

Fall 2020 Newsletter
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PEACE ON EARTH

“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” Luke 2:13,14

Very shortly we will be entering what has been for most people a pleasant holiday season, but has there ever been a year like this in these United States? Think of what the last months have seen in American cities! Unprecedented restrictions on people’s movements, social isolation, schools closing, churches adopting virtual services, mandatory closing of businesses not deemed “essential,” loss of jobs, and general fear of contagion from the COVID-19 virus. Stress on every hand, senseless killings, angry demonstrations in American cities, looting in Chicago and other cities, businesses closing their doors permanently because of inability to survive the long shutdowns, wildfires throughout the west from California to Washington destroying vast tracts of forestland as well as homes and businesses in their paths, hurricanes menacing the Gulf states.

The whole world is reeling under similar conditions. Travel between countries is narrowly proscribed or prohibited and transportation and tourist industries are staggering under their losses. In addition, a dozen insurgencies (warring or terrorist groups) are currently active in several parts of the world. But topping all these considerations, is the death toll from the COVID-19 contagion which as of this writing, October 12, 2020, had reached 1,074,817 globally. No country is exempt.

Will fear of contagion dim the festive atmosphere of the coming season? Most people are hoping for the warmth and joy of holidays past, but under the shadow of COVID, many people are

wondering if the holidays will be dismal, lonely times. Will families be able to gather safely? Should we rethink our participation?

In contemplating the three holidays that come in quick succession at year’s end, it is ironic that of the three, the first is dedicated to Satan and all things evil and ugly. Satan, whose very name means “opposer” was the one who brought sin into the world and with it the evils under which we stagger. Jesus called Satan “the prince of this world.” (John 12:31) and the Apostle Paul echoed his words calling him “the god of this world.” (2 Cor. 4:4) Every kind of evil assailing mankind and every act of inhumanity to man has its basis in Satan’s lie, “you will not surely die.” His lie is further seen in Hallowe’en’s roots in the Druidic and Celtic fire festivals of Samhain (pronounced sow-hen) when the dead were said to walk among the living and the veils between past, present and future could be lifted. Jesus called Satan “the devil” and said, “He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth...for he is a liar, and the father of it.” (John 8:44)



The fascination with spiritism, zombies, and the dark arts is rampant in today’s world. Was Satan always a creature of darkness and evil? The name Satan, meaning “opposer” or “opponent” became the name of the angel Lucifer when he

rebelled against God in Eden. Using the symbol of “king of Tyre,” the prophet Ezekiel described the angelic beauty of Lucifer by the inspiration of the holy Spirit. “You have been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, the ruby, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the turquoise, and the emerald, and gold....You were the anointed cherub that covers [that had the care of the first couple], and I had put you in the holy height of God where you were [in the heavenly courts]; you have walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire [stars]. You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, until iniquity was found in you...Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you have spoiled your wisdom because of your brightness.” (Ezek.28:13-17)

For Lucifer, however, it wasn't enough to act as God's agent in caring for the human pair in Eden. He saw the veneration God received from the human pair and plotted the means to steal their devotion for himself. Pride made Lucifer covet the place of God which he sought to take by usurpation. The Prophet Isaiah gives us more of his story. “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.” (Isa. 14:12-14)

So, in the form of a serpent, *Satan* [Lucifer] tempted Eve to disobey God's one restriction with a truth and a lie: the truth—that she would obtain a knowledge of evil to add to her knowledge of good; the lie—that she would not die. Adam, perhaps dreading being once again alone, joined Eve in her sin, thereby bringing God's penalty upon themselves and their entire race. (1 Tim. 2:14) Mankind has been learning the lesson of evil under Satan's reign for more than 6,000 years. All the wars, famines, diseases, pains and sorrows of life are part of the wages of sin, as well as its ultimate penalty, death. God in his wisdom has allowed man to struggle with these things so that, ultimately, they will appreciate the desirability of choosing good.

The character of Satan is contrasted with the character of Jesus in Philippians 2:5-8 (*English Standard Bible*): “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

God's abounding love for the fallen human race prompted him to send his own beloved Son into the world that he might be their Savior. (John 3:16; 1 John 4:14) At Jesus' birth, the angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward man.” (Luke 2:14) Yes, praise and glory to God for his

most unspeakable gift, his only begotten Son, and for God's good will manifested to man! (John 3:16)

Christmas is considered by Christians to be the birthday of Jesus. Most Biblical scholars would admit, the actual date of Jesus' birth was probably not on December 25, but more nearly in early October. As Christianity began to spread throughout the pagan Roman world, the historian Will Durant observed that the church “grew by the absorption of pagan faith and ritual” redefining them in a Christian context.(Caesar and Christ, p.575) The pagans celebrated December 25 as the day of the virgin birth of Mithras, a Zoroastrian god who, it was believed, was sent to save the world. Another popular holiday also celebrated at around the



same time was the Saturnalia, a time of drinking, revelry, gift-giving, bonfires, and candles. The ancient Druids also celebrated the winter solstice which occurs around December 21 with mistletoe and yule logs. It is easy to see the origin of some of our modern Christmas traditions in these ancient festivals. Sadly, for most people today, the holiday has become more about Santa Claus, Christmas trees and presents, than about the birth of the Savior of the world.

