

Week 49

Introduction

Peter was one of the most prominent of Jesus' twelve disciples and was appointed by him especially to be his apostle to the Jews *Gal.2:7* and in this capacity he wrote two letters to the Jewish Christians scattered throughout the Roman Empire.^{1:1} The phrase "scattered strangers" in the original is the Greek word "diaspora" which, anglicised, is the term the Jews still use today to refer to their patriots scattered outside the Promised Land. Peter exhorted these Jewish Christians to holiness and obedience, warning them specifically of the falling away from the true gospel which was soon to occur among the disciples of Christ.

Week 49

1 Peter 1

Day 337

Peter addressed the disciples as "the elect according to the foreknowledge of God" who are saved by obedience and the shedding of Jesus' blood,^{v.2} and he blessed God, the Father of Jesus Christ, for his mercy in begetting the disciples to a living hope.^{v.3} Begetting by God of the disciples as his children is a feature of Peter's letter, as is the glorious hope available through the resurrection of Jesus.^{v.3} After their own resurrection, the disciples will receive an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance.^{v.4} This is now "reserved in heaven"^{v.4} but it will be revealed in due course^{v.5}, at the appearing of Jesus Christ,^{v.7} and is the most valuable possession we could have. Gold is the world's most precious metal but will be valueless to us at death, as well as at the judgment-seat. In contrast, faith will then be priceless because it will result in praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ,^{v.7} As gold is purified by fire, faith is purified by trial^{v.7} and can have this faith in Christ even though we have not seen him. We can believe in him and rejoice at the prospect of salvation in glory when he appears.^{vs.8-9}

The prophets of old recorded beforehand the suffering of Christ and the glory to follow for they were inspired by the same Spirit which begat, anointed, inspired, and empowered Jesus to perform miraculous deeds.^{v.11} The same Holy Spirit came upon the apostles^{v.12} whose teaching enables us to see the things which were hidden from the understanding of prophets and angels.^{v.12} Knowing the glorious future in store for the faithful, we should awake to our responsibilities,^{v.13} be obedient children of God^{v.14} and holy in our manner of life as our heavenly Father is holy.^{vs.15-17} A very high price has been paid for our redemption from sin and death

- not gold or silver - but the precious blood of Christ.^{vs.18-19} The sacrifice of Jesus as a lamb without blemish was foreordained before the foundation of the Jewish "cosmos" i.e. before the time of Moses, e.g. he is the "seed of the woman" who would destroy sin.^{Gen.3:15} This does not mean Jesus existed at

that time but was in the mind and purpose of God, and the prophets were inspired to write of him beforehand until, being born of Mary and anointed in adulthood, he was manifested in the last times of the Mosaic era.^{v.20} Jesus was manifested for those who believe in God that raised him from the dead, that they might have faith and hope.^{v.21} They are also required to love one another with a pure heart fervently ^{v.22} to show they are indeed God's children, having been born again by his word.^{v.23} We are born naturally of corruptible seed and, being but flesh, we perish, but if we have been born of the word by belief and baptism, we can live for ever after resurrection from the dead, because the word of God endures for ever.^{vs.23-25}

Week 49

1 Peter 2

Day 338

When someone is born again by the word of God he is like a newborn baby which has no malice or guile but has an insatiable desire for milk. Therefore the apostle exhorted the disciples to desire the sincere milk of the word that they might grow thereby.^{vs.1-3} God's purpose in sending forth his word is to develop a household composed of righteous individuals, and the corner stone of this house is Jesus Christ ^{v.6} *Isa.28:16*. The Jewish builders rejected him *Psa.118:22* and stumbled over him.^{*Isa.8:14*} To them he had no value, but to believers he is precious ^{v.7} as he is to God ^{v.4} who made him the most important stone in the building.^{v.7} He has also made the faithful living stones, built upon Christ to form a spiritual house of God.^{v.5} Jesus is rejected by men who stumble at the word of God ^{v.8} but disciples who believe are: "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a special people to shew forth the praises of him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light".^{v.9} Because of disobedience, God had declared the scattered Jews were not his people *Hos.1:9* but by belief and obedience they could be restored to favour *Hos.1:10* - as were these Jewish disciples.^{v.10}

In this honoured position, the disciples were commanded to order their lives aright among the Gentiles, even if they were branded "evildoers". Their good works would be revealed in the day of glory ^{v.12} and by well-doing, as the servants of God, they would put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.^{vs.13-16} If any of them were literal slaves they were to give good service, even to abusive masters, "enduring grief, suffering wrongfully, for conscience toward God".^{vs.18-19} This is a lesson for all disciples of Christ, not to demand our "rights" as is the way of the world, but to suffer injustice patiently after the example of Christ.^{vs.20-21} "who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously".^{vs.22-23} Jesus suffered for us, bearing our sins and healing us by his

stripes,^{Isa.53:4-6} that we should live unto righteousness.^{v.24}

Week 49

1 Peter 3

Day 339

The apostle gave exhortation also to wives, husbands, and the disciples generally. Believing wives should, by their godly behaviour, influence their unbelieving husbands to come to God's truth.^{vs.1-2} They were not to emphasise their outward appearance, as is the wont of the fashion conscious world,^{v.3} but to manifest the meek and quiet character which pleases God ^{v.4} after the example of the faithful wives of old.^{vs.5-6} Husbands were to honour their wives, for they were heirs together of the life promised by God.^{v.7} A husband and wife together in the Lord are united as one - united in selfless love - and all the disciples are commanded to be of one mind and to love one another that they might inherit the promised blessing when Christ comes.^{vs.8-9} In support of this, the apostle cited a Psalm to show what we must do if we desire to see the good days that are coming and to enjoy eternal life ^{vs.10-12}; *Psa.34:12-16*. Those who live as directed in this passage are protected by God,^{v.12-13} even if they suffer at the hands of evildoers and false accusers,^{vs.14-17} as did Jesus.^{v.18} He was the righteous one who suffered for sins that he might bring us to God.^{v.18}

Jesus lived in the flesh and then died for us, but afterwards he was brought to life again by God's Spirit.^{v.18} The Spirit of the LORD inspired him and his apostles to speak God's words, that by believing we can save ourselves from the wrath to come.

Noah was inspired by the same Spirit to warn the people of his day,^{vs.19-20} but they would not listen and died in the flood, ending up in the prisonhouse of death.^{v.19} The experiences of Noah and his contemporaries are a clear warning to people of all generations, as well as being a figure of salvation in Christ.^{v.21} The Spirit in Noah warned the people to turn to righteousness, but only eight souls obeyed and were saved. The same Spirit in the apostles warns of the coming judgments of God, but relatively few people take heed and believe the gospel and are baptized. Baptism is the answer of a good conscience to God and shows that the believer has willingly commenced a new life of obedience in Christ. It also represents burial and resurrection. After his resurrection Jesus went to heaven where he was highly exalted, with all authority in heaven and earth being put under him ^{v.22} and, enlightened by the scriptures, we can see that world events are safely in his hands and that they are moving rapidly towards the moment for his return.

Week 49

1 Peter 4-5

Day 340

Disciples of Christ are required to be like him: have the same mind and ceasing from sin.^{v.1} This involves resisting the sinful impulses of the flesh and not doing the will of men but the will of God.^{v.2} Previously, we may have indulged in the lusts of the flesh ^{v.3} but afterwards we must cease doing so, even if our former associates are offended by our change of life and speak evil of us.^{v.4} It helps to keep in mind that we will have to give account to Christ whom God has appointed the judge of all, whether living or dead at his coming.^{v.5} The same gospel has been preached by the prophets of the LORD from the beginning, e.g. it was preached to Abraham *Gal.3:8* and to the people of Israel in the wilderness,^{*Heb.4:2*} as well as by Jesus and his apostles, and hearing the gospel makes men and women responsible to God's judgment.^{v.6} Sometimes the statement that "the gospel was preached to them that are dead" ^{v.6} is mistakenly taken literally but, of course, the gospel was preached to Noah's contemporaries when they were living, although they were dead when Peter wrote his letter. It is impossible for people who are dead to hear the gospel because the dead have no consciousness and cannot know or believe anything. Men will be judged according to how they lived this life, and those accounted faithful will live eternally in the spirit,^{v.6} being made spiritual bodies like the Lord Jesus Christ after his resurrection.

