

THE PROMISE OF AN AMAZING LAND GRANT

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"In the same day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. 15:18).

The promise of God's land grant to Abram has created considerable discussion among theologians. The patriarch, who had recently arrived in Canaan, was a stranger in a new land. Although he was wealthy by ancient standards, he possessed nothing except the flocks and herds which he brought from Haran. The description of his meeting with the Lord was mysterious and startling. "And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking flint, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces" (Gen. 15:17). Did Abram sleep and dream, or was this a vision? Later, he described how he saw a smoking flint and a lamp that moved in the darkness. As he contemplated the meaning of these things, God said, "Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates."

The eastern boundary of this land grant was clearly defined. The seed of Abraham would inherit all the territory which reached to the river Euphrates. That was an enormous amount of land. The western boundary was not so definitive. The text mentioned "the river of Egypt" which according to some writers was the Nile, the lifeline of the country. The commentators Keil, Kurtz, Hungstenburg, and Kalitsch agree with this interpretation. However, in Bible times the border of Egypt was the Wady el Arish which was named "the Brook of Egypt." This was at the southern extremity of the land into which Abram had come. The writers Knobel, Lange, and Clark believe this was the southwestern limit of Abram's inheritance.

It is significant that the seed of Abraham never possessed that land. Reference to the Wady el Arish was made when the land was divided among the occupying tribes of Israel (Num. 34:5; Josh. 15:4; Isa. 27:12). During the reigns of David and Solomon most, but not all, of that territory was occupied by the armies of Israel (1 Kings 4:21; 2 Chron. 9:26). When the debates and arguments are concluded, one fact remains: the seed of Abraham never acquired those territories. Therefore, the complete fulfillment of the ancient promise must take place in the future. Perhaps this will not be completely fulfilled until the millennial reign of Christ when the entire earth will belong to His kingdom.

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Nevertheless, "if coming events cast their shadows before," the return of Israel to her homeland must be one of the greatest events in history. The Jews who had been scattered to all parts of the earth, who possessed no national home, and had endured unprecedented persecution, are now established in their ancient homeland. Continuing attacks by terrorists disturb the serenity of the land, and this can be seen on the west bank of the Jordan River. Arabs claim the land belongs to them, but Orthodox Jews assert the territory was given to the seed of Abraham long before any Arab existed, quoting the promise made by the Lord. Perhaps their claim is legitimate, for God stated, "But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year" (Gen. 17:21). The Arab nations belong to the seed of Abraham, but they descended from Ishmael rather than Isaac.

God named ten nations which occupied the promised land; these were ultimately reduced to seven, probably because some had been destroyed or had united with other tribes. Today's maps indicate the Euphrates runs through Iraq to the Persian Gulf. Israelis being

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asked to relinquish territory now in her possession, but if the ancient promise made to Abraham is to be literally fulfilled, the Jewish people in some sensational way will acquire even more territory.

How this will be accomplished may remain a mystery until it happens.

Modern Israel attracts more attention than any other country. Jerusalem was dominated by Gentile nations from the days of Nebuchadnezzar who lived in the sixth century before Christ. Today it is the capital city of the State of Israel. The eyes of the world are focused upon the Middle East to see if God intends to fulfill the promises made to Abraham

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THE PROMISE OF TREASURE IN THE SEAS AND SAND

"For they shall suck of the abundance of the seas, and of treasures hid in the sand" (Deut. 33:19).

The tribes of Israel were apprehensive; their leader Moses was about to leave his people. Canaan was ahead, but everyone realized an indiscretion had deprived the patriarch of the privilege of entering the land of milk and honey. Moses seemed resigned to his loss, but his eyes were gleaming as he expressed a desire to bless the tribes. His words proved he was a true prophet. Unerringly, he explained the future, but of all the predictions his message concerning Zebulun was most intriguing. He described how the tribesmen would assemble for celebrations of praise and righteousness, and suggested their gratitude would be occasioned by the discovery of hidden treasure in the seas and sand.

It is exceedingly interesting to read the interpretations given by older commentators. Compared with modern writings, their comments appear to be "quaint." For example, Keil and Delitzsch state, "The thought expressed is, that the riches and treasures of both sea and land would flow to the tribes of Israel" (Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. 1, "Deuteronomy," page 508). The prosperity to be known during the millennial reign of Christ would best be seen among the people over whom He reigned. Matthew Henry said, "Zebulun that goes abroad, shall suck of the abundance of the seas, which are [milk] to the merchants." Jamieson, Fausset and Brown say, "Both tribes (Zebulun and Issachar) should traffic with the Phoenicians in gold and silver, pearl and coral, especially in murex, the shell fish that yielded the famous Tyrian dye; and in glass, which was manufactured from the sand of the river Belus in their immediate neighborhood." Adam Clark wrote, "They shall be very prosperous in coastal voyages, for this tribe's situation was favorable for traffic, having many As Zebulun would be prosperous in shipping and trade, Issachar would be in agriculture and pasturage."

