



Prayers of The Righteous

*Tracing Prayer Through
The Word of God*



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THE PRIVILEGE AND POWER OF PRAYER*– R. 1864**And Jesus spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought
always to pray and not to faint. – Luke 18:1-8*

TO THE thoughtful, appreciative mind, one of the greatest privileges which the Word of God offers is that of personal audience and communion with the King of kings and Lord of lords. When we consider how great is our God, and how exalted his station, how wonderful is the condescension that thus regards our low estate! He it is whose glory covereth the heavens, and whose kingdom ruleth over the whole universe. He it is who is without beginning of days or end of years: “From everlasting to everlasting thou art God.” He is the immortal, the self-existing One, “dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see.” The heavens declare his glory and the firmament showeth his handiwork. In all his vast universal domain there is nothing hidden from him, nor can he be wearied by its care. His wisdom, who can fathom? and his ways, who can find them out? or who hath been his counsellor? His mighty intellect grasps with ease all the interests of his wide dominion, from immensity to minutia. His eye never slumbers nor sleeps, nor can the smallest thing escape his notice, not even a sparrow’s fall; and the very hairs of our heads are all numbered. It is his skill which clothes with life and beauty the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven. And are not we, the creatures of his hand, “fearfully and wonderfully made,” and the subjects, too, of his love and care? – “O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways; for there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.

“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in the grave, behold thou art there; if I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost part of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, . . . even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.” – Psa. 139:1-12.

Fallen creatures though we be, from the noble estate in which we were created, God so loved our race, even while we were yet sinners, as to make provision at great cost for our redemption and restitution and subsequent eternal glory. And therefore it is, – because he loves us, – that through Christ he extends to us the gracious favor of coming to him as children to a father. Wonderful is the condescension, wonderful the love and favor of our God!

Yet our God is a God to be revered: he is not one like ourselves, our equal, into whose presence we may come without that ceremony and decorum due to his glorious person and office. (Job 9:1-35.) The court of heaven has regulations and ceremonies of respect and due deference which must be complied with by every man who would gain an audience with the King of kings; and it behooves us to inquire what those

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regulations are before we presume to address him. Here the Word of God gives explicit directions.

Our Lord Jesus, the appointed “days-man” for which Job so earnestly longed (Job 9:32,33), said, “No man cometh unto the Father, but by me. I am the way.” (John 14:6.) Then he gave us an illustration of the manner in which we should address him, in what is known as the Lord’s prayer. (Matt. 6:9-13.) The illustration teaches:

(1) that we (believers in Christ) may consider ourselves as in God’s estimation reinstated (through faith in Christ) to the original position of sons of God, and that we may therefore confidently address him – “Our Father.”

(2) It indicates on our part worshipful adoration of the high and holy One, and profound reverence for the glorious character and attributes of Our God. – “Hallowed be thy name.”

(3) It expresses full sympathy with his revealed plan for a coming Kingdom of righteousness, which will be according to his will. – “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven.” This shows the attitude of heart to be toward righteousness, and fully submitted to the divine will and purpose, that God may work in it to will and to do his good pleasure.

(4) It expresses in plain and simple language its dependence on God for daily needs, and the confidence of a child in the Father for the supply of those needs out of his abundant fulness. – “Give us this day our daily bread.”

(5) It seeks forgiveness for trespasses, and recognizes also the obligation thus incurred to render the same to those trespassing against us – “And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors;” and

(6) it seeks to be guarded against temptations and to be fortified by God’s abounding grace against all the wiles of the adversary* – “And abandon us not to trial, but preserve us from evil.”

**The Sinaitic and Vatican MSS. omit the words, “for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.” Matt. 6:13.*

Such are the principles which must ever characterize our attitude of mind and heart when we would avail ourselves of the privilege of addressing the throne of heavenly grace. In brief, our prayers, to be acceptable to God, must express confident faith, loving esteem and reverence, full sympathy with the divine plan and submission to the divine will, childlike dependence upon God, acknowledgment of sins and shortcomings and desire for forgiveness, with a forgiving disposition on our part toward others, and an humble craving for the divine guidance and protection. These may not always all be expressed in words, but such must at least be the attitude of the soul.

Those who thus come to God are privileged always to have their interests considered at the throne of grace, and the welcome we shall always find there may be judged of

by the cordial invitations to come often and tarry long. Well might we hesitate to avail ourselves of such privileges were we not thus assured, but having this assurance we may come with confidence to the throne of grace. – Heb. 4:16; 13:6.

The Lord knew how necessary to our spiritual life would be this communion with himself. Tempest-tossed and tried, how much we need our Father’s care and the comfort and consolation which his presence and sympathy realized imparts. And have not all the meek and contrite in heart the promise not only of the occasional attentive hearing, but of the abiding presence of both the Father and the Son, our Lord Jesus? Jesus said, “He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas – not Iscariot – saith unto him, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” – John 14:21-23.

The thought which this promise of the abiding presence of the Father and Son conveys to our minds is that their thought and care and interest will be constantly upon us, and that at any instant we may engage the special attention of either or both. The same idea is also conveyed by the words of the Apostle Peter (1 Pet. 3:12) – “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers.” And we are urged to be “instant in prayer,” to “pray always, and not to faint,” to “pray without ceasing;” for “Like as a Father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him; for he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust.” “As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him,” and “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.” Yea, “the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children, to such as keep his covenant and to those that remember his commandments to do them.” – Rom. 12:12; Luke 18:1; 1 Thes. 5:17; Psa. 103:13,14,11,12,17,18.

*Rejoicing
in hope,
patient in
tribulation,
continuing
steadfastly
in prayer.
Rom. 12:12*

We cannot come too often, then, to the throne of the heavenly grace, if we are of those who can claim the abiding presence of the Father and the Son – if we are of them that love him and keep his commandments and who recognize the Lord Jesus as the only way of access to the Father. And even “if any man sin” – be overtaken in a fault – so that from his outward conduct he might be judged as not loving the Lord, yet, if he repent, let him remember that “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous,” who “is the propitiation [satisfaction] for our sins,” “who also maketh intercession for us.” “Who,” then, “shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” – 1 John 2:1,2; Rom. 8:33,34.

Wherefore, the Apostle urges, “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession; for we have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us, therefore, come with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” – Heb. 4:14-16.

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With such urgent and loving invitations let no child of God hesitate to come to him often or to tarry long in communion and fellowship with him. It is our privilege to enter into our closets and shut the doors and pray to our Father which seeth in secret, who will reward us openly. (Matt. 6:6.) And not only so, but he will go with us through all the business and hurry and commotion of the day; and at any instant in the midst of cares and perplexities we may turn our prayerful thoughts to him for wisdom, for strength and Christian fortitude, or for comfort and consolation for ourselves or others. And though we hear no responding voice, if we are attentive to the course of his providence we will shortly see the shaping of events and circumstances for our good and the good of others in answer to such prayers. Beloved, have we not many a time proved this true? – in perplexities, in tribulations, in afflictions, in persecutions, in bereavements, in temptations and trials?

In coming to God we need have no fear that he is too busy with other matters of greater importance, or that he is weary of our coming to him repeatedly with things of small importance. It was to assure us against this very thing that our Lord spoke the parable of the importunate widow, who was heard and answered on account of her importunity. In so doing we evince both the earnestness of our desires and our faith that our prayers will be answered, if we faint not from lack of faith or zeal when the answer is delayed, as often it must necessarily be, since time is an important element in all God's work.

All night, until the break of day, Jacob wrestled in prayer, saying, "I will not let thee go, unless thou bless me." Paul thrice besought the Lord until he was assured his grace would be sufficient for him. The Lord himself frequently spent **whole nights** in prayer, and he prayed earnestly and with many tears. (Luke 6:12; Matt. 14:23; Mark 6:46; 1:35; Luke 5:16; Heb. 5:7.) And the Apostle Paul says, "In everything, by prayer and supplication [earnest pleading] with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." – Phil 4:6.

Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.
Luke 6:12

The Apostle himself acted on this principle when he urged, in his letter to the Romans, that the saints "strive together [Greek, **agonize**] with me in prayers to God for me," that he might safely accomplish a certain work which seemed to be of the Spirit's leading. – Rom. 15:28-32.

"In every thing." – That signifies that our heavenly Father is deeply interested in everything that relates to us and ours. What thing is too small for his notice who numbers even the very hairs of our heads? In today's household or business cares, then, we may have his loving sympathy and helpfulness. Do a mother's counsel and a father's wisdom seem inadequate to restrain and guide aright the wayward course of impetuous and over-confident youth, they may bring their cares and fears to the Lord; and, as the children cross the threshold to meet the world's temptations, his wisdom and providence may be invoked to so shape their circumstances and surroundings as to show them eventually the sure safe way and the folly of pursuing any other.

Do business cares perplex and annoy? remember the Lord's caution, "Be not overcharged with the cares of this life," and the Apostle's warning, "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and utter ruin; for the love of money is the root of all evil, which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves

through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life.” And, remembering these things, come to the throne of the heavenly grace for wisdom and direction as to how you may so adjust your temporal affairs as not to be **overcharged** with the cares of this life. It is right to be charged with them to the extent of diligence (Rom. 12:11) and the utilization of such diligence in the Lord’s service; but it is the overplus, the corroding care, that interferes with peace of mind and communion with God, that is to be avoided.

Does poverty pinch and cause anxious thought? take that also to the Lord in prayer; and then, while diligently using the means at hand, to provide things decent and honest, patiently and confidently wait and watch the indications of providence, assured that he who feeds the fowl of the air, which neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and who clothes the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, is both able and willing to clothe and feed you and yours.

And so through all the list of earth’s trials and cares, its wants and its woes, its bereavements and disappointments and calamities and distresses, its failures and shortcomings and sins and mistakes, we may take them all to the Lord in prayer and receive that strength and sympathy and consolation and help we so much need. Let us live in the presence of the Father and the Son who have promised to abide with us. It will sweeten our days and comfort our nights and ease our burdens and lighten our cares and brighten our hopes, and, in a word, it will lift us up above the world into a higher and purer atmosphere. Such is the will of heaven concerning us: let us appreciate and avail ourselves of the privilege.

By all the encouragements of precept and example, the Lord assures us that the fervent prayer of a righteous man (a justified and consecrated child of God) availeth much. (Jas. 5:16.) We are urged also to come in faith. Jesus said, “If ye have faith and doubt not, . . . all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” (Matt. 21:22.) As he was addressing his consecrated disciples, it must of course be understood that all their petitions would be subjected to divine wisdom, and therefore the answers to their prayers, though always sure, might not always be in the way expected, but they would always be considered and answered in some way for their highest good.

What a blessed privilege, dear fellow-disciples of the Lord, is ours, to be instant in prayer, to pray always – to lift up our hearts and minds to God at any time and in any place and to realize thus daily and hourly that the Father and our dear Lord Jesus continually abide with us. And then, when the active duties of the day have been performed under his eye and supervision, or at any time when the soul realizes its necessity, how precious is the privilege of entering into our closets and there alone with God unburdening our hearts.

