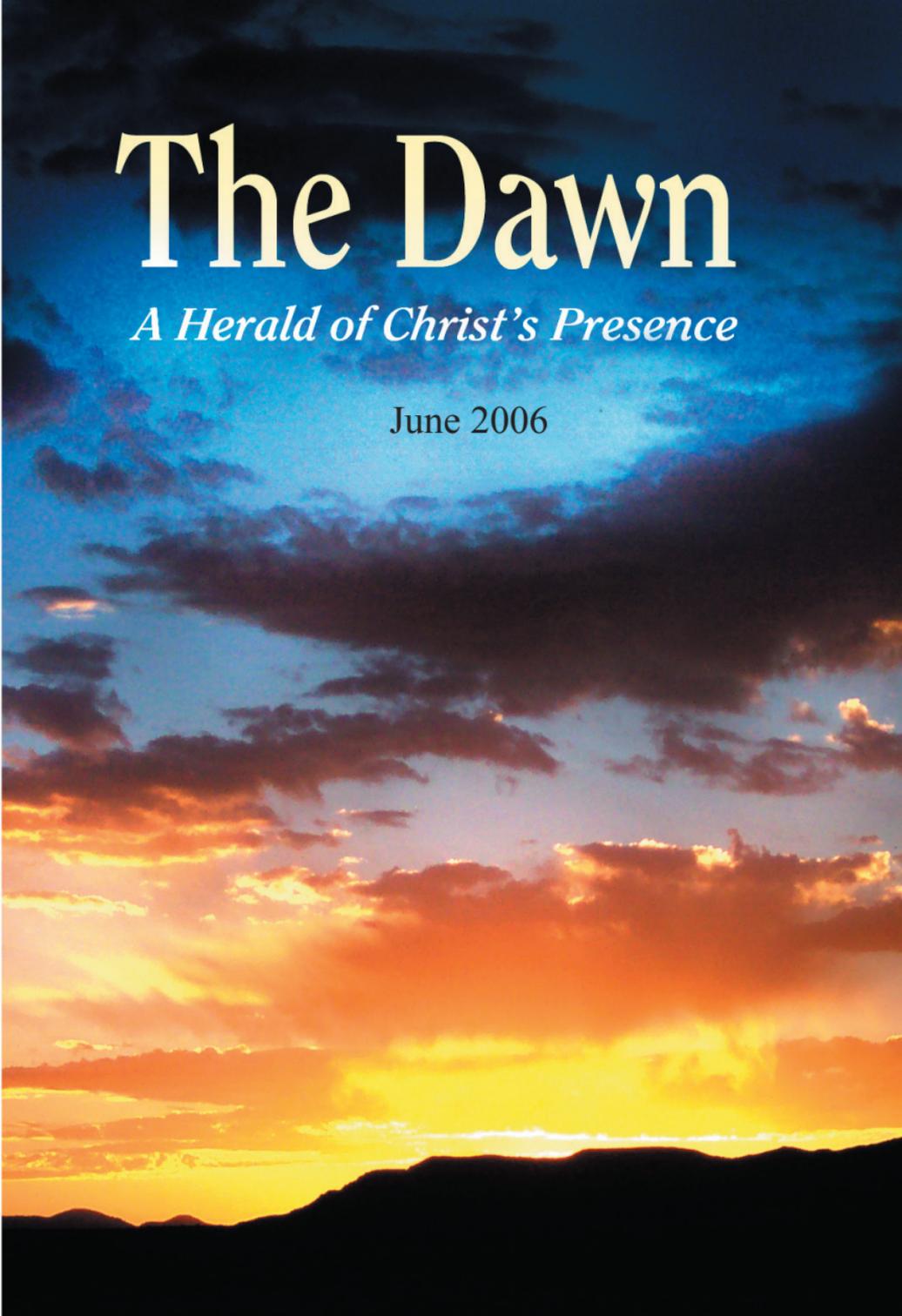


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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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HIGHLIGHTS OF DAWN

- The Sons of Ishmael—
A Prophetic Clash of Cultures 2

INTERNATIONAL BIBLE STUDIES

- Living in Unity 14
Finding Wisdom 16
Building Together 18
Serving Responsibility 20

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND DOCTRINE

- God's Word in Prophecy—Part 6
Knowledge Shall Be Increased 22
The Vision Speaks 33
Eden to Zion 43
The Substance of Things
Hoped For 53
Weekly Prayer Meeting Texts 32

OBITUARIES 42

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS 62

CONVENTIONS 63

The Sons of Ishmael

A Prophetic Clash of Cultures

“The angel of the LORD said to her, I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they shall be too many to count. .

. . Behold, you are with child. And you shall bear a son; And you shall call his name Ishmael, . . . And he will be a wild donkey of a man, His hand will be against everyone, And everyone’s hand will be against him; And he will live to the east of all his brothers.”

—Genesis 16:10-12,

*New American
Standard Version*

THIS SCRIPTURAL RECORD

describes the events surrounding God’s promise to Hagar, Sarah’s Egyptian servant girl, that she would give birth to Abraham’s firstborn son whose name would be called Ishmael. In a more important and much broader sense, however, this event becomes a prophecy that portends to Ishmael and his offspring, which were foretold to become a very great nation. These Ishmaelite tribesmen were to be characterized by their difficult and uncouth behavior and, as the prophecy indicates, they would act like wild men of the desert. Further to

this concerns the fact that their hand would be contemptuously and continually set against their neighbors, and that their neighbors' hand, in turn, would also be set against them.

A MARK OF CHARACTER

It was but a few years later that Isaac, who had been born to Abraham by Sarah, became the real child of promise, and when it came time for him to be weaned, his father prepared a great feast for him to mark the special occasion. Ishmael, who was a young lad and the older half brother at the time, acted true to the prophecy regarding him in our featured text, "Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking." (Gen. 21:8,9) This expression 'to mock' [to laugh; poke fun at; to make sport of] indicates Ishmael's character even as a young lad. It also suggests a more serious trait that cannot be simply or easily passed off as an insignificant incident in an innocent child's behavior.

ISHMAEL AND HAGAR SENT AWAY

No doubt this taunting of Isaac included the question of heirship, and a degree of envy that perhaps involved Ishmael's rights as the firstborn son of Abraham. This position is made more clear in the next verse, "Wherefore she [Sarah] said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." (vs. 10) Thus it was that Ishmael's demonstration of mocking and scorn toward Isaac contributed to the dismissal of him and his mother Hagar from Abraham's household.

PAUL CONFIRMS GENESIS ACCOUNT

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the brethren at Galatia, confirms Ishmael's boyhood behavior, saying, "We, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh [Ishmael] persecuted him that was born after the Spirit [Isaac], even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman [Hagar], but of the free [Sarah]." (Gal. 4:28-31) Sarah had but one son, Isaac, and by his birth he represented the entire spiritual seed of promise—our Lord Jesus and his faithful bride class. These will, in the future day of Christ's kingdom, bless all the families of the earth as promised in the Abrahamic Covenant. Ishmael, on the other hand, typified the Israelites who were in bondage under the Law Covenant.

A NOMADIC PEOPLE

Much like Isaac's son Jacob, who had twelve sons and whose name was later changed to Israel (Gen. 32:28), Abraham's son Ishmael in turn married an Egyptian woman and also had twelve sons. (chap. 25:13-16) The Ishmaelites were, therefore, from the very beginning partly Semitic and partly Hamitic.

Instead of settling down in one permanent place, these people preferred the nomadic life, and built few cities. True to form, Ishmael was a restless man of the desert, and roamed wherever and whenever he wanted. It is not certain where these people made

their usual abode, but it is generally thought that their habitat ranged from Havilah, which was in the northwest corner of the Arabian peninsula—which would suggest one possible limit of their territory—to the other limit of this vast wilderness region of Shur which was in the Sinai peninsula.—Gen. 25:18

HANDS AGAINST THEIR NEIGHBORS

From early Bible times, and throughout the many centuries since, these Arabian Bedouin have made their presence known by making a habitual nuisance of themselves wherever they happened to roam, and they were well known for their adventurous and lawless nature. They were marked by their infamous repeated and violent acts of theft, robbery, pillage and murder against whomever they came into contact. Therefore, they were a common concern among their neighbors to root out these men of the desert, mostly at great cost and with little success. They were a plague to the other peoples, and thus earned for themselves a reputation for being a fierce, warlike people, hard to get along with, even as the prophecy states—that his hand would be against everyone, and the hand of everyone would be against him. For nearly four thousand years, this prophecy pertaining to Ishmael and his descendants has been fulfilled in a most remarkable way.

ISHMAEL'S DESCENDANTS

The descendants of Ishmael were divided into tribes, in much the same way as the families of Jacob. Each tribe differed to some extent in disposition, habits, and mode of governing themselves. Some made great advancements in civilization and

learning, which came about through contact with other cultures. Others ceased to be nomads and took up a more settled and orderly lifestyle, and many intermarried with other peoples which also modified their characteristics of living.

However, the tribes that remained in the desert, the Bedouins and others, remained largely unmixed with the outside world and its influences. True to the Old Testament prophecy, they were characterized by their wild behavior, and even now do they tend to continue in their uninterrupted state of hostility, submitting to no law but their own self-will, and without acknowledging rights of others.

ISLAM BECOMES A POWER

During the seventh century, Mohammed set himself up as the leader of these Bedouin Arabs, and, for political reasons, claimed himself to be a descendant of Ishmael, and therefore of Abraham. This greatly strengthened and extended their power. Under his as well as his successor's influence, these tribes, having been filled with their new religion and hereditary thirst for blood and pillage, developed into a ferocious horde. Thus armed, they carried the banner of Islam throughout Asia, Africa, and even into parts of Western Europe, including Spain. Throughout history, these desert people have not hesitated to ransack, pillage, and slay even those of their own brotherhood in religion.

