventist Movement took root. In America William Miller was a leading light of this movement, in England Henry Drummond organized productive prophetic studies on his estate, and in Europe and Asia, German-born Joseph Wolff, a Jewish Christian Missionary, had considerable influence. If the angel that



Elijah, fed a second time after sleeping

provided this first feeding represents a specific agent that “nourished” the church concerning Daniel’s prophecies of the end times, perhaps William Miller is the fulfillment.

But the Adventists were disappointed. They correctly understood that Jesus’ return was near. They correctly understood some of the time prophecies of Daniel. But some of their conclusions were imprecise. In Matthew 25, in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, while the bridegroom tarried, the virgins “slumbered and slept,” a parallel to what occurred to Elijah after the first feeding, he “laid himself down again” (1 Kings 19:6).

The virgins were awakened with an announcement concerning the bridegroom. Elijah was awakened by an angel a second time, and said “arise, and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights until Horeb the mount of God” (1 Kings 19:7,8). The second feeding represents the rich repast of Truth we know as God’s Plan of the Ages. Luke 12:37 tells us that after the return of Christ the Church would receive such a rich spiritual repast. “Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching ... he shall shall ... make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.” The same promise is given in Revelation 3:20 to the Laodicean church, the church of the harvest period of the Gospel Age.

40 YEARS TO 1914

Thus the second feeding of Elijah represents the feast of truth we have received since the return of Christ. As the 1260 years of Daniel 12:7 ended in 1799, the 1335 days of Daniel 12:12 take us 75 years later to the date 1874. This is the reason brethren today who see that Jesus has returned to supervise the harvest work (Revelation 14:14), and the transition of the ages (Daniel 12:1-3), use 1874 to mark the beginning date of the parousia, or presence, of Christ.

Elijah went in the strength of that feeding for 40 days to Mount Horeb. If these days represent years in fulfillment (as it is in the prophecies of Daniel), then this suggests that 40 years after 1874 the saints would “come” to Mount Horeb. That would take us to the year 1914, when the “time of trouble” of Daniel 12:1 commenced. Remarkably, that was the year when World War I commenced, followed by World War II about two decades later, with Armageddon impending at the close of the harvest. In other words, it is now apparent with the aid of perspective that the time of trouble is a broad period encompassing more than a century.

Brethren before and about the time of 1914 did not have the same perspective that the passing of decades has provided us. They supposed the time of trouble would be relatively brief, perhaps a few years. Even at the close of the ministry of the beloved servant, Bro. Charles Russell, in 1916, he anticipated that within “a year or two or three” the church would be complete in glory and the kingdom ushered in.² However, the time has been expanded.³

WIND, EARTHQUAKE, FIRE

At Mount Horeb, Elijah was shown a vision of the time of trouble in three phases — wind, earthquake, and fire. In each of these the text says “Jehovah was not in” these things, but afterward Elijah heard a “still small voice” which represented the blessings Jehovah would bring in a quieter, more pleasant time, following the trouble.

Perhaps what Elijah himself saw in these things is that the peaceable instruction in righteousness among the Israelites was not accomplished through the tumultuous events he had recently experienced. Those dynamic events were necessary. But to turn hearts to God and invest them with faith, trust, and appreciation, requires peaceful, Godly instruction. That would come through the patient instruction of Elijah that followed.

There was work to be done. Elijah thereafter went back to Israel and served the school of the prophets that did inculcate godliness among the Israelites. Likewise, the time of trouble we are presently passing through, which is a necessary prelude, will be superseded by the quieter, pleasant, patient, and enduring teaching in the hearts of the world of mankind during the blessed Millennial Kingdom of Christ.

THREE STAGES

It is feasible to suppose that the wind, earthquake, and fire that Elijah witnessed represent three stages to the time of trouble, specially as we now know from observation that the trouble is a protracted period of decades taking us greater than even a century. (For it has been a century since 1914, and evidently some years remain before the Kingdom is established.)

Wind in scriptures is a picture of war (Daniel 7:1). An Earthquake represents political upheaval (Revelation 11:13). Fire represents an unstructured, more radical feature of trouble, sometimes supposed to be anarchy, or

some form of organized trouble without governmental control or checks.

We suggest that (a) the wind represents a war phase, which history shows to have been in two major blows, World War I and World War II. This phase commenced in 1914, and run to the close of World War II in 1945.

(b) Following the second world war came an “earthquake,” the dissolution of the major European colonial empires. India gained independence from England in 1947, Israel gained independence in 1948, much of Africa and Indochina in the 1960s and 1970s, and the fall of the Soviet Empire came in 1989 when Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania were freed.

