

THE AGES.

The plan of salvation comprehended in the three worlds, is progressive in its character, requiring ages for its development. There seems to have been but one age definitely marked in the world before the flood, but this present world is sub-divided into three ages. The first, Patriarchal or one-man age, in which only one man at a time represented the Lord as ruler of the family; (in this it was similar to the age before the flood.) The second, Jewish, or the twelve tribe period, for in it, or from Jacob's death, the last patriarch, until the death of Christ, the tribes of Israel represented the Lord's cause, and were reckoned His people. The third, beginning at Christ's resurrection and reaching to His second coming, usually known as the Gospel age, during which the Lord turns to the Gentiles to take out a people for His name, i.e., the Bride, the Lamb's wife, the Church.

This brings us to the beginning of the world to come, which is, in God's purpose, subjected to the Bride made ready and glorified together with Christ; and it also is divided into ages, the first of which may be the thousand years' reign, (Rev. 20,) or that reign may include more than one dispensation. We would not speak of the order of future events with as much confidence as of the past, but it is evident that the period after the Lord's coming and exaltation of the Bride, is not as some say, "One Eternal Age," for Paul in speaking of that exaltation and the object of it, says it is. "That in the ages (aionios) to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace." (Eph. 2:7.) In the worlds and ages we thus have an outline of the plan, a bird's-eye-view of its development, and a glimpse at the glorious outcome. We may thus be prepared for a more particular study of the work of the various ages, and be better able to appreciate the progressive character of revelation.

Each age is a step in the plan, and each step higher than the preceding one. "Onward and upward" is a motto based on the spirit of God's plan. Each age is a period of time, and each period has its own peculiar dispensation, or work of God. The object of the Lord, by the various dispensations of wisdom, power and love, is to reveal Himself, and so save mankind. God deals with the race in some respects, as with an individual, adapting His truth to the capacity, as in infancy, youth and manhood, which will explain why some things are stated as they must appear to man, rather than the absolute truth, which can only be received by a mind made perfect. Thus the sun is said to rise and set; and the unchangeable God is said to repent that He had made man, as if the work of infinite wisdom had proved a failure.

The Lord spoke to man as parents are compelled to talk to their children, coming down to their apprehension.

Some think this is deception or lying, but we view it differently. It is making a vague impression rather than none at all. Tell a little one that the sun stands still and the earth moves, and he is confused, for he will believe his own sense or what appears true to his own eyes, rather than what is told him.

Revelation is not designed to teach the science of astronomy, or anything else which man can discover himself by the use of his natural powers. God helps us only when we cannot help ourselves.

It is on this principle of adaptation that God teaches by symbols, figures, types and shadows, representing the real or spiritual truth by natural objects. The truth is in some respects hidden that it may be revealed, contradictory as this may seem at first thought. It is hidden for a season and made plain in due time. He spoke in dark sayings and parables, giving occasionally the key which would open them when applied. With a smoked glass, which obscures the light, we can see the sun better than with the naked eye. God in Christ can be known, but without a mediator he is unsearchable.

Before the Jewish age the Lord appeared as a man; but the law was by the disposition of angels; but "in these last days, He has spoken to us by his Son." When it can be realized that the incarnation, or "God manifest in the flesh," was a culmination of the same principle of teaching spiritual things by the natural, as God had used from the beginning, the unity of the Bible will be vindicated, and confidence in it as a divine revelation established.

However much the stream of truth may be soiled by handling, it but shows the nature of the soil through which it has flowed, while the sparkling jewels it contains reveals its heavenly origin.

The truth is revealed in a progressive manner, according to the plan of ages. Take one line of thought for example: when sin, by one man, had entered, and all its dark consequences entailed upon humanity, the first ray of light and hope dawned upon our race in the form of a threatening against the Tempter – "Her seed shall bruise thy head, &c." Here is confessedly the whole plan in a nutshell. The Conqueror, the struggle, resistance, and the final victory. The figure used means death to, the Serpent, and in its execution, can signify no less than the extirpation of all that hideous monster represents. It points to a clean universe, when both sin and death shall be no more. But what could Eve know about it? It was not addressed to her, but to the Tempter. It was a threatening, not a promise; though containing, as in germ, the whole plan of salvation.