Such has ever been, and still is, the character and motivation of these Arab Bedouin which has proven true to the words of the prophecy concerning them. No power, great or small, has ever been able to control or subdue their movements, tame them as a

people, nor to induce them to respect the law and order of civilized society. Today they continue to dwell as they have done for centuries in the presence of their brethren, and no man is safe who enters their domain.

CONFLICTING CULTURES

Some historical writers have suggested that one of the main obstacles to peace at the present time stems from the centuries-old misunderstanding of two of the world's oldest cultures. It is noted that this is true especially in connection with the misunderstanding and misuse of the two divergent terms 'crusade' and 'jihad.' This matter has entered the debate as possible long-term circumstances that continue to effect the present struggle between Islam and the West. Mary Lee Settle, in a book review, "A Great Divide and How It Began," reviews Andrew Wheatcroft's recent book, *Infidels: A History of the Conflict Between Christendom and Islam*, in which he points out that each of these terms conjures up opposite images to both Christians and Muslims.

TWO POINTS OF VIEW

Wheatcroft explains the historical significance of these two opposing points of view and the widely differing cultures that exist in our day. He points out that the word crusade was first used by Europeans to describe the invasion of the Holy Land during the early period of the Crusades. He explains the image that the word creates among Christians as that of a noble knight riding on his well-groomed horse while attired in shining armor. To the Muslim, however, the image is that of a brutish invader,

heavily armed, bearing a cross on his chest and a broadsword in hand, intent on rape and robbery, and from whom his ancestors had to hide underground to escape for their lives.

It is the same with the word jihad, which, to the Muslim, suggests a bold warrior defending the ancient culture of Islam with his life; whereas to the Christian (and to the politician who seeks to influence his subjects by arousing fear), they see nothing but a fanatic terrorist falsely representing his religion.

MID-EAST POLICIES

To illustrate the seriousness that exists between these two conflicting cultures, we note the comments that were made by Condoleeza Rice while visiting the United States troops in Kabul, Afghanistan, soon after her appointment as Secretary of State. “Washington will build a different kind of Middle East. A different kind of broader Middle East that’s going to be stable and democratic, and where our children will one day not have to worry about the kind of ideologies of hatred that led those people to fly those airplanes into those buildings on September 11th.”

As a reflection on these remarks, we note a news commentary with a critique of Rice’s statement under the title: “America’s Dangerous Mideast Assumptions: The View From Damascus,” *Los Angeles Times* (March 25, 2005). Bouthaina Shaaban, commenting on Rice’s remarks, said, “This absurd generalization embodies the fallacy that underlies the entire United States war on terrorism, which has severely damaged America’s reputation and credibility

around the world and which has led to the disastrous policies that will harm relations between the United States and the Arab world for decades to come. To suggest that a group of extremists is representative of the people of the Middle East is outrageous. It's as if someone were to suggest that the criminals of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo are representative of American people and American values.

“The other dangerous idea in Rice’s remarks is that the attacks of September 11 are a reasonable justification for the wrong-headed United States policy in the Middle East. That’s ridiculous. Americans should be aware by now—but I don’t think they are—that the events of September 11 have weighed heavily on Arabs and Muslims just as they have on the people of the United States. The terrorists of Al Qaeda have targeted Arabs and Muslims repeatedly. They are, therefore, our enemies just as they are your enemies. So why should we be punished for their crimes?”

VIEW FROM DAMASCUS

From another perspective, Bouthaina Shaaban, Syria’s current Minister for Emigrant Affairs, comments upon the relationship between his country and other Middle East nations, with the United States. Continuing in the aforementioned news item, he said, “I’m afraid that Americans don’t know what’s really going on in the Middle East today. Apparently, it doesn’t come through from your embedded journalism. What is happening today is that Palestinian groups are being dismembered, the Lebanese resistance is being disarmed, and the Syrian

government is being demonized—all while Israel continues to occupy the Arab lands it has held since 1967 in violation of all United Nations resolutions calling for its withdrawal. Israeli extremists are seizing Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem. An apartheid wall is being constructed that will separate tens of thousands of Palestinians from their cities and villages.” We note with interest Shaaban’s remarks directed against the nation of Israel as being a major source of the current Middle East problem.

ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

Another attempt at understanding the situation of turmoil in the Middle East, and how to deal with it, was presented in a news commentary under the caption, “How to Win Friends in the Mideast.” Rami Khouri, writing for the *Los Angeles Times* (March 31, 2005), said, “The United States recently appointed Karen Hughes and Liz Cheney to re-vamp two persistently enigmatic and largely failed policies—global public diplomacy and the promotion of democracy throughout the Middle East.

“If these two able officials want to do a better job than their predecessors in grasping why this noble American mission to promote freedom is received with such skepticism, scorn, and even resistance around the world, and not just in Arab-Islamic lands, here’s what they should ponder. The United States track record has hurt, angered or offended most people in the Middle East. By primarily backing Arab dictators and autocrats or supporting the Israeli position on key issues of Arab-Israeli peace-making, credibility has been lost.

“There is no global consensus that the United States is mandated to promote freedom and democracy, or that this is the divinely ordained destiny of the United States. There is such a mandate, though, in the Security Council resolutions to end foreign occupations and international legal conventions—most of which the United States resists, ignores, or applies very selectively. No surprise then that virtually the whole world resists the United States.”

GOOD INTENTIONS FAIL

Some news reports, regarding American Mid-East policy and Israel’s role in the violence, tend to be biased and do not take into account the Bush administration’s good intentions in extending democracy and freedom to the people of this region. The war on terror has been more correctly identified as a war against militant Islam, including some perhaps who may be Ishmaelites. Thus the efforts at attaining peaceful solutions are being attempted in light of the prophetic words concerning the sons of Ishmael.

ISHMAEL & ISRAEL

The prophecy concerning Ishmael, foretold that, “He shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren” (Gen. 16:12); and may best be understood when this part of the prophecy is contrasted with the prophecy concerning the other branch of the Abrahamic tree, that which pertains to the Israelites. This prophecy says, “The LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone.”—Deut. 28:64

These two prophecies, one pertaining to the Ishmaelites, and the other to the children of Israel, have been fulfilled in a most remarkable way throughout the history of these two distinct houses of Abraham. For centuries, the Jews were wanderers, scattered throughout the earth, and with no place they could call home. We recognize, however, that through God's providence, we have been witnesses to the regathering of these people to their own land, which has occurred during the closing years of the present Gospel Age. (Jer. 16:15) The descendants of Ishmael, on the other hand, have remained largely secure and at home in their own native surroundings. They have remained there while being unmoved by repeated attempts of powerful nations to dislodge them without success.

Thus it is seen that the Lord has directly overruled in the affairs of both of these two distinct ancient cultures, and has set the bounds of both of these ancient people. Ishmael, the son of the bondwoman and his descendants, was permitted to dwell in the land of his birth. Isaac, the child of promise and his descendants, have suffered dispersion, not being permitted to dwell in the land of promise.

GOD'S OVERRULING PROVIDENCE

These wonderful promises are a strong indication of our trust and faith in the inspired Word of God that, in due time, the Ishmaelites, and the children of Israel, will both come to know the true God. This blessing will be extended to all people, nations, and languages in Christ's future kingdom.—Dan. 7:14; Zeph. 3:9 ■

Written Aforetime for our Admonition

OF THOSE THINGS written aforetime, none conveys a greater lesson than that of Kadesh Barnea. After hearing the report of the spies, the whole of the fighting men of the Hebrews refused to go forward and take the land that God had promised them, although he had led and fed them through the wilderness, guaranteed their victory, and brought them to the moment of attaining the land. The record of this unbelieving disobedience is given in Numbers, chapters thirteen and fourteen. This is referred to in Hebrews 3:8 as “the provocation.” When David was about to take Jerusalem, he reminded his followers of the sin of Kadesh Barnea. (Ps. 95:7-11) The apostle refers to these incidents, and admonishes us to hear the LORD’s instruction and not to harden our hearts.

Failure is due to lack of faith. Without faith we lose confidence in the power of our Heavenly Father. The disobedient Israelites appeared in their own sight as “grasshoppers” compared to their enemies (Num. 13:33), but to Joshua and Caleb those same enemies were “bread.” (Num. 14:9) This incident has been a lesson to the church throughout the Gospel Age, but we today are almost through the wilderness; the Millennial kingdom lies before us, and if faithful we shall soon reign with Christ.

It is inconceivable that we should let the Truth slip now, but the apostle warns that we are made partakers of Christ if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end.—Heb. 3:6 ■

Living in Unity

Key Verse: *“I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”*
—*I Corinthians 1:10*

Selected Scripture:
I Corinthians 1:10-17

brethren in the church at Corinth whom he had learned were responding otherwise to what they had learned of the principles of Truth and righteousness. They were found to be speaking and acting independently from the rest of the ecclesia, and the apostle warned them to not set themselves up as alternate teachers among the Lord’s people, or to boast of their new and independent understanding of the Word of God. He points out that the truths that he had been engaged in teaching and expounding to them should have been rightly understood and appreciated by all of the brethren in the same manner and spirit of Christ.

IN THIS WEEK’S LESSON,

Apostle Paul addresses the responsibility that all brethren in Christ have to conduct themselves in the ways of unity and harmony, as well as in Truth and righteousness, toward others of like precious faith. This Christlike spirit should prevail among the Lord’s people at all times and places, but especially toward those of like precious faith who have also been called out of darkness into the marvelous light of present Truth.