The apostle exhorted the disciples to live their lives as if the judgment could occur at any moment, being sober, watching unto prayer, having fervent love for each other, and being hospitable, as good servants of God.^{vs.8-10} They were also to speak as the oracles of God ^{v.11} - spiritual things should be expressed in spiritual words which are found in the scriptures. Peter told these disciples that they would have to endure severe persecution, "a fiery trial", and he exhorted them to rejoice that they would be suffering with Christ and that at his coming they "would be glad with exceeding joy".^{v.12-13} Despite appearances, they were the happy ones if they were reproached for the name of Christ ^{v.14}. They would suffer as Christians ^{v.16} but they were not to do evil deeds to justify the authorities afflicting them,^{v.15} Judgment will begin at the house of God ^{v.17} and the righteous will scarcely be saved,^{v.18} therefore we should carefully do all we can to secure approval. Although those who disobey the gospel may be careless of the coming judgment, believers should commit themselves unto God in well-doing, knowing that the Creator will faithfully keep his word.^{v.19}

Peter exhorted the elders ^{5:1} to feed the flock of God,^{v.2} not motivated by filthy lucre (money) and not lording it over the disciples who are God's heritage,^{v.3} and they would receive an unfading crown of glory when the chief shepherd appears. Unfortunately, many of them began to lust after money and exalt themselves, eventually arrogating to themselves the title of "clergy", meaning "heritage", and subordinating the rest of the congregations to the position of "laity". However, it is the disciples who are God's heritage and none should

exalt themselves over them. All the disciples are exhorted to humble themselves ^{v.5} that they might be exalted, not now, but in due time, ^{v.6} i.e. at the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The disciples of Peter's time suffered severe violence from their enemies who raged against them, hauling them before the courts. "Adversary" ^{v.8} is, in the original Greek, a legal word meaning "opponent at law" and this legal opponent of believers was metaphorically like a "roaring lion". Examples of this behaviour are recorded in *The Acts of the Apostles*, ^{17:5-6} and the unbelieving Jews especially fiercely attacked believers, behaving like their fathers of old. *Ezek.22:25* This adversary brought false accusation against the disciples, therefore he is called "the devil". This is an appropriate label for this body of persecutors, being a false accuser, but has no reference to an imaginary supernatural evil being who never charged the disciples before the Roman legal authorities.

These afflictions came upon the Jewish Christians to whom Peter wrote and also upon their Gentile brethren in the faith. ^{v.9} Both Jew and Gentile believers were exhorted to "cast their care upon the Lord", ^{v.7} knowing they had been called to eternal glory, so that after they had suffered they would be strengthened and made immortal and incorruptible at the coming of Christ. ^{v.10}

Week 49

2 Peter 1

Day 341

Peter, in this second letter, reminded the disciples of the "exceeding great and precious promises" by which we "might become partakers of the divine nature". ^{v.4} By gaining knowledge of the only true God and his Son Jesus Christ ^{v.2, Jn 17:2-3} we can have the hope of eternal life. Lust, naturally present in us all, conceives sin which brings forth death *Jas.1:15* but we can escape from the corruption that is in the world through lust ^{v.4} and attain to everlasting life. Godliness is required, therefore the apostle exhorted the disciples to diligently build godly attributes upon their belief: virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. ^{vs.5-7} If we, having been purged from our old sins, ^{v.9} develop these characteristics we will be fruitful in the knowledge of ^{v.8}. The apostle, therefore, exhorted the disciples to be diligent to make their calling and election sure, ^{v.10} for if they did these things they would never fall (from grace), ^{v.10} and an entrance would be ministered unto them abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. ^{v.11}

Peter knew, not only that he would be crucified like Jesus ^{v.14} but also that there would be a serious departure from the truth after his death. He was

concerned, therefore, to help the disciples remain in the truth in which they were established by reminding them of its vital elements,^{v.13,15} e.g. the return of Christ. The apostles had not followed cunningly devised fables when they had told the disciples of Christ's return, for some of them had seen the vision of his coming.^{vs.16-18 Mat.17:1-9} They had been privileged to see Jesus in his future glory at his coming, yet Peter

declared that the word of God in the scriptures is a greater assurance than this vision. We have seen neither Jesus nor visions of his glory in the kingdom of God, but we do have the word of God in our possession which is "a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that we take heed in your hearts".^{v.19} Only God's word can give us spiritual light until Christ, as the day star at dawn, arises to shine brightly in the political heavens.^{v.19} Unfortunately, most people do not treat the scriptures in this manner but view them as the private ideas of the writers.^{v.20} This is false. All scripture expresses God's mind, and not the mind of men, for "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit".^{v.21} This must be the fundamental tenet of our faith for unless the scriptures are wholly inspired we cannot have complete confidence in any particular part of them. All scripture is the word of God, and those who read and understand it are able to speak with conviction concerning him and his purpose (see Mark 1:22).

Week 49

2 Peter 2

Day 342

Peter forewarned that there would be false prophets among the Christians, just as there had been previously among the people of Israel, who would bring in heresies resulting in destruction. Unfortunately, many disciples would follow these false teachers and deny the faith, even speaking evil of the way of truth.^{vs.2-3} To alert the disciples to this danger and encourage them to resist the error and remain steadfast in the truth, Peter cited previous examples of God's judgments upon those who departed into unbelief and wickedness. The first was that of Korah, Dathan and Abiram *Num.16* who, as Levites and princes in Israel, were the messengers of the LORD (the original word for messenger is "angelos").^{v.4} These rebelled against Moses, Aaron, and the LORD's appointments, and were punished by being suddenly cast into the grave (the Bible "hell") and delivered into chains of darkness until the day of judgment.^{v.4} It is instructive that the normal Greek word translated "hell" is "hades", meaning "the grave", but Peter uses a different word here to indicate that the rebels did not simply descend into a normal grave but went down into the lower depths of the earth. This word is "tartarus" which the Greeks applied to the place below "hades". This agrees with Moses' declaration concerning the destiny of the rebels: "If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the LORD hath not sent me. But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow

them up and they go down quick [alive] into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD. And the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up”. *Num.16:29-32*

The second example was that of Noah and the flood which Jesus also cited as a warning to the disciples and through which only a very few survived.^{v.5} The third example was that of Sodom and Gomorrha and, with sodomy now gaining general acceptance even among the religious, we are wise to be like righteous Lot who was vexed daily by the deeds of these people.^{vs.7-8} The wicked were abruptly overthrown, and sudden destruction is also promised at the return of Christ. The righteous, however, were delivered: God is able to deliver the righteous as readily as he is able to reserve the wicked for judgment.^{v.9} Men too easily fall away to the lusts of the flesh and despise the righteous dignities we read of in the scriptures.^{v.10} They become like brute beasts and, in the end, perish like them.^{v.12} Disastrously, many disciples in the first century descended to this appalling level and corrupted the Christian congregations.^{vs.13-19} Having forsaken the right way, many of these apostates only sought to make money, like Balaam, *Num.22* “loving the wages of unrighteousness”.^{v.15} God said, through Peter, it would be better for such people never to have known the way of righteousness, because the judgments of God are severe upon those who corrupt his word and truth.^{vs.20-22}

Week 49

2 Peter 3

Day 343

Peter stated his purpose in writing this second letter was to make them remember the word of God and the commandments delivered to them through the apostles.^{vs.1-2} This stirring up was vital in view of the scoffers among the disciples who, influenced by their own lusts, would begin to challenge the vital doctrine of Christ’s return.^{v.3} They would say: “Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation”.^{v.4} Jesus had promised to return but, as decades passed by without him coming, some disciples would begin to question it. The “fathers” were those disciples who had been with Jesus from the beginning *1Jo.2:14* who would fall into the sleep of death before Jesus returned. In the opinion of the doubters nothing would have changed since the beginning of the new creation in Christ when men and women by belief and baptism became new creatures. They would hold these opinions through ignorance of the scriptures ^{v.5} which taught that before Jesus’ coming the Jewish political heavens and earth would be swept away, just as the political constitution in Noah’s day had been eliminated.^{vs.5-7} Noah’s world was destroyed by water, but the Jewish one would be destroyed by fire.^{vs.7,12} This would be effected by Jesus, in control of world events, using the Roman legions against the people of the land. Jesus taught by a parable that he would do this because of

the Jews' wickedness *Mat.22:7* and he warned his disciples of it, directing their attention to Daniel's prophecy *Dan.9:26* that the Romans as "the people of the prince" would come and destroy Jerusalem.

