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Review

AUGUST 28, 1975

ADVENT REVIEW AND SABBATH HERALD + GENERAL CHURCH PAPER OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

God's Presence With Us

By EDWIN R. THIELE

THE OUTSTANDING MESSAGE OF THE BIBLE is that of God's presence in a world that had rebelled against Him but was in need of His grace and care. When our first parents sinned, God did not forsake them or leave them helpless victims in the clutches of the enemy, but He gave them every evidence of His continued watchfulness and love.

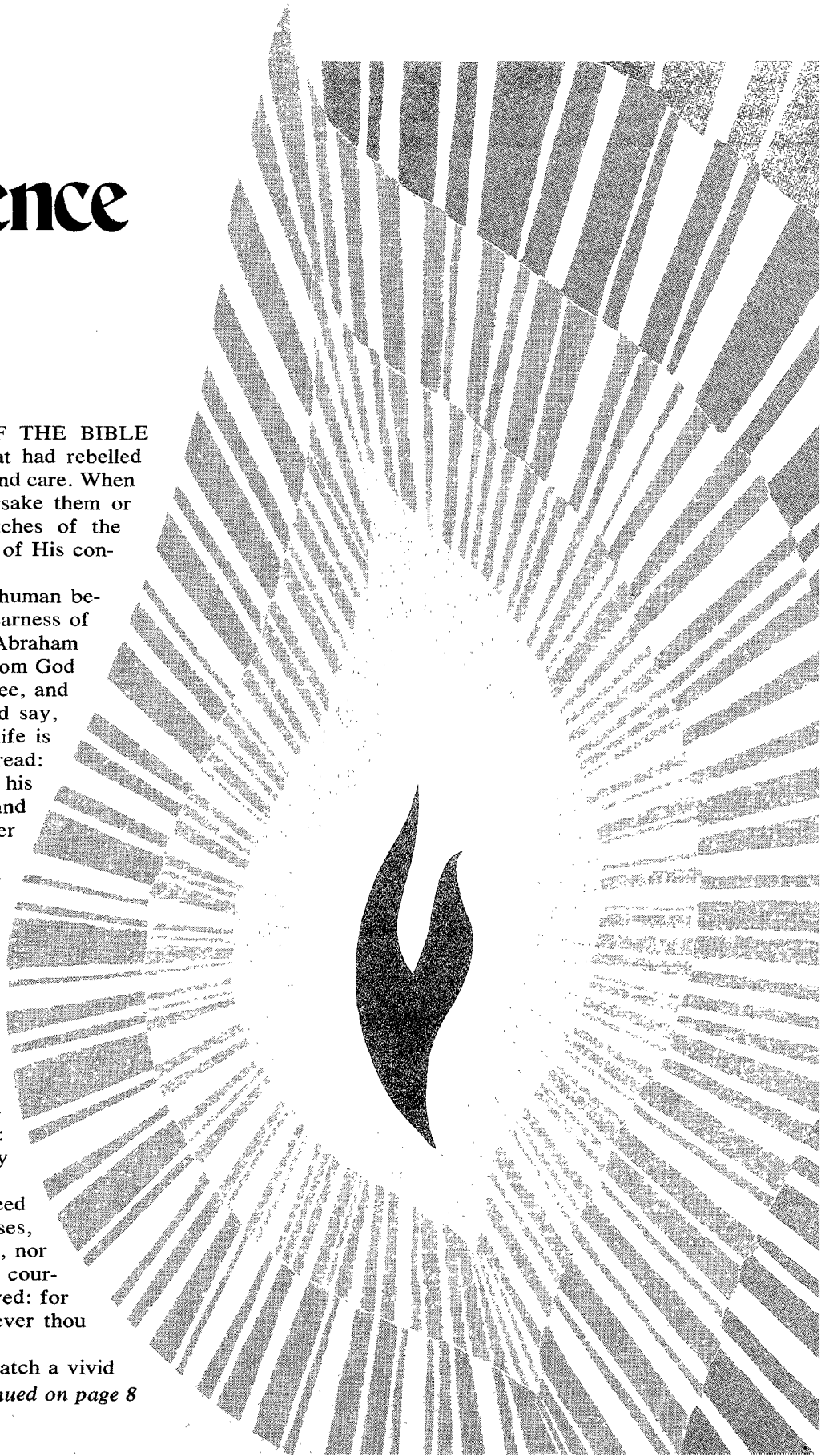
The story of the Bible is the story of human beings who in this world experienced the nearness of Heaven. Enoch walked with God and Abraham held converse with Him. Isaac received from God the promise: "Fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee" (Gen. 26:24). Jacob could say, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved" (chap. 32:30). Of Joseph we read: "The Lord was with Joseph. . . . And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand" (chap. 39:2, 3).