(c) Not long after 1989 the focus of difficulties became the Arab countries where Islam is widespread. The first Gulf War began the following year with Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, The attack on New York by Al Qaeda followed in 2001, and the second Gulf War began two years later. Terrorism and turmoil have continued ever since then. Evidently this stage of trouble will continue until the close of the harvest.^{4 5}



Elijah’s vision of the Time of Trouble

THE TIME POINTS INVOLVED

The three broad phases of the time of trouble give us a scriptural “overview” of our time. Each of these phases is decades long. The wind phase takes us to 1945, the earthquake phase takes us to 1989, and the fire phase introduces us to the Kingdom when the “still small voice” will lead the world to peace.

Here we observe an interesting symmetry on either side of the 40 years from the Return of Christ (1874) until the Time of Trouble (1914). In the Elijah picture, the date 1799 is represented in the close of the 3½ year drought. The expectations of the Adventists (the first feeding of Elijah) was for Christ’s return in 1843.⁶ The actual return of Christ at the close of the 1335 years was in 1874.

From 1799 to 1843 was a period of 44 years and from there to the return of Christ was another 31 years. Forty years later brought us to the Time of Trouble in 1914. Thereafter, until 1945 was a period of 31 years, and until 1989, 44 years more. This symmetry — 44, 31, 40, 31, 44 — suggests design and intent. These are not simply random periods. This strengthens our opinion that, collectively, we have understood the prophetic periods correctly.⁷

STILL TIME

All indications are, from the responses to the Truth in various countries, that the High Calling remains open for those who wish to enter, and it is being embraced. At some point before the end of the harvest this work presumably will taper down, for new entrants to the heavenly calling require years of time to cultivate the new creature. However, most brethren sense that within a generation the harvest will close and the kingdom will be established. This expectation seems consistent with the Elijah picture. We have some years remaining for active service.

— *Br. David Rice*

(1) This connection links Moses and Elijah in an engaging way. They are also linked in that each of them fasted for 40 days, something unique to these two prophets in the Old Testament. Moses and Elijah are the “two witnesses” in Revelation 11:6 that represent the Old and New Testament. Malachi’s closing prophecy of the Old Testament, predicting the coming of Jesus as the Messenger of the (Abrahamic) Covenant. Moses and Elijah appeared in vision with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, testifying about Jesus, who also fasted for 40 days.

(2) Volume Three of “Studies in the Scriptures,” Foreword, page i, paragraph 4.

(3) One reviewer notes — “However, a goodly number of Bible Students in 1914 were not expecting October to be spectacular. E.g., George B. Raymond and a few others at the Columbus convention, 1914 June/July. (A Bible Student lore has now grown up forgetting about them.)”

(4) 2 Kings chapter three probably depicts the resolution of the conflict between Israel and the Arab world at the end of the harvest.

(5) Those who think that the harvest period may also be represented in the travels of Paul in Acts chapter 27 will see a parallel to these phases. Paul first journeyed to Sidon where he had sweet fellowship with the saints, depicting the first 40 years of the harvest up until World War I. Thereafter the ship Paul sailed in met stiff winds (wars), and encountered this in two parts, in the Sea of Cilicia and the Sea of Pamphylia.

At Myra, on the underside of Asia Minor, Paul’s company changed ships, just as the ship of state in old Christendom (Europe) changed after World War II. They sailed westward to the last extremity of land, the peninsula port of Cnidus, the last port of call on the mainland. This takes us to the “new world order” following the close of the Soviet Empire. In the third part of the journey Paul’s ship was buffeted by billows, barely passing Salmone, coming to Fair Havens for some respite, before being overtaken in the storm which ultimately ruined the ship.

(6) 1843 was the year that Bro. Miller calculated for the return of Christ. The prolonging of the time to 1844 he supposed to be from the grace of God allowing probation until the end of the spring to spring year introduced in 1843. The date October 22, 1844, was promoted an Adventist named Bro. Snow. This date was fixed as the Day of Atonement for that year. They considered that date auspicious enough to mark the return of Christ. After the passing of that date, there was widespread disappointment.

(7) There is another point of interest in Elijah’s experiences. Here are five notable points in the episode — Elijah’s confrontation with the priests of Baal, his first feeding, laying down to sleep, his second feeding, and arriving at Horeb 40 days later. The dates associated with these in fulfilling the picture are 1799, 1829, 1843, 1874, 1914. These align well with the five prophetic periods of Daniel — 1260, 1290, 2300, 1335, and 2520 years.

Queen Esther

“And [Mordecai] brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle’s daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter” (Esther 2:7).

Queen Esther was selected as a consort for the great king from young ladies throughout the empire. Only the fairest need apply, for the selection was on the basis of beauty and grace — not pedigree, social standing, or position. The king in this episode is “Ahasuerus,” which is a rendering of the Hebrew name applied to the king. He is better known in Greek history as Xerxes.

