

*Spreading the Good News of the Coming Kingdom of God*

*January 2008*

# *Unshakeable Kingdom*



**Christmas -  
Is Christ "Into" It?**

# Unshakeable Kingdom

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Every year the entire world focuses on celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. But is it really His birth that is being celebrated? What was the original celebration that occurred during this time of year. Where did the familiar Christmas traditions originate? How did they become attached to the Christmas holiday? And the most important question of all: Does God approve?

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## FROM THE PASTOR...

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# Have You Met My Father?



I would like to introduce you to the Father—to the true God whom so many seem to have neglected, to the one who is the center of our worship—the Father of us all. That may sound unusual to you, but it is true that in many churches today, Jesus Christ is the center of worship, and the Father is relegated to a vague position in the Godhead. It is quite proper to worship Jesus Christ as our God and our Brother; however, one of the reasons the Father sent Jesus Christ to this earth was to reveal the Father to His children. “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” (Luke 10:22) The Father is the center of our lives.

The Father is the supreme authority of the Universe and under Him is His son, the head of the Church of God. Jesus recognized and taught that the Father was greater than He in authority. “If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father,’ for My Father is greater than I.” (John 14:28) They are co-equal in power and might, but the One who became Jesus Christ in order to die for us submitted Himself to the One who became the Father. This is to fulfill the plan of God in setting up His Kingdom under the government of God. This Government will be under the Father. “Then comes the end, when He (Jesus) delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He (Jesus) puts an end to all rule and all

authority and power. For He (Jesus) must reign till He (Jesus) has put all enemies under His (Jesus) feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For “He (The Father) has put all things under His (Jesus) feet.” But when He (the Father) says “all things are put under Him,” it is evident that He (the Father) who put all things under Him (Jesus) is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him (the Father), then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him (the Father) who put all things under Him that God may be all in all.” (1 Corinthians 15:24-28)

God’s Church is kept in His name. “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia:” (2 Corinthians 1:1) The Father is the Supreme Authority sitting on His throne in Heaven. Jesus is at His right hand. We are His sons and daughters and the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ His son. That is why when we pray, we start our prayers with “Our Father”. Never forget the Father in our prayers as He is our God just as Jesus is our Savior.

Ronald W. Laughland  
Pastor

# CHRISTMAS:



# 2,000 Years Before Christ!

By Clayton D. Steep

*If Christ were on earth today, would He be joining in with the Christmas festivities? Where did these traditions come from? It might surprise you to find out that these customs were already being celebrated...thousands of years before Christ was born!*

It was that festive season again. The little children were filled with anticipation and excitement.

The whole family was busy putting up decorations. Boughs of holly and evergreen were assembled and placed about the house. The mistletoe was hung. A tree was chosen and decorated with sparkling trinkets and ornaments.

It was a season of giving and re-

ceiving presents, a time to sing songs, admire all the pretty lights and burn the Yule log. There were to be parades with special floats, sumptuous meals and merrymaking.

A modern Christmas celebration? Not at all!

At the end of December and the beginning of January all these festive celebrations were taking place in various nations of Europe cen-

turies before Jesus Christ was born!

## **An "old fashioned" Christmas**

Where Christmas customs came from is really no secret. You can read the origins of Christmas customs in encyclopedias and other reference works.

The Encyclopedia Britannica, for example, draws attention to these facts: "Christmas customs are an

evolution from times that long antedate the Christian period—a descent from seasonal, pagan, religious and national practices, hedged about with legend and tradition.” (15th edition, article “Christmas”)

In ancient times, many people, realizing their dependence upon the sun for light, heat and the growing of crops, watched the sun’s yearly course through the heavens with deep interest. At different seasons, feasts and celebrations were observed to help, it was thought, the solar orb on its way.

The end of December was an especially significant time in the Northern Hemisphere. The days were short. The sun was at its lowest point. Special festivals of thanksgiving and encouragement to the sun were celebrated.

When, at the winter solstice, the days began to lengthen, there was great celebration lasting into the first part of January. The sun—the light of the world—had been (re)born!

Such festivities, once meant to honor the sun and its god, were freely adopted by the spreading and increasingly popular “Christian” religion. Why not, in the same way, honor Jesus—the real light of the world? Never mind the fact that He was not actually born in December.

Through the centuries different combinations of customs developed in different nations. But the fundamental origin of the celebrations goes back at least 4,000 years.

### Trees and candles

The modern Christmas tree is supposed to have originated in

German lands in the Middle Ages. But long before that, the ancestors of the Germans customarily decorated their homes with lights and greenery at the winter festival.

Since evergreens were green throughout the dead of winter, the ancient Germans looked upon them as especially imbued with life. It was in honor of the tree spirit or the spirit of growth and fertility that greenery was a prominent part of ancient pagan winter celebrations.