As Moses was sent on his mission to deliver Israel from Egypt, the Lord assured him, "Certainly I will be with thee" (Ex. 3:12). So intimately acquainted did Moses become with God that in his parting message to Israel he could say with deep conviction, "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. . . . Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord" (Deut. 33:26-29).

When God appointed Joshua to succeed Moses He said to him, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. . . . Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (Joshua 1:5-9).

From the psalms David composed we catch a vivid

Continued on page 8



picture of the close converse he had with Heaven. The presence of God was dear to him and fellowship with his Lord was a constant source of confidence, happiness, and peace. From his own deep experience he bore witness: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me. . . . Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (Psalm 23).

Often exposed to danger but saved by the hand of God, David could say, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? . . . Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple. For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock" (Ps. 27:1-5).

Often, as God's people were attacked by powerful enemies, they were saved from seemingly certain destruction by the power of God. Such was the case in the days of Jehoshaphat, when Moab, Ammon, and Edom joined forces against Judah. The earnest prayer of the king was answered by the divine assurance: "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the Lord will be with you" (2 Chron. 20:17). In the resulting engagement the enemies of God's people fell out with each other and "every one helped to destroy another" (verse 23).

Crisis in Time of Isaiah

In the days of Isaiah a severe crisis arose when the professed people of God were weak and their enemies were exceptionally strong. Both Israel and Judah had strayed far from God and righteousness, and by their iniquities were inviting their own ruin. Assyria was then at the height of its power, bent on controlling the world.

While the great Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III, 745-727 B.C., was bringing all western Asia under his sway, the wicked king Ahaz came to the throne of Judah and was almost immediately attacked by Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel. It was the purpose of these kings to remove Ahaz from his throne and replace him by a foreign king of their own choosing (see Isa. 7:1-6).

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This attempt to bring to an end the dynasty of David was nothing less than a challenge to God Himself. The Lord sent Isaiah to Ahaz with the message, "Fear not, neither be fainthearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah" (verse 4). "Thus saith the Lord God, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass" (verse 7).

A man without faith in God, Ahaz sought to meet the crisis by selling himself and his nation to Assyria in order to secure Tiglath-pileser's help (see 2 Kings 16:7-18; 2 Chron. 28:19-24). The Lord sought to strengthen Ahaz's faith by providing him with a sign of His presence and help, but Ahaz refused God's proffered sign. Thereupon Isaiah administered to Ahaz God's stinging rebuke: "Listen, house of David. Are you not content to wear out men's patience? Must you also wear out the patience of my God? Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign: A young woman is with child, and she will bear a son, and will call him Immanuel. . . . Before that child has learnt to reject evil and choose good, desolation will come upon the land before whose two kings you cower now" (Isa. 7:13-16, N.E.B.).

Who was the father of the child to be given to the king and nation as a living sign from God? Who was the young woman whose child would be called Immanuel? What was the basic significance of this sign and what was the lesson to be taught? The answers are found in the eighth chapter of Isaiah.

The father of the child I believe to be none other than Isaiah himself, and the mother was to be his wife. I identify him with Maher-shalal-hashbaz (see Isa. 8:1-3). That name meant "Speed spoil, hasten prey," and signified a speedy judgment to come. "Before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria" (verse 4).

