

JEREMIAH, WHOSE PROMISE WAS BETTER THAN A CALENDAR

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"And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith And I will bring upon that land all my words which I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book; which Jeremiah hath prophesied against all the nations" (Jer. 25:12-13).

Seventy years represent a lifetime, but for Jewish captives in Babylon that period seemed endless. The lament mentioned in Psalm 137 came from the depths of their souls. "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there, they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?" (Ps. 137:1~). Memories of personal failure can be bitter!

Babylon was the greatest fortress in the ancient world. Its name babilu or babilani, meant "The gate of the gods." "Babylon was encircled by a double system of defenses each comprising two walls. The inner ('Inger-Bel) was twenty-one feet thick and reinforced with towers at sixty foot intervals. The outer (Nemir-Enlil) was eleven feet in width and also had protruding watch-towers. About six feet outside those ring walls, lay a brick lined key wall to contain the waters fed from the Euphrates River, which formed a flood defense" (Londervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 1, pp. 441~2). That massive fortress was considered to be impregnable.

A Sad Fate... The Silent Singers

The sorrow of the Jewish captives in Babylon was intense when they said, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth" (Ps. 137:5~). It was unnatural for such gifted people to remain silent. The singers had lost their desire for music; their hearts were broken, and their minds were filled with remorse. Successive generations had worshiped idols until finally the Lord permitted them to go to Babylon where idols stood on every street corner. Each time the Jews saw pagans prostrating themselves before man-made deities, they were disgusted and asked, "How could

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we have been so foolish to forget the God of our fathers?" Sometimes the Lord had to take drastic measures to open the eyes of people who had no desire to see! As the captives toiled in the unrelenting heat, they had sympathy for their ancestors who had toiled amid similar conditions in Egypt. Jeremiah promised that after seventy years God would send a deliverer, but when the older slaves remembered His words they wondered if he had made a mistake.

A Strange Fulfillment... The Stirred Spirit

The ancient historian wrote, "And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon. . . to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah . . . to fulfill three score and ten years. Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus" (2 Chron. 36:2~22). God's timing was perfect. Cyrus could have attacked Babylon earlier or later, but everything was arranged according to the will of the Almighty, although Cyrus was unaware of what was taking place.

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A Sublime Freedom... The Splendid Start

The conqueror of Babylon was a wise man; he thought of everything. Knowing some people would be unwilling to undertake the hazardous journey to Judah, he commanded those who preferred to remain to help those who accepted his challenge. Furthermore, all the treasures captured in the conquest of Israel were returned, and the money collected was considerable. Ezra reported, "And this is the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives. Thirty basons of gold, silver basons of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand. All the vessels of gold and silver were five thousand and four hundred" (Ezra 1:11). God knew how to supply the needs of His people, and it is a cause for thanksgiving that He still has that ability. David was wise when he said, "Commit thy way unto the Lord: trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass" (Ps. 37:5).

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THE PROMISE OF INTERNATIONAL FAME

"Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Matt. 23:13).

Simon's house was very crowded; there was hardly room to move! The former leper had expressed to his friend, Martha, the desire to invite Jesus to supper. It was the least he could do to express the gratitude in his heart. Somewhere along the road of life he had met the Savior and had been transformed. Leprosy was expelled from his body, and a new experience had become possible. Jesus was about to visit Bethany, and Simon desperately wished to do something for his Benefactor. Yet his resources and skills were limited; he had no experience in entertaining visitors, and the prospect of welcoming twenty people frightened him. The Lord and His disciples would number thirteen; Martha's family increased that to sixteen, and a few neighbors would also be present. Simon smiled when he remembered Martha's expertise. She would help.

Supper had ended. Mary asked to be excused so she could make a quick visit to her home. After her return an altercation erupted in the sitting room. Apparently she had broken a box of very precious ointment and anointed the Savior's feet. Some of the disciples were complaining, "To what purpose was this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor" (Matt. 26:8-9). The voice of Jesus was heard clearly in the kitchen when He said, "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her." Suddenly the company was hushed; Jesus had made a remarkable statement.

A Promise Fulfilled... How Reliable His Word

Mary of Bethany was one of the few people who gave something to Jesus. The wise men brought gifts to the infant Christ, a lad gave his lunch, and someone offered a drink when Christ exclaimed, "I thirst." Perhaps the woman at Sychar's well responded when Jesus said, "Give me to drink" (see John 4:7), although the possibility exists that in the excitement which followed, she forgot His request.

