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What Can We Believe?

“To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. ... Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?”
—John 18:37,38

WE LIVE AT A TIME WHEN virtually limitless information is available to us in the palm of our hand. To illustrate this in a very small way, the author of this article recently did a Google keyword search of the word “information.” In less than one second, the search returned 20.7 billion “hits.” To put this number in perspective, if an individual spent no more than one minute reviewing each of these hits, it would take over 39,000 years to go through them all, or about 500 average lifetimes.

It is clearly evident that none of us can scratch the surface as it pertains to processing the vast world of information at our disposal, yet we use information to make nearly every decision in life. Whether it be related to health, job, family, home, finances, political beliefs, social issues, or religious convictions, all of us make decisions every day based on various items of information.

The fact that there is such inexhaustible information available to us may raise numerous questions in our minds. What are the sources of the information we use? Are they truthful and reliable? Are our sources of information properly motivated to be of help to us? Do such sources hold themselves accountable for the information they disseminate? Given the fact that many sources of the same information are routinely in conflict with each other as to what they publish, we might conclude that much of what we see and hear is actually “misinformation.” In today’s world, it also seems evident that motivations for publishing information are often self-seeking, and when information is found to be incorrect, accountability is severely lacking.

Although the foregoing comments are particularly directed to present-day circumstances, in centuries past similar conditions confused and confounded mankind. In the days of Pontius Pilate, nearly two-thousand years ago, though the sheer volume of information was much less, questions and uncertainties were in the minds of many who desired to seek the truth. For example, when Jesus was brought before Pilate’s judgment seat, the Roman governor himself struggled with conflicting information. On one hand, the religious leaders of the Jews accused Jesus of all manner of sin, even labeling him a blasphemer of God. On the other hand, Pilate saw in Jesus a humble man who exemplified only righteous and loving qualities. What, and who, was to be believed?

GOD’S WORD IS TRUTH

As our opening text recalls, Pilate asked Jesus, “What is truth?” So far as the record indicates, Jesus

made no direct reply to Pilate's question. However, the night before, when Jesus was praying in the hours just prior to his arrest, he said to his Heavenly Father on behalf of his disciples, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (John 17:17) The "word" of truth here referred to is undoubtedly the Old Testament Scriptures, as it was the only written Word of God then in existence. Today, the New Testament must be included as part of that Word in which truth is to be found.

To make a careful search of all the promises of the Old Testament with a view to discovering in them some central, consistent theme which we might properly speak of as "the truth" would be a difficult task. By studying the Old Testament alone, no one could be sure that he had made a correct analysis of the main thought which its pages contain. Here is where, however, the New Testament serves as a guiding star in our search for truth. In Acts 3:21 the Apostle Peter mentions a subject which he says "God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."

This is a definite clue as to the principal theme which God had caused all his prophets to set forth. What was this great theme song of the Heavenly Father, so important to him that he caused all his prophets to write about it? Peter describes it as "times of restitution of all things." The Greek word here rendered "restitution" is one which would be more accurately translated "restoration." Clearly, then, it is the divine purpose, set forth throughout the Old Testament and now confirmed in the New Testament, that all things shall be restored.

What are these “all things” of which Peter spoke, and when and how are they to be restored? In verse nineteen of this same narrative, Peter uses the word “therefore,” saying, “Repent ye therefore.” This indicates that the great lesson which he sets forth, culminating with his reference to the times of restitution in verse 21, is based upon something which had occurred or had been said previously. Looking back through the chapter, we find that the apostle had invoked divine power to restore a man who had been lame from the time of his birth. The Jews who witnessed this greatly marveled, wondering by what power so great a miracle had been wrought.—Acts 3:1-10

In verses 12-18, Peter explained the matter to them, saying that it had been accomplished through faith in Jesus, the Prince of life, whom they had crucified. He made clear, however, that the death of Jesus was not a miscarriage of the divine plan, but that God before had stated by the mouth of all his prophets that Christ should suffer. The people had committed a national sin and would need to repent ere the blessings provided by God through Christ could be theirs. Then the apostle continued, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”—vs. 19

The meaning of the Greek word translated “refreshing” in this verse is “revival,” as in the example of a person who has been out of breath. Peter was evidently alluding to the case of the man whom he had just restored to health, and used this miracle as an illustration of future blessings provided by God for all mankind. This promise is made

even more beautiful when we realize that the expression, “presence of the Lord,” in the Greek text, means “the face of Jehovah.” In ancient times, to show one’s face to another was a mark of favor, whereas to turn away was a sign of disfavor.

The thought of these words is similar to that contained in the blessing which God commanded Moses to pronounce upon Israel, which reads: “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.” (Num. 6:24-26) Figuratively speaking, God turned his face away from his human creation when our first parents transgressed the divine law. They were driven out of their perfect home in Eden, and began to suffer the effects of sin, which eventually resulted in death.

Peter tells us, however, that a time is coming when the Creator will again turn his face toward the people, because the ransom—a corresponding price for the first perfect man, Adam, who disobeyed—has been provided by the voluntary death of the perfect man Jesus. God will, as it were, lift up his countenance upon mankind, with the result that there will be seasons of refreshing—times of revival—as illustrated by the healing of the man who had been lame from birth.

“HE SHALL SEND JESUS CHRIST”

How, and when, and under what circumstances will the promised times of refreshing come to the people? Peter answers these questions by explaining that it was God’s purpose to “send Jesus Christ.” This is evidently a reference to Jesus’ Second Advent,

or presence. When Peter spoke these words, our Lord's First Advent had already taken place. He had been raised from the dead and had ascended to heaven. Thus, speaking of Jesus in his glorified heavenly condition, Peter continues, "Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."—Acts 3:20,21

In Peter's words, we have some of the most important facts of divine revelation brought into focus for us, not by human deduction or philosophy, but by the inspired teaching of one of Jesus' own apostles. Furthermore, he tells us what it was that God caused all his prophets to write about, and he places the fulfillment of all that they promised pertaining thereto as following the second coming of Christ. Indeed, he states that it is for the accomplishment of this divine purpose that the plan of God calls for Christ to come again.

Though not spoken of in the context of Peter's words here, just prior to the "restitution of all things" is a preparatory work which includes the "shaking" of present evil institutions, culminating in their removal in a great "time of trouble." (Hag. 2:6,7; Heb. 12:26-28; Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21,22) Following this, and the completion of the church class, the promised blessings will be poured out upon all mankind.

In the verses following his declaration of the promised "restitution of all things," Peter cites some examples of what the prophets actually said on the subject. The first one he mentions is a prophecy by Moses: "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up

unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.” (Acts 3:22; Deut. 18:15) Indeed, Moses was a great prophet and leader of Israel under their original Law Covenant given at Mount Sinai. However, none gained life under that arrangement because its perfect standard of righteousness was beyond the measure of an imperfect man’s ability.

However, everlasting life will be available to the people when the prophet “like unto” Moses is raised up. That is, a full restitution, or restoration, to perfect, everlasting human life will result to all who obey that prophet. Surely no one, simply by reading the promise made by Moses, could ever reach the conclusion that it applies to Christ during his second presence. It is only because the inspired Apostle Peter tells us that this is how it will be fulfilled that we can appreciate it as one of the all-important features of God’s plan for the restoring and blessing of mankind in the coming Messianic kingdom.

After citing this prophecy of Moses, Peter goes still further back into the prophetic record of the Old Testament, even to the promise which was made to faithful Abraham—“In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.” (Acts 3:25; Gen. 12:1-3; 22:18) We rejoice that Peter thus gives us this further example of restitution promises, for it serves to assure us that these future blessings of life have been provided for Gentiles as well as for Jews. They will be made available to “all the kindreds,” families and nations of the earth.

There are two key parts of that promise made to Abraham. One is that all the families of the earth

are to be blessed, and the other is that the blessing would come through Abraham's seed. In Galatians 3:16, an important New Testament explanatory statement is made in this regard. Paul specifically identifies Jesus as the "seed" promised to Abraham through whom mankind is to be blessed. Additionally, in verses 27-29 of the same chapter, the apostle explains that the faithful followers of Jesus, by faith, also become a part of that seed, "and heirs according to the promise."

The opportunity of participating with Jesus in the future work of blessing was first offered to the Jews. (Acts 3:26) However, when a sufficient number of them did not accept the opportunity, God "did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name." (Acts 15:14) It has required nearly two thousand years, from Jesus' First Advent until now, to select from among Jews and Gentiles those who will participate with Jesus as the promised seed in the future blessing and restoration of the people to life on the earth. This work of restitution, the Scriptures point out, will be accomplished during the thousand years of Christ's kingdom.—Rev. 20:6; I Cor. 15:25,26

"The priests, and the captain of the temple," were grieved that Peter taught the people so plainly, and "preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead." (Acts 4:1,2) In his wonderful discourse recorded in chapter 3, Peter had not used the word resurrection, but the people clearly understood that the great future work of restitution, which he declared had been spoken by God through the mouth of all his holy prophets, certainly implied a resurrection of the dead. They were correct. The

word resurrection, which means “a standing up again,” is merely another term which the Bible employs in presenting to us the prospect of the glorious blessings of health, joy and life soon to be offered to a suffering and dying world.

