

# THE WORD OF TRUTH

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## *THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUTH*

It is hardly possible to read Pilate's question, "What is truth?" recorded in John 18:38 without detecting the note of weariness and skepticism of one who has persuaded himself that there is no such thing as truth. He did not even wait for an answer. He broke off the conversation with his question and turned away.

The fact is that truth was very near him. Literally it was standing in front of him. If he had waited for an answer he might have learned. If he had asked the question as an honest inquirer with a real desire to get an answer, our Lord might have repeated in Pilate's presence the same words which He had spoken to Thomas and the other disciples a few hours before: "**I am the truth.**" **John 14 :6.** He was the very embodiment of truth. He was truth personified. To obtain Him was to obtain the truth.

But is it possible to obtain Him in such manner that when He becomes ours the truth is our possession? Yes, this is possible, for when we by faith lay hold of Him we lay hold of the One who is the truth. Will we then have the answer to all our questions, the solution of all our problems? No, for this One must be apprehended. He must be "put on." We must work out in reality the truth of Christ in us and we in Him. As we discover Him, as we increase in the knowledge of Him, we will discover the truth and increase in its knowledge. In Him is the answer to every question. In Him is the solution of every problem. But how is this to be? What is the secret of "putting Him on?" The answer to this is found in another statement.

"Thy word is truth," is another declaration of the One who said, "I am the truth." See John 17:17. He had asked of God the sanctification of those who were His disciples. He asked that this be done by means of "the truth." "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth," is the entire statement.

There can be no question here but that "sanctify" means "to make holy," that is, to hallow or set apart for God's own use. This is done through the truth, and only through the truth. And that there be no question as to what He meant by "the truth," the Lord added the positive declaration, "Thy word is truth."

Thus while "the truth" was standing before Pilate, the only way he could obtain the truth, the only way he could embrace it and make it his possession was to turn to the revelation which God had already given of the One who stood before him. This revelation was contained at that time in the thirty-seven books, which made up the Old Testament. The more of this that Pilate laid hold of, the more of Christ he would possess.

There was no light for Pilate or anyone else that came from having seen Christ in person. There was no transforming truth to be obtained by looking into His face. God had spoken concerning Him, and what He had said of Him was the truth. This truth was enshrined in the words that made up the Old Testament. By means of the truth there, men could lay hold of the One who is the truth.

It needs to be emphatically declared that this One who was the embodiment of the truth could not be apprehended by selecting one portion of the Word which spoke of Him, then ignoring the rest. "If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free," was His own word concerning this (John 8:32, 33). Any portion of Scripture will do for a beginning, but it will serve only as a beginning. God may use any part of His Word to implant the beginning of His truth within us. But if we think that having been introduced to Christ through some portion of His word we can then ignore the rest of the word and simply go on with Him, we deceive ourselves and cast a slur upon the truth that God has spoken.

The case of the Ethiopian eunuch recorded in Acts 8:26-40 sheds light on this. He had his copy of Isaiah open to what we now call the 53rd chapter. This is a portion, which speaks as plainly of Christ as any in the Old Testament, but he declared that he could not understand it unless someone guided him. Then we are told that Philip BEGAN at that same Scripture and preached unto him Jesus. This chapter made an excellent place to begin, but if Philip stayed within it, the Ethiopian would have laid hold of very little of Christ. I do not believe for one moment that Philip confined his message to Isaiah 53, or even to the book of Isaiah. If so, he failed to follow the example of the greatest of all teachers, the Lord Jesus Christ, who when He preached Himself to two of His disciples used the following method:

**And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself. Luke 24:26.**

This is sufficient to show that if we are taught by Christ concerning Himself, He will do it by leading us into the study of everything in the Word of God from Genesis to Revelation. All roads in Scripture lead to Christ. Truly He fills the pages of the Book. If our lives are filled with Him, they will be filled with the Word that God has given. All Scripture leads to Him no matter how remote it may seem from Him in the start. All Scripture was given by inspiration of God. It is all profitable, and essential for enlightenment. It is all profitable, and essential for correction. It is all profitable, and essential for discipline or training in righteousness. Only by means of "all Scripture" can the man of God be equipped, fitted out for every good work. This is the teaching contained in II Timothy 3:16,17.

In view of this a man must be branded as an unsafe teacher who would point to any portion of the Word and say that it has no real practical value toward making the man of God fully equipped, fitted out for every good work. He reveals his ignorance if he points to a chapter and says there is nothing in it that reveals Christ.

Take a look at Genesis 36. This chapter has sometimes been ridiculed.. Bible readers often give it a quick going over, seeing little of value in it. It does not appear very useful in teaching, enlightening, or equipping the man of God. However, for all you, or I, or anyone else may know, there may be treasures hid in this chapter that we cannot now see. In fact this could be the very portion that God might use to lead us into some truth which we vitally need to know.

It appears that many who make constant use of the word *truth* need to look it up in a dictionary. For too many think that truth is related only to what we say or tell. Their only acquaintance with truth is that of telling it or not telling it as they speak of the mundane affairs of this life. Truth, to them, has no bearing upon the things of God. "It makes no difference what one believes as long as he is sincere," is their favorite expression.

