

GOD HAS A PLAN

WITH all the scientific knowledge and technical ability displayed throughout the world, one might easily suppose that man is capable of doing almost anything and everything. But we quickly become disillusioned when we remember that, together with all the remarkable advancement within our generation, man has also been able to devise the potential for his own self-destruction. To forestall the possibility of this happening, America alone is spending hundreds of billions of dollars a year for defense purposes, and other nations sums in proportion.

Human selfishness is at the root of this problem, and science does not eradicate selfishness; it is only implemented. So when we look into the future, even the near future, and see ever-increasing speeds of travel, increasing plenty and luxury, more wonderful homes in which to live, and better ways of doing everything we have to do—many of them by automation—the thrill of anticipation is somewhat subdued by that other possibility that our cities, our country, our civilization, and even most of the human race itself, might be destroyed before the happy tomorrow fully matures.

We do not wish to be prophets of doom—far from it. We are merely calling attention to man's shortcomings for the purpose of emphasizing the fact that where man will fail, God has a plan which will succeed, so that the future of the race, as depicted in the Word of God, far excels anything for which man has ever dared to hope.

This is a plan which cannot, and will not, fail; a plan in which man will be permitted to employ all his marvelous capacities and have them directed along lines which are unselfish. And then, over and above that, God will do for man what man cannot do for himself. The future, then, is very bright, much brighter by far than scientific knowledge would indicate. It is as bright as the promises of God.

Selfishness Appears



In calling attention briefly to God's plan we have chosen five illustrations, three of them depicting actual events recorded in the Bible, and two illustrating the prophecies and promises of the Bible. The first of these illustrations will be readily recognized. It is the temptation scene in the Garden of Eden. The "serpent," which the Bible uses to symbolize Satan, is tempting mother Eve to disobey her Creator by partaking of the forbidden fruit. We all

know the consequence of this. Eve did partake, and so did Adam, with the result, as foretold, that they were sentenced to death and driven out of the Garden of Eden to die.

However, what preceded the temptation is important to note. When God created our first

parents in his image he commanded them to multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. Man was given dominion over the earth. However, he was told that if he partook of the forbidden fruit of the Garden he would die: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."—Gen. 2:17

In the command to multiply and fill the earth and have dominion over it, the divine purpose of the creation of the human race is revealed. Man was not created and placed on the earth temporarily, later to be taken to heaven or consigned to purgatory or hell. When he sinned he did not lose a home in heaven but his privilege of enjoying a home on earth.

Satan, through the serpent, told mother Eve that she would not die if she partook of the forbidden fruit. (Gen.3:4) From this falsehood there have developed, throughout the ages, the unscriptural theories that there is no death. Death, it is said, is not really what it seems; it is a gateway into another life. But the fact remains that death is a reality, and "the wages of sin are death." (Rom. 6:23) The reign of sin and death has been, and continues to be, a cruel one. God's plan alone provides escape from it.

God's Promise to Abraham

In our next illustration we are reminded of a wonderful promise God made to Abraham. This was subsequent to the Flood. He said to this faithful patriarch, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 12:3) For two thousand years the human race had been dying, but here God promised that he would bless all the families of the earth. This was indeed a ray of hope.



Later, when Abraham's son Isaac was grown, God asked Abraham to offer up his son in sacrifice. Abraham's obedience to this request is portrayed in our second illustration. God did not permit Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, but provided instead a lamb to be offered as a substitute for him. Here is a beautiful illustration of the fact that before all the families of the earth can be blessed through the "Seed" of Abraham a loving Father must give up in sacrifice his beloved Son.

As the plan of God unfolds, we find that it was actually the Heavenly Father himself who "gave his only begotten Son" to be the Redeemer and Savior of the world. (John 3:16) God was so pleased with Abraham's willingness to co-operate with him in this matter that he confirmed his original promise by his oath.—Gen. 22:1-18; Heb. 6:13-20

Jesus, The Promised "Seed"

In the New Testament we are informed that the "Seed" promised to Abraham, the Seed that was to bless all the families of the earth, was in reality Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of

many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."—Gal. 3:16

In the outworking of God's plan for blessing all the families of the earth, Jesus is the appointed channel through which these promised blessings will flow. However, "all" the families of the earth include those who have died. Death came as a result of sin, and the condemnation of death rests upon the entire human race. In order for Jesus to extend blessings of life to the people it was necessary to give his own life for the sins of the world.

