

# THE WORD OF TRUTH

OTIS Q. SELLERS, Editor JANUARY, 1950

VOL. XI, No. 5

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## ***THE PREMILLENIAL KINGDOM OF HEAVEN***

The title of this study will seem to be discordant to many. We have been so prone to think of the millennium as being the kingdom of the heaven that the thought of a premillennial kingdom will seem like a contradiction of terms. Nevertheless, this title has been chosen with great care as it expresses accurately the truth I desire to declare, that there will be an aspect or phase of the kingdom of heaven that will precede the millennial form of the kingdom.

This may not appear to be a new idea to some, since many dispensational fundamentalists hold that there is in existence today "the kingdom of heaven in its mystery form" and that this is "Christendom." I do not agree with this for it is impossible for me to believe that there is anything on earth today that can honestly be called the kingdom of the heavens. To say that "Christendom" is the kingdom of the heavens, as many do, is to call evil good, to put darkness for light, to put bitter for sweet (Isaiah 5:20).

It is my conviction that God for 1900 years has been engaged in a great demonstration of grace, and that during this time He has dispensed nothing but grace. His purpose in this is to demonstrate and establish the graciousness of His character. I believe that when this purpose is completed to His satisfaction, great and marvelous changes will take place and men will be living under vastly different conditions than what they are today. The following is to be expected when God's present purpose is complete. (1) The salvation of God returns to Israel, thus reversing the declaration of Acts 28:28; (2) Israel is received by God as a nation and they become "Ammi" or "My People" once again; (3) this brings about such a radical change in the world (the order or system in which and under which men live) that it is described as "life from the dead" (Rom. 11:15); (4) God ceases His policy of dispensing nothing but grace and begins a work wherein light is predominantly dispensed to mankind; (5) mankind is enlightened concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment, and each man will be responsible and accountable under this light (John 16:7-11); (6) this in time will result in the earth being purged of disobedient men and the sons of the kingdom being established in the earth. The details concerning this will be found in the study that follows.

Ever since I was led to dedicate my meager talents to the work of perpetual and progressive Bible study, I have labored unceasingly to uncover, recover, or discover the truth that God has placed within His Word. I consider this truth of the premillennial kingdom of the heavens to be the most transcendent that it has been my privilege to uncover and declare. It is a truth that is needed for the times in which we live. It is a message of joy and hope in a time of almost universal sorrow, discouragement and despair. To my great God I offer humble praise for the grace that has made possible the uncovering of this glorious truth.

The conclusions set forth in this study have been developed over a period of five years. My studies in this subject are by no means complete and the presentation here is partial. The things set forth here will be enlarged and clarified in future studies. If anything in this study contradicts or clashes with anything I have said before, then this must be considered as my latest light.

(Note: Additional material related to this subject will be found in *The Word of Truth*, Vol. X, No.3 under *God's Declared Purposes*; Vol. X, No.4 under *The Future of Israel*; Vol. X, No.6 *Not for Your Sakes*; Vol.. XI, No. 1, 2, 3, 4, under *The Order of Things to Come*.)

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## ***THE ORDER OF THINGS TO COME***

**(Continued from Volume XI, Number 4)**

### **THE PREMILLENIAL KINGDOM**

It is the testimony of the Word of God that there will yet be divine government and universal blessing upon the earth. The will of God shall some day be done upon the earth as it is in the heavens. The unfolding of this truth is by means of a great body of Scripture that runs through the Old Testament and into the New. If one reads the Bible from Genesis to Revelation he will find that it reveals that God will ultimately triumph over all sin and will be all in all. The fullness of this triumph is reached in the new heavens and new earth when the earth will be restored to its original blessedness.

The Bible reveals that the restoration of the universe to its original conformity to God is not something that is immediately accomplished. It could be if God willed it that way, but He has revealed that it will be otherwise. There are those who believe that the next prophesied event to take place is the second coming of Christ and that this will be followed immediately by the great white throne of judgment and the new heavens and the new earth. But this is not the testimony of the Word of God, for it reveals that this glorious consummation is reached through various stages or aspects. Before the final aspect of the kingdom of God is reached, there is to be a thousand year period during which Satan is bound and great companies of redeemed live and reign with Christ. This thousand-year period is commonly called the millennial kingdom of Christ; a very apt designation, even though the word *millennial* does not appear in the Bible. Words fail us when we attempt to describe the glories of this millennial kingdom, since there is so little now to which we can liken it. The prophets use every superlative when they write of that time "when the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before His ancients gloriously." Isaiah 24:23. Nevertheless, this millennial kingdom is only a step toward the goal. It will be superseded by that time of blessedness, which transcends all others, the new heavens and the new earth.

Many there are who believe that the next great event of prophecy is the rapture or catching away of all living believers, followed by the resurrection of the dead in Christ, this to be followed by the great tribulation upon the earth, the second coming of Christ, the millennial kingdom, then the new heavens and the new earth. This, in brief, is the position held by most dispensational fundamentalists, a position which we have often designated in these pages as the *Darby-Scofield* system of prophetic interpretation. However, it is my conviction that this system has failed to recognize those prophecies which reveal an aspect of the kingdom of heavens which precedes the millennial kingdom, and, therefore, precedes the second coming of Christ. This I call the premillennial kingdom of the heavens since it precedes the millennial kingdom. The truth concerning this can best be approached through an Old Testament avenue.

### **The King and the Kingdom**

The Old Testament sets forth two great lines of prophecy which are closely related, yet are distinct. For purposes of designation these are usually called the prophecies of the King and the prophecies of the kingdom. It is of the greatest possible importance that we recognize that in both of these lines of prophecy there was an element that greatly puzzled the very men who were inspired by God to write them. Their prophecies of the King seemed to contradict when they spoke of the sufferings and glory of Christ. They searched diligently in the hope of solving the mystery of their conflicting witness. However, they lacked the truth that explained and clarified all the truth of two comings, one related to His suffering and one related to His glory. See I Peter 1:10-12. In the Old Testament, all prophecies concerning Christ are blended. No individual from Adam to Christ had any intimation that there would be two advents of Christ. Yet these two advents are clearly discerned now.

This same puzzling feature existed in regard to the second great line of prophecy, that of the kingdom. The prophets spoke of great blessing and followed in the same breath with prophecies of great tribulation. See Jeremiah 30:3-8 for an example of this. Note the blessing recorded in verse three and the tribulation in verse eight. Again they spoke of great tribulation followed by great blessing. They spoke of blessings that were to precede the great and notable day of the Lord (Joel 2), and tribulation that was to come with that day. Then they spoke of blessings in the day of the Lord. See Isaiah 2:6-3:26; Isaiah 4. That this seemingly contradictory testimony greatly puzzled them is revealed by our Lord in **Matthew 13:17**:

**For verily I say unto you. That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.**

This statement followed His setting forth of the great parable of the sower. (Matthew 13:3-9). The disciples asked Him bluntly why He spoke to the multitude in parables. His direct answer was:

**Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries (secrets) of the kingdom of heaven but to them it is not given. Matthew 13:11.**

The word *mystery* in this verse is not a translation. It is a transliteration; that is, a carrying over of a Greek word into the English. This is at times a wise procedure, especially so where there is no word in English that fits the Greek word. But there was no need for it in this passage as an acceptable English word was available that fully expresses the Greek word *musterion*. It is the word **secret**. Thus, the things being revealed to them, the things hid from the multitude, the things that prophets and righteous men had desired to see and hear but could not, are the secrets of the kingdom of the heavens.