It is before the age of two that a child learns to put together such words as "my father" and "my mother." And it is also before the age of two that a child learns to "refuse the evil, and choose the good." Thus the birth of this child foretold a judgment to fall on Damascus and Samaria and their kings Rezin and Pekah who were threatening Judah's throne, within two years. Ahaz began his reign in 735/34 B.C., and the child was conceived soon thereafter, for it was in 732 B.C. that Tiglath-pileser took Damascus, slew Rezin, and carried the spoil to Assyria. At the same time he boasted of having placed Hoshea on Israel's throne to take the place of Pekah, and of carrying off the spoil of Israel to Assyria and of imposing a tribute of ten talents of gold and X talents of silver on the land. (See DANIEL DAVID LUCKENBILL, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, vol. 1, p. 293.)

Since Judah under its wicked king Ahaz was rejecting the ways of God and choosing the evils of "Rezin and Remaliah's son" (Isa. 8:6; 2 Chron. 28:1-4, 22-25), God would permit the Assyrian flood to come over Judah also: "Now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria. . . . And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over," and "shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel" (Isa. 8:7, 8).

The great lesson God's people needed to learn was that of having the presence of God with them and placing their reliance on Him rather than on human confederations.

cies. "Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary." "Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces. . . . Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God is with us" (verses 12-14, 9, 10). The words "God is with us," are in Hebrew pronounced "Immanuel."

Perhaps, no other prophet did more than Isaiah to bring to the world a picture of the greatness and the presence of God. When he received his call, he saw "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple," with angels proclaiming the fact that "the whole earth is full of his glory" (chap. 6:1, 3).

For those who see the Eternal there is no reason to be fearful of men. "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (chap. 41:10). "Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. Fear not: for I am with thee" (chap. 43:1-5).

The lesson of Immanuel (God with us) sustains God's people in times of trial and difficulty.

Isaiah also had a son named "Shear-jashub," which meant "remnant return" (chap. 7:3). Although the nation under Ahaz had strayed far from God and appeared to be threatened with imminent doom, a remnant did return to the Lord and the nation was spared. To what extent the lesson of Immanuel had been learned, we may know from the reign of Hezekiah, son and successor of Ahaz. Of his reign we read that "he trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. For he clave to the Lord, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses. And the Lord was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth: and he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not" (2 Kings 18:5-7).

When Sennacherib came against Judah, determined to bring Hezekiah to terms, it was with the message of God's presence that the king encouraged his people: "Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God

to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah" (2 Chron. 32:7, 8). God honored the faith of His servant, and when Sennacherib's army came against Jerusalem, it was destroyed by an angel of the Lord (see Isa. 37:33-36).

While the southern nation of Judah learned the lesson of Immanuel and was saved, the northern nation of Israel failed to learn the lesson and was doomed. Hoshea, who replaced Pekah in 732 B.C., ruled nine years (see 2 Kings 17:1), after which he and the nation met their end following a three-year siege by Shalmaneser V.

Fulfillment in Christ

Significant though the fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy was at the time of Isaiah, it was to have a much more significant fulfillment at the time of Jesus when He came to earth both as the Son of God and the Son of man. Isaiah had foretold His coming: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). Concerning Him the angel said to Joseph, "Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matt. 1:20-23).

When Jesus came to earth, He came both as God and man. He was Immanuel in the fullest possible sense. Of a truth Jesus could say, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. . . . Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me" (John 14:9-11).

The message of Immanuel was not only for Old and New Testament times, but it was for all ages and all men. It is especially for us upon whom the ends of the world are come. Jesus' parting message was, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). It was to the church of Laodicea that He said, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20). And as John saw the holy city descending to earth he heard "a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (chap. 21:3).

As the people of God, that is our hope and that is our message. Immanuel should be a daily, certain reality to us—God with us and in us, today and every day, living out in our lives the vital, vibrant, ever-present realities of holiness and Heaven.

"Verily, verily," Jesus said to His followers, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also" (John 14:12). That was His purpose in coming to earth—to wipe out the results of sin and bring man back to the place where he might naturally, willingly, cheerfully, instinctively, do the works of God. That is what Immanuel in its truest sense should come to mean to us. □