It is difficult to read the comments of these great men without remembering they lived in an earlier century. Evidently they con-

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sidered the term 'nurse' to be figurative, which explains Matthew Henry's reference to the seas contributing to the wealth of merchants. Today it is believed sucking treasure from sea and sand refers to oil. when Moses made his statements to the tribes of

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Israel, he knew that in the end times God's people would become wealthy because of the discovery of oil fields.

The territory promised to Abraham's seed far exceeds what to day is known as Israel (see Abraham's "Original Land Grant" in this book). The greatest oil-producing countries of the world belong to the Arabs who also are the descendants of Abraham. Nevertheless, God said the Patriarch would be blessed through the seed of Isaac, and that meant the Hebrews, the nation of Israel. Apart from this fact, the ancient promise has already been fulfilled. If the promise refers to Israel, then the Jews must either extend their borders, or oil must be found within their present territory.

"The Middle East is a region that supplies at least 70% of the oil consumed daily by non-communist countries. It is the source of well over 50% of West Europe's oil; 90% of Japan's; 30% of the U.S.A.'s; and 80% of Africa's. Every fifteen minutes a tanker filled with oil sails through the Strait of Hormuz at the head of the Persian Gulf, enroute to oil refineries around the world" (The Encyclopedia of Illustrations, Dr. Paul Lee Tan, p. 797, Assurance Publishers, Rockville, Maryland). It is now recognized that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by an oil fire resulting from an earthquake which devastated the area around the Dead Sea. Some years ago a Jewish business man named Federman expressed the belief that oil

had returned to the region, and efforts were made to begin Israel's first oil exploration. Unfortunately, his efforts were unsuccessful. A prominent television broadcaster in California announced in June, 1989, that oil had been found near one of Israel's cities. The world is waiting to see if his statements are accurate. when Israel becomes a great oil producing nation, her importance in world affairs will increase enormously. The use of tankers to transport oil from foreign ports will become unnecessary; Israel would export oil from her own Mediterranean terminals. Danger will also increase, for her Middle East neighbors will envy her prosperity. This might be the time in history when the promise made by Moses to Zebulun will be fulfilled.

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JOB, WHO LOOKED BEYOND THE GRAVE

"For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God; Whom I shall see for myself and mine eyes shall behold, and not another" (Job 19:25-27).

To repeat what has already been said, the writing of Job is believed to be the first biblical book written. It belonged to a period when the earth was comparatively young. There was no recognized house of God; few, if any, prophets; no Scripture; and no religious

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institution to which Job could have appealed for enlightenment. The patriarch lived in an era when theological conception was in its infancy, and it was therefore remarkable that during his suffering he developed amazing ideas. His increasing perception of survival was seen in three statements: (a) how dismal death was the end of all things (see Job 3:11-17); (b) how doubtful -he asked a question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14); and (c) how decided-"For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth" (Job 19:25). Some writers deny there was any prophetic value in these texts, but for evangelical students Job's testimony remains one of the most inspiring utterances in ancient literature (see the author's book, Bible Cameos, pp. 69-70).

His Glowing "I Know"

Surrounded by circumstances and people who encouraged doubt, Job's faith was resplendent. Although his friends believed he was a hypocrite, and his wife advised him to curse God and die, Job's testimony was a light shining in darkness. He did not understand why he was suffering such anguish; he did not appreciate the comments of his neighbors, but he remained sure of the integrity of God. It was this fact which enabled him to exclaim, "But be knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10).

His Gracious Colleague... My Redeemer

Even in antiquity the function of the goel or "redeemer" was well-known. He was a kinsman who possessed the authority to redeem slaves or property, a man who intervened when misfortune overtook a relative. Job believed God to be a near kinsman, that in

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some mysterious way, He was closely related and cared sufficiently to help His family. Job was a man who saw and believed truth yet to be revealed.

His Great Claim... Liveth

How Job arrived at his conclusion is open to conjecture. He had been in "the refiner's fire," and maybe his revelation came from God who superintended operations. His earlier contention that death terminated existence stood out in bold relief. If all else died, God remained immortal; His everlasting love for human beings could not diminish.