In the parables of Matthew we have certain truths concerning the kingdom of the heavens, which were hidden or secret before the first advent of Christ, but which were made known to his disciples. These "secrets" provide the key that clarifies the Old Testament prophecies of the kingdom. Again and again we read "the kingdom of heaven is like," and these words are followed by a parable, which reveals a truth concerning the kingdom, which hitherto had been a secret. When these truths are fully examined there is only one possible conclusion. **They reveal an aspect or phase of the kingdom of heaven, which precedes the millennial kingdom, and which, also, precedes the second coming of Christ.**

Since this precedes the millennial kingdom it is most fitting that it be called the premillennial kingdom of the heavens. And just as the millennial kingdom is a step toward the goal of the new heavens and new earth, this premillennial kingdom is the forerunner of the millennial kingdom and a step toward it in the program and purposes of God.

In the Old Testament all prophecies concerning the premillennial kingdom and the millennial kingdom are blended. No reader of the Old Testament could possibly know that there were two aspects of the kingdom set forth in these prophecies. It was not until the Lord revealed the secrets of the kingdom of heaven that this was known. Practically every prophecy concerning the kingdom will have a precursory fulfillment in the premillennial kingdom, but this will not exhaust the prophecy. It will have its complete fulfillment in the millennial kingdom. Therefore, we must not attempt to divide these prophecies into two distinct groups, those that apply to the premillennial and those that apply to the millennial kingdom. We can do this only in a few instances. The truth will be found when we realize that most of these prophecies apply to both aspects of the kingdom, and that they will be fulfilled in a precursory manner in the premillennial kingdom and completely in the millennial kingdom.

Precursory fulfillments of prophecy are familiar to every careful student of the Word. In fact, apart from a direct, inspired statement, we cannot say that any prophecy has had its positive and final fulfillment. What seems to be may be only a precursory fulfillment, which adumbrates the definitive final fulfillment. A preliminary fulfillment of any prophecy must never be counted as having exhausted it. Even so the precursory fulfillment of the kingdom prophecies in the premillennial kingdom of the heavens do not exhaust these prophecies. They will have their unconditional fulfillment in the millennial kingdom.

That "the kingdom of the heavens" delineated by the parables of Matthew 13 precedes the millennial kingdom is not a new or radically different idea. This is the position of almost every expositor of the dispensational-fundamentalist school of thought. They hold almost as a unit that there is a phase of the kingdom of heaven that precedes the millennial kingdom, and this phase is usually called by them "the kingdom of heaven in its mystery form." They teach that this aspect of the kingdom began when Jesus went out of the house as recorded in Matthew 13:1, that it continues without interruption until it is superseded by the millennial kingdom, and that this kingdom of heaven is Christendom. To quote Arno C. Gaebelin, an able expositor of this view: In one word "the kingdom of the heavens" in Matthew is equivalent with "*Christendom*." It includes the whole sphere of Christian profession saved, and unsaved, so called Romanists and Protestants, all who are naming the name of Christ. Therefore, the church is not the kingdom of the heavens, though the church is in the kingdom of the heavens. The Lord teaches in the seven parables how matters will go in the earth while He is not here, and what men will do with that which He brought from heaven and left in the hands of men. *Gospel of Matthew, page 263.*

This interpretation has had wide acceptance, but it will not stand the test of critical investigation. All one needs to do is to substitute the word *Christendom* and the idea it represents in any passage

where "the kingdom of heaven" occurs and he will find that it creates nothing but confusion. The reader may try this himself in Matthew 13:11, 44, 45. The interpretation breaks down at every point.

When these parables are carefully considered it will be found that they reveal an aspect of the kingdom of the heavens which is still future. The present parenthesis in God's dealing with Israel is no part of this. Some truths in these parables can in a measure be applied to the present time, but to interpret them as picturing the present time cannot be honestly done if we take each statement at its face value. This can be proved by examining the parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13:24-30. Since it is the first parable that begins with the words, "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto," we will consider it in advance of the parable of the sower. The parable should be examined first with no thought of interpretation entering in, then the interpretation considered afterward. This is the way our Lord gave it-first the parable, later the interpretation.

### **The Wheat and the Tares**

***Another parable put He forth unto them, saying. These parables were in reality riddles or puzzles. They were given to hide the truth from some and to reveal it unto others. See Matt. 13:11.***

***The kingdom of heaven.*** This phrase is used only by Matthew to describe a literal kingdom to be set up by the God of heaven. It will embrace every kingdom under the heavens. This expression emphasizes the source from whence this kingdom comes, the heavens, and the sphere of its operation, all that is under the heavens; that is, on the earth. This title is so full of meaning that it cannot possibly be used as a descriptive title for Christendom today. The phrase can mean only something that is good. It cannot mean something that is predominantly evil. The Bible knows of only one kingdom of the heavens, even though it is presented in several aspects.

***Is likened unto.*** Our Lord is unfolding truth to His disciples, which has heretofore been hidden. It is as if He were saying to them: "There is a truth concerning the kingdom of the heavens which you know nothing about. You do not know that it appears in two forms, one preceding the other. I am revealing to you this great truth. Here is a simple illustration of what it is like in its initial form."

In view of this we must pay close attention to the similitude, which the Lord gave. We must not alter in the least this facsimile. Men have been ever prone to alter this simple picture, which the Lord painted. We must not be guilty of carrying thoughts into it, which are not there, then persuade ourselves that we found them there.

***A man which sowed good seed in his field.*** There is only one true picture which we can get from these words. We see a man; we see him sowing; we know his seed is good; and we know where he sowed it-"in his field." We must not think of a farm, composed of wooded areas, orchards, uncleared areas of briars, pools of water, etc. Our attention is centered on a field. This word both in the Greek and English indicates a piece of land selected for or put to a special use, or one that yields certain products. This man did not plant good seed on a farm, he planted it in a specially selected field. We can rest assured that this man was a good and diligent farmer.

