

KINGDOM BIBLE STUDIES

"Teaching the things concerning the kingdom of God.."

FROM THE CANDLESTICK TO THE THRONE

Part 172

THE FIRSTFRUITS, THE HARVEST, AND THE VINTAGE

(continued)

“And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto a son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, *Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.* And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped” (Rev. 14:14-16).

This beautiful vision is reminiscent of some of the parables of our Lord. The first parable given by Jesus is the one commonly called the Parable of the Sower. It is one of the *kingdom parables* setting forth the principles of the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God. Jesus says of it that it is the parable of parables and unless it is understood other parables cannot be. You must realize that all the parables in the Gospels are about the kingdom of heaven and this parable is the first. It is the starting point of Christ’s teaching about the mystery of the kingdom.

We read, “And He spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them up: and some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among the thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: but other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit...who hath ears to hear, let him hear. Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When anyone heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the wayside. But he that receiveth seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that receiveth seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (Mat. 13:3-9, 18-23).

The very first word of this parable challenges attention — “Behold — Harken!” The final phrase repeats the challenge — “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” My earnest prayer to God is that He will teach all who read these lines *how to hear*. As we hearken to hear, may the spirit of wisdom and revelation

from God make clear to our hearts that this significant parable is not just the Parable of the Sower, nor yet of the Seed, but also a parable of the SOILS. It is about the soil of a man's understanding and response into which the word of the kingdom of God falls. "And there were gathered unto Him great multitudes" — *there was the soil!* Why had they come? Some from curiosity — idle followers of the crowd. Some came from self-seeking motives — it might be profitable to cultivate the company of this rising star and His associates. Some came as revolutionaries — to make Him king, to use Him as a flag of revolt against Rome. Some came in quick but shallow enthusiasm, others in deep longing, yet others drawn irresistibly by the Father, and others they knew not why. How would they receive His words? As variously as the soil of a Galilean hillside receives the seed! Not in vain had Jesus watched the sower tramping his furrows. He would tell the multitude a story about themselves. Being under no illusions He would tell them just what chance His teaching would have with them, and why in some it would find no lodgment, at least not in their present condition before being dealt with by the mighty hand of God. "And He spake many things...saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow..."

Ah, there stood the Sower in their midst, and the words He spoke unto them were the Seed! By that word He was cast into their earth, into that earth which *they were*, He spake as never man spake, the words of eternal life, the word of the kingdom of heaven, of a higher plane of life available to men, even the inner life of the spirit. Although no one can, with the natural mind, understand the level of life belonging to the kingdom of heaven within, a man can understand the level of life on which he lives. Everyone can see the nature of life in this outward world! He can see through his outer senses what is done by people on this level of life: and he can, if he looks at himself, see what he does. He will then see what life is like at this level. And I do not hesitate to say that neither life nor himself can be different *at this level*.

The parable of the Sower is, then, about a man who casts Seed upon the ground. The Seed is "the word of the kingdom." There is a gradual ascent in quality of the four types of character revealed in the parable. Some of that Seed, some of that kingdom word, falls upon the wayside, or on the trail around the planting area. This first soil is impenetrable. The second, the stony ground, is a soil that has been plowed, but not deeply. Thirdly, some of the Seed falls into the weedy and thorny ground, which is an area that has been cultivated and can bring forth, it is rich earth with possibilities of a generous harvest, but it has not been tended enough to get rid of all the weeds. It is a hearing of high potential, of genuine vision, but this realm is not wholehearted, for it is held in reserve, uncrucified. This ground exists in a state of duality, double mindedness, divided between the irreconcilable loyalties of spirit and soul, of God and self. And last, but not least, there is the good ground that brings forth an eventual harvest, some an hundred fold, some sixty fold, and some thirty fold of the Seed that is planted in It.

Now hear this — that planting ground in its various conditions is not just different individuals — that planting ground is also right within each one of us! It is completely impossible to over-emphasize the importance of this foundational and fundamental truth: YOU ARE THE SOIL into which is cast the word of the kingdom of God! This is why Jesus declared, "Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is WITHIN YOU!" It is here, O child of God, that the majesty, magnificence, glory, power, and dominion of the everlasting kingdom of God has its beginning. The Most High God, full of wisdom, grace, and faithfulness is preparing a people in the lowly estates of this present evil world who are destined to reign with Christ in His throne, first over all this planet, and then from universe to universe. Hear me! These present days of preparation in the lowest parts of the earth are fraught with infinite importance and eternal significance. It is here and now that preparations are to be made. You are mistaken, dear ones, if you suppose that the Lord has paid the high price of Calvary and wrought mightily by the sovereignty of His omnipotent Spirit within your life merely to whisk you away to some golden street to strum a harp forever! Oh, no! He has planted a *kingdom seed* within the soil of your life to bring forth in

this earth and in the physical universe A GREAT KINGDOM HARVEST! It's not about heaven — it's about the HARVEST!