BY ALL THE PROPHETS

Why, then, there is there so much conflicting information and so many differing opinions in the world with regard to man’s present and future destiny? Where do they get their support? It may be possible to find a text of Scripture, or even several texts, to prove almost any theory we may wish. This is especially true if Scriptures are taken out of their intended setting and thus distorted as to their meaning. However, this is not the method by which we arrive at the great truth concerning the times of restitution, for here is something, Peter explains, which had been declared by all of God’s holy prophets.

As we look through the writings of the prophets, we find that they do indeed point forward to a time of restoration, each one using different language and employing different illustrations to enable us to grasp their meaning more readily. Isaiah was one of the holy prophets, and in many places in his wonderful book he touches upon the glorious theme of restitution, not by using this word, but by describing the blessings to be showered upon the people during the thousand years of Christ’s earthly kingdom. We note the words below from his pen.

“In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. The meek also shall

increase their joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. For the terrible one is brought to nought, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off: That make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought. Therefore thus saith the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale. But when he seeth his children, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel. They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine.”—Isa. 29:18-24

Several important and encouraging facts are brought to our attention in the foregoing promise. The blind eyes and deaf ears are to be healed. (Isa. 35:5) This undoubtedly refers to both mental and physical blindness and deafness. The “terrible one” is brought to naught, a probable reference to the binding and ultimate destruction of Satan. (Rev. 20:1-3) The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. Certainly, this denotes a wonderfully changed world from the present, when the meek and the poor are so often downtrodden and oppressed.

Jacob shall be there, the prophet says, and shall see his children. This dates the promise as applying to the time of the resurrection from the dead. Then those who formerly “erred in spirit” shall be given understanding. This is another assurance that

the blinding and deceptive influences of Satan will then be removed. Then it will not be necessary for anyone to ask, "What is truth?" All will learn and be filled with the knowledge of the Lord.—Isa. 11:9

In Isaiah 35:6,8,10, other features of the times of restitution are brought to our attention. Here the prophet tells us that the lame man shall leap as a deer. Isaiah also says that a "highway" shall be there, and that it shall be called "The way of holiness." From the time of Adam's fall into sin and death, mankind has been traveling over what Jesus described symbolically as a broad road which leads to destruction and death. (Matt. 7:13) The promised highway is the return road from death. It will be over this highway, Isaiah writes, that the "ransomed of the LORD shall return, ... with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads."

Paul explains that Jesus "gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." (I Tim. 2:5,6) All, therefore, are included in the statement, "the ransomed of the LORD," and it will be when they return from death that the great truth concerning the atoning blood of Christ will be testified, or made known, to them. All those who accept this provision of divine grace and who come into heart harmony with the righteous laws and principles which will be taught to all people at that time, will continue to live, everlastingly.

We find the following additional testimony of Isaiah concerning this glorious time: "The Lord [Jehovah] hath made bare his holy arm [Christ Jesus] in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God." "They shall build houses, and inhabit them;

and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them.” “And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.”—Isa. 52:10; 65:21,24

“FROM THE LAND OF THE ENEMY”

Jeremiah was another of God’s holy prophets who foretold the times of restitution. In giving comfort to mothers who lost their children in death, he wrote, “A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the LORD; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the LORD, that thy children shall come again to their own border.”—Jer. 31:15-17

Paul identifies death as a great enemy which is to be destroyed during the reign of Christ. (I Cor. 15:25,26) The “land of the enemy” is therefore the condition of death, and the promise that children shall come again from this land surely means that they shall be raised from the dead. Returning to their own border simply means that they will be restored to life on the earth. What a glorious prospect is provided by Jeremiah’s testimony!

THE GENTILES ALSO

The promises of God pertaining to restitution are not limited to the Jewish people. This is indicated clearly by the Prophet Ezekiel. He wrote concerning the restoration of the Sodomites and the other wicked people of the past, stating: “When thy sisters,

Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate, ... then thou [the Israelites] and thy daughters shall return to your former estate.”—Ezek. 16:55

The former estate of the Sodomites was here on the earth as human beings. This was true also of the Israelites. Ezekiel’s prophecy reveals that they are all to return. Thus, again, is the hope for all of restoration, or restitution, brought clearly to our attention.

It is evident that Jesus was well acquainted with this prophecy and understood what it meant. In speaking of the future kingdom judgment day he said it would then be “more tolerable” for Sodom and Gomorrah than for those Jews who in his day had rejected his message. (Matt. 10:15) This certainly assures us that the ignorantly wicked people of the past are to be awakened from the sleep of death and given an opportunity to accept Christ and live. The Scriptures point out that the judgment day is in reality a day of trial, of testing, and that those who then hear and obey shall live.—John 5:25

REDEMPTION PROMISED

In one of the Old Testament promises of a coming Redeemer, the Lord said, “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.” (Hos. 13:14) How glad we are for the Heavenly Father’s assurance that he will not “repent,” or change his mind, concerning his purpose to deliver the people from death and to destroy the grave, the death condition!

The Prophet Habakkuk wrote, “The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD,

as the waters cover the sea.” (Hab. 2:14) Through the Prophet Zephaniah, God declared, “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.” (Zeph. 3:9) Haggai testified also on behalf of the Lord, saying, “The desire of all nations shall come.” (Hag. 2:7) Zechariah wrote, “The LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day there shall be one LORD, and his name one.”—Zech. 14:9

How thankful we are that the record of the Scriptures provides consistent, harmonious and reliable information from Genesis to Revelation concerning God’s great plan for his human creation. Only in the Bible’s testimony can we find the real answer to the question, What is truth? Indeed, God’s Word is the source of all truth, and provides in its pages the basis for a glorious future hope which all can truly believe! ■

“The instructions of the LORD are perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

The commandments of the LORD are right, bringing joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are clear, giving insight for living.

Reverence for the LORD is pure, lasting forever. The laws of the LORD are true; each one is fair.

They are more desirable than gold, even the finest gold.

*They are sweeter than honey,
even honey dripping from the comb.*

They are a warning to your servant, a great reward for those who obey them.”

Psalms 19:7-11, New Living Translation

Obedient Faith

Key Verse: “*You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.*”
—**Deuteronomy 4:2,**
New American Standard Bible

Selected Scripture:
Deuteronomy 4:1-14

IN HIS PERFECT WISDOM, God determined to provide his chosen people, Israel, with various laws and ordinances by which they should live. The details of many of these laws are recorded in Exodus chapters 20-24. In chapters 25-30, God’s instructions are given concerning Israel’s priesthood and the construction of the Tabernacle.

The provision of this Law Covenant arrangement came about after God had fulfilled his promise to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. (Exod. 3:7,8; 14:30,31) Now that they were a

free people, it was needful that they have a set of laws to guide them in daily living, as well as in their religious service to God. Israel’s observance of God’s law began as they traveled toward the land promised to their forefather Abraham. When God called Moses to lead the Israelites, he told him, “I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, ... unto a land flowing with milk and honey.”—Exod. 3:17

We recall the Lord’s original statement to Abram concerning a yet unseen land of promise. “Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that

I will shew thee.” (Gen. 12:1) Abram followed God’s instructions, and because of his faithfulness in doing so he was rewarded with much land and flocks. (Gen. 13:14-17; 24:34,35) His name, Abram, which means “exalted father,” was later changed by God to Abraham, which means “father of a multitude.” (Gen. 17:5) By Moses’ day, the Israelites constituted this “multitude” which had come from the loins of Abraham, and they were now journeying to the land promised to him and his progeny several centuries before.

Turning again to the time of Israel’s deliverance from Egyptian bondage, God told Moses that he was the one to be used to deliver the people. He said, “Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh.” (Exod. 3:10) After spending forty years in the land of Midian tending his father-in-law’s flocks, Moses had become very humble. He had learned meekness and distrust of his own ability. This attitude, however, was exactly what was needed in order for him to be an instrument in the accomplishment of God’s purposes.

Like Moses, we must learn that God’s purposes in us are not according to our works, power or ability, but God’s. All those who would be used in his service must learn the lesson contained in these words of the Master: “Without me ye can do nothing.” (John 15:5) Each of us should carefully watch for the leadings of divine providence, as Moses learned to do, realizing that only as we are co-workers together with God can we accomplish anything.—I Cor. 3:9

Our Key Verse points out to us that in working together with God, we are to follow his commandments only and not seek to do our own will. It is recorded that when God presented his law to Israel, Moses “took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient.” (Exod. 24:7) We, too, must live by faith and trust in God, and realize that obedience to his commands is vital as we strive to be sanctified in thought, word and deed.—I Sam. 15:22 ■

Faith in Action

Key Verse: *“The bowl of flour was not exhausted nor did the jar of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke through Elijah.”*

*—I Kings 17:16,
New American
Standard Bible*

Selected Scripture:
I Kings 17:8-16

THE EVENTS RECORDED in I Kings chapter 17 relate to the ministry of the Prophet Elijah. He had been chosen by God to inform Ahab, king of Israel, that there would be no rain or dew upon the land for several years. (vs. 1) This was due to Ahab’s wicked reign over Israel’s ten-tribe kingdom. (I Kings 16:29-33) The evil reigns of the kings of Israel, of which Ahab was a descendant, had continued up to this time, and the record states that “Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.”