The Romans trimmed trees with



trinkets and toys at that time of the year. The Druids tied gilded apples to tree branches. It is difficult to trace back exactly where the legend first gained popularity, but to certain peoples an evergreen decorated with orbs and other fruit like objects symbolized the tree of life in the Garden of Eden.

Branches of holly and mistletoe were likewise revered. Not only did these plants remain green through the winter months, but they actually bore fruit at that time, once again honoring the spirits of fertility. Still today, catching someone under a branch of mistletoe can

serve as a convenient springboard for romantic activity. Few people stop to wonder what in the world such strange customs have to do with the birth of Jesus.

The ancients lit festive fires in late December to encourage the sun, just as Christmas bonfires, candles and other lights burn today at the same time of the year. Use of the “Yule log,” part of the “Yuletide” season, hearkens back to the ritual burning of a carefully chosen log by the Druids. The word yule comes from the old Anglo-Saxon word hweol, meaning “wheel,” a wheel being an appropriate symbol for the sun.

### Holiday cheer?

You thought the Christmas shopping spree was a 20th-century phenomenon?

Listen to how fourth century writer Libanius described end-of-the-year gift-giving and partying in the ancient non-Christian Roman Empire: “Everywhere may be seen...well-laden tables...The impulse to spend seizes everyone. He who through the whole year has taken pleasure in saving...becomes suddenly extravagant. A stream of presents pours itself out on all sides.” (quoted in Christmas in Ritual and Tradition)

Of all times in the year, it was indeed the season to be jolly. Then, as now, in a constant round of partying, it was common—yes, expected—to seek the “spirit” of the season in whatever intoxicating drink was at hand. Drunkenness was widespread. Fortunately, however, the modes of transportation in those days did not lend themselves to the high rate of drunken-driver-induced traffic fa-

talities that are part of the Christmas season in many nations today.

### And Santa Claus?

An important part of the pagan harvest festivities—beginning in October-November with what has become Halloween—involved good and bad spirits. In many lands, mythical visitors—usually bringers of good or evil—became the center of attention in the winter season. Through blending pagan legends with traditions about saints, certain similar figures emerged.

We recognize them today in different nations as Santa Claus, Father Christmas, St. Nicholas, St. Martin, the Weihnachtsmann, Pere Noel. Whatever name is used, all these winter visitors fulfill a similar role.

These fictional persons—“Christianizations” of the pagan Germanic deities—perpetuate certain folk rituals wherein varying degrees of rewards and punishments were dealt out to celebrants.

Through the centuries these customs came to be centered around children.

It is not hard to see a connection between Santa using the chimney,



the shoes and stockings hung by the fireplace and the ancient superstitions about hearth spirits. The fireplace served as the natural entrance and exit of the gods of fire and solar gods when they visited homes. For thousands of years, especially among the Chinese, it was customary to sweep and scour the house in preparation for the visit of the hearth spirit.

Each year, dressed in a pointed fiery red cap and red jacket, this

fire-god traveled from the distant heavens to visit homes and distribute favors or punishments. Today he is welcomed in the Western world each Christmas season.

Popular Christmas customs, as we can see, plainly reflect non-Christian legends and practices. Since Jesus was not even born in December to begin with, the logical question to ask is: What is there that is Christian about Christmas?

Did you know, for example, that some of the very Christmas customs observed today were once banned by the Catholic Council of Rome, the English Parliament and the Puritans of New England?

More important, what does the Bible say about Christmas? Should a Christian have anything to do with such holidays? For the answers write for your free copy of our booklet *The Plain Truth About Christmas*. See the request form (below) for more details on this and other free booklets. □

**The booklets listed below contain more information on related subjects that have been covered in this issue, and are offered FREE by the Sabbath-keeping churches of God. Please check the ones you desire and mail to the address below:**

- “The Plain Truth About Christmas” - Where did we get Christmas?...from the Bible, or paganism?** Here are astonishing FACTS which may shock you! Do you know the origin of the Christmas tree—of “Santa Claus”?
- “What do you Mean...SALVATION?”** - Do you realize not one in a hundred knows what it is—how to get it—when you receive it? Don’t be too sure you do!
- “Why Were You BORN?”** - Do you really know why you were born? Do you realize God has a purpose being worked out?

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# Rejoice...In Thy Youth!

By Tony L. Styer

*Does God expect teens, filled with youthful energy, to allow life to pass them by while adhering to His law? The answer might surprise you!*

**A**s a young man or young woman who knows the truth of God, you basically have two choices.

You can either do what is right and live a boring life of obeying God's laws. Or you can throw the truth of God out the window, and have fun! Right?

Wrong!