While secret prayer is the blessed privilege of every child of God, and one without which his spiritual life cannot be sustained, it is also the privilege of Christians to unite their petitions at the throne of grace. This united prayer is specially commended by the Lord. (Matt. 18:19.) “Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father; for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

With such promises as these, together with an experience of their fulfilment, who can doubt the love and favor of our God and of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ? Therefore let us be encouraged to pray always and not to faint when the answers seem to tarry long, for time is often required to work out the deep designs of an allwise and loving Providence. Remember the words of the angel to Daniel. Daniel said, “While I was speaking and praying and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God, for the holy mountain of my God; yea, while I was speaking in prayer,” the answer came by the hand of an angel who said, “O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. **At the beginning of thy supplications** the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee; for thou art greatly beloved.” – Dan. 9:20-23.

On another occasion, when Daniel had mourned three weeks, fasting and praying, because of his inability to understand, the angel of the Lord came and said, “Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that thou didst **set thine heart** to understand, and to **chasten thyself before thy God**, thy words were heard, and I am come **for thy words**.” – Dan. 10:2,3,10-12.

Even so shall it ever be with all the beloved of the Lord: at the beginning of our supplications God begins to set in operation the influences and to shape the circumstances which are designed to work out the intended blessing for us – if we faint not, but continue instant in prayer, thereby evincing our continued earnestness of desire, and if we confess our sins, and set our hearts to understand, and chasten ourselves before him. How many prayers are not heard or are hindered because the one who asks does not first purify himself of evil in his own heart? “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts;” i.e., you ask selfishly and without regard to the will of God. (Jas. 4:3.) But to the chastened and sanctified comes the promise – “Before they call [reading the desire of the heart even before it finds expression in words] I will answer [will begin so to shape events as to bring the answer soon or later]; and while they are yet speaking I will hear.” (Isa. 65:23,24.) While this is in connection with a prophecy relating to the Lord’s people in the Millennial age, it nevertheless is true of all his faithful ones of this age. Praise the Lord for all his loving kindness to even the least of his lowly children!

1.

Notable Prayers and Faith Through The Ages

Why did the disciples ask the Lord to teach them how to pray? were not the Jews a praying people, and were not the prayers of the righteous acceptable to God from the beginning of the world? Yes, the Jews were a praying people, and their prayers, when devout and sincere, and in harmony with the expressed will of God, were acceptable, and were answered. So also were the prayers of others before the Jewish age began. Adam communed with God in Eden until sin separated him from God and he was cast out of Paradise. After he had sinned, he heard and promptly recognized the voice of God as he and Eve walked in the cool of the day. They feared the voice then because they had sinned, but their prompt recognition of it indicated that it was familiar to them, and that often before they had delighted to hear it.

The first act of God's mercy after the penalty had been pronounced, and the promise had been given of a coming deliverer – “the seed of the woman” – was to clothe each of the penitent pair with a garment of skins, provided by a sacrifice, which prefigured the sacrificed “Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.” We confidently say the penitent pair, because had they been rebellious and defiant, instead of penitent, God could not have dealt thus mercifully and kindly with them. He would not have forced them to wear the typical robe, nor have rewarded them with the hope of a future deliverance. Evidently they still had faith in God, and repented that they had hearkened to the voice of the tempter and forfeited the divine favor by disobedience; and they were anxious to find some way of return to that favor, since God in his mercy had given them a ray of hope which lifted them out of the slough of despair; and they desired, if possible, to have some recognition, some way of access to God, to reassure their hearts from time to time that they were not cast off forever. Such reassurance of hope for the race was given in the institution of the typical sacrifices, which began in the clothing of Adam and Eve in the skin of the sacrificed animal, the robe thus provided typifying the imputed righteousness of the sacrificed Lamb of God, Christ Jesus.

So we find those descendants of Adam who had respect to the will and promise of God offering to God acceptable typical sacrifices in harmony with his arrangement, thereby expressing both their faith in the promise, and their desire for full harmony and communion. Thus Abel and Seth and all the godly ancients sacrificed; and through these typical sacrifices they approached God, they walked with God, and had

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the evidence in their own hearts that they pleased God, as it is written, – “By faith Abel offered. . . sacrifice. . . by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts. By faith, Enoch, . . . before his translation had this testimony, that he pleased God. By faith, Noah. . . became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” – Heb. 11:5-8.

Thus there was a typical justification and way of access to God open to faithful individuals long before the law of Moses instituted the typical ***national sacrifices***, which brought that people, ***as a nation***, near to God and secured a measure of his temporal favor to them, which, in turn, were also typical of the greater favors to come by and by, when the typical sacrifices should give place to the antitypical sacrifice, the real sin-offering which takes away the sin of the world, which the blood of bulls and goats could only prefigure, but could never accomplish.

With the typical adoption by God of Abraham’s family and the institution by the law of Moses of the typical national sacrifices, the privileges of approach to God through these, and of communion with him, was systematically taught by the law and the prophets. Consequently, in the nation of Israel we have multiplied instances of earnest and believing prayer; and instances, too, thank God, of the gracious hearing and answering of their prayers. And not only so, but some of the believing Gentiles, seeing what God had wrought in Israel, believed on him, and also caught the spirit of prayer; and, though unjustified even typically by the typical sacrifices, their prayers were heard, and God kept them in remembrance until the time appointed for his favor to turn to the Gentiles. R. 1945

*Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to
God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of
those who diligently seek Him.
Hebrews 11:6*

ENOCH

And Enoch walked with God. . . . Genesis 5:24

Four thousand years before the birth of Jesus, God declared that the Seed of the woman would bruise the Serpent's head. This dark saying we now see signifies that sin with all its work of havoc in the world is to be offset and destroyed in due time and that the power of God to this end will operate through a wonderful Son of the disobedient Eve. Centuries passed with no sign of a fulfillment of this promise. Our race became more degraded and lapsed more and more into unbelief. Then Enoch was born, of the line of Seth. "He walked with God" and was used as a Divine mouthpiece to give a further prophecy, saying, "Behold, the Lord cometh with myriads of His holy ones, to execute judgment (justice) in the earth." – Jude 14,15. R. 4939

The testimony respecting Enoch was that his was a life of faith; that he walked with God and not with the world; that he sought to walk righteously, in harmony with the Divine will. The testimony is that all that approach God must believe that he is (else they would not seek to approach him), and must believe that he is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him, else they would not deny themselves the things highly esteemed amongst men and seek at the cost of sacrifice to do the things pleasing to the heavenly Father. The record respecting Enoch is very meager, but we do know that he was a prophet and that through him the message came that Messiah would come eventually with ten thousand of his holy ones to execute righteousness, judgment, in the earth – to overthrow sin and set up Divine standards amongst men. "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all." – Jude 14,15.



Enoch not only prophesied this but he believed it and it stamped his entire character and made him separate from the world and drew him nearer to the Lord. Similarly faith in the coming of our Redeemer and the establishment of his Kingdom and the reward of his faithfulness and the judgment or trial of the world during the Millennium, in which every man will receive a just recompense of reward, whether good or bad – this faith still has a sanctifying power. Let us cultivate daily, hourly, the setting of our affections on things above, the things which God hath in store for them that love him, for which we pray, "Thy Kingdom come." R. 4386

By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him," for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. Heb. 11:5

Enoch, the faithful prophet of old, whose only prophecy recorded is his announcement of the second coming of the Lord to execute righteousness in the earth and to convince the gainsayers (Jude 14,15), suddenly disappeared from amongst men, and the inspired record is that he was not found because God had taken him. R. 3417

And Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him. Genesis 5:24

NOAH

*Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God.
Genesis 6:9*

Of Noah it is written, “Now Noah was perfect in his generation” – he and his family were separate, free from the contamination of their time, from improper intercourse with the angels, which kept not their first estate. – Gen. 6:4.

Noah’s faith in God was manifested in his building of the Ark in obedience to the Divine instruction that a great rain and flood of waters would come, which would destroy every living thing and wipe out the corrupted race. This was no slight test of faith either, for we are to remember that the Scriptures declare that up to that time there had been no rain on the earth. It was moistened by irrigation and by mists and fogs. “For the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth. . . . But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.” – Gen. 2:5,6.

For a long period Noah’s faith was tested even unto the entering of the Ark and the closing of the door before the rains descended and the floods came. Of him it is well declared, therefore, “He became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” God is pleased to call Noah and all others who thoroughly, genuinely trust him, friends. He recognizes them as separate and distinct from the world in general. Their faith is their distinguishing quality. Nevertheless a manifestation of the faith and the testing of it by works of obedience is required. Blessed is the man who has much and strong faith in the Lord, which will stand trial, testing; for subsequently will be granted to him a corresponding blessing. Nay, more than this, the Lord has guaranteed us that he “will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able” and he informs us that he knoweth our frame and remembereth that we are but dust. R. 4386

*And
Noah did
according
to all that
the LORD
commanded
him.
Genesis 7:5*



Building the Ark by James Jacques Joseph Tissot, 1836-1902

There is no difficulty in exercising faith in God and in any and all of his promises, if we acquaint ourselves with his character and in simple sincerity apply our hearts unto the instructions of his Word. Our faith in all God's promises should be as unwavering as our confidence that tomorrow's sun will rise. Thus it was in the cases of some commendable examples to which the Apostle Paul refers (Heb. 11) – of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel, and the prophets, who, by faith in the promises and directions of God, subdued kingdoms, shut lions' mouths, quenched the power of fire, raised dead ones to life, and, in hope of a better resurrection submitted to privations, persecutions and ignominious deaths, having faith in the promise of God, in due time to reward their loyalty to him and to the principles of truth and righteousness. When God declared that a flood was coming and commanded the building of an ark, the reasonable course was to build the ark and to warn men, although the flood, and every indication of it, tarried for many years.

Observe that in every instance of faith commended in the Bible there was good ground for faith; there was a clear command of God, a well defined principle of truth and righteousness; and no foolish imaginations or vague impressions were blindly followed. How foolish Noah would have been to spend energy and valuable time in building an ark and warning the people, if he had only *imagined* that a flood was coming. How culpable Abraham would have been in laying his son on the altar of sacrifice, had he only *imagined* that God desired him to do so. And how insane Lot would have appeared in hastening out of Sodom that bright morning declaring that the city would be destroyed, had he been given no reliable divine assurance of it.

Notice that in each instance of unusual requirement God gave clear evidence of his will according to the methods of that dispensation, either by an angel, a vision, or some remarkable circumstance – ways, however, which are not now necessary, since the completed Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments form a perfect guide to faith (2 Tim. 3:15-17), and which, therefore, are not now resorted to. And in the instances of suffering and martyrdom cited, God's will was clearly expressed in the principles of truth and righteousness which he ordained, and which were properly recognized as more valuable even than life. These illustrations of faith should be specially marked by very many who claim to have *wonderful faith* in God, when the chief wonder in it is the ability to believe so much on so slight a foundation. R. 2162

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Hebrews 11:7

JOB

JOB'S EXPERIENCES TYPICAL OF HUMAN HISTORY – R. 5401

“All these things happened unto them for ensamples [margin, “types”], and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the ages are come.”