It is natural for men to feel that the purpose of God grinds slowly because our lifespan is so short, but God lives for eternity so that finite time is insignificant to him, a thousand years being like a single day.^{v.8} But God is not slack concerning his promise and the apparent slackness which men attribute to him not keeping his word is, in fact, due to his longsuffering and concern that men and women have time to repent and save their lives.^{v.9} Nevertheless, the time of destruction did arrive, in A.D.70, as will the time for the re-creation of the Jewish heaven - a new heaven and earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.^{v.13; Isa.65:17-25} True and faithful disciples of Christ look for this promised new constitution when Jesus will be established as King of Israel, and if we are such we should heed the apostle's exhortation: "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless".^{v.14} Unfortunately, very few look for the coming of Christ to do what God has promised. The common practice now, and for many centuries past, is to wrest the word of God and use the terminology to concoct fables which blind people's eyes to the truth. Peter lamented that people did it with his writings, and those of the apostle Paul, to their own destruction.^{v.16} We should avoid this trap and understand the words we read both in the immediate context and that of the scriptures as a whole. Thus can we heed Peter's warning to "beware" ^{v.17} and also "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen".^{v.18}

Week 50

Introduction

Daniel was one of the princes of Israel taken captive when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, captured Jerusalem. *Dan.1:1,3,6* He lived to a great age and saw the overthrow of Babylon by the Medo-Persians and the issue of the decree enabling Jews to return to Jerusalem and Judea. During this period, God imparted important information to him, usually symbolically in visions or dreams, which outlined world events from that time forward till the setting up of the kingdom of God. We, living so late in history, can look back and confirm that most of these prophecies have already been fulfilled and can anticipate the imminent fulfilment of the others with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Week 50

Daniel 2

Day 344

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was the ruler of the ancient world, *vs.37-38* having conquered all the neighbouring kingdoms. Settled in this undisputed supremacy, he fell asleep one night contemplating the future *v.29* and had a dream *v.1* sent by God which showed him, not only what would happen to his kingdom and its successors, but also what would happen ultimately in the purpose of God in the latter days: "There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days". *v.28* Briefly, the message was that ultimately "the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume [bring to an end] all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever". *v.44* This chapter describes Nebuchadnezzar's dream, his inability to remember it, the revelation of the dream to Daniel, and the meaning of the dream. This is extremely interesting to us because we can look back on world history and see that events have occurred precisely as outlined through Daniel and, as we live in the "latter days", we can anticipate the setting up of God's kingdom as promised.

In his dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw a colossus, *v.31* composed of metals, with a golden head representing his own kingdom. *vs.32, 38* This would be succeeded by another kingdom, represented by silver chest and arms which history shows was the dual kingdom of the Medes and Persians *vs.32, 39*. This in turn was succeeded by the kingdom of Greece, represented by a belly and sides of brass. *vs.32, 39* Both these kingdoms, like Nebuchadnezzar's, would "bear rule over all the earth". *v.39* The Greeks were superseded by the Romans whose empire eventually became divided into two parts, the Western and Eastern Empires, represented by legs of iron. *vs.33, 40* However, after the Romans the world would be a mixture of independent strong and weak nations, is represented by feet of iron and clay. *vs.33, 41-43*

History shows that this prophecy of developments among the nations has been fulfilled exactly. Some nations and individual rulers, such as Napoleon and Hitler, have attempted to gain world domination but have failed, and the situation today is as described - a mixture of strong and weak nations. The dream then indicated that God would intervene in the world through Jesus. Nebuchadnezzar saw a stone smash into the feet, topple the image, and grind it to powder.^{vs.34-35} Jesus is consistently represented in the scriptures as a stone and he spoke of himself as a stone “grinding to powder”.^{Lu.20:17-18} The stone in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was “cut out of the mountain without hands”^{v.45} to indicate that Jesus would come from human stock, but by God’s will not man’s, and he would be the one to overthrow

Nebuchadnezzar's Image



Head of gold = Babylon

Breast and arms of silver
= Medo-Persia

Belly and sides of brass = Greece

Legs of iron = Rome

Stone = Jesus

the kingdoms of men and establish the kingdom of God in the land of Israel.

Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom ruled over all the earth and he wondered if it would continue for ever. It did not, but God's kingdom in Israel will rule over all the earth and it will last for ever.^{v.44} Nebuchadnezzar and all other rulers have, because of death, left their kingdoms to other people, but Jesus will never leave the kingdom of God to others because he lives for ever

Week 50

Daniel 3

Day 345

Nebuchadnezzar made an immense idol of gold ^{v.1} before which he required all people in his empire to fall down and worship.^{vs.4-5} Any person failing to do so was to be thrown into a fiery furnace.^{v.6} Most people obeyed ^{v.7} but certain companions of Daniel refused to worship this golden image.^{v.12} Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego explained to Nebuchadnezzar that they trusted in their God to deliver them from his threats ^{vs.16-17} and even if he threw them into the furnace they would not bow before the image.^{v.18} Nebuchadnezzar was furious and commanded the temperature of the furnace be increased sevenfold and the three men be thrown therein.^{vs.19-22} The furnace was made so hot that it burned to death the soldiers who cast the men into it but, astonishingly, these three faithful men were then seen by Nebuchadnezzar walking in the midst of the fire, unharmed and accompanied by a fourth individual "like the Son of God".^{vs.24-25}

Many faithful men and women throughout the ages refused to bow down to idols and were executed. They died, but had the hope of resurrection. No doubt Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego were preserved on this occasion to show Nebuchadnezzar and everyone else that God is in control and that the faithful come through fiery persecution to eternal life. These three faithful men came forth out of the fire unharmed ^{vs.26-27} and their experience is undoubtedly a representation of the multitudes who have suffered severe persecution in, as it were, the company of the Son of God. Whatever tribulations the saints have had to endure throughout the centuries they have had the assurance, reinforced by this account in Daniel, that their lives cannot be obliterated by their enemies because in the end they will be brought forth to eternal life. As Jesus promised his disciples: "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish".^{Lu.21:16-18} Ultimately, world rulers and all the people of the earth will acknowledge the one true God when he makes known his salvation in the sight of the Gentiles,^{Psa.98:1-2} as did Nebuchadnezzar at the deliverance of Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego.^{vs.28-30}

Week 50

Daniel 5

Day 346

The LORD had declared through Isaiah that Babylon would be destroyed “in a moment in one day” *Isa.47:9* and this occurred in the days of Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar’s grandson, as recorded in this chapter. He held a feast which became a drunken orgy during which he blasphemed the God of heaven by drinking from the golden vessels taken from his house in Jerusalem.^{v.2} Suddenly, in the midst of this feast, fingers of a hand appeared and wrote a message on the wall of the palace.^{v.5} Naturally, this terrified Belshazzar and his fellow revellers and they sought an explanation. A better representation of the writing on the wall is:

MENE MENE TEKEL U PERESIN
i.e. NUMBER NUMBER WEIGHT AND DIVIDE.

“MENE” means “number”. “TEKEL”, more familiar to us as “SHEKEL”, means “weight”. The conjunction “and” is represented by the letter “U” placed at the beginning of a word. “PERESIN” means “divide” and begins “PERES” which is also the name for Persia in the Chaldean language. The message was in these common Chaldean words but the Babylonians could not determine its significance. Daniel, inspired by God, enlightened them.

He explained that the judgments of God were about to come upon Belshazzar and Babylon because of their pride, idolatry, wickedness, and blasphemy.^{vs.17-24} Belshazzar should have learned from the experience of his grandfather whom God had driven to madness because of his foolish pride ^{v.20} “till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will”.^{v.21} Belshazzar had not learned the lesson and therefore the judgment of God was to descend upon him and the city, for the Medes and Persians would take Babylon and kill Belshazzar that very night.^{v.30} This was the meaning of the writing on the wall: “God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians”.^{vs.26-28}

God controls the nations and has predetermined their territories and duration *Acts 17:26* and has numbered the days of the present kingdoms upon earth which will soon come to an end. God is the judge, not only of nations, but also of individuals, weighing them in the balance to assess their righteousness. Soon the judgment of God will come upon the nations and they will be divided to make room for his Son who will rule the world: “God now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead”.*Acts 17:31*.