I stress this because the usual conception of this parable is that it sets forth an irresponsible and careless farmer who went out and scattered seed haphazardly. This idea seems to come from a mistaken conception of the parable of the sower whose seed fell upon four kinds of soil. But, even that was not due to carelessness upon the part of the sower. We have a different picture here-that of a man sowing good seed in a field. Ask any farmer what it means to sow wheat in a field or to sow rye in a field. Ask him to describe the picture these words bring to his mind. You will realize at once that these words can mean only one thing. A man sowing seed in a selected and prepared plot of ground.

Let us not be guilty of obliterating the picture our Lord painted by covering it with a slap brush job of our own.

***But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way.*** "While men slept," is an idiom meaning "at night," or "under cover of darkness." These men are not to be criticized for having slept. They were doing a normal and natural thing. Their Lord did not berate them. Why should we?

Note carefully the statement "sowed tares among the wheat." It is not wheat sowed in a field that is predominantly occupied by tares, but tares sown in a wheat field. The wheat must be many times more numerous than tares or the statement "tares among wheat" will be false. Let us settle this in our mind, Do we see tares growing in a wheat field, or wheat growing in a tare field when we consider these words of our Lord?

***But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.*** The wheat was sown first, then an enemy oversowed it with tares. They looked the same while growing and no distinction could be made until the fruit appeared.

***So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?*** Note the surprise of the servants when they found tares growing among the wheat. They seek to verify their understanding that he had sowed only good seed in the field. They question him as to where the tares came.

***He said unto them, An enemy hath done this.*** The householder is not puzzled. He does not question the quality of the seed or the condition of the field. He declares simply and finally, "An enemy hath done this."

***The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?*** This strange situation demanded that they seek explicit instructions concerning what they should do.

***But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.*** The master orders that the tares be left alone. His reason is that there is danger of rooting up the wheat if any attempt is made to gather up the tares. However, he does not plan to ignore these tares. He will deal with them in due time.

***Let both grow together until the harvest.*** The tares neither die off or die out. They grow alongside the wheat until the harvest.

***And in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.*** At the time of the harvest the tares are gathered first. They are tied in bundles with a view to burning them. The wheat is gathered into the householder's barn.

This is the parable of the tares and the wheat. When it is looked at factually instead of emotionally it presents a different picture than the one men are constantly presenting. Some have been guilty of rewriting this parable to make it fit a predetermined explanation. As a rule its strong statements are toned down so it will fit into and be applicable to the present time. But this parable presents no picture of the present time, as will be plainly seen when we consider the interpretation. The meaning of this parable is beyond the pale of dispute. Our Lord gave the interpretation. There cannot be two interpretations. To bring in another is to dishonor Him.

## The Parable Explained

**After the Lord sent the multitude away and had again entered the house the disciples came to him and sought help on this parable. See Matthew 13:36-43.**

***Declare unto us the parable of the field.*** "Make thoroughly clear right now," is their urgent request (A. T. Robertson).

***He answered and said unto them, He that sowed good seed is the Son of man.*** In the first parable, that of the sower (Matthew 13:3-23), the sower was not necessarily the Son of Man. John had sowed the word of the kingdom (Matt. 3:2), the Lord had followed him sowing the same message (Matt. 4:17), and the twelve had also gave forth as sowers of this same seed (Matt. 10:7). But here in this parable the sower is the Son of man and none other. He is the sole planter of this seed.

***The field is the world*** Not the heavens-the field is the world. Not some part of the world, but the world without limitations. This must not be limited. We must accept our Lord's interpretation.

***The good seed are the children of the kingdom.*** The good seed here is not the gospel; It is not the word of the kingdom; it is not the Word of God. This seed is men- men who have the kingdom character as outlined in the sermon on the mount. The Greek word here translated "children" means sons.

Thus in three sweeping statements the sower, the field, and the good seed are positively identified.

Innumerable men have believed that the sower is the Son of man, that the field is the world, and that the good seed are the sons of the kingdom. But where are the men who have dared to put these three truths together, then believe what they reveal? When this is done there is only one possible picture, only one possible understanding of His words-the Lord Jesus placing throughout the entire world men who possess the kingdom character to such an extent that they are called the sons of the kingdom. Furthermore, when we have the entire picture, we see this being done before His second coming.

The true picture thus painted by our Lord seems almost incredible; but who dares to say that He will not do it or that He cannot do it. There is nothing in the past that corresponds to this parable. The Lord has never yet sowed the world with the sons of the kingdom. There is nothing at present that fits this parable. If our Lord had spoken about wheat being sown in a tare field we might apply this to the present time, but that is not the picture He painted. He was not giving a likeness to anything in the past. He was not painting a picture of the present. He was setting forth a likeness of the kingdom of the heavens, and there will yet be a condition of things upon this earth that will fit this parable to perfection; and to do so this form of the kingdom of the heavens must precede the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Those who engage in police work are as a rule trained to look at a photograph and impress it upon their minds in such manner that they will instantly identify the man if they should see a face that matches the picture. They would make themselves ridiculous if they arrested a man because he had two ears, the same as the photograph. If men will take an honest look at this parable and its interpretation they will know that they see nothing today that fits this parable. Take now an honest look at the world. Do we see it planted, like a wheat field planted with wheat, with men who have the kingdom character? Do we see rulers, judges, legislators, citizens, employers, workers, educators, students, fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters all of whom have the kingdom character? Do we see this today? No, we do not. But this is what it will be when the Lord plants this world with the good seed, the sons of the kingdom.

*The tares are the children of the wicked one.* Here the tares are identified. They are the sons of the wicked one. They bear his character. They were predominant in the day when the Son of man was on earth, "You are of your father the devil," was the rebuke of Christ to some of them. They are still predominant today.

*The enemy that sowed them is the devil.* Let us not hesitate to believe this entire picture. The world must be cleared and made ready for the planting of the sons of the kingdom. This good seed must be planted; that is, established in the world. Then, following this, the devil will sow his sons. The appearance of these "sons of the wicked one" causes great surprise. One can hardly imagine anyone being so naive today as to be surprised at finding wicked men in this world. Furthermore, if we could go to our Lord today and say, "Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field?" the answer would be, "No, I have not yet sown the world with the sons of the kingdom."

*The harvest is the end of the world.* It need hardly be pointed out that this translation is wrong. The harvest is the consummation of the eon, is the meaning of the Greek. This is proof that all this precedes the second coming of Christ. His coming is after the consummation of the eon.

*The reapers are the angels.* This work is not left to men. It will be done by messengers divinely commissioned. The results are set forth in **Matthew 13:40-43**.

**As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.**

Several important truths should be noted here. The angels gather out of His kingdom all things that offend and those who do iniquity. We see here a kingdom being purged of its enemies, not a kingdom being brought into existence. After these enemies are disposed of, the sons of the kingdom (the righteous) will shine forth as the sun in their Father's kingdom. That is, they will shine forth in the millennial kingdom.