All of these kinds of soil lie between our ears, for they all represent levels on which we *hear, receive, understand, and appropriate* the word of the kingdom! It truly is “all in your mind!” In each case Jesus says that the ground, of whatever kind it is, is “the man that *heareth* the word.” So the ground relates to hearing and also to understanding! How you “hear” the word, how you “understand” the word of the kingdom reveals what kind of ground the Seed is falling upon. Every man, every woman, has within his or her understanding a wayside area, a stony area, a thorny area, and a good or responsive area. The minister of Christ, whoever he or she may be, casts the kingdom word upon your mind, into your understanding. As the word is ministered in the power of the Spirit it is just the Lord Himself walking among you throwing the word out, the truth of the kingdom, scattering it abroad upon your mind; but the word lands not in just one place, but upon all four areas of your thinking and understanding.

The fault was not in the Sower, nor yet in the Seed, but in the Soil. The problem lay in the factor of response, for the hearer was in a condition *incapable of either receiving or nurturing the word*. Let us meditate briefly upon the Seed that fell by the wayside. The “wayside” or “pathway” is the well-worn outer part of your conscious mind where you have already pre-set, pre-conditioned, and pre-determined what truth is — and woe to anyone who dares to tell you that what the scriptures or the Holy Spirit says is different! In this area the kingdom is unable to sprout, gain a foothold, develop, and become established *because the ground is not fit for the Seed*. It is as unreceptive as the uncultivated roadside, where, finding no root, it brings forth nothing, but is carried off by the birds of the air — the thought processes and carnal reasonings of the natural mind and human understanding!

Let me illustrate. Every one of us has received Seed in that area — in that condition, mentality, and state of being. Some who read these lines were brought up in a background that taught you that Pentecost was past, that speaking in tongues was not for today, that the gifts of the Spirit ended with the early church, along with the ministries of apostles and prophets. You had heard that drum-beat all your life, you were versed in all the arguments and the scriptures and were convinced that your pastor and your church were right. Then by God's divine appointment a word came to you — and it landed first on your wayside. Somebody told you that there was a supernatural experience available today in the Holy Spirit. They had experienced it! When that Seed came into your mind you automatically rejected it. You didn't need to give it any thought or consideration — instinctively you judged it to be erroneous. You *knew* better! But actually you knew nothing at all except what you had been conditioned to believe. So the adversary came and grabbed that Seed and fed himself upon it and you were left barren.

But thank God — the Sower didn't throw just *one* seed out! He cast a whole handful. And some of that Seed went a little deeper into your mind and consciousness and it got into your stony area. It's an area just beyond your pre-set, pre-conceived, and pre-conditioned ideas that's been broken up in a shallow way. It is my understanding that “stony” in the land of Israel is not a concentration of pebbles, nor a scattering of larger rocks, but a layer of hardpan. Sometimes it takes dynamite to break the stuff up. There is a thin layer of soil on top of the hardpan, but the roots of the plants can't get deep enough — they can't penetrate the hardpan. So the Seed will germinate but there isn't enough soil for the plant to grow to maturity. That area is a realm of half-heartedness. Out on the wayside you dismissed it outright — “No — no way!” But as you thought a little deeper you admitted, “Well, I see in the scripture where the promise of the Holy Spirit is *'unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call'* (Acts 2:39). There's a little room there to think that maybe this experience could still be for us today — but my pastor says that it isn't for today, my church doesn't believe in it — so while you consent to it, you are not sufficiently exercised to pursue it — there isn't enough soil for the truth to take root and grow and develop unto the harvest.

Perhaps you even go to your minister and discuss the proposition with him. You would *like* to press into this new truth that has been awakened within. You lay your cards on the table. The minister replies, “Oh, no, that’s not for us today. Prophecies and tongues were to continue only “until that which is perfect is come,” and that which is perfect is the infallible canon of scripture. Once the word and revelation of God was complete the church no longer needed the special spiritual gifts. You get involved with that bunch of people and you are going to get a demon. And when you get a demon we have no need of you here in this church. You can go your own deceived way.” The pressure and persecution begin to arise, and guess what happens — because you want friends, recognition, and security the fragile little plant of promise quickly withers and dies! It has no root in itself. The hope springs up powerfully within you for a short season, but because there is no depth of soil it withers as soon as the sun comes out in its fury. Yet — thank God, the great Sower didn’t throw out just *two* Seeds!

The third seed falls into your weedy area and it takes root and begins to grow. You think, “Maybe I ought to go to some of the meetings and see for myself what is happening there.” You go, and soon you are experiencing things you have never experienced before! The truth and reality begin to find expression and manifestation in your life. Our only hope is that as you return from that meeting you don’t get caught like Br’er Rabbit in the briar patch! In the thorny ground the Seeds sprout, they take root, there is growth and new life, but the vitality is quickly smothered by prickly thorns so that the ultimate harvest is aborted. In spite of our experience, and the reality and power of it, the pressures and demands of life crowd in upon us, the demands of work, the needs of family, the cares, riches, and pleasures of life suffocate the new plants and suddenly the things of God do not seem as important to us as we once thought they were. The briars strangle the shoots. The synoptic writers all use the word “choke.” The throbbing spiritual life is gagged, the vision blurred, the hope dimmed. Fruit buds appear; but there is no fruit. The Seed never develops unto maturity. The point is straightforward. The cares of *this life* abort the growth of the kingdom in our lives. They sap the life out of the kingdom and squelch the harvest!