Daniel was granted a vision of the future from his days in a dream similar to that of Nebuchadnezzar's *ch.2* except that the four great kingdoms were represented by animals instead of parts of an image. This enabled more information about these kingdoms to be disclosed. Babylon was represented by a lion, the changes in which indicated the development of this kingdom out of the Assyrian empire, with Nebuchadnezzar being more humane than the cruel Assyrians.^{v.4} The Medo- Persians were represented by a bear ^{v.5} with one side higher than the other, to indicate that the Persians would ultimately predominate, and three ribs in its mouth to indicate its dominions would be divided into three provinces.^{Dan.6:1-2} Greece was represented by a leopard ^{v.6} with four wings and heads to indicate that after Alexander's death his dominion would be divided into four parts.

Rome was to figure in the purpose of God for so long, approximately 2500 years, and pass through so many phases, it could not be depicted by any animal in nature. It was therefore represented by a symbolic beast.^{v.7} Rome was "dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly", indicated by the beast's great iron teeth, and it would break in pieces all other kingdoms. Daniel was particularly anxious to learn

The Beasts of Daniel's Dream

Lion = Babylon



Bear = Medo-Persia



The Beasts of Daniel's Dream



Leopard = Greece

fourth beast = Rome

the significance of this fourth beast, especially of its horns.^{v.19-20} Horns are used in scriptural symbolism to represent powers, and during its long history Rome had tremendous secular power over other nations. However, in the purpose of God another kind of power, religious and ecclesiastical, was to arise in Rome which would make war with the saints. This power is represented by a little horn with eyes and a mouth ^{v.8} indicating that it would see spiritually and speak blasphemies against the God of heaven.^{v.25}

In the event, the Papacy arose as a great power in the earth and overthrew three states in Northern Italy to establish the Papal states.^{v.8, 24} Significantly, Rome took the title of the “Holy See” and the Pope issued great “Bulls” against kings and peoples who opposed him, claiming authority over all as the “Holy Father”. For more than a thousand years of “Dark Ages”, Popes changed times and imposed laws ^{v.25} upon the subjugated peoples of Europe. During this period many who believed the Holy Scriptures were persecuted, tortured, and burnt at the stake.^{v.21} However, times are determined by God and the days of Papal affliction of the saints were numbered. The set time of the saints’ dominion will soon arrive, and Daniel saw that the persecution of the saints only continued “until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the

saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom”.^{v.22}

Daniel saw Jesus and the saints, represented by “one like the Son of Man”,^{v.13} receive power and glory from God: “And there was given him dominion (“empire” in the original), and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed”.^{v.14} God gave Nebuchadnezzar a kingdom, an empire and glory so that all people should serve him,^{2:37-38} but he and his kingdom passed away. God will give Jesus and the saints a kingdom, empire and glory so that all people of the earth will serve them, but their kingdom will last for ever: “the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever”.^{v.18} One day soon Jesus will be established in the promised land as the King of Israel, and the resurrected saints will reign with him for a thousand years. We are urged to believe the gospel of the kingdom of God and obey the commandments so that we may be included in this great company of saints.

Week 50

Daniel 9

Day 348

Daniel knew from the scriptures that the Jews’ captivity in Babylon would only last for seventy years after which they would be permitted to return to Jerusalem and the promised land.^{vs.1-2, Jer.25:11-13} We are in a similar position today in that we also can see that the times God has set in the scriptures for the return of all Israel to the land are coming to an end. Therefore we can learn from Daniel’s action: he prayed earnestly for the LORD to do what he had declared beforehand,^{vs.3-19} and Daniel was heard because he asked his petitions according to God’s will.

The LORD sent the angel Gabriel,^{v.21} who nearly five hundred years later came to Mary, to tell him his prayer was heard and to inform him when the Messiah would come and what he would do. A period of four hundred and ninety years was predetermined by God: in the midst of the last seven years of which the Messiah would be cut off.^{vs.24-27} Seventy weeks represents, on the day for a year principle,

490 years and this information enabled the faithful to look for the coming of the Messiah and explains the visit of the wise men seeking “he that was born king of the Jews” *Mat.2:2* and also the general expectancy among the people *Lu.3:15* when John came among them as Christ’s forerunner.

In the event, Artaxerxes issued a decree in B.C.455 that the Jews could return to the land to build Jerusalem ^{v.25; Ezra 7:7-8} so that the period of 490 years ended in

A.D.36. Jesus began preaching the gospel in A.D.29 and, after “half a week” or

three and a half years, in A.D.33 he was cut off,^{v.26} i.e. crucified, in the middle of the last week of years.^{v.27} Daniel was told, not only that the Messiah would be cut off and when this would occur, but also what would be accomplished by his death. Christ would confirm the covenant made with Abraham,^{v.27} bring the need for animal sacrifices to an end,^{v.27} make reconciliation for iniquity and an end of sins by dying for the sins of the people, and bring in everlasting righteousness,^{v.24} i.e. open the way by which men and women can be accounted righteous and live with him in the future age.

That time was a time of suffering for the Messiah - the time of glory was to come later - and shortly after his crucifixion the temple, Jerusalem, and the land were made desolate by an overspreading of abomination by the Romans because of Israel's wickedness.^{v.27} Jesus himself cited this prophecy in warning his disciples to save themselves by fleeing when they saw the Roman legions advancing: "When ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not, (let him that readeth understand,) then let them that be in Judea flee to the mountains".*Mk.13:14*

Week 50

Daniel 10

Day 349

On a certain occasion when Daniel was fasting and praying over a period of three weeks *vs.1-4* he was given a vision *vs.5-6* which clearly relates to the future when Jesus returns to the earth, raises the dead, and gives eternal life to the faithful. The vision was of a man whose description uses imagery found throughout the scriptures to describe the glorified body of which Jesus is the head. This is "the one like the Son of Man", composed of a multitude of individuals, "the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude",^{v.6} who will execute judgment upon the nations.

Most members of this great community of saints will be brought forth from the grave and changed from corruption to incorruption. To represent this, Daniel passed through a remarkable experience. He described himself as if he was dead: "I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength",^{v.8} "in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground".^{v.9} However, the saints are not to remain in the grave for ever, for "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise".*1Thes.4:16* Therefore Daniel heard a voice,^{v.9} and a hand touched him and raised him firstly to his knees ^{v.10} and then upright, but trembling.^{v.11} The dead are raised to judgment, which will be a fearful prospect, but those who are "greatly beloved" will be reassured with words of comfort.^{v.11} We can appreciate that it will be difficult to speak at the judgment-seat in the awesome company of Jesus and a multitude of angels, and Daniel was dumb ^{v.15} but

enabled to speak ^{v.16} as will everyone at the judgment for “every one of us shall give account

of himself to God”. *Rom.14:12* Those who are accepted by Christ at the judgment will have their bodies changed into divine nature. *2Pet.1:4* Instead of having weak, mortal and corruptible bodies, the saints will have strong, immortal, incorruptible and glorious bodies as Jesus now possesses. *1Cor.15:54; Phil.3:21* Therefore Daniel, in this representation of resurrection, was strengthened ^{v.18} and commended with the words: “O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong”. ^{v.19} We are given this information in the scriptures so we are encouraged do what God requires and, like Daniel, be commended and given immortality when Jesus comes to judge the world in righteousness.

God is in total control of events and uses his angels, mostly unseen, to effect his purpose in the earth. We have a glimpse of them at work in this chapter. At that time there was conflict between the Persians and the Greeks. God had decreed that the Greeks would ultimately win, and certain angels had a role in bringing this to pass. Clearly this involved hard work on their part for the angel explained to Daniel he was delayed twenty-one days while he dealt with the king of Persia and required the help of another angel. *vs.12-13* After speaking to Daniel the angel returned to deal with the Persian king, knowing also that the king of Greece would come, i.e. Alexander the Great, who would be victorious. ^{v.20} We can be sure that the angels are also at work today, controlling events among the nations to bring about the situation described in the scriptures when Jesus will intervene in world affairs and be established as king in Jerusalem.

Week 50

Daniel 11:40-45 and 12

Day 350

Chapter 11 outlines the historical events to take place in relation to the Holy Land, starting with the overthrow of the Persians by the Greeks led by Alexander *11:1-3* who would die young and leave his kingdom to his four generals. *11:4* Two of these would occupy territory neighbouring the promised land, Syria and Egypt, so that they and their successors are known respectively as “the king of the north” and “the king of the south”. This chapter describes the conflict between these two powers and its effect on the Holy Land until “the time of the end”, i.e. our own time.