His Growing Confidence... "He Shall Stand at the latter Day upon the Earth"

Serious thinkers would never deny this was partially fulfilled when the Son of God came to earth to redeem sinners. Nevertheless, the remaining part of the text suggests even more. Job went on to say, "Yet in my flesh shall I see God." Although Job endured his misfortunes and came through his ordeal triumphantly, his ultimate decease was inevitable. The decaying process could not be prevented, but Job declared, "And though... worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." Job believed his mortal body would

put on immortality, that the corruptible would put on incorruption. His vision embraced eternity, and therefore his utterance must be included among those promises awaiting fulfillment. It is difficult to decide whence came such knowledge. Perhaps it would be safe to assume he was taught by the Lord Himself.

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His Glorious Conclusion.. "Whom I Shall See for Myself"

Evidently Job's faith removed the fear of death. In some delightful way God revealed Himself to His trusting servant, and the patriarch believed he had received a promise of immortality. He would die, but the Lord would raise him from the dead and provide a glorified body. He would stand with his divine Redeemer upon the earth. This realization enabled him to say, as did Paul, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor. 15:55). The prolonged trial of Job revealed two things: (a) increased riches which could not prolong his life; and (b) a triumphant faith which money could not buy. Which was the greater?

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THE PROMISE OF A MEDICAL BREAKTHROUGH

"For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind... And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people... There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old" (Isa. 65:17-20). "And everything shall live whither the river cometh" (Ezek. 47:9).

Disease has always been one of man's greatest enemies, and throughout time gifted men struggled to overcome its supremacy. One of the first licensed physicians was Imhotep, an Egyptian, who practiced medicine about 3,000 B.C. He was very successful, and Egyptians worshiped him as a god. Originally, physicians were priests, and their medicines were the result of mingled faith and superstition. As their knowledge increased, some doctors became surgeons, and the embalming of bodies became a practiced art (see Gen. 50:2). The first female obstetricians mentioned in the Bible were Shiphah and Puah, who saved the lives of many Hebrew children (see Ex. 1:15-17).

"About 300 B.C. a famous school of medicine was started in Alexandria, Egypt. The faculty had the benefit of considerable medical knowledge from Greek, Roman, Babylonian and Indian sources. It is wise for Bible students to remember this. If Luke were trained at the Alexandrian school, or by graduates of that school, his medical knowledge had considerable scientific basis" (The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, p. 788).

The method used by Jesus was different from those of all other medical practitioners. He never gave prescriptions, but issued His word of command. He spoke, and sufferers were healed. Yet, apart from a few special occasions, death remained an unassailable foe. Today doctors only delay the inevitable. Perhaps that explains the strenuous efforts now being made to increase longevity. Some people, suffering from terminal illness submit to experiments whereby their bodies are frozen after death and preserved, to be restored at a later date when cures have been found for their ailments. It is apparent, however, that medical research has its limitations, and even famous people die.

Against this background of human effort and failure, the words of Isaiah shine as a beacon light. He also had limited knowledge of medicine and advised that a plaster of figs be placed upon the body

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of his dying king (see Isa 38:21). As the prophet looked down the corridor of time, he saw the desired breakthrough of medical research. Nevertheless, he explained the ultimate triumph would only

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come when God performed a miracle. The prophet wrote, "The child shall die an hundred years old, but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed" (Isa. 65:20).

That prediction suggested many ideas. If death at the age of one hundred years were to be considered the life span of a child, then how old would the parents be? They could possibly live for seven, eight, or more hundreds of years. That would mean a revolutionary change in the mortality rate. Major diseases such as cancer will be overcome; other threats to human life will be nonexistent, and hospitals and morticians may be inactive. Yet this can only happen when Christ reigns upon the earth. Ezekiel endorsed Zechariah's account of the great earthquake which will divide the Mount of Olives; he predicted its activity would release from the earth a river of water possessing medicinal curatives. He said, "Everything shall live whither the river cometh" (Ezek 47:9). The people who journey to Jerusalem to worship the King of Kings will find refreshment for their souls in the sanctuary and healing for their bodies in the river of life. God's ultimate aim is the complete elimination of death. Paul wrote of the end times, "For he must reign, till he hath

put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:25-26).

Faith and science should walk together. Talented men who seek for new cures need God's help. Behind each new discovery is the smiling face of the Almighty. When the greatest efforts of men fail, He can perform what is impossible by any other means. This was demonstrated during the ministry of Christ. The possibilities will be boundless when He reigns in righteousness over all the kingdoms of the earth.

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THE PROMISE OF AN ETERNAL TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM

"Moreover I... will set my sanctuary in the midst of them forevermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them: ye~ I will be their God, and they shall be my people " (Ezek 37:2&27).