– 1 Corinthians 10:11

THE Book of Job is credited with being the finest piece of literature in the Hebrew language. It is a poem: and all scholars admit that no translation yet given does it justice. Martin Luther, after reviewing his last effort to translate it into the German, said, “Job is suffering more from my version than from the taunts of his friends, and would prefer his dunghill to my translation of his lamentation.” The Book of Job “is admitted, with hardly a dissenting voice, to be the most sublime religious poem in the literature of the world,” said Samuel Cox. “I call that one of the grandest things ever written with pen. . . . There is nothing written, in the Bible nor out of it, of equal literary merit,” said Thomas Carlyle.

Whoever was used of God as the penman, his name is not given. The book is introduced with a prose narrative of Job’s losses and sufferings. (The account of Satan’s conversation with God concerning Job should be considered as allegorical – after the style of Pilgrim’s Progress.) Then his patient endurance is set forth. Next follow the poetic colloquies between Job and his three friends, then Elihu’s argument, then the Almighty’s address, then Job’s confession. The conclusion, relating to Job’s return to favor and blessing, and his death, is in prose.

Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord --that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. James 5:11

Some have assumed that the Book of Job is merely a parable; and that Job himself is merely an imaginary character. But if this were the case, the teachings of the book would not be different. However, we see no cause to doubt that such a person did live and pass through the experiences related. In Ezekiel 14:14 and James 5:11, Job is classed with other holy men, which would not be the case were this narrative merely a parable. Besides, there are particular details given, such as are not common to parables.

The fact that Job lived a hundred and forty years after his adversities, or probably over two hundred years in all, together with the fact that neither he nor his friends make any allusion to Israel or Moses or the Law, nor to Abraham and God’s Covenant made with him, seems to indicate beyond doubt that he belonged to the Patriarchal Age. Possibly he lived about the same time as Abraham. His home was evidently in Arabia, and probably not far from Palestine.

Job is introduced as a man of great learning and influence; as a man of great piety, who knew and revered God and appreciated justice; as a man of great generosity, who considered the widow and the orphan; and as a merchant prince of great wealth, who by his numerous servants and three thousand camels, carried on an extended and very prosperous traffic.

Suddenly disaster came upon him and he was bereft of his children, his wealth, his influence and his health. He sought in vain for an explanation as to why God should permit such evils to befall him. Yet still he trusted in God, saying, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him!" His wife urged that it had been without Divine appreciation that he had sought to do justice and mercy all his life, and exclaimed, "Curse God and die!"

His three friends came to visit him, and, taking much the same view, told him in lengthy argument that he must have been a great sinner and a hypocrite. But, conscious of his own heart-honesty toward God, Job defends himself and goes to too great an extreme in declaring his innocence, but silences his critics. He seems to realize his need of some one to represent his cause before the Lord. He cries out that he is as righteous as he knows how to be; that he cannot reason the matter with God, being so much beneath Him in knowledge and power. He declares that the willfully wicked are not so troubled, while he who has pursued righteousness is so afflicted that life has no further pleasure and he wishes that he had never been born. (Chapters 9, 10, and 16.) Feeling his own insufficiency to state his case before the great Jehovah, he desires a "daysman [a mediator] betwixt" God and himself. – Chapters 9:33; 16:21.

Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both.
Job 9:33
KJV

Job's masterly reply to the false reasonings of his friends (which many improperly quote as inspired), and his expressions of confidence in God and of his ultimate deliverance, are clearly presented in Chapter 13:1-16. And then, with prophetic wisdom, in Chapter 14, he presents a most wonderful statement of the course of God's dealing with mankind.

THE PROBLEM OF THE AGES

The question which perplexed Job and confused his reasonings was the same that for centuries has confused others of God's people; namely, Why does God permit evil (calamities, afflictions, etc.) to come upon His faithful servants? and why are the wicked permitted to flourish? But not until the Gospel Dispensation was it possible for any to know the mind of God on this subject; for it is one of the deep things which could be revealed only by the Spirit of God, and only to those begotten of that Spirit, as St. Paul explains. (1 Corinthians 2:9-14.) And the Holy Spirit was not thus given, as a guide and teacher, until after Christ had redeemed us and ascended up on High, there to present His sacrifice as the price of our return to Divine favor, peace and communion.

Although many are still in the dark on this subject, it is now open and clear to all the earnest ones to whom "it is granted to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven," to understand "the deep things of God." (Matthew 12:11; 1 Corinthians 2:10.) These see that the reign of evil, the reign of Sin and Death, under Satan, the Prince of this world, is permitted for two reasons: first, that all men may gain a full experience of the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the bitterness of its legitimate fruit; and, second, that God's people may be fully tried and tested as to their loyalty to God in the shadow of affliction and trial, as well as in the sunshine of health and prosperity.

Thus while God did not directly cause the evil state of things which surrounds us in nature and among men, but let it come upon men as the legitimate result, or fruit, of disobedience, sin, yet He does make use of the wrath of man and the sins of men and

the animosity of Satan to work out grand designs which they do not comprehend, and of which His children know only by faith in His Word of revelation. For instance, how little did Satan and those malicious Jewish priests and Pharisees and those heartless Roman soldiers know that they were assisting in the working out of the Divine Plan when insulting, mocking and crucifying the Lamb of God!

And so it is with the many afflictions of God's people – especially those of the Little Flock, the Bride of Christ. Trials are designed to fit and polish them for the greater usefulness and honor in the future developments of God's great Plan. Thus, regardless of the wilfulness or the ignorance of the persecutors, these trials of faith and patience are working out for such a "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." This they do by preparing the called ones to be heirs of glory, by cultivating patience, experience, brotherly sympathy and love – which is God-likeness. Such, and such only can rejoice in tribulation and realize that all things – bad as well as good; unfavorable, as well as favorable – will be overruled in God's providence for their ultimate benefit.

JOB'S HOPE OF A RESURRECTION

But, returning to our consideration of Job, let us note in **Chapter 14** some of his prophetic wisdom. The first four verses graphically picture what all of experience realize – that human life under present conditions is full of trial and sorrow, from the cradle to the tomb. And Job shows that he realizes that as a son of fallen parentage he could not be perfect, free from sin, clean, in the full sense of the word.

In **verses 5,6**, he tells the Lord that he recognizes the fact that the authority and power to limit man's days are in His hands, but urges (not seeing the ministry of trouble), Why not let me and all men live out our short time in peace – even as we would not afflict a hireling who already has a heavy, burdensome task!

Verses 7-10 are close reasonings respecting the utter hopelessness of man in death, so far as any powers of his own are concerned. A tree may die and yet its root retain life, which, under favorable conditions, may spring up into another tree. But when man dies there is no root left, no spark of life remains. He giveth up the spirit of life, and where is he?

Having confessed that there is no ground for hope inherent in man, Job begins to express the only, the real hope of our race – a resurrection – see **verses 12,13**. Man lies down in death and loses all power to arouse himself – nor can he be resuscitated from the sleep of death by any one, until God's due time. This will be the Resurrection morning, the Millennial Day, when the present symbolic heavens shall have passed away, and the new heavens or new spiritual ruling power – Christ's Kingdom – shall have come into control of the world. In this Job fully agrees with the teachings of our Lord and the Apostles.

The more he thinks of that blessed time when evil shall no more have dominion, but when a King shall reign in righteousness and princes shall execute judgment, the more he wishes he might die and be at rest. He exclaims (**verse 13**), "Oh, that Thou wouldst hide me in the grave [sheol]; that Thou wouldst keep me secret [hidden] until Thy wrath be past; that Thou wouldst appoint me a set time and remember me!" Job had

faith in a resurrection, else he would never have uttered this prayer for death – for hiding in the grave. But he preferred death, and desired to sleep (**verse 12**) until the morning, for one reason only – that he might have no further experience with sin and with God’s wrath – evil.

A short period in the end of the Gospel Age is specially called “the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,” because it will be “A time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation.” Yet the entire period from the time Adam fell is called a time of Divine wrath, and properly so; for in all this long period “the wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness,” in a variety of ways. While Love is a controlling principle in the Divine Government, it can operate only in harmony with Justice and Wisdom. It was both just and wise to let man feel the real weight of condemnation to death incurred by wilful transgression, in order that when Love should in due time provide a Ransom and a Resurrection, the culprit might the more gladly avail himself of the provided favors of Restitution and everlasting life. Thus death and all the evils permitted to come upon the culprit race are manifestations of God’s wrath, which will be yet further shown in the great Time of Trouble. This will be followed by full and clear manifestations of God’s Love and favor in Christ and the glorified Church during the Millennial Age. – Romans 1:18.

In **verses 14 and 15**, he puts the question pointedly, as though to determine and settle his faith; but he immediately answers affirmatively: “Thou shalt call, and I will answer Thee [and awake out of the sleep of Adamic death – compare John 5:28,29]; Thou wilt have a desire to the work of Thine hands” – for His people are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus. – Ephesians 2:10.

ELIHU’S HOPE OF A REDEEMER

When Job had refuted the arguments of his three friends, Elihu (whose name signifies God Himself) spoke from a different standpoint, reproving the three friends as well as Job. Elihu shows Job that he had been reasoning in part from a wrong premise – that he must not expect to fully comprehend all the ways of One so far above him, but must trust in God’s Justice and in His Wisdom. And in Chapter 33:23,24 he shows the one thing necessary to man’s recovery from the power of death, and his restoration to Divine favor, saying, “If there be with Him a Messenger as defender, One of a thousand [i.e., a rare One] to declare His own righteousness for man, then will God be gracious unto him [man] and say, Release him from going down to the grave; I have found a Ransom.”

This is indeed the case with man. God’s Wisdom and Justice cannot be impugned. The sentence of death is justly upon all men through Father Adam. (Romans 5:12.) But God has provided us a Redeemer, Christ Jesus our Lord; and He, in harmony with the Father’s Plan, became a man, and then gave Himself a Ransom-price for all by paying the death-penalty that was upon Adam. And as soon as the Bride, otherwise called His Body and the Temple, is complete, this great Mediator will stand forward to declare His righteousness as for, or applicable to, every one who will accept it.

Then will follow Restitution, as pictured in **verses 25 and 26**. Physically, these for whom the Mediator stands shall be restored to a perennial youth, in which death and

decay will find no place. They shall find acceptance and communion with God in joy and peace; and He will restore them to the original perfection, lost through sin in Eden. But an acknowledgment that God is just, and that the Restitution was unmerited will be required. This is indicated by **verses 27,28**: “He will chant it before men, and say: I have sinned and perverted the right; and it was not required me. He has redeemed my soul from going into the pit and my life that it may be brought to the light.”