At the beginning of the 20th century the Holy Land was occupied by the Turks, who had kept the land desolate for four hundred years, and Egypt was in the hands of Britain. The ruler of Britain therefore had the role of “the king of the South” and, during the first world war the British “pushed at” ^{v.40} the desolating power and drove it out of the land. Britain then declared that the Jews could have a national home in the promised land and eventually, in 1948,

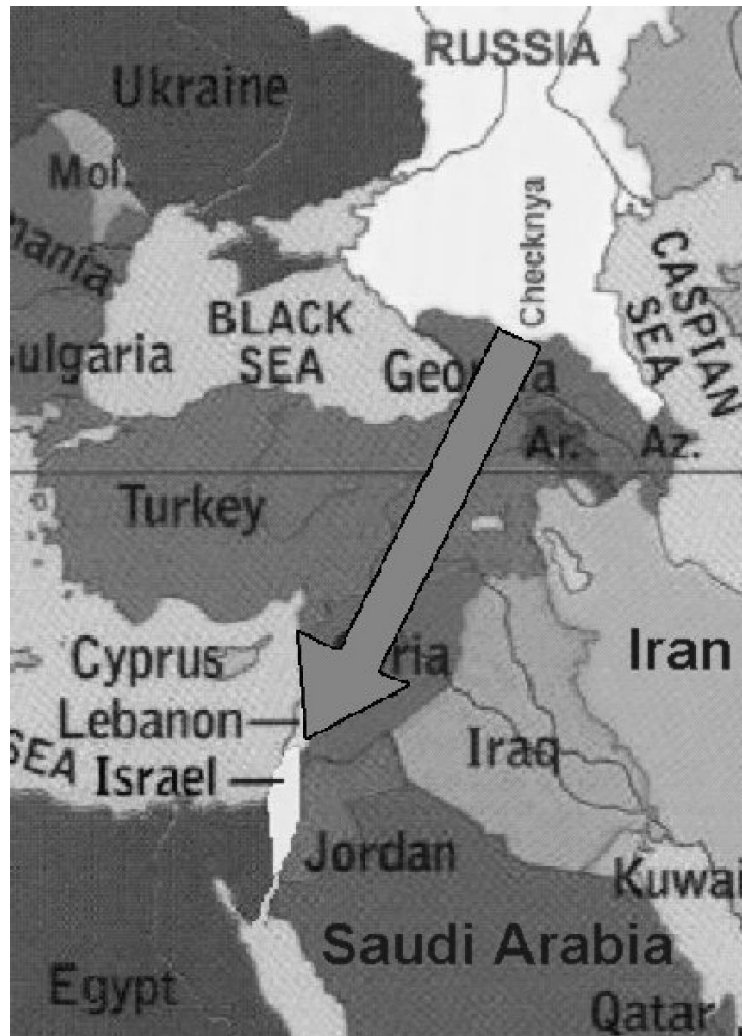
the State of Israel came into existence. However, Israel will be invaded from the north by a confederacy of nations headed by Russia, and at this time God will intervene.^{Ezek.38} The autocrat of Russia will take the role of “the king of the North” and “push at” the desolater, Turkey, and “enter into the countries”.^{v.40} He will enter “the glorious land” ^{v.41} and overflow into Egypt,^{v.42} but the nations east of the River Jordan will escape.^{v.41}

With the help of other nations, notably Libya and Ethiopia,^{v.43} the autocrat of Russia will appear to be totally victorious and will establish his headquarters “in the glorious holy mountain”.^{v.45} Nevertheless, God has decreed “he shall come to his end, and none shall help him”.^{v.45} Jesus, “the great prince” given the symbolic name “Michael” meaning “Who like God”, will destroy him and his armies.^{12:1} There will be in those days a time of trouble such has never been since the nations

came into existence, but it is at this same time that eternal life will be given to those whose names are written in the book of life.^{v.1} They will be delivered by resurrection from the dead, for “many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt”.^{v.2}

It is vital to be wise now and do what God requires, for “they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever”.^{v.3} Jesus will be the sun of the new political constitution of the world, and the saints will be the stars, and together they will establish righteousness in the earth: “Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever”.^{Isa.32:1,17} The timing of events among the nations are in God’s hands but we know that the moment of his intervention is near at hand. We should make ourselves ready, for “Blessed is he that waiteth” ^{v.12} and he “shall be purified and made white”.^{v.10} Specific time periods were given through Daniel ^{vs.11-12} which throughout history the saints have been able to identify, knowing that they will receive their inheritance at the culmination of God’s purpose, as Daniel was told: “go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days”.^{v.13}

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Map of Russia's Invasion of Israel

Week 51

Introduction

The apostle John, one of the closest companions of Christ, being “the disciple whom Jesus loved”, wrote not only the gospel record but also three letters in each of which he urged the disciples to keep the commandments, especially to love one another. His gospel emphasised that Jesus is the Son of God and these letters speak particularly of the disciples as the sons of God. Like all the other apostles, he warned the disciples against false prophets and urged them to maintain the purity of the truth. Jude, likewise, emphatically warned the disciples against departing from the faith once delivered to the saints.

Week 51

1 John 1

Day 351

John was among the group of especially privileged men and women who met with Jesus after he was raised from the dead and elevated to the divine nature, so he could write: “We have heard, seen with our eyes, looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life”.^{v.1} Jesus was the Word of God made flesh *Jn.1:14* and the apostles were with him, not only during the three and a

half years he preached the gospel, but also for a few weeks after he rose from the dead and before he went to heaven. They therefore had physical evidence that “the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us”.^{v.2} This experience was not for their personal benefit only, but also that their witness would enable many others to believe and have fellowship with Jesus Christ and his Father: “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ”.^{v.3} The purpose of God from the very beginning was that a great multitude of men and women should have fellowship with him and his Son: morally during their mortal lives; and physically in the future after a change to the divine nature. The means of gaining this fellowship is declared here, i.e. by believing the word spoken by the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ.^{v.3}

God called Jesus “the man that is my fellow” *Zech.13:7* and the disciples are called Jesus’ fellows *Psa.45:7; Heb.1:9* so that through becoming related to Christ by belief and baptism we also become part of God’s fellowship and family. The disciples are then required to behave like the children of God and “walk in the light”,^{vs.5-7} which means walking in paths of righteousness enlightened by the word of God, and to cease from sin. All men and women sin^{v.8} but God has provided a means of salvation by which we can be saved from our iniquities. Firstly, the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin^{v.7} and, secondly, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”.^{v.9} By this means, men and women can be presented to Jesus blameless when he comes.*1Cor.1:8; Phil.2:15; 2Pet.3:14* We should also note the significance of the last verse: if we deny any truth that God has declared in his word, we make him a liar!

Week 51

1 John 2

Day 352

We are commanded not to sin, but if we do we have an Advocate with the Father,^{v.1} Jesus, who is the “propitiation” for our sin.^{v.2} This word echoes back to the mercy-seat of the ark of the covenant upon which the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled, representing the sacrificial blood of Christ. This blood was shed for “the whole world” but most people do not take advantage of this marvellous salvation. Any of us can have the privilege of intimate fellowship with Christ and can “know him” in this sense if we keep his commandments^{vs.3-4} and follow his example,^{v.6} and by this means “is the love of God perfected”.^{v.5} Therefore the apostle exhorts the disciples to keep the commandments, especially to love one another.^{vs.7-11}

John wrote to “children”, those newly born in the truth, and to “fathers”, those who had known Jesus from the beginning,^{v.12-14} and he exhorted them all to love God, and not the world.^{v.15} The world is full of the influences which lead us away from God and into sin, i.e. “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life”.^{v.16} We should resist these desires for they will pass away for ever together with the present constitution of things, but those who do God’s will shall live for ever.^{v.17}

At the time of John’s old age many disciples were enticed away from the truth by the attractions of the world and the teaching of false prophets. True disciples therefore had to be extremely alert to maintain their faithful position in Christ. Some apostates are identified by the apostle as “antichrists” ^{v.18} "instead of Christ". These men, therefore, while claiming to be disciples of Jesus and believers of the gospel were in fact against Christ! It became imperative from then on, not to accept that people are Christians and disciples of Christ simply because they say so, but to examine what they believe, for Jesus will reject a great many professors in the day of judgment.^{Mat.7:21-23} A common error in John’s day was to “deny that Jesus is the Christ” i.e. the Messiah,^{v.22} and this error became virtually universal. How many today believe the truth that Jesus will return as Israel’s Messiah, re-establish the Kingdom of God as in the days of David, sit upon the same throne of the LORD in Jerusalem, and reign over Israel for ever?