Whether or not a new temple will be erected in Jerusalem has caused endless discussion in theological circles. There are three schools of thought regarding the message of Ezekiel: (a) He predicted a rebuilding of Solomon's temple after the Babylonian captivity; (b) He was prophesying about the church in a figurative sense; and (c) A still future, literal temple will be built during the millennial kingdom.

The first suggestion is unacceptable because the temple restored after the captivity was not erected according to the specifications given by Ezekiel. Furthermore, it did not last forever. The second idea presents problems. If the prophet were merely describing a hypothetical idea, why did he waste time supplying irrelevant measurements? The Savior said, "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place . . . Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains" (Matt. 24:15-16). These details mention geographical

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positions. The Jews believe that when their Messiah arrives, a magnificent temple will be erected as evidence of the covenant to be made with His people.

This interpretation begets another WoblenL The Bible teaches the Antichrist will make an agreement with Israel guaranteeing political and religious independence for seven years. Unfortunately, "in the midst of the week" (see Dan. 9:27), he will violate the agreement and "cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease." Theologians differ in their doctrines concerning the return of Christ, but they agree that the desecration of the holy place will take place before the millennial reign. Therefore, the temple either in part or the whole, must be constructed prior to the return of the Messiah.

The Israelis are the most heavily taxed people on earth. Their military expenses are astronomical, and without foreign aid such an enterprise cannot be considered. It has also been claimed the Mosque of Omar stands upon the site of the ancient temple. Since Jews would not build elsewhere, it will need to be demolished. One rabbi said, "That presents no problem~God could send an earthquake!"

The majority of Jews in modern Israel are not religiously in-

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clined; many are professed atheists. During a visit to the Holy Land, I asked a Hebrew guide a question concerning God and the holocaust in Germany. He became sarcastic, saying, "Bah! We Jews are supposed to be God's chosen people. He must have been asleep when six million of us perished in the gas ovens of Hitler's Germany. Sir, if that is the way God looks after His people, we prefer to look after ourselves!" Unfortunately, many Israeli citizens would agree with his statement. On the other hand, devout Jews are struggling to restore faith in God and the complete restoration of everything relative to Old Testament customs.

Dr. Paul Lee Tan has said, "A special school has been established in Israel to train young Israelis of the tribe of Levi in ancient rites of sacrifice. It is called 'Yeshiva Avodas Hakodesh' The school was founded by Rabbi Hirsh Ha-Cohen, and dedicated in December 1970. Only students who can trace their ancestry to Aaron are admitted. There they learn the laws of ancient animal sacrifice and how to perform the practices which existed in the ancient temple" (Encyclopedia of Illustrations, p. 634, Assurance Publishers, Rockville, MD).

Unfortunately, certain speakers make statements which cannot be verified. Rumors of stones made to specification and sent from America to Israel have spread through the world. Indignant denials

have been made by the Israeli authorities, but people are wondering what and whom to believe. If financial burdens were lifted from the Jewish nation, the building of the temple could easily be arranged. American Jews alone could, and probably would, underwrite the expense necessary for the fulfillment of Israel's greatest project. Oral Roberts, in his book End Times, reports a statement made during his conversation with the late Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben Gurion. He said, "We are not a religious people, but we need our temple to bind us all together." As the plans of God continue to unfold, events will become increasingly dramatic.

Nearer and nearer draws the time:
The time that shall surely be
When the earth shall be filled with the glory of God
As the waters cover the sea.

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EZEKIEL, WHO HEARD A PROMISE IN A CEMETERY

"lurus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel... And shall put my spirit in you and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD" (Ezek 37:12-14).

The thirty-seventh chapter of Ezekiel is one of the most sensational messages ever written; what the prophet predicted nearly 3,000 years ago is now being fulfilled. The young priest was explicit when he wrote, "The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and lo, they were very dry" (Ezek. 37:1-2).

The Holy Spirit conducted Ezekiel on a walking tour through a cemetery! Skeletons were everywhere. When the prophet saw a mass movement of bones, he was probably shocked and wondered if he were dreaming. Then God explained this was a preview of what He intended to accomplish. His explanation was clear and concise. The bones represented the Hebrews who had been scattered around the world. The Lord intended to change that situation; He would regather the people and make them a nation within their own land. This promise was partially fulfilled when the captives returned from Babylon, but at that time Jews only returned from Babylon. The complete fulfillment of God's promise has yet to take place. The prophet said, "And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant. . . and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children forever; and my servant David shall be their prince for ever?" (Ezek 37:25).