Elihu’s words were as wise as any of those spoken by Job’s comforters – probably wiser; but they were merely human wisdom, so far as we can discern. In Chapter 34:29 he asks the question, “When He [Jehovah] giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?” Evidently the young man sought to draw a line in the criticism of Job, agreeing with neither Job nor his friends, but endeavoring to be moderate in his position. He defended the Almighty, claiming that if God had not so ordered, Job’s adversities could not have come upon him.

To Elihu it seemed clear that God had a hand in Job’s experiences. Satan could not have sent all these calamities unless God had permitted it. Neither man nor angel of whatever rank could thwart the Divine will. God, not Job, had the authority to decide what should be done. God alone had the right to order all of life’s affairs. Incidentally Elihu showed that Job was more righteous than were his friends; and that while he was imperfect, like all, yet he was not being punished on this account.

A DIFFICULT LESSON FOR MANY

The Christian may very well draw a lesson from Elihu’s question. Although the words are not inspired, yet they are very wise. We can recognize the truth they contain – that when God purposes to give peace, quietness, the whole Universe will be in obedience to His Laws, and none can make trouble.

If we have difficulties, if we have persecutions, if we have troubles of any kind we should look to God. We should say: This thing could not happen to me unless the Lord permitted it. We have come under special Divine care. God has promised that all things shall work together for good to us who are His children. The lesson of trust is one of those difficult lessons for us to learn and apply – to realize that all of life’s experiences are under Divine supervision and that nothing can happen to us but what is for our highest good. This is not now true of the world, but merely of God’s family. By and by God will make all things work out blessings for the world.

It is in respect to these who are His children that all things now work for good. When we are in difficulty, we are to look up in confidence and trust to the Lord. Our Heavenly Father wishes us to exercise faith in Him. St. Peter tells us that we are “kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation.” Therefore we greatly rejoice, even “though now for a season we are in heaviness through manifold trials” and temptations. “The trial of your faith is much more precious than that of gold that perisheth.” –1 Peter 1:5-7.

FALSE PEACE OF MANY

There is another way by which some may have quietness. Many in the world enjoy a measure of peace, or rest from worry. Yet they are unaware of the great truths which we

enjoy, and are in blindness, ignorance, superstition, error, through Satan's delusions. They have a feeling of security and ease, through the blinding influence of error and falsehood. Those of the world who come into relationship with God, are therefore sometimes awakened from false security. Then they gain the true peace and rest of heart. The Lord says: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." No true rest can be gained otherwise.

The Lord's people have a peace and rest of mind through the knowledge of the Lord's Plan, the knowledge of His Justice, Mercy and Love, and a blessed realization that He is our God. All these things give us peace and quiet and rest of mind. While the world are troubled more or less, God's children have a peace that the world knows not of, that the world can neither give nor take away. And when the trials are all over, the Lord will make up for all the troubles of the present time, for all His children have suffered. We shall then look back on these trials and consider them but light afflictions, only for a moment. – 2 Corinthians 4:17.

TESTS OF LOYALTY AND DEVOTION

When the Lord permits great clouds of trouble to come upon us, we should first look to see if we can discern any wrong-doing in ourselves which might properly bring chastisement. We should have joy in the Lord. But perhaps we have not been living close enough to the Lord. Yet these clouds of affliction do not necessarily mean that we have not been living close to Him, as we have seen in the case of Job.

We remember likewise in the experiences of our Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before His crucifixion, how He said to His disciples, Peter, James and John, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." We remember that God did not give Him quietness, but allowed trouble like a great flood to sweep over His soul. He was troubled to know surely whether He had been entirely loyal, faithful and obedient, as was necessary to maintain the Father's favor. We are told by the Apostle Paul that our Lord Jesus "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him out of death – and was heard." – Hebrews 5:7.

We find that the Father sent His angel to minister unto His dear Son, in His deep distress. As soon as the angel had given our Lord the assurance of the Father that He was well pleasing in His life and conduct, He became perfectly calm. And the assurance sustained Him in all the trying experiences which followed – the trial before the Sanhedrin, before Pilate, the treatment of the soldiers, the journey on the way to Calvary, and in the midst of the trying process of execution which followed.

Only at the last, when the Father, because Jesus must take the sinner's place, withdrew His presence from Him in His dying moment did our Lord manifest disturbance of mind. Then He cried out in agony of soul, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" It was necessary for our Lord to experience the entire cutting off from God and from all relationship to God, in order to pay the full penalty for Adam's sin. This experience was at the very last moment. The Heavenly Father permitted this, for it was necessary to our Lord that He should realize the meaning of the sinner's separation from God.

We do not consider it necessary that in every case our Lord's true and faithful followers should have a similar experience. We are not, as was our Redeemer, the Ransom, the Sin-bearer for the world; but it would not be surprising if some may have similar experiences to those of our Lord. Some of the saints have died, exclaiming: "I am sweeping through the gates of the New Jerusalem!" while others have had dying experiences more like those of our Lord, and have cried out, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

We can be content to leave our experiences entirely in the hands of Him who loves us, and can have an inward peace and calm and a rest of soul, knowing that no outward storm will be permitted but such as the Father sees will bring forth in us the peaceable fruits of righteousness, if we are properly exercised thereby.

RESTITUTION FOR MANKIND PICTURED

In the concluding chapters of the Book of Job, Jehovah addresses His afflicted servant, reproving his temerity in attempting, with his little knowledge, to judge God. This Job acknowledges, and finds peace in trusting God. Job's three friends, however, are severely reprov'd by God. But when they obey God and go to Job and offer up for themselves a burnt offering according to the Lord's commandment, and Job prays for them as God further instructed, they are restored to Divine favor. At once Job's prosperity returns – his friends and influence are restored; his wealth was exactly doubled, for he had twice as many flocks and herds and camels. He had also the same number of sons and daughters as before, and the Scriptures note that there were "no women found so fair as the daughters of Job."

This ending of Job's career with a general Restitution is incomprehensible to those who have never seen that the Plan of God in Christ provides for a "Time of Restitution" of all things lost in Adam, to all of his race who will accept them under the terms of the New Covenant. (Acts 3:19-21.) But those who do see this Plan of God can readily see, too, that Job's experience was not only actual, but also typical. He seems to represent mankind. Man was at first in the Divine likeness and favor, with all things subject to him. (Psalm 8:4-8.) Because of Adam's sin Satan obtained an influence in human affairs which has resulted in degradation, sickness and death. God, however, has never really forsaken His creatures, and is even now waiting to be gracious unto all in and through Christ Jesus our Lord.

*Now the LORD blessed the latter days of
Job more than his beginning.
Job 42:12*

Job's Prayer of Repentance and His Restoration

1 Then Job answered the LORD and said:

2 "I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You.

3 You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

4 Listen, please, and let me speak. You said, 'I will question you, and you shall answer Me.'

5 "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You.

6 Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."



7 And so it was, after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is aroused against you and your two friends, for you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has.

8 "Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, go to My servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering, and My servant Job shall pray for you. For I will accept him, lest I deal with you according to your folly, because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has."

9 So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did as the LORD commanded them, for the LORD had accepted Job.

10 And the LORD restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.

Job 42:1-10

ABRAHAM

The Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God.

– James 2:23

Abraham, styled "The Father of the Faithful" – not because Noah and Enoch and Abel had not been faithful, but because with Abraham God started a faith family to whom were given many and great promises. That family became known as the nation of Israel, and latterly as Spiritual Israel. Again, Abraham was the father of the faithful, because while the heroes that preceded him exercised faith in God, it was more along abstract lines, whereas the Divine revelation to Abraham was the Gospel, the good tidings in definite form – that in and through his Seed all the families of the earth should receive a blessing. Thus the Apostle declares that God preached in advance the Gospel to Abraham, and thus all who believe that Gospel, of which redemption by Messiah is the essential, all such are called "the children of Abraham," and he is spoken of as their father, the one through whom this Gospel hope was caused to descend.

But in still another sense Abraham was the Father of the Faithful: in the sense that he typified the heavenly Father, as Isaac typified our Lord Jesus, and as Isaac's bride, Rebecca, typified the elect Gospel Church.

Abraham's call of God was the result of his having faith in God and because he lived at an appropriate time for the Divine purposes to begin to be expressed. First his faith was tested by the Divine command that he leave his native country to wander up and down through Palestine as a shepherd, dwelling in tents without any fixed habitation, without any attempt to take possession of the land and to establish himself in it by building fortresses, etc. The promise was that in after times God would bring his posterity to this land and give it to them for a possession.

The promise went further and declared that if obedient the Lord's blessing would continue and that the seed of Abraham would become great and influential and that through it all nations would receive a blessing – and by implication all would come under its control. It required great faith to believe all this under the circumstances. And the test continued, as, year by year, Abraham's wife] grew older, until the time of motherhood was long past. Still we read that Abraham's faith "wavered not."

Still later, after Isaac the son of promise had been born and had grown to manhood, the Lord tested the faith of this wonderful man by telling him to offer his son as a sacrifice. We are not to assume that this instruction was given by any mere impression of the mind, nor would it have been proper for Abraham to have accepted and acted upon anything short of an absolute demonstration of the Divine will in such a matter. The father love, the hopes of years, and apparently the Divine Word and Oath were all about to be wrecked. Yet his faith "faltered not," for he accounted that God was able to raise his son from the dead and that surely God would fulfill his every promise to which he had bound himself, not only by his Word, but also by his Oath.

While we exclaim, Wonderful faith! let us remember that this was the very quality of Abraham which specially commended him to the Almighty as his particular friend. And let us remember that if we would have the particular friendship and blessing and fellowship of the Lord this is the channel through which it is to be sought – the channel of faith, of trust, of obedience. “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” The more faith we have the more pleasing we shall be in the Lord’s sight and the more we may be used of him as channels of blessing to others – however imperfect we may be in other respects.

“THE CITY WITH FOUNDATIONS”



When the Apostle declares that Abraham “looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God,” we must not think this to mean that in his journeying throughout Palestine, he expected some day to come upon a newly-built city of divine construction. Nor should we think with some others that Abraham was looking for the New Jerusalem to come down from heaven – a city built of literal precious stones with gates of literal pearls. No, Abraham knew nothing about that city, for nothing respecting it had yet been revealed.

A city, in olden times, stood for and represented a fortification, a government, a rule of authority. Abraham realized that the earth was full of sin and violence and out of harmony with God. He knew that Enoch, his ancestor, a man of God, had already prophetically declared that Messiah would come, the representative of Jehovah, and establish a Government, a Kingdom, a City of Righteousness. He longed for that righteous government and realized that its foundation of righteousness would be deeply laid, and that it would be an everlasting Kingdom. He knew that occasionally a monarch came to an earthly throne possessed of good intentions and partially able to exercise these, but that soon his throne, his kingdom, crumbled and passed to others.