In our featured scripture, we find Paul admonishing certain

The scriptural record states that Paul addressed this divisive issue when he said, “I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe’s people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, ‘I am of Paul,’ and ‘I am of Apollos,’ and ‘I of Cephas,’ and ‘I of Christ.’” (I Cor. 1:11,12, *New American Standard Version*) Paul is thus emphasizing that the root of this problem is evidence of their having the spirit of sectarianism, rather than possessing the spirit of Christ with humble and contrite hearts. This was strong criticism by the apostle towards those within the Corinthian ecclesia. He tells them that they should be more alert to the fact that Christ is not divided, and that the message of Truth that had been proclaimed to them was a harmonious and blessed gift from God.

The apostle continued by making it known to them that he was glad that he had not been involved in the baptism of any of them. He said, “I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name.” (vss. 14,15) Paul was distancing himself from any involvement in the sectarian spirit that was evident in the Corinthian church. He wished it to be known that he was not flattered by their actions, and that he would neither condone nor authorize this worldly spirit.

In keeping with the spirit of our Lord, each should be aware of the apostle’s teachings on this subject of living in unity. This lesson thus concludes with a further exhortation from Paul’s teachings. He says, “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”—Eph. 4:1-6 ■

Finding Wisdom

Key Verse: “Which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.”

—*I Corinthians 2:13*, *New American Standard Version*

Selected Scripture:
I Corinthians 2:1, 6-16

THE APOSTLE PAUL BEGINS

the second chapter of this letter to the church at Corinth by acknowledging his own fleshly weaknesses and inadequacies in connection with his humble attempt to preach the marvelous Word of God. “When I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony [mystery, *Marginal Translation*] of God.” (I Cor. 2:1, *New American Standard Version*) The marginal translation (NASV) indicates that the word ‘mystery’ was used in some ancient manuscripts of the Bible. The word mystery is also found in the text of *Rotherham’s Translation*.

It is clear from his written message to the Corinthian church, that Paul was speaking about the hidden wisdom and purpose of God in selecting from among the fallen human family a spiritual class for his own. These brethren were among those who were being called, and this invitation and selection has been taking place throughout the present Gospel Age. However, it remains a mystery to the worldly wise who are able neither to understand nor to appreciate it.

The purpose of this mystery is the apostle’s general

theme, as he points out, “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth [discerneth, *MT*] all things, yet he himself is judged [discerned, *MT*] of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.”—vss. 14-16

Having declared in the opening verses the meaning and purpose of his ministry, Paul says, “We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”—vss. 7,8

The minds of the religious leaders and princes of power, both in Paul’s day as well as in our own, have been blinded by Satan to the present calling of the Lord’s people. We are overwhelmed by the wondrous love that God has shown toward us, and the Divine mystery concerning the bride of Christ. We praise him for the prospect of sharing in the soon-to-be-established kingdom of Christ that will ultimately bring blessings to all the families of the earth.

Paul further expresses, “As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” (vs. 9) The fleshly senses are totally unable to comprehend the full meaning of Paul’s words. The eyes, ears, and hearts of mankind cannot intelligently ponder the wondrous hope that dwells in the mind of the New Creature in Christ.

In these closing years of the Gospel Age, the consecrated followers of our Lord continue to hold fast to the glorious scene that is set before them. “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”—vs. 10 ■

Building Together

Key Verse: “*We are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building.*”
—*I Corinthians 3:9*

Selected Scripture:
I Corinthians 3:1-15

IN THE KEY VERSE OF THIS lesson, the Apostle Paul testifies to the blessed relationship that the Lord’s people share as ‘labourers together with God.’ This special privilege was extended to the followers of our Lord Jesus during his First Advent, and it has continued throughout the entire Gospel Age. However, it has taken on even more meaning, and includes a broader dimension, to those brethren who have been witnesses to his Second Presence, and the great harvest work that is taking place in our own time. Jesus is now present as Lord of the harvest, and is presently directing the preparation work in connection with his kingdom that will soon be established.

During his earthly ministry nearly two thousand years ago, Jesus commissioned his disciples to go forth preaching this glorious Truth. “Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.”—Matt. 9:37,38

As a further dimension and meaning of our being fellow laborers with God, Paul tells us that we are ‘God’s husbandry.’ The word husband, as it is used in this text, suggests the work that is required to care for those who have heard the Divine call, and have responded favorably.

Jesus uses the illustration of the vine, and the degree of care that must be exercised to produce the desired fruitage. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it [to prune, or make clean], that it may bring forth more fruit."—John 15:1,2

James encourages us, "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming [Greek *parousia*, presence] of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain." (James 5:7) The work of calling a people for God's name will have required the entire Gospel Age, and thus encompasses the great events of the 'early' rain of Jesus' first work, as well as to his return at the end of the age as the 'latter rain,' the ultimate conclusion of that work.

Paul acknowledges that he may have been blessed with the planting of the seed of Truth, and that Apollos may have assisted in the necessary watering of it; yet nevertheless it is God that gives the "increase." (I Cor. 3:6) Further, he says, "Neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." (vs. 7) God's providential and meticulous care over his spiritual children will see the work to its final and glorious completion.

The apostle stresses next the importance that every one who has received the Truth must use utmost care in laying a good foundation for our faith, and that foundation is our trust in our Lord Jesus Christ. (vss. 10-13) Let us consider well the great blessing of working together with God toward the grand prospect of sharing in the ultimate blessing of all the families of the earth, in fulfillment of God's promise given to Abraham and his seed many centuries ago. (Gen. 22:15-18) "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"—I Cor. 3:16 ■

Serving Responsibility

Key Verse: “*Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.*”
—*I Corinthians 4:1*

Selected Scripture:
I Corinthians 4:1-13

Truth in this manner.

The apostle further emphasizes that these servants of the Truth are ‘stewards,’ which adds further dimension and meaning to the task which has been set before them. Stewardship suggests a deeper sense of responsibility than to simply speak the Truth, and indicates someone who has taken special charge of another person’s property. They are thus considered as managers or overseers of that property. In this case, stewardship pertains to the ministering forth and revealing of long-kept secrets that have been stored in the Scriptures until it was time for them to be revealed.

Being overseers of the secret truths of God is more fully explained by Paul in his letter to the ecclesia at Ephesus. “If indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,

IN THIS LESSON THE APOSTLE Paul is directing our attention to the important responsibilities and obligations that the children of God have when serving the glorious Truth of God’s Word to others. The word ‘ministers’ [servants], as it is used in our Key Verse, addresses those who would endeavor to serve the

which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.”—Eph. 3:2-5, *New American Standard Version*

Faithfulness in carrying out the duties of an overseer is stressed by Paul in his epistle to the brethren at Corinth. He told them, “It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” (I Cor. 4:2) Further to this, he said, “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.”—vs. 5

We have all been richly blessed by Paul’s ministry and his revealing to us the wonderful mysteries of God. To this he testifies, “I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints.” (Col. 1:25,26) His responsibility as overseer of these sacred secrets, and the privilege he had to reveal them to the Lord’s people, is also suggested in his letter to the Romans. He says, “Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began.”—Rom. 16:25

The most profound mystery of the ages reveals God’s plan to extend an invitation to consecrated believers of his Word to become a member of the body, or bride, of Christ. This calling and selection of the church has been the principal work during the present Gospel Age, and, when it is finished, this faithful class will share with our Lord in the grand work of uplifting fallen mankind from the penalty of death. In reference to this mystical body of Christ, Paul explains, “This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.”—Eph. 5:32, NASV ■

Knowledge Shall Be Increased

*“Thou, O Daniel,
shut up the words,
and seal the book,
even to the time of
the end: many
shall run to and
fro, and knowledge
shall be
increased.”*

—Daniel 12:4

THE PROPHET DANIEL HAD

been instructed by God to seal up the meaning and interpretation of the wonderful ‘end time’ visions and prophecies that God had given to him.

These blessed truths, that had been received and recorded by the prophet so long ago, were to be hidden and sealed from the worldly wise and curious seekers of knowledge until the closing times of the present Gospel Age. In due time, however, God’s eternal purpose would be realized in the revealing of his timely message to watchers who would be on hand at the end of this age, to understand the meaning of Daniel’s prophecy.

Further to the above instructions which were given to the prophet, we read, “He said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.” (vs. 9) This closing up and sealing of the visions became a reality throughout the long

intervening centuries, until it's meaning was revealed to those who were on hand to receive it during the latter part of the nineteenth century. This revealing coincided with the promised return of our Lord, and the subsequent blessing to the people of God during the harvest period and closing years of this Gospel Age. Knowledge of the truth of God's eternal purpose was a glorious message to the 'watchers,' and the study of these scriptures has taken on added dimension to those who have meditated upon their true meaning and purpose.

God's wondrous grace and providence to the little flock of his watchers was further manifest to John the revelator. The final message to the church is recorded by him in the message to the Laodicean church. He writes, "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) Thus was the "meat in due season" made available to the watchers.—Matt. 24:45

THE TIME OF THE END

In the early period of the nineteenth century, in the years following the French Revolution, the Bible began to come into general use for the first time. Although there had been much accomplished by energetic reformers over two centuries earlier, during the period of the Protestant Reformation, the work was greatly enlarged upon as a result of the increased level of freedom among the people. Various truths, that had remained hidden in God's Word for centuries, were rediscovered and meditated upon by the common people in their own languages. Many new translations of the Bible began to appear, and

the printing press made its availability widespread to a variety of new readers. It was not until the nineteenth century that there was any large degree of freedom for private and independent study of the Bible, and this freedom was particularly operative in the grass roots society of colonial America.