Although December 25 may not be the proper day for celebrating the birth of our dear Redeemer, nevertheless, since He did not express His desire that we should celebrate His birthday, it is quite immaterial upon what day that event, of so great importance to all, is celebrated. Upon this day, so generally celebrated, we may properly enough join with all whose hearts are in the attitude of love and appreciation toward God and toward the Savior. The habit of giving little remembrances one to another at this time of year seems especially appropriate. God is the giver of every good and perfect gift.(James 1:17) He is continually giving, and we are continually receiving from Him; but amongst all His gifts the one of greatest importance to us is the gift of His Son to be our Redeemer.

The Bible's hope for all mankind is a resurrection out of death, The Apostle Paul wrote that “the wages of sin is death, but the **gift of God is eternal life** through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom.6:23) For Jesus to become man's redeemer and to provide salvation out of death, it was necessary for him to become a man. (Heb.2:14, 9) This was accomplished by his being born of a human mother. He must also be a perfect man, not under the Adamic curse, so his father could not be anyone from Adam's race. Therefore, God formed in Mary's womb a perfect embryo, fully human, but separate from the Adamic line and untouched by the curse because he was God's own son. (John 14:2; 16:10)

Of God's salvation the angels sang, “Peace, good will toward men.” But two thousand years has passed since the angels sang their song of Peace. Where is the peace that was promised?

The song of the angels at the time of Christ's birth was a prophecy of God's plan for man. Short-sighted men failing to understand the prophetic nature of the promise, have rearranged the words of the angel's song from "Peace on earth, good will to men" to "peace on earth to men of good will." These modern writers fail to see that it has been clearly demonstrated that men of good will have suffered long and hard at the hands of the scheming and ambitious. The prophet Jeremiah lamented, "Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?" (Jer. 12:1) The Psalmist also observed, "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree." (Psalm 37:35) A quick look around the world today will confirm that there is trouble on every hand and wickedness thrives. So, will the promised peace never come?

The disciples asked Jesus how they would know that he had returned and the time for the establishment of his Kingdom and the end of this age had come. Matthew 24 records Jesus' words. Among the many experiences he told them to expect, Jesus said, "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." (v.21,22) Daniel also prophesied of "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time..." (Daniel 12:1) Are we close? Is the current virus the trouble prophesied, or is it our ability to destroy all life with nuclear weapons? We will have to wait and see, but we do know all flesh will not be destroyed. Israel's restoration to its land (the fig tree, vs.32-34) is a sign that the Kingdom and the promised peace are near, and the fulfillment of our Lord's prayer, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done **in earth** as it is in heaven." (Matt. 6:10)

The book of Revelation tells of the time when "the tabernacle of God" will be with men and "they shall be his people;" when "God will wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." (Rev. 21:1-4) Peter described this time as "times of restitution" (Acts 3:20-23). "Restitution" indicates the return of something that was



lost. Man lost perfect life and the dominion of the earth, and it is human life and an earthly paradise which will be restored to him. Then the knowledge of the Lord will fill the earth, and all will know

the Lord and serve him with an unclouded understanding, and His Will will be done on earth. (Isa. 11:9; 2:4; Hab. 2:14; Zeph. 3:9)

But first Jesus had to come as the world's savior. The Bible uses the word "ransom" to describe what was accomplished for us by the death of Jesus. (1 Tim. 2:5,6) The word ransom means a *corresponding price*. "By man came death," wrote Paul, and "by

man came also the resurrection of the dead." Jesus bought Adam's entire race by his faithful sacrifice. Therefore, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (1 Cor. 15:21,22) The Apostle Peter in his great sermon on the day of Pentecost said, "there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." (Act 4:12)

God's gift of life through Christ is available to all, but only through belief and obedience. Yet, the vast majority of mankind have died without having received the true knowledge of Christ and this provision of life through him. (Rom. 10:14,15) Does this mean that they will not obtain salvation? Paul wrote to Timothy that God "will have **all** men to be **saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.**" (1 Tim.2:4) He further wrote, "we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of **all** men, specially of those that believe." (1 Tim. 4:10) The Apostle John also wrote, "And he [Christ] is the propitiation for our sins: **and not for ours only**, but also for the sins of the **whole** world." —1 John 2:2

God will bring all of mankind to a clear knowledge of Jesus. The general resurrection of the dead is described in Revelation 20:13 as a returning from hell [*hades*]. When Jesus died as the world's Redeemer, he purchased the "keys of hell" (Rev.1:18) and will set the captives free (Isa. 61:1). Jesus told his disciples (John 5:28,29, NASB) "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which **all** who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life [the faithful followers of Jesus in this age], those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment." [Greek *crisis—a trial period*—during which they can learn the ways of righteousness] This does not mean, however, that all mankind is assured of everlasting life. It means only that all will be released from the death sentence that was pronounced against Adam and his progeny and be given an individual opportunity to demonstrate their own worthiness of life.

Between the celebration of Satan and the birthday of the Lord is the largely overshadowed Thanksgiving holiday. Of the three, only Thanksgiving has its roots firmly fixed in praise for the God of the Bible and thankfulness for His blessings. Alas, in our modern day the concept of thankfulness has taken a backseat to the turkey and trimmings and the football game. These are truly perilous times! Let us not be part of them. (2 Tim. 3:1-5)

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