Disturbing the A Tremendous Miracle

"So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone... and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army" (Ezek 37:7-10). The miracle of the dead bones was astonishing, but evidently God's prediction was even more astounding. Israel had been the greatest nation on earth, but the Babylonian captivity obliterated her magnificence. Although the edict of Cyrus enabled many of the captives to

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return to Palestine, others refused to accept his offer. That was the beginning of a dispersion which carried Jews to every part of the earth. Centuries later, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, and the people lost their national home. They were expelled from many countries and persecuted unmercifully. The sufferers had no government to which to appeal for assistance; their future was bleak. Then suddenly, the question "Can these bones live?" assumed a new meaning, and it became evident nothing was too difficult for God to accomplish.

Dispelling the A Thrilling Message

The Psalmist said, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain" (Ps. 76:10). The Lord pos-

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essed the amazing ability to accomplish the impossible. This became evident during the lifetime of Hitler, when in spite of the murder of millions of Jews, displaced Hebrews began to dream of returning to their homeland. The dead bones of Israel's nationalism began to move, and ultimately, God made them to stand "in their own land." Not long ago there were no Jews in Jerusalem, and very few in the entire land of Palestine. Today, there are between four and five million, and the number is steadily increasing. Harry Gold-

en wrote in the Holiday magazine, "The minimum requirement to immigrate into Israel is the statement, 'I am a Jew.' The immigrant needs no papers, no testimonials, no affidavits signed by rabbis, and no religious tests. Here, for the first time, immigrants may come into a country where they are not punctured by needles nor forced to display their teeth."

Describing the Deliverer... A TntstedMonarch

'N'lten this movement was in its infancy, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion said, "Gur policy is to bring all Jews to Israel... we are still at the beginning." This continues, and the most sensational events are yet to occur. "And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David... And I the Lo~ will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LA)~ have spoken it" (Ezek 34:2~24). "and my servant David shall be their prince for ever" (Ezek 37:25). Evidently, these promises have never been fulfilled. God has brought His people from all parts of the earth, and will complete what He commenced.

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GOD'S PROMISE TO ABIDE IN ISRAEL FOREVER

"Now let them put away their whoredom, and the carcasses of their kings, far from me, and I will dwell in the midst of them for ever" (Ezek 43:9).

Ezekiel was reared in Jerusalem, and probably was a priest when he was taken with other captives to Babylon. He ministered to Israel throughout the captivity, and methods used in the presentation of his message, were, to say the least, sensational. He drew a plan of Jerusalem on a brick (see 4:1-3). He lay on one side of his body for several days, and then on the other (see 4:48). He shaved himself with a sword, and then divided the hair (see 5:1 - 17). His methods were extremely effective, for at all times the prophet explained the reasons for his strange behavior. He mentioned the possibility of God's residing in Jerusalem forever.

God Resided with Adam and Eve... For Days

It was written, "And they heard the voice of the Lo~ God walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (Gen. 3:8). The Lord desired communion with the man and woman He had created, and that could have continued eternally. Unfortunately, sin ruined the happiness of our first parents and changed the plans of the Almighty. Distance replaced the warm, thrilling fellowship of those early days, and Adam and Eve were expelled from their garden. God did not forsake His children, but the glowing ecstasy of the initial happiness was overshadowed by human guilt. Nevertheless, the Lord never lost the desire to live among His people.

God Resided with Israel... For Forty Years

God's people have never been expected to walk alone! When

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the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, He accompanied them throughout their wilderness journeys. Realizing their inability to see an invisible God, He commanded Moses to erect a tabernacle and arranged that a cloud should be above it by day, and a pillar of fire by night. These were indications that the Lord would be in residence among His people. The same truth was evident when the glory of God filled Solomon's temple. Alas, the sign of God's presence was removed, and the wayward Israelites became captives in Babylon.

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The Savior Resided with People... During His lifetime

It is impossible to describe adequately the magnificence of the Lord's ministry, for His miracles were shared only with men and women in Palestine. Yet, for those who were privileged to be present, children on His knee, lepers being cleansed and joy shining in His eyes were evidence that God had not changed. He loved being with His children. That delightful characteristic remained unchanged from the earliest days of time.

The Spirit Resides In The Church... Until The End Of The Age

The abiding presence of the Holy Spirit is probably the greatest asset of Christians. The Old Testament revealed that God was for His people; the Gospels explained how God was with His disciples; the remaining part of the New Testament taught that God was in His followers. However wonderful these facts appear to be, they fall short of what God promised. The Holy Spirit lives within the church, but unfortunately, human weakness often hides Him from those whose vision is limited.

God Will Reside in Jerusalem... Forever!