Those who have considered it know that **truth in regard to any subject is simply that which accords with the facts in the case.** The truth that is in the Bible becomes our possession when we obtain the facts of Scripture and think in accord with these facts. The Bible is a book of innumerable facts. Every direct statement in it is a positive fact concerning the subject of the statement. Most of these facts can be obtained by diligent and honest reading. By honest reading is meant that the subject is discovered, the statement made must be related to the subject, and the whole considered in the light of the context where God has placed it. Some Biblical facts are quite obscure. It is not always easy to discover the subject of a portion. For these the most diligent and careful search must be made. It has been said, "Every man has a right to his opinion, but no man has a right to be wrong in his facts." Yet human nature is such that once men have made up their minds, or if they desire that a theory shall be true, they manufacture, twist or misinterpret facts in support of their own ideas. Pride often prevents them from examining the supposed facts lest they find them false and lose their support. They welcome no facts except those that can be used in some manner to corroborate their own ideas and conclusions. There is only one safeguard against this. No man is immune from it, but there is one thing that will protect him from it at all times. *This is a genuine love for the truth.* Man can stumble upon a certain amount of truth. The acceptance of a creed will often lead men to hold a fair portion of truth. But no man ever stumbles upon the love of the truth. That man should love truth is not natural. It is supernatural—a disposition wrought in man by the Spirit of God.

In the providence of God, lest in this present evil eon the love of the truth should perish from the hearts of men, He often places this precious deposit in earthen vessels such as you or me. To claim that we have the truth shows nothing but pride. We know nothing yet as we ought to know it. To claim that we have a genuine love for the truth is a claim that any believer has the right to make if his life gives witness to his claim.

I, in all humility, claim to be one who devotedly loves the truth. Every faculty I possess, limited though they may be, is dedicated to God for the purpose of knowing the truth. I have laid aside all other studies in order to give myself to the attainment of truth upon every subject that is dealt with in the Word of God. I prayed for years that God would give me a love for the truth, hardly realizing what I was praying for or to what a love for the truth might lead me. I know that prayer was answered. I suddenly came to the realization that I loved truth more than anything else, truth personalized in Christ and truth enshrined in the pages of God's Word.

Paul, in his second letter to the Thessalonians speaks of those who "received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (II Thessalonians 2:10). The word *saved* here probably means "delivered," and the word "received" in the Greek has to do with the treatment accorded to a person or thing more than just the act of receiving.

It has been a constant joy throughout my ministry to see the response of those in whom God had placed "a love for the truth." But it has been a source of constant disappointment to see in many this love for the truth wane and die out. I have seen men who when they have been exercised of God concerning the truth were almost parallel in their experience with the Corinthians when Paul pointed out to them their erroneous position. Of them he says:

**What carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter, II Corinthians 7:11.**

I do not interpret Paul's words as speaking of those who come into possession of a love for the truth. I simply say that words such as these describe the response of many that I have seen become truth lovers. Nevertheless, something happened and all of a sudden the love of the truth has vanished, and in its place is a critical attitude toward the truth, an attitude that is usually expressed by criticism of someone who still earnestly loves the truth. All love for the truth has ceased when we fix our eyes upon an earthen vessel in which God has placed it, or the vessel God uses to carry the truth to us.

The love of the truth is a living thing. It either grows or dies out. Some truth gained during the time when the love of the truth was alive may remain, but the real love of the truth is gone when this love ceases to grow and increase. They get to thinking that maybe truth is not so important after all. Next, they say other things are just as important as truth. Finally, they find the truth to be inconvenient. Not quite daring to repudiate it openly, they often repudiate it by turning against someone who holds it.

"Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" is Paul's question to the Galatians who had failed in regard to the truth that he had delivered to them (Gal. 5:7). He declares that the persuasion to abandon some of the truth had not come from the One who called them into it. A little leaven had entered in and leavened the whole lump, is Paul's analysis of the difficulty.

At the present time I am convinced that there is a definite down grade tendency so far as the love of the truth is concerned. On one hand we are witnessing a revival of "religion," but on the other hand a recession from the truth. I do not refer to any certain truth or doctrine, but simply to truth as a whole; or to be more explicit the love of the truth. This is disappearing from the lives of many. And since I feel that they do not realize what is happening, it is my duty to sound the alarm.

First of all, it is evident that part of the present retrogression from the truth is caused by the spirit of the times. The world has passed through years of frightful war, there has been a short period of uneasy and uncertain peace, and now we are face to face with the threat of an even greater and more terrible war. The danger that cannot be denied of life being snuffed out at any moment by atomic bombs has caused such a feeling of frustration among men that nothing seems very important. This has brought about a state of mind among men that has led many to adopt as their philosophy of life, "let us eat and drink for tomorrow we may be dead." When this spirit prevails men who have recognized the value of sobriety often turn to drink, men who have prided themselves in honesty become defaulters, and those who have glorified in fidelity become unfaithful. It is simply the spirit of the times. The world calls it a "moral break-down" and often excuses it because of the stress tinder, which men live and the dangers they face.

This same spirit of the times creeps in and has its effect upon those who have loved the truth. In view of the immensity of the dangers we face, the quest for truth does not seem very important to some. And I will readily grant that to the eyes of the flesh the correct interpretation of, say, Daniel's Seventy Weeks does not seem very important when men are faced with atomic warfare. Nevertheless, to the eye of faith the quest for truth, whatever the subject, is still the most important quest in the world. To illustrate my point, here is a quotation from one correspondent:

"You will agree that in case one of us experienced loss of loved ones, betrayal by a friend, financial losses, loss of health, opposition from those near to us, you and I would need something more than a knowledge of the doctrines of the Scriptures."

This writer takes it for granted that I will agree with him, but he is mistaken, for I emphatically disagree with his thoughts. My faith in the sustaining power of the Word of God is such that I believe the one who has devoted himself to the patient investigation of the facts God has placed

within His word, if this has been done with the simple acknowledgment that this truth he is investigating will lead to the One who is the Truth, he is in possession of that which will guide and sustain him under every circumstance.