Abraham, therefore, was not in sympathy with any in his day, nor since, in looking for an earthly kingdom, but he was looking beyond all these for the Kingdom of God’s dear Son – the Millennial Kingdom. His eye of faith looked down and beheld Messiah and the exaltation of Israel and the blessing of all the families of the earth during the Millennial day. Our Lord Jesus attested this, saying, “Abraham rejoiced to see my day (the Millennial day of Christ’s reign) and he saw it and was glad.” The Jews misunderstood our Lord to mean that he had been with Abraham. Others misunderstand him to mean that Abraham saw by faith his work of sacrifice. It is true that our Lord did appear to Abraham. It is true that in a certain sense Abraham foresaw the sacrifice of Christ in the typical sacrifice of Isaac, but it is also true that “the Day of Christ” is the Millennial day for the world’s blessing and that it was that which Abraham saw and which gladdened his eye of faith. R. 4387

Abraham Intercedes for Sodom

20 And the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave,

21 "I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me, and if not, I will know."

22 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD.

23 And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?

24 "Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city. Would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it?

25 "Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

26 So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes."

27 Then Abraham answered and said, "Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord:

28 "Suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous. Would You destroy all of the city for lack of five?" So He said, "If I find there forty-five, I will not destroy it."

29 And he spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose there should be forty found there?" So He said, "I will not do it for the sake of forty."

30 Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Suppose thirty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there."

31 And he said, "Indeed now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: Suppose twenty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of twenty."

32 Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but once more: Suppose ten should be found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten."

33 So the LORD went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.

Genesis 18:20-33

ABRAHAM'S PRAYERS FOR SODOM – R. 3946

GENESIS 18:16-33

“Men ought always to pray and not to faint.” – Luke 18:1

THERE are several very interesting matters connected with this lesson. Abraham had been living in Canaan and Lot in Sodom for a considerable time, when, at the noon hour, three men one day appeared to Abraham – strangers. He was prompt to show them hospitality, and Sarah his wife joined. The Apostle evidently referred to this incident in the words, “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for some thereby have entertained angels unawares.” (Heb. 13:2.) Present-day conditions render such hospitality less necessary, especially in cities where public boarding-houses and hotels are expected to care for the strangers. There is danger, however, that the blessing which goes with hospitality is to a large extent missed by a considerable number of people. While the modern methods have some advantages, the general tendency of all of them is toward greater selfishness – neglect of our neighbor, whom the Lord would have us love as ourselves – not neglecting to do good unto all men as we have opportunity, especially to the household of faith. – Gal. 6:10.

To whatever extent these divine injunctions are disregarded we are in danger of losing a blessing, of failing to cultivate generosity, and, on the contrary, cultivating selfishness. God is the great Giver “from whom cometh every good and perfect gift”; and in proportion as his children would return to his image they must cultivate his spirit of benevolence, generosity, kindness, helpfulness – especially to the poor and the needy and the strangers. We are not wishing to suggest the receiving of any and every person into the home, which might be a very dangerous practice; but we do urge that the changed conditions of our time be not allowed to make our hearts hard, selfish and unthoughtful as respects the interests of our friends or neighbors, and the stranger. We cannot afford to do so, for “If any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of his,” and this would mean the loss of those things which God hath in reservation for them that love him.

*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.
James 1:17*

THE LORD AND TWO ANGELS

The three strange men, Abraham afterwards learned, were angels, one of them the special messenger of Jehovah. We feel confident that this one was the Logos, the Only Begotten One, through whom the Father's power was exercised, so that by him all things were made that were made. (John 1:1.) We are clearly to distinguish between our Lord's appearance here as a man and the appearance of his two companions, the angels, as men, and our Lord's subsequent appearance in the world as the man Christ Jesus. The two were totally different. In the first case the spirit nature was retained, and a human body was merely created and used temporarily for a special purpose, just as our Lord after his resurrection as a spirit being appeared in various forms as a man, but was not really a man. When the due time came for the redemption of Adam and his race it was necessary that our Lord should become a man – perfect, complete as was father Adam in his original creation – “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” When he thus became a man, or as another Scripture expresses it, “was made flesh” (John 1:14), it meant the complete laying aside of the spirit nature before enjoyed – a change or transmutation to another nature, the human.

This was necessary, because it was a man who had sinned, and because the divine law required a man's life for a man's life as the ransom price. But no such transmutation was necessary for the work mentioned in our lesson. The Lord and his two angelic companions could have appeared to Abraham as to Moses as a flame of fire in a burning bush, or as the bright angel appeared to Daniel, or as an angelic form with less glory and brightness; but God was dealing with Abraham according to faith – he wished him to learn to walk by faith and not by sight. Hence the angels appeared as strange men and were entertained as such, and Abraham's hospitality was demonstrated and became a lesson to all the children of God. Furthermore, the faith of both Abraham and Sarah was tested on this occasion by the Lord's predicting the birth of Isaac shortly, to the amusement of Sarah, who was then old and who doubted, and to the confirmation of Abraham's faith in the promise already given him and trusted in for twenty-five years without sign of accomplishment.

THE CRY OF SODOM

Still hospitable, Abraham accompanied his visitors, whom he had now discerned to be celestial beings appearing in human form. As they moved in the direction of Sodom the Lord is represented as holding a colloquy with himself as to the propriety of intimating to Abraham what might be expected as a judgment upon Sodom, of whose wickedness Abraham certainly was aware. We are given to understand that the fact that Abraham thus far had proven faithful, and that to him belonged the ultimate promise of the blessing of all the families of the earth, was one reason why he was informed respecting the fate of Sodom, "For I have known him [become intimate with him, made a covenant with him, revealed myself to him], to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon him that which he has spoken of him." Thus we see by this indirect teaching that there is method in the Lord's revelation. Matters are made known to his people not merely to satisfy curiosity, but especially because they are in relationship to the Lord and because they are to learn certain lessons in connection with their experiences of life that may be helpful to them in the ultimate work to which they have been called.

In this case, we remember that Abraham had the promise that in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed, and this included the Sodomites as well, as we shall see later. Abraham then, believing the Word of the Lord, had a right to expect that in some way or other, either then or in the future, he and his posterity would have to do with righteous judgment upon the Sodomites. Besides, the Lord is pleased to have those who are in harmony with him know the equity, the justice of all his dealings. "Come, let us reason together," shows us this principle. (Isa. 1:18.) But the Lord never reasons with any except those who have faith in him and trust in his promises. These are the truly wise, of whom it is written, "The wise shall understand [matters as they become due], but none of the wicked shall understand" (Dan. 12:10); and again, "The secret of the Lord is with them that reverence him, and he will show them his covenant." – Psa. 25:14.

Explaining his mission the Lord declared that a great cry had come up to heaven from Sodom and that he was about to investigate, which implied that forbearance had ceased to be of avail and that the time for Sodom's punishment was at hand, and so

Abraham understood the matter. We are not to suppose that merely rumors of matters reached the Lord, and then special investigating committees were sent, but rather that this affair was stated in simple language, so that Abraham and all who have read the record since might know that the Lord takes full cognizance of the affairs of earth, that he does not ignore our conditions, and that while he is plenteous in mercy, and long-suffering and patient, he nevertheless “will not always chide, neither hold back his anger forever”: a time of retribution shall come.

This is the same thought to which the Apostle Peter draws our attention in connection with the end of this Gospel age and the trouble which will then be precipitated upon the world of mankind. He represents God as having great mercy, long suffering and willingness, that all might turn unto him and live. Nevertheless he shows that a change of dispensation will come, that justice will be laid to the line and righteousness to the plummet, and that all who will not obey that great Prophet shall be ultimately destroyed. (Acts 3:23). In this connection the New Testament refers to Sodom and its sister cities as illustrations of the fact that God will not always chide. We read that the calamity which came upon the cities of the plain were set forth as an example, “suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” – [utter destruction, not eternal torment]. (Jude 7.) Thus eventually God will destroy all evil doers with an “everlasting destruction [not preservation in torment or otherwise] from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power.” – 2 Thess. 1:9.

LOVE IN ABRAHAM’S CHARACTER

This one little incident in Abraham’s life shows us something of the loving benevolence of his heart, and causes us to love and appreciate him more than ever. The intimation that judgment upon Sodom was near would upon a cruel and loveless heart have suggested a very different course from that pursued by Abraham. Such would have said, “Well, that is an awfully wicked community; they certainly deserve all you could give them; they could not be worse. I told my nephew Lot that he was making a mistake in going to live with such a deplorable set, and having his family intermingle with them; it will serve them all just right whatever kind of punishment you mete out to them.”

But Abraham was not at all of this disposition: his heart at once went out in sympathy, and benevolently he surmised that although the plain was notoriously wicked there might at least be fifty righteous persons there – not righteous in the absolute sense of being perfect, but in a relative or accommodated sense of doing right to the best of their ability. (Rom. 8:4.) Abraham had the spirit of a mediator: he said to himself, God has been wonderfully gracious to me every way, and now that he has opened this subject to me I will make bold to tell him of my heart-sympathy for the people, and to express a hope that he will be generous to them. Then he adds, “Wilt thou consume the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous in the city, wilt thou consume and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, that so the righteous should be as the wicked; that be far from thee. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

If these words surprise us – to think that Abraham would dare to call in question the righteousness of the Lord – we should remember that he did not have the blessed

advantage that we possess, namely, of the guidance of the Word of God and the enlightenment of the holy Spirit, whereby the Lord's people since Pentecost have been begotten again and granted insight into the deep things of God. We may indeed esteem that this was Abraham's way of putting a question to the Lord rather than criticising him – "If you would destroy the righteous with the wicked, show no difference, would it be just? Lord, show me how this would be just? surely you would do right. I would like to see how justice would be compatible with the course I understand you to have in mind."

PARALLELS IN OUR EXPERIENCES

Similar questions come to us now. Financial disasters come, and probably as often affect the righteous as well as the wicked; storms and tempests do injury to their interests; indeed, sometimes the Lord seems not only not to show favor to the righteous, but, if anything, permits, as in Job's case, more peculiar disasters to fall to their lot. Under the instructions of the great Teacher and his various assistants, the apostles, we have learned that our interests as New Creatures are sometimes best served by difficulties in the flesh, and that God's promise that all things shall work together for good to them that love him and are called according to his purpose, is true. The Lord supervises the experiences of his faithful, so that these afflictions shall seem but light, and shall work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory as New Creatures, in the life to come.

Abraham's love of righteousness and sympathy for all who desired to do right was manifested in this petition. It suggests to us that God, in choosing him as one through whom some of his blessings should flow to the world of mankind in due time, made a good choice. We may be sure also that all who will be associated with Christ in his Millennial Kingdom, either as members of the Bride class on the Spirit plane, or as members of the great company, or of the ancient worthy class of princes (Psa. 45:16), must all have such a broad benevolence and desire to do good and to favor the righteous in every way, else they would not be fit for the great work to be entrusted to them.