It is thrilling to remember that when Israel's iniquity has been removed, and when the City of David becomes what it should

always have been, the Lord will live in His temple, and everybody will know He is God. At that time people will worship Him in Jerusalem and observe the Feast of Tabernacles. They will know God is in their midst (see Zech. 14:16). Time will not terminate His residency. Throughout eternal ages the Lord and His people will be united.

If a text may be quoted out of its setting, then exultantly it can be said, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). Then, as never before, other predictions will be fulfilled. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech. 8:23).

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THE PROMISE OF BLESSINGS IN UNLIKELY PLACES

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing

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there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt" (Hos. 2:1~15).

One of the most delightful flowers in the world is only found in Western Australia where it blossoms beneath the ground. A complete specimen has never been found, for in the vast expanse of the desert, it is impossible to know where to find it. Farmers who farm adjacent lands sometimes find broken pieces of the rare plant. Plows cut the flower in pieces, and these are thrown to the surface. Businessmen in Perth published an artist's impression of the flower, and if the real thing resembles what has been imagined, it is among the most beautiful orchids in existence. Yet, it blooms in the dark!

The prophet Hosea would have appreciated that fact. His marital affairs produced one of the strangest stories in the Scripture. The popular young preacher married a lady of ill-repute who eventually deserted her family to rejoin former lovers. Misfortune followed her, and unable to pay her debts, she was offered for sale at a slave auction (see the author's book *Bible Gems*, pp. 6~, Kiegel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI). The prophet mentioned his wife when he spoke to Israel and made a remarkable statement. He described a vineyard in a wilderness and the finding of treasure in a most unlikely place. Hosea assured his listeners that as he had forgiven and restored his spouse, God was willing to do the same things for His wife, Israel. He would always be willing to do this if they would destroy their idols.

The references to vineyards in the wilderness" and "the valley of Achor as a door of hope" invite investigation. The former suggests fruitfulness in a desert, and the latter, hope where there was only despair. Achan had committed an unpardonable sin when he secretly stole prohibited articles. His body had been buried beneath a pile of stones in "the valley of Achor" (see Josh. 7). Thereafter, the place and its name became a curse in Israel. Yet God indicated the desolate area could become an entrance into a new realm of blessedness.

To be taken into the wilderness would normally suggest God intended to punish his erring children. Nevertheless, in this instance

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He promised to speak comfortably to His people. The cloud of God's judgment had a silver lining. Occasionally, very precious things are discovered in a desert, especially when God becomes a Guide!

God's Message Is Always Sympathetic... "I Will Speak Comfortably

Sometimes, God thought it necessary to chastise His people, but gentleness always held the rod! Even in the final days of time when Israel endures unprecedented anguish, God intends to deliver a remnant of his people. Even their place of barrenness will become an avenue of hope, leading to the magnificent splendor of Christ's reign upon earth.

God's Majesty Is Permanently Supreme I Will Give Her"

The end of God's work can never be in doubt! Evil may appear to win occasional battles, but the ultimate triumph of righteousness is assured. God is supreme, His word infallible, and His power unlimited. Whatever He plans comes to pass. The church knows it, Israel will know it, and every Christian should rejoice and "abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (see Ps. 91:1).

God's Mercy Is Frequently Surprising... "I Will Give Her Vine-

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yards"

"The valley of Achor for a door of hope." God promised to make the unattractive, frightening valley of judgment become a path to unsurpassed happiness. He alone was able to accomplish a miracle of that caliber. Where stones had fallen in judgment, benedictions would descend in grace. The kindness of the Lord would turn tears to laughter, mourning to rejoicing, and despair into everlasting hope. These brief promises are cameos revealing the expanding grace of the Almighty.

God's Music Is Constantly Sublime... "She Shall Sing..."

"She shall sing there, as in the day of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt" When Israel left Egypt and discovered the Lord's ability to divide the Red Sea' cares vanished, fear disappeared, and their music probably filled angels with delight No man can be rescued from a horrible pit without desiring to sing a new song (see Ps. 40:1-3).

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ZECHARIAH, WHO PREDICTED AN EARTHQUAKE

"And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south" (~ch. 14:4).

Earthquakes have always terrorized mankind; to stand amid swaying and falling buildings when ground movements resemble the waves of the sea is a frightening experience. Men may be educated or illiterate, rich or poor, important or ordinary individuals, but when the earth shakes and mountains shudder, everyone becomes helpless. It has been claimed that one of the most disastrous quakes in history occurred in 1556 in Shensi, Central China, when 650,000 people died and approximately 780,000 were injured. These astounding figures make the human spirit tremble.