For some reason, living God's way is sometimes perceived to be uninteresting and boring...as if God's laws are designed to prevent us from having any fun. Yet, nothing could be further from the truth!

God created for us an entire world to enjoy. He filled it with things for us to do: exploring, hunting, hiking, climbing and so

much more. He also created us with minds that are capable of inventing even more things to do: sporting games to play, vehicles to drive, airplanes to fly...the possibilities are endless!

God says, "All of this is yours; use it, and enjoy it." Genesis 1:26 tells us that God gave man dominion...that means "power" or "authority"...over all animals, fish, birds...and over the entire earth.

Then God told us, "I only have ten rules for you to follow". He gave us the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17). But as long as we stay within those ten rules, we are free to use and enjoy anything and everything God put on this earth for us!

Stop and ask yourself for a mo-

ment, why did God create rules anyway? Are they there just to keep us from enjoying life? Did God place all of the "fun stuff" off limits, so He could watch us yearn for things we aren't allowed to do? Is He just trying to test us, to see whether or not we'll obey Him?

Actually, God had a very good reason for each and every one of these Ten Commandments.

The first four are there so that we will show proper love and honor to Him, our Creator. One day we will be a part of the God family...but in order to take on God's name, we must love and honor our Father.

The next six commandments were given so that we don't hurt

ourselves...and to prevent our hurting other people around us.

In fact, when Jesus Christ came to this earth, He summed up all Ten Commandments in just that way: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30-31, paraphrased).

God gave us these rules to make our lives even *more* enjoyable! He didn’t want us to suffer the penalties that come when we don’t show love—meaning outgoing concern—for others.

God talked directly to teenagers in the book of Ecclesiastes. Let’s read what Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 11:9: “Rejoice, O young man, in your youth...” (this applies to young women as well) “and let your heart cheer you...walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes:”

In other words, *have fun!* ENJOY your youth! Branch out...try new things! *Party* a little bit!

But Solomon continues with a warning...“but know that, for all these, God will bring you into judgment.”

In other words, have fun...but be aware that when God’s laws are broken, there will be consequences!

There is an old saying that goes “Fun is only fun if it’s still fun the next day.” But if sin is involved, the fun disappears!

Getting into a car full of friends who are drinking might seem like fun at the time. But a car accident could get all of you killed, or crippled.

Having sex before marriage may seem enjoyable at the time. But an unwanted pregnancy could

alter your entire life. In fact, the very act of having sex before marriage will harm and cheapen your future marriage. Not to mention that you could end up with a sexually transmittable disease that would eventually kill you.

Taking drugs might seem relaxing and entertaining...but drugs harm your mind and remove your sense of purpose in life. And again...drugs can kill you.

### Youth is temporary

Solomon adds one more warning as well: “Therefore remove



sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.”

Vanity, in this case means “temporary”. Your youth will one day end; you will grow older, and the feeling of invulnerability will vanish. And when you’ve grown older, the seeds you are sowing right now will have grown. You will have to live with the consequences.

God is telling us, “Have fun in the *right* ways, *within* My laws.”

But does this mean you are risking “missing out” on the best parts of human life?

Not at all. Christ gave us a promise: “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it *more*

*abundantly*” (John 10:10). God’s way of life brings *more* happiness and fulfillment...not less.

You don’t need drugs or alcohol to “get high”. There are natural highs...the kind that God created. Spend a night camping with friends under a star-filled sky. Challenge yourself by learning rock-climbing or spelunking. Try backpacking into the wilderness, to witness the beauty God has created. Seek out sporting activities that won’t interfere with the Sabbath. You might be surprised with the opportunities you’ll find.

Build Godly friendships—friendships that are based on true concern for one another. These will lead to happiness throughout your entire life...in your marriage, in your job, and in your future relationships.