If the facts are honestly faced the careful student will realize that the kingdom of heavens portrayed in the parable of the wheat and the tares is not the millennial form of the kingdom. The truth unfolded there reveals the King's arrival on the scene and the acts of judgment, which are preparatory to the thousand-year reign of Christ. Since these parables do portray "the kingdom of the heavens" we cannot say that this descriptive phrase belongs only to the millennium. Neither can this high and holy designation be rightfully applied to Christendom. Those who do this make one form of the kingdom of heavens to be a Satanic monstrosity. That form of the kingdom revealed in the "secrets" of Matthew 13 is still future. It will not be a reality until the world has been sowed with men who have the kingdom character.

Other parables present other pictures of this premillennial kingdom. These make an interesting study, but it is not our purpose just now to consider all parables. At present we need to consider how this premillennial kingdom is to be established-how it is to be brought about.

First of all, I would state as emphatically as possible that neither the premillennial kingdom nor the millennial kingdom will be brought about by any human process or agency or by any divine process that is operating in the world today. This kingdom will never be established by God dealing with the world in grace, by God saving sinners through gospel preaching, or by any activity of gospel agencies that are operating today. It will be brought about as a result of a divine operation and activity, which is not in operation at the present time. In other words, the divine energy that will in the end produce the premillennial kingdom is not now operating toward that goal.



If we should read in the newspaper an announcement that a great building is to be erected on a certain site, we would be inclined to take this announcement at its face value and believe what it says. If we should go and view the proposed site and find that it is already covered with buildings, this would not cause us to doubt what we had read. We would not refuse to believe it even though we saw no activity whatsoever upon the site. We would assume that the site is to be cleared of all present buildings to make way for the new edifice. And if any should ask us, "How?" we would answer that there are men who have both the knowledge and tools for doing such work. If after the site were cleared, we should see that there are no foundations there to support a great building, this would not cause us to doubt. We would take it for granted that foundations of sufficient strength to carry the building will be laid. If another should object that there are no materials on the site, we would answer by saying that materials are available, and if not, they will be produced. Bricks can be made from clay, steel can be produced from ore, and glass can be manufactured from sand.

Let us think of the premillennial kingdom along these same lines. It has been announced and described by Jesus Christ. There is no other conclusion that can be gained from the parable of the wheat and tares except that Christ will someday sow the world with the sons of the kingdom. If we look at the site of this kingdom, the very field in which this good seed is to be planted, we find it dominated by men who display Satan's character, the sons of the wicked one. This does not lead us to doubt His announcement. He can and He will clear His field and get it ready for a full planting with men who have the kingdom character. This is not to be done by any judgment, which sweeps the earth clean as did the flood of Noah's time. And even though we now see no divine activity toward clearing the world, this should not lead us to doubt. No jot or tittle will pass from His word until it is fulfilled. He will begin to clear and make ready His field in His own time. If any should ask, "How can these things be?" we answer that He has the wisdom and power to do this. If others object that there is a lack of seed; that is, the sons of the kingdom, with which to sow the entire world, we again answer that this seed will be produced. If from stones, God can raise up children of Abraham, He is well able to produce sons of the kingdom out of the unlikely material we see on every hand today. With man this is impossible. He cannot do one whit toward it. With God all things are possible. See Mark 10:27.

### A New Order of Things

The truth we are considering can best be understood if we approach it through truths that are analogous to it. When God placed Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, He placed them in a situation which has not existed since the time of their fall. The condition under which they lived has never been duplicated. No sin was present in the world and death was not working in them. Furthermore, God had spoken to them and apprised them of certain facts. **"Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,"** was God's word to them. This declaration established a divine condition under which they had to live. To live in harmony with it meant that they would enjoy the blessings of life without death. To violate this principle meant that they would experience the penalty it imposed. Thus, by means of His word God established a divine situation, a definite order, a principle as fixed as the law of gravitation. When they transgressed, God did not need to speak or act again. Death passed upon them, and the process of death began to work in them. Their sin brought about a new order, a new situation, a new condition. Sin is in the world, death is working in them. These are the facts they must face. They must live and act with these facts in mind.

From the fall of Adam to the time of the flood all mankind had to live under the situation and conditions brought about by Adam's sin. However, this situation was entirely different from anything under which man has lived since the flood. The complete dominion that man had over the animals (Genesis 1:26) was not lost in the fall. Many have stumbled at the testimony of the Word of God because they think that the present situation and conditions under which men now live are identical with those that prevailed before the flood. They think that the fall immediately diminished man to his present physical limitation and condition. Therefore, they refuse to believe and even ridicule the idea that men lived over nine hundred years before the flood. Their basis of rejection and ridicule is that none can live so long today. Furthermore, they ridicule the divine record of Noah bringing the animals two of every kind into the ark. They do this because such a feat would be impossible today. They take their place with the scoffers who say that "all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation" (II Peter 3:4). They are "willingly ignorant" of the fact that before the flood man had complete control over all animals. They answered his call and did his bidding. It was after the flood that the fear and dread of man came upon the animals. These facts alone are sufficient to show that the economy under which men lived between the fall and the flood is not the same as that under which we live today.

A further example of a change in the conditions under which men lived is seen in the thirty-three years of the Acts period, when we consider the case of Ananias and Sapphira. These people lived in the Acts period and they were in the church of God. These two facts created a situation which could lead to "blessing or cursing." Covetousness could not be passed over by God under these conditions. For them to lie or to misrepresent was sure to bring judgment upon them. To conform to the divine order of the church of God would mean great blessing. Failure to conform meant that tragic consequences would follow. They took the chance, misrepresented their giving, and as a result both of them died. Take also the example of the Corinthian believers. Because they ate of the bread and drank of the cup unworthily, many of them were sick and some were dead. This was the divine situation under which they lived, a situation which does not exist today.

At the present time mankind lives under a situation that has no parallel in all history. It began at that point marked by Paul's declaration in Acts 28:28. The conditions that now prevail, the situation under which men live is revealed by Paul in Ephesians 3:2. This is the dispensation (administration) of the grace of God. The divine situation, the divine conditions under which men live today have been brought about by the fact that God is completely occupied in a great demonstration of the graciousness of His character.

The reader will note that I speak of the "divine" situation under which we live, inasmuch as Satan has also created a situation and condition under which we must live, which we cannot get away from. Because God is dealing in grace rather than in judgment, the mass of men are very bold in their evil ways. Satan and mankind have been forward in taking advantage of the fact that God is engaged in demonstrating the graciousness of His character. I firmly believe that the wickedness of men today is a thousand times greater than it was at the time of the flood. God is tolerating a Satanic system today that is infinitely worse than that which prevailed in the days of Noah. He does this because of His determination to show once and for all that He is a God of grace.

It is a truth clearly revealed in Scripture that this demonstration of the grace of God is not to continue forever. The decision as to when its purpose has been accomplished rests with God. When it is complete, the dispensation of the grace of God will come to an end. A goal will have been reached. A purpose will have been accomplished. God will then resume His declared program and purposes as set forth in the Old and New Testaments. The resumption of this program means that all men upon the earth will find themselves living under a vastly different situation, under different conditions, under a new order of things.

