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GOD'S MERCY TO ISRAEL AND TO OTHERS

– *DECEMBER 26. – QUARTERLY REVIEW. –*

ISRAEL A FAVORED NATION – GOD'S MERCY IN THE LAW COVENANT – SPIRITUAL ISRAEL A NEW NATION – THE ROYAL PRIESTHOOD – OTHER NATIONS UNRECOGNIZED BY GOD – HOW DIVINE MERCY WILL EVENTUALLY REACH ALL PEOPLE.

"Jehovah is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness." – Psalm 103:8. – R.V.

ONE difficulty with us as Bible students has been that in the past we took too narrow a view of the Divine character and of the Bible. For more than twelve centuries the Bible was not studied. Instead, certain Bishops, thinking themselves to be Apostles of equal authority with The Twelve whom our Lord Jesus appointed (St. Paul taking the place of Judas), thought that they had full right, as Apostles, to make up a substitute for the Bible. These substitutes were styled creeds – Confessions of Faith. These were studied, and the Bible was neglected.

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that God's people got far away from the true teaching of His Word. Even when the Bible began to come back to the people in Reformation times, their poor heads were so badly clogged and confused with the false doctrines of twelve centuries of human theorizing that they were not prepared to see the Bible in its own light, but rather in the light of these creeds. Besides, they had been long taught that to doubt the creeds would constitute them heretics, and that the punishment for heresy is eternal torment. Hence the endeavor to keep in line with the creeds in all subsequent Bible study.

Now Bible students see that this was all a mistake – that the Bible should have been studied in its own light. They see that the creeds are full of confusing errors, which really make the Word of God of none effect where they are recognized. Now our Bible studies are different, because of our clearer knowledge of these matters, as well as because we are living in the dawning of the New Age – at the time when God promised that His people should understand His Word – "The wise shall understand." – Daniel 12:10.

GOD'S DEALINGS WITH ISRAEL

Our Text was addressed, primarily, to the nation of Israel. On account of disobedience, God cut off Father Adam, Mother Eve and all their children from special fellowship with Him, sentencing them to death – as not worthy of everlasting life – "Dying, thou shalt die." (Genesis 2:17, margin.) But even this sentence God did not hasten. The sinners might live as they could.

God's Mercy was manifested toward the posterity of Abraham – Isaac, Jacob, and then all of Jacob's children. God made the twelve tribes into one nation, cementing them together by His promises to them in connection with the Law Covenant instituted by Moses at Mount Sinai. If they would keep God's Law, they would live forever – not die at all. Moreover, they were to be blessed in all of their affairs – their health, their flocks, their herds, their cattle. Everything would be blessed.

But they could not keep this Law Covenant, because of having been born in sin, like the remainder of the race. Nevertheless God purposed that through endeavoring to keep the Law that nation should be greatly blessed. And it was so. True, He chastened them for their wrongdoings and shortcomings, but always with loving interest and care, never wholly casting them off. Their national distresses and captivities were in the nature of

chastisements, [R5817 : page 380] with a view to teaching them necessary lessons.

Thus God's favor continued with that one nation – and with no other nation – from the death of Jacob down to the death of Jesus, a period of 1845 years. Even then, in casting off the nation when they rejected Jesus and crucified Him, the Lord made provision for all of the Jews who were spiritually inclined, that they might not only be retained in His favor, but might come into still greater favor at Pentecost and onward, being there begotten of the Holy Spirit – no longer to be a House of Servants, under Moses, but the House of Sons, under Jesus. (Hebrews 3:5,6.) Even when rejecting the nation, God intimated clearly that the time would come when His favor would return to them – after the establishment of Messiah's Kingdom – Amos 9:11,12; Acts 15:13-17.

GOD'S NEW NATION

Meantime, the saintly Jews who were "Israelites indeed" became the nucleus, or start, of Spiritual Israel. Of this Spiritual Israel St. Peter says, "Ye are a Royal Priesthood, a holy nation, a people for a peculiar purpose – that ye might show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

We see, then, that the Church is God's New Creation, the new nation with which He has been dealing exclusively during the Gospel Age. He is dealing with these with a view to their education and development, that they may be associated with our Lord Jesus in His great Millennial Kingdom. Then for a thousand years He and His saintly company, gathered from every nation under heaven, will bless Natural Israel and all the nations of the world with light, with knowledge, with assistance and uplifting, for the purpose of delivering them from the bondage of sin and death, back to the likeness of God, lost by Adam and redeemed on Calvary.

It is because of this special work that God has for the Church that He has made her trials fiery ones, declaring, "Through much tribulation ye must enter into the Kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22.) This class of fully consecrated ones, regardless of sectarian lines, have all been begotten of the Holy Spirit. None others are recognized of God. This Church have their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life – in Heaven – and are in the present life demonstrating their faithfulness, their loyalty to God. When the foreordained number shall have taken the step [**R5818 : page 380**] and shall have demonstrated their loyalty even unto death, then this holy nation will be complete.

It is the Spiritual Seed of Abraham to whom belong the great promises of God. Of this class St. Paul says, "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's Seed, and heirs according to the Promise." (Galatians 3:8,16,29.) The Promise was made to Abraham, and declares, "In thy Seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." (Genesis 22:18.) We have St. Paul's word for it that Christ and His Church are this Spiritual Seed, whose mission it will be, in God's due time, to bless all mankind – "all the families of the earth" – not only those who are alive and remaining at the time of the establishment of the Kingdom, but all who have ever lived. God's mercy referred to in our Text is especially toward this Spiritual Israel – even more so than toward Natural Israel.

THE BREADTH OF DIVINE MERCY

Now we come to the grand climax of God's mercy and grace. The Jewish nation was small. The Church, the Spiritual Israel, is small. But God's grace and mercy are to extend to the whole world of mankind – every creature for whom Christ died. The time for dealing with the world and giving them their opportunity of sharing in God's grace and mercy has already been appointed by the Father. It will be during the Millennium – the thousand years of Christ's Reign. He will be the great spiritual King of the earth; and His

Church will be associated with Him as His joint-heirs and assistant rulers, teachers, healers, uplifters, rewarders and punishers of mankind during the Millennium. All this service of the world will be with a view to bestowing upon them, if they will, the grace of God, the mercy of God, which He purposed from the beginning, and which is to be brought to mankind through Messiah's Kingdom of Glory.

For a thousand years the rising Sun of Righteousness will bless the world, flooding the earth with the light of the knowledge of God. For the same thousand years Satan shall be bound, that he may deceive the people no more. For the same thousand years the work of blessing and restitution will progress – Times (or years) of Restitution the entire Millennium will be. Every creature will have his eyes of understanding opened to see, to know and to understand the Love of God, His tender Mercy and His Wisdom, all centered in and manifested through our Lord Jesus Christ. God's Mercy will be exercised toward the world with a view to its release from the bondage of sin and death to the full liberty of the sons of God – the same that Adam enjoyed before he sinned. – Romans 8:19-23.

Thus we see "a wideness in God's Mercy, like the wideness of the sea." Thus we see that His grace, while limited first to one earthly nation, then later to an elect company from all nations, is finally to be extended to every human being the world around, bringing all to the fullest privileges and opportunities of knowledge, love, obedience and blessing.

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