John the Baptist said concerning Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) In Isaiah we read that Jesus was "brought as a Lamb to the slaughter" and that he made "his soul an offering for sin." (Isa. 53:7,10) The Apostle Paul wrote that Jesus "gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."—I Tim. 2:3-6

This great work of redeeming the human race from death was accomplished at Calvary. The Lord's viewpoint on redemption is explained by the Apostle Paul. We quote: "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."—I Cor. 15:21,22

Thus we see the importance of the death of Jesus in the plan of God for the blessing of all the families of the earth. The promised blessing will be revealed to the people after their resurrection. Jesus' death and resurrection guaranteed the restoration of life on earth. (Acts 17:30,31) The people will be resurrected to life on earth as humans to receive the promised blessings.

Another Feature



Without further information concerning God's plan for the blessing of the people we would naturally conclude that the work of blessing should have commenced soon after the death and resurrection of Jesus. We know that it did not. People still continue to suffer and die, even as before. The Bible explains why. The reason is that in his plan God provided a "little flock" of faithful followers of the Master selected from the world of mankind, who, when the

time of blessing arrived, would be associated with Jesus in the work of dispensing peace, health, and life to mankind.

In Galatians 3:27-29 we are informed that true Christians, represented as those who are baptized into Christ, are one with him and are part of Abraham's "seed, and heirs according to the promise." For more than nineteen centuries the work of selecting these for their future work, has been in progress.

To these faithful ones Jesus promised to prepare a place, and, when he returned, to take them unto himself, that they might be with him in the kingdom. (John 14:2,3) Jesus said, "Fear

not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."—Luke 12:32

The Kingdom Hope

A long chain of promises in the Old Testament, and continuing in the New Testament, reveal that God would establish a worldwide government and His promised blessings of life would be extended to the people. One of the promises of Jesus' birth declares of this great One that "of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end."—Isa. 9:6,7

The Scriptures reveal that while Jesus came at his first advent to suffer and to die for mankind, he returns at his second advent to set up his kingdom for the purpose of blessing the people. During the time of his second presence on earth as a mighty Ruler, "the King of kings," the world will be enlightened concerning the true God and given an opportunity to obey divine law and live forever.—Rev. 19:16

The wonderful manner in which world conditions today are fulfilling the prophecies of the Bible gives us every reason to believe that we are standing at the threshold of the long-promised messianic kingdom. The Prophet Daniel identified our day as "the time of the end" and indicated that at this time there would be a great increase of knowledge and much running to and fro in the earth.—Dan. 12:4

The expression "time of the end" does not mean the end of time. Neither does it refer to the traditional burning up of the earth. Rather, it refers to the end of the reign of sin and death. The "time of the end" refers to the time of divine intervention in the affairs of men through the establishment of the messianic kingdom. All the evils, such as war, exploitation, hunger, sickness, and death will be brought to an end.

The Earth to Abide Forever

As far as the earth is concerned, the Bible clearly states that it is to abide forever. (Eccles. 1:4) The Lord assures us that he did not create the earth in vain but formed it to be inhabited. (Isa. 45:18) As we have learned, God's plan is that man should live on the earth forever. This is his home. Man will not destroy himself with hydrogen bombs and even those killed in war will be restored to life in the resurrection.

When Jesus was asked concerning the time of his return, he foretold that there would be "great tribulation" —tribulation, or trouble, so great that unless those days should be shortened, no flesh would survive. (Matt. 24:21,22) This very situation is confronting the world today; but Jesus assures us that this time of tribulation will be shortened, that all flesh will not be destroyed.

Our Day in Prophecy

Essentially all the important world developments of our day are foretold in the prophecies of the Bible.



We call special attention to the great increase of knowledge and rapid travel of our time, as foretold by Daniel. Our illustration tells the story more eloquently than would be possible with words.

The younger members of our generation may not realize that most of the things portrayed in this illustration did not exist until the twentieth century. Man has not attained these gradually through the ages of the past, but suddenly, and in our day. Thus we have a remarkable fulfillment of the Bible's prophecy concerning the approach of Messiah's kingdom.

Daniel also foretold, concerning this "time of the end" of the reign of sin and death, that there would be a "time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation." (Dan. 12:1) This is the "great tribulation" referred to by Jesus. (Matt. 24:21,22) Jesus also spoke of it as a time when there would be "distress of nations, with perplexity," and when the hearts of the people would be looking forward with fear to the things coming upon the earth.—
Luke 21:25,26

This is an accurate description of our day. All nations of the earth are distressed, and fear of what may be coming upon the earth fills the hearts of people everywhere. The Scriptures do not reveal in detail how destructive the situation will become before the authority of Christ's kingdom asserts itself and saves the human race from its own folly.