I speak from experience. I did not experience the loss of my loved one, but I did face a time when the doctors said, "We can offer you no hope." In the past six months, I have been betrayed by friends. I have suffered great financial losses. Opposition to me and my message has never been as great. It seemed as if the rulers of the darkness of this world heaped everything on at one time. And I want to declare as emphatically as possible that during this time it was the truth I had learned of the One who is the Truth that sustained me. This was always a rock under my feet. It was something fixed in the midst of a raging sea. Furthermore, I desire to say that the one truth, which I had learned from His Word which meant more than any other was the truth, is that this is the dispensation of the grace of God. If this seems strange to anyone, I can do nothing more than repeat it. It was this truth that was balm when my heart was sore, it was this truth that comforted me when my soul was troubled.

I have proved for myself the truth set forth in **Exodus 33:21** - "**And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place beside Me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock.**" That place beside Him, to me, is that "I shall ever be in His word and that His word shall ever be in me. If this is my abiding place, there will ever be a rock under my feet. I say with the Psalmist, "**Thou art my portion O Lord, I have said that I would keep thy words.**" **Psalm 119:57.** I am sure that the correspondent whom I quoted above did not carefully consider what he was saying. If so, I do not feel he would have said it. He is saying that the truths declared in God's word are not sufficient to fully equip us for anything, which may cross our path. I do not agree with him. If he reads II Timothy 3:15, which deals with the blessings and deliverances of God's people and not the salvation of sinners, he will discover that the knowledge of the Holy scriptures is able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

I have just cleared my desk of all but two books. One of these is a pamphlet issued by the government, which tells what to do in case of an atomic attack. I have not yet read it and do not know what it says. The other is my Bible. I have read this many times, and I am familiar with all that it says even though I understand very little of it. In view of the threat of atomic attack it may seem more practical and urgent to read this small pamphlet. I may do so when and if I can find time. However, with all my heart I believe that a knowledge of God's Word will do more for me in case of atomic attack than all the instructions contained in this small pamphlet. This is my faith in the present importance of every Word that God has spoken. It is a faith that comes from taking God at His word and thinking accordingly. It is based upon a statement found in **Proverbs 2:10-13: When wisdom entered into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee: to deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh forward things; Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness.**

In 1947 I wrote a paragraph along this line, which I now repeat: I claim no power to see into the future, and I would not be guilty of painting dark pictures of the years to come. Yet, I know that the problems the post-war world must face will be as great as those imposed by the war. Starvation, disease, disorder, and chaos are almost sure to have their reign. Our own country may remain untouched by the ravages of war, yet we will not be isolated from the problems of the post-war world. These problems in our own country may be so great that all the combined wisdom of men may not be equal to them. These years are just ahead for us; nevertheless, we can face them with assurance and confidence if we know the personal and the written Word of God. We cannot imagine the problems we may have to face, but we do know that a knowledge of the Word of God will make

us wise in that day. In the days that may intervene before these days are upon us, let us diligently seek to greatly increase our stores of divine wisdom.

That was my position in 1947, and that is still my position in 1951. At the present time I am witnessing the truth getting some very bad handling from some who profess to be lovers of and heralds of the truth. My own love for the truth leads me to enter my protest against their actions.

The truth is now being slandered by some who are giving it a bad name. It is being slightly referred to as "doctrine", and this is being done in such manner as to imply that "doctrine" is something bad which we will do well to leave alone. Some of these men insist that they are not interested in "doctrine." Their interest, they say, is in practice. They point the accusing finger at me and say that I stress doctrine above practice; that all I care about is what men believe, not what men do. These men go so far as to distinguish between what they call "practical truth" in the Bible and "doctrinal truths," and they do this in such manner that "*verboden*" is written over what they call the doctrinal portions. They now seek to lead men to believe that we should center our attention on what they call the "practical portions," taking only a passing glance at what they have labeled the doctrinal passages. Furthermore, they infer that all who are interested in the "practical portions" are men of great spirituality, but anyone interested in the "doctrinal portions" is a carnal Christian, walking after the flesh, interested only in increasing the size of his head rather than the size of his heart. Much is made of certain platitudes, which have been lifted from the context of Scripture, and there is much talk about "being crucified with Christ," and "being dead to sin," but these are phrases and experiences, which they do not explain, since such explanations would of course lead them into doctrine.

I believe that all this is a serious threat against the truth, and that it will do serious damage to all within whom God has placed a love for truth. This is just another form of that philosophy which has been properly called "part-truthism." When the principle of "whole-truth" is abandoned for "part-truth," the love of the truth is gone. In view of this I feel the need of speaking my mind concerning these matters.

The opposite of *practical* is *impractical*. If one part of the Scripture is labeled as being practical, we then by inference are labeling other parts as impractical. Since none of God's Word is impractical, any man who seeks to set forth one part as being practical brands himself as being an unsafe teacher and an untrustworthy leader. It is "wrong division" of the worst kind to try to divide the Scriptures into practical and impractical portions.

Those who have been labeling certain portions of the Scripture as "practical" will insist that their distinction is between the "practical" and "doctrinal portions." So let us take a look at the logic of these distinctions.

The word *doctrine* in Scripture means teaching or instruction. The Greek word *didake* should be translated "teaching" in every occurrence. **Teaching**, or **instruction**, is the primary definition of doctrine in the dictionary. Therefore, when men label a portion of Scripture as being "doctrinal," they are simply labeling it as a portion, which teaches. This being true, then above all, God's untaught people should apply their hearts to those portions that teach. There may be some who feel that they are so well taught that they can now ignore the "doctrinal portions," but I am not one of these.