Thank God, there were not just *three* Seeds — because this third Seed begins well but eventually has the life choked out of it. There is another Seed — same Seed, same handful — but it goes a little deeper, right into the center, into the *spirit of the mind*, into the deepest depth of the heart and the core of the life. There it finds **good ground** and it takes root, it begins to grow, and all the thinking and all the experiences gather together and suddenly that Seed that has been rejected three times, on three different levels of your life, begins to produce its fruit! The reality of God triumphs within you over all resistance, over every hindrance and barrier and opposition. You have reached the point of no return. That is how we want to hear! Not out of our pre-conceived concepts of things we think we know — that is the hardest, most unprepared soil of all!

When I hear something that conflicts with my understanding my response is: “Father, is this possible? Is there any truth, any reality in this?” I consider it before the Lord, actively searching the mind of the spirit. I don’t want to reject out of hand any Seed from the Sower! I don’t want to hear half-heartedly. I don’t want to say, “It sounds good — but it really isn’t important.” I choose to be at least as noble as the Bereans and “search the scriptures daily *whether these things be so*” — so that whatever the new understanding is, if it be of God, it becomes rooted in me and produces its fruit. I have no desire to stop short and allow it to be choked out by the cares of life and the deceitfulness of riches (things I esteem as being of greater value). That is, I don’t want to get so involved that I think its not important to give myself to new understanding and experience, nor do I want to think that I am so rich in understanding and experience that I need nothing more. So I keep pressing toward the center of my garden area and I find that when the Seed, the word of the kingdom, is nurtured in that area, the Christ-life is raised up! Oh, my Father, let me “hear” with the “good soil”! May I hear with an open heart and a contrite spirit, a heart that can produce the life of the word of the kingdom!

We have used the illustration of Pentecost, the truth of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, because that is something nearly every reader of these pages can relate to out of their past experience. But the real subject of the parable is not Pentecost — it is THE KINGDOM OF GOD! The kingdom is a realm *far beyond* Pentecost! Within the word of the kingdom lie other great and eternal truths like the new creation man, spiritual maturity, the manifestation of the sons of God, God’s great plan of the ages, the purpose and processes of judgment, and the reconciliation and restoration of all creation into God again. I have no doubt that many readers have experientially passed through these same “stages of the soils” as the deeper truths of the kingdom of God fell upon your hearing ear. The kingdom of God began to be established in your yielded, believing heart as the great Sower planted there within the furrows of your understanding, on the different levels, the good word of the kingdom. Christ enters the fertile soil of the believing heart. He takes the throne and begins to rule and lead the believer till in him *Christ is all, and all is Christ*. This is the kingdom of God *within you!* Oh, the mystery of it!

THE HARVEST

The Spirit has spoken mightily in these days that it is harvest time for God’s people. People confuse the word “harvest” with soul-saving or revival. But there is a vast difference! When I say it is harvest time I am not talking about getting sinners converted or the saints experiencing revival. Revival time and harvest time are two entirely separate, distinct things! A revival occurs in the lives of the Lord’s people when they have once experienced something and it has died and grown cold. Then, through the process of revival, it is stirred up and renewed. Revival is being brought back to life again in some area of your spiritual experience. So when I say, *this is harvest time*, I am talking about entering into something that is *new*, something that is *fresh*, something that has *just been produced*, something that has come to life, *matured*, and *reproduced the original seed* which is now ready to be offered as bread and life to the hungry creation. Ah, beloved, it’s harvest time! It is time for God to bring forth something fresh, glorious, and powerful out of our lives — something the world has never seen before except in the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus the Christ!

This great harvest of the formation of Christ in His people is the harvest for which the Husbandman has been waiting with long patience throughout the church age. Gifts of the Spirit are really no evidence of spiritual attainment. Gifts are just that — *gifts* — and they are given freely, not because of the merits of the recipient, but because of the goodness and grace of the Bestower. But with **fruit** it is entirely different! Fruit must grow, fruit must develop; and it is within the fruit that the life of the original seed must settle and find its full expression and power. God does not come to His church looking for gifts, but for the **formation of Christ — the fruit of the divine life**. He gave us gifts freely by His grace, and all we had to do was receive and use them. Even many scoundrels in the church have done so! What God wants now is **fruit** — THE SON OF GOD PERFECTLY FORMED IN YOU IN ALL THE FULLNESS OF HIMSELF! That is something which must **grow** upon you by your patient and continual walk in the Spirit. As George Warnock once wrote, “Until now the Husbandman has come into His garden, pruning, cultivating, watering — without expecting anything in return. But now the harvest time is approaching, and soon He shall visit His garden for one purpose and for one purpose only: seeking for fruit, and trusting that His tender care over the vine has produced genuine **fruit of the Spirit**. It is the **fruit** that is the embodiment and expression of Christ-likeness within the heart and soul.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ is God’s firstborn Son, and those who compose the body of Christ are the many sons of God brought to glory (Heb. 1:5-6; 2:10). As God’s firstborn Son, Jesus is the model, example, pattern, and prototype for all His brother-sons, who will be conformed to His image and share His glory. We should not expect to share His glory without first maturing in life and being fully formed in the image of God’s Son!