A passage in Romans sheds much light on this.

**For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what will the receiving of them be, but life from the dead. Romans 11:15.**

The truth in this passage is somewhat obscured by translating *katallage* by "reconciling" with all its theological implications. This is simply the word *allasso* (change) with the prefix *kata*. This prefix accelerates the word *allasso* (change) and gives it the meaning of a radical or far-reaching change. (See Word of Truth, Volume VII) Thus we know from this passage that the "casting away" of Israel had brought about a radical change in the world. I do not digress here to show what "casting away" means or to set forth what this change was. It is our duty to believe the Word, not to begrudgingly accept it after all related matters have been explained. God has spoken. He has told us that their casting away brought about a radical change in the world, a change in the order under which men lived. This being true, the receiving of them will be "life from the dead." There is an ellipsis of thought here that is easily supplied from the context. The truth declared is that if the casting away of them brought such a radical change in the world, the receiving of them will bring about another change of such character that it can best be described as "life from the dead." Thus the statement is metaphoric. The change that will take place in the world when God receives Israel again is called "life from the dead."

The careful student of Scripture will know that as the Acts period neared its close the expectation was that God would receive Israel as His people again and begin upon them that great work which would fulfill every prophecy written of them. However, instead of receiving them, He further widened the breach by sending His salvation to the Gentiles (Acts 28:28). This postponed God's receiving them again while His great demonstration of grace runs its course. When this is finished, He will receive Israel. They will become "Ammi" (My people) once again.

The "receiving" of Israel does not mean their conversion, restoration, cleansing, and blessing. All these follow their receiving. Their receiving will be an accomplished fact soon after God decrees from heaven that His salvation is to return to His people Israel. This will bring about such a radical change in the divine order, the situation under which men live, that the average citizen of this world will be as foreign to it as the African Bushman would be if he were suddenly deposited in downtown Chicago. There would be nothing there to hurt this Bushman, and thousands would be willing to offer him help, but he would need at once to become passive and seek to conform to his new situation. But let us leave such fantasy and get down to facts. Let us take a look at this present order, the situation in which we now live. Concerning this world (*cosmos*) Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer has eloquently spoken:

"The *cosmos* is a vast order or system that Satan has promoted which conforms to his ideals, aims, and methods. It is civilization now functioning apart from God—a civilization in which none of its promoters really expect God to share, who assign to God no consideration in respect to their projects; nor do they ascribe any causativity to Him. This system embraces its godless governments, conflicts, armaments, jealousies, its education, culture, religions or morality, and pride. It is that sphere in which man lives. It is what he sees, what he employs. To the uncounted multitude it is all they ever know so long as they are on this earth. It is properly styled *the satanic system*, which phrase is in many instances a justified interpretation of the so-meaningful word *cosmos*. It is literally a *cosmos diabolicus*."

This conclusive delineation of the satanic system into which men are born and under which they live is true in every detail. It should be noted that this system has reached its zenith in this the dispensation of the grace of God. In a former day because sentence against evil works was sometimes delayed the hearts of men were fully set to commit wickedness (Ecclesiastes 8:11). God's

longsuffering encouraged men in their sins. He did not intend it to be that way, but that is the way it was. Since the close of Acts, because of God's great purpose to demonstrate the graciousness of His character and all judgment of sin is in abeyance, men are all the more bold, all the more set to do evil. They learn from experience that no sin or disobedience now receives its just recompense of reward. They should learn from experience that God is now dispensing nothing but grace. But this lesson is not learned.

### The World Enlightened

The premillennial kingdom of the heavens will be brought about by God bringing in a new order of things. This new order will come about from what He dispenses. At present He dispenses nothing but grace. The chief thing He will dispense in the future is light. The one great prophecy that sets this forth is found in **John 16:7-11**:

**Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me: Of righteousness, because I go to My Father. and ye see me no more: Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. John 16:7-11.**

Concerning this passage, certain facts stand out and should be fully considered. This is a prophecy, a declaration from the lips of our Lord concerning something that was to take place in the future. We are so inclined to think that prophecy is found only in such books as Daniel and Revelation that we need to remind ourselves that some of the most definite predictions in the Bible came from the Lord while He was upon the earth. He looked into the future, saw what was to be, and gave revelation concerning things to come. The prediction set forth here has never yet been fulfilled.

Only those who are willing to accept partial fulfillments in place of total fulfillments will insist that this prophecy has come to pass. I am not one of these. I believe that a great and majestic prediction such as this must have a fulfillment equally great and majestic. It is certainly true that the Lord went away as He said. It is true also that the Comforter came to the disciples. But the Holy Spirit has not yet reproved the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. This, the most important part of this prophecy has not yet been fulfilled. If we look at the world today, do we see mankind reproved of sin, righteousness, and judgment? No, we do not. If we look, the best we can say is, "Fools make a mock of sin."

We need to consider carefully this great prophecy. The work it predicts is the foundation of the premillennial kingdom of the heavens. Three important words stand out. These are *expedient*, *Comforter*, and *reprove*. The first and last of these words have become changed in meaning since they were used by the translators; the word "**Comforter**" is a poor translation.

The word *expedient* means that which is apt or suitable to the end in view; therefore, advantageous. Weymouth translates this, "It is to your advantage," which very neatly expresses the truth here. .

The word *Comforter* is in the Greek *Parakletos*. We lack a suitable word in English to translate this. It means, "One called to another's side to aid him." When we realize that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, will someday act to all mankind as a Paraclete, this seems incredible. We are amazed at the thought. Our natural tendency is to weaken the prediction and limit it to a few believers among mankind. But this we must not do.

The word *reprove* in this passage no longer expresses the truth contained in the Greek word which it translates (*elegcho*). *Reprove* is now a harsh word containing the idea of rebuke, while this Greek

word is a tender word; nevertheless, one of great force. It means to enlighten by making known the facts. It contains also the ideas of "to shame, to put to shame; to do so by proving one in the wrong."

With these facts before us we know that our Lord predicted a work of the Spirit in behalf of the world that seems incredible. Yet, God has spoken, and it is our duty to take Him at His word and think accordingly. This work is done by the Paraclete who is called "the Spirit of truth." It has two aspects, one which is related to the disciples and the other to the world. This glorious work in behalf of the world is not related to the Lord's presence. It cannot take place while He is on the earth. It is related to His absence, not to His presence. He said, "It is to your advantage that I go away-for if I go not away the Paraclete will not come to you-but if I depart I will send Him unto you." Only one conclusion is possible. In harmony with the purposes of God He could do more for them and for the world by departing and sending the Spirit of truth than by remaining with them.