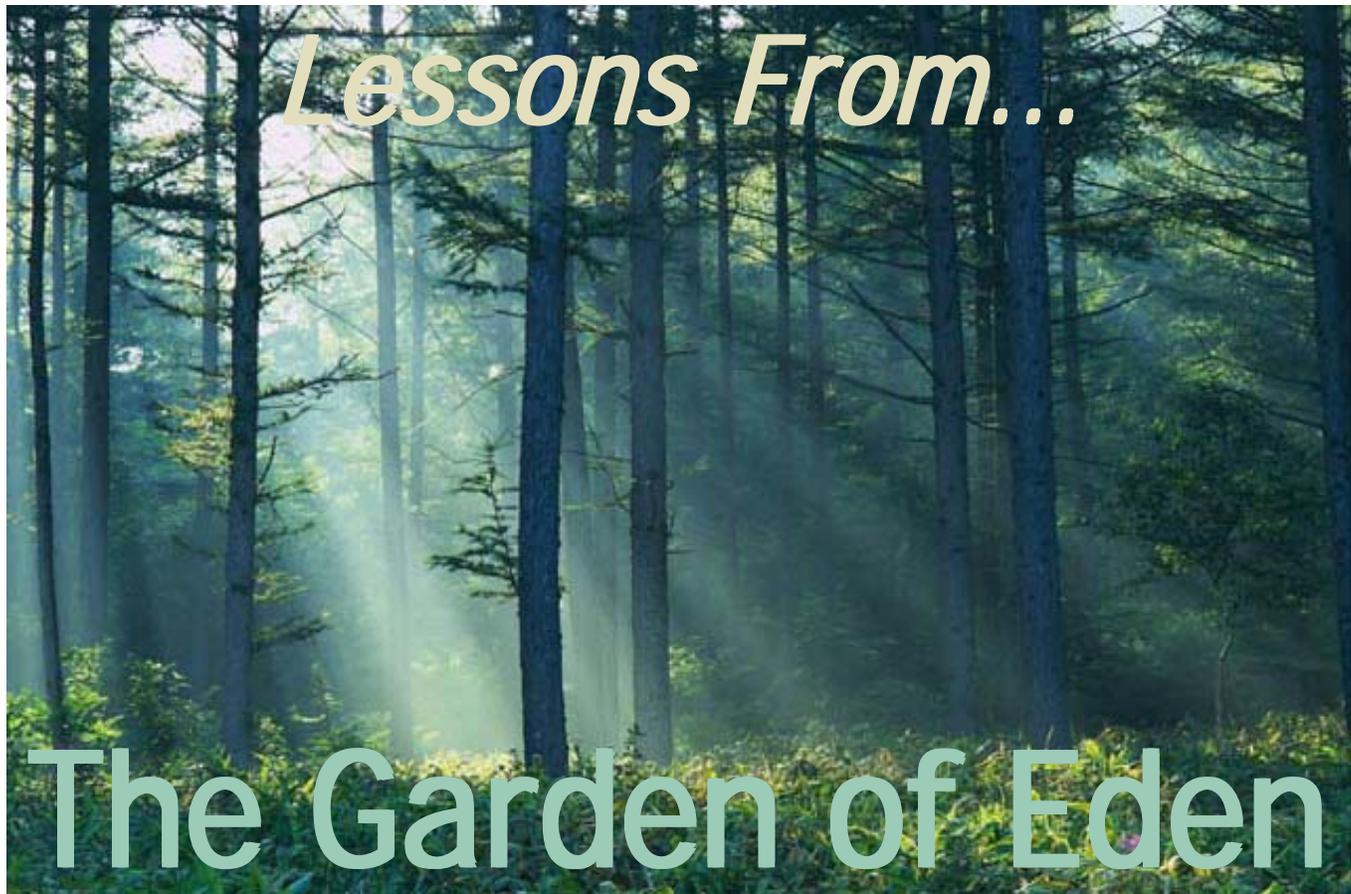
And in the end, there is an even greater payoff!

One day, if we yield our lives to God, we will be in God’s Kingdom. And that’s when the fun *really* starts!

Do you think God is bored? That He has created pleasures for us that are better than what He has?

God tells us in Isaiah 65:17, “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.” The future that God has prepared for us will be so wonderful, so filled with pleasures, that even the best things about this current life will be totally forgotten!

So enjoy your teenage years. But enjoy them in the right way...so that you can have true happiness now, in this life...but even more important, so you can one day know the type of joy that God knows! □



By Ronald W. Laughland

**R**ecently watching a television presentation of stories from the Bible that described it as a series of made up tales was more than a little disturbing. It questioned whether the Hebrews had concocted these stories merely as spiritual lessons or had plagiarized them from other cultures. It would have been laughable except that the program presented its producers' beliefs as fact when no real facts were presented to prove their case. The Bible was represented as just a collection of fairy tales—especially the story of the Garden of Eden. They said there was no other explanation of the stories in Genesis chapters one through four.

It is apparent that they just do not know. It has not been revealed

to them. What makes their lies so heinous is that many will believe the suppositions as the truth, which will drive them even further from knowing God. Let us talk about the truth and what the Bible really says.

Let us look at what the story of Genesis presents as the beginning of mankind's life on earth. We will assume that the Bible is just what it purports to be—the story of creation—and see if it makes any sense today.

The story of what happened to mankind starts in Genesis 1:26. God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness." He then gave them power over the whole earth. "Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and

over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

Chapter one of Genesis is an overview of the creation week. In Genesis 2 we see an expanded version of what happen at the creation of man and woman. God placed Adam and Eve in a Garden located in what is now know as the Middle East. He provided plenty of food for survival. He commanded them to cultivate and take care of the beautiful garden. He gave them every good thing for ease of living and happiness in a beautiful garden—a paradise!