There were many students and exponents of the Word of God who lived during this time, but one in particular was William Miller. He was instrumental in bringing revived attention to the prophecies that pertained to the Second Advent of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the 'time of the end.' His preaching became very popular and great numbers of people professed to follow Miller's teachings along these prophetic lines. He was particularly interested in Biblical time prophecies which he believed pointed to the exact day and hour in which our Lord Jesus would return to earth. He established a specific date and then proclaimed it widely. The date he believed would fulfill his predictions was 1844. But Jesus did not come as expected at that time, and there was great disappointment experienced by many of those who were convinced that his teachings had been true.

Although Miller had learned much from his studies in the Bible, and had faithfully proclaimed them, he did not understand the real meaning and purpose of Christ's return. His teachings continued to include some of the truth-beclouding traditions that had been carried over from the Dark Ages. This included the belief that Jesus would suddenly appear in the sky, take up his followers to himself and then set the earth on fire, thus making an end of human experience.

DISAPPOINTMENT AND RENEWED INTEREST

Although there had been bitter disappointment among Miller's followers resulting from his failed predictions concerning the year 1844, there came a renewed vigor and fresh searching of the Scriptures for better and more accurate information. He had truly sparked interest in the approaching time of the end prophecies, and the promised return of our Lord Jesus. It was during this time that Pastor Charles Russell, a Congregationalist, began to search the Scriptures in an endeavor to discover new and important truths which would prove the meaning and purpose of Christ's return. As a conscientious young man he acknowledged that one of the most blessed truths that the Bible study group in Allegheny had learned from these studies was the real purpose of Christ's return. They had concluded that it was not for the destruction of the earth and of the unbelieving human family as previously thought. They began to realize that God's ultimate design for mankind was the setting up of a kingdom of truth and righteousness over the whole earth, for the purpose of bringing the poor groaning creation back to relationship with God.

He came to understand that it was God's purpose to restore the human race to perfection as it was originally enjoyed by Adam, and he helped to clarify the doctrine of the ransom. It was discerned that the word ransom really implies a substitution, and that Jesus gave his perfect humanity as a substitute for the perfect life of Adam as Paul had said: "Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." (I Tim. 2:6) This, in turn, meant that Jesus could not be resurrected as a man. Therefore, his

Second Presence would not be as a man, but as a glorious Divine being invisible to human eyes.

Further light also revealed the hope of a great salvation which was being offered to the followers of Jesus during this present Gospel Age. The apostle explained this to the Corinthian brethren. "For he says, In a Season acceptable, I listened to thee, and in a Day of Salvation I assisted thee. Behold! now is a well-accepted Season; behold! now is a Day of salvation." (II Cor. 6:2, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*) It was further seen that the heavenly hope implied much more than merely being saved out of a destroyed earth. It was now discerned that those who strive to make their "calling and election" sure, will receive an abundant entrance into the heavenly phase of Christ's kingdom. (II Pet. 1:10,11) They will reign with our Lord for a thousand years and share in the grand work of restoring the human family to life on the earth.—Rev. 20:4

THE DUE TIME

While it was seen that Christ would be engaged in the future work of restoration during the administration of his kingdom (Acts 3:19-21), the revealing of this precious truth also helped to bring into proper focus other important doctrines in the Bible. The Scriptures identify these wonderful truths as the "meat in due season" (Matt. 24:45), and are therefore especially applicable to those who are on hand during the closing years of this Gospel Age. Since our Lord's Second Presence, his people, the watchers, have now come to understand "present truth." (II Pet. 1:12) God's equitable plan of restoration and reconciliation will be made known to the whole

groaning creation under the administration of Christ's thousand-year kingdom.

The idea of human restoration on earth had previously been suggested by some, but this great truth had never been clearly understood by the Lord's people until the end time of this age. When it had thus been realized, the 'meat in due season' brought harmony to the entire Word of God, and those who understood it could no longer keep it secret.

During this time, God had providentially raised up his servant, Bro. Russell, and the other watchers, to make known these unlocked secrets of the Word of Truth. Enthused with love for the Lord, he had the message printed and delivered to churches throughout the United States as "Food for Thinking Christians." Thus the meat in due season began to be proclaimed far and wide throughout the country. As time went on, the hearts of thousands were caused to rejoice. Whether accepted or rejected, the importance of this harvest message was recognized by many. The fact that all mankind were to have an opportunity to be restored to human perfection was almost too good to be true.

CHRIST'S PRESENCE RECOGNIZED

As we give closer consideration to these facts, and realize that a group of faithful watchers were given meat in due season, the implication is that the Lord's Second Presence [Greek, *parousia*], must have also then begun, for this was to be one of the first evidences of his return. The fact of Christ's presence was manifest to the watchers by the revealing of precious truth concerning the long-hidden Divine plan of the ages.

The presence of Christ has not yet been made known to the world in general. The appreciation of this blessing will ultimately be manifest to all mankind. Paul said, "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing [Greek, *epiphania*—manifestation] of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." (Titus 2:13) The watchers have appreciated the meaning of this text as the manifestation of present Truth to them in the closing years of this present Gospel Age.

The Prophet Isaiah, writing under inspiration of the Holy Spirit many centuries ago, points to the glorious and blessed time when God's purpose for his earthly creation will be made known. He writes, "The LORD hath made bare [uncovered] his holy arm [Christ] in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God."—Isa. 52:10

The unhampered reign of sin, violence, and evil has always been a severe test upon the people of God, but in our modern-day world God continues to allow his name and eternal purpose to be blasphemed while his own people suffer. The apostle's assurance was that this would not continue forever, that Christ would be revealed in power and great glory to the world. In the exercise of his great power, all evil will be destroyed, and the willingly obedient will be brought back to righteousness.

The presence of Christ will be revealed to the world under severe circumstances. Daniel described the end of this age as a "time of trouble." "At that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there

was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.” (Dan. 12:1) We are witnesses to the increasing level of violence that was foretold to precede the setting up of Christ’s kingdom on earth.

A DAY OF JUDGMENT

Peter describes this time as a “day of judgment” over an ungodly world. He also uses fire as a symbol, even as Paul had done. “The heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.” (II Pet. 3:7) ‘Fire’ is used to describe the destruction of evil, but Peter adds, “Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” (vs. 8) He then assures us that God is longsuffering. “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”—vs. 9

Thus we see that Christ will be revealed to the world in what is symbolically described as “flaming fire.” This fire points to God’s zeal against Satan’s unrighteous rule over the affairs of earth. “If, indeed, our glad tidings be veiled, they have been veiled to those who are perishing; to those unbelievers, whose minds the God of this age blinded, in order that they might not see clearly the effulgence of the glad tidings of the glory of the Anointed one, who is the likeness of God.”—II Cor. 4:3,4, *WED*

THE FIRE OF GOD'S JEALOUSY

The Prophet Zephaniah adds dimension to the eternal purpose of God in connection with the human family. "Wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy." (Zeph. 3:8) Although 'fire' is used to describe the destruction of all unrighteousness, Zephaniah explains the ultimate outcome of the fire of God's jealousy. He adds, "Then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent."—vs. 9

When the present order of selfishness and unrighteousness has been taken away, the whole human creation will be lifted up, and will learn the meaning and purpose of our Lord's return and presence. The Apostle Paul wrote, "To you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed [Greek, *apokalupsis*] from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."—II Thess. 1:7,8

Jesus tells about the work that will be done in the kingdom. "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come,

ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”—
Matt. 25:31-34

Matthew’s account describes the time when our Lord, together with his glorified church, will reign over the nations. The separating and judging work will require the entire Millennial Age (the 1,000 years) to accomplish. The whole world will thus be tested and dealt with in a righteous manner, and all will be given opportunity to be brought to a full and clear knowledge of the Truth. Those who have the Lord’s spirit, and who are meek, teachable, and willing to be led in the way of Truth, are described as sheep. These, we believe, will be the majority, and will ‘inherit the kingdom’—eternal human life. Others, who are self-willed, stubborn, possessing goatlike characteristics, and who display no desire to live righteously, will be deemed unworthy of life, and die the Second Death—eternal destruction.

THE WHOLE CREATION WAITS

The human family will be uplifted and blessed by the administration of Christ’s kingdom, which is now near at hand. “The anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves,

waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.”—Rom. 8:19-23, *New American Standard Version*

Let us rejoice that while as yet Christ’s presence is known only by the few, we know that in God’s due time it will also be manifested to the whole world of mankind, including the countless numbers of those who yet wait in their graves. “It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; . . . we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”—Isa. 25:9 ■

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

JUNE 1—“He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.”—John 14:21 (Z. ’95-75 Hymn 145)

JUNE 8—“He which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”—James 5:20 (Z. ’95-203 Hymn 22)

JUNE 15—“And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.”—Isaiah 55:3 (Z. ’96-29 Hymn 178A)

JUNE 22—“It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. . . . Every man according to his several ability.”—I Corinthians 4:2; Matthew 25:15 (Z. ’07-63 Hymn 210)

JUNE 29—“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”—Matthew 5:8 (Z. ’00-71 Hymn 208)

The Vision Speaks

“The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie.”

—*Habakkuk 2:3*

THE CREATOR’S CHARACTER is brought into question each time those who serve him suffer, while those who serve Satan prosper. In this “present evil world” (Gal. 1:4), most perceive righteousness merely as an admirable, but ultimately unattainable, aspiration. (Gal. 1:4) Many consider it to be an abstraction, an ideal of little practical value. Some feel it is only a burden. Few choose to pursue righteousness since its advantages are uncertain and its rewards are seldom immediate. Throughout the ages, skeptical mankind has complained that if God does exist, he has been inconsistent in his defense of the righteous. Unbelievers do not understand why any would commit to righteousness since that Divine principle seems to receive so little Divine support.—Luke 12:32

Satan has always characterized God as unable, or unwilling, to save the righteous from abuse and treachery. As a result, all Divine principles and precepts are questioned. To the worldly, God’s plans and purposes are shrouded in mystery. That tends to deepen its suspicion of him and his motives. That skepticism fosters the absurd conclusion that, in his own

defense, God should throw open to his suspicious subjects the secrets of his sanctuary that he may prove he harbors no ulterior motives nor hides any weaknesses. Absent such wholesale disclosure of Divine secrets, mankind has formulated numerous systems of religious belief, based on what it has imagined those Divine secrets to be. It continues to press the righteous for an answer to the question, Why do the righteous suffer?