The U.S. government has spent enormous sums of money on earthquake research hoping to obtain information that would warn of approaching catastrophes in time to save many lives. Stringent building laws have been applied to new constructions, and the seismologists work ceaselessly to discover means of accurately predicting such catastrophes. Unfortunately, their reports have been inconclusive.

The Unique Prediction... A Devastating Eruption

Zechariah, the prophet, was born in Babylon and returned with Ezra and Nehemiah to Palestine. When he was still a young man, God ordered him to become a prophet. He had no academic ability and had never graduated from a college. Yet, in a remarkable way, he described events to take place thousands of years after his death. Apart from divine enabling, it would have been impossible for that young man to utter his statements. The Middle Eastern countries have often been troubled by earthquakes, but the Mount of Olives has never been rent apart. It is known that a major earthquake fault exists beneath the mountain (see the author's book "What in the World Will Happen Next?", page 133, Irregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI). The evidence of a true prophet was his ability to disclose details unknown to other people. God put words into His servant's mouth that they might be relayed to a national audience.

The Unavoidable Power... A Detailed Explanation

The details of the expected earthquake in Israel are exciting. The prophet said the mountain would be divided; one half would move to the north and the other to the south to create a valley between the seas. The prophet Isaiah supplied extra details. He said low places will be exalted and high places brought low (see Isa 40:4). God's mighty power will make a valley between the Mediterranean and Dead seas. The Salt Sea will be exalted, and Jerusalem lowered to make the city of David a seaport. During the reign of Christ upon the earth, ships will be able to take their pilgrim passengers all the way to their desired destination.

An illustration of what will happen may be found in the Corinthian Canal which was completed in 1893 across the isthmus of Corinth. The emperor Nero initiated such a construction in 78 A.D. but later abandoned his project. Thereafter, vessels were frequently pulled on wooden rollers across the isthmus. Engineers completed the waterway in 1893, and their achievement is now admired annually by millions of tourists. God will miraculously create another canal from the "Great Sea" to the "Salt Sea."

The Unlimited Possessions ... A Decided Eruption

It would be impossible to overemphasize the far-reaching effects

of the eruption that will change the appearance of Israel. Dr. Paul l'ee Tan stated, "The wealth of the Dead Sea is so enormous as to be almost unbelievable. . . . After Jerusalem was captured in 1917 by General Allenby, a British geologist began to investigate the mineral riches of the Dead Sea. And the secret has come out Its tremendous reserve is estimated at 22 thousand million tons of magnesium chloride; 12 thousand million tons of common salt; 6 thousand million tons of calcium chloride; and 1 thousand million tons of magnesium bromide. The saleable value of these chemicals would come out at the staggering figure of \$1,270,000,000,000. This amount would be equal to the combined wealth of the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy" (see Encyclopedia of Illustrations, p. 627, Assurance Publishers, Rockville, MD). When the hand of God stirs that entire region and riches buried deep in the earth are brought to the surface, Israel's wealth will be beyond calculation.

'THE PROMISE OF BEING INCLUDED

"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. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels" (Mal. 3:16-17).

Malachi was a prophet commissioned by God to help Nehemiah in the task of restoring Jerusalem. The reformer, returning from Babylon, discovered corruption among the priests and people. The burden of caring for and leading the nation became too heavy for one man to carry. The prophet became a source of unfailing strength to his leader. He not only rebuked the compromising men in the temple, but he also encouraged faithful people. In spite of the apostasy which had ruined the nation, some remained true to the Lord and His laws (see the author's book Bible Gems, pp. 91-92, Kiegel

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Publications, Grand Rapids, MI).

God's Inspired People... "Thee' That Feared the Lord"

Nehemiab was encouraged to know that throughout the land were men and women who detested the actions of their religious leaders. They met at various locations to converse about the goodness of the Lord, and the Lord was pleased with their conversations. The word "often" should be emphasized; the people met and worshiped as often as they were able. At a much later time, the Savior referred to similar people as "the salt of the earth." They were wise. Paul would have appreciated them, for he said, "Whatsoever things are lovely. .. think on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

God's Important "A Book of Remembrance Was Written"

The book of remembrance was written, not to help God remember, but so that its existence would encourage the faithful to strive for even greater triumphs. Angels are interested in the affairs of earth and rejoice when people respond to the claims of Christ (see Luke 15:10). Evidently God's country is nearer to ours than some people imagine. The Living Bible translates Hebrews 12:1 as, "Since we have such a huge crowd of men of faith, watching us from the grandstands, let us strip off anything that slows us down, or holds us back"

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God's Invaluable "My Jewels"

God spoke of the time when He would make up His jewels. A better translation would be "when I display my special treasure." It is not known when this will take place. This is one of the unfulfilled promises of the Bible. Many people collect stamps, coins, works of art, or diamonds and other jewels which are very valuable. The Lord also has a collection of jewels which He purchased with His precious blood (see I Peter 1:18-19). The Savior is proud of His treasures and according to the text intends to display them before the assembled hosts of heaven. To be present at that display and to be a part of that unique treasure will be a privilege beyond comprehension. It has been claimed that one redeemed soul is worth more than the world. Perhaps the Savior's evaluation would be even higher. He believed that to obtain such a treasure, it was worth dying on the cross.