We may use the illustration of a sunflower seed. At the time of this writing our patio is brightened by a whole array of sunflowers that my wife planted this past year. The seed is sown into the ground and sprouts; this pictures regeneration. Then the sunflower grows; this is the process of growth in life and development. Eventually the sunflower plant develops to the point of blossoming and bearing seed; this is full maturity, a reproduced life, the harvest condition. The stage of blossoming is the stage of glorification. If you do not grow in life unto the full stature of the Son of God, yet await the time of blossoming, the state of glorification, you are a dreamer.

Many believers are interested in only two things: having their needs met and getting to heaven. But neither of these are the primary concerns of the great Husbandman! He is looking for maturity, the reproduced image of His Son, the manifest Christ-life, a full-grown new creation man (Eph. 4:13). In the New Testament the “gathering together” of the Lord’s people is likened to a harvest, and a harvest is possible only after the crop has matured and ripened. If the crop is not ripe, but is still tender and green, how can the harvest come? It is impossible! Let us look at the Lord’s people in the churches today. They are the “crop”! Is it ripe? Is Christ formed in them? Are they mature sons of the Father? Can we believe that according to the present stage of the growth of the crop the harvest is imminent? Look at the field — nowhere is it ripe already to harvest! Although there are millions of sincere believers all over the earth busily engaged in trying to serve the Lord and work for God, where is the formation of the life of *manifest sonship*? How can we then expect to have the harvest? I dare to say that the harvest will not come until the harvest is ripe! Yet I am not discouraged. I am, in fact, greatly encouraged today! Why? BECAUSE I SEE THE FIRSTFRUITS COMING SWIFTLY TO MATURITY! At the time of the ripening of the firstfruits the balance of the crop still bears the appearance of greenness. Only the firstfruits have that appearance of whiteness that denotes ripeness. If you truly yearn today for the harvest fields to become white and ready for the Reaper, then yield yourself under the mighty hand of God that *you* may ripen unto the time of the gleaning of the firstfruits! God will then perform His “quick work” and cut it short in righteousness; the fields will speedily mature and ripen!

Many people also confuse the word “harvest” with judgment. Untold thousands of Bible teachers teach that when the Son of man comes with His sickle and casts it into the earth, He is actually mowing down His enemies with great destruction and blood. What strange delusions the carnal mind invents! While the Greek noun *therismos* (**harvest**) with the verb *therizo* could have been used of the mowing down of enemies, they are never so used in the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint), even in the passages where judgment is symbolically likened to a reaping; and in the New Testament they are used of the ingathering of men into the kingdom of God (Mat. 9:37; Mk. 4:29; Lk. 10:2; Jn. 4:35-38). It is furthermore significant to note that the Son of man is armed, not with the sword that slays, but with the sickle that reaps! Who is more peaceful, more joyful and expectant, than the reaper in the harvest field even though he carries in his hand the sharp sickle? And to His disciples Jesus said, “*Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth...gathereth fruit unto eternal life: that he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together*” (Jn. 4:35-36). Harvest is a good thing, the subject of the first promise of the renewed earth (Gen. 8:22). Wheat, or corn, the result of harvest is good. Its color is good: “the fields are *white* already to harvest.” Harvest is the result of seed sown. “***Thrust in Thy sickle and reap; for the time is come for Thee to reap***” is to say, “The harvest which ***Thou*** art to reap is ripe; the seed which ***Thou*** has sown hast now grown up; the earth which ***Thou*** hast cultivated has produced this golden grain, and it is fit that ***Thou*** shouldest gather it in.” What is this grain that grows out of the earth and which is now (in our text) fully ripe and ready to be harvested? Ah, it is those of whom the Lord spoke when He said, “*Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit*” (Jn. 12:24). Now the seed sown by the great Sower is the “***word of the kingdom.***” The result

is “***the children of the kingdom.***” The Gospels give one testimony as to the meaning of harvest; showing that it relates to the SPIRITUAL STATURE of the people of God!