THE SANCTUARY

The psalmist contemplates, “Behold, these are the wicked; . . . always at ease, they have increased in wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure, And washed my hands in innocence; For I have been stricken all day long, And chastened every morning.” (Ps. 73:12-14, *New American Standard Version*) Unlike the cynical world, the psalmist considers the matter humbly and reverently and is brought to a vital truth: None outside the sanctuary of God can understand his ways. The realization of that truth is expressed by the psalmist: “When I pondered to understand this [question of why the righteous suffer], it was troublesome in my sight Until I came into the sanctuary of God; Then I perceived their end.” (Ps. 73:16,17, *NASV*) The psalmist realized the answer to his question lay within the ‘sanctuary of God.’ He understood that admission into the sanctuary required total submission to God’s will and ways under all circumstances and conditions, even unto death. Proving he properly understood the matter, the psalmist expressed the spirit of total submission as well as the expectation of its eventual reward. “Thou shalt

guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.” Ps. 73:24

Though the psalmist came to understand that the answer to his question lay inside the sanctuary of God, he was not invited in. Indeed, no one would be until the First Advent of Christ Jesus, and the Gospel Age. Only those who submit and trust utterly in the Lord are admitted into the sanctuary, wherein lay God’s sacred secrets. Christ Jesus himself emphasized that fact. “The disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them [the public] in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. . . . But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.”—Matt. 13:10,11,16,17

TYPICAL AARON

Christ Jesus is the door into the sanctuary. (John 10:7,9) None can enter, though, unless invited and authorized to do so. “[No one can] come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me.” (John 6:44, *New Living Translation*) This was typified in Israel’s Tabernacle arrangement. Regardless of who had access to the Tabernacle during the year for other ritual purposes, only Aaron, Moses’ brother, was permitted access to that sanctuary on Israel’s annual Day of Atonement. He, alone, had been initiated and authorized to enter as the high priest of God. (Lev. 8; Lev. 16:17) To become the high priest,

Aaron had to figuratively die to his prior identity as Aaron, the Levite, just an ordinary member of the twelve-tribe camp of Israel. His figurative death was represented by the literal sacrificial deaths and burnt offerings of various animals. Signified by the anointing oil poured upon his head by Moses, Aaron took on a significance that had never existed before: he became Aaron, the typical high priest of God, consecrated, fully authorized to enter alone the typical sanctuary of God once every year thereafter.

ANTITYPICAL AARON

That typical illustration was fulfilled by our Lord at his First Advent. The man Jesus, born a Jew, member of the tribe of Judah, citizen of Nazareth, came to the Jordan River in an attitude of complete submission and devotion to God. He [Jesus] was immersed in those waters by John the Baptist, thereby signifying the death of the man Jesus. (Heb. 10:7,9) Emerging from the water, our Lord was anointed with the Holy Spirit by his Heavenly Father. Thus it was signified that Jesus' identity as the antitypical High Priest of God had begun. As antitypical Aaron, he alone was fully authorized to enter into the secrets of God's Divine plan of salvation for mankind during the antitypical Atonement Day. (Matt. 3:13; Heb. 10:5-7; John 1:32) Any who would subsequently follow the Lord into those mysteries within the antitypical sanctuary during the Gospel Age, must be invited to do so. (Acts 2:39) In addition, they must, as did their Master, die to their own will, wholly submit to the will of God, and receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Ever after, they must patiently accept and trust whatever experiences God's

wise council deems necessary. “In your patience [with those experiences] possess ye your [lives].”—Luke 21:19

Those called and chosen during this Gospel Age thus form the figurative spiritual body of the antitypical High Priest, the various members of which are collectively covered by his personal righteousness likened unto a robe. (Eph. 1:22,23; I Cor. 12:18-27; Isa. 61:10) The body of the antitypical High Priest, through no merit of its own, thus follows the head into the sanctuary and unto those great mysteries. It is there they learn the wisdom of suffering.

THE HIGH TOWER

Long before the Gospel Age, the prophet Habakkuk questioned why the righteous suffer, saying, “O Jehovah, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear? I cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save. Why dost thou show me iniquity, and look upon perverseness? for destruction and violence are before me; and there is strife, and contention riseth up. Therefore the law is slacked, and justice doth never go forth; for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore justice goeth forth perverted. Thou that art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and that canst not look on perverseness, wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy peace when the wicked swalloweth up the man that is more righteous than he.”—Hab. 1:2-4,13, *American Standard Version*

Essentially, Habakkuk asks the same question as the psalmist—How can the suffering of the righteous be explained to unbelievers? As did the psalmist, Habakkuk determines to humbly and reverently

await the answer to his query. “I will climb my watchtower now and wait to see what answer God will give to my complaint.” (Hab. 2:1, *The Living Bible*) That God is the tower is made clear, “Thou [God] hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy.” (Ps. 61:3) As he waited upon the Lord for the answer to his question, Habakkuk figuratively climbed his watchtower: he set aside his own view and adopted God’s Divine perspective of the matter.

THE VISION WRITTEN

Having gained the necessary elevated perspective, a vision came to Habakkuk. With it came a twofold commission. “The Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.” (Hab. 2:2) According to *Strong’s Bible Concordance*, ‘write’ means, ‘to describe or record.’ Habakkuk did that literally in his prophecy, thereby satisfying the first part of his commission.

However, the prophet did not satisfy the second part of his commission to ‘make it plain.’ *Strong’s Bible Concordance* defines the word plain as ‘explain.’ The second part of Habakkuk’s commission could thus be properly stated, to explain the vision by putting in a name.

Absent that name, Habakkuk could only refer to the vision as ‘it.’ He does so five times in verse 3. “The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.” Very similar language is found in Hebrews, chapter 10; language where the Apostle Paul clearly refers

to our Lord Jesus, saying, “Yet a little while [for an appointed time], and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.” (vs. 37) The similarities between these verses force the conclusion that Habakkuk and the Apostle Paul speak of the same vision. That the vision had a name is evident from Paul’s earlier reference to Christ Jesus as the “heavenly vision.” “Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.” (Acts 26:19) Paul was referring to Jesus of Nazareth whom he met on the road to Damascus after his resurrection. The vision Habakkuk experienced, therefore, was a name he was not then permitted to know—Christ Jesus.

UNFULFILLED COMMISSION

No Old Testament prophet, including John the Baptist—designated the greatest prophet ever born of woman—was afforded the blessing of understanding the mysteries of the sanctuary. Not even the angels, who also desire to look into those things, are privileged to know them. Yet, the least admitted unto the sanctuary of God are afforded that wonderful privilege. (Luke 7:28; I Pet. 1:10-12; Matt. 13:11) Habakkuk did all he could do; he recorded what was spoken to him. But he could not explain it and, therefore, could not make it plain.

A heavenly commission only partially fulfilled is very unusual. Habakkuk’s is not unique. A similar circumstance of a partially fulfilled commission from God features the prophet Elijah. “The LORD said unto him [Elijah], Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and

Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meho-lah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.” (I Kings 19:15,16) The word ‘anoint’ in this context is used in the sense of authorizing. It does not necessarily mean to literally cover with oil, though that is not excluded from the definition as this narrative demonstrates.

Of the three he was commissioned to anoint, Elijah was allowed proximity only to Elisha. Therefore, Elijah did what he could do; he anointed or authorized Elisha by casting his mantle, the emblem of his authority, over Elisha’s shoulders. (I Kings 19:19) Subsequently, we find that not even Elisha anointed the remaining two, Hazael and Jehu, directly. He authorized only one. This he did with his tears as he told Hazael that God wanted him to be king over Syria. (II Kings 8:7-15) Jehu was the only one of the three anointed with oil. Not, however, by Elijah, nor Elisha, nor even by another prophet, but by one of the followers of the prophets. (II Kings 9:1-10) The point being that the word of the Lord was fully accomplished. The three individuals he wanted authorized were indeed authorized. Each authorization was accomplished by quite different means, but all by the power and will of God. Elijah would have fulfilled his commission and accomplished all three authorizations had he been allowed the opportunity, but he was allowed the opportunity only with Elisha.

So with Habakkuk. Had God provided him the knowledge and the opportunity, Habakkuk would have certainly explained the vision by putting in the name of Christ Jesus. He could not, however, for, as it says in Habakkuk 2:3, the knowledge

related to the name of that vision was not due to be known for an ‘appointed time’—a time far into the future of Habakkuk’s day. Therefore, just as Elijah did what he could do and left that which was undone to others, so did Habakkuk. He recorded the vision and left it to others to later explain it by putting in that name.

A DIVINE PLEDGE

He had been sufficiently encouraged by his experience. From it, he understood righteousness would be vindicated by God in his due time. “Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger.” (Hab. 3:12) Encouraged by the certainty of that Divine pledge, Habakkuk likewise pledged that he would continue to praise God, trusting the outworking of his Divine purposes to the destruction of all evil and the exaltation of all righteousness in due time. “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” (Hab. 3:17,18) Habakkuk had learned that one could, indeed, suffer all things joyfully if that joyful suffering glorified God. During this present Gospel Age, Christ and his disciples have personified that which Habakkuk learned. Suffering in the defense of the holy name of God is to them more valuable than their very lives.