God's Immense Protection... "And They Shall Be Mine"

To protect their treasures, owners do amazing things. Diamonds are placed in vaults. Works of art are displayed in museums patrolled by guards, and even stamps and coins are carefully guarded. Collectors are pleased with their acquisitions and are proud of their possessions. Evidently the Savior has similar feelings. Sometimes,

His diamonds have flaws, but with the skill of an expert, He works on the blemishes. It is thrilling to know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him (see 1 John 3:1-2).

God's Inexhaustible Power... "I Will Spare Them..."

Malachi evidently believed God's judgments would overtake the false priests whose evil example had influenced the nation. Yet he predicted the Lord would protect His faithful servants. He compared an earthly parent with God, and his definition was new. The fatherhood of God was something which Jesus taught. Perhaps the prophet was preparing the way for the new concept. The Lord was not one to be feared but loved. The continuing affection for His

jewels guaranteed He would never forget them

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THE ANGELS WHO MADE A PROMISE

"Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

It was a solemn but delightful moment! The Lord had delivered His final message and had ascended into the heavens. The disciples watched His homegoing; one moment He was with them, the next He was gone. It could not be true, and yet it was! They were like men in a trance; then nearby voices aroused them "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?"

The late Dr. G. Campbell Morgan believed the two messengers were Moses and Elijah. He suggested that angels were always called "angels," hence the "two men clothed in white apparel" must have been human! His deduction is questionable for angels were sometimes called "men" (see Josh. 5:13; Mark 16:5). The interpretation is inconsequential because the message far exceeds the importance of the messengers. The angels were convinced of certain details.

The Disciples Were Sure of His Destination... Heaven

When Elijah was taken up by a whirlwind into heaven (see 2 Kings 2:11), the sons of the prophets which were at Jericho said, "Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the Spirit of the Lord hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley. And he (Elisha) said, Ye shall not send. And when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, Send. They sent therefore fifty men; and they sought three days, but found him not" (2 Kings 2:1-17).

The angels who spoke to the disciples had no such illusions. They knew where Christ had gone, and realized the importance of His mission. The writer to the Hebrews expressed the same truth, "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb. 9:24). The angels who had rejoiced at Christ's birth and witnessed to His resurrection knew that since the earthly phase of His work had been completed, the heavenly ministry was just beginning. He was to become the representative of His people before the throne of God. The disciples should not be gazing at clouds when there was much work to be done.

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They Were Sure of His Determination... To Return to Earth

"This same Jesus . . . shall so come." There was nothing new about the message, for the Savior had enunciated identical facts. He would be as a nobleman going into a far country but would certainly return. The Lord urged His followers to be diligent during His absence (see Luke 19:12-13). Throughout His ministry Christ repeatedly affirmed that the establishing of God's kingdom would be linked more with His second coming. He came first to redeem sinners; He promised to come again to claim those who responded to the Gospel. Jesus said, "And if I go

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and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3).

The angels were well-informed & They were aware of God's plans and helped to fulfill His purposes. They assured the disciples that Christ would return "in like manner, as ye have seen him go into heaven." That promise has never been fulfilled. It was true when the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost, but that did not fulfill what had been promised. He went up with a body which could be seen and handled (see 1 John 1:1). Furthermore, He ascended from the Mount of Olives to which, according to the prophet Zechariah, He will return (see Zech 14:4). If there be any meaning in the Bible, Christ must come back to earth.

They Were Sure of His Durability... "In Like Manner"

The angels promised that Christ would be seen "in like manner, as ye have seen him go into heaven." That statement was an affirmation of immortality and evidence that the glorious body of the Savior would be ageless, unchanging, and enduring. Even though almost 2,000 years would pass, the Lord would be unaltered. His face, hands, side, and general appearance would be the same. The prophet Zechariah said, "And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends (Zech. 13:6). That prediction has never been fulfilled. The time must come when the Lord will return in the clouds of heaven to be seen and heard by millions of people. Paul wrote, "at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11). The angels were correct when they said, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ" (Rev. 11:15). "And they shall see his face" (Rev. 22:4).

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