God then devised a simple and easy test for Adam and Eve to see if they would obey Him. They could pass this test by making the right decision. "Then the LORD

God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Genesis 2:15-17)

Why would He devise a test like this? What purpose would it serve?

God is Eternal; He has always existed. He knows how to live and what produces happiness and the right way of life—like a physical father telling his son or daughter "if you obey me and do as I say, I can teach you how to have a happy life." The tree of life, symbolically, was the tree that, if chosen, would produce a life of the same happiness, joy and character that God possesses. The right decision would be to follow the revelation of the right way of life rather than taking what seemed good to man.

Instead, man made the decision to follow another option given by "the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan" (Revelation 20:2). By taking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, mankind took to itself—from that point on—the determination of what is good and what is evil. Human beings decided to live by experimentation rather than revelation from the Father. Life is a series of choices. One may choose to make one's decisions by what feels good to the individual, what looks good, or what one thinks is the right way to live. "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise,

she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate." (Genesis 3:6)

Eve was deceived by the Serpent—Satan the Devil. But Adam was not deceived. God had given

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*Mankind took to itself the determination of what is good and what is evil.*

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him personal instruction as to what he should do and what he should not do. He explained the consequences. But Adam decided for himself, under pressure from his wife, to follow a freely chosen course of action. Then he tried to blame her and God for his sin. Human nature, rather the nature of God, took hold in this world. "Then the man said, 'The woman



whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.' And the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'" (Genesis 3:12-13)

Blame-placing and accusing

others became a part of the foundation of this world. The acquired human nature leaves the descendants of those who made that fateful choice with individual attitudes that aggrandize self. "I am good.

These others are all wrong. I made my choice, but I don't want to pay for my sins. I don't care about others. I just want to do what I want to do. I have to look out for myself. I am number one, and I will hurt anyone just to get my way and be happy as I see it." This nature, in reality, is the nature of Satan.

How does this decision by Adam affect us today? The older generation teaches the younger generation; therefore, the good and evil that the elders choose they teach to the next generation. They teach not only by designed instruction but also by example. The example Adam and Eve set is the leading factor in the self-involved way children are today as are their parents who grew up in this world's system of child-rearing.

The lessons from the Garden of Eden are many. Evolution teaches that man is merely a highly evolved animal who responds to stimuli in a way controlled by our animal nature. Mankind lives the way of life that feels good to them and what appears to be good for their own well-being. Therefore, if we are just a highly evolved animal, there is no life after this life. Mankind must have every good thing now. As the Bible teaches, "If the dead do not rise, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!'" (1 Corinthians 15:32)

Do you want to follow Satan's nature and die or follow God's nature and live? □



# The United States & Britain in Prophecy

## Chapter 1—Could Prophecy Ignore Us?

By Herbert W. Armstrong

*Beginning with this issue, we will be reprinting this eye-opening and important booklet as it was first published in 1945.*

**W**here is the United States mentioned in Bible prophecies or are we mentioned at all? We are the wealthiest of nations and the most powerful. Could prophecy ignore us?

Consider, too, our people today constitute the HOME—the last defense, of Christianity. It is *our* people who have printed and distributed the Bible by unbelievable millions of copies in the languages of all peoples.

We know Bible prophecies definitely refer to Russia, Germany, Italy, Turkey, Ethiopia, Libya, and Egypt, of today. *Could* they then, ignore modern nations like Britain and America? Is it reasonable? Assuredly, it is not. Nor *are* we ignored. The fact is, we are men-

tioned more often than any other race. Yet our prophetic identity has remained hidden to the many.

Modern nations are not spoken of in their modern names, except in few cases. Usually they are referred to by the names of the ancient ancestor from which they sprang.

Thus, Turkey is referred to in prophecy as *Esau* or *Edam* because the Turks are the descendants of Esau. In like manner, the Arabs are spoken of as Ishmael; the Russians are Magog.

The Bible story of *our* ancestry and our modern prophetic identity is the most amazing—yes, astounding—the most fascinating and interesting story ever told. It is really the story thread of the

Bible itself, from Genesis to Revelation.

### Promised to Abraham

Centuries ago, this same wealth and power and national greatness was promised by the Almighty God to Abraham. Yet few have ever noticed this astonishing fact of scripture.

The promise of the Messiah and of salvation through Him is well known by the most superficial Bible student. They know that God gave the spiritual promise to Abraham of Christ to be born as Abraham's descendant—and that salvation comes to us through Christ. But God made also another, entirely different, most amazing promise to Abraham. Notice how

God called Abraham and the twofold nature of His promise: “Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee: and *I will make of thee a GREAT NATION*...and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Gen.12:1-3).