The apostles and many first century Christians had the Holy Spirit ^{v.20} to teach them the truth ^{v.27} but they, like us, still had to examine all doctrines against the word of God. In our day we have access to his word only in the Holy Scriptures and these alone teach us how to abide in Christ, and if we do abide in him, then “when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming”.^{v.28} If we desire to be accepted by Christ at his return and be accounted God’s children we should do righteousness for: “If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him”.^{v.29}

Week 51

1 John 3

Day 353

Having declared that they that do righteousness are born of God, the apostle extols the love of God in making the disciples of Christ his children.^{v.1} The world did not acknowledge Jesus as God’s Son when he lived among them, so neither does it recognise the true sons of God now. Furthermore, the world does not know what the saints will be like when Jesus returns, but faithful disciples do know - they will be like him and partakers of the divine nature, for they will see him in his full glory.^{v.2} This is the marvellous hope of Christ’s disciples who are exhorted to be morally like Jesus, pure as he is pure,^{v.3} so they can have their hope realised at his

coming. They are also exhorted to live as the children of God now, and the rest of the chapter contrasts the children of God with the children of the devil, i.e. sin.^{vs.7-8}

“Sin is the transgression of God’s law” ^{v.4} and, although all men and women transgress, Jesus takes away the sins of the faithful so that they can be accounted righteous.^{v.5} Nevertheless, they are still required to cease from sin ^{v.6} and to do righteousness.^{v.7} Sin was introduced into the world in the beginning by the first man but God promised that it would be destroyed by the seed of the woman.^{Gen.3:16} The Saviour is also the Son of God and he was manifested to destroy all the works of the devil,^{v.8} and we manifest whether we are the children of the devil or the children of God by our actions - whether we continue in sin or do righteousness.^{vs.8-}

¹⁰ In particular, the children of God love their brethren and sisters in Christ.^{vs.10-19} We can show the same love that God showed in sacrificing his Son and that Jesus manifested by willingly laying down his life.^{v.16} By doing so in deed ^{v.18} we can assure our hearts before him ^{v.19} and we can have confidence in God ^{v.21} if we “believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.”^{v.23}

Week 51

1 John 4

Day 354

All the apostles warned the disciples that many would fall away from the truth and believe another gospel and in another Jesus.^{2Cor.11:3-4} John called upon them to test the “spirituals” i.e. those who claimed to have the Holy Spirit ^{v.1} because they would encounter many false prophets. A particular error at that time was that Jesus Christ did not have the same flesh as ourselves.^{vs.2-3} It was imperative, in the purpose of God, that Jesus be a partaker of our sinful nature so that he could be tempted in all points as we, yet achieve complete success over sin by a perfectly righteous life. This was made possible by Jesus being both the Son of God and son of man by the manner of his conception by the Holy Spirit and birth of Mary. Many people, however, have not liked the idea of Jesus having the same sinful flesh as ourselves and have introduced the idea of him having “clean flesh”. This was a serious error and spiritual leaders who advocated it were “antichrists.”^{v.3} These introduced a multitude of errors into Christianity and the world listened to them ^{v.5} so that within three hundred years apostate Christianity had united with Roman secular authority to become established as the state religion of the Empire.

John gave the disciples a test for them to apply to distinguish between those who taught truth and those who proclaimed error. This is essentially the same test which God gave to Israel: “To the law and to the testimony [the Holy

Scriptures]: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them”.*Isa.8:20* The apostles, like the prophets of old, were inspired to write the word of God, therefore John declared: “We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error”.^{v.6} We can, and should, apply this same test today. We should test everything which is said on religious matters against the word of God through the apostles. Thus we shall be able to accept the truth and reject the error. Men invent and imagine many things, all of which lead people away from God and eternal life, but the word of God brings salvation.

John continued to exhort the disciples to love one another for thereby they could show that they were the children of God.^{v.7} God is love ^{v.8} and he manifested his love by sacrificing his only begotten Son that we might have life.^{vs.9-10} Therefore, says John, “we should love one another”.^{v.11} Disciples can show they love God by loving their brethren whom they can see ^{v.20} for “No man has seen God at any time”.^{v.12} This may seem a contradiction of those scriptures which speak of men seeing God but, in fact, they did not see the Father of Jesus Christ, the Creator of the Universe, but a manifestation of him, usually in angelic form. In the same way, the disciples who saw Jesus, saw a manifestation of the Father.*Jn.14:9* We are exhorted to show perfect love, as did the Father and Jesus, so that “we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world”.^{v.17}

Week 51

1 John 5

Day 355

We can show we are the children of God by believing Jesus is the Christ ^{v.1}, i.e. the king of Israel who will re-establish the kingdom of God and reign upon the throne of David in Jerusalem, and by loving the other believers who are also the children of God.^{v.2} Furthermore, we can manifest our love for God by keeping his commandments.^{v.3} Our faith, i.e. our belief of God’s word and promises, enables us to gain the victory, and an essential element of the true faith is not only that Jesus is the Messiah but also that he is the Son of God.^{v.5} Jesus was declared to be the Son of God at his baptism,*Mat.3:17* his crucifixion,*Mat.27:54* and his resurrection.*Rom.1:4* Therefore, said John, “This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. And there are three that bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one”.^{vs.6-8} The extra words in this passage beginning “in heaven” and ending “in earth” did not appear in any copy or translation of John’s letter for 1400 years after he wrote it and are therefore understood to be spurious. These extra words first appeared as a note in the margin of a Latin translation from whence it found its way into

Tyndale's printed English New Testament and thence into the King James Version giving supposed support for the doctrine of the Trinity which is not taught in the scriptures.

God has provided abundant witness to his Son in the Holy Scriptures and our wisdom is to accept what he has testified.^{v.9} Most people do not believe the record that God has given of his Son, which is very serious because "he that believeth not God hath made him a liar".^{v.10} On the other hand, believers can rejoice in knowing and accepting what is written because: "this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son".^{v.11} The disciples "have passed from death to life" ^{3:14} meaning that their status is such that death will be but a sleep from which they will be awakened, for to them it is said: "Your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory".^{Col.3:3-4} The apostles wrote the truth about the Son of God so that, by believing, we can have eternal life.^{v.13} The disciples of Christ are required, not only to believe, but also to cease from sin, i.e. the habitual transgression which is our natural behaviour. We may pray for forgiveness ^{vs.14-15} provided our sin is not a sin unto death.^{v.16} This is probably a reference to the words of Jesus to the Jews, who attributed his miracles to Beelzebub, that blaspheming against the Holy Spirit would never be forgiven.^{Mat.12:31}

Jesus, in prayer to his Father, said that he will give eternal life to as many as the Father gives him and "this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent".^{Jn.17:2-3} Therefore John concluded his letter, saying: "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life".

Week 51

2 John and 3 John

Day 356

The apostle wrote these two short personal letters, the first to a lady and her children in the truth.^{v.1} He rejoiced at their walking in the truth and keeping God's commandments,^{v.4} emphasising the command to love one another.^{vs.5-6} He also warned of deceivers who would proclaim that Jesus did not have our nature ^{v.7} and he exhorted the believers to be on their guard and not to succumb to this error and consequently lose the promised reward.^{v.8} This is a serious warning of which we should all take heed: if we believe error concerning the nature of Christ we shall not be rewarded by God! If we disobey or depart from the true doctrine of Christ we will not belong to God,^{v.9} but "He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son".^{v.9} Even association with an apostate is dangerous for thereby we

become “partaker of his evil deeds”.^{v.11}

Gaius continued in the truth and gave John great joy.^{3Jn.2-3} In particular, he showed love to the disciples who visited him on their journeys.^{vs.5-8} However, there was trouble in his congregation in that one member, Diotrephes, magnified himself, rejected the teaching of the apostles, and cast out those who accepted it.^{vs.9-10} Demetrius was in the same congregation and he had a good reputation in the truth.^{v.12} Men of different characters become members of Christian congregations but we should follow those who are good, not those who are evil.^{v.11} We are wise if we follow those who themselves follow the example of the apostles: “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample”.^{Phil.3:17}