After Elijah pronounced the drought to come upon the land, God instructed him to turn to the east and go “hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.” God also told the prophet that ravens would be sent there to feed him. Elijah, desiring to be faithful to God’s word, did as the Lord instructed. (I Kings 17:2-5) God carried out his promise to provide for Elijah’s survival with food brought by ravens, and by ensuring that the brook Cherith had not dried up.—vs. 6

After some period of time the brook dried up. The Lord then told Elijah to go to Zarephath, and that he had instructed a widow who lived there to sustain him.

(vss. 7-9) Upon arriving at his destination, Elijah asked the woman for water to drink and bread to eat. This was a severe test of the widow's faith and generosity, and would appear to be a bold request for Elijah to make, especially considering that the drought had also reached her location.—vss. 10,11

The widow's initial response clearly showed her distress. "As the LORD your God lives, she replied, I don't have so much as a muffin, just a handful of flour in a bowl and some oil left in a bottle. Now I am going to find some sticks so I can cook a last meal for my son and for me. Then we're going to eat it and die." (vs. 12, *International Standard Version*) Now the poor widow had been asked to give away what she presumed would be her and her son's last meal.

Although she was a Gentile, the widow apparently had respect for God, for when Elijah gave her the Lord's promise that she would have enough food for her household until the drought ended, she believed, and granted the prophet's request for bread. Her faith was rewarded. The account states that "she, and he, and her house, did eat many days," until the drought ended. (vss. 13-15) As noted in our Key Verse, the small amount of food she had was not "exhausted," nor did her slight quantity of oil run out. All this was "according to the word of the LORD."

Elijah's request to have bread prepared for him first, prior to the widow providing food for herself and her son, was not because of greed or selfishness on his part. It was, rather, part of the lesson of faith which the Lord wished to demonstrate. Just as the widow's faith was tested, the Lord similarly tests our faith. (James 1:2-4) Our provisions may at times seem to run low, but God knows this and will overrule for both our spiritual and temporal welfare if we trust him. Especially along spiritual lines, let us be ever thankful that our Heavenly Father provides us with the bread of life and the oil of the Holy Spirit to sustain us each day.—John 6:35; Eph. 1:12-14 ■

Humble Faith

Key Verse: *“For this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed.”*

—*Luke 7:7, New American Standard Bible*

Selected Scripture:
Luke 7:1-10

in that area because it was conveniently located on the coast of the Sea of Galilee.

The account in Luke chapter 7 explains that a centurion, who was captain of the Roman guard in that region, had a servant who was very dear to him. This servant had become seriously ill, and was near death. The Gentile centurion asked the leaders of the city, who were Jews, to send for Jesus, that he might heal his servant. (vss. 2,3) He had evidently heard of Jesus and his mighty acts of healing, and was probably well aware of the miracles which Jesus had already performed in the region.—Luke 4:31-41; 5:12-26; 6:6-11

The fact that the centurion did not go to meet Jesus personally should not be presumed to signify any lack of respect. Rather, the opposite seems to be the case, since

THE SCENE FOR OUR LESSON

son was set shortly following Jesus' sermon on the mount. “Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum.” (Luke 7:1) Having been spurned and rejected at Nazareth, where he grew up, Jesus made Capernaum his “home base” during his Galilean ministry. Peter and others of Jesus' disciples, many of whom were fishermen, also made their homes

he no doubt knew that Jesus was a Jew and realized that Jews were not to have any dealings with Gentiles. (Deut. 7:1-6; Matt. 10:5; Acts 10:28) The centurion, however, was greatly desirous to have Jesus heal his servant. From the narrative it is evident that although the centurion was a Roman army officer, he was a man of humble mind, full of kindness and well reported of, even among the Jews.

The leaders of the city sought out Jesus, and upon finding him, explained that although the centurion was a Gentile, he was of a noble character, and worthy of having Jesus heal his servant. They further stated, "He loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue." (Luke 7:4,5) Upon hearing these reports, Jesus went with the city leaders and traveled to the centurion's house. As they neared his home, a servant came to meet Jesus with this message from the centurion, "Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof."—vs. 6

Our Key Verse indicates the centurion's faith was so strong that the only thing necessary was for Jesus to "say the word," and his servant would be healed. Jesus expressed his astonishment at the great faith of the centurion, saying to all the people there, "I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." When those who had come to meet the Lord returned to the centurion's home, they found that his servant had been healed.—vss. 9,10

Our Lord's miracles served as illustrations on a limited scale which pointed to the grand scope of miracles that will be accomplished for mankind during his Messianic reign. Then, all those who are sick will be healed, the dead will be raised, and all will have the opportunity to be restored to perfection.—Isa. 35:5-10; Acts 3:20-25; 24:15

As followers of the Master at the present time, instead of requiring signs and visible assurances, let us rest in faith, content that he who has so graciously overruled for us in the past is equally faithful today to fulfill all of his good promises to us.—I Cor. 1:9; 10:13 ■

Forgiveness Based on Faith

Key Verses: *“For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little. ... And He said to the woman, Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”*
—*Luke 7:47,50, New American Standard Bible*

Selected Scripture:
Luke 7:36-50

THE WORDS OF OUR KEY

Verses were spoken by Jesus following his giving the parable of the creditor and two debtors. He gave the parable while at the home of a Pharisee named Simon, who had been listening to Jesus’ preaching, and invited him to his house for a meal.—*Luke 7:36*

While Jesus and Simon were eating, a woman from the city, who was known to be a sinner, came to the home, evidently aware that Jesus was there. She brought with her an alabaster box of fine ointment. The account continues, stating that she “stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.”—*vss. 37,38*

When Simon the Pharisee witnessed what had happened, he reasoned within himself that if Jesus were truly a prophet, he would have known that the woman was a sinner and should not have allowed her to touch him. Jesus perceived his thoughts and saw the

opportunity to provide a lesson.

Jesus then spoke this parable to Simon. “There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?” (vss. 41,42) The Pharisee answered that he supposed the one who had the greatest debt would love the creditor the most. Jesus confirmed that he had reasoned correctly.—vs. 43

However, the lesson Jesus wished to impart was not yet complete. He pointed out to Simon that although he had been hospitable by inviting him into his home for a meal, he had not provided water for his feet or oil for his head, nor had he shown any special brotherly affection toward him. This woman, on the other hand, had washed his feet with her tears, and anointed them with ointment. In a loving act of humility, she had even kissed his feet.—vss. 44-46

By her works, Jesus said, “she loved much,” whereas Simon had only loved “little.” Jesus pointed to her works because only through them would Simon be able to see the proof of her faith. In our Key Verses Jesus declared that the woman’s greater love was developed by a realization of her sinful condition and a sincere desire to be relieved from it. He said to her, “Thy sins are forgiven. ... Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.” (vss. 47-50) In reality, of course, it was the woman’s faith, not her works, which led to her forgiveness.—Eph. 2:8,9

Those of God’s people who are faithfully serving him will be found filled with a genuine love for their “Head,” Christ Jesus, and all the members of the “body.” (I Cor. 12:12-14; Eph. 4:15,16) The basis of their love, as in the woman’s case, will be found in a large appreciation of their own imperfections and of God’s mercy and grace toward them in the forgiveness of their sins. These conditions will surely manifest themselves, as did the woman’s, by humble service at the feet of the Master. ■

The Teaching of Baptism

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death.”
—Romans 6:3,4

BAPTISM COULD WELL BE one of the most widely practiced, yet most generally misunderstood, subjects connected with Christian religion. Many churches urge their adherents to sprinkle infants with what is termed “holy water” as soon after birth as possible, believing that should

they die without this rite being performed, these innocent children would not be saved. Other Christians believe that in the simple act of being immersed in water they are “born again,” and from that moment their salvation is assured regardless of all else. Still another group keeps records of names and genealogies of millions of people, both living and dead. This is done in the belief that the salvation of those they consider as having died in a lost state can be secured, even many centuries later, through a living descendant’s being baptized for them.

These are but a few examples of the differences of thought which surround the teaching of baptism.

To properly understand this important teaching we must look beyond man-made traditions and examine what the Bible truly says. It was Jesus who established baptism as a principal doctrine. He demonstrated when and how it is properly performed, and his apostles, in their writings, clearly defined its meaning.

In listing some of the basic principles of truth, the Apostle Paul includes “the doctrine of baptisms.” (Heb. 6:2) Doctrine simply means teaching, and since the word “baptisms” used in this verse is in the plural, Paul is apparently reminding us that in the Scriptures we may expect to find reference to more than one baptism. In a general way, however, all these baptisms bear a certain relationship to one another, so that to us there is actually but “one baptism.” (Eph. 4:5) In the New Testament, the Greek words translated “baptize” and “baptism” mean to “make fully wet,” to “immerse, or submerge.”

JOHN’S BAPTISM

Baptism is first brought prominently to our attention in the Bible in connection with the ministry of John the Baptist. We read concerning him, “John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” (Mark 1:4) John’s ministry was not to the world in general, but to the people of the Jewish nation, who, through the Law given at Mount Sinai, were in covenant relationship with God. However, there were many in Israel who were not living up to their privileges under the Law. Thus, they were estranged from God and from his covenant. Their repentance, and the remission of their sins against

the Law Covenant, brought them back into God's favor and friendship.