Notice the TWOFOLD promise: “I will make of thee A GREAT NATION”—the national, material promise that his flesh-born children should become a great nation—a promise of RACE; 2) “...and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed”—the spiritual promise of GRACE.

The same promise is repeated in Genesis 22:18: “And in *thy seed* shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” This particular “one seed” refers to Christ, as plainly affirmed in Galatians 3:8, 16.

### Race, as well as grace

But that the “great nation” promised refers alone to race—not to the *one* seed, Christ, but to the plural, multiple seed of natural fleshly birth, is made certain by God’s repetition of His promise in greater detail later.

“And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, *and will multiply thee exceedingly...and thou shalt be a father of MANY NATIONS*. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of MANY NATIONS have I made thee” (Gen. 17:1-5).

Notice, the promise is now CON-

DITIONAL upon Abraham’s obedience and perfect living. Notice, the “great nation” now becomes MANY NATIONS—*more* than one nation. This cannot refer to the “one seed,” Christ. The following verses prove



that. “And *I will make thee exceedingly fruitful*, and I will make NATIONS of thee, and KINGS (more than one) shall come out of thee” (v. 6). Notice, these nations and kings shall *come out of Abraham*—physical generations—multiple seed, not just one descendent *through whom* scattered individuals *may* become Abraham’s children by spiritual begetting through Christ (Gal. 3:29). The scattered, individual Christians do not form NATIONS. The Church, it is true, is spoken of as “a royal priesthood, an holy nation” (I Peter 2:9), but Christ’s Church is not divided into “many nations.” This is speaking of RACE, not grace.

“And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in THEIR generations...” (Gen. 17:7). The “seed” is PLURAL—“in their generations.”

“And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, *the land* wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan (Palestine), for an everlasting possession; and I will be THEIR God” (v. 8).

Notice, the LAND—material possession—is promised to the PLURAL seed, of whom He is

“their,” not “his,” God. The plural pronoun “their” is used again in verse 9: “And thy seed after thee in *their* generations.”

### Not fulfilled in Judah

Again, notice carefully—Judah has never been more than *one nation*. They are not, and never have been, MANY nations.

So here is an amazing prophecy, a solemn promise from Almighty God, that could not be fulfilled in Christ, in Christians, nor in the Jewish people. We must look for a number of NATIONS apart from either the Church or the Jewish people. Amazing as it is, we must do it or deny God’s promise!

God put Abraham to the test, and Abraham, *through faith*, OBEYED—even to being willing to sacrifice his only son, if need be. And after that the covenant no longer was conditional. Now it became UNCONDITIONAL.

“*By myself have I sworn*, saith the Lord, for BECAUSE thou *hast done* this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; *and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies* (so far the material, national promises of RACE); and in thy seed (Christ) shall all the nations of the earth be blessed (this promise spiritual, of GRACE); BECAUSE thou *hast obeyed my voice*” (Gen. 22:16-18). The promise now is unconditional.

God has SWORN to make it good. God does not promise these things if Abraham or his children do certain things. He promises them to Abraham because he already has performed his part of the agree-

ment. If these promises could be broken or annulled, then no promise in the Bible is sure! Abraham already *has performed* his part of the agreement. Now God MUST perform His part, without fail.

Notice an additional detail of the promise—the nations who are Abraham’s racial descendants are to possess the gates of their enemies. A gate is a narrow passage of entrance or exit. When speaking nationally, a “gate” would be such a pass as the Panama Canal, the Suez Canal, and the Straits of Gibraltar. This promise is repeated in Genesis 24:60.

### A company of nations

These tremendous promises were repromised to Isaac and to Jacob. Ishmael and Abraham’s other sons were rejected from this birthright. Esau, Isaac’s son and Jacob’s twin brother, sold it and was rejected. The promise, as *confirmed* to Isaac, is recorded in Genesis 26:1-5. To Jacob in Genesis 27:26-29, where MATERIAL blessing of wealth in the things of the ground is added, with the prophecy that heathen nations shall *be ruled* by the birthright nations of Israel and again in Genesis 28:13-14, where the still added detail that these nations of Israel shall eventually spread around the world is recorded.

Still later, God appeared unto Jacob, whose name was changed to ISRAEL, even further defining the makeup of these “many nations” thus: “And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; A NATION and a COMPANY OF NATIONS shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins” (Gen. 35:11).

So the “many nations” are even-

tually to take shape as a nation—One great, wealthy, powerful nation; and another COMPANY OF NATIONS—a group, or commonwealth of nations allied.

This promise never has been fulfilled in the Jewish people. It could not pertain to the Church, for there is but ONE true Church acknowledged in the Bible, and it is not a nation or a group of nations, but a collection of called-out individuals scattered through ALL nations. Yet this amazing promise MUST stand fulfilled, unless we are to deny the Bible and God’s sacred Word!