Every prediction made in John 16:7 has been fulfilled. The promise made in John 16: 8 has not yet been realized. Mankind has not yet been enlightened concerning sin, concerning righteousness, and concerning judgment.

It is probable that some will point out the obvious fact that in the past 1900 years many have had a measure of light granted to them in regard to sin, righteousness and judgment, and insist that this fulfills the promise of our Lord. We must remember that a work of this nature has been going on ever since Adam said, "I was afraid, because I was naked." Genesis 3:10. Enlightenment such as this is not the direct result of the Spirit of truth coming into the world. The words of Christ here declare that mankind as a whole will someday be apprised of the facts concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. This is not true today. The god of this age is blinding many more than the Spirit is enlightening. But the Lord is not slack concerning His promises. The words of Christ will someday come to pass, and in such manner that every man on earth will be enlightened concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. Our minds fail to imagine what this will be like.

To safeguard the truth, lest I be charged with teaching universal salvation at some future time, let it be understood that I do not believe that enlightenment and salvation are the same. All God-given light must be fully acted upon before any blessing is obtained.

The first work of the Holy Spirit will be to enlighten men concerning sin. Every man on earth will be in possession of the divine truth in regard to sin. While this enlightenment concerning sin will lie in one direction, let us not forget that the lesser is always included in the greater. The Holy Spirit will begin this universal work by enlightening men concerning the greatest sin. If this should happen today we can imagine in part the effect it would have on that vast host of men who feel proud of intellectual superiority because they refuse to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Today our entire light concerning Jesus Christ comes from the pages of God's Word. It is there we learn that the greatest sin is to fail to believe in Him. If men never read the Word, or if they never hear the Word, they will have no knowledge of this important truth. However, this situation is not going to continue forever. The time is coming when the Holy Spirit will enlighten all mankind concerning sin. Imagine what consternation it will cause when one generation of educators, psychologists, psychiatrists, criminologists, and parents are enlightened to see what sin is in God's sight-that it is missing the mark, that it is wrongdoing toward God and man, and that it is not a mere slip involving no moral responsibility or incurring no guilt. Many scientists and psychologists have been bent on destroying man's sense of sin. Imagine the chagrin of such men when the Spirit of truth enlightens the world concerning sin, and the least man on earth has the same knowledge concerning sin as the most learned. And, remember, this ministry is to be accomplished for mankind by a Paraclete, one who is walking alongside to help. He will enlighten men concerning sin, show them that if they walk in the light the blood of Christ will cleanse them from sin, and that if they persist in sin, physical judgments will be their portion.

Having enlightened mankind concerning sin, the Spirit will then enlighten men concerning righteousness. This is the extreme opposite of sin. It is the thing a man should hunger and thirst after once he has been enlightened concerning sin. The mass of men today are in darkness concerning sin, and they do not know what righteousness is. Ritualists are going to suffer acute embarrassment when God enlightens the world in regard to righteousness. (Happy day, happy day!) Never again can man ignorantly believe there is merit to be gained through ordinances. .

The Holy Spirit will also enlighten mankind concerning judgment. To judge means to come to a conclusion. Judgment is the effect of judging or the carrying out of a conclusion. A true conclusion in any matter can be arrived at only by means of rigid adherence to a set of principles or rules. For example, a judge of livestock at a county fair must come to a conclusion concerning the merits or quality of the animal before him. A true conclusion can be arrived at only if he rigidly adheres to a set of rules or principles. If in judging he takes into consideration the one who owns the animal his judgment may be perverted.

Today men come to conclusions on matters of vial importance after having abandoned every rule and principle of judgment. Even in regard to the truth of God, conclusions are arrived at on the basis of who teaches it, the popularity of the doctrine, or because it is believed by a certain denomination. When the Holy Spirit has enlightened men concerning judgment, they will no longer need to judge according to prejudices, appearances, or desires. They will be able to judge righteous judgment. One can try, but it is beyond human ability to imagine what an overturning and change this will bring about.

This great work of the Holy Spirit will be the major factor in bringing in the premillennial kingdom of the heavens. The Spirit will produce the sons of the kingdom. These will be planted in this world. When the evildoers have been cut off, and the meek have inherited the earth, the premillennial kingdom will be a reality.

The present order of things is the result of God dispensing nothing but grace to mankind, and Satan carrying on unhindered all his nefarious activities. All the human race has today as a counteractant of Satan's efforts is the undeserved favor of God. Now God dispenses naught but grace. When His purpose in this great demonstration of grace is complete, He will dispense light. When He does, men will need to conform to this light. Those who do not will pass from this earth. The new order of things that comes into being when God receives Israel again will be such that men will live because they should, and they will die for the same reason. God's judgments will then be in the earth. My desire is that God will soon speak again and say, "Let there be light."

**(To Be Continued, Vol. XI, No. 6)**

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## ***STUDIES IN ACTS***

### **Chapter Five**

When the Word of God is considered there is a meeting between the mind of the reader and the ideas set forth by the Holy Spirit. The place of this meeting immediately becomes a battleground and in the end the truth declared by the Spirit or else the reader's prejudice and preconception is going to survive. Only one will be victorious, when the battle is over.

Many who read the fifth chapter of Acts will see in it nothing more than a normal situation, about what we could expect to see today "if the church were more holy" -as one writer puts it. Those who do not read over the top of the words of this chapter, who strive to keep their own preconceptions in the background will see in this record the truth that these people lived in a different situation, under

different circumstances and conditions, under a different divine administration than what we do today. Ananias and Sapphira were followers of Jesus Christ in the Acts period. They were also a part of the **ecclesia** of God, which at that time was being formed by the Spirit of God. These two facts alone placed them in a situation in which no believer finds himself today. Their death was a sign of the times in which they lived. This sign indicated to all that they lived in a time when men in their position could expect each sin and transgression to receive a just recompense of reward. All others were thus warned that they could expect a similar penalty if they committed a similar sin under the same circumstances.

**5:1, 2. But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles feet.**

The name Ananias means "God is gracious," that is, that He is a God who deals with men in love and favor that they do not deserve. This is true, but Ananias did not live under an administration of grace as we do today. He lived in a time when men beheld "the goodness and severity of God" (Rom. 11:22). We live in a day when we behold nothing but God's goodness. Ananias as could not misrepresent his giving and continue to live. We can misrepresent our giving and still attain to a ripe old age.

Ananias and Sapphira belonged to a company of people who were destined to judge the world, even to judge angels. See I Cor. 6:1-3. This was the purpose for which this ecclesia was being called. A spirit of covetousness could not be tolerated for one moment by God in any member of this ecclesia. When men had been chosen in Israel to be rulers over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, two of their four qualifications were that they should be men of truth and men who hated covetousness (Exodus 18:21). No man can rule under God if he lacks these two qualifications. Here, among those destined to rule, the sins of lying and covetousness are found.