We are not to understand that their repentance and the remission of their sins were accomplished by water immersion. Baptism was merely an outward symbol which indicated that repentance and the acceptance of God's will as expressed through the Law had already taken place in the heart and life of the one immersed. There is no sin-cleansing efficacy in water, not even in the water of the river Jordan. The real objective of John's ministry was later well illustrated by Jesus' parable of two Israelites who went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, the other a publican. The Pharisee prayed, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." The publican, on the other hand, "standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner."—Luke 18:10-13

In the parable, Jesus said of the repentant publican, "This man went down to his house justified rather than the other." (vs. 14) A true spirit of repentance and humility resulted in his justification, or reconciliation to friendship with God under the terms of the Law Covenant. It was this repentant heart condition that prompted those Israelites to seek water baptism by John.

John's ministry was designed to "prepare" the people to receive Jesus. (Luke 7:24-27) Under the Law arrangement, and until Pentecost, the publican of the parable represented those who took the necessary step of repentance to restore them to the favor of God in the manner in which it was then

available. It is this which was thus symbolized by those receiving the baptism of John. Those who went on to accept the Messiah and devote their lives to being his disciples, eventually came under the redemptive merit of his blood and received justification to life.

JESUS REQUESTS IMMERSION

John the Baptist had been conducting his ministry for about six months when Jesus came to him and asked to be baptized, or immersed, in the Jordan River. (Matt. 3:13-15) At first John refused, saying, "I have need to be baptized of thee." John knew that the one great desire of Jesus had been to do his Heavenly Father's will. He knew, too, that there was no occasion for repentance in Jesus' sinless life, so he felt that the symbol of repentance as he had been administering it was wholly inappropriate.

Jesus, however, did not explain the situation to John. He simply said, "Suffer it to be so now." John then yielded to Jesus' request and baptized him, apparently realizing that the Master must have had some valid reason for taking this step of water immersion. Jesus' only further remark was, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." Evidently there was something in the Old Testament Scriptures which indicated to Jesus that this was a proper and necessary thing to do.

The Old Testament contains many instructions which served as a guide for the Master in laying down his life as man's Redeemer. Some of these were in the nature of prophecies, and some were in the form of pictures and illustrations. For example, the various ceremonies and sacrifices of Israel under

the Mosaic Law served as an “example and shadow” of greater things to come with respect to God’s plan for mankind. (Heb. 8:5; 10:1) Related to this is the point mentioned by Paul in which he compares the “house” of Israel under Moses to another “house” over which Christ is the head.—Heb. 3:1-6

The Israelites came under the leadership of Moses while still in Egypt. In order to be delivered from their bondage to Pharaoh, it was necessary that they trust themselves fully to Moses’ headship over them. Soon after they left Egypt, the Israelites were faced with a true test of their devotion to God and to his servant, Moses. The Egyptian army had pursued and was about to overtake them. The Red Sea was in front of them. Through Moses, the Lord instructed them to go forward. A failure to obey would surely mean death at the hands of the Egyptians. Obedience meant the risking of life in the Red Sea. The Israelites followed the leadership of Moses into the sea, which meant that they put themselves wholly into his hands as the representative of their God.

TWO OLD TESTAMENT BAPTISMS

Commenting on the significance of this experience, Paul wrote that the Israelites “were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” (I Cor. 10:1,2) This was a symbolic baptism. The real baptism, or burial of the Israelites into the headship of Moses, had previously occurred. They had committed themselves to his leadership, else they would not have been with him in the Red Sea. Yet the water on each side and in the clouds above them served well to illustrate their “baptism” into Moses.

Since the Apostle Paul refers to this Old Testament immersion in water, certainly Jesus knew about it, and of its significance. We think it reasonable to conclude that Jesus saw it as his guide to “fulfil all righteousness.” Though in one sense all the Israelites were symbolically baptized at the same time as they passed together through the Red Sea, each one still had to make his individual decision to follow Moses, their leader. With the spiritual house of Israel, baptism is likewise an individual matter, and Jesus, the Head, was the first to enter into this arrangement.

The Apostle Peter refers to another symbolic baptism from the Old Testament. He speaks of the “eight souls” which were “saved by water,” and then explains, “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us.” (I Pet. 3:20,21) Here another group of people, or house, was involved, that being Noah, his wife, his sons and their wives. Here, also, death would have come to the family had they not followed the leadership of Noah into the ark and to safety.

How could they be sure that they would be saved in the ark? This was a matter of faith, and of surrender. God had given instructions concerning the building of the ark. If they trusted in Noah, God’s servant, they would enter the ark, which they did, and were saved. The waters of the flood in which they were more or less engulfed pictured their immersion into the will of God, under the head of their family, Noah. Since Peter mentioned the lesson of this “baptism” experience of Noah and his family, it seems that Jesus also could see it as a guide in the way of righteousness. This, therefore, could be another reason he asked John to immerse him.

BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT

At the age of thirty, Jesus offered himself in full consecration to God, burying his own will into the will of his Father. When he was baptized by John, the Holy Spirit came upon him and he was filled by it. (Luke 3:21,22) This constituted for Jesus what is later referred to in connection with his disciples as being “baptized with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 1:5) Although John was the instrument used to literally immerse Jesus in water, it was God who baptized him, as it were, filling him with his Holy Spirit of truth. The account states that “the heavens were opened to him,” and the Spirit of God descended “like a dove.” (Matt. 3:16) The descent of a dove upon Jesus was merely the outward manifestation of the Holy Spirit’s baptism. He was then “led by the Spirit into the wilderness,” where the divine will would be fully revealed to him—the opening of heavenly truths.— Luke 4:1

Jesus recognized this, and later he referred to his real baptism as something which had not as yet been fully accomplished. He said, “I have an immersion to undergo; and how am I pressed, till it may be consummated.” (Luke 12:50, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) This statement by Jesus is not to be thought of as a question, as might be indicated by the sequence of the words, “how am I.” The modern arrangement would be, “How I am pressed” until my baptism is completed! Jesus’ baptism, or immersion by the Holy Spirit, instilled within his being full submission to the will of his Heavenly Father, and would continue to do so until he finished his course in death.

BAPTIZED WITH HIM

John the Baptist foretold that others would also receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and that Jesus would be used to baptize in this way. (Matt. 3:11) Thus, we find that shortly before Pentecost Jesus told his disciples that in a few days they would receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Cornelius and his household, the first Gentile converts, were likewise said to be baptized by the Holy Spirit. Later, the Apostle Paul wrote that we are all baptized by one Spirit into the body of Christ.—Acts 1:5; 11:16,17; I Cor. 12:13

In connection with Jesus' baptism of the Spirit there was an outward and miraculous demonstration of the power and acceptance of God. This was true also at Pentecost, and in connection with the experience of Cornelius and his household. In this latter case it was to give assurance of the acceptance into the divine family of Gentile believers, for this represented an extension of divine grace beyond that to which the Jews were accustomed.

These outward and miraculous demonstrations were never repeated, and there is no reason to suppose that they ever will. However, every true follower of the Master has come under the undeniable and impelling influence of God's Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus was filled with the Spirit from the very beginning of his dedicated life of sacrifice, so in every one of his consecrated followers, in proportion to their ability to be emptied of self-will, God's Spirit takes control.

The privilege of sharing in Jesus' baptism was indicated by him in a conversation with James and John. They requested of him, "Grant unto us that

we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.” Jesus’ reply was, “Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” Upon saying that they were able, Jesus said, “Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized.”—Mark 10:35-39

Jesus was not here referring to his symbolic immersion in the waters of Jordan, but to his baptism into the will of his Heavenly Father—that will which was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. With Jesus, this baptism was continuing, and did continue, until on the cross he cried, “It is finished.” (John 19:30) To James and John he indicated that they would have the opportunity of sharing this baptism with him.

INTO DEATH

The sacrificial death aspect of baptism is brought to our attention by the Apostle Paul in the words of our opening text, where he speaks of our being “baptized into Jesus Christ” and “into his death.” Paul continues, saying, “For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.” (Rom. 6:3-5) Our baptism is, as Paul indicates, “into Jesus Christ,” even as the baptism of the Israelites was into Moses. Our wills are buried into God’s will, as it is expressed through Christ. This burial means that we accept the headship of Jesus, and the spirit of our consecration is to be that of obedience to the instructions of our Head.

Thus, we become directed by the influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives—the same Spirit that led

Jesus into the wilderness, and “pressed” in upon, and urged him on to sacrifice, even unto death. The Holy Spirit leads all those who have surrendered to the will of God in the same direction as it did Jesus. All who have been accepted by the Father come under the Holy Spirit’s influence because they are all members of the same body. There is, then, only this one true baptism for the consecrated believers of the Gospel Age.