JEREMIAH, WHOSE PROMISE WAS BETTER THAN A CALENDAR and ran to the nearby city. Others asked Jesus to supper, but for devious reasons. The Pharisee invited the Lord but used the occasion to criticize his guest (see Luke 7:3~40). Only a few people

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spontaneously gave something to the Lord, but of that small number, Mary of Bethany received a special reward! Today, even in isolated jungle villages, natives know what happened in Simon's house. All women should be thrilled to remember these sisters of an earlier age. Mary, His mother, gave Jesus birth. Martha offered fellowship and food. A small company of dedicated women gave loving attention and dedicated service (see Matt 27:55). The Lord never forgot those who ministered to His need.

A Problem Fermenting... How Wise His Reply

How Mary obtained her treasure is uncertain. Maybe she saved her money and bought it, or it might have been a present from her sister and brother or even a gift from a would-be suitor. She gave the best she had, but the disciples criticized her action. The suggested gift to the poor was possibly an excuse, hiding their avaricious desires. That the Lord interpreted the act as being an anointing for burial suggests three things: Her vision~she was aware of His approaching death; Her virtue~she desired to give her treasure while He was still alive; Her victory~personal desires were abandoned and she gave whole-heartedly. The Savior's response silenced the criticism that might have ruined the fellowship in that home. Her achievement was filled with merit No person should offer to

Christ anything less than the best.

A Person Favored... How Gentle His Attitude

The fragrance of that perfume was very noticeable; it filled the room, the small town, and, ultimately, it crossed oceans and filled continents. An ordinary woman who never preached, sang, nor took a prominent part in anything special gained international fame. Her deed was mentioned in the Word of God and sent on a worldwide mission. Yet it must not be forgotten the same fame was shared by a widow who placed two mites in the collection box at the temple. She probably did this unobtrusively, for she was embarrassed by the insignificance of her offering. Christ saw her action. Nothing can be hidden from Him. Fame is often a fleeting thing. People who gain applause from onlookers are often forgotten within a few months. To gain and maintain international fame is something rarely accomplished. Mary of Bethany discovered that secret, and so may we if nothing we possess is too valuable to lay at the Savior's feet

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THE PROMISE OF AN INDESTRUCTIBLE MESSAGE

"Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away" (Luke 21:32-33).

Among the many statements made by Christ, the promise concerning the enduring qualities of His Gospel was one of the greatest. That a Carpenter who lived among tools, wagons, and other equipment needing repair should express such amazing confidence staggers the imagination. Perhaps when He was a boy, Jesus attended the school of a rabbi, but He never studied in a college nor

JEREMIAH, WHOSE PROMISE WAS BETTER THAN A CALENDAR attended classes in a university. Yet He became the most sensational teacher of all time. Even by modern standards professors who know nothing of the Savior are not qualified to instruct students. The Carpenter from Nazareth is unavoidable! The verbal attacks of infidels supply evidence that they have been confronted by the Man of Galilee. It was to be expected that He who created the universe should be interested in the lilies of the field and concerned when a wounded sparrow fell to the ground. It is now recognized that the One who held children in His arms could have explained problems that baffle earth's greatest scientists. Although enemies scoffed at His statements and ridiculed His words, Christ said His message would never be forgotten. After nearly two thousand years three facts endorse His claim

Its Miraculous Preservation

The survival of a book depends upon its message, charm and accuracy. The United States of America produces over 80,000 new volumes every year, but these are only a small part of the eight billion books printed annually throughout the world. Many are only printed once. Unsatisfactory sales result in their early disappearance from bookstores. Only a very limited number are reprinted after twenty years, and the greatest books are often forgotten after one generation. Even the most ardent students have difficulty locating a book printed centuries ago. If a desired copy is found in an ancient library, it is beyond the purchasing power of millionaires. It is a challenging fact, therefore, that the Bible, one of the oldest books in existence, may be purchased for a nominal sum at any bookstore.

History records that throughout the centuries copies of the Scripture were confiscated by authorities and burned in an attempt to

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destroy Christianity. Those who preached its message were executed, but the death of the martyrs became the seed of the church. The Bible proved itself to be indestructible! When its pages were destroyed by fire, the message survived in the memories of Christians and was reproduced by those who cherished the Word of God. This cannot be claimed for any other book.