The dimness of that light was the characteristic of the whole age. Let us follow the light and observe its development. Two thousand years pass before we find the promise, "In thy seed shall all kindreds of the earth be blessed." This is the same great plan. That was a curse, this a blessing; but curse to the Serpent means blessing to the nations. This is an increase of light on the same subject, and yet how dim. We, living at this late day, know that seed was Christ. (Gal. 3:16.) This is the Holy Spirit's definition of the promise. But the wording of the

promise made it refer to Isaac or, in other words, "the seed according to the flesh." It may be said the promise had a double meaning – natural and spiritual. True, but the natural was all that could fairly be drawn from the words, and the spiritual was kept out of sight until the true seed had come. Isaac and Christ are to each other as the natural and the spiritual. Here, as everywhere, the order holds good; first the natural and then the spiritual. The natural is the basis, being first; Christ came through Isaac. The greater in this sense proceeds from the less. "The elder shall serve the younger." From the lower to the higher is God's order, and all these facts prove the progressive character of God's plan.

The Spirit reveals also the fact that the "Seed" comprehends not one person only, but many persons united as one. Let special thought be given to this fact. It is much neglected. Truths of great value are obscure on account of this neglect.

This many in one is true of the natural as well as the spiritual. The Jews were the natural seed, and the whole age [R22 : page 5] was used for their development. The Christian Church is the spiritual seed and an age is used for their development. Paul contrasts them thus: "They which are the children of the flesh are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. Rom. 9:8. Not one child, but children! Who are they? Gal. 4:28, answers: "Now we brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of the promise." Then it follows that, "we brethren" are the seed.

During the Jewish age, while the natural seed was being developed, the law and the prophets bare witness, and the light increased, but only the spiritually minded could discern the deeper truth. The mass saw only the natural, and were led to expect an earthly glory; hence, they rejected their Messiah when He came. It is true He came in the flesh, as a part of the Jewish nation, and fulfilled such prophecies as related to His sufferings in the flesh, but these were

overlooked as not in harmony with their desires; (see Isa. 53) and to them, in their blindness, it was as if He had not fulfilled them. Christ fulfilled, "First the natural," and did not enter fully upon the spiritual until he was born from the dead, "quicken (made alive) by the spirit," which was in Him before he died.

The true seed, destined to "bruise the Serpent's head," and bless the nations, is both spiritual and immortal. Jesus is the Firstborn into that condition, and is appointed Head of immortal mankind – the second Adam. (As shown before, the natural is the basis of the spiritual, and man having forfeited his natural life, it is necessary that the natural man should be redeemed from death to give opportunity for development into the higher life. This redemption is a preparatory feature of Christ's work, and for this purpose He gave his life a ransom. Thus Christ is restorer of the old race as well as Head of the new race.)

During the Gospel dispensation and by the spirit of Christ, the members of the body are being prepared, and during the sounding of the seventh trumpet they will all be rewarded. Rev. 11:18.

"They that are Christ's at his (parousia) presence."

These, made one with Him even as he is one with his Father, (John 17:21-22,) constitute the seed. – "Heaven's conquering army." Rev. 19:14. The work of the seed must follow the complete development of the seed. Overlooking this fact has led thousands to suppose God's plan of salvation terminates at the second [R23 : page 5] coming of Christ. From what has been written, it may be seen that God does not begin to save the world (proper) until then. The work of ages past has been the calling out of a few, under discipline, for a high position. Oh, what a responsible place we occupy, to whom the light of the good news has come. Our position in the kingdom depends on our faithfulness. The crown and reign are to those who suffer and overcome.

But what an encouragement to endure all – our's is indeed a high calling. Many are the titles given the church of Christ in the Word, but none so endearing as the "Bride, the Lamb's Wife."

To realize the glory and excellence of such a position in prospect, must prove the antidote to melancholy and worldliness, and be the strongest motive to faithfulness. J. H. P.

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ONE personal struggle and conquest over self will be of more benefit than listening to a hundred sermons or singing a hundred hymns. It is not so much what we learn as what we practice that benefits us.