And as we have noted the character which God chose in Abraham, we may feel sure that the calling and drawing of the Father are chiefly if not exclusively to the same class of benevolent hearts. We cannot say that God has not drawn some very selfish persons into close fellowship with himself, and that none of this class will ever attain to a share in the Kingdom itself or in its work; but we may surmise that this would be very nearly the truth, "The liberal soul shall be made fat." The stingy, the selfish, the ungenerous, we incline to think, will not be drawn, not be called to a participation in the Kingdom. Not that any of us have anything whereof to boast in the way of generosity – not that the grace of God is not able to effect a wonderful transformation from selfishness to generosity – but because those who are most selfish have proportionately less of an eye to see and less of an ear to hear of the message of God's mercy and grace and boundless goodness, and therefore will be less in sympathy with the various features of the divine plan as respects the present and the coming age and its work. So that as a measure of love would seem to be indispensable to our drawing, we see most assuredly that a full development of love is absolutely necessary to our attaining the prize of our high calling.

GROWING IN GRACE, IN MERCY, IN LOVE

The Lord answered Abraham that if there were fifty righteous, well-intentioned people in Sodom it would not be destroyed, and Abraham perceived that he was not more just nor more generous than the Lord. But as he thought over the matter it occurred to him that there might perhaps be one or two less than fifty, and so he asked if the city might be spared if there were only forty-five. The reply was, Yes: the Lord was still as benevolent or more benevolent than Abraham: he was merely finding out the goodness of the Lord. His own courage increased, the spirit of love and benevolence having begun to operate, and he queried of the Lord whether now forty would secure mercy upon the city. The answer was, Yes. Abraham had not yet touched the bottom in seeking to measure the Lord's goodness. Step by step he increased his request. Would it be spared for thirty? Then would it be spared for twenty? until finally he asked the Lord if he would spare the city for ten. In every case the answer was, Yes. In every case the Lord was proven to be no less just, no less generous, than his servant. He had not yet been blessed as we have been with the anointing of the eyes of his understanding to an appreciation of the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of the love of God, which passeth all understanding.

There is a lesson for us in all of this – a lesson that we should be more and more like our Father which is in heaven, whose message is, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy”; and again, “If ye do not from the heart forgive those who trespass against you, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses.” – Matt. 5:7; Mark 11:26.

THE DEPTHS OF GOD'S MERCY

Abraham's solicitude was not for the wicked but for the righteous, and so our sympathies should be with all who in every place love righteousness and hate iniquity – to do them good, to serve their interests, to render them assistance, doing good to all men, especially to the household of faith. Abraham's prayers were not for the wicked but for the righteous. “Shall the righteous suffer as the wicked?” was his plea. It is to be remembered, however, that some who now pray for the wicked do so under the misconceptions handed down from the “dark ages,” that the wicked are not destroyed, but preserved either in a purgatory of suffering or an eternity of torture. This ungodly, unscriptural, unreasonable thought had not yet been introduced to the world; the plain word death still meant death, and the hope for a future was that of a resurrection of the dead in God's due time, and under more favorable conditions than in the present – when God's Kingdom would be in power, in control.

When Abraham subsequently heard the result of the disaster – that only his nephew Lot was found a righteous man, and that the Lord delivered the one from destruction, and delivered on his account some who were not as worthy of his favor, members of his family, it must have brought a blush to his cheek – to think that he had questioned the justice of God in supposing that he was about to destroy, with the wicked in the city, as many as fifty righteous when here he beheld God's loving mercy even to the extent of delivering the one righteous person and some of his dear ones.

Thus it is with us all: we are finding continually that the “heart of the Eternal is most

Prayers of The Righteous

wonderfully kind”; – that in our poor, imperfect, fallen condition we have no measures that will reach to those lengths and breadths and heights and depths of the love of God, which passeth all understanding. Truly, as the Word declares, “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my plans loftier than your plans.”



Lot and His Family Flee From Sodom
Gustave Dore, 1832-1883

*Then the LORD
rained brimstone
and fire on Sodom
and Gomorrah,
from the LORD out
of the heavens. So
He overthrew those
cities, all the plain, all
the inhabitants of the
cities, and what grew
on the ground. But
his wife looked back
behind him, and she
became a pillar of salt.
Gen. 19:24-26*

STILL NEW BEAUTIES SEEN

While our minds are contemplating the glories of God in connection with this incident of the destruction of Sodom, let us remember that now he has shown us a still deeper degree of sympathy and love in his provision for the whole world of mankind through the great Redeemer, Abraham’s son, our Lord. What more do we see? Ask the Lord himself and hearken to his answer, “It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for you” – of Bethsaida and Chorazin and Capernaum. What is this? A day of judgment? Is not the judgment of Sodom past? Yes, truly they were declared of the Lord unworthy of life and were cut short. To quote the words of inspiration, They were haughty, they neglected the poor and the needy and committed abomination, and the Lord took them away from life in the great catastrophe which came upon their city “as he saw good.” (Ezek. 16:49,50.) That our Lord had these very

people of Sodom in his mind is evidenced by his own words, “fire came down from God out of heaven and destroyed them all.” They had a day of judgment and now met their doom and were made an example of, illustrating God’s indignation against all unrighteousness, and his will that all evil-doers shall be destroyed. What then did our Lord mean by referring to a day of judgment future? Will they be judged again?

We answer, Yes. They will be judged again, not in the sense of punishing them a second time for their evil deeds – they have already suffered for those. The promised day of judgment means a fresh time of trial pending. But how can this be? Is God not satisfied with his previous judgment respecting this people? Is he not satisfied respecting his decision concerning Adam and the entire race – that none are fit for eternal life because of the impairment of sin, because under the sentence of death?

“A RANSOM FOR ALL, TO BE TESTIFIED”

Ah! the key to this promise of a judgment day in the future for the world of mankind, including the Sodomites, lies in the fact that by divine arrangement “Jesus Christ by the grace of God tasted death for every man” – “gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” Thus we see that he paid the penalty for the Sodomites and for all the rest of us – the death penalty. Hence God’s original sentence or judgment, which would have meant the everlasting destruction of us all, has been met, has been satisfied. It was from this standpoint that God spoke to Abraham in advance about the coming day of judgment, and predicted that then Abraham’s seed, Christ, would bless all the families of the earth. It was not explained to Abraham how divine justice would be met and the sinner released through a ransom. This we see because it is in the past, and, more clearly than he, we may understand, guided by the Apostle’s words, that “God hath appointed a day [the Millennial age] in the which he will judge the world in righteousness [grant the world a fair trial that will take cognizance of these weaknesses and frailties through the fall] by that man whom God hath ordained” – Jesus and his Church, his Bride. – Acts 17:31.

From this standpoint of present truth, unfolding of the divine plan, how we perceive the riches of God’s grace and loving kindness, not only toward us who have accepted of his favor through Christ and received of his holy Spirit as his servants and handmaidens, but his proposed blessing in due time upon the world of mankind in general, the majority of whom are in the great prison-house of death, of which Jesus has the key (Rev. 1:18), that in due time the holy Spirit shall be poured out upon all flesh – that all the blind eyes may be opened and all the deaf ears unstopped, to the glory of God and for the assistance of all mankind, who, under those favorable conditions, will turn wholly and completely to the Lord to serve him with full purpose of heart – and as for the remainder who will not so do, after all this opportunity, they shall be utterly destroyed from amongst the people. – Acts 3:23.

JACOB

Jacob's Prayer

9 Then Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the LORD who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you’:

10 “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant, for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies.

11 “Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, lest he come and attack me and the mother with the children.

12 “For You said, ‘I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.’”



The Prayer of Jacob by Gustave Dore, 1832-1883

Genesis 32:9-12

The prayer of Jacob at the time he was anticipating a meeting with Esau on his return from Padan-Aram may be considered one of the most excellent examples of earnest, persevering prayer to be found in the Lord's Word. It is full of confidence and trust in God. It recounts God's Promise to his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac and the renewal of this promise to himself. He mentions to the Lord His promise also to bring him again to his home land. His humility is shown in his words: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which Thou hast shown unto Thy servant; for with my staff [only] I passed over this Jordan [when fleeing from home], and now I have become two bands [great companies]." – Genesis 32:10. He tells the Lord of his fear of Esau, yet shows that his fear is offset by his confidence in the Almighty. R. 5280

A NEW NAME – GOD-GIVEN – R. 3969

GENESIS 32:9-12,22-30

"Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." – Luke 10:20

OUR last lesson saw Jacob en route for his Uncle Laban's home, a journey of about 500 miles. His subsequent experiences in the service of his uncle, and how he became a wealthy owner of flocks and herds, and the father of a large family, belong to the interim. The present lesson finds him nearing his old home. Remembering the anger of his brother Esau when they parted 20 years before, he sent at the hands of servants several valuable presents of cattle, sheep, etc., with the message that he was coming on in peace. In reply he learned that Esau with 400 mounted men was coming forth to meet him, and he feared that this meant an unkind reception. Our present lesson opens with Jacob's prayer to the Lord at this time when he was in fear of his brother. It is

THE FIRST RECORDED PRAYER OF THE BIBLE

Scholars have pronounced this a perfect prayer as measured by the standard of the Lord's prayer; for it seems to follow the same general lines:

- (1)** Adoration to the Almighty;
- (2)** humiliation and self-effacement in the presence of the Lord;
- (3)** petition for divine care and protection;
- (4)** repetition of the divine promises as the ground for faith and hope.

The various parts of the prayer thus indicated are:

- (1)** "O God of my Father Abraham, and God of my Father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country and to thy kindred, and I will do thee good:
- (2)** I am unworthy of the least of all the mercies and all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant; for with my staff [without other possessions] I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two companies [referring to his large possessions of flocks and herds and herdsmen, etc., which he had divided into two bands or companies]:

(3) Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother; from the hand of Esau; for I fear him lest he come and smite me and the mother with the children [i.e. root and branch]:

(4) And thou saidst I will surely be with thee, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.”

It cannot be claimed for Jacob nor for any of the ancient worthies (nor for anyone else for that matter) that they were perfect and that therefore the Lord favored them. The one thing that stands out sharply, distinctly, above any other thing in the character of Jacob, as in that of Abraham and of Isaac, is his faith. Let us remember that he did not live under the favored conditions which we enjoy of fellowship with the Lord through the Scriptures, through the holy Spirit and through communion with the brethren – that on the contrary he was alone in his faith. Nor had anything in particular been explained to him respecting the grand ultimate consummation of the divine plan as it is our privilege now to see this through the telescope of the divine Word and the illumination of the Spirit of Truth. He merely knew that a promise had been made to Abraham that seemed to imply the ultimate blessing of the world through his posterity, and his faith had grasped this promise, so that to him it had become a reality, the predominant power and influence in his life. For that promise he had endured and was still enduring, and confident even in the face of hostility, even though he trembled in fear of his greater antagonist – for by this time Esau, the possessor of Isaac’s wealth and the lord over his servants, was known as the “prince of Edom.”

CONFIRMED BY BETTER PROMISES

The lesson to us is that a still greater promise being left to us – that is to say, the same promise having further developed and divided into two parts, and the higher or spiritual feature having been bestowed upon the Church of Christ – we who realize ourselves to be heirs of this same promise, and who now see its spiritual force and signification, have still more reason than had Jacob to humble ourselves before the Lord, to acknowledge our dependence upon him, to ask him for deliverance from the great enemy and from every foe to our best interests, and to plead his gracious promise, confirmed unto us in the death of Jesus our Lord. Ah, yes! the Apostle clearly indicates this when he says to us, “If ye be Christ’s then are ye Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise.” – Gal. 3:29.