Its Matchless Predictions

When Jesus taught throughout Galilee, some of His listeners questioned His authority for making what they considered to be outrageous statements! The religious leaders of the time accused the Lord of blasphemy. Nevertheless, Jesus continued to speak of the future as if He were describing what had already happened. He spoke of His death and resurrection, the destruction of the temple, the descent of the Holy Spirit, and the exploits of men who were to support His cause. He predicted His return to earth and said His kingdom, which at one time appeared insignificant, would eventually offer shelter to all nationalities. After two thousand years His accuracy has become evident to everybody. There cannot be many places on earth where His name remains unknown. Roman emperors tried to destroy the church; preachers of the Gospel were beaten, imprisoned, and burned to death. Yet, where Christians died the church continued to survive.

This could not have been a coincidence!

Its Marvelous Power

The greatest evidence to prove the inspiration of the Bible is its ability to transform lives; one testimony is worth a ton of theology. Centuries ago a beggar confronted by the arguments of learned men replied, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see"

JEREMIAH, WHOSE PROMISE WAS BETTER THAN A CALENDAR (John 9:25). The story has been told of an infidel who was in the process of taking tons of communist literature to South Africa. Sailing on the same ship was a Salvation Army missionary. Eventually, the two met and began to discuss the merits of Christianity. The man began to gloat over the inability of the young lady to offset his reasoning. Suddenly, the Christian began to weep, saying, "I cannot destroy your arguments, but you cannot destroy my love for the Savior." The tears terminated the discussion, but before the ship arrived in Cape Town, the man had thrown overboard all his literature. It is difficult to argue against changes! Christ promised His message would be indestructible!

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THE PROMISE OF A SUPERNATURAL POWER

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

This promise was one of the Savior's most sensational utterances. He was about to leave His disciples with a very formidable task. When David confronted Goliath, he knew he only had one antagonist. When the giant fell, the Philistines fled. The disciples of Jesus did not have that consolation. The opposition of the Jewish leaders would never cease, and the animosity of the Romans would continue as long as the empire existed. The fishermen from Galilee had limited intellectual ability; they were ordinary people such as those found on any beach around the Sea of Galilee. They were to represent their Master on a very special mission.

Nevertheless, they were overwhelmed with apprehension for circumstances had drastically changed. The Master's warning was disturbing, "They shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake" (Luke 21:12). The prospect of martyrdom was not pleasant. The exponents of the new faith would be beaten and tortured until death. They were being asked to do the impossible—to survive a political crisis which apparently would never end. Yet Jesus promised a different kind of assistance; the Holy Spirit would become the Leader of the crusade to reach the world and would impart strength to the evangelists. The Lord's promise was exciting, but perhaps beyond their comprehension. "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." Certain facets of this stirring promise quickly became evident.

Power to Perceive... Their Essential Message

The Greek word *dunamin* occurs in 130 places within the New Testament. It is translated as: power (Acts 1:8); mighty works (Matthew 11:20); virtue (Luke 6:19); miracles (Acts 2:22); strength (2 Cor. 1:8); might (Col. 1:11); abundance (Rev. 18:3). Explaining the word, Dr. Thayer says, "It meant inherent power, strength and ability." It suggests incomparable might and ability to do the extraordinary; biblical writers used it to express something superlative. The Lord

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said, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:12-13). The instruction to be given by the Holy Spirit would enable listeners to understand the

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Scriptures regarding the Messiah. He would be heaven's professor
sent to help students.

Power to Preach... Their Exciting Ministry

The two outstanding preachers within the early church were Simon Peter and Stephen. Unfortunately, although Peter was eloquent, his subject matter was limited and his attitude not above reproach. Stephen was a more charming orator and well-versed in the Scriptures. Unfortunately, he was destined to become the first martyr of the church, and would play no part in world evangelism. The disciples had experience in itinerant preaching, but there is no record they had ever won a convert. Doubtless Peter and the others did their best to represent Christ, but that was insufficient to meet the challenge of the future. They would stand before educated listeners and ruthless monarchs. They needed to learn how to handle such threatening situations. Peter's efforts on the Day of Pentecost indicated the Holy Spirit had taken control of His servant. The Savior said, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost

is come upon you." Educational attainments are of superlative worth; oratorical ability may be developed, but Simon Peter had no time to develop anything! When the Holy Spirit took possession of him, the immature preacher became dynamis-Hynamite!