These facts remind us that John has prepared us for a scene of spiritual harvest conditions, maturity followed by ingathering, by his earlier description of the scene of the gathering unto the Lamb of the “firstfruits.” Where the firstfruits have been offered to God, the full ingathering may be expected to follow! The firstfruits here bear something of the same relation to the full harvest as in chapter seven the hundred and forty-four thousand did to the great multitude which no man could count. The offering of the *omer* or first sheaf by the priest in the temple set free the rest of the crop for general use, and was therefore the signal that the harvest was nigh at hand. And this without doubt is why the command “***Send your sickle and reap***” is given by a *messenger* who ***came out of the temple!*** Can you not see the mystery? Such as the firstfruits are, such is the harvest. The firstfruits are holy and mature, so is the harvest.

Some teachers have even sought to distinguish the *harvest* of verses fourteen through sixteen from the *vintage* of verses seventeen through twenty. They say the harvest is the ingathering of the elect, whereas the vintage is the gruesome fate of the enemies of God, slain in a gory battle in which their dead bodies float in a sea of blood up to the horses’ bridles. But such cannot be! Harvest and vintage are described in too close a parallelism to be regarded as symbols for entirely contrary realities! Both are inaugurated by the same angelic command to ***reap the harvest of the earth***, and the earth’s harvest-grain is balanced by earth’s vine, both are described to be ***ripe***, and the reaping of both are described in almost identical terms.

THE HARVEST RAIN

Among the various types of our Lord’s coming is His coming unto us AS THE RAIN. The world cannot receive the Christ today because it *seeth* Him not, neither *knoweth* Him. But for all whose hearts hunger and thirst for the fullness of His presence, power, and glory the promise is sure: “***Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth***” (Hos. 6:3). The apostle James, speaking of the coming of the Lord, penned these significant words: “***Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he (it) receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts; for the coming (manifest presence) of the Lord draweth nigh***” (James 5:7-8). Furthermore, the prophet Zechariah gives us this inspiring admonition of hope: “***Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain; so shall the Lord make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field***” (Zech. 10:1). In that beautiful Messianic Psalm, Psalm 72, the sweet singer of Israel intoned these marvelously instructive words about the coming of the King of Glory: “***He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth***” (Ps. 72:6). Little wonder that the scriptures reiterate again and again that the Lord comes ***with clouds***; for there can be no rain without clouds, and we are exhorted to ask for rain, via the avenue of clouds (Zech. 10:1).

Thus the prophets foretold a coming time of the manifestation of the Lord as rain upon the earth, the former rain, and the latter rain. They spoke of a time when there would be an outpouring of the Spirit of Christ in the earth that would be known as the early or former rain; they also prophesied of a time when there would be an outpouring of the Spirit of Christ in the earth that would be known as the latter rain. The early or former rain was the outpouring or visitation of the Lord that you can read about in your Bible in the book of Acts. The latter rain began about the beginning of the twentieth century. Historically you will find sovereign outpourings of the Holy Spirit in great power and glory, attended by the manifestations of the Spirit, in all kinds of places from about 1885 onward; places like Armenia in Russia, places you wouldn’t dream of. God was beginning to restore something! At the dawn of the twentieth century the

baptism in the Holy Spirit was restored to God's people. Talk about a bomb going off! The latter rain had begun.

Yet, these were mere "showers of blessing" which continued until 1948 when there occurred an unprecedented cloudburst of glory! The effect of the move of God that began in Canada in 1948 soon spread around the whole world, and there are few places that have not felt its power in one way or another. With this coming of Christ as latter rain God has done a great and mighty thing, but this is only the beginning! This is the HARVEST RAIN which prepares the grain for its final thrust to maturity. As a result the firstfruits are coming to their ripeness, and a mighty army of saints is in preparation as overcomers to stand up in the earth in the fullness of the life, image, glory, and power of the Son of God. The manifestation of the sons of God is drawing nigh, and events of immense magnitude and universal significance loom bright upon the horizon!

There were seasonal rains in Palestine, the former and the latter rain. The former or early rain was the rains that came at the time when the seed was planted in the ground, and speaks of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the early or former part of this age. The latter rain was the rain which came about six months later to bring the harvest to maturity and speaks of the outpouring of the Spirit in the latter part of the age. When a farmer plants the seed for a new crop, he desires the early rain to water the fields and to promote the immediate growth of that seed. In like manner, when the seed of the kingdom was first planted in the soil of the early church, the Lord then came as *the early rain* so that the seed would germinate and produce the beginnings of the desired life. Again, when the farmer sees that his crop is growing unto maturity, he then desires *the latter rain* so that the grain will mature in the head of the plant and his harvest will be abundant. The harvest is the result of the rain!