Week 51

Jude

Day 357

Jude was one of the twelve apostles ^{Lu.6:16} and he wrote this short letter to the disciples ^{v.1} after erroneous doctrines and disobedient practices became widespread in the congregations. He wrote principally to exhort the disciples to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”^{v.3} The true faith is that revealed in the scriptures and proclaimed by Jesus and his apostles, but men had come into the churches and corrupted it.^{v.4} Jude reinforces his exhortation to faithfulness by citing examples from the scriptures in which those who did not believe or did wicked deeds were punished severely by God.^{vs.5-9} Like Peter ^{2Pet.2} he cites the cases of Israel in the wilderness,^{v.5} the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram ^{v.6; Num.16} and Sodom and Gomorrha.^{v.7} He also cites the adversaries of the people of Israel returning from Babylon as recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.^{vs.8-9} These adversaries were “the devil” who disputed about “the body of Moses” which is the people of Israel, just as “the body of Christ” is the discipleship of Jesus. The reference to Michael the angel rebuking the adversary with the words “The Lord rebuke thee” ^{v.9} is from the prophecy of Zechariah ^{Zech.3:2} in which the

prophet saw a vision representing the angel rebuking the adversaries of the Jews. In this place he also refers to those saved from the affliction as “a brand plucked out of the fire” which Jude too applies to disciples rescued from error in his day.^{vs.22-23}

Jude graphically described the evil doers in their midst and spoke of the coming of Christ in judgment.^{vs.10-16} Peter had warned the disciples of the apostasy to come in similar terms but Jude wrote when it had arrived and the evil doings were in the congregations. He alluded to the previous warnings of the apostles ^{v.17} and, in particular, to that of Peter who said there would be

mockers in the last days (of the Jewish era). *v.18; 2Pet.3:3* Therefore Jude urged the disciples to heed the warnings, as we should also in our day, and exhorted them, saying: “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. *vs.20-21* God would help us to be faithful and bring us before Christ in glory at his coming: “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen”.

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Besides the major prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, which correspond with the four gospel records in the way they represent Christ, the LORD has also given us a further twelve prophecies in the Old Testament. The prophets who wrote these under God's inspiration lived mostly in times when Israel were being carried away captive, were in captivity, or were returning from captivity to the land in small numbers. Much of the prophecies therefore have to do with the purpose of God with Israel and their return to his land. In particular, they look forward to the coming of the Messiah, both when he would come as their saviour and sacrifice his life, and when he would come to deliver them from all their enemies and reign over them in the restored kingdom of God.

Week 52**Joel 3****Day 358**

Joel prophesied of the time when the Jews will be brought back to the promised land and to Jerusalem.^{v.1} This will be a time of conflict when the nations attack Israel and when God, through Jesus and the saints, saves them. The LORD says he will gather "all nations" into the land and plead with them for his people of Israel because they had scattered them among the nations and parted his land.^{v.2} They sold them as slaves throughout the world ^{v.3} and Israel's immediate neighbours have been at the forefront of the affliction because they want the land for themselves.^{vs.4-6} What is not generally recognised is that the land is the LORD's ^{v.2} and Israel are his people.^{v.2} Of Israel he has declared: "Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee", *Num.24:9* and God has declared he will judge individuals according to their treatment of his people and, in particular, he will recompense the persecutors of Israel upon their own heads.^{vs.7-8}

The LORD has spoken ^{v.8} and called upon the nations to arm to the teeth and prepare for the war in the land of Israel.^{vs.9-14} This preparation has been going on rapidly ever since the Jews were first allowed to return to the land in 1917, with the invention and development of fearful weapons of war so that even weak nations can obtain them and declare themselves strong.^{v.10} But the power of man is nothing to that of God who will overthrow the nations despite all their modern weapons and save Israel ^{vs.15-16} so that all people will know that the God of Israel is the only true and living God.^{v.17} Israel's land will again become a land flowing with milk and honey, it will be cleansed of iniquity, and the LORD will dwell in Jerusalem.^{vs.18-20}

Week 52**Micah 4****Day 359**

Micah was a prophet contemporary with Isaiah and in this chapter he speaks

of the future in the same terms *Isaiah ch.2* when Jesus will return to Jerusalem in power and reign over Israel and the world. Jerusalem was the capital of the kingdom of God in the past but the judges and people practised great wickedness *3:8-12* so that God overturned the kingdom and Jerusalem was destroyed, with even the site of God's house being ploughed as a field by the Romans.*3:12* Nevertheless, in the future, there will be a reversal of this, with the LORD's house being rebuilt and Jerusalem becoming the metropolis of the world.*4:1* The people of many nations will then willingly go up to Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel because his law, administered by Jesus, will go forth to all corners of the earth.*v.2*

Jesus will judge the nations of the earth, abolish weapons of war, and establish worldwide peace.*vs.3-5* It is at this time that the remnant of Israel, scattered throughout the world, will return to the promised land and become a strong nation under their King, Jesus.*vs.6-7* The kingdom of God will come to Israel, the daughter of Zion, which will be the first dominion of Jesus' realm. The "first dominion" is the kingdom, which will be in the land of Israel, but Jesus will also have other dominions for he will reign over all the nations of the earth. This prophecy was, no doubt, a great encouragement to the faithful in Israel at the time Micah gave it when the ten tribes were carried away captive to Assyria, but God declared that the two tribes would pass through similar tribulation when carried to Babylon, which occurred a hundred years later.

Many think that the scattering of the Jews, first to Babylon and later worldwide by the Romans, means that God has cast off his people, enabling other nations to claim the land and Jerusalem for themselves. This is seen throughout history and also in present-day disputes.*v.11* "But they know not the thoughts of the LORD" *v.12* for he will empower his people of Israel, the daughter of Zion, to defeat her enemies as evidence that he is the God of Israel and Lord of the whole earth.*v.13*

Week 52

Micah 5

Day 360

The Lord Jesus has always been foremost in the thoughts of the LORD and he was spoken of extensively in the scriptures, even before he was born. This chapter declared he would be born in Bethlehem, a fact noted by the scribes at the time of his birth, *Mat.2:6* and would be "ruler in Israel" *v.2* and called "the judge of Israel".*v.1* The scriptures speak of both Jesus' suffering and his glory, and here we see that he was to suffer being smitten by men.*v.1; Mat.27:29-30* Most people know of his suffering upon the cross but do not anticipate him being ruler in Israel, but this doctrine is essential for salvation because God requires us to believe the good news of the Kingdom of God which is the kingdom of Israel.

Jesus will also be "great unto the ends of the earth" because he will be endued

with the power of God and will reign with his majesty.^{v.4} He will also save Israel from the northern invader,^{v.5} the Russian autocrat. The invader is referred to here as “the Assyrian” because he will come against Jerusalem from the north and suffer the same overwhelming destruction ^{v.6} as Sennacherib and the Assyrians of old.^{2Ki.19:35-37} Jesus will be assisted in this work by the saints who will be raised from the dead and made immortal to reign with him, and these are represented symbolically as “seven shepherds and eight principal men”.^{v.5} The people of Israel will return safely to the land and none will be able to stop them.^{v.7} At this time the Jews will be hated in many parts of the world and attempts will be made to destroy them. When this happened in Europe during the second world war six million Jews went meekly to their deaths in the holocaust, but in the future they will be like a lion among the sheep, all their adversaries will be cut off^{vs.8-9} and in the promised land they will be cleansed of their idolatry and wickedness.^{vs.10-14} For the world this will be a time of trouble, vengeance and judgment,^{v.15} but the outcome will be righteousness, peace and prosperity in the earth.