WATER BAPTISM

When Jesus presented himself to John to be baptized in water, a new house, the house of sons, began to be formed. This house of sons was to be made up of faithful individuals from among all mankind. These were to be inducted into this house based on their individual surrender to the will of God, and their desire to accept the headship of Jesus over their lives. As their Head, Jesus recognized that it was the will of God to symbolize his dedication to the Father by water immersion. If there was no other criterion to guide us, we should recognize that it is also the will of God that we follow Jesus’ example in this as in all other matters pertaining to the will of God.

Not a great deal is said in the Bible about water baptism, but enough, nevertheless, to reveal clearly that it is the will of God for all who fully dedicate themselves to him. When the Ethiopian eunuch, to whom Philip witnessed in the chariot, saw the privilege of becoming a disciple of Christ, he said, “See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?” Philip realized that there was nothing to hinder, so he baptized the eunuch.—Acts 8:36

Such readiness to recognize the propriety and importance of water baptism might well be an early indication of the genuineness of one's consecration to the Lord. Though it is only a symbol, what a meaningful symbol it is! The one being immersed is overwhelmed by the water into which he is submerged. It presses in on him from all around until he is lifted out of the water by the immerser as a picture of the prospect of his being raised in the first resurrection. Surely all who have truly surrendered themselves to do the will of God should, when the opportunity presents itself, feel like the Ethiopian, and they will not want anything to hinder them from taking this step.

SAVED BY BAPTISM

When the Apostle Peter referred to Noah and his family passing through the Flood, he said that it was symbolic of how "baptism doth also now save us." He then made a further observation, that the baptism which saves us is "not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (I Pet. 3:21) This "answer of a good conscience" is the dedication of ourselves to do God's will. When we come to understand something of the great love God has expressed toward us through Christ, the only answer we can give in good conscience is to say, "Here Lord, take my little all, and take my heart. Reveal to me thy will day by day, and give me strength to do it." This is the burial of our will, and the acceptance of Christ's headship. (Prov. 23:26) This is consecration, and our part in true baptism.

When Jesus took this step of full surrender and dedication to his Father, there was no turning back. He realized that the completion of his baptism meant voluntary and sacrificial death. He realized, also, that only by faithfulness even unto death could he hope to be raised from the dead by the power of his Father, to participate in the great future work of the kingdom. Knowing this, when Peter tried to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem, where Jesus knew he would be put to death, the Master said, “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.”—Mark 8:31-35

Thus, Jesus explained that for himself, and for all who take up their cross to follow him, salvation depends upon faithfulness unto death—the baptism of death. For those whose conscience has answered the love of God by the denial of self and the taking up of their cross to follow the Master, life itself depends upon faithfulness. Thus seen, the implications of true baptism are serious and exacting. Baptism denotes more than merely a reformation of life, or as Peter states it, a “putting away of the filth of the flesh.” This is expected by the Lord as a prerequisite to the dedication of our lives to him. When we make a full consecration, however, it calls for all that we have and are. From thenceforth everything belongs to God, and we are following Jesus in his baptism into death.

Jesus said that if we lose our lives for his sake “and the gospel’s,” we will save them. We are glad that he included these words, for otherwise there

might be a question as to how we should lay down our lives in sacrifice. We know that the Gospel, or good news, is represented in Jesus. He has told us that this Gospel is to be ministered throughout all the world as we have and can make opportunities. (Matt. 24:14; Luke 24:46-48) If we are completely buried in the tasks implied by this commission, and remain so until we are completely consumed in this sacrifice of praise to God, then glory and honor and immortality will be ours in the resurrection.—Rom. 2:7

FOR THE DEAD

In the fifteenth chapter of I Corinthians, the Apostle Paul sets forth the hope of the resurrection and assures us that in the kingdom death will be destroyed. (vss. 12-26) He then adds, “Else, what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?” (vs. 29) What is meant by Paul’s statement that if there is to be no resurrection of the dead, then those who have been baptized for the dead have served in vain. The answer is suggested by Paul in another of his letters: “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ... For ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”—Gal. 3:27,29

God promised Abraham that his seed would bless all families of the earth. (Gen. 12:3; 22:18) All the families of the earth concerning which this promise is made are either already dead or dying. Jesus, and those baptized into him, are the seed of Abraham, being prepared by God to bless the dead world of

mankind. The only way mankind can be blessed is by their being raised from the dead. As Paul argues, if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has died in vain. His baptism into death was for naught, and the baptism into death of his disciples is to no purpose. Jesus died on behalf of the dead world, and the death baptism of his disciples is designed by the Heavenly Father to qualify them to be associated with Jesus in the future work of blessing mankind by raising them from the dead and helping them to attain eternal life upon the earth.

What a glorious divine purpose is thus shown in connection with Christian baptism. Those who participate in it will share in blessing the world of mankind. Surely, then, true baptism is more than living a moral life, and attending religious services when it is convenient. It is a baptism unto death. Paul said, "I die daily." (I Cor. 15:31) Do we who are being baptized into Christ die daily? Only by faithfulness in so doing will we gain that "great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him."—Heb. 2:3 ■

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 Ann Kuenzli, Orlando, FL—August 26. Age 96

Sister Judith Moffat, Waterbury, CT—August 28. Age, 78

Brother Godofredo Laurente, Buena Vista, Leyte, Philippines—September 3. Age, 76

“The Way, the Truth, and the Life”

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

—*John 14:6*

THESE WORDS, SPOKEN

by Jesus to his disciples, indicated that their continued favor with God would no longer be through Israel's Law Covenant, but through him.

This being the case, Jesus gave particular attention during his First Advent to informing his Jewish brethren of the special opportunity which would soon be theirs of being a house of sons, rather than merely a house of servants.

This privilege given to the house of Israel would be realized in proportion as they were faithful to the light that came to them. Before they could become sons of God, it was first necessary that Jesus should be their Redeemer, make reconciliation for sins, and open up a “new and living way.” (Heb. 10:19,20) This he had come to do, but he had not yet finished that work. Those Jews who followed Jesus, and

who would come to understand God's eternal purposes and arrangements, and act in harmony with them, had to first be made free. They must be liberated from the condemnation resting upon them due to their sinful condition and their inability to carry out faithfully the requirements of the Law Covenant. Thus Jesus promised the Jews who believed on him as their Messiah that this understanding "shall make you free."—John 8:31,32

All these things, however, were at this time mostly a mystery to Jesus' followers. They were known fully only by our Lord himself, having been made clear to him because he had been begotten by his Father with the Holy Spirit. There were many things the Master said that were hard to understand. He often spoke in parables, and in dark sayings. (Matt. 13:34,35; Ps. 78:2) On one such occasion, his disciples said in apparent frustration, "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" Some even left following him altogether.—John 6:60,66

Jesus anticipated this condition of things as he spoke in words which were not yet possible for his disciples to understand. Even among the Jewish religious leaders who opposed Jesus, the declaration was made, "Never man spake like this man." (John 7:46) Jesus was, in reality, telling those who followed him: "From me you have heard words very different from those of the scribes and Pharisees. Continue with me for a little while. If you will do this, you will understand the situation fully in due time. You have begun to exercise faith in these things and will be blest accordingly. Continue in that faith and have patience. As you fully become my disciples you will be granted a deeper knowledge of my Father's plan,

and this will make you free from the rituals, ceremonies and traditions which your religious leaders continually bind about you and all the people. It will give you all the blessings and privileges that come to the children of God.”

BLESSINGS BEGUN AT PENTECOST

Paul tells us, “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.” (I Cor. 2:14) Those of sincere and honest hearts who continued to follow Jesus, though not yet filled with the Holy Spirit, saw that he was different from any other teacher or leader of the Jews. Jesus was loving, kind, sympathetic, merciful and forgiving. It is recorded: “All bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.” (Luke 4:22) His demeanor and attitude were not that of a “natural man,” but one imbued with the power and influence of God.

When Pentecost came, the Heavenly Father received all who had continued in Jesus’ word, and they were begotten by the Holy Spirit into God’s family. Their eyes of understanding were illuminated, and they began to discern spiritual things. All the light did not come at once, but it progressed as the days and years went by. They were now, however, in a much fuller sense, Christ’s disciples, recognized as such by the risen and glorified Lord, and by the Heavenly Father. Through faith in the redemptive merit of Jesus’ blood and full dedication to the doing of the Father’s will, Christ’s followers were not only made free from the Law Covenant

arrangement, but made free from Adamic sin and death. (Rom. 8:1-3) Being “in Christ,” as Paul states, they were each “a new creature.” Old things had “passed away,” and all things had “become new.”—II Cor. 5:17

In his prayer to the Father, Jesus said, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” (John 17:17) By the word “truth” Jesus was referring to the revealing of God’s plan through the Holy Spirit, and the sanctifying influence that should result based on that knowledge being received into an honest heart. This sanctification, or the process of being made holy, began with the Pentecostal blessing, and still continues to operate in the life of each individual child of God. Sanctification gradually progresses as each footstep follower of Christ allows the Truth to have its designed influence towards holiness in thought, word and deed. Thus, we can appreciate the import of Jesus’ words, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.”—John 8:31

To continue in Jesus’ word is, in reality, to become more acquainted with the Heavenly Father; to know more about his character attributes of wisdom, justice, love and power; to understand more fully his will, his methods, and his plans. Such knowledge is necessary in order for us to be sanctified by the Truth. As our opening text states, however, Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life,” and the one through whom we come to know the Father. The Scriptures testify, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, ... he hath declared him.” “He that hath seen me,” Jesus stated, “hath seen the Father.”—John 1:18; 14:9