Jacob indeed will come in as one of the heirs of the earthly phase of the blessing, but the distinguished honor of sitting in the throne has passed to the Spiritual Israel, and we who are now called according to the divine purpose should be very alert to make our calling and election sure; and still more intelligently and more fervently should we, who have now been brought nigh by the blood of Christ, glorify our Father in heaven in respect to the riches of his grace, to which he assures us we are welcome upon a manifestation of the necessary faith and obedience. Shall we not cry day and night unto the Lord respecting the exceeding great and precious promises given unto us, and our expectation of realizing them – that we may have grace and strength to overcome, to come off conquerors through him who loved us and bought us with his precious blood?

WRESTLING IN PRAYER

Jacob was not content merely to pray; he labored also, and set his affairs in the best possible order for the ordeal of the morrow and in arranging his company into two great bands. Then the prayer probably was continued, only a synoptical statement being given us. The particulars are not recorded, but apparently an angel of the Lord appeared to him in human form with some communication respecting his prayers and his fears. In his earnestness to have the divine blessing Jacob laid personal hold upon the angel, urging a blessing – feeling that it was a matter of imperative need, that he could not be fit for the events of the morrow unless he had this blessing.

Jacob's experience here reminds us of our dear Redeemer's experiences in the Garden of Gethsemane, when he wrestled with strong cryings and tears, pleading with him who was able to save him out of death, out of the hands of the great enemy. Our Lord agonized for long hours and finally got the blessing. And so it was also previously in Jacob's case here narrated: he urged, he pleaded, he wrestled with the Lord for the thing which he knew the Lord had promised him – the divine blessing upon his home-coming and in respect to his future as a servant of God and an heir of the oath-bound promise. The entire procedure of the night is briefly summed up in a few words in our lesson, "They wrestled until the breaking of the day" – the angel apparently endeavoring to avoid giving him the blessing, and Jacob determined so much the more that the blessing was necessary and that he must have it. It was then that the angel touched Jacob's thigh, wrested the sinew. But in spite of all Jacob held on and got the blessing with the break of day.

*So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."
Gen. 32:30*

We are not to suppose that God was averse to the giving of this blessing and that Jacob prevailed to secure it in opposition to the divine will. On the contrary, we are to understand that it was God's good pleasure to give the blessing. He had already intimated this; but that the blessing might be valuable to Jacob it was withheld for a time until he would more and more feel his need of it and cry out and struggle to obtain it, that when obtained it might be the more highly esteemed, and effect thereby the greater influence upon his heart and faith and future course. And it is so with our prayers. "The Father himself loveth you," is the Master's word; nevertheless, Jesus said we should pray and not faint, not grow weary, not lose our interest in the things desired if they are the things that God has indicated to be in harmony with his will. If, for instance, we read in the Scriptures that the Lord is more pleased to give his holy Spirit to them that ask him than earthly parents are to give good gifts to their children, then it cannot be amiss for us to watch and pray with patience and continuance for this holy Spirit – that we might obtain this great blessing, the character-likeness of our Lord.

"THE TRIAL OF YOUR FAITH"

We have found that it was often by bringing us into severe trials, ordeals, putting us under crucial tests, that the Lord develops more and more our faith, our love, our trust, our hope in him. He would have us learn well our lesson, that without him we can do nothing, but that with his blessing and favor all things are ours, because we are Christ's and Christ is God's. Let us, then, in all the important junctures of life, be sure that we are seeking chiefly the divine will, as expressed in the divine promise, the Oath-Bound

Covenant: let us seek it patiently, earnestly, persistently – let us wrestle with the Lord that thereby we may be made the stronger, that when the proper and advantageous experiences have been enjoyed the blessing will come – at the proper moment to do us the most good and in the manner that would be most helpful.

In some respects this return of Jacob to the promised land shadowed the coming return of his posterity, which is even now at hand. As a nation they are even now trembling for fear of extermination in all parts of the world; they know not when the blow will fall nor in what manner their interests will be injured, but those of them who are in the right attitude of heart toward God will, we believe, very soon come to this praying point. The Lord intimates this, saying respecting the day just before us, “I will pour upon them the spirit of prayer and of supplication, and they shall look upon me whom they pierced.” (Zech. 12:10.) The result of this praying, supplicating, will be the blessing of the New Covenant under which, with the Lord’s favor, they will go on to the grand fulfillment of the gracious things already declared more than 3,000 years ago.

THE NEW NAME – A PRINCE WITH GOD

As a part of the blessing granted by the angel in the name of the Lord, Jacob’s name was changed to Israel, explained to signify that he was a prince with God, or had great power with God, as exemplified by the fact that he had secured this blessing by the demonstration of great faith and loyalty and zeal. This name, Israel, is the one by which all his followers prefer to be known – they are Israelites. As the Gospel Church is termed in the Scriptures Spiritual Israel, and as the head of the Church is Christ, we see another parallel or foreshadowing by Jacob of Jesus – of Jesus’ struggle and our Lord’s ignominy in the garden. It was because our Lord overcame, because he exercised faith and obedience, that he indeed is the great Prince of the Lord, appointed the great Prince and Savior for the people.

Already Christ is the Prince of the Church, which in obedience to his call is seeking to walk in his steps, that they may be joint-heirs with him in the glorious Oath-Bound Covenant which he has inherited, just as the Israelites sought to follow Jacob and become heirs of the same promise. But as there were tests upon Jacob, so also there needed to be tests upon his people: and likewise as there were tests upon our Redeemer, so there must be tests upon all of his people, his followers, his Gospel Church. Many of the people of Natural Israel stumbled because of lack of faith – not holding on to the divine promise they were overcome by the spirit of the world, the spirit of selfishness, etc. Similarly today, in this harvest time of the Gospel age, we find the indications to be that many more have been called than will be chosen – than will be worthy of acceptance as footstep-followers of the Redeemer, the true Israel, the Spiritual Prince with God. As Jesus was the prevailing Prince with God, so all of those whom he accepts as members of his body, his Church, must also have the same spirit and be, in the language of the Scriptures, “overcomers.”

THE CHURCH’S NEW NAME

By his faith Jacob obtained a rank, a standing, amongst his posterity with his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham, and in olden times no Israelite would appropriate any of these three names – they were considered too sacred for others than the originals. The

changing of Jacob's name reminds us of other similar changes: for instance, amongst our Lord's disciples Simon was renamed Peter, and again Saul of Tarsus was renamed Paul, and this gradually led to the custom prevalent throughout Christendom of giving to every convert a new name, a Christian name, and this principle was eventually applied to children of believers and ultimately to all children.

But God proposes a new name for his people – his Church – the Bride, the Lamb's wife. As Jesus was our Lord's name and he became the Christ, the Messiah, so all who become members of his body come under his new name, and are recognized of the Lord and may be recognized of each other as members of the Christ (Rev. 3:12); and again, the Lord, prophetically speaking of Christ, says, "This is the name whereby he shall be called, The Righteousness of Jehovah," (Jer. 23:6): and again, speaking of the Bride of Christ, we read, "This is the name by which she shall be called, The Righteousness of Jehovah." (Jer. 33:16.) The name of the Bridegroom is given to his Bride – "They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels." (Mal. 3:17.) And those who will get this new name, we may be sure, will all be called upon to demonstrate that they will be overcomers. They must all pass approval before the Lord for their faith and their persistency in holding to him and his gracious promise – the Oath-Bound Covenant.

"DO IT NOT, WORSHIP GOD"

The answer of the angel, when Jacob in turn asked for his name, reminds us of the words of the poet, –

"O! to be nothing, nothing –
To him let their voices be raised;
He is the fountain of blessing,
Yes, worthy is he to be praised."

The angel seemingly had no desire to flaunt his own name and have it handed down to posterity. He was content that he was the mouthpiece and representative of Jehovah God, and desirous that the Lord alone should have the honor and distinction of having conferred the blessing, and that the instrument through which the divine favor was extended might not be in evidence to detract from the glory of the Lord. Would that all of us who are the Lord's people could take exactly this unselfish view of our various opportunities to serve the Lord and his brethren – to be willing to be out of sight ourselves that all might the more clearly see that the blessings conferred are from the Lord alone. This thought is brought to our attention in Rev. 19:10, where John, as a representative of the Church, having heard and seen wonderful things, fell at the feet of the angel to worship him who had showed him these things. The command was, "See that thou do it not, for I am thy fellow-servant – worship God." So if there come to any of us a thought of doing homage to the Lord's messengers or servants through whom his blessing has been bestowed upon us it will be proper for him to give the admonition, "Do it not, worship God"; and in any event it would be our duty to fully recognize that our blessings come not from any human being but from God, however much he may use human instrumentalities in conveying his blessings. He alone is to be honored and revered and appreciated as the Author and Giver of every good and perfect gift. – James 1:17.

A MODEL PRAYER

Excerpt from R. 2864

Jacob's prayer at the time he was anticipating a meeting with Esau is recorded in this lesson, and may be considered one of the best examples of prayer to be found in God's Word. It is so full of confidence and trust in God. It recounts the original promise to Abraham, its renewal to Isaac, and its second repetition to Jacob at Bethel, and the Lord's promise there given him, that he would bring him again to his home country. It shows the humility of Jacob's mind, which cried out, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which thou hast shown unto thy servant; for with my staff [only] I passed over this Jordan [when fleeing from home], and now I am become two bands [great companies]." He tells the Lord of his fear of Esau, yet shows that his fear is offset by his confidence in the Almighty. It was at this time, and doubtless in answer to this prayer, that the angel of the Lord appeared to Jacob, and so full of faith in the power of God, and in the promise of God was Jacob that he laid physical hold upon the angel, declaring that he would never let go until he got a blessing.

Here, the lesson proper, relating to Jacob's struggle with the angel, comes in. The angel appeared as a man, as was frequently the case in olden times; Jacob had recognized him, nevertheless, and laying hold of him urged that he as God's representative, sent to meet him, should give him a blessing. We cannot suppose for a moment that the angel was not powerful enough to release himself from the grasp of Jacob, and hence that the wrestling and struggle between them kept up until the morning light, the angel vainly pleading, "Let me go," and Jacob as persistently holding on and declaring, "I will not let thee go unless thou bless me." We must suppose, on the contrary, that the Lord was well pleased to bless Jacob, and had sent the angel for this very purpose; and that the circumstances were intended as an opportunity to draw out Jacob's longing desires in this respect; to demonstrate to himself how much he really desired the Lord's favor, the Lord's blessing. And when the desired result had been obtained – when Jacob had evidenced the intensity of his desire for harmony with God and such blessing as God alone could give – then the blessing came – Jacob's victory. Not that Jacob prevailed to get from God, through his angel, something the Lord was not pleased to grant; but that he prevailed to obtain the coveted blessing by manifesting the zeal, the energy, the patience, and the faith which God was pleased to see and reward.

