

THE GREAT PARADES OF THE BIBLE

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. . Follow me, And he arose and followed Him (Mark 2:14).

The difference between a hobo and a pilgrim is that the one person wanders, the other has a fixed destination. Life is a journey. The road may lead through green pastures or sandy deserts. but the end is assured. The path of life leads from the cradle to the grave. The Christian is a pilgrim who is always going somewhere. Five episodes of human history graphically display this fact.

The Call to Come

Two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive (Gen. 6:20).

Among the numerous criticisms of the biblical account of the flood is the statement that it would have been impossible for Noah to collect two of every kind of animal upon the earth. One cynic wrote: "It would have been necessary for Noah to live six hundred lifetimes—not six hundred years—to accomplish that task." Evidently the critic was not a careful student of the Scripture. The patriarch was never asked to collect animals. He was told "two of every sort shall come unto thee." Noah's responsibility was the completion of the ark: it was the work of the Lord to bring the species destined to repopulate the world. That, to some degree, was the greatest achievement since the creation of the world. Animals that enjoyed the company of their kind, that thrived on the grass God had grown, suddenly became discontented and restless. The pasture which had been enjoyable failed to please, and the company of other animals became boring. A strange agitation began to destroy the tranquility of the animals. They appeared to be hearing a voice that said, "Leave it. leave it." Jehovah had chosen two of every kind of beast: the others were content to stay where they were. They came from all directions and presented a sight never before seen. Giraffes and rabbits, elephants and field mice walked side by side. They all appeared to be aware of the need to get into the ship that Noah had completed. If it were possible for animals to talk, the rabbit might have looked at the stately giraffe to say. "With a neck like that, you should be safe anywhere." The mice might have said to

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the lions and elephants, "We understand why we need help. but you are strong. Perhaps they might have replied. "Little fellows, it is not what we are that matters but where we are! The smallest inside that ship will be safe: the strongest outside will be lost. Come on. get in before the door closes."

That picture from an ancient world suggests that Jesus knew what He was saying when He uttered the words: "But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matt. 24:37). As it was, so shall it be. God was and is still determined to populate the new world with those He will call. When the Holy Spirit moves upon the consciences of men and women, worldly pleasure ceases to satisfy. and the company of the unredeemed is no longer attractive. Then God's voice suggests the need to search for safety. The universal church of Jesus Christ supplies evidence that those who have heard His call have come from every tongue and nation to find refuge within His ark of salvation. What we may be is of no importance: where we are is all that matters. Jesus said: "Verily, verily. I say unto you. He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation: but is

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passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). The first pilgrimage leads to the Cross of Calvary.

The Call to Leave

"And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way: and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light: to go by day and night" (Exod. 13:21).

The Lord brought the animals into the ark because He intended to take them into a new world, When Jehovah redeemed Israel in Egypt. it became evident He was determined to lead His people into Canaan.

The ancient Hebrews were inexperienced in war. They had no weapons with which to defend themselves, and only a miracle of divine intervention could guarantee their survival in the wilderness, Without the presence of God extinction would have been inevitable. It became increasingly evident that the safety of the nation depended on the fact that Jehovah remained in the midst of His people. Israel would never be alone. The cloud which hovered over the tabernacle by day and the pillar of fire which

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led through the night assured them the Lord would be a Helper in time of trouble. With His assistance they could accomplish the impossible.

During the journey to Canaan God lived among His people: today He lives within His people. When Paul wrote to the Corinthian church he said, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God. and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16). It is an amazing fact that throughout the world the Holy Spirit guides God's children. His leadership is available for the African in his jungle hut, the mysterious Chinese believer in his distant country, and to all nations of the world. The cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night may still be seen by those whose faith sees the invisible. God continues to lead His people. and the end of the pilgrimage is assured. "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18). "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself: that where I am, there may ye be also" (John 14:2-3). The redeemed of the Lord were never meant to remain in Egypt!

The Call to Follow

"Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things)" (Eph. 4:8-10).

Between the death and resurrection of the Savior, He performed a special mission—to open a door and proclaim freedom to multitudes of saints who had been unable to enter into the presence of God, When Simon Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, he made an important statement: "For David is not ascended into the heavens" (Acts 2:34). The sins of the world had not yet been abolished, and, consequently, the people who had died—both saints and sinners—went to a place called Sheol, or Hades (see Luke 16:19-31), The death of Christ made it possible for the Savior to liberate His people and lead them into

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the presence of His Father. He appeared before millions of Old Testament saints to say: "It is time to leave. Follow me." The gates of Sheol were opened, and one of the greatest parades commenced. One-half of Sheol remained occupied by the unrighteous people awaiting judgment. but the other half was emptied as the Lord led multitudes into the presence of the Almighty. Language is too impoverished to describe the joy of the released souls: they beheld the Savior and knew His redeeming death had made their homegoing possible. When they heard Christ saying. "Brethren, it is time to leave. Follow me." they were ready to commence their journey.

The Call to Ascend

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord (I Thess. 4:16-17).

When the Lord liberated the ancient saints, He led them by a new and living way into the presence of His Father. Throughout the Old Testament period believers had gone to the righteous section of Sheol, but that never happened again. When saints die they go immediately into the presence of God. "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body. and to be present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8).

Bodies are not essential for survival in the presence of God. Nevertheless, it is said that "we shall have a body like unto his glorious body" (Phil. 3:21). Without them it would be impossible for the church to reign with Christ on earth. The mortal body must put on immortality, and the corruptible must be superseded by incorruption. This exciting transformation will take place when the Savior returns for His Bride—the church. When the trumpet of the archangel announces the return of Christ, the bodies of saints will be raised to newness of life and caught up into the clouds where they will be claimed by their former owners. Resurrected bodies will hear and answer the call of God, and the Rapture of the church will present one of the most glittering spectacles ever witnessed. Redeemed souls who have died will

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respond to the summons of the Almighty, and the heavens will be filled with people resplendent in immortality. Angels will watch in surpassing wonder, and the sky will resound with the song: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to redeem us by His blood." Thereafter God's kingdom will be filled with excitement as preparation is made for the marriage of the Son of God.

The Call to Return

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse: and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns: and he hath a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. . . . And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. . . . And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written. KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (Rev. 19:11-16).

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God intends to purify the world. Through His servant Isaiah He said: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid: and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed: their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like an ox. And the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:6-8). God intends to make this planet what it was originally meant to be.

This was to be the introduction of God's final attempt to purify the earth. Later legions of human beings deceived by Satan would make an attempt to destroy the followers of God, but their efforts would be destroyed by fire descending from heaven (Rev. 20:7-10). That the saints will accompany their Lord on this final episode suggests questions difficult to answer. They are described as riding upon white horses. Does that mean that heaven has vast stables of purebred horses? That arrangement would require innumerable hostlers to attend to the constant needs of the animals. If that were true, it might be difficult

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to appreciate many implications. Was John using terms easily understood on earth to express the omnipotence of the Lord? The saints will share in that tremendous parade which will bring them back to earth. Paul was so convinced of the continuity of fellowship between Christ and His followers, that he wrote to the Romans saying: "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom, 8:38-39). God is able to complete what He commences. The parades mentioned in this study endorse that fact.

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