Esther was not called to be the queen of the empire. That was a person known to us from the narratives of the Greek historian Herodotus, who gives her name as Amestris. The events of her life described by Herodotus show her to be a very vindictive person, not what we might suppose of Esther. Beyond this there are certain historical facts about Amestris that make it certain that she is not the same person as Esther. Amestris was the daughter of Otanes, a Persian general who was uncle to Ahasuerus — not a Jewess, such as young Esther. Amestris was married to Ahasuerus before the events of the book of Esther unfold. Her sons were men of age before Esther was ever introduced to the king (Mc&S, “Esther,” page 307).

The position to which Esther was called was queen of the royal harem. That was the position occupied also by Vashti, Esther’s predecessor. This accords with the use of the expression “keeper of the women” in Esther 2:3,8,15. Amestris, the wife of Xerxes, had regular access to him, whereas Esther, even when exalted as queen of the harem, was in trepidation of her life for approaching the king unless he called for her.

A PICTURE OF THE CHURCH CLASS

Esther, selected for her beauty and grace, represents the Church class that is called to highest station based on their beauty and grace of character. The book Song of Solomon likewise depicts the church as exquisitely lovely. The meaning for the Church class is that we must be fair, lovely, gracious, in character, heart, mind, thought, if we are to be attractive to our king Jesus. Any Christian person knows that outward appearance is not what either God or Christ are concerned with. “Jehovah looketh on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

Jesus said in John 15:8, “Herein in my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.”

There are two well know lists of the kind of spiritual fruitage that we are to bear. Galatians 5:22,23 gives this list: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” 2 Peter 1:5-7 says to add to our faith these seven qualities: virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity. To re-express this list in more apparent terms, we are to be moral, understanding, self-controlled, enduring, godly, and add two kinds of love: phileo (brotherly affection) and agape (unselfish love, concerned for the highest welfare of the other).

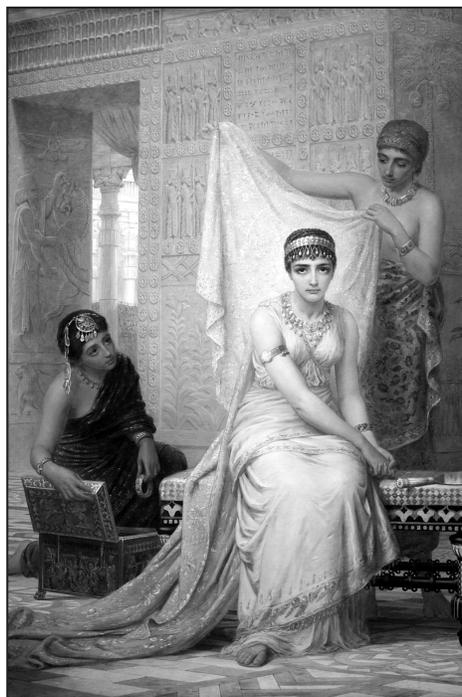
Inasmuch as we have two lists of these qualities of character, one from Paul and one from Peter, sometimes we use the expression “fruits and graces of the Spirit,” which may derive from these two lists. We should apply ourselves to these qualities not casually, slowly, with indifference, but as Peter expresses it, “giving all diligence.” The experiences of life are the means by which we grow into what may be considered lovely, to our heavenly groom. We should apply ourselves to these experiences. We should consider our reactions, our motives, our words, our thoughts, our conduct, in light of what we are seeking to achieve from our experiences. We should be assiduous respecting this. A bride does not casually prepare for her wedding.

ESTHER, CHAPTER ONE

“Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this is Ahasuerus which reigned from India even unto Ethiopia, over 127 provinces), That in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace, in the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him: When he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even 180 days” (Esther 1:14).

The number of provinces is 127. This number is not common, but it appears conspicuously in the age attained by the only woman in the Old Testament whose age at death is recorded. That is, Sarah, the wife of Abraham. In Galatians chapter four Paul says that Sarah and Hagar represent two covenants. The two covenants that Paul discusses in chapter three are the Abrahamic Covenant and the Law Covenant. Hagar is clearly associated with the Law, so Sarah evidently connects with the Abrahamic Covenant.

However, that covenant pertains to three ages. The Jewish people were under this promise. Paul says that the Law was added to it, but did not abrogate the original promise (Galatians



3:17, 19). However, as Sarah was long barren before producing the child or seed through which the blessings would come, so the covenant was “barren” of producing the real heir, Christ, for many centuries. Then Sarah did have her child of promise, Isaac. He represents Jesus, but also the Church class, “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed and heirs” (Galatians 3:29).