### The birthright and scepter

Now we come to a most vital distinction, and a bit of Bible truth, known to but very few. Note it carefully.

The *spiritual* promises—the promise of the “one seed,” Christ, and of salvation through Him—the Bible calls “the SCEPTER.” This promise as nearly everybody knows, was handed down through the Jewish people. Jesus Christ was of the tribe of Judah and the house of David. “*Salvation*,” Jesus said, “is of the Jews” (John 4:22). “To the Jew first,” explained Paul, “and



also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).

This fact is confirmed in Genesis 49:10: “The SCEPTER shall not depart from Judah.”

BUT—and here is the astonishing vital fact so few ever seem to

have noticed—“but the BIRTHRIGHT was *Joseph’s*.” Yes, Joseph, who was sold by his brothers down into Egypt, where he became food administrator and prime minister—Joseph who was called “a *prosperous* man,” even as his descendants were destined to become. “For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler (scepter promise); *BUT the birthright was Joseph’s*” (I Chron. 5:2).

The birthright, which Esau sold to Jacob—the promise of national greatness and material wealth—never was handed to the Jewish people, who are of the tribe of JUDAH. So naturally we should not expect to find this promise fulfilled in the Jewish people today.

### The birthright is Joseph’s

And just what is a *birthright*? It is that which comes by right of birth. The term “grace” means undeserved, unmerited favor something that is NOT one’s right, NOT inherited by birth, but bestowed as a *free gift*. But a “birthright” is inherited, by birth, as one’s RIGHT. Consequently, the term “birthright” includes only the inheritance of MATERIAL blessings, passed on from father to son—those blessings one cannot take with him, when he dies.

And what is a “scepter”? It is the badge of royal power, kingly office. The scepter was God’s promise of a continuous dynasty of KINGS, culminating in Jesus Christ who shall be King of kings; and therefore the scepter included the promise of eternal salvation THROUGH Christ.

So notice carefully, the *scepter*, which is the spiritual promise of GRACE, through which ALL nations

may be blessed, went to JUDAH, while the BIRTHRIGHT went to JOSEPH. And the birthright includes possession of the land, Palestine, possessing the material “gate” of material enemies, inheriting their land and ruling over them, spreading and colonizing around the world! The two phases of the promises to Abraham now are separated into *two different tribes* of Israel!

The interesting story of the passing on of this birthright from the aged Israel to the two sons of Joseph is found in the 48<sup>th</sup> chapter of Genesis. You should read it there, entirely.

Notice, Jacob adopted these two lads, Ephraim and Manasseh, as his own legal sons because they had an Egyptian mother. Notice, verse 16, he says, “let *my name* be named on *them*.” Hence, THEY were to be called, “the house of Israel.” It is THEY who rightfully own the name of ISRAEL, *not* Judah! “...and let THEM grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth,” continues Jacob, administering the blessing. Let WHO grow into that promised multitude? Notice it—NOT Judah, *not* the Jewish people—but the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh and THEIR DESCENDANTS.

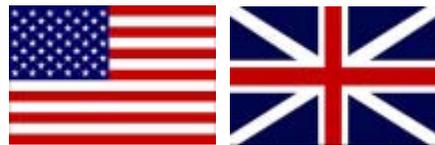
Together they were to grow to a multitude. But eventually, as indicated by another prophecy, Isaiah 49:20, to be explained later, the descendants of these two lads were to separate, and Ephraim would lose Manasseh, then to become a separate nation. So, continuing, speaking of Manasseh, Jacob said, “*he also shall become a people, and he also shall be GREAT: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a mul-*

*titude* (or a company or commonwealth) *of nations*” (v. 19).

And so EPHRAIM and MANASSEH, the sons of Joseph became the BIRTHRIGHT holders. Who, today, are the descendants of Ephraim, and of Manasseh? Somewhere, Ephraim must be a group, or commonwealth of nations, while Manasseh must be the greatest single nation on earth! Either it is so, or the Bible is not true!

### David takes the throne

After the death of Jacob and his twelve sons in Egypt, their children grew in about two and a quarter centuries to a population probably between two and three million in that land. But Israel’s children became slaves (Exod. 1:6-14). Then God raised up MOSES and fitted him in a



special way to lead these children of Israel out of the bondage that had come to them in Egypt.

When they reached Mt. Sinai, in the peninsula wilderness, God made a covenant with them establishing them as a NATION, *His* nation—among the kingdoms of the world. Their government was theocratic, with the civil, as well as the spiritual and religious laws, given directly from God. God Himself was their King and He ruled them by a system of judges.

