

HE ASCENDED, LEADING CAPTIVES

---JANUARY 2. – ACTS 1:1-14.---

FIVE SPECIAL POINTS OF THIS STUDY: (1) THE NUMBER OF APOSTLES LIMITED TO TWELVE; (2) THE IMPORTANCE OF THE KINGDOM TO COME; (3) IT WAS NOT THEN DUE TIME TO EXPLAIN THE TIME OF THE KINGDOM'S ESTABLISHMENT; (4) BEFORE THE KINGDOM WOULD COME THE DISCIPLES WOULD HAVE A GREAT WORK TO DO IN PROCLAIMING IT THROUGHOUT THE EARTH; (5) AS THE LORD'S ASCENSION WAS KNOWN TO FEW AND WAS WITHOUT COMMOTION, SO HIS SECOND COMING WOULD IN LIKE MANNER BE KNOWN TO FEW AND BE AS A THIEF.

"When He ascended on High, He led a multitude of captives, and gave gifts unto men." – Ephesians 4:8.

OUR lesson is from the pen of St. Luke, as indicated by the first verse. (Luke 1:3.) There are five special features to the Study. First is the declaration that the Apostles were only those whom Jesus had especially selected to that office – St. Paul, by Divine arrangement, subsequently taking the place of Judas. This is in contradiction to the claim of the Bishops of England and of Rome that they are Apostolic Bishops, with apostolic powers, but it is in full agreement with the Master's statement that all others claiming to be apostles are "liars." – Revelation 2:2.

The second point of the lesson is that Jesus, before leaving His Apostles, instructed them concerning the Kingdom of God. This is in full accord with all the records of His previous teachings. Nearly all of His teachings were in respect to this wonderful Kingdom of God which will be established when He will come in power and great

glory, and of which His invited disciples and followers are to be members – sharing His glory and His Throne, as His joint-heirs.

The third point we notice especially is referred to in Verses 6 and 7. The Apostles inquired respecting the Kingdom and the time for its blessing of Israel; but Jesus informed them that it was not for them to know the times and seasons respecting the Kingdom (Acts 1:7) – that the matter was entirely in the Father's hands. The fourth point of our Study centers in Verse 8, where the Lord declares that prior to the establishment of His Kingdom His Church would witness to it throughout the earth – after receiving the blessing at Pentecost. The fifth point of special notice centers in Verse 11, in the statement of the angels, "This same Jesus...shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into Heaven."

WRONG VIEWS OF THE KINGDOM

Peculiar and conflicting views respecting the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Messiah, are held by Protestants. Much more logical, but equally unscriptural, is the view held by Roman Catholics. The confusion of Protestants is lamentable. Some hold that somehow the Kingdom of God began at Pentecost; others hold that somehow it began when Jerusalem was destroyed; and yet all of them realize that the promises made by Jesus respecting His Second Advent must still be future.

Roman Catholics hold that they set up the Kingdom of God about the year 800 A.D.; first, by dividing between clergy and laity, and exalting the clergy to be a special class; then, the Roman Church having great power, and the kings of earth being comparatively weak, Papacy established a spiritual rule over the kings and princes of the earth in the name of Christ – the Popes being recognized as Christ's vicegerants, as reigning instead of Christ, as His substitutes.

The kings and princes of earth were informed that they might continue to rule the people if they would be obedient to the Papacy;

that in that event they would be kingdoms of God; but that if they should fail to be obedient to Papacy, the latter would inform the people that such kings were no longer to be recognized, but were disowned by God's spiritual Kingdom, and would appoint other kings and other princes in their stead. The rulers of Europe readily assented to this partnership, by which the people would recognize them as having Divine authorization to rule. Matters have progressed in this way for eleven hundred years. Austria and Hungary still fully assent to the Divine power in Papacy – though others of the kingdoms of Europe have more or less broken the pact.

Great Britain was one of the first to break with Papacy, under the leadership of King Henry VIII. He had a dispute with the Pope, and forthwith proceeded to organize the British people as another kingdom of God and the Church of England as a separate spiritual kingdom from Papacy; and the king himself and his successors became the heads of both the Church and the state. Lutheranism made similar progress in Scandinavia and amongst the German States. These acknowledged Lutheranism; and Lutheranism in turn acknowledged them as kingdoms of God. Thus today the kingdoms of this world are still kingdoms of God on the authority originally from Papacy and subsequently through Protestants.

AN ERROR – CHRIST'S KINGDOM FUTURE

All intelligent people, Catholics and Protestants, now perceive that a serious mistake was made – that the kingdoms of this world never were kingdoms of Christ, and that the name Christendom has been misapplied to them. That name signifies Christ's Kingdom; and it is very inappropriate to apply it to the warring nations of Europe, now seeking to blow each other off the face of the land and off the face of the sea. Moreover, the Apostle declares that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His," and tells us that the Spirit of Christ is manifest in meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, brotherly kindness, love. – Romans 8:9; Galatians 5:22,23.

We are sure that in all those warring nations there are [R5829 : page 12] saintly people who manifest the Spirit of Christ; but we are equally sure that the warring kingdoms themselves do not manifest this spirit, and are "none of His." On the contrary, they manifest what the Apostle styles, works of the flesh and of the Devil – anger, malice, hatred, envy, strife, bitterness. Bible students are convinced that the great war now started in Europe is the beginning of that great trouble which the Bible calls "Armageddon," and which the Bible declares will prepare mankind and usher them into the Kingdom of God's dear Son, which will be "the desire of all nations" (Haggai 2:7), and through which a Reign of Righteousness will be established throughout the whole earth.