One who has corresponded with men concerning this insists that the distinction, which must be made is between those "passages which teach us **what to do**," and those passages which teach us "**what to believe**." He further declares that we should now give our supreme attention to those passages, which tell us what to do rather than those, which tell us what to believe.

Ever since I entered upon my ministry of the truth there have been constant demands that I cease dealing with truth and start dealing with the lives of men. There is a constant pressure that I cease being a teacher of the truth and become a director of the consciences of men. This I have steadfastly refused to do. My chief ground for doing this is my simple faith in the power of God's Word as a molding factor in the human life. You may point me to one, ten, or fifty who are living low, unspiritual lives, and you may feel that the next time I stand before them I should administer a stinging rebuke, expose their sins, and demand that they become spiritual Christians. But this I refuse to do, because it would be a complete renunciation of my faith in the power of the Word of God to change the lives of men. I know also that the power of truth as a molding character in one's life depends upon his comprehension of it. The clearer the comprehension, the more powerful will be the influence it exerts on a man's life.

I have received numerous letters from well meaning people who start about like this: "There is a man that attends your class and he . . . ." then follows a recital of the weaknesses of the man or woman of whom they are writing. These people seem to take it for granted that all who attend a class, which I teach are some kind of super-saints, and if they are not, then they most certainly should be. Furthermore, they think that the unspirituality of these persons would be soon corrected if I would change my message and emphasize some other portion of Scripture rather than the one being dealt with.

I know as well as anyone that the lives of most men are being lived on a very low and fleshly plane. This is as true of those who happen to come under my ministry as those who are not. Furthermore, I am convinced that if I would separate myself from all whom I teach and find new hearers altogether, the conditions would still be the same. And I do not believe for a single moment that men's lives are going to be changed by me making fervid emotional appeals for them to "fully surrender," to "follow Jesus," or to "imitate Christ."

I would like more than anything else to see every man I know live in such manner as will bring joy to the heart of God. But while I may deplore the unspirituality of their lives, I would not for one moment let anyone think that I am dealing with men or that they are dealing with me. I am dealing with truth, and they are dealing with truth. I will lay all truth I know before them, and if it does not produce fruit in their lives I will not for a moment doubt the power or value of all truth. The Bible tells me of others concerning whom "the word preached did not profit them not being mixed with faith in them that heard it" (Hebrews 4:3). Even so there is no suggestion that the proclamation of the Word be altered or abandoned just because it did not profit some.

My commission is to preach the word; not just the so-called practical portions of it. I am to do this at the opportune time and at the inopportune time. I am to enlighten, rebuke, and entreat. This is to be done with patience and doctrine (teaching). And even though the time comes when men will not tolerate sound doctrine (teaching), I am not to look about for another message, which they will tolerate. If proclaiming the Word will not change the lives of men, I refuse to consider that maybe some other proclamation will change their lives. My commission is to "proclaim the Word" (II Timothy 4:1-4).

I have been greatly disturbed in heart and mind as I have heard earnest and real desire to know the Word being branded by some as being nothing more than a desire to "fill the head with the doctrines of Scripture." I am sure that those who say this do not know what they mean. They may speak loftily of "having the mind occupied with Christ," but I would like to hear from them how the Spirit leads the mind to be occupied with Christ except by leading our minds to be occupied with the truths God has placed in His Word. Those who speak of putting "doctrine" in contrast with "practice" do not appear to know what they are saying. They are condemning what they call "head knowledge," and

slightly refer to an "intellectual study of the truth," and go so far as to declare that these things lead the mind away from Christ.

It is true that some may study the Scriptures apart from any thought of obedience to God. Bible study is a required course in many colleges, and students work at it to get a passing grade. Screen writers in Hollywood are continually ransacking the Scriptures in hope of finding unique and expressive titles for movies. And there are those who study only to find proof texts, to have material in hand to use in discussions and arguments. All this is intellectual study and results only in the head being filled. But even if some do it this way, this should not deter us from the study of every Word that God has spoken. The believer who obeys God will never neglect the Sacred Scriptures. His life, his ministry, his actions, his very being must be oriented around the Word of God.

In the real study of the Word of God we must use and value each portion as being something through which God can unfold to us His truth, both that which is truth as well as the One who is the Truth.

I believe that to keep the sinner from the Savior, and to keep the believer from "all truth" is the great twofold work of Satan in this day. He is having great success. He has many helpers. But he will get no help from me.

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## ***THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS***

**(Continued from Volume XII, No. 2 )**

In our previous study we saw that the dual word "heavens" in the Hebrew stands for the beings in the place called "the heavens" as well as the place itself. It was God's purpose in creation that the heavens should rule the earth. When God gave up men (See Romans 1:24,26,28) the heavens ceased whatever rule they had exercised over the men of the earth, but it is God's declared purpose that the heavens will rule or govern the earth again. This is called in the Greek scripture *he basileia ton Ottranon* which means the government of the heavens, but is usually translated "the kingdom of heaven." Since God rules among the heavens, this government, which God will yet impose upon the earth can also be called the kingdom (or government) of God.

Those who seek to understand the difference between the two phrases "the kingdom of the heavens" and "the kingdom of God" should make sure that they have obtained and fully considered every available fact from the Word of God. While these two phrases are not identical, they are used interchangeably in the first three gospels. Numerous passages can be cited wherein Matthew uses the term "**the kingdom of the heavens**" and Mark and Luke uses "**the kingdom of God**." In Matthew 19:23, 24 both of these terms are used in connection with the story of the rich man who was reluctant to give up his possessions. A consideration of all passages bearing upon this theme can bring no other conviction than that the kingdom of the heavens is the kingdom of God, even though the kingdom of God is a wider sphere than the kingdom of the heavens.