Thus Sarah in particular represents the spiritual part of the Abrahamic covenant. By contrast, Keturah, who bore six sons, represents the earthly part of the Abrahamic covenant. Sarah pertains to the Gospel Age, Keturah to the Millennial Age. Keturah’s six sons represent mankind. Evidently these were produced while Keturah was still a concubine (1 Chronicles 1:32). But after the passing of Sarah (the end of the Gospel Age), Keturah became a full wife and the status of her children was elevated, as it will be with the world during the Millennium.

Sarah, who attained the age of 127, corresponds to the heavenly calling of the Church, represented by Esther, whose king ruled 127 provinces. There is the connection. Both numbers pertain to the saints. This number is a prime number, it is not evenly divisible by any other whole number (other than one). So perhaps the meaning of this number is simpler — the first two digits (12) and the final digit (7) each depicting the heavenly calling in its own way. In Revelation, the elect church is depicted by the number 144, or 144,000 (Revelation 21:17, 14:1), which involves 12 x 12. The church is also depicted as in seven parts, the seven churches of Revelation, and seven “days” of Leviticus 8:33.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Ahasuerus, Xerxes, was one of 11 rulers of the Medo-Persian Empire. Here is the sequence — Cyrus, Cambyses, Smerdis, Darius, Xerxes, Artaxerxes — that takes us from the days of Daniel to the days of Nehemiah. Then followed Darius II, Artaxerxes II, Ochus, Arogos, and finally Darius III, also termed “Codomanus” in Volume three. It was that king that was defeated by Alexander the Great. He is also referred to in Nehemiah 12:22 as “Darius the Persian” in whose time Jaddua served as high priest — the latest historical reference in the entire Old Testament.

Cyrus was in the days of the aged prophet Daniel. The first Darius is known in history as Darius Hystaspes (Hystaspes was his father). This was the Darius mentioned in the books of Haggai, Zechariah, the fourth chapter of Ezra, and in Ezra 6:15, when the temple rebuilding was completed. Xerxes is the Ahasuerus of Esther, and Artaxerxes was the king under whom Ezra returned (year seven) and Nehemiah returned (year 20).

Smerdis reigned but a few months, but recognizing his reign is critical to the fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel 11:1-2. During the reign of Cyrus, Gabriel told Daniel, “There shall stand up yet three kings in Persia [Cambyses, Smerdis, Darius]; and the fourth [Xerxes, Ahasuerus] shall be far richer ... and by his strength through his riches he shall stir up all against the realm of Grecia.”

Here the prophecy of Daniel connects to the story of Esther. The Grecian campaign of Xerxes is the reason for the six-month conclave mentioned in Esther. Ahasuerus was preparing his conquest of Greece. In picture, this represents that Jesus also was preparing for a conquest of the Gentile world, represented by the Greek-speaking believers who were served the Gospel by Paul and others.

Notice this concept of conquering the “Grecian” gentile world also in Zechariah chapter nine. Verse 9 is famously about Jesus, “Thy King cometh unto thee ... lowly, riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.” Verse 13 then speaks of a campaign against Greece. “I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece.” This was fulfilled literally during the Maccabean battles of Israel against their Greek-Syrian overlords, but spiritually fulfilled by the “battles” to convert Gentiles to Christ.

Xerxes made great in-roads into Greece, but he did not conquer the country. Likewise Jesus made great in-roads into the Gentile world with the Gospel, but he does not convert the world in this age. His conquests, “thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king’s enemies” (Psalms 45:5, Revelation 6:2), cause arrows of truth to enter the hearts of unbelievers, converting them to be followers of Christ.

Thus the historical background of the book of Esther fits well as an episode depicting the beginning of the Gospel Age selection of the Church.

VARIOUS SPECIFICS

Esther 1:6 says there were hangings of white and blue, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble. There were beds of gold and silver, and a pavement of red, blue, white, and black marble. The opulence shown here symbolizes the preciousness of our calling. God’s people may be poor in this world’s goods, but the wealth and treasure of their calling is beyond compare. The colors white (purity), blue (faithfulness), purple (royalty) are all fitting to the meaning. (The color green in verse six is evidently a mistranslation.)

The pavement included red (redemption) and black (Song of Solomon 1:5) marble, the element that is depicted in Song of Solomon 5:15 as the foundation established in Christ. The scene is in the third year of the reign of Ahasuerus, three being a picture of redemption, is also fitting for the opening of the Gospel Age.

The six months of preparation for the conquest is picked up later in the story in six months of oil, and six months of perfume, in the preparation of Esther (Esther 2:12), perhaps showing that the Gospel Age is still a time of imperfection while the curse of 6000 years rests upon the world.

Esther 1:7 says there was abundant royal wine for the guests, picturing the wine of redemption, in diverse vessels of gold, referring to divine truths of diverse sorts in the Gospel. In drinking, “none did compel” (verse 8), just as redemption now is available for those who wish it, but none are compelled.

— *To be continued*