ONLY BY CHRIST

Christ is the sufficiency which God has provided for us in all respects. He has been “made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” (I Cor. 1:30) We first received, through learning of his sacrificial work on our behalf, the necessary wisdom and instruction by which we may, through his merit, come to the Father. Christ is our wisdom all along the way. The Heavenly Father had a glorious plan before the foundation of the world, which was first alluded to in Eden, just after man’s fall. (Gen. 3:15) In due time, God gave a further intimation of that plan through Abel, Enoch, Abraham, and still later through Moses and the prophets. How and when the world was to benefit from it, however, was still hidden.—Heb. 11:4; Jude 1:14; Gen. 22:18; Luke 24:44

A key component of the wisdom brought to us through Jesus is indicated in Paul’s assertion that Christ “hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” (II Tim. 1:10) Though the Old Testament contained many promises and veiled prophecies of the future, the substance of the Gospel was not declared, nor understood, until Jesus came. The apostle says that our salvation “at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.” (Heb. 2:3) Our Lord began to speak it, but the secret of the Gospel and its wisdom was not fully revealed until after Pentecost. Even in Jesus’ case, it was not until after he was begotten of the Holy Spirit that he himself comprehended it clearly and began to set before us the way of “life and immortality.”

JESUS OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

In addition to his being the source of our wisdom, Jesus becomes our righteousness. He covers our sins and imputes to us his own righteousness, the merit of his redemptive sacrifice. This imputation brings us to a condition of complete righteousness in God's eyes. It is not actual perfection, but a condition of reckoned justification, which God is pleased to recognize in the way he has arranged.—Isa. 61:10; Rom. 4:7,8; 5:17,18; II Cor. 5:21

Jesus does not become the righteousness of everybody, not even of those who give some notice to his words, but to those alone who come to the point of full dedication and submission to the Father's will. There is a good reason for this, for only those who offer themselves to become members of his body during this Gospel Age—only the Spirit-begotten—would be profited by a justification by faith. Only these are now on trial for life. In the next age, during Christ's earthly kingdom, others will come to him. Now, however, justification, or righteousness, through faith, only comes to those who walk in his steps of sacrifice and service.—Eph. 2:8-10

JESUS OUR SANCTIFICATION

The step of consecration on the part of those who become Jesus' disciples is an initial step in the process of sanctification. God told Israel, "sanctify yourselves," then added, "I am the LORD which sanctify you." (Lev. 20:7,8) He is telling us, spiritual Israelites, to set ourselves apart by full consecration, and then he will direct our further sanctification through experiences, testing and trial. Jesus is our sanctification in the sense that he becomes our pattern of character,

behavior and service. When praying on behalf of his disciples, Jesus said, "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified." (John 17:19) We are accepted in him, and his grace, advocacy and example enable us to attain complete sanctification.

God sets us apart by begetting us with the Holy Spirit to a new nature and making us prospective members of the royal priesthood, together with Jesus, our High Priest. (I Pet. 2:5,9) Our begetting with God's "holy Spirit of promise," is the pledge, or "earnest of our inheritance," which will be fully experienced when we are changed from the human to the spirit nature "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." (Eph. 1:13,14; I Cor. 15:52) The Holy Spirit, as the pledge of our inheritance, is given to us for the purpose of assisting in the process of sanctification already begun in us, until its completion.—Phil 1:6

JESUS OUR DELIVERANCE

In the text quoted earlier in which Paul says Christ is "made unto us ... redemption," the thought is that of full deliverance. Those who make satisfactory progress in attaining godly wisdom, who manifest a life lived as much as possible in harmony with the principles of righteousness, and who attain a holy character, set apart from the selfish spirit of this present world, will experience full deliverance from present sinful conditions, and from all imperfections of the flesh. This will be accomplished through the power of the first resurrection. (Rev. 20:6) Here also, Christ Jesus plays a vital role. He promised his disciples, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." "I go to prepare a place for

you And if I go, ... I will come again, and receive you unto myself.”—John 11:25; 14:2,3

While the Heavenly Father is the author of all wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, they are given to us through his Son, who is the Father’s representative. Jesus received the spirit of the Father and has shed it forth upon us. We are anointed through our Head as members of his prospective body. We know that God, who “raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus.”—II Cor. 4:14

JESUS OUR LEADER

It has been said that a good leader leads by example. This is especially true when we consider Jesus. His life exemplifies that of a guiding head, whose ability to lead was proven at great cost. God is our leader in the greatest sense of the word, and he has appointed his Son as the shepherd of his flock. As our shepherd, Jesus leads his sheep in the “paths of righteousness,” and as they pass “through the valley of the shadow of death.” (Ps. 23:3,4) He watches over the sheep, uses his staff of guidance and care, protecting them from those who would do them harm, especially the great adversary, Satan. The shepherd’s desire for the sheep is that goodness and mercy will be with them every day, making “all things work together for good.” He continues his care over them until, if faithful, they enter into and “dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”—vss. 1-6; Rom. 8:28

We know that this relationship with Jesus was made possible by the laying down of his life as a “ransom for all.” (I Tim. 2:5,6) Our Lord spoke these words with reference to himself, “I am the good shepherd:

the good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep.” (John 10:11) This was further shown by his words, “Greater love hath no man that this that he lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends.” (John 15:13,14) It was Jesus’ desire to willingly lay down his life for us. We as his sheep, his disciples, must desire to walk in his footsteps, and gladly follow his example by laying down our own lives daily in sacrifice. With this comes trials, testings and experiences that involve joys and sorrows, all of which are designed to transform our character into the likeness of our shepherd.—Luke 9:23; Rom. 12:1,2; I Pet. 4:12,13

REWARD OF TRUE DISCIPLESHIP

Jesus’ expression, “Then are ye my disciples indeed,” implies a distinction between real disciples and those who are disciples in name only. Since we desire to be Jesus’ disciples in the fullest sense, let us mark well the expressed condition, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.” (John 8:31) The hypocrisy of discipleship in name only is wholly displeasing to the Lord.

It is a blessed thing to take the first step in the Christian life, which is the acceptance of Christ as our Redeemer and yielding ourselves fully to the Father through him. However, the reward of this step depends upon our continuing in his Word, and its teachings regarding the attitude of true disciples. The disposition of human pride might cause us to wander away from the simplicity of divine principles found in the Scriptures. We could be tempted to seek out new theories and philosophies of our own, or to investigate those of others who desire to be considered wise according to this world’s estimate. The

reward of continued discipleship, however, is based on the statement, “Ye shall know the truth.” (John 8:32) Having known it, therein we must abide. To those who may extend their search for truth to human theories, it will not be found there. Such will be, as Paul warned, “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”—II Tim. 3:7

Our Lord, the apostles and the prophets, together with the inspired writings of the Scriptures, provide the divine truths which we need to know and apply. We are to study and meditate upon them, to trust implicitly in them, and to faithfully conform our characters to them. This is what is implied in Jesus’ statement, “continue in my word.” Doing so is also entirely compatible with utilizing the many helps which the Lord provides through our brethren in the body of Christ, and as enumerated by the Apostle Paul. (Eph. 4:11-15; I Cor. 12:12-14) God always has raised up, and will continue to do so, such helps as might aid in the work of assisting and edifying the body of Christ. However, it is the duty of each member to carefully prove all things by the infallible Word of God.—I Thess. 5:21

If we continue in the Word of the Lord as earnest and sincere disciples, we shall indeed know that Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life,” and that there is no other means by which we can come unto the Father. With such a firm foundation of faith, we can be prepared and “ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.” (I Pet. 3:15) We can properly “contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” (Jude 1:3) We can “war a good warfare,” and witness “a good confession.” (I Tim. 1:18; 6:13)

With courage we can “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ,” even unto the end of our earthly sojourn.—II Tim. 2:3

We do not come to a knowledge of the Truth all at once. Gradually, step by step, we are led into a greater understanding of its principles. Every step is one of sure and certain progress leading to further attainments both in knowledge and in the establishment of Christian character. Such gradual, but steady, progress allows the principles of truth to become a mighty sanctifying power in our life. It brings forth in our lives the blessed fruits of righteousness, peace, joy, love, meekness, faith, patience, and every other virtue and grace, which time and cultivation ripen to maturity.