There is a time coming when the heavens are to govern the earth. This will be God's government of the earth, since He rules in and among the heavens. And while the heavens will govern the earth, they never at any time govern themselves. The kingdom of the heavens is a future kingdom or government, which is not in operation now. But the kingdom or government of God is already in operation now in some realms. God already governs in that realm that is "far above all" He also rules

in the heavens. This is what our Lord revealed to His disciples when He taught them to pray, "**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**" God's government already exists in and among the heavens, and His will is done there. When His government extends from the heavens to the earth, then this prayer, which the Lord told His disciples to pray will have its answer. In view of these facts, we will make a serious mistake if we fail to take all truth revealed concerning the earthly sphere of the kingdom of God and add this to the truth revealed concerning the kingdom of the heavens.

Another mistake that some are making is the idea that the kingdom of the heavens must appear suddenly and complete upon the earth. This idea probably comes from making the word kingdom to mean something concrete (a king, country, capital, flag, etc.) instead of something abstract. **Mark 4:26-29** refutes the idea of the kingdom appearing suddenly and complete. God's government over this earth, His rule through the heavens over mankind, is there likened to the sowing and growth of seed. Five steps are to be noted in this.

(1) The seed is placed in the earth and for a short time is hidden from view. Nevertheless, the seed is growing. How seed grows, we do not know.

(2) A blade appears and develops. It is now visible, even though growth cannot be seen by the human eye. But definite progress can be marked from day to day.

(3) An ear appears and develops.

(4) The full grain in the ear appears and ripens.

(5) The harvest. The sickle is now used-not to eliminate weeds, or to punish the wheat, but to gather the results of the sowing. We must not connect any of God's harvests with punishment or wrath. The result of God's work in and through the kingdom of the heavens will be a great multitude of people who are ready and fit for the millennial earth.

The rule of the heavens is a period of time that precedes the second coming of Christ and the millennium. The rule of the heavens is based entirely upon the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and it is in no manner based upon His return to the earth. In fact the heavens cannot rule unless the Lord Jesus is in and among the heavens. Here are His words concerning this:

**Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater than these shall he do; because I go to My Father. John 14:12.**

**Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is expedient (to your advantage) for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you: but if I depart I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove (impart knowledge to) the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. John 16:7- 8.**

In the later studies I will show that the rule of the heavens began the moment Christ came forth from the grave, and continued until that point marked by Paul's declaration in Acts 28:28 wherein he announced that the salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles. This suspended the rule of the heavens until God brings it back again. Nevertheless, the kingdom of the heavens was a reality and in operation for thirty-three years following the resurrection of Christ. This was the stage that compares with the "blade" in the parable of our Lord; and this truth must not be denied just because we do not see "the full corn in the ear" during the Acts period. More on this later.

When we have a true conception of "the kingdom of the heavens" every statement concerning it, every likeness of it, every parable spoken in regard to it will fit without any need for forcing or revision. With these facts before us we are ready to begin again our consideration of the truth revealed in the gospel of Matthew concerning it. Keep in mind at all times that when John, the

disciples, or our Lord announced that "the kingdom of the heavens" is at hand, they could mean nothing but that that aspect of the kingdom which compares with the "blade stage" of grain would soon appear.

### **Thy Kingdom Come**

The prayer, which our Lord taught His disciples contained the petition, "Thy kingdom come." Two things are to be noted here. The kingdom was not there at that time, for they were taught to pray for its coming. This is in truth a plea for God's rule to replace man's misrule, a petition for God to begin His government in and over the earth. This is emphasized by the petition that follows; "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

This prayer has been frightfully abused and misused. It is constantly mouthed by many who do not know what they are asking for, and who probably would not care for it if God gave the answer. There are many facts about divine government, which will be very distasteful to the average man. Many who pray this prayer contradict their petition by insisting that God's kingdom is here now, that He is now governing the world. If this is true, if God is now governing the earth, then it is my opinion that we should pray for His kingdom to depart, and then look somewhere else for a better government than God has given the world during the past 2000 years. But we need not go to this extreme, for God is not now ruling the earth. This is the day of man. It is the time of man's misrule. This explains why Satan could offer to Christ "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them." See Matthew 4:8.

The petition "thy kingdom come" is in order until the kingdom begins. After it begins it would be a lack of faith to pray for it to come. The proper petition then will be, "thy kingdom increase." As stated before, when this prayer is answered the kingdom will appear first as a blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear, then the ripened grain, then the harvest. It is this "harvest" that will be used to establish the glorious millennium of Christ's reign over the earth. The millennium is also the kingdom of God, but the heavens will begin their rule under God long before the millennium begins.

### **The Kingdom Heralded**

When the Lord chose His twelve disciples, He sent them forth as heralds to proclaim that the heavens were soon to begin their rule over the earth. I do not believe that it is proper to say that the twelve, the Lord Jesus, or John the Baptist *offered* the kingdom. Neither do I believe that it is proper to say that the kingdom was rejected and that this rejection led to its suspension or postponement. It is true that it was rejected, and it is also true that the rule of the heavens, which began at the resurrection of Christ is also suspended, but it is not true that it was suspended because men rejected it.

The twelve were to announce that the "kingdom of the heavens is at hand." An announcement such as this cannot be considered as an offer, and whether men heeded or rejected the announcement could not make any difference in the plans and purposes of God. He had not said that He would rule over them if they did not rebel against it. His word was:

**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 purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against Me. See Ezekiel 20:33-38.**

It was God's declared purpose that He would rule over Israel. This rule was to be by means of the heavens, and this purpose cannot be altered one whit by human reactions to it. The kingdom of the heavens was to be announced as being at hand, and it was not being submitted for the approval of Israel or the nations.