THE MESSAGE

Christ Jesus was the vision whom the prophet Habakkuk was allowed to experience but not understand,

because the understanding was yet for an appointed time. This Gospel Age has been the appointed time of waiting for the vision. The church understands that the harvest has begun, that the harvest is the end of the age and that the time of waiting is, therefore, past. (Matt. 13:30,39) Christ Jesus, the vision, is present and now speaks. He proclaims the principle by which ‘this present evil world’ will be ended, and by which the world that is to come will be governed. That message and that principle are precisely what God told Habakkuk the vision would speak when it came. “This [will be] the message: Those who are evil will not survive, but those who are righteous will live because they are faithful to God.”—Hab. 2:4, *Today’s English Version*

In the forthcoming Millennial Age, all will understand that Christ Jesus is the vision and that all must look to him for life. Mankind will then comprehend the infinite truth—“Where there is no vision, the people perish.” (Prov. 29:18) A thankful world will thereafter praise Almighty God for his farseeing wisdom which, through suffering, provided that wonderful vision without which the people would have perished. ■

OBITUARIES

The following brethren have recently finished their Christian course. We wish to express our sincere sympathy to their family and friends in the loss of these dear ones.

Sister Dorothy DeFord, Canton, IL—March 17. Age, 102

Brother Mark Brandon, Vernon, BC—April. Age, 87

Sister Clare Lutz, Greer, SC—April 23. Age, 91

Eden to Zion

*“Open ye the gates,
that the righteous
nation which
keepeth the truth
may enter in.”*

—*Isaiah 26:2*

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

once existed alone, “from everlasting to everlasting.”

(Ps. 90:2) As he is now, so was he always—perfect, complete, lacking nothing, suffi-

cient unto himself. So shall he ever be, unchanged and unchanging. All things that have been created, or will be created, are intended to express his perfect sufficiency. Whatever our Father does enhances all he has done before. Each creative act produces a deeper, richer blessing for the living. So will it continue throughout eternity. (Ps. 19:1) It is, therefore, incumbent upon all creatures of higher intelligence, whether flesh or spirit, to live in a manner that is beneficial to all other life for the glory of the Creator. Since its earliest inception, for its protection and benefit, the Creator continually covered, or overspread, his Creation with all good and perfect gifts through his various living agencies, principalities and powers. In a perfectly balanced state, he provided for a thriving Creation that, in turn, served him by living in mutual harmony for the benefit of all . . . until Eden.—James 1:17

THE COVERING CHERUB

Lucifer, a cherub of the spirit realm, later called ‘serpent’ and Satan, did not subscribe to the foregoing principle. He was a very powerful spirit being who was consumed by pride, and lust for more power. He wanted not to serve the living, but wanted the living to serve him. (Ezek. 28:12-14; Isa. 14:13,14) The creation of an earthly realm, particularly two human creatures in Eden—Adam and Eve—provided him an opportunity to challenge the Divine principle of ‘living to benefit the living.’ In effect, this was a direct challenge to the very sovereignty of the Creator, Author of that principle. (Gen. 1:26,27) Scheming to maneuver the Creator into a dilemma, Lucifer correctly reasoned that since Adam and Eve were free moral agents, God would not intervene even if they were tempted by him. Lucifer risked everything, and initiated his challenge through the man and woman whom he persuaded to disobey the single condition of their covenant with God. That condition is expressed as follows: “The LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”—Gen. 2:16,17; Hosea 6:7, *Marginal Translation*

ALLURE OF DISOBEDIENCE

Lucifer surmised that God had but two options if Adam and Eve transgressed that specified condition: (1) Terminate Adam and Eve’s access to the tree of life because of their corrupted state, or (2) grant them continued access to the tree of life in spite of their

corrupted state. Encouraged by Lucifer to ignore the Divine prohibition, the pair ate of the fruit of the 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil' and were corrupted. They were intentionally corrupted to provoke the exercise of either option. From Lucifer's perspective, he had maneuvered the Creator into an indefensible position where the exercise of either option would bring his motives and abilities into question. Terminating Adam and Eve's access to the tree of life would constitute a hopeless death sentence, which would eventually bring into question God's omnipotence—his will and ability to protect his creatures from one determined to corrupt and, thereby, kill them. (John 8:44) On the other hand, allowing Adam and Eve continued access to the tree of life after their transgression would involve altering a stated Divine rule. Even a slight alteration would eventually bring all Divine principles, laws, judgments, and decisions rendered by God, based upon those principles, into doubt.

COSTLY KNOWLEDGE

Adam and Eve ate of that proscribed fruit and experienced sin thereby, which cost them everything. Had the man and woman resisted Lucifer's wiles and not disobeyed, they would have learned the difference between good and evil through Lucifer's inevitable exposure and condemnation as a lone conspirator. They would have seen that the difference between good and evil is obedience to the will of God. They would have understood it is not necessary for one to experience evil to know one should avoid evil. The man and woman tragically, and foolishly, paid with their lives for knowledge of good

and evil which, in due time, would have been theirs anyway.

Judgment, which Adam and Eve shared with Lucifer as coconspirators, was rendered for their transgression and the sentence was death for the man and his mate. “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Gen. 3:19) Lucifer was also condemned to death. “The LORD God said unto the serpent [Lucifer], Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly thou shalt go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life.” (Gen. 3:14) “Thou shalt be brought down to hell [grave], to the sides of the pit.” (Isa. 14:15) “Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee.”—Ezek. 28:18

AN ENCOURAGING PROPHECY

In addition to these pronouncements, reference was made to the future dominance of the woman’s seed over Lucifer’s seed. “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” (Gen. 3:15) The implication was that Adam and Eve would not die before other generations were born to them, and that some degree of relief from their plight might lie within one of those future generations. Encouraging as this prophecy surely was, and welcome as Lucifer’s condemnation must have been, neither directly offered the man and woman hope that their ruined condition

would ever be altered. If ruin was, in fact, to be their permanent condition, Lucifer could have claimed a victory. A single victory would have disproved God's omnipotence. All things Divine, including Lucifer's condemnation, would have been questioned thereafter.

A RAY OF HOPE

The first intimation of hope for Adam and Eve came with God's response to Lucifer's challenge. Rather than terminating them forever, or granting them continued access to the tree of life, the infinitely wise Creator symbolically expressed great pity, love, and compassion by physically covering the nakedness of the defeated pair. "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them." (Gen. 3:21) The word coat in *Strong's Bible Concordance* is #3801. It means 'shirt, garment, robe.' But, more importantly, it means 'to cover.'

The garments were the first indications that God would address Adam and Eve's death sentence. They were the first hint that anything pertaining to the man and woman's circumstance would be, by some means, covered. The covering garments were symbolic references to the marvelous, and completely unforeseen, Divine idea of atonement.

Lucifer had badly miscalculated. He had risked his entire existence on the erroneous assumption that the Creator had but two options. God, in fact, had the stupendous and completely unsuspected third option of Christ, his beloved Son. He was a miracle of righteousness and obedience through whom, in due time, the impure could be returned to purity, neither ignoring the sin, nor altering the

principles of God to accommodate the sin. No being below the Divine plane of existence could have conceived the solution to Adam and Eve's desperate situation—atonement through the blood of an acceptable sacrificial substitute (Jesus, the man), and the application of that blood by a qualified High Priest (Jesus, the anointed) on behalf of the transgressor who desires reconciliation with God. Atonement through Christ was Adam and Eve's only hope, though they knew it not. It was to Christ that the aforementioned 'seed' and 'coats' had referred. Little did Lucifer realize they were symbolic references to the instrument of his eventual demise.

THE GUARDIAN CHERUBIM

Having covered our first parents both literally and symbolically, God sent them forth from the garden. "He drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."—Gen. 3:24

The stated mission of the 'Cherubims' was on behalf of the 'tree of life.' It was not a further pursuit against Adam and Eve. The cherubim were to 'keep' or preserve the 'way' of the tree of life. The 'flaming sword' did not turn toward Adam and Eve exclusively, but turned in every direction; the implication being that access to the fruit of that tree, and the blessing of everlasting life, would be utterly denied to all under all circumstances for an indefinite period of time. The word way in the phrase 'keep the way of the tree of life' is defined by *Strong's Bible Concordance* #1870 as 'a road (trodden); a course of action or mode of action, often adverse.' The intended way,

or course of action, of the tree of life was that it bless Adam and Eve and their progeny with everlasting life, by yielding to them its fruit indefinitely. Had Adam and Eve retained their purity, everlasting life would have continued to be a blessing to them. However, with sin abroad after the fall of Adam, the fruit of the tree of life could no longer offer endless life as a blessing. It could offer only an eternity of adversity in sin. Therefore, the cherubim and the flaming sword were employed in Eden to preserve the intended way of the tree of life, until sin and death could be destroyed through him who was symbolized by the seed and the coats. Until Christ declares the fruit of that tree once more beneficial to mankind, the vigil of the cherubim will continue.

BEHOLD THE LAMB

What, then, of Christ? Let us recall the familiar words of John the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) We see the universal import of his words, for to whom was he speaking if not all the earth; even the dead and yet unborn? For whom was he speaking if not heaven? It was incumbent upon John to proclaim the arrival of Christ and what he had come to do. Through him came the heavenly announcement that the fruit of the tree of life would be made available to mankind, but not before its stain of sin is removed by the blood of the man Jesus—the Lamb of God. The blood of the Lamb is capable of removing the Adamic condemnation from man, of undoing the moral harm done to Adam and his race by his fall, and repairing the damaged relationship between them and the Creator. The tree

of life was powerless to do that. It was never part of its way.