Not only does the true disciple of Jesus know the Truth and become sanctified by it, but by blessed experience something of its liberating power also becomes known. As soon as any measure of it is received into a good and honest heart, it begins to remove the bonds of sin, ignorance, superstition and fear. Its restorative beams of light penetrate the darkest recesses of the heart and mind, invigorating the whole being, and even quickening the mortal body of the faithful.—Rom. 8:11

“THY WORDS GIVETH LIGHT”

These words from Psalm 119:130 point out to us the importance of the wisdom of God. God’s words only produce light, never darkness. Ignorance and superstition will eventually vanish before this light, and sin will not endure its brightness. This will be a blessed reality throughout the earth in Christ’s coming kingdom. Now, however, millions are still

under the blinding influence of error and other delusions practiced by the Adversary. Through his machinations they have been made to fear God as a vengeful deity, consigning most of his creatures to an eternity of torment. Thank God, those who have been blessed to receive his truth have awakened from that horrible nightmare and have come “out of darkness into his marvelous light.”—I Pet. 2:9

All such have also been made free from the fear now upon the whole world as the great political, religious, social and economic systems of our day are being shaken to the very core. (Heb. 12:25-28) They know that God’s object in permitting this mighty storm is to clear away the present systems of the world and that, after the storm shall have done its work, God will establish an abiding peace. (Isa. 9:6,7; 32:17,18; Hag. 2:7-9) Instructed by the Scriptures, they realize the necessities of the situation, and have confidence in divine providence, which can make even the wrath of man to praise him, and to make all things work together for mankind’s ultimate good.—Ps. 76:10

Having received the wondrous favor of knowing our Heavenly Father and his beloved Son, Christ Jesus, through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit as to the harmony of the Scriptures, let us continue in this knowledge, giving no heed to worldly doctrines, traditions or theories. Let us be faithful to the Truth under all circumstances, and defend it against every assault. Finally, let us prove our appreciation of the glorious light of truth by bringing forth its blessed fruitage in our lives, and by our loyalty and faithfulness, working out our salvation with fear and trembling, faithfully, even unto death.—Phil. 2:12; Rev. 2:10 ■

Elisha and the Floating Axe Head

“Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee.”

—II Kings 2:9,10

THE FIRST MENTION OF

Elisha in the Bible is in I Kings chapter 19. In verses 8-10 we find Elijah dwelling in a cave at Mount Horeb, hiding from his enemies. It was here that God commanded Elijah to go into the “wilderness of Damascus” to accomplish certain things. (vss. 15-18) Verse 19 states that, on his way through Canaan toward Syria, Elijah found Elisha engaged in plowing a field with twelve yoke of oxen.

Upon meeting him, Elijah cast his mantle upon Elisha. This would indicate that he was the one whom the Lord had chosen to become the prophet of Israel to succeed Elijah. The

account states that Elisha then bade goodbye to his family, disposed of his goods, including his oxen, leaving all that he had. He then “went after Elijah, and ministered unto him.” (I Kings 19:20,21) To Elijah and Elisha, the mantle literally represented the office of a prophet, as given by the authority of God. In this case, however, Elisha was not to assume the official duties of a prophet until the death of his predecessor, Elijah.

ELIJAH’S MANTLE A PICTURE

The mantle of Elijah, which he conferred upon Elisha, his successor, was made of animal skins. “He wore a garment of haircloth, with a girdle of leather about his loins.” (II Kings 1:8, *Revised Standard Version*) A lesson for us is that this mantle, being made of animal skins, is a fitting picture of the “robe of righteousness”—that is, the merit of Jesus’ ransom sacrifice, made available for us to cover our sins and imperfections.—Isa. 61:10; Rom. 4:7; 13:14

We might also think of Elijah’s mantle as representing the anointing of the Holy Spirit. This association is made by David, who, in the Psalms, alluded back to the anointing of the priesthood of Israel. There we see that the anointing oil was poured upon the head of Aaron the high priest, and it ran down upon his garment. (Exod. 30:25-31; Ps. 133:1,2) Thus it is that the anointing of the Holy Spirit that we have received has come to us because we are under the robe of Christ’s righteousness. We see, then, that both the covering merit of Jesus’ sacrifice and the anointing of the Holy Spirit seem to be represented in the mantle of Elijah.

ELISHA'S MINISTRY BEGINS

Following the event of the calling of Elisha by Elijah, we hear nothing more of Elisha for several years. Following the death of Elijah, in which he was miraculously separated from Elisha by a "chariot of fire," Elisha began his ministry as God's anointed prophet. (II Kings 2:11-15; Heb. 11:13) Elisha lived a long and productive life in the service of the Lord, doing even greater works than that of Elijah. As stated in our opening text, Elijah had promised him a double portion of God's spirit, which Elisha faithfully used in the performance of many miracles.

Elisha's first miracle was the purifying of the waters of Jericho recorded in II Kings 2:18-22. Some of the other outstanding events in his life were the restoring of the Shunamite's son to life and purifying the deadly pottage at Gilgal. (II Kings 4:8-41) Elisha was also used as an instrument of God in the healing of Naaman, the chief captain of the armies of Syria, whose leprosy was cleansed by washing in the waters of the Jordan. (II Kings 5:1-14) The only mention of Elisha in the New Testament, found in Luke 4:27, is a reference to the cleansing of Naaman the Syrian.

Although he performed numerous miracles, Elisha's primary ministry was that of a reformer, teaching the people to turn from sin and idolatry and to be obedient to the God of Israel and to the Law. In examining these experiences, not so much as types, but as object lessons for us, we believe that God intended the events of Elisha's life to provide us valuable lessons concerning our conduct and development as spiritual Israelites.

THE FLOATING AXE HEAD

In II Kings, the 6th chapter, we have the very interesting account of Elisha and the floating axe head. We wish to look at this particular event carefully and see what lessons the Heavenly Father may have in this experience that can be of benefit to us. The brief account is recorded below.

“The sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye. And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants. And he answered, I will go. So he went with them. And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood. But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed. And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim. Therefore said he, Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it.”—vss. 1-7

“SONS OF THE PROPHETS”

Who are the “sons of the prophets” referred to in the first verse of this account? The sons, or “company of the prophets,” were a religious fraternity which began in the days of Samuel. (I Sam. 19:18-20) This group, instituted by Samuel in his old age, was formed to school young men in the teachings of the Law so that they could watch over the religious and moral interests of the people. Over a period of many years these groups were set up in

some of the major cities in Israel. Those who attended them lived in a communal arrangement, separating themselves from the rest of society, so far as their religious training was concerned. However, they also mingled with the people in fulfilling their mission of religious and moral uplift.

A similar situation has been true of the followers of Jesus during the present age. Just as Samuel instituted the school of the prophets, so Jesus came at his First Advent and established what has often been referred to as the “school of Christ” for his footstep followers. Jesus is the “Master” teacher, and each of his followers is a “disciple,” in this symbolic school.—Matt. 4:23; 10:24; 11:1; Luke 20:21; John 3:2

The first school of prophets was set up at Naioth in Ramah. Naioth means “residence,” and Ramah means “elevated.” How true it is that, as spiritual Israelites, our prospective “residence” is in heaven, and even now we dwell together with Christ in “heavenly places.” (Eph. 1:3; 2:6) As these groups were established in many cities throughout Israel, so it is that the Lord’s people have been established in little groups throughout the earth. We come together so that we may sit at the feet of our great teacher Jesus, and to be taught of him concerning the Word of God. We are not “sons of the prophets,” but rather “sons of God.”—Rom. 8:14; Gal. 4:6; I John 3:1,2

TRAINED IN THE SCHOOL OF CHRIST

Just as the sons of the prophets separated themselves from the people at large in receiving their religious training, so we also must come apart from

the world if we are to be taught of the Lord. Yet we are still in the world, and we, like the sons of the prophets, must be light-bearers and examples to mankind. (John 15:18,19; 17:11-16; Phil. 2:15) The Prophet Isaiah informs us of our work in the world, that we have been anointed with God's Holy Spirit to "preach good tidings unto the meek; ... to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." (Isa. 61:1,2) Thus, if we are being taught in the school of Christ, we must also be faithful ministers of the Truth, by word and by conduct, in our daily contact with the world.

As time went on in this group of the sons of the prophets, established by Samuel, the authority over this arrangement was passed down through several of God's prophets until the latter part of the period of the kings. Elijah became the overseer of this arrangement and then, finally, this authority was passed on to Elisha. Returning to chapter 6 of II Kings, let us consider the experiences of the sons of the prophets, and draw certain lessons related to our discipleship in the school of Christ.

GOING DOWN TO THE JORDAN

In the foregoing quote from II Kings 6:2, we see the sons of the prophets going down to the Jordan River for the purpose of building a house to dwell in. Similarly, at the outset of our Christian experience it was necessary for us, symbolically speaking, to go to the Jordan. There, by faith, we presented ourselves in consecration to God and were cleansed by the precious blood of Christ. (I Cor. 6:11; I John

1:7; Rev. 1:5) Our offering to the Lord was lean and poor, and did not appear as much in the eyes of men, but God saw in the heart of each one of us a sincerity, a devotion to his will, and he valued this more highly than gold and silver.