We must also understand that not only dispensationally is there the manifestation of the former and latter rain, but individually, too, on the plane of our personal development in Christ. As one has written: "The Husbandman plants His seed, and He shall receive His harvest. However it requires long patience, for there are some tremendous processings required to bring it to that *ripened* harvestable state. There will be the early rains to make the seed sprout and grow. There will be the latter rains to close out the growing season and give fullness to the grain in the ear. There will be the hot drying days as it matures and ripens — and patiently the Husbandman waits. Yet suddenly He announces *the time is now* — conditions are just right, let us reap! 'We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus...' (Eph. 2:10). We are the *product* of His hand. *He comes to us*, He becomes in us the Seed, then He visits us periodically — 'the times of refreshing which come from the presence of the Lord' (Acts 3:19). HE is our early rain which causes our life in Him, His life in us, to sprout and grow. Visitation after visitation, change after change, going from strength to strength — IF WE RECEIVE HIM IN EACH VISITATION. All of God's times are related to certain spiritual states, and we have to be in the right state and condition to be in its corresponding time...that we might come into the *now* of its fulfillment. Thus we pass from vision into reality, from profession into possession" — Ray Prinzing.

The result of the rain — former and latter — was the harvest. When the Lord gave the promise to Israel of a land of abundance and one that flows with milk and honey, He promised that if they would obey His word He would give them "*the rain in your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy CORN, and thy WINE, and thine OIL.*" Yet, in spite of the promise, it still requires great patience to wait for the rains to come and do their work! The husbandman has long patience in waiting for the precious fruit of the earth, James tells us, and so must we! How perfectly this figure suits the Lord Himself! HE has spent much labor and has sown much precious seed. He has tilled and cared for His heritage. All preparations completed, there remains but to wait. To rush the harvest would be to destroy it. So even as the farmer waits not only till the early rain makes the seed to sprout, but also till the

latter rain fills the ears before they ripen, for both are needful before harvest can be gathered, the Lord on high lingers and has long patience. Thus are we too to wait that coming of His which will bring the fulfillment of our hope and full sonship to God.

Whether I live in the flesh to see the harvest of this age matters not, for I will stand in the place I am called to in the hour of the great unveiling. It is apparent that the harvest represents saints of the Lord coming forth in the image and likeness of Christ and with the fullness of His life — sons indeed. It is also obvious that God has a purpose to accomplish in each age of mankind upon the earth. Each age ends in a harvest. For example, it was in God's plan and purpose that Jesus Christ should come forth in glory and perfection as a result of the age of the law and the prophets. At the end of that age there came a harvest period and a harvest work — a gathering in of the results from the labors of the entire age. He was the **end product** of all that God was saying and doing throughout that glorious age! Christ Himself was the harvest of that age, along with all who were gathered into Him in that day; therefore we can expect a like but even more glorious harvest as this age comes to a close! The manifest sons of God and the glorious church without spot or wrinkle, the bride who has made herself ready — these are the harvest of this age! Patience, brethren!

THE HARVEST OF THE “EARTH”

As surely as there is a time to sow, there is also a time of harvest when the fruit of the earth will be reaped. Solomon declared, “*To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven*” Eccl. 3:1). This harvest is called “***the harvest of the earth,***” signifying that it is a harvest out of the “earth-realm” of the carnal church systems of man. It is not the harvest of the systems, but the harvest of the Lord's people that have been held in captivity in Babylon. Oh, yes! God has not forgotten His people who love Him, who seek to serve Him, but in ignorance walk carnally and soulishly in the lowlands of spirituality. At the time of the harvest God will have so dealt with the earth-realm, the carnal church order, that at last He has brought forth a great purging, a mighty change and transformation, and true spiritual maturity even there and a harvest grown to fullness. It is my deep conviction that this transformation and maturity is wrought as a result of the three angels' messages and ministries in verses six through thirteen of chapter fourteen of the Revelation.

Jesus is the Cloud-Man with the sickle in His hand and He's ready to gather a harvest, the harvest of the earth-realm. What a scene! What a wonder! Every man must come to the harvest. The Lord's people are His field, His vineyard, His garden, growing out of the seed of Christ. The hour of harvest arrives and it is time to gather in the grain. The grain, barley and wheat, were harvested at the time of Passover and Pentecost. With all certainty this is the harvest of the feasts of Passover and Pentecost! There is a Man in the heavens ready to reap something today! His sickle is in His hand! Millions upon millions conformed to the image of Christ! Can you conceive of such a thing, can you embrace the beautiful hope? A glorious, triumphant church at last! What incredible *patience* the husbandman has had! And just as the sowing actually took place two millenniums ago, how wonderfully certain it is that the harvest will come — and be reaped! And it will not be long after the firstfruits appear upon mount Zion! Isn't it wonderful!

With keen spiritual insight Ray Prinzing wrote, “***And another messenger came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap; for the time is come for thee to reap: for the harvest of the earth is ripe.***” Now let us shout ‘Hallelujah!’ ‘***Out of the temple***’ comes the message we have long waited to hear. It is a true word, it is a pure word, for as we already observed, the temple has been measured, brought up to specifications — ‘*unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*’ Now the message that goes forth is HIS MESSAGE — not the programs of man, not the schemes and plans of carnal men building kingdoms, supposedly for God, but actually for their own ego trip. And the message is that it is now GOD'S HOUR for the ingathering.