Power to Prevail... Their Extensive Mission

What Peter and his colleagues did on the Day of Pentecost was remarkable, but only Paul demonstrated the full extent of the promise made by Jesus. The disciples were content to linger in Jerusalem, and their commission was almost forgotten. When Saul of Tarsus became a Christian, he commenced an extensive crusade to reach the known world. It was a task that the disciples should have already commenced. Perhaps inspired by Paul's example, some of the apostles traveled to other nations, but Paul alone was the spearhead of Christian enterprise. His untiring efforts laid the groundwork for world evangelism (see also the author's commentary *The Amazing Acts*, pp. 2425).

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THE PROMISE OF AN EXPANDING MINISTRY

"I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness... delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee... And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him" (Acts 26:1&17; 2&30).

The city of Caesarea was filled with excited people. King Agrippa and his wife, Bernice, were making an official visit. In honor of the occasion, Festus had made arrangements to make the event memorable. Everything proceeded according to plan until Festus informed Agrippa of the strange prisoner left behind by his predecessor, Felix. The king's curiosity was aroused, and Agrippa expressed a desire to hear the incarcerated preacher. An audience was hurriedly arranged, and ultimately Paul entered with chains hanging from his wrists and ankles. The apostle looked at the assembled audience, but when he realized the importance of the occasion, his eyes shone.

He said, "Yes, O King, Jesus, who rose from the grave, said to me: I have appeared unto thee for this purpose. . . Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee: To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light."'

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Paul's eyes were misty as he reminisced! He seemed to emphasize the words, "the Gentiles unto whom now I send thee." Beyond the mountains and oceans were people who had never heard about Jesus. They were to become his parishioners. He had traveled extensively on his missionary journeys but was convinced his task had not been completed. He was old, and his strength diminished. Travel was a burden. How could he complete his mission?

The Illustrious Counselor... Attracting

It was said that all roads led to Rome. The Caesars had established a far-reaching empire; trade, news, and soldiers moved quickly in all directions. Paul knew this, but how he would be taken to the city was planned by God. At no expense to Paul, he was taken to the imperial city and after an appearance before the emperor was granted freedom. He rented a house somewhere within the city and established a home. It became evident that when the apostle was unable to visit foreign lands, God arranged that people of all nations would come to Rome.

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The International Congregation... Absorbing

There was much to be seen within the city of Caesar, but when Paul lived in his "own hired house," his home was more attractive than temples. Men spoke of the strange man whose residence had become the most interesting place in the city. It was common knowledge that many people desired to hear the doctrines that disturbed the philosophers. "There came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets from morning till evening" (Acts 28:23). The statement "none forbidding him" was used frequently by medical writers to denote freedom, unhindered action in a variety of things such as respiration, perspiration, the pulse, and the muscles (Hobart). Every day Roman citizens and foreign visitors listened to Paul, and some of these people became missionaries. For example, Caractacus, a Celtic chief captured by the Romans, earned his freedom during his captivity in Rome. Having heard the Gospel (perhaps from Paul), he returned to evangelize his own people. It is believed he was the first Christian missionary to preach in Britain. The slave Onesimus also was led to Christ by Paul, and the letter to Philemon indicated the reality of the fugitive's conversion.

The Inspired Converts... Acknowledging

It would be interesting to know who paid the rent for Paul's home. As a prisoner he would have little, if any, financial resources. Perhaps the local church supported him. From time to time the churches established through the apostle's ministry sent love offerings to supply his need (see Phil. 4:16). During his stay in Rome, Paul wrote several epistles. How he found time to write during his busy schedule remains a mystery, but his untiring efforts enriched the world. The apostle's imprisonment, considered by many to have been regrettable, was overruled by God to accomplish the impossible. Evidently, the Lord knew what He was doing! Paul never wasted time, and neither should we, if we desire to receive a crown (see 2 Tim. 4:~).

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PAUL, WHO HEARD GOD'S PROMISE IN A STORM

"Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island" (Acts 27:26).