Luke records only the facts, but it is not difficult to reconstruct the scene. Barnabas with sincere heart had sold a piece of land, brought the money and laid it at the Apostle's feet. He expected no word of praise. He was doing what he believed the Lord would have him to do. It may be that as he turned to leave after depositing the money at the Apostle's feet that Peter called him back, spoke a word of acceptance and personal commendation. It may even have been that Peter assured him that he would receive "an hundredfold now in this time," in harmony with the words of the Lord (Mark 10:29). All this was too much for Ananias. The dormant seed of covetousness began to sprout in his heart. He talked the matter over with his wife. They agreed on what to do, what to say and how to act. Ananias carried out the deed, waited until the ecclesia was assembled and the Apostles were present to teach. When the time came to make offerings, he deposited the bag of money at the Apostle's feet, adding a few words that expressed his intentions and explained his act. He fully expected Peter to answer, accepting his gift and personally commending him for his deed, assuring him that he could expect an hundredfold in return. He knew that if Peter said this on earth it would be ratified in heaven. Peter did speak, but instead of words of commendation there came an exposure of his sin.

**5:3-4. But Peter said. Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? While it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men but unto God.**

The word "filled" here is the very verb used for the filling of the Holy Spirit in 4:31. Ananias had been filled with the Holy Spirit, but he allowed Satan to come in and fill his heart. The question of Peter implies that Ananias could and should have resisted Satan (I Peter 5:9, James 4:7). Peter names the sin, "kept back part of the price," and reveals that the sin was without reason. Ananias did not

need to sell his property, and even if he sold it the entire amount received was his to do with as he pleased. He could have brought the whole amount or any portion of it and none could have criticized him in the least. The only requirements were that he make no false pretense about it and that there be no element of covetousness in his act. His penalty reveals that giving was a risky practice in the Acts period. Note that in verse three he lied to the Holy Ghost, while in verse four he is charged with having lied to God. The Holy Spirit is God.

**5:5-6. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out and buried him.**

Peter spoke only such words as the Spirit gave him. These exposed the sin of Ananias, but did not announce or pronounce the judgment that was to fall upon him. This would make it clear to all that the judgment was in its entirety a divine act. When Peter had declared his few words, Ananias collapsed and expired. He was granted no time for repentance. He had committed a sin unto death, and the penalty was speedily executed.

Those unfamiliar with burial customs and practices in Israel might well question why Ananias was buried so hurriedly, and why Sapphira was not called to her dead husband's side. What they did was in harmony with the customs of that time. If a man died away from home he would be taken to the family sepulchre, after which his family would be notified. They could then go to the sepulchre and anoint the body if they desired to do so. The word "burial" here is apt to convey the idea of placing in a grave in the earth. The Greek word means entombed.

**5:7-10. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.**

The Apostles and the ecclesia were engaged in the most serious occupation that men had ever been called to perform. Not even the death of one of their number could cause them to postpone the work at hand. They are serving the Lord, not men, and they will permit no disruption of their service. Some think that Ananias and Sapphira in their cupidity planned that Ananias should precede her and receive the plaudits of the ecclesia, then she would arrive later to furnish the occasion for a second round of praise and congratulations. This could well be the truth. We can imagine her coming in and looking about the room for her husband. A strange silence greeted her. When Peter spoke he directed his words to her and asked if it were true that the land had been sold for the amount brought by Ananias. With all positiveness she affirmed that this was true. Peter's answer is an exclamation of grief, and his words reveal to her that her husband is already dead. The footsteps of the young men who had carried him to his tomb are heard approaching the door. Peter declares that they will now carry her out.

**5:10-11. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost; and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.**

Her death took place the instant Peter finished his words. There could be no mistake about the supernatural character of the deaths of this man and his wife. The whole company of believers and all who heard of the fate of Ananias and Sapphira were filled with awe and dread. Of this A. T. Robertson says: "It was a dangerous thing to be a follower of Christ unless one was willing to walk straight." This is true, but it was true only in the Acts period. Today one can become a professed follower of Christ and be in no danger at all. The fact that God is dealing only in grace protects them



from such physical judgments. This alone is enough to prove the unique character of God's present administration.

**5:12-13. And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)**

This gives us a correct picture of the state of things in Jerusalem. By the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were wrought among the people. Acts presents an unbroken record of miracles, signs and wonders. The followers of Christ did not abandon the temple. Solomon's porch was the usual meeting place of those who followed Christ. No outsider ventured to join himself to them. The rulers watched for an opportunity to bring an end to their testimony, but the people magnified them.

A contradiction seems to appear here. We are told that no man dared to join himself to them; therefore, their number did not increase. The fate of Ananias and Sapphira caused men to hesitate to put themselves into a company where death came upon those who did not walk straight. Yet we are told that multitudes both of men and women were added to the Lord. Both of these ideas cannot be true, for one contradicts the other. It appears that we are told here that while the number did not increase, it did not decrease. The believers were all the more added to the Lord by the events, which took place.

**5:5-6. Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks. and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed everyone.**

The signs and wonders, which were wrought among the people, (verse 12) caused the people to magnify the apostles. They carried this to the extent that the sick were carried out into the streets, that is, streets up and down which Peter customarily walked, and then deposited on some sort of pallet to await Peter's passing. Since Peter's chief duty was to give himself continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4) faithfulness would require him to refuse to go to the homes of the sick, and he would also need to forbid any being brought to his home or to the temple lest his God appointed work be disrupted. Therefore, the sick were arranged in such manner that at least his shadow might fall upon some of them. This took none of his time, none of his strength, and would not even take his mind off the Word of God. The only possible idea that can be gained from this record is that he did actually heal them. Doubts as to whether Peter actually healed these sick by means of his shadow may arise from other sources but it cannot arise from the Word. Strange indeed that some will believe that Peter's touch could have healed, yet they doubt if healing could have been transmitted by a shadow. We need to remind ourselves that all healings such as this emanate from the Lord and they are wrought by His power. The media used can make no difference if it is God's will to heal. The Apostles had prayed that God would stretch forth His hand to heal (Acts 4:30). He answered by doing so, and Peter does not need to stretch forth his, His shadow was sufficient. This reached out beyond Jerusalem to the "cities round about." From these places the sick were brought in and not one needed to be carried back unhealed. They were healed everyone, no matter how severe or impossible the case. This was the character of the times in which they lived.

**5:17-18. Then the high priest rose up, and all that were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees) and were filled with indignation. And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.**

The recital of events seems to indicate that for some time the Sanhedrin tolerated the bold

disobedience of its orders not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. The people are with the Apostles, not the Sanhedrin, and if this continues the rulers will have to abdicate in favor of the Apostles. Their envy increases, their indignation mounts until they can stand it no longer. They lay hands on the Apostles and put them in the common prison. To be thrown into jail was no more pleasant or honorable in that day than it is in ours. The act of the high priest subjected the Apostles to public disgrace.