As the twelve went forth to proclaim the nearness of the rule of the heavens they were ordered not to take any road that would lead them into Gentile territory, and not to enter any Samaritan city. They were commanded to go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The reason for this is found in the fact that the rule of the heavens is to begin first in the people called Israel.

As the disciples proclaimed their message they were told to give the most positive demonstrations of the benevolent and glorious character of heaven's government over the earth. The miracles, which they were told to perform were not for the purpose of proving the truth of their message. John the Baptist had proclaimed the same message, and he performed no miracles. The mighty works these men were told to do were indications of what men could expect when the heavens governed the earth. Politicians of today tell us what they will do when they are elected to office, or when their party is in power. These men showed what the heavens would do, even before the heavens had assumed control. They were in a sense passing out free samples of the benefits that would come to men when the heavens governed the earth. In this connection it will be helpful if we consider each thing they were told to do.

**Heal the sick.** The physical welfare of the people, commonly called the "public health," is a definite responsibility of every government. A government which does not give due heed to the health of its citizens is not fit to govern. Today our governments strive to keep down epidemics, control contagious diseases, and to alleviate the suffering if such widespread illnesses occur. When the heavens rule they will shirk no responsibility in connection with public health. Not only healing for those who are ill, but increased health and strength for those who are well will be available to all under God's beneficent rule. This is one of the most glorious features of heaven's rule over the earth. This was guaranteed by the first coming and death of Christ. See Isaiah 53:4 and Matthew 8:17. The first fruits of this blessing were definitely seen and felt in the Acts period. If the heavens should resume their rule tomorrow, there is no sick person on earth who would not have before him a renewed expectation that complete deliverance can be his portion. And under God's rule men will not be restored to health only to find that in a few months another ailment has attacked their bodies. Once God has granted healing and health to those who come under His rule, sickness and death will result only from personal sins.

**Cleanse the leper.** Whatever leprosy may have been in Biblical times is uncertain. It was then the most terrible scourge known to man. The best that men could do about it was to banish from all social contacts the one who had contracted this disease. It was beyond the reach of man's ability even to attempt a cure. Under heaven's government there is no scourge known to mankind that will not be effectively dealt with. God's government is one that is impossible of failure, in any detail. Its greatest glory will be seen as it overcomes things designated as "wholly impossible." Even a missing limb can be restored under the rule of the heavens.

**Raise the dead.** As a positive demonstration of one of the great blessings, which would be the portion of mankind under the rule of the heavens they were told to raise the dead. That the resurrection of the dead was to be expected under the rule of the heavens is certainly indicated in this demonstration. This is a truth upon which a vast amount of work needs to be done. One idea concerning the resurrection of the dead has everyone being raised in the same group at one time. Other ideas see two, three, or four groups. I personally believe that I see four distinct group resurrections in the Word, but I can no longer believe that everyone who is to be raised is to come forth with one of these groups. Resurrection is an individual and personal matter. **Every man in his**

**own order,"** is the declaration of the Word (I Corinthians 12:23). If "his own order" falls in with a group, a man will be raised in a group, but if not, then his resurrection can be individual and personal. God can speak the name of David and call him forth, just as He spoke the name of Lazarus. It seems essential that certain individuals will need to be raised to do their predestined work just as soon as the heavens begin their rule,

***Cast out devils.*** The mystery of demon possession is such that it almost appalls the student of the Word. Today, we may well wonder if some of the so-called "criminally insane" are not victims of demon possession. Whether this is so or not, the best that present governments can do is to put such people in asylums or prisons for the criminally insane. Under God's government, complete deliverance can be the portion of all such. See our Lord's demonstrations of the benefits of heaven's government as recorded in Mark 5:15. The demon possessed man was found quiet, clothed, and in his right mind. The full blessings that can be the portion of men under God's rule by the heavens cannot be comprehended. They are beyond our understanding and comprehension.

In our next study we will consider in some detail the secrets of the kingdom.

## **To Be Continued - Vol. XII, No. 4**

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# ***STUDIES IN ACTS***

## **Chapter Seven**

There is an important lesson to be learned from this chapter. In it we will see how a Spirit-filled man of God conducted himself when he stood before the council in Jerusalem to give an answer to the charges that he had spoken blasphemous words against the temple and against the law. I do not believe that Stephen sought to defend himself or to clear himself of the charges that were made against him. He stands before the same council, which a short time before had condemned the Lord to be crucified. A few of the old members may be gone, and a few new ones may have taken their place, but the council is the same. Their hands drip with the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It cannot be but that Stephen knew well the words of the Lord Jesus Christ in which he said:

**The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household. Matthew 10:24-25. See also John 15:20.**

The condemnation of Stephen was a foregone conclusion before his trial ever began. He makes no defense, he does not answer any charge against him. It is his task before God to bring the Word of God to bear upon the hearts of these men. The manner in which he did this and the message, which he gave are two of the most important lessons that we can learn. Not for one moment does Stephen consider that he is on trial. His eye of faith leads him to see that God has turned the tables and it is the council, his accusers, and the false witnesses who are on trial before God.

Some commentators on this chapter have greatly underestimated Stephen's message. They feel it did not quite fit the need of his hearers. A few have criticized his words as being a digression from the points at issue. We who believe that Stephen spoke by direction of the Holy Spirit want no part of such ideas. The scene upon which Stephen's message was given is not too difficult to construct in our minds. Certain men of the synagogue of the Libertines, Cyrenians, and Alexandrians disputed the message of Stephen, and he silenced them utterly by the wisdom and spirit by which he spoke. When fair discussion had failed, these unbelievers determined to resort to foul means. They hired men who were willing to lie for a price. By this means they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes. They arrested Stephen and brought him before the council. Thus Stephen stands before a mixed audience of his accusers, representatives of the people, elders, scribes, false witnesses and the council. It is his greatest opportunity to proclaim God's Word. Among his hearers is the most bitter enemy of Christ at that time, a young man whose name was Saul.