Stars are best seen on dark nights, and God's promises are appreciated most when circumstances suggest their fulfillment to be impossible. Blessed is the person who can stand on a sinking ship and exultantly cry, "I believe God!" For two terrifying weeks Paul's ship had drifted out of control. The captain and his men were completely helpless, and all hope of reaching land had been lost. The sailors were brave, but under those conditions even the strongest men trembled. They had been lost in the darkness, and the ceaseless noise of huge waves battering the ship intensified their fear. The vessel was about to splinter and break in pieces, and the sea would be their grave. Luke, in describing that scene, said, "And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away" (Acts 27:20).

The Man Who Listened... Carefully

"For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not Paul: thou must be brought before Caesar and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee" (vv. 23-24). The other people aboard the stricken vessel heard only the noise of the tempest. Paul resembled Elijah of whom it is written, "And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains... and after the wind an earthquake... And after the earthquake a and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle" (1 Kings 19:11-13). Paul and Elijah were expert listeners, and so are all who spend time in God's presence. It is better to listen than to complain!

The Man Who Continually

When God speaks, He says something important; when His children listen, they learn! Paul was assured that his companions would be saved from drowning, but he was also given a magnificent example of the unerring wisdom of God. He was informed that the vessel would be cast upon a certain island.

"The Mediterranean is an inland sea lying between the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa . . . in a nearly east and west direction, it is about 2400 miles in length... Its width varies from

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1000 miles to less than 100 miles The area of the Mediterranean is estimated at 965,000 square miles... The area of Malta is 95 square miles" (Funk and Wagnall Encyclopedia, Vol. 16, pp. 4,790, 5,948). Without a chart and compass and in the middle of a tempest, it would be impossible to find such a small island. It would be easier to find a needle in the proverbial haystack!

The Man Who Laughed... Confidently

If another person had spoken those words, Paul would have been justified in rejecting the message. Yet, he believed God and with confidence relayed the message to his companions. He said, "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me" (Acts 27:25). Possibly he smiled as he gave his message and overcame unbelief with laughter. He had heard the promise of God and never questioned its accuracy. If God held the

JEREMIAH, WHOSE PROMISE WAS BETTER THAN A CALENDAR universe in His hand, He would not have trouble steering a ship in a storm.

The Man Who Led... Courageously

James said, "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:20). Paul believed the same truth for "While the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying... this is for your health: for

there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you. And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all" (Acts 27:33-35). It was too dark and difficult for the sailors to see God, but they saw and heard Paul and that was all they needed.

The Man Who Completely

The apostle not only loved his LOrd, he loved everybody! His parish was the world, and wherever he journeyed, he became an inspiration to listeners. His example thrilled the churches; he was the greatest of all missionaries. People seldom complained when he asked them to sacrifice, for they knew he had given everything for Christ and world evangelism. Probably he was the greatest of all theologians, for he wrote most of the New Testament. Yet greater than his knowledge and more far reaching than his travels was the example set before his friends. Writing to the Christians in Corinth, he said, "And though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2).

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GOD, WHO MADE THE GREATEST PROMISE OF ALL TIME

"Eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the word began" (Titus 1:2).

I knew a charming young lady, a student in an American university, who had an intellectual problem. Aware of the pain throughout the world, she could not understand how God, who saw the end from the beginning, could possibly have created man in the first instance. She believed the suffering could have been prevented if God had been more considerate! When I was a young student, I also had a similar difficulty.

Then one day I saw the adoration in a young mother's eyes as she adoringly looked at her chuckling baby. Throughout my ministry, I have watched tears of joy running down the faces of men and women as they endeavored to describe their happiness in knowing Christ. I listened to the song of a lark and saw a kitten becoming increasingly tangled as it played with a ball of yarn. I have been enthralled watching a boy playing with his puppy, and I asked would God have been fair to prevent such happiness because some people preferred to sin? Would the Almighty have been fair to Himself and us had He refused to create human beings? Even the angels might have said, "When He had a chance to do something good, He refused." Paul's letter to Titus introduced readers to a promise made before time began.