Jesus did not pretend to tell His people how long or how short the time would be before the establishment of His Kingdom. He declared the matter fully in the Divine care and not proper to be revealed to God's people then. But elsewhere He did tell them of certain indications that would be given them at the proper time, by which they would know, and be enabled to lift up their heads and rejoice, realizing that their deliverance was drawing nigh.

Similarly we are not to understand that the Apostles expected Christ's Kingdom in their day, before their death. On the contrary, we remember that St. Paul, while foretelling his own death, declared that some of the Lord's people would not sleep in death, but would be alive at the Second Coming of Christ and be "changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." (1 Corinthians 15:51,52.) Similarly St. Peter, without attempting to tell of the times and seasons, declared that he put his message into writing and committed it to holy men for the benefit of the Church after his death. – 2 Peter 1:15.

Our Lord's words in Verse 8, to the effect that His followers would give a witness throughout the entire world, was a further demonstration that the Kingdom would not come in a few days or a

few years, but would be long enough away to give opportunity for a full testimony of the Lord's favor to all people, nations, kindreds and tongues. And so it has been.

"THIS SAME JESUS SHALL SO COME"

Bible students are coming to notice the exact wording of the Scriptures more carefully than formerly. The statement that Jesus would so come again in like manner as they saw Him go into Heaven, has been generally taken to mean that Jesus would come a fleshly or human being. This would be a contradiction of the statement that He was put to death in flesh, but quickened, made alive, resurrected, in spirit. (1 Peter 3:18.) It would also contradict the Master's words that He was about to ascend up where He was before – to the spirit plane, or condition. It would also contradict His declaration, "Yet **[R5830 : page 12]** a little while, and the world seeth Me no more; but ye shall see Me." – John 14:19.

In a word, the entire tenor of Scripture is to the effect that when Jesus left the Heavenly glory and was made flesh, it was not the Divine intention that He should remain a fleshly being forever, but quite to the contrary – that He took this earthly condition for the suffering of death and would not need it afterward. Adam was a fleshly, human being; and, in order to be the Redeemer of Adam and his race, Jesus needed to be a perfect human being – "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." (Hebrews 7:26.) But there could be no reason why He must continue to be a fleshly being and out of touch with all the Heavenly conditions.

When we remember that the perfect Adam was a little lower than the angels, we must see that the perfect man Jesus was also a little lower than the angels. But that He did not keep this lower condition is fully asserted by St. Paul, who, after telling about His faithfulness even unto death, declares, "Wherefore God hath highly exalted Him, and hath given Him a name above every name." (Philippians 2:9, 10.) The exalted Jesus is a spirit Being of the very

highest order – "of the Divine nature" – who sat down at the Father's right hand, on the Father's Throne, waiting for the time when He would take His own Throne, establish the Millennial Kingdom and associate the Church with Him in His Throne as His Bride. "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My Throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His Throne." – Revelation 3:21.

During the forty days after His resurrection, Jesus appeared and disappeared some ten or eleven times, mostly for a few moments each. Our lesson tells us that during these visits to His faithful He gave them instructions. He did not appear to them as a spirit being to strike them down with the glory of His presence, shining above the brightness of the sun, as He subsequently appeared to Saul of Tarsus. (Acts 26:13.) On the contrary, He appeared as a man, sometimes in one form and sometimes in another form – as a gardener, as a traveler, etc. On two occasions He appeared in bodies similar to the one in which He had been crucified, showing the spear marks and the nail prints. These bodies were materialized in the upper room when the doors were shut; and of course clothing was materialized at the same time, for He was not naked.

These manifestations of Jesus were for the purpose of demonstrating unquestionably to His disciples the fact that He was no longer dead. His appearance in different bodies was to prove that none of these bodies was His real spiritual body, but merely a manifestation. The Bible tells us of previous manifestations of the same kind when our Lord was a spirit being, before He became a man. Away back in Abraham's time, the Lord with two angels materialized and talked with Abraham and ate with him. (Genesis 18.) When Jesus arose from the dead, quickened in spirit, He had gotten back again to where He was before. The description of the resurrection change of the Church fits equally well to the Lord. He was sown in death – "in weakness, raised in power; sown in dishonor

[a companion of thieves], raised in glory; sown an animal body, raised a spiritual body." – 1 Cor. 15:42-44.

"COME IN LIKE MANNER"

It should be carefully noted that the angels did not say, "come in like *form*." The Lord departed from them in some kind of fleshly body, or form, which would enable them to see Him ascending into the clouds as they could not see His spirit body. The manner of Jesus' going did not appertain to His form. Our Lord's manner of going was quiet, secret, unknown to the world, known only to His disciples, without noise, without ostentation, without trumpets or bugles. He will so come in like manner – unknown to the world. He will be present as a thief in the night; and none will then know of His presence, except His disciples.

How contrary all this is to what we once supposed, when we thought of our Savior as forever degraded to human conditions, which at their best are a little lower than the angelic! How sadly we misunderstood the matter when we used to sing:

"Five bleeding wounds He bears,
Received on Calvary;
They pour effectual prayers,
They strongly plead for me!"

When we thus sang, we evidently did not understand the [R5830 : page 13] methods of the Lord's intercession for His saints any more than we understood His glorification as a spirit being, "far above angels."

Now we understand that the seventh trumpet, with which He comes, is not a literal trumpet, but a symbolical one; and that like the preceding six, it makes no noise upon the air. Now we see that the world will not be conscious of the Master's Second Advent during the thief stage, nor until the Great Time of Trouble, when He shall

be revealed in flaming fire, taking vengeance. (2 Thessalonians 1:9.)
What the world will then see will be the trouble; and gradually they will come to understand that the great King is identified with the trouble which will be making preparation for the establishment of the Reign of Righteousness by the overthrow of everything that is unrighteous.