Those familiar with the writings of Jonathan Edwards can easily imagine what he would have said if he should have been the speaker on this occasion. He would have hurled those mighty human thunderbolts of condemnation as he warned these men of the eternal, conscious torment that would be their lot if they failed to turn to Christ. And we can also imagine what the platform-hopping modern evangelist would have done and said if it had been his privilege to be the speaker at such a gathering. This is why the conduct and message of Stephen teaches us such an important lesson. Let us note his opening statement:

**7:1-5. Then said the high priest, Are these things so? And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken: The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran. And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land wherein ye now dwell. And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.**

The reader will see at once that these are historical facts, concerning which everyone in the entire gathering would be in perfect agreement. Stephen has said nothing that is not well known to everyone in the audience. Those who are listening know nothing up to this point that they did not know before. Let us consider what follows.

**7:6-8. And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land: and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years. And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God; and after that they shall come forth, and serve me in this place. And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham *begat* Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac *begat* Jacob: and Jacob *begat* the twelve patriarchs.**

These words are also historical facts, as familiar to his hearers as they were to Stephen; and we are inclined to wonder why such a message is being given. It seems that Stephen could use more direct, sharper, more forceful words than what he is doing. If he desires to marshal facts, it seems that there are other and more pertinent facts, which will act upon the consciences of those assembled before him. What is the explanation of the character of his message? Is he throwing away a golden opportunity to bring a message to the hearts of his hearers?

I believe that the explanation of the character of Stephen's message is found in this. God is using this opportunity to demonstrate the power of His word when He sees fit to use it powerfully. The message of Stephen may be nothing more than historical facts known to all his hearers, but it so happens that these historical facts are the Word of the living God. These facts were not taken from

profane history. They come from the inspired Word. The weapon which Stephen wields is sharper than any two edged sword. These facts are living and powerful. They can divide between soul and spirit. They can discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. What was said on this occasion was not important. The importance is found in the fact that what was said is the Word of God.

Men have ever been prone to wrongly divide the Word of God into historical, doctrinal, and practical portions. Some would throw all the emphasis upon what they call the practical portions. The lesson that we learn from this chapter is that even the history contained in God's Word may be used by the Holy Spirit to lay bare the hearts of men. And it is not always necessary that some practical exhortation of our own be linked up to a historical passage in order for it to be effective in the lives of those who hear. An exhortation may be valuable, but we need to remember that God's Word has a power that is independent of any appeal or exhortation we may base upon it, or of any application we may make of it. The historical and doctrinal portions of the Word can never fail to be practical. The Holy Spirit can use any passage of God's Word to accomplish His purpose, no matter what that purpose may be. This explains why so many strange passages have been used by the Spirit of God to introduce a man to Christ.

But we will see that the message of Stephen was not irrelevant. I do not mean to infer that he could have used any portion of the Word and laid bare the hearts of his enemies. He is led to declare these facts by the Holy Spirit, for there is truth in them that the Spirit will use to condemn those who hear Stephen.

**7:9-14. And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt: and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent our fathers first. And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren: and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh. Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.**

Stephen continues his recital of simple historical facts, but now we can begin to see why these facts were chosen. Underneath these facts is the obvious truth that a man whom they now greatly honor was at the first rejected, following which was a period of separation, this followed by an acknowledgment of the mistake and a restoration of relationship. The patriarchs, the twelve sons of Jacob, whom these men acknowledged and honored as their fathers, had acted in a spirit of envy and sold Joseph into Egypt. The life of Joseph is a miniature of the life and sufferings of Jesus Christ. The fathers had sold Joseph, and these men had rejected Christ. Stephen does not here say "Like father, like son," but that is the truth that the Spirit is applying to the hearts of these men. The one whom the patriarchs despised and ill-treated became their savior and lord. The audience that heard Stephen could hardly fail to see that he is applying this to the Christ whom they had crucified. This audience also lacks the strength to withstand the spirit and wisdom by which Stephen speaks (See 6:10).

**7:15-19. So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died; he and our fathers, and were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham brought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem. But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. The same dealt subtly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children to the end they might not live.**

Stephen is brief in his recital here. He is apparently using these facts to lead into his next presentation, which is to be the most powerful parallel he will draw between the actions of Israel of

Old and their descendants to whom he speaks. He will now set before them their most revered lawgiver, Moses.

**7:20-28. In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months: And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up and nourished him *for* her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds. And when he was full *forty* years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not. And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, *ye* are brethren; why do *ye* wrong one another? But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Wilt thou kill me, as thou didest the Egyptian yesterday?**

Here Stephen draws a powerful parallel between Moses and Christ. He emphasizes the truth that at first Moses was scorned by the very people whom he came to deliver, and that the efforts he put forth in their behalf were wholly misunderstood. This assembly well knew that Messiah was to be one like unto Moses; therefore, Stephen emphasizes those things in the life of Moses that were similar to Christ. Had not Pharaoh sought the life of Moses? Even so had Herod sought the life of Christ.