God Promised

The apostle mentioned something which took place before the commencement of the ages. There were no stars twinkling in the heavens, and life existed only in the eternal Trinity. Somewhere in the depths of ageless infinity, Oruniscience convened a meeting. The agenda was intriguingly simple, yet overwhelmingW difficult-how

JEREMIAH, WHOSE PROMISE WAS BETTER THAN A CALENDAR to bring order out of chaos, to bring beauty out of nothing, to fill a limitless void with chami, and to enable human beings to enjoy sinless immortality. The results and implications of that meeting baffle the mind. The creation of angels and men were considered, and at some point during the proceedings, the omnipotent God made a promise. Far down the corridor of what was to be time, He saw a world filled with people and promised to offer them eternal life. That was the first promise ever made. It is almost impossible to decide to

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whom the commitment was made. Did God promise Himself? Did He make the promise to the Word, who was in the beginning with God? Did He make it to the unborn millions of people who were destined to be the recipients of a treasure only He could provide?

God Planned

At some point in that meeting, the possible failure of the project was considered. What if man should sin and become unfit to cooperate in the project? What then could be done to prevent eternal disaster and salvage what remained of the initial program? Was the Lord, the Everlasting Father, surprised when the Word calmly said, "If man fails, then I will assume the responsibility for his failure. Since the laws of righteousness will demand retribution, I will take his sin, pay his penalty, and restore his opportunity to obtain an eternal home in your presence." John referred to that occasion when he wrote of "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). It became evident to John that God foresaw human guilt and found a way by which to circumvent the problem. Perhaps it was at this juncture the Father said to the Son, "If you will do this, then in your name, I promise to give eternal life to whomsoever you sponsor?"

God Persevered

God knew His people would need a home in which to live, and He provided it. "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, let there be light, and there was light" (Gen. 1:2-3). From that thrilling beginning, the Lord's creative work continued until the earth became a place of entrancing beauty. "And God saw that it was good" (v. 25). Then with pride and joy, God said, "let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (v. 26). Life was breathed into dust, and man became a living soul. Afterward, He made Eve. "She was lovely; she was indescribably charming; dignified as befitting a queen of creation, as refreshing as the morning dew. Her eyes were lit with curiosity and expectation as she scanned her surroundings. Her movements were graceful and effortless, and when she spoke, pleasure filled the Creator's heart. She was fascinatingly beautiful, she was good, and she was very desirable. 'And the Lord God brought her to man.'" (see the author's book, Bible Pinnacles, p. 1). The Gospel reveals how God fulfilled the first promise that was ever made.

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THE PROMISE OF AN UNCHANGING CHRIST

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Heb. 13:8).

Age changes everything! The top came off the pyramid of Giza. The weather effects the carved faces on Mount Rushmore. Machines of all kinds need to be repaired and ultimately removed

JEREMIAH, WHOSE PROMISE WAS BETTER THAN A CALENDAR from service. The weather, sky, and ocean may change within hours, and the opinions of people within minutes. H. F. Lyte wrote, "Change and decay in all around I see; O Thou, Who changest not, abide with me." The Bible declares that Jesus Christ remains the same. He came to earth, lived, and died as a man, but when His body "put on immortality," He never changed again. Among the promises of God is the jewel of everlasting worth.

Everlasting A Purpose Performed

"In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Titus 1:2). "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life" (John 5:24). Paul affirmed that God, even from eternity, promised eternal life to people who conformed to His will. The teaching of the Savior confirmed and endorsed that fact.

Everlasting Redemption... A Price Paid

"Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us" (Heb.9: 12). The Savior obtained eternal redemption, and this implies His death covered every eventuality. It not only reached back into time, but also guaranteed the future needs of redeemed people will be supplied.

Everlasting Salvation... A Plan Perfected

"But Israel shall be saved in the LORD with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end" (Isa. 45:17). This verse presents a magnificent progression of thought. What was purposed before time began was made possible through the death of Christ and given by Him to repentant sinners. The words were spoken primarily to Israel, but "all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us" (2 Cor. 1:20).

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Everlasting Fatherhood... A Parent Protecting

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counseller, The mighty God, the everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Is~ 9:6). "Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him. .. he that hath seen me hath seen the Fathe?' (John 14:89). Acceptance of Christ commences a unique relationship between the sinner and God. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12).

Everlasting Joy... A Pleasure Persisting

"And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isa. 35:10). Doubtless this prediction concerned the return of the captives from Babylon, but that was only a foreshadowing of the happiness to be known by those who found redemption in Christ People who surrender to the Savior rejoice in the goodness of the Lord. "And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost"

(Acts 13:52).