However, the Scriptures do make plain that man's selfish, exploiting institutions are to be destroyed. Our final illustration symbolizes the remnants of these institutions and the earnest seekers of the Lord's blessings have turned their backs on them as they gaze out into the future age and its promised blessings.

God's City



In the distance we see the dim outlines of a city, the holy city of God. This, of course, is merely a symbol. In the Bible a city is used to symbolize a government. We are familiar with this use of language. To us "Washington" stands for the American government, "London" for the British, and "Moscow" for the Russian. So in the Bible, particularly in the Book of Revelation, we are told of a "holy city" which comes down from God out of heaven. This is God's new government, and its Head will be Christ Jesus.—Rev.

21:1-5

Jesus said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36) So we are told that his government, his city, originates with God. It is not of human origin. It is not set up by the wisdom or power of fallen man. It is a divine government, and its laws will be God's laws. Through obedience to these laws mankind will be blessed in fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham that through his "seed" all the families of the earth would be blessed.

The Water of Life

That blessing, we are assured, will include the destruction of sickness and death. Describing conditions in the earth when God's holy city, or government, has accomplished the purpose of its reign, the Revelator said: "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."—Rev. 21:4

In another promise of the messianic kingdom and its blessings, the kingdom is pictured as a throne—"the throne of God and of the Lamb." (Rev. 22:1) Flowing out of this throne is the river of life. On the banks of the river are trees of life. In addition to the life-giving fruit of these trees, we are told that their leaves are for the healing of the nations. (Rev. 22:2) Truly the people of all nations now need to be healed!

This great blessing is soon to reach all mankind. Just as our first parents were driven out of their Garden home and deprived of the fruit from its life-giving trees, so during the messianic kingdom now near, and because Jesus took the sinner's place in death, all of Adam's children will be invited to come and partake of the fruit of life and the water of life freely.—Rev. 22:17

Dead to Be Restored

As we have already briefly noted, it is not only the living generation that will receive the life-giving blessings of Messiah's kingdom. God has promised that during the reign of Christ all who have died are to be restored to life and given an opportunity to enjoy these same blessings. If this were not so, the plan of God for the salvation of the human race would come far short of the Creator's loving purpose toward his human creatures.

The hope of the resurrection of the dead is centered in Jesus, the Redeemer. (I Cor. 15:21,22) During his earthly ministry Jesus gave several marvelous demonstrations of the ability of divine power to restore the dead to life. One of these was the awakening of Lazarus from the sleep of death, the account of which is recorded in John 11:1-44.

Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha. They lived in Bethany. Lazarus became ill at a time when Jesus was conducting his ministry in Galilee, which was far north of Bethany. The sisters sent word to Jesus that their brother was sick, supposing that Jesus would come to Bethany as quickly as possible. He received the announcement, but instead of hurrying to Bethany and to Lazarus, he waited for two days and then said to his disciples. "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." Jesus' disciples thought that he referred to natural sleep and said to Jesus, "Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well." To them this was evidence that Lazarus was recovering.

The Sleep of Death

Then Jesus revealed to his disciples what he meant. He said to them, "Lazarus is dead." In this brief conversation one of the most important truths of the Bible is brought to our

attention, which is that those who die are not alive in heaven, hell, or purgatory, but are in a state of unconsciousness, which Jesus likened to sleep. Not only is sleep a state of unconsciousness, but those who sleep awaken from their unconscious state; and so it will be in the case of those who sleep in death. Divine power, exercised through Christ, will awaken all those who thus "sleep."

The death that entered the world because of Adam's transgression would have been permanent had it not been that divine love provided a Redeemer. (John 3:16) Because Jesus took the sinner's place in death, everlasting oblivion has been turned into a temporary "sleep" from which the Bible promises an awakening. In the case of Lazarus, Jesus gave us assurance of this by demonstrating the ability of divine power to fulfill God's promises by awakening Lazarus from the sleep of death.

All to Be Awakened

On another occasion Jesus said: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment." (John 5:28,29 *Revised Version*) Jesus explained that those in this life who have "done good" according to God's standards will, when awakened from death, immediately receive their reward of eternal life; while all others will be brought forth to a "resurrection of judgment."

The Greek word *krisis* is translated "judgment" in the Revised Version. It has the same meaning as our English word crisis, namely, a time of testing. To pass a crisis means to pass through a severe experience successfully. So the unbelievers, when awakened from the sleep of death, will be subjected to disciplinary experiences designed to teach them the ways of the Lord. If they pass this crisis and learn to obey the laws of the kingdom, these too will have the opportunity of partaking of "the water of life freely." —Rev.22:17