THE HOLY WAY

Let us recall that *Strong's Concordance* literal definition of the word way is 'a road trodden.' In due time, when the church is complete, the merit of the sacrificial blood of the ransom will be applied in heaven on behalf of the world, thereby redeeming it from its condemnation in Adam. A road, or way, by which the ransomed can return to all that was lost in Adam, will then be open. Isaiah calls that road "the way of holiness," and he foretells the marvelous time of its opening. "An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."—Isa. 35:8-10

NEW JERUSALEM

There is a city described in Revelation very much as the city of Zion is described in Isaiah. "I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. . . . And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. . . . And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in

the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.”—Rev. 21:2,4,24,25

ALL THINGS NEW

It is apparent that the ‘Zion’ of Isaiah and the ‘new Jerusalem’ of Revelation, both populated by ‘the redeemed,’ ‘the ransomed,’ ‘the saved,’ are the same city. In each account, the city is a symbol for the Divine administrative principles of God’s new order to which all must eventually submit to attain life. Revelation twenty-one states the matter most directly, “I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; . . . And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.” (vss. 1,5) That new order is characterized by the bride of the Lamb. “There came unto me one . . . saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.”—Rev. 21:9,10

“There shall in no wise enter into it [the city] any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” (Rev. 21:27) Having lost life in Eden, mankind must journey to Zion to regain it. When redeemed, man must thereafter come to the Lamb and his bride to be written into the book of life, and thereby gain entrance to the city. A thousand years of treading the way of holiness will be required for that to be accomplished.

During that long journey, mankind will learn righteousness and obedience. “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have [a] right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.” (chap. 22:14) These are the same ‘gates’ that were referenced in Revelation 21:25—the gates to the New Jerusalem; to Zion.

THE KEY

Doing the commandments of God is the key to unlocking the gates to the city wherein resides the tree of life. After being redeemed, after a journey of a thousand years upon the way of holiness, after fully embracing the laws of the new order, and after a “little season” demonstrating its ability to do them, mankind will be written into the “book of life.” (Rev. 20:3,15) With that, the cherubim of Genesis, characterized as gates in Revelation, will, after thousands of years, step aside and admit mankind unto the city, the new order, and grant it access to the tree of life. Adam and his progeny will regain the covenant relationship with God lost in Eden and, as privileges of that renewed relationship, regain sovereignty of the Earth, direct communion with God, and everlasting life. Until they are able to do God’s commandments, the cherubim and the flaming sword will continue to keep the way of the tree of life. Mankind, enabled by its journey to do in Zion that which it was unable to do in Eden, will have, by the grace of God, profited mightily while Lucifer will have lost all. ■



The Substance of Things Hoped For

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

—*Hebrews 11:1*

FAITH IS THE ABILITY TO

believe as true that which cannot be demonstrated by our natural, physical senses. We cannot see God nor hear his voice, nor touch him. Thus

it takes faith to believe in his existence. The Apostle Paul emphasizes the importance of having this special quality of faith, and that God is pleased with those who exercise it. In this same chapter on faith he explains, “Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”—Heb. 11:6

This is faith in its simplest form. But true Christian faith goes beyond this. We not only believe that God exists, but we have faith in God, and in his integrity, justice, love, wisdom, and power. We have faith in the rightness of the Divine plan as it pertains to ourselves individually, and to his people collectively. We also have faith in the Divine plan for the world in general. This is the minimum of

faith which one must possess in order to approach God and receive blessings from him.

Abraham was richly rewarded for his faith. We read in Genesis 15:6, "He believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness." Paul quotes this in Romans 4:3, and in the twenty-second verse adds, "It was imputed to him for righteousness." Clearly, it was imputed to him. Abraham, like all other members of the fallen and condemned race, was imperfect. It was impossible for him to live up to the Divine standard of righteousness, yet he had strong faith in God and in the promises of God. God was willing to—and did—'count,' or consider, Abraham's faith as an evidence of his integrity. He knew that Abraham would serve him perfectly if he could.

Because of Abraham's faith, God accepted him as a friend. Here was a genuine basis for friendship. Abraham believed God and, because he did, God had confidence in him. Thus a beautiful friendship was established and maintained which continued throughout Abraham's lifetime. On various occasions, God spoke to Abraham, reiterating and enlarging upon the promise he made to him on the "plains of Mamre," that through his seed he would bless all the families of the earth.—Gen. 13:18, *Marginal Translation*; 22:18

Abraham's faith in these promises caused him to look for a "city," a government, which would have foundations, whose builder and maker would be God. When put to the final test, Abraham's faith was such that he believed God would raise his son, Isaac, from the dead. And willingly giving up the boy as a sacrifice, Abraham "received him in a figure" from the dead.—Heb. 11:10,17-19

“FAITH COMETH BY HEARING”

In Romans 10:17, we read, “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” The reference here is to an active, demonstrated faith which God is pleased to count as righteousness. There are doubtless millions who have the ability to exercise faith in God, and these do believe that he exists. But only when God reveals himself through his Word, and invites cooperation in his plan of salvation, is the opportunity given to demonstrate faith by obedience.

Beginning with the death of Jacob, God chose his twelve sons and their families as a nation. To these, in due time, he gave his Law. To these, he sent his prophets, and through the prophets gave them an opportunity to know his plan as it was due to be understood, and to cooperate therein. Only a few responded in obedience, and this was because they believed God.

The faith of these was so strong that it reached beyond their immediate surroundings and experiences. Some received marvelous evidences of God’s favor. Paul speaks of these, saying that they “subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong,” were “valiant in fight,” and “turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again.”—Heb. 11:32-35

Strong faith was essential in these victorious experiences, and it enabled them to see the overruling providence of God in connection with them. The three Hebrews—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—quenched the violence of fire through their

faith (Dan. 3:19), and defied Nebuchadnezzar. They said that the God whom they served was able to deliver them. But they also told the king that if their God did not deliver them, they would not bow down to the image which he had set up. (vs. 18) Their faith was not that God would deliver them, but in God. They believed that whatever he did would be right. It is this sort of faith that God counts for righteousness.

Continuing, Paul writes, “Others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”—Heb. 11:36-38

To pass through experiences such as these required a faith that could trust God even though there was no visible evidence of his care and protection. It was faith in the promises of God pertaining to the future that sustained them. They endured these things in order that they might obtain a “better resurrection.” (vs. 35) Their concern was in the fulfillment of God’s promises pertaining to the future. Like Abraham, with respect to Isaac, they believed that God was able, and would raise them from the dead in his own due time. This was the faith that was counted to them for righteousness.

While the whole nation of Israel was called and chosen by God, only these few, the Worthies of old, made their calling sure to the position designed for them in the Divine plan. They did this by their faith. It was a

faith that was demonstrated by their obedience under the most trying circumstances. Because they thus proved their worthiness, in the resurrection they will be given perfect human bodies through which they will be able to express their praises to God, and to serve him perfectly as “princes in all the earth.”—Ps. 45:16

FAITH DURING THE GOSPEL AGE

The quality of faith is unchanged from age to age in the plan of God. It was true in the past and is true now that ‘without faith it is impossible to please God.’ No one can enjoy God’s friendship without having faith in him. Those who are able to exercise faith are rewarded with whatever blessings the LORD may be dispensing at the time.

The woman, mentioned in Matthew 9:20-22, was cured of an “issue of blood” because of her great faith. Jesus said to her, “Thy faith hath made thee whole.” The blind, referred to in Matthew 9:29, were told by Jesus, “According to your faith be it unto you.” They exercised faith and received their sight.

The Bible reveals that there are degrees of faith. The disciples had faith to believe that Jesus was their Messiah. But, on the storm-tossed Sea of Galilee, they became fearful. (Matt. 8:24) After Jesus rescued Peter from the sea, he said to him, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” (Matt. 14:31) On another occasion the disciples said to Jesus, “Increase our faith.”—Luke 17:5

In Romans 1:16,17, we read, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; . . . For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith.” The ‘gospel of Christ’ is received by faith,

but not instantaneously. It is revealed gradually as faith is able to receive and act upon it.

The apostles are good illustrations of this 'faith to faith' revelation and receiving of the Gospel. Even before they heard of Jesus they knew something of the Messianic promises and had faith in them. When they came into contact with Jesus and his wonderful ministry, they believed that he was the Messiah, and left all to follow him. Thus upon the basis of their faith God was dealing with them.

In his prayer, Jesus said to his Father concerning his apostles, "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word." (John 17:6) These men were completely dedicated to God. They had faith in his Word, and were obedient to it. Prior to Pentecost they did not clearly understand the Divine plan, but they believed and obeyed that which they did understand. Because of this, God looked upon them as his people. 'Thine they were,' said Jesus. Like Abraham, they were God's friends. How richly their faith was rewarded!

KNOWLEDGE

The faith that opens the door to friendship with God is not a blind belief. It is faith in the plans and purposes of God to the extent that it is his will to reveal them. It was Abraham's faith in the promises that constituted the basis for his friendship with God. This was true of the apostles. It is still true today.

During the Gospel Age, God reveals his plans and purposes through his written Word. The purpose of this revelation, even as in the past, is to invite cooperation in the outworking of the Divine plan. During the Gospel Age, this cooperation can be only

through association with Jesus, and under his headship. Jesus said, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” (John 6:44) This shows that there is a certain selection on God’s part. He is not at the present time drawing the whole world, but only those whom he chooses.

God chooses those whom he knows are able to exercise faith in him and in his promises. In addition to their ability to exercise faith, these are also humble of heart and willing to learn. The first evidence of God’s drawing power in their lives may well be in an experience, or series of experiences, which cause them to realize the futility and worthlessness of the material values so highly esteemed by the world in general.