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Everlasting Kindness ... A Pleasantness Prevailing

"In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer" (Isa. 54:8). This revelation was vastly different from the the Lord whose frightening presence shook Mount Sinai. God's love for His people was beyond comprehension.

Everlasting Consolation... A Peace Pervading

"Now our Lord Jesus Christ hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace" (2 Thess. 2:16). The word translated consolation or encouragement is parakleesis. It was used by the Lord to describe the Holy Spirit "For if I go not away, the Comforter (Paraclete) will not come unto you" (John 16:7). The continuing Presence of the divine Spirit guarantees continuous consolation and help for God's children.

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Everlasting A Power Providing

"The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut 33:27). This probably is the greatest of all the implied promises. It guarantees the arms and hands which hold the universe will have no difficulty protecting us! There can never be an emergency with which God cannot cope! "When I fear my faith will fail, He will hold me fast"

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THE PROMISE OF A LIGHT AT
THE END OF THE TUNNEL

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (James 1:12).

The Epistle written by James expresses the practical side of the Christian faith. The apostle appreciated sound doctrine but insisted faith without works is dead (see James 2:17). He never mentioned the Incarnation, redemption through the blood of Christ, nor the Resurrection. Apparently the basic facts of the faith were not as important as dedicated conduct. Perhaps he was disillusioned with disappointing people who professed to be followers of the Lord. He was not as interested in the three thousand converts won at Pentecost as he was with the number remaining active for Christ five or ten years after their professed conversion. The apostle wrote of faithfulness and endurance and insisted "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). Difficulties were a tunnel through which the faithful would travel. He believed there was always a light shining at the end of the road. There

were crowns to be won, and Christians should not risk losing their rewards.

A Crown of The Blessing of Endurance (James 1:12)

"The man that endureth temptation... he shall receive the crown of life." James believed eternal life was a gift offered to undeserving sinners, but he proceeded to emphasize other features of discipleship. Even Jesus had warned His followers, saying, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). The church was not a haven for cowards! Christians would be required to die for their Master. Some would be fed to lions, and others burned at the stake. If heaven were a desired destination, then pilgrims should rejoice as they approached the end of their journey. James suggested that Christians should act and talk and even dress like people whose home lay beyond this world; they should be holy. Such conduct might lead to sorrow and suffering, but those who remained faithful would receive "the crown of life." That was the light at the end of the tunnel.

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A Crown of Righteousness... The Reward of Expectancy (2 Timothy 4:8)

Looking back Paul said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). Looking forward, he was able to say, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." The apostle who had walked through dark tunnels of adversity was approaching the end of his pilgrimage when Christ would give to him a crown of righteousness. Paul believed that all who looked for the appearance of the Savior would share in a similar experience.

A Crown of Rejoicing... The Reward of Evangelism (1 Thessalonians 2:19)

"For what is our . . . crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" John wrote,

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"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 4). Paul's happiness was even more intense when he considered meeting converts at the feet of Jesus. Nothing could supersede the thrill of hearing "Thank you for introducing me to the Savior." To wear a crown is an ultimate! A prince may be elated, but to ascend the throne is a greater honor. Paul believed one of his most thrilling moments in heaven would be his meeting with those whom he had won for Christ

A Crown of Thcorruption... The Reward of Elegance (1 Corinthians 9:2~25)

The apostle wrote, "Know ye not that they which run in a race, run all, but one receiveth the prize. So run, that ye may Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown: but we an incorruptible." Doubtless, he was considering athletes who worked hard for the dubious distinction of winning a diadem of parsley! Christians should strive even more to win eternal rewards. The elegance of this eternal recognition would be known throughout God's kingdom.

A Crown of Glory and Honor... The Reward of Emmanuel (Hebrews 2:7)

It was a wonderful moment, when after returning from His mission on earth, the Savior was crowned "with glory and honor." That occasion had been typified by the crowning of Israel's high priest. That was a symbolic act performed when the national intercessor

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was initiated into his important office. The Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled that type when He became the High Priest of His church. The magnificence of that event begs description, for the Lord was honored before the assembled hosts of heaven. Could it be possible -if only in a lesser sense-that God will also honor those saints in whose service He finds merit? One smile from the Lord will more than compensate for all the trials ever endured.

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