Week 52

Zechariah 8

Day 361

Zechariah, the last of the Old Testament prophets to be murdered by the people,^{1:1; Mat.23:35} prophesied in the reign of Darius king of Persia who decreed the Jews could return to rebuild the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem. The prophet saw visions of the final return of the Jews, now soon to occur, and spoke of both the sacrifice and the reign of Christ. In this chapter the LORD speaks of his return to Jerusalem to exalt her ^{vs.1-3} and describes the peace and prosperity of the city which will be marvellous.^{vs.4-6} The people of Israel will be saved from among the nations and brought back to Jerusalem where they will be God’s people again in the land.^{vs.7-8} Those returning from Babylon had this future return as their great hope and were exhorted to be strong, for God would bless them from the day the foundation of the temple was laid.^{vs.9-15} The Jews have for centuries been a curse among the Gentiles, but God promises that in the future they will be a blessing.^{v.13}

The people were exhorted to speak truth and execute judgment and peace in their cities,^{v.16} to treat one another well, and to avoid the things which God hates,^{v.17} and they were encouraged to do all this by the glorious future in prospect. The LORD told them of the time when their joyful feasts will be acceptable to him,^{v.19} and when they will be exalted above the other nations. The Gentiles, including powerful nations, will then be anxious to seek the LORD at Jerusalem.^{vs.21-22} Gentiles will eagerly associate with the Jews because they will hear that God is with them.^{v.23} What a change for the Jews! After centuries of persecution, they will be highly esteemed and befriended by the Gentiles.

God is the creator of the universe and has made mankind for his own purpose *v.1* and, as part of this purpose, he will soon make Jerusalem a stumbling stone for the nations who will bring their armies against it. *vs.2-3* We hear in news broadcasts the problem that Jerusalem presents to the nations and, from the scriptures, we know that soon a great confederacy will invade Israel and capture the city. God will then manifest his power in the earth and give his strength to the rulers of Jerusalem *vs.4-5* who will devour their enemies. *v.6* The two families of Israel, the ten tribes and the two tribes, went into captivity separately and they will return in two stages. The LORD will save Judah, the two tribes, first. *v.7* Therefore, since the first world war, the Jews have returned to the land, and the State of Israel, with Jerusalem as its capital, constitutes “Judah” and these Jews in the land will be saved first when Jesus and the saints defeat the invaders.

The new governors of Jerusalem will be the saints who will be like the angels *v.8; Lu.20:36* while the mortal inhabitants of the city will be courageous as David was of old. *v.8* When Jesus enters Jerusalem the Jews will look upon him whom their fathers pierced two thousand years previously, *v.10* and they will mourn for him. *vs.10-14* So that this scripture could be fulfilled, the Roman soldiers pierced Jesus with a spear as he hung upon the cross, *Jn.19:34,37* and when Jesus returns to Jerusalem it will dawn on the Jews that the Messiah is the one their ancestors conspired to crucify. They will ask him, “What are these wounds in thine hands?” and he will reply: “Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends”. *13:6* The Jews were Jesus’ brethren and they should have been persuaded by the works that he did that he was their Messiah, but they rejected him and had him crucified. Even his closest disciples and friends fled from him, like sheep scattering when the shepherd is afflicted. *v.7; Mar.14:27,50*

It is notable that God calls Jesus “the man that is my fellow”. *v.7* We have seen before the explanation of this: the power of the Holy Spirit came upon Mary to conceive a child who at his birth was the Son of the Highest. *Lu.1:32,35* Jesus is not “God the Son” but he is both “Son of God” and “Son of man” by the means of his conception. Jesus also has fellows, for God declared: “Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows”. *Heb.1:9; Psa.45:7* This shows that Jesus is the link between the saints and God and that through him we can have fellowship with the Father, as Jesus prayed concerning believers: “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me”. *Jn.17:21*

The prophet again prophesies of the earth shattering event to take place at Jerusalem when all nations will be gathered to battle in the day of the LORD.^{vs.1-2} The city will be captured and half of the inhabitants will be taken into captivity. Then the LORD will fight against the enemies of Israel as he fought in times past.^{v.3} He will do this through the Lord Jesus Christ who will return to the earth with God's power. Two thousand years ago he ascended to heaven from the mount of Olives just outside Jerusalem *Acts 1:9-12* and soon, approaching Jerusalem to deliver her, he will come again to this mount.^{v.4} The power of God in him will then divide the mount of Olives in two to transform the land ^{vs.4-5} enabling water to flow from Jerusalem into the Dead Sea to heal it.^{v.8; Ezek.47:1,8}

Jesus and the saints will then enter Jerusalem.^{v.5} As a body they will be a manifestation of God in the earth, therefore they are referred to as "LORD my God" (YAHWEH Elohim) which means "He who shall be my mighty ones". Interestingly, the next verse which seems obscure makes reference in the original Hebrew to "thy splendid ones drawing in their light".^{v.6} This, no doubt, refers to the fact that Jesus and the saints, being of the divine nature, will need to draw in their bright splendour when dealing with mortal men and women because their brightness would physically harm them. The angels did this when revealing themselves to mortal men, and the saints will be equal to the angels. At that time, the LORD will be king over all the earth.^{v.9}

When the nations, led by Russia, aggressively invade Israel they will appear to be victorious but, suddenly, a greater power will intervene to destroy their armies. It is likely then that the Russians will resort to the nuclear arsenal they possess in an attempt to obliterate Israel. Certainly the plague with which the attackers of Jerusalem will be afflicted ^{v.12} corresponds with the effects of the atomic bombs exploded at the end of the second world war. Possibly, and very likely, God will cause them to be afflicted by their own horrendous weapons when he protects his own people of Israel. This is expressed, by Ezekiel concerning the Russian invader, in terms appropriate to the times in which the prophets wrote: "I will smite thy bow out of thy left hand, and will cause thine arrows to fall out of thy right hand". *Ezek.39:3*

After this terrible war, God will establish universal peace, with the world ruled by the Prince of Peace. People of all nations will be required to come to Jerusalem year by year to worship the LORD and keep the feast of tabernacles.^{v.16} Should any

people refuse to comply with this requirement, they will quickly be brought into line by the withdrawal of rain ^{v.17} for the elements will be under Christ's control. Egypt, however, has negligible rainfall, receiving its water from the River Nile, therefore they will be dealt with by another method.^{vs.18-19}

Worshippers will go up to Jerusalem, where will be the house of God and the throne of the LORD upon which Jesus will sit, and the city will be completely holy to the LORD.^{vs.20-21}

Week 52

Malachi 3 and 4

Day 364

Malachi was the last prophet of the Old Testament, living about four hundred years before Christ, and he prophesied, not only of the coming of the Messiah, but also of his forerunner.^{v.1} This role was performed by John the Baptist *Lu.1:17* and will also be performed by Elijah at Jesus' second coming. Jesus specifically applied this prophecy to John.^{*Mat.11:10*} The religious leaders also quoted this section of Malachi in an attempt to prove that Jesus was not the Messiah because Elijah had to come first.^{4:5; *Mat.17:10*} Even when he was dying on the cross they threw this taunt at him.^{*Mat.27:49*} Jesus, however, explained to the disciples that Elijah will certainly come as a forerunner in the future, but that John filled that same role at that time.^{*Mat.17:11-13*}

Elijah was a prophet to the ten northern tribes, and when these are regathered he will prepare them to enter the land and meet their Messiah. "But who may abide the day of his coming?" ^{v.2} because the power of God will execute judgment upon the people and refine them as gold and silver.^{v.3} The prophet urged the people to do righteousness because of these judgments and reprimanded them for behaving like Esau whom God hated instead of like Jacob whom he loved.^{1:2-3} They had filled the land with evil and oppression ^{v.5} but if they would return to the LORD ^{v.7} and do righteousness God would "open the windows of heaven and pour out blessings upon them".^{v.10} The LORD will certainly do this in the future because, under the rulership of Christ, Israel will be righteous and the land will flourish: "And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts".^{v.12}

The Jews did not understand how they were displeasing God ^{v.14} which illustrates the blindness and perversity of human nature. They said: "It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts?" ^{v.14} They turned everything upside down so that the wicked prospered,^{v.15} but there were a few faithful men and women who kept close to the word of God and we can follow their example today: "Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name".^{v.16} The reward for such people is very great for God will make them his own precious jewels and children ^{v.17} in the day he distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked.^{v.18}

The day of judgment is coming when the wicked will be destroyed.^{4:1} This is when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to be the Sun of the new political heavens.^{v.2} To them who fear the LORD he will arise with healing in his beams, raising them from the dead and changing their bodies into immortality and incorruptibility. They will then, with him, execute the judgment of the LORD, treading down the wicked as calves in a stall trample the corn.^{vs.2-3} The wise remember the law of God ^{v.4} for he will certainly do what he has spoken. He will send the prophet Elijah before Jesus in the great and dreadful day of the LORD and change the heart of his people so that they have the same disposition as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ^{v.6} who also will live with Jesus in the kingdom of God. May we be among those who “shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven”.*Mat.8:11*

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