Their hearts prepared, they are brought into contact with the Truth of the Word. This also is by the providence of God in the exercise of his drawing power. When they hear the Word, or read it, and their minds and hearts begin to respond to it. God is pleased, for this was the object of the exercise of his drawing power in their lives.

One of the first things learned from the Word of Truth is the fact that all are sinners, members of a sin-cursed and dying race. If faith lays hold upon this fact and the heart properly responds, the result will be repentance. Like the publican who went up to the Temple to pray, those who repent will cry out, “God be merciful to me a sinner.”—Luke 18:13

The LORD is indeed merciful, for his providence has been working to bring about this very state of repentance. If God loved the whole world of sinners so much that he sent his Son to be their Redeemer, surely his love goes out much more to those who, when learning of his gracious provision

through Christ, begin to respond to his drawing power and demonstrate their faith by repenting of their sins, and asking for forgiveness.

Just as no one can come to Jesus unless drawn by the Father, Jesus explained that only through him could anyone have access to the Father. (John 14:6) This means that the Truth by which God draws, points the way to Jesus and to the redeeming merit of his shed blood. During this Gospel Age, the only object of thus being drawn to God through Christ is to become disciples of Christ. To be a disciple of Christ means to follow in his footsteps of self-sacrifice. It means to deny self and to take up one's cross and follow Jesus into death. It means to be "planted together in the likeness of his death."—Rom. 6:3-5

The footstep followers of Jesus walk in a path that is difficult to tread, a "narrow" way. (Matt. 7:14) To walk in this way means shame, ignominy, persecution, affliction, suffering, and death. In Revelation 20:4, it is described as being "beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God." And even though the word 'beheaded' is used symbolically, it denotes suffering and the loss of life.

These are some of the hard facts that are revealed to those whom the LORD is drawing. After repenting of their sins, they realize that they are faced with the necessity of making a decision as to whether or not they will accept the invitation to become disciples of Christ, and share in his sufferings. The LORD wants them to weigh this matter very carefully. This is indicated by Jesus in his parable concerning the man who was to build a tower. This man would be very foolish, the parable teaches, unless he first sat down and counted the cost.—Luke 14:28-30

Counting the cost of discipleship is the will of God for everyone who is drawn by his love to the point of repentance. Just as God is pleased with the attitude of true repentance, he is also pleased with those who sit down and consider the cost of full surrender to do his will as it is now revealed to be the terms of discipleship.

There is no set length of time during which one may 'contemplate the cost.' The Bible tells us that when Abraham was called of God he obeyed. We need not suppose that Abraham obeyed without giving consideration to all that was involved. It seems reasonable to conclude that he took some time to take into account the cost.

Since those whom God draws are invited to lay down their lives in his service, we may suppose that while they are seeking to know God, he encourages them by his promises, to make the right decision. This does not mean comparing the value of what is sacrificed with the worth of what God has promised in return. Those who have faith in the promises of God realize that there is no comparison. There is nothing here that needs to be counted. The counting is the giving of consideration to whether or not the trials of the narrow way will be more than can be borne. This must be in the light of God's promises of grace and strength to help in every time of need. Thus the measure of faith in God and in his promises will actually determine the decision that is made. Jesus asked James and John if they were able to drink of his cup and be baptized with his baptism. They replied, "We are able." (Mark 10:38,39) So with all who count the cost. If they have an unfaltering faith in the promises of God, their decision will also be 'we are able.' ■

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS

The speakers listed below are routed through the Pilgrim Department of The Dawn. Their visits are furnished free upon request. Write to: The Dawn Pilgrim Department, East Rutherford, NJ 07073. A visit will be arranged whenever possible.

F. Dueña

Bogata, Colombia	June 2
Medellin, Colombia	3
Buenos Aires, Argentina	10
Berazategui, Argentina	11
Montevideo, Uruguay	13

B. Keith

Spokane, WA	June 26
Columbia Falls, MT	27
Havre, MT	28,29
Prince Albert, SK	30,31

J. Freer

Spokane, WA	June 26
Columbia Falls, MT	27
Havre, MT	28,29
Prince Albert, SK	30,31

The speakers listed below, in cooperation with the Dawn, are invited by individual classes, or their services have been arranged by their home classes:

E. Blicharz

St. Petersburg, FL	June 11
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E. Kuenzli

Louisville, AL	June 11
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B. Jakubowski

Prince Albert, SK	June 30,31
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L. Young

St. Augustine, FL	June 25
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E. Kalinski

Grand Rapids, MI	June 11
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CONVENTIONS

These conventions are listed by request of classes who sponsor them. So your convention can be placed in these columns in time, make your request in writing three months before the date of the convention to Dawn Magazine, 199 Railroad Avenue, East Rutherford, NJ 07073.

CHICAGO MEMORIAL DAY CONVENTION, May 27,28,29—(*Correction from May Dawn*) Contact J. Vasilovich. Phone: (773) 774-2542

WATERBURY CONVENTION, June 3,4—Saturday held in Morris, CT. Sunday at the Litchfield Firehouse Hall. Contact A. Tsimonis, PO Box 1494, Waterbury, CT 06721-1494. Phone: (860) 567-0109

PORTLAND CONVENTION, June 16,17,18—Ramada Inn, 6221 NE 82nd Avenue, OR 97220. Phone: (503) 255-6511. Contact G. Black. Phone: (503) 659-6930

DETROIT MONTH-END CONVENTION, June 25—Northwest YWCA, Grand River at Beech Daly, Redford, MI. Contact F. Nemesh. Phone: (248) 649-6588

PRINCE ALBERT-SASKATOON CONVENTION, July 1,2,3—Siwak Farm. Contact B. Siwak. Phone: (306) 763-3170

OKANAGAN VALLEY CONVENTION, July 7,8,9—Schubert Centre, 3505 - 30th Avenue, Vernon, BC. Contact B. Blencowe, #113, 901 Middleton Way, Vernon, BC V1B 3Z1. Phone: (250) 545-0780

BIBLE STUDENTS GENERAL CONVENTION, July 15-20—University of Pittsburgh, Johnstown, PA. Contact M. Nekora, 1425 Lachman Lane, Pacific Palisades, CA 90272. Phone: (310) 454-5248.

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION, August 6-11—Nowy Sacz, Poland. (International Youth Seminar follows in Baia Mare, Romania, August 14-18.) Contact T. Machacek. Phone: (219) 662-8107

MILWAUKEE CONVENTION, August 19,20—Lake Lodge, 1235 East Howard Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53207. Contact D. Moore, 2176 South 71st Street, West Allis, WI 53219. Phone: (414) 541-8937

JACKSON LABOR DAY CONVENTION, September 2,3—FaHaLo Camp and Conference Center, 3000 Mt. Hope Road, Grass Lake, MI 49240. Contact R. Lumley, 2531 Ashton Road, Jackson, MI 49203. Phone: (517) 782-7252

NEW YORK LABOR DAY CONVENTION, September 2,3—Wellesley Inn, Two Bridges Road & Exit 52, Route 80, Fairfield, NJ 07006. Contact D. Szybinski, 250 West 102 Street, 1A, New York, NY 10025. Phone: (212) 998-2095

SEATTLE LABOR DAY CONVENTION, September 2,3,4—Seabeck Christian Conference Center, 15395 Seabeck Hwy NW, Seabeck, WA 98380. Phone: (360) 830-5010. Contact L. Flinn. Phone: (253) 939-9838

HUNTSVILLE CONVENTION, September 8,9,10—Holiday Inn Select, 401 Williams Avenue, AL 35801. Phone: (256) 533-1400. Contact P. Mosley, 1006 Mill Race Circle, Guntersville, AL 35976. Phone: (256) 582-3640



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To us the Scriptures clearly teach:

THAT THE CHURCH IS “THE TEMPLE” OF THE LIVING GOD—peculiarly “his workmanship;” that its construction has been in progress throughout the Gospel Age—ever since Christ became the world’s Redeemer and the chief “corner stone” of this temple, through which, when finished, God’s blessings shall come “to all people,” and they find access to him.—I Cor. 3:16,17; Eph. 2:20-22; Gen. 28:14; Gal. 3:29

THAT MEANTIME THE CHISELING, SHAPING, AND POLISHING of the consecrated believers in Christ’s atonement for sin progresses, and when the last of these “living stones,” “elect and precious,” shall have been made ready, the great Master Workman will bring all together in the first resurrection; and the temple shall be filled with his glory, and be the meeting place between God and men throughout the Millennium.—Rev. 15:5-8

THAT THE BASIS OF HOPE FOR THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD lies in the fact that Jesus Christ, by the grace of God “tasted death for every man,” “a ransom for all,” and will be “the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,” “in due time.”—Heb. 2:9; John 1:9; I Tim. 2:5,6

THAT THE HOPE OF THE CHURCH is that she may be like her Lord, “see him as he is,” be a “partaker of the divine nature,” and share his glory as his joint-heir.—I John 3:2; John 17:24; Rom. 8:17; II Pet. 1:4

THAT THE PRESENT MISSION OF THE CHURCH is the perfecting of the saints for the future work of service; to develop in herself every grace; to be God’s witness to the world; and to prepare to be the kings and priests in the next age.—Eph. 4:12; Matt. 24:14; Rev. 1:6, 20:6

THAT THE HOPE FOR THE WORLD lies in the blessings of knowledge and opportunity to be brought to all by Christ’s millennial kingdom—the restitution of all that was lost in Adam, to all the willing and obedient, at the hands of their Redeemer and his glorified church—when all the willfully wicked will be destroyed.—Acts 3:19-23; Isa. 35