“Long have we eagerly awaited this time. Through the centuries the efforts of Missionary Societies have ebbed and flowed, and as the *‘times of refreshing have come from the presence of the Lord,’* there have been some precious ingatherings. But always the harvest was so ‘in part.’ The revivals were held, and a remnant was gathered in, but the vast majority of the city remained untouched. God was still gathering His Firstfruits. But now the time for the general harvest arrives, and with joy we hear Him say, ***‘Thrust in thy sickle, and reap.’*** The harvest shall be completed...the process will be accelerated, for, *‘Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop with wine, and all the hills shall melt’* (Amos 9:13)” — end quote.

While writing this message I came across the following prophetic dream report from Neville Johnson in Perth, Australia, which we receive as a word of the Lord. He writes, “I found myself in the dream standing on a beach, the tide was almost full and somehow that seemed significant. The water gently lapped the sandy shoreline and a light colored mist hung over the water a few hundred meters offshore. The atmosphere was crisp yet warm. Suddenly a boat appeared through the mist heading towards me. A man was standing, holding a tiller, and cheerfully calling to me, saying, ‘Do you want to come fishing?’ I hesitated for a moment, then said, ‘OK,’ pushing the boat out and at the same time jumping in. The man’s face emanated a glow that was not of this world; he had a rugged yet refined look and he seemed very focused and determined.

“I had the strange feeling that I had been here before but could not quite put my finger on it. The boat quickly moved out into deep water and stopped. The water was teeming with fish and it almost seemed like the fish wanted to be caught. This man looked at me and said, ‘My name is Peter.’ With that he threw the net out and in what seemed like no time at all, he was pulling it in again and the net was teeming with fish. As soon as the fish hit the deck of the boat, they turned into people of all ages. I was struggling to get my mind around this unusual phenomenon when Peter said, ‘The final harvest must be reaped but it can only be reaped by those who have crossed the River Jordan.’ Suddenly it dawned on me that, in my dream, I was talking to the apostle Peter.

“Before I could speak, Peter continued, ‘Jesus was involved in two fishing trips while He walked this earth; one was at the beginning of His ministry and one towards the end of His ministry’ (Lk. 5:4-10; Jn. 21:6-8). Peter continued, ‘On the first fishing trip the net broke, but on the second trip the net held. And so it will be in this final harvest...the net will hold. The net broke in the early church and much was lost, but it will not be so in your day. Those who have left the wilderness behind and have crossed over into the promised-land are those who have one goal and motive which is only to build the kingdom of God. Jealousy, anger, and selfish ambition no longer will hinder them nor spoil the harvest. Pride no longer motivates them and they have come into rest. The final harvest has begun and will increase in intensity until the end. The end is now in sight, the finishing line is in view; what began at Pentecost will finish in your day.

““The great cloud of witnesses watches with great joy and anticipation for the final consummation. Just as the harvest began with one generation in my day, so it will finish with this present generation in your day. My generation saw the foundations laid; your generation will see the building completed. There will be many in your generation that will overcome all things, even death. My generation saw tares sown into the harvest field, your generation will see all the tares removed. The harvest wave is upon you and you will accomplish, in one generation, what hundreds of generations have longed to see. The feast of Pentecost must give way to the feast of Tabernacles. Your generation will accomplish that which the church could not over the past two thousand years. The glorious shadow that emanated from the early church was just that, a shadow. You will see the fullness of the glory of God in one generation manifested in such a way that nothing will be impossible. The miracles we saw were just a foretaste of what was to come.’

“Peter paused, looking at the people in the boat. He said, ‘See how the boat has now grown!’ I was amazed! The boat was now huge and was accommodating so many people. It was impossible to estimate how many people were now in the boat. Peter continued, ‘The seed of early church martyrs will blossom in your generation. One seed will produce countless multitudes in the harvest of your day. They will watch, with gratitude to the Lord, for allowing them to be a part of what you will experience. This seed will explode into continuing, ever increasing harvests...they have waited to see this day.’

“Peter looked at me and said, ‘Tell the Christian leaders of your day...if they seek to profit by this harvest and build their own kingdoms with the harvest, they will be destroyed. This harvest is Holy; this fruit is precious. If you cause any to stumble, you will surely be destroyed.’ I felt the force and gravity of what Peter had just said. It hit me like a hammer blow and I had to steady myself somewhat in order not to miss anything more Peter had to say. Peter continued, ‘Purity of heart is required for those who are to be involved in gathering this harvest. It is the *Lord’s* harvest — not *your* harvest. HE has waited for this with great longing and anticipation! Don’t be impetuous like I was, follow the Lord of the Harvest. True sons of God are led by the Spirit of God!’ I began to feel a holy fear which triggered a determination never to hurt or hinder the harvest...never to use it for my own ends and purposes. Peter looked at me and said, ‘Great grace will be given to your generation but great accountability will be required.’ With that, he was gone and I awoke” — end quote.

