

*** w77 12/15 pp. 754-755 “They Will Be Certain to Fight Against You” ***

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HOW would any of us feel as married persons if our legally wedded mate turned unfaithful to us and flagrantly committed adultery? Say a wife, wedded to us from her youth, broke her vows, left us and went selling herself to men of loose moral conduct. If a faithful husband, would we not feel hurt at heart? After hopes of reconciliation had been blasted, we might send her away with a bill of divorcement. In our predicament, we might never want her back!

2 Twenty-six centuries ago, in the days of the prophet Jeremiah, a case like that had developed, but on a national scale. It has a modern-day parallel, and so it concerns us today. It deserves our examination, to see how we may be involved. In the record of the case as set out by Jeremiah, we read this: “There is a saying: ‘If a man should send away his wife and she should actually go away from him and become another man’s, should he return to her anymore? . . . And you yourself have committed prostitution with many companions; and should there be a returning to me?’ is the utterance of Jehovah. ‘Raise your eyes to the beaten paths and see. Where is it that you have not been raped? Alongside the ways you have sat for them, like an Arabian in the wilderness; and you keep polluting the land with your acts of prostitution and with your badness.’” —Jer. 3:1, 2.

3 The nation of Israel is the one here addressed. Accordingly we read: “Do return, O renegade Israel,’ is the utterance of Jehovah. ‘I shall not have my face drop angrily upon you people, for I am loyal,’ is the utterance of Jehovah.” “I shall not stay resentful to time indefinite. Only take note of your error, for it is against Jehovah your God that you have transgressed.” “Return, O you renegade sons,’ is the utterance of Jehovah. ‘For I myself have become the husbandly owner of you people; and I will take you . . . and I will bring you to Zion.’” —Jer. 3:12-14.

4 The one today who is like renegade Israel is Christendom. There are more than 900,000,000 persons who are yet tied in with Christendom, for they are enrolled church members in her many sects and denominations. Has Jehovah God ever been the “husbandly owner” of Christendom? Today she plays down the name of Jehovah and puts the name of Jehovah’s Son Jesus almost exclusively to the fore. More than 18 centuries before Christendom began to exist, Jehovah did become a “husbandly owner.” To whom? To the nation of Israel. He gained ownership of them especially by liberating them from slavery in ancient Egypt and then by bringing them into a legal contract with himself at Mount Sinai, the prophet Moses being used as the mediator between God and man. (Ex. 19:1 through 24:8) But what now about Christendom?

5 Here is something that the anointed Jeremiah class of today must point out to Christendom, and this modern Jeremiah is doing so. Christendom had its roots in the Christianity of the first century C.E. The true Christian congregation came into being on the festival day of Pentecost in the year 33 of that century. It became “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for special possession,” to Jehovah God. (1 Pet. 2:9) This meant that his marriage relationship with natural circumcised Israel was annulled, abolished. She became divorced! Jehovah now entered into the position of “husbandly owner” toward the newly born “holy nation,” spiritual Israel. This “holy nation” he had bought with the precious blood of his Son Jesus Christ, the Greater Moses. He brought this “nation” into the “new covenant” that Jeremiah had foretold.

(Jer. 31:31-34) Jesus was the Mediator of that new covenant. In autumn of the year 36 C.E. believing non-Jews were admitted to baptism and became part of spiritual Israel.

*** ts chap. 12 pp. 104-107 A Rich Man in Hades ***

By reason of the Mosaic law the nation of Israel was in a covenant relationship with God and therefore could be spoken of as being a wife to him. At Jeremiah 3:14, for example, God refers to the nation as an unfaithful wife: “Return, O you renegade sons,’ is the utterance of Jehovah. ‘For I myself have become the husbandly owner of you people.’” Then, with the coming of Jesus, an opportunity was extended to the Jews to become part of his “bride.” That is why John the Baptist said to his disciples: “You yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but, I have been sent forth in advance of that one. He that has the bride is the bridegroom. However, the friend of the bridegroom, when he stands and hears him, has a great deal of joy on account of the voice of the bridegroom. Therefore this joy of mine has been made full. That one [Jesus] must go on increasing, but I must go on decreasing.”—John 3:28-30.

In order to become part of Christ’s “bride,” the Jews had to be released from the Law that made them, figuratively speaking, a wife to God. Without such release, they could not come into a wifely relationship with Christ, as that would be an adulterous relationship. The words of Romans 7:1-6 confirm this:

“Can it be that you do not know, brothers, (for I am speaking to those who know law,) that the Law is master over a man as long as he lives? For instance, a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is alive; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law of her husband. So, then, while her husband is living, she would be styled an adulteress if she became another man’s. But if her husband dies, she is free from his law, so that she is not an adulteress if she becomes another man’s. “So, my brothers, you also were made dead to the Law through the body of the Christ, that you might become another’s, the one’s who was raised up from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. . . . Now we have been discharged from the Law, because we have died to that by which we were being held fast, that we might be slaves in a new sense by the spirit, and not in the old sense by the written code.”

While the death of Jesus Christ was the basis for releasing the Jews from the Law, even before his death repentant ones could come into a favored position with God as disciples of his Son. The message and work of John the Baptist and of Jesus Christ opened the door for the Jews to seize the opportunity to gain divine favor and put themselves in line for a heavenly inheritance as members of Christ’s bride. As Jesus himself expressed it: “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of the heavens is the goal toward which men press, and those pressing forward are seizing it.”—Matthew 11:12.

Hence, the work and message of John the Baptist and of Jesus Christ began to lead toward a complete change in the condition of the symbolic “rich man” and “Lazarus.” Both classes died to their former condition. The repentant “Lazarus” class came into a position of divine favor, whereas the “rich man” class came under divine disfavor because of persisting in unrepentance. At one time the “Lazarus” class had looked to the Pharisees and other religious leaders of Judaism for spiritual “crumbs.” But Jesus’ imparting the truth to them filled their spiritual needs. Contrasting the spiritual feeding

provided by Jesus with that of the religious leaders, the Bible reports: “The crowds were astounded at his way of teaching; for he was teaching them as a person having authority, and not as their scribes.” (Matthew 7:28, 29) Truly a complete reversal had taken place. The religious leaders of Judaism were shown up as having nothing to offer to the “Lazarus” class.

On the day of Pentecost of the year 33 C.E. the change in conditions was accomplished. At that time the new covenant replaced the old Law covenant. Those who had repented and accepted Jesus were then fully released from the old Law covenant. They died to it. On that day of Pentecost there was also unmistakable evidence that the disciples of Jesus Christ had been exalted far above the Pharisees and other prominent religious leaders. Not the religious leaders of Judaism, but these disciples received God’s spirit, enabling them to speak about “the magnificent things of God” in the native languages of people from widely scattered places. (Acts 2:5-11) What a marvelous manifestation this was of their having God’s blessing and approval! The “Lazarus” class had indeed come into the favored situation by becoming the spiritual seed of the Greater Abraham, Jehovah. This was pictured as the “bosom position.”— Compare John 1:18.

As for the unrepentant Pharisees and other prominent religious leaders, they were dead to their former position of seeming favor. They were in “Hades.” Remaining unrepentant, they were separated from the faithful disciples of Jesus as if by a “great chasm.” This was a “chasm” of God’s unchangeable, righteous judgment. Of this, we read in Scripture: “Your judicial decision is a vast watery deep.”—Psalm 36:6.