

A RACE OF FAITH

"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one received the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown: but we an incorruptible,"

1st Co 9:24, 25.

The LORD GOD never changes. When I learned that truth, I began a meaningful historical journey that tied everything together. Rather, than see God's plan in a dispensational way, it became clear that the LORD makes covenants with men that results in a glorious future.

God's predestinated plan unfolds during Biblical times, as God dispensed Himself in **"Sundry times and diverse manners"** (Heb 1:1) through Prophets, Kings and Priests. Finally, God dispensed Himself when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us in the Person of Jesus Christ.

What the first Adam failed to do, Jesus, the Second Adam came to fulfill. God needed to become flesh, if man was to be saved. Otherwise, God's judgment and wrath was all that awaited man.

The needed plan; that of entering man's domain of flesh begins immediately after eleven chapters of the Bible expire. Chapter twelve records God calling Abraham out of the Land of Ur.

From Abraham and his call, a nation will arise producing a Seed who will incorporate all of God's promises into man. Abraham's descendants - the nation Israel, would hear the blessed words, **"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:"** Isaiah 9:6. God's anointed, Jesus, the Christ (Messiah), is born this day in Bethlehem.

It will take careful guidance from God to continually reveal His plan. As we view God "handing off" Himself to man; first through His word - then, Himself, by entering the body of Jesus, we see, perhaps for the first time; God's desire for His **"will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven,"** Mt 6:9.

Further, as God dispenses Himself to each man, nation and, within the flesh, a beautiful journey is envisioned. It's God's plan; but, He calls man to carry the promise forward by placing a "Righteous Baton of Promise" into their hands.

For me, it is easily to view His plan as a race. This is not a dash, however; nor a marathon but, as time runs on, the race is more of a RELAY RACE.

When the race begins, it seems that Abraham was on the mark, all set and ready to run the race. Abraham gets out of the blocks quickly, the split second God calls him - **"staggering not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God,"** Romans 4:20.

Abraham runs his portion in record time. He transfers the "Righteous Baton" expertly to the next runner; with the help of God, the judge of the race. Once begun, the race has no stopping point. The end will be reached and the eternal prize is to be given to all who run in faith. **"Heirs of the world"** (Ro 4:13) and **"inheritors of the earth"** (Mt 6:9) are vividly seen within the Second Coming of Christ.

A Relay Race is run on a circular course, ending up where it all began. **"In the beginning,"** God planned a glorious end for every participant. It's the way of God and in the Christian Race. What goes around, comes around is without question. Carrying the Promise that God made to Abraham begins and ends with God, the Author and Finisher of our faith.

And, just think of the eternal sacrifice Jesus became on our behalf. Not only did He come to earth to redeem man, but He left His glory with the Father, forever, in order to bring man a glorious end. **"Then cometh the end, when He (Jesus) shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and authority and power,"** 1 Cor 15:24.

In every relay race that I've seen, four runners carry a baton; each giving it all he has for his particular segment of time. The baton must leave with the first runner and cross the finish line in the hand of the last runner. The baton cannot be dropped. This is how we visualize the "Baton of Promise."

In God's RELAY RACE, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Israel) will run the Old Testament portion; while, the Church carries the "Baton of Promise," during the New Testament.

And, as in any race, every runner must stay faithfully on track (according to Biblical teaching) and, remain within the lines (of truth and authority).

Our first runner, Abraham, hears the starter's Signal. **"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee,"** Genesis 12:1. Abraham is off!

God's plan is pure and must be carried out free from any works of the flesh; thus, Ishmael is left behind. In blazing speed, Abraham carries the 'Baton of Promise' to his heir of the promise, Isaac. There are no questions this time about the meaning of the Baton "Stick."

Isaac sprints steadily at first, until his father draws near. Then bursts forward, grasping the 'Baton of Promise' securely in his hand, looking forward to the next runner.

Isaac expects to pass the baton to Esau but, instead, it's Jacob! It is God's plan, so Isaac stays within the restricted lane of righteousness and plants the 'Baton of Promise' in the hand of the second born, Jacob.

Although, not a hunter, Jacob is a blessed runner. It becomes clear just how blessed when, after just a few strides, God changes his name to Israel and, suddenly, his lane has filled up with a nation of people. Like the sands of the sea, all of them run, but too many fail to remain in the designated lane. **"With many of them God is not well pleased:"** (1st Cor 10:5). Many are destroyed and disqualified. Only a few running with Jacob will finish the line with the "Baton of Promise" in their hands.

The "examples" of Israel (1st Cor 10:11); along with the "great cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12:1), has been well learned by the New Testament Church. Once the 'Baton of Promise' is passed to the body of Christ, Jesus sends His church off with assurance. **"Go,"** He instructs, **"I am with you all the way."**

Encouraging words also come from Paul, the Apostle. **"Run the race with patience,"** he admonishes; while, warning every runner to stay in the lane of

promise. "Remember," Paul says, "**a man is not crowned, except he runs (strives) lawfully,**" 2 Timothy 2:5.

On this last leg of the relay race, the church sees many alongside them, running "**greedily after the error of Balaam for reward,**" Jude, v 11. Fortunately, Paul is running, encouraging us all not to "**run in vain, neither labor in vain,**" (Phil 2:16). A second wind comes by Paul words of discipline, "**That ye may...shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life,**" V 15,16.

The 'Baton of Promise' is squeezed tightly in every church member's fingers. This is God's race. It doesn't depend on fleshly conditioning and will. The victory comes from "**God that shows mercy**" (Ro 9:16), the One who put them in the race.

It is with Holy Spirit wisdom that Church members recognize the eternal prize is God, Himself - exactly what God promise Abraham. "**I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward,**" Gen 15:12.

Heading for the finish line, each runner's mind races faster than the pace of the relay. They reflect on God's mercy and realize that the beginning of the race is the same as its end. And, gloriously, they understand that the prize of the PROMISE is sure to them; as it was to the fathers, "**whom as concerning the flesh Christ came,**" Rom 9:5.

Paul's stimulating words are as goads, pushing every runner around the oval track of life. With intensity, each sandal-laden foot strikes the path in recognition that the word of God is taking effect within each runner.

Retrospection should overcome every servant. Thank God, I'm in the race with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, I don't ponder grandiose visions of gaining some physical prize. I am moved by the Holy Spirit, working wonderfully within my heart. It's not me, but God who has chosen me to run with these men of faith. I read Hebrews Eleven and understand that God calls me to finish the course (2nd Tim 4:7).

Yes! God has mercy on "**whom He will have mercy**" (Rom 9:15). And, I realize that I am a "**vessel of mercy**" (Rom 9:23). It's true, Gentile Jim has "**obtained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith**" (Rom 9:30).

Oh! How I must finish His race; the race that He has for me! I may not come in first, but I will finish the course. The end is near. At the finish line, I see a stone in Zion. My weary legs are given renewed strength. In full heart, I run, "**believing on Him.**" I am not ashamed of the race He has for me. I know that I will not be disappointed (Ro 9:33) at the end.

There it is, Jerusalem. Only a few more strides. I look around to see a determinant body running beside me. They all have the "Baton of Promise," right where it should be. Some begin to lift their hands. But, I admonish them to wait until we cross the finish line.

And, so we run, looking for and hastening the day of the Lord. For now, we'll carry the "Baton of Promise." But, while running, we'll sing of the hope that lies within us. "I am a Child of the King," the "living God" (Rom 9:26).