The name "Jordan" means "descending" or "downward." It is a fitting description of the general downward course of mankind resulting from the effects of sin. As the Jordan River ended at the Dead Sea, so also the human race, since man's fall, has streamed downward to its end result, the condition of Adamic death. We recall that Jesus, at the age of thirty, came to the Jordan and there gave expression to his complete dedication to the will of the Father in consecration. There John baptized Jesus in the downward flowing waters of that river. (Matt. 3:13-17) Jesus, of course, was sinless, but his baptism in the Jordan was a fore-gleam of the fact that three and one-half years later, on the cross, he would take Adam's place in death, allowing for the release of mankind from the curse and its downward effects. In due time, at the start of the Messianic kingdom, the waters of the symbolic Jordan will be smitten and rolled back, as it were, and mankind will be made free from Adamic condemnation.—John 1:29; Rom. 5:18,19; I Tim. 2:5,6; I John 2:2

However, before that can take place the work of the Gospel Age must be completed. Now, the benefits of Jesus' sacrifice are applied on an individual basis, according to faith. Going down to the Jordan can be likened to our voluntary consecration to God and the subsequent cleansing we receive by the merit of Jesus' sacrifice, which is the basis of our justification. Thus, by Christ Jesus we are lifted up from

our previous downward course, and we begin to walk in “newness of life.”—Rom. 3:24-26; 6:4; Eph. 2:8-10

BUILDING THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

After coming to the Jordan River the sons of the prophets, under Elisha’s supervision, were each to take a beam, or log, and together construct a building to dwell in. So it is that we, having come to the Jordan in consecration, then set out on the lifetime work of preparation for a place in the spiritual house of the Lord. Each one of us is represented as a beam in God’s house, and we are reminded of our Lord’s words, “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God.”—Rev. 3:12

The record states that Elisha accompanied the sons of the prophets and instructed them in this building work. Christ Jesus is likewise present with us as our High Priest and Advocate, our exemplar and our teacher. We look to him for instruction regarding this work of preparation going on in the life of each one of us.—Heb. 4:14,15; I John 2:1

OUR STEWARDSHIP—PICTURED BY THE AXE HEAD

Let us consider closely II Kings 6:5-7, quoting these verses again: “As one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed. And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim. Therefore said he, Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it.”

We know that in building a house made of logs such as the one referred to here, the only tool that was generally necessary was an axe. It was used to

cut down the tree, then to skin the bark off the log. The axe was also used to notch each end of the log so it would be properly fitted and interlocked with the logs from the other walls at right angles. The axe did everything in preparing each of these beams that was to go into the house. It well represents everything over which we have been made a steward for the purpose of preparing ourselves as New Creatures so that, in due time, on the other side of the veil, we might have a place as a beam in the house of the Lord—as a “pillar” in the temple of our God.

We notice in our text that it was a “borrowed” axe. It did not belong to the one who was using it. With us, all that we have belongs to the Heavenly Father—it does not belong to us. We turned everything over to him when we made a consecration. However, he gave these things back to us and appointed us stewards over them. We must use all that we have received from the Lord—our talents, abilities, time, energy, even material possessions—in a way that would be in our best interest as God’s spiritual sons, and to his honor and glory. All of these things over which we have been made stewards, if used properly, will contribute to the work of preparation of ourselves as a “beam,” or pillar, in God’s house.

In this narrative, we see another lesson. When one of the axe heads fell into the water and began to sink, Elisha caused it to come up from the bottom of the Jordan and to float or “swim” on top of the water. Elisha took it out of the water and gave it back to the one who was using it. In our case, natural abilities, talents and worldly possessions may all look more or less the same as those of our neighbors, coworkers and friends in the world.

However, the difference is in the fact that our axe head “floats” and theirs does not. That is, what has been given to us by the Lord to be stewards over has been lifted up from the waters of the Jordan, out from under the generally degraded conditions present in the world today, and sanctified for our use.

STEWARDSHIP IS ALL-INCLUSIVE

The Apostle Paul tells us, “It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful,” and “do all to the glory of God.” (I Cor. 4:2; 10:31) These words indicate that the “axe head” that the Lord has loaned to each one of us for our preparation as New Creatures involves more than merely our natural talents and temporal possessions. Along this line, the Apostle Peter states, “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” (I Pet. 4:10) The knowledge of the Truth is a gift given by the “manifold grace of God,” over which, Peter says, we have been made stewards. The apostle further explains that to fulfill our stewardship in this respect means we must “minister” one to another, and thus build one another up in our most holy faith.—Jude 1:20

Indeed, we must recognize how all-inclusive our stewardship is. Everything that has to do with our lives, temporally as well as spiritually, has been provided by our Heavenly Father. It is all sanctified for our use in preparation as a beam in the spiritual temple of the Lord, whether it be talents, time, abilities, possessions, or the grace of God that has been shed forth to each of us as one of his prospective sons. Let us see to it that we use our axe properly—

cutting off the bark of dross, getting rid of the rotten spots, trimming off the little branches of sin and smoothing out the sharp corners and rough edges of our character.

LABOURERS TOGETHER

A final lesson that may be drawn from this incident in the life of Elisha is that referred to by the apostle in I Corinthians 3:9, "We are labourers together with God." We see the sons of the prophets under the leadership of Elisha bending all their energies to the work at hand, each of them shaping and preparing their individual beams for the building of their house. While the primary concern of each one is their own beam which they are preparing, they could never finish the construction if they were not working together all the way through the building process.

We learn from this that our present work is primarily an individual responsibility. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," we are told. (Phil. 2:12) Yet we must also keep our spiritual eyes set upon the building as a whole and its final assembly as a glorious spiritual temple on the other side of the veil. The Lord is pleased to have us manifest interest in all of the preparatory work of this house of the Lord. What a blessed opportunity we have to come together in meetings and conventions, and of cooperating with our brethren around the world in disseminating the message of truth and the Gospel of the kingdom.

We are reminded of the apostle's word in Ephesians 2:19-22, "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the

saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”

Just as Elisha was there to oversee the construction of that house for the sons of the prophets, so our Lord is with us. With us, too, are all those who are similarly engaged in this work of preparation for a place in God’s spiritual house. Our Elisha, Jesus, has given us the blueprints and specifications in his Word, and we must follow these carefully. If faithful, this symbolic spiritual house, of which we will be a part, will be the means by which the entire world of mankind will be restored to life, to dominion over the earth, and to earthly sonship with God.

We recall the words of John the Revelator in which he speaks of the time when all the willing and obedient of mankind will likewise become the symbolic dwelling place of God on the earth. “I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. 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. ... He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.” (Rev. 21:3,4,7) May the Lord help each of us to be faithful in our individual and collective work of preparation for this glorious time. ■

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.

COLORADO CONVENTION, October 4-6—Holiday Inn Express & Suites, 17140 West Colfax Avenue, Golden, CO 80401. Contact D. Moss. Email: deb.moss@comcast.net

ITALIAN CONVENTION, October 5,6—Hotel Delta Florence, Via Vittorio Emanuele 3, Calenzano, Prato, Italy. Contact Sr. Viloeta. Email: infoassembleaitaliana@gmail.com

WEST NEWTON CONVENTION, October 5,6—Sewickley Grange Hall, Route 136, West Newton, PA 15089. Contact L. Mlinek. Email: lmlinek@verizon.net

AGAWAM CONVENTION, October 6—Agawam Senior Center, 954 Main Street, Agawam, MA. Contact F. Sansom. Phone: (860) 861-6881 or Email: elshaddai144k@icloud.com

GRAND RAPIDS CONVENTION, October 12,13—Kenowa Hills Middle School, 3950 Hendershot Avenue NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49544. Contact T. Malinowski. Phone: (616) 304-7691 or Email: malinowski.tjm@gmail.com

ORLANDO CONVENTION, October 26,27—South Seminole Lodge, 122 Triplet Lake Drive, Casselberry, FL 32707. Contact C. Goodman. Phone: (407) 695-6815 or Email: clmgoodman@gmail.com

SAN LUIS OBISPO CONVENTION, October 26,27—Masonic Hall, 859 Marsh Street, San Luis Obispo, CA. Contact M. Allard. Phone: (805) 773-2962 or Email: medlallard@juno.com

MILWAUKEE CONVENTION, November 2,3—Lake Lodge, 1235 East Howard Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53207. Contact D. Farchione. Phone: (414) 324-9667 or Email: debfarchione@aol.com

NEW HAVEN CONVENTION, November 3—Italian-American Club, 85 Chase Lane, West Haven, CT. Contact A. Suraci. Phone: (203) 248-3793/(203) 430-5770 or Email: annasuraci@comcast.net

CALI, COLOMBIA CONVENTION, November 16,17—Hotel Las Americas, Calle 21 Norte #3N-34. Cali, Colombia. The room rate is \$40.00 per night. The deadline for this rate is October 15. Contact C. Anania. Phone: (973) 262-0467 or Email: njbiblestudents@gmail.com

SOUTHWEST CONVENTION, November 29-December 2—Ontario Gateway Hotel, Ontario, CA. Hotel reservations, phone: (909) 975-5000. Mention Bible Students Convention for special rate available until November 3. Other information, contact D. Rawson. Phone: (408) 644-7668 or Email: rawsondr@yahoo.com

CHICAGO CONVENTION, December 28,29—Addison Park District, 120 E. Oak Street, Addison, IL. Contact D. Whittaker. Phone: (630) 293-4810 or Email: secretary@chicagobible.org

PHOENIX CONVENTION, January 18,19—Drury Inn, Happy Valley, 2335 W. Pinnacle Peak Road, Phoenix, AZ 85027. Hotel reservations, phone: (800) 325-0720. Confirmation #2369019. Reservation deadline, December 16. Other information, contact A. Mengos. Phone: (480) 390-3767 or Email: samengos@yahoo.com

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