We speak the truth in saying that the hour for the deliverance of God’s people and the manifestation of His fullness within them and upon them is wonderfully nigh at hand. The harvest is upon us! Hallelujah! The King is coming in mighty spirit-power to set His people free, to burst asunder the chains of their captivity, that they in turn may deliver creation. Once the church is cleansed from her idols and defilement, she will be in a position to bring deliverance to a sin-sick and judgment-weary world, when “the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9). Only when Christ’s church is cleansed from her idols can she ever hope to be a light unto all nations. You see, my friends, God intends not only to raise up a vast company of the *manifest sons of God upon mount Zion*; He also purposes to have a *glorious church without spot or wrinkle, the bride of the Lamb, the New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven!*

Do not sell the “church” short, my friend, as though God no longer has any use for the church, and will use only the sons. The believers in Christ who now sit within the church systems are also the Lord’s people, and I tell you now that Christ *loves* the church and gave Himself for it that He might *sanctify* and *cleanse* it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a *glorious church*, no longer having any *spot* or any *wrinkle*, or any *such thing*; but that it should be *holy* and *without blemish*. Don’t think He won’t accomplish this, for He most certainly shall! ALL of the Lord’s people will one day march out of the darkness of tradition, the bondage of carnality, the limitation of static creeds, the delusion of false doctrines, the foolishness of immaturity, and the prison houses of men’s kingdoms and move into the bright light of the knowledge, wisdom, truth, glory, and power of God. Oh yes, they will! God will bring forth a light that is seven-fold in its intensification, so that there will be nothing hidden from it, and its heat and brightness will consume and destroy everything that opposes. And that deliverance has to come! The firstfruits will hasten the glad day! No one can deliver men from the lies of the antichrist while continuing to preach those lies. No one can deliver the world from the bondages of sin, fear, ignorance, carnality, limitation, and death while himself remaining a captive of those things. And before God’s church can cause all nations to walk in the light of that City which she is, she must first be cleansed from all her own idols and darkness and bondage and shame and march in victory out of Babylon’s domain.

We think we have seen some wonderful moves of God, and we have, but we haven’t even scratched the surface, we haven’t seen anything yet that faintly resembles the glorious things God will do in this great HARVEST TIME! God is laying a foundation in His firstfruits, and teaching, processing, qualifying,

equipping, and empowering His sons, ***His sickle***, for the coming invasion of all the church systems of man. He must do something unprecedented for us first, so that we will be ready. Let us not deceive ourselves, we don't have all that we need for this great work, but God is quickening us for it. He is stripping away our dependence upon money, education, status, recognition, titles, methods, promotions, and materials, drawing us to move out of that and into HIS REALM. The realm of God is the realm of *SPIRIT*. It is the realm of *BEING*. God is teaching us the ways of His Spirit, and we must be endowed with the absolute fullness of His Spirit, which is the seven fold *SPIRIT OF SONSHIP*.

Oh, how we long for the fulfillment of the vision! As the messenger came out of the temple his message was simply: "***Reap, for the time is come, because the harvest of the earth is RIFE.***" The hour appointed by God had struck. There was not a single moment's further delay. "***He that sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.***" How much can be put into so few and simple words! They paint at a single stroke the deliverance and transformation of the whole church of Jesus Christ! How deliberately God proceeds and operates in all of this! Unhurried, yet right on schedule! Not so much as a single sheaf, or ear, or kernel, intended for the granary of the kingdom of God, is passed unnoticed, or is lost. All are safely gathered in! It's HARVEST TIME!

Several years ago a dear sister wrote to me some inspired words which I have cherished to this day, for they illustrate so beautifully the greatness of our God in the fulfilling of His purpose in both His firstfruits and His harvest. She said, "I still raise sheep and make wool felt hats, scarves, and ponchos from their wool. This morning as I was working in my studio the Lord blessed me with a little observation. I was working on a very large brimmed hat and I started on it yesterday and worked on it till I was tired of it, and let it rest over night so I could start in again this morning. When I looked at it this morning it just looked like a mess — it didn't look like it would ever become small enough to actually fit on the hat shaper I was using or take on the finished form. But I just kept rubbing and rolling and adding more soap and hot water and *suddenly* it just came together! It always seems too funny to me that at the midpoint in the process it just looks like you have a big mess and then suddenly it comes together into a beautiful finished piece. I felt the Lord was telling me this is how it is with us as well! We usually feel like we are a big mess, but He is going to *suddenly* finish His work in us! He has been patiently working on us for years and it is exciting to know that soon He will finish us up and come forth from our being!" To which I would add — beyond us individually, when we look at the church world today we see what looks like an even bigger mess! That God could bring forth a glorious church, cleansed, delivered, changed, transformed, matured, and empowered to reign with Christ seems almost hopeless. But fear not, my beloved, for God has His "suddenly" when He will move speedily, do His quick work, and bring forth beauty and glory out of this "mess"! Aren't you glad!

To be continued...

J. PRESTON EBY

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