**7:29-33. Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Midian, where he begat two sons. And when *forty* years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sinai an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him. Saying. I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold. Then said the Lord to Him. Put off thy shoes from thy feet: *for* the place where thou standest is holy ground.**

The parallel here is clear. Just as his own people had rejected Moses and refused the deliverance, which he offered to them, even *so* the Jews had rejected the Lord Jesus and refused the salvation that He sought to bring them. Both Moses and Christ were denied, both were thrust away by Israel.

**7:34-41. I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt. This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush. He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years. This is that Moses which said unto the children of Israel. A prophet shall the Lord your God *raise* up unto you of your brethren. like unto me, him shall *ye* hear. This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sinai, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: To whom our fathers would not *obey*, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt. Saying unto Aaron. Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.**

The history of Moses is the very heart of Stephen's message. His chief point is that the one whom they had rejected was chosen by God to be their deliverer. It is most evident here that Stephen is not defending himself. He is preaching Christ, using Moses as the type. The fact that Israel had rejected Christ did not prove that He was not sent by God. His rejection was the very sign that identified Him

as the prophet like unto Moses. The point of Israel's rejection of Moses was, "Who made thee a ruler"; but God sent him back to be a ruler. The rejection of Christ was with the words, "We will not have this man to rule over us." God's answer, written large in the Scriptures, is that this is the One who will rule over them.

**7:42-43. Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets. O ye house of Israel have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? Yea, ye took the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your God Remphan, figures which ye make to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.**

Having charged that Israel staged a regular idol festival at Mount Sinai, the very place that the law had been given, Stephen now brings Scripture to bear upon them by showing the inspired record of the sins of their fathers. Paul's declaration in Romans 2:17-29 shows that the Jews considered themselves immune from any wrongdoing. The fact that they possessed the law led them to feel that they could do no wrong. It seems that it is this attitude that Stephen is exposing here. The long history of Israel from Mt. Sinai on was a long and dreary record of failure and sin. The possession of the law was no guarantee that it would not be broken.

**7:45-47. Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus (Joshua) into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; Who found favor before God and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built him a house.**

The simple historical facts that Stephen sets forth are being used powerfully by the Holy Spirit. He reviews the story of the tabernacle and temple and shows that the possession of these divine appointments had not deterred Israel from sin. A review of Israel's history revealed a long series of apostasies. Their fanatical reverence for the temple is here exposed. Israel never had a temple until the time of Solomon, and it was following his reign that idolatry became so prominent in Israel, finally bringing about the Assyrian captivity of Israel and the Babylonian captivity of Judah.

**7:48-50. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands: as saith the prophet. Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hands made all these things?**

This quotation from Isaiah is directed against their overestimation of the temple. This was a truth, which Israel never accepted. They preferred to believe that the most High did well in temples made with hands. This is a truth, which men still reject today. They habitually refer to their edifices as "the house of God," assuming that He dwells in buildings made with hands. This quotation from Isaiah was sure to provoke bitter opposition. The time has now come for Stephen to put his finger upon their sin and close his testimony.

**7:51-53. Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One: of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.**

All of God's prophets had suffered at the hands of Israel. They were always at variance with the Holy Spirit. And Stephen's hearers have proven themselves to be the true sons of their fathers. The fathers had rejected the prophets who spoke of the coming of the Just One. They had rejected the Just One. They had received the law, but they had not observed it. The tables are thus turned. They

had accused Stephen of speaking against the law, but the Sanhedrin now stands convicted of utterly breaking the law.

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## ***THE EDITOR TO HIS FRIENDS***

\*\*\*\*I rejoice to report that Mrs. Sellers has made very rapid strides in recovering from her long illness. She got out of bed for the first time in five months on December 1, and since then has shown almost daily improvement. She must still take things easy and avoid overdoing, but she is again looking after the correspondence. This means that replies to your correspondence will be cared for more promptly. We both give thanks unto God through Jesus Christ for His abundant grace through this whole experience.

\*\*\*\*Mrs. Sellers joins with me in expressing our heartfelt thanks to our many friends for their material gifts to help us in some of the expenses during her illness and hospitalization. These gifts amounted to \$1990, and they were indeed a blessing, coming to us at a time of great need. Inasmuch as our expenses totaled over \$6000.00 you will realize just how much we were helped by your liberality.

\*\*\*\*My ministry to the Los Angeles Bible Testimony was resumed on Sunday, February 4. I now teach every Sunday morning at 11:00, and Mr. Herbert Baudistel teaches each Sunday evening at 7:30. These meetings are held at 245 South Lucas Avenue. A Class is also held each Tuesday at 7:45 at 607 South Kenmore Avenue.

\*\*\*\*It has been my joy during the past several years to make a new study of all that the Word of God reveals concerning "the heavens." In a study such as this I try as far as possible to put aside all that I think I know and make a new investigation as if the subject were one that I had never touched before. In the past year I have carefully reviewed my findings with several other students, and I have also presented them to the group here in Los Angeles. This has greatly helped to advance and season some of the ideas, which I uncovered. I trust at some later date to be able to present this material in written form. In the meantime I wish to declare that I believe *in* and teach that there are three realms to the universe, namely, the earth, the heavens, and the heavens of heavens. Furthermore, I believe that God's present calling of believers is linked up with "the heavens of heavens," not "the heavens."

\*\*\*\*The Lord willing I will be in the Mid-west and East for ministry beginning April 11. I look forward with joyous anticipation toward fellowshiping with the friends of the ministry in these areas once again.

\*\*\*\*Mr. and Mrs. Otis Q. Sellers announce with pleasure the forthcoming marriage of their daughter Jane Lou to Mr. Fred R. Hancock of Victorville, California. The wedding will take place at the home of the bride's parents on Saturday, March 17. The young couple plan to make their home in Victorville, where the groom is employed as a chemist.

**End, Vol. XII, No. 3**