But soon the Israelites became dissatisfied with God as their King and demanded that a *man* should be their king as in the Gentile nations around them. And so God gave them Saul as their first human king. Saul, however, was not a good king, nor was his heart right

with God. He refused obedience to God and was finally rejected. Saul was dethroned. His dynasty ended with him.

Then God placed David, a man after His own heart, of no relationship to Saul, upon the throne of Israel. David sat on the *Eternal’s throne*. Because of his obedience and sincerity and honesty of heart, David, like Abraham, received a most astonishing UNCONDITIONAL promise from God, as little known as the birthright promises to Abraham.

### The Davidic covenant

We have space to quote but briefly from the scriptures setting forth this amazing Davidic covenant. Like the covenant with Abraham, God made the Davidic covenant unconditional and unbreakable.

David wanted to build a great temple as God’s house in Jerusalem. The Almighty replied, “And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shall sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom” (II Sam. 7:12). This, of course, was his son Solomon, who succeeded David to the throne.

“He,” God continued, “shall build a house for my name”—and it was Solomon who did build the temple—“and *I will establish the throne of his kingdom FOREVER*” (v. 13).

Notice it! The throne of David, occupied by Solomon, was to be established FOREVER! If that throne ever ceased to exist, then God’s promise has failed!

But some say that promise was conditioned upon the obedience of

Solomon and the future line of kings or their people. Notice the scriptural answer to this: “I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commits iniquity, *I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men*: yes, notice this BUT—“my mercy shall not depart away from him, AS I *took it from Saul*, whom I put away before thee” (v. 14-15). Saul’s dynasty ceased. God promises He will never take away this throne from David’s line in this manner. David’s dynasty SHALL NEVER CEASE! Continuing, next verse, “And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established FOR EVER before thee: *thy throne shall be established FOR EVER.*”

### Through all generations

Not only was that throne established FOREVER, it was to exist *continuously* forever—through ALL GENERATIONS!

“I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, *Thy seed* (his dynasty) will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations” (Ps. 89:3-4). Note it! That throne was to stand forever “as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven” (v. 28-37).

“For thus saith the Lord; David shall *never* want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel” (Jer. 33:17). So far as is historically known, the last king of David’s dynasty to sit upon that throne was King Zedekiah of Judah, who died in 585 B.C. with the Jewish nation a captive people, with all his sons, and all the nobles of Judah killed. There is no historic record of any continuance of that throne from that year. *Did* David want for a man to

sit upon his throne, and continue his dynasty, from that day on?

Some say Christ took over the throne. But He didn’t. Instead He was crucified, resurrected, and ascended to heaven. He SHALL come, and soon now, to sit upon that throne as the King of kings and Lord of lords. But HOW can Jesus Christ, when He returns again to earth, take over and sit upon a throne that long ago ceased to exist?

### No throne for Christ?

IF the throne of David ceased with Zedekiah, then it does not exist today. And if it does not exist, *how shall Christ sit upon a nonexistent throne?* And, since it was to continue through *all* generations, how about those many

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### *If the throne of David ceased with Zedekiah, how will Christ sit on a non-existent throne?*

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generations between Zedekiah and the birth of Jesus?

“Thus saith the Lord; If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; *then* may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne” (Jer. 33:20-21). Day and night still continues. Does David’s throne?

But what do *the people say?* “Considerest thou not what this people have spoken, saying, The two families which the Lord hath chosen, he hath even cast them off? Thus they have despised my people, that they should be no more a nation be-

fore them” (v. 24). But what does GOD say? “Thus saith the Lord; If my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; THEN will I cast away the seed of Jacob, and David my servant, so that I will not take any of his seed (dynasty) to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (vv. 25-26). Strong words, those! Unless you can stop this old earth from turning on its axis—unless you can remove the sun and moon and stars from heaven, says the Almighty God, you cannot prevent Him from keeping His covenant to maintain *continuously, through all generations*, FOREVER, from the time of David and Solomon, a descendant of David in one continuous dynasty on that throne!

He would not necessarily rule over ALL the house of Israel, or the Jewish people—but at least some of them, and enough to form a nation.

Remember again, the SCEPTER promise, which includes this line of kings until it culminates in CHRIST at His second coming: “The scepter *shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver* (margin, ruler’s staff) *from between his feet, UNTIL SHILOH* (Christ) *COME*; and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen. 49:10).

### The test of Bible truth

*Has* the scepter departed from Judah? *Has* the throne ceased? Or does it, as God so bindingly promised, exist today so that Christ can take over and sit upon a functioning, continuous throne when He comes? The infallibility of the Bible is at stake! God’s WORD is at stake. □

# Coming Next Issue...



## *The Meaning of Passover*

*...How Is It Important To Us?*



## *Easter...*

*...Where It Really Came From!*



## *True Repentance...*

*...What Does It Mean?*



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