**5:19-20. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth and said: Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.**

This incident is treated by Luke as a normal happening, which is what it was in the time when it occurred. When Peter alone was arrested and placed under heavy guard in a far stronger prison (Acts 12:6-10), his fellow Apostles may have felt that it might be time for fulfillment of the Lord's words concerning him recorded in John 21:18, 19. Nevertheless, they prayed without ceasing and to their surprise he was delivered. But here it is different. Their release by an angel caused no surprise or comment. It was the fulfillment of a normal expectation in that time. The angels command to them is bold. His words paint a picture of what they are to do. They are to speak and act just as they did before, as if no arrest had ever taken place.

**5:21-23. And when they heard that they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within.**

We can imagine the inward feeling and the outward expression on the faces of the high priest and the Sadducees when they heard this report. Everything was in order—doors, locks, and guards, but when the doors were opened the twelve prisoners were not there.

**5:24-28. Now when the high priest and the captains of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow. Then came one and told them saying, Behold the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.**

The disappearance of the Apostles from the prison caused great perplexity among the priests and the commander of the temple police. They had made the arrests; the rest of the Sanhedrin now learn of the matter for the first time. They wonder what will happen if this thing is allowed to go on. In the midst of their perplexity and fear, a messenger came and told them that the men whom they had summarily thrown into prison were back in their usual place and teaching the people.

The situation is now so delicate that the chief captain went to the temple with his underlings who are to rearrest these men. They did not dare to lay a hand upon them. It is probable that they requested: the Apostles to accompany them and appear before the Sanhedrin. The Apostles accompanied them of their own accord. The people are with them, not with the Sanhedrin. Caiaphas knows this very well, and when the Apostles are brought before him he charges them with seeking to dethrone him, to overthrow the Sanhedrin, and to lead the people to wreak vengeance upon them for the death of "this man." This is a slur. They refuse to speak the name of Jesus.

**5:29-30. Then Peter and the other Apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God, rather**

**than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him. When they heard that, they were cut to the heart and took council to slay them.**

Peter as the spokesman for the twelve presents a perfect defense. God is to be obeyed, not man. He shows how God had gone contrary to them. God had raised up Jesus whom they slew. They hanged Him on a tree, thus declaring He was accursed, but God had exalted Him to be a Prince and a Savior. They denied these things, but the Holy Spirit gave witness to them, and the Apostles added their testimony to the Holy Spirit. Since God had acted contrary to them, they also must be contrary to them if they walked with God. When they heard these facts set forth they were cut to the heart. They determine to do with these men what they had done to the Lord Jesus.,

**5:34-35. Then stood there up in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed of yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.**

"One in the council" means one in the Sanhedrin, a member of that body. Gamaliel was a Pharisee, a teacher of the law, and he was the instructor of Saul, whom we best know as Paul. He counsels that they act cautiously. He champions the cause of the Apostles because he is a Pharisee and desires to score a point against the Sadducees.

**5:36. For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody: to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain: and all as many as obeyed him, were scattered and brought to nought.**

As an argument against any precipitate action he sketches briefly the career of one named Theudas, who claimed to be somebody, secured a following of about four hundred men, but was soon killed and those who followed him were scattered and faded from the scene. His entire movement came to an end without any interference from the Sanhedrin. A logical mind would have rejected this argument since Jesus Christ had already been slain, but His followers did not scatter, and instead of fading into nothing they were increasing every day.

**5:37. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.**

This argument is as false as the first. Someone should have pointed out the flaws in his reasoning. The facts were well known. It had not worked this way in the case of Christ and His followers.

**5:38-39. And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it: lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.**

Gamaliel's "counsel of indecision," his cowardly evasion of the obvious facts that this work was already stamped as a work of God suited the Sanhedrin because they were afraid of the people. The most convincing evidence had not convinced Gamaliel. He suggests they wait for more evidence, for more signs, for more proof. He probably died in his unbelief.

**5:40-42. And to him they agreed: and when they had called the Apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.**

By rejecting and crucifying Jesus Christ the Sanhedrin had already decided that this entire movement was not of God. Here they agree to take no action until they are sure if it is of God. Their insincerity is seen also in the fact that they stripped the twelve Apostles and gave each thirty-nine blows with rods across the back. This was no small disgrace, but the Apostles rejoiced that they were worthy to suffer such disgrace for His name. They make no change in their activities. Each day they are in the temple, where the Sanhedrin and temple police can see and hear them. They continue to teach and proclaim Jesus Christ.

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## THE EDITOR TO HIS FRIENDS

\*\*\*The pamphlet on *Ecclesia Truth* is not yet ready. In the course of setting this truth down in its final written form, it became apparent that certain related truths needed to be developed and clarified in order to give a reasonably full presentation of this great subject. Other work during the past three months has made it impossible for me to give this the time it needs, but I hope to give it first place in my studies and labors during the next few months. I will need at least six months in order to complete this study and to get it into final written form. Please do not order this pamphlet until you have an announcement from us that it is ready for distribution.

\*\*\*I plan to be in the Middle-west and East for about four weeks beginning April 12. Groups or classes desiring ministry should write as soon as possible. A full itinerary must be decided on before March 15 in order to allow sufficient time to prepare and send out advertising.

\*\*\*The Editor is teaching a Class in San Diego, California each Monday night at 7:30 in Hotel San Diego. The response to the first three meetings held has been good.

\*\*\*I believe that in 1949 we have distributed more pieces of literature than we did in the entire three years that preceded. The growing interest in the truth we are presenting is most gratifying. We usually get 5200 copies of the magazine each issue, but 7500 copies of this issue are being printed. The study it contains on "The Premillennial Kingdom of Heaven" is one we desire to distribute as widely as possible. We will be glad to furnish you with extra copies for distribution, or we will send them out for you if you will. furnish the names and addresses.

\*\*\*The *Scripture Research Fellowship* which is being sponsored by *The Word of Truth Ministry* has been received with real enthusiasm by the majority who have been invited to participate. Seventy have responded to the invitation and have indicated their desire to become "Participants"; one has refused due to ill health, and the rest have not been heard from. The name of our publication will probably be *Scripture Research Journal* and we hope that the first issue can be sent to all participants about the last of February.

\*\*\*Due to export and import difficulties we have been unable to secure sufficient copies of *The Companion Bible* and *The Englishman's Greek Concordance* to fill the orders that have come to us. We buy these retail in England with British funds, and this creates an export problem. Another problem arises when they reach this side. We make no profit from these, due to the low prices at which we sell them. Our gain is that some of our British funds are thus turned into American money. Those desiring copies of these publications may continue to send their orders to us, but these must not be "rush" orders. We will fill them in turn as our supplies arrive.

\*\*\*Our Multilith press is now paid for. We express our thanks to all who gave to help us obtain this very useful equipment

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