The lesson of the spiritual Israelite in this circumstance is in harmony with our Lord's words, "Men ought continuously to pray and not to faint." God wishes us to be persistent, and our persistence measures and indicates the depth of our desires. If the blessing in answer to our prayer does not come in the moment of asking we are to continue "instant in prayer," – patiently waiting for the Lord's due time, faithfully trusting him that he is willing to give the blessing which he promised, even though he may for a time withhold it with a view to our becoming the more earnest in seeking it.

Although Jacob was a natural man, not a "new creature in Christ Jesus," nevertheless his prayer is a model one, in that he did not specify even the earthly things which had been promised him. All he asked was a blessing, in whatever manner the Lord might be pleased to give it. Alas, how many spiritual Israelites seem to have a much less keen appreciation of proprieties in such matters than had Jacob! Many ask and receive not

because they ask amiss, for things to be consumed upon their earthly desires – wealth or fame or temporal good things. (Jas. 4:3.) How many forget that the Lord has already promised to take care of the temporal necessities of his spirit-begotten children, and to do for them better than they would know how to ask or to think. How few seem to remember that as new creatures our conditions and desires should be specially for the things that pertain to the new creature, and that it is this class of blessing the Lord invites us to ask for and to wrestle to obtain, assuring us that as earthly parents are pleased to give good gifts to their children, so our Heavenly Father is pleased to **give the holy spirit** to those who ask him. (Luke 11:13.) If the Lord’s consecrated people could all be brought to the point where the chief aim in life, the burden of all their prayers, would be that they might have a larger measure of the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of holiness, the spirit of the truth, the spirit of Christ, the spirit of a sound mind, what a blessing it would mean! If, then, they should wrestle with the Lord until the breaking of the day their hold upon him would be sure to bring the desired blessing. The Lord has revealed himself to his people for the very purpose of giving them **this** blessing; nevertheless, he withholds it until they learn to appreciate and earnestly desire it.

Jacob got the blessing and with it a change of name. He was thenceforth called Israel, which signifies “Mighty with God.” This new name would thenceforth be continually a source of encouragement to him, an incentive to fresh zeal and trust in the one whose blessing he had secured. All of Jacob’s posterity adopted this name. They were all known as children of Israel, or Israelites; for God acknowledged the name as applicable to all of the nation. Similarly, in antitype, we have Christ Jesus our Lord, the true, the antitypical Israel, the one who, through faith and obedience to the Father, has prevailed, has overcome the world and the flesh and the Adversary, and has received the divine blessing as the result of his struggle. He has been highly exalted and is declared now to be prince or ruler of the kings of the earth. He has sat down with the Father in his throne. – Rev. 1:5.

Nor does the analogy end here; for, as Jacob had twelve sons, so our Lord Jesus had twelve apostles; and these, and all who come into Christ through their ministry of the gospel, are accepted as the true, the spiritual, Israel. The same name belongs to all of these that belongs to the Head. As with fleshly Israel there were some who were “Israelites indeed,” and others who were not, but of the synagogue of Satan, in the spiritual Israel there are nominal and real Israelites; and only the latter will ultimately obtain the blessing and be joint-heirs with Jesus Christ their Lord. And the name, “Victor,” or “Mighty with God,” will be a name which will apply to everyone of the Lord’s faithful ones in the same manner that it applied to Jesus himself. Each one will be required to manifest his loyalty to the Lord, his faith, his trust, and only those who love the Lord and the promise he has made that they will hold on to his promise, and will not let him go without a blessing – only such will receive the great blessing, only such will be able to overcome the world, the flesh and the Adversary. “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith” – in God and in his promises.

MOSES



Moses Comes Down From Mount Sinai, by Gustave Dore, 1832-1883

*And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man
speaketh unto his friend.*

Exodus 33:11

*There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto
Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face.
Deuteronomy 34:10*

To others of the prophets the Lord usually manifested himself through visions or dreams or by angels in human form, but seemingly Moses was granted a still closer approach to the divine presence. When thinking of the expression, “face to face,” we should understand it to signify that Moses enjoyed a closeness of fellowship and favor with the Lord rather than that he really looked into the face of Jehovah, concerning which it is written, “No man can see my face and live” (Ex. 33:20); and again, “Whom no man hath seen or can see.” (1 Tim. 6:16.) It may be that our Lord Jesus as Michael especially represented the Father with Moses, as it was he who prevented the Adversary from having Moses’ body after death. But in any event, applying the matter antitypically to the Christ, we see that in a special sense the antitypical Moses in the flesh throughout this Gospel Age has had a favor in connection with the divine presence not enjoyed by any others of previous times.

*He said,
“You cannot
see My face,
for no man
shall
see Me,
and live.”
Ex. 33:20*

We see the Lord’s face with the eye of faith, for we have seen our Lord Jesus, who represents the Father, and who declares that whosoever hath seen him hath seen the Father – has enjoyed the best possible revelation of the Father whom no man hath seen. Again he declares respecting the Church, his Body, “Their angels [messengers] do always have access to the face of my Father,” as though he would tell us that all of our interests and affairs are brought directly to the Father’s attention, so that there is no danger of any delay and any peradventure that all things will work together for good to them who love him. Again we see the Father’s face in the sense that we see his love, which is displayed to us through a knowledge of the Truth by the holy Spirit granted to us. Not merely divine power do we see, not merely divine wisdom do we see, not merely divine justice do we see – but God himself is love, and he has shown us his love. We who with the eyes of our understanding have seen our Redeemer and come to a knowledge of him have seen the Father and become acquainted with him proportionately, for all things are of the Father and all things are by the Son. “Let me die the death of the righteous – let my last end be like his.” – Numbers 23:10.

Our Lord Jesus was the Righteous One, and when we think of death we are to think of him and his death, and to remember that as he laid down his life we also ought to lay down our lives on behalf of the brethren. As he sacrificed earthly interests and advantages and privileges and pleasures that he might die the sacrificial death in accord with the divine plan, so let us remember that we have covenanted similarly to be “dead with him.” For if we be dead with him we shall also live with him; if we suffer with him we shall also reign with him. Our hope of participation with him in his resurrection to glory, honor and immortality, is based upon our faithfulness in participating with him in his death, which means also a share with him in the sufferings of this present time. But standing as we do with the Pisgah prospect before us, strengthened by might in the inner-man, why should either death or its attendant sufferings deter us? Nay, in all these things we will rejoice and triumph through our Lord and Redeemer, our Head!

R. 4055

The Song of Moses

1 Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and spoke, saying:

“I will sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!

2 The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise Him, My father’s God, and I will exalt Him.

3 The LORD is a man of war. The LORD is His name.

4 Pharaoh’s chariots and his army He has cast into the sea. His chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea.

5 The depths have covered them. They sank to the bottom like a stone.

6 “Your right hand, O LORD, has become glorious in power. Your right hand, O LORD, has dashed the enemy in pieces.

7 And in the greatness of Your excellence You have overthrown those who rose against You. You sent forth Your wrath. It consumed them like stubble.

8 And with the blast of Your nostrils the waters were gathered together. The floods stood upright like a heap. The depths congealed in the heart of the sea.

9 The enemy said, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil. My desire shall be satisfied on them. I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.’

10 You blew with Your wind, the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters.

11 “Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?

12 You stretched out Your right hand. The earth swallowed them.

13 You in Your mercy have led forth the people whom You have redeemed. You have guided them in Your strength to Your holy habitation.

14 “The people will hear and be afraid. Sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants of Philistia.

15 Then the chiefs of Edom will be dismayed. The mighty men of Moab, trembling will take hold of them. All the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away.

16 Fear and dread will fall on them. By the greatness of Your arm they will be as still as a stone, till Your people pass over, O LORD, till the people pass over whom You have purchased.

17 You will bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which You have made for Your own dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established.

18 “The LORD shall reign forever and ever.”

19 For the horses of Pharaoh went with his chariots and his horsemen into the sea, and the LORD brought back the waters of the sea upon them. But the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea.

Overflowing with religious sentiment, the Israelites gave thanks unto the Lord God, recognizing him as their Deliverer. Moses composed a hymn of praise in which the people joined, while Moses' sister Miriam and the singing women prepared a response to the various parts of the hymn of praise. Hebrew scholars have remarked on the evidence of the antiquity of the song of Moses, recorded in Exodus 15:1-20, some even noting the fact that a few of the words showed an intermingling of the Egyptian language. It is further authenticated by the reference made to it in the book of Psalms, where the entire matter of the deliverance of the people and the overthrow of their enemies in the sea is graphically described by the sweet singer of Israel. (Psa. 106:7-12.) The incident and the Song of Moses are further corroborated by our Lord in his last message to the Church, in which he represents in symbol a certain class of his followers experiencing a great deliverance in the end of this age and singing, "The song of Moses, the servant of God, and of the Lamb." – Rev. 15:2,3.

20 Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. 21 And Miriam answered them: "Sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!" Ex. 15:20-21

If it was appropriate, as we all admit that it was, that the Israelites should give glory to God for their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt, much more is it appropriate that spiritual Israel should recognize the still greater deliverance from the power of Satan and the thralldom of sin, accomplished for us through the blood of the Lamb of God who died for our sins. If the illiterate people who had been in a measure of slavery for a long period and who had not the advantages of this Gospel age were prompted to give thanks to the Lord, how much more should we, who have tasted of his grace and goodness, show forth the praises of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light." (1 Pet. 2:9.) What wonder, then, that the Scriptures everywhere refer to the Lord's people as being ministers, servants, of the Truth, and declare that the Lord has not only lifted our feet from the horrible pit and miry clay of sin and death, but has additionally "put into our mouths a new song, even the loving-kindness of our God." – Psa. 40:2,3.

This song can now be sung by us who can exercise faith in the Lord, in his Word, in his providence, but it is not its complete fulfilment: that will be attained when all the people of God shall have been found – when the Lord's mercy during the Millennial age shall have opened the blind eyes of the world, unstopped the deaf ears, caused the knowledge of the Lord to fill the whole earth, and gathered all who are truly the Lord's to himself, and during the Millennial age shall have lifted them out of the bondage of sin and death and brought them into full harmony with the divine standard by the processes of restitution, according as it is written – There shall "be times of restitution of all things which God hath promised by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:19-21.) Then will be the great fulfilment of this passage of the Red Sea, and the overthrow of the enemies of the Lord and his people. It will be then, at the end of the Millennial age, that Satan and all who are on his side, enemies of righteousness, will be forever destroyed, and at the same time all who love righteousness and hate iniquity and avail themselves of the Lord's favors, privileges, will then be saved to the powers of an eternal life, under the leadership of the great antitypical Moses, as it is written –

"A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you from amongst your brethren like unto me [Moses]; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that the soul that will not obey that Prophet shall be destroyed from amongst the people." – Acts 3:22,23.

Moses' Supplication

10 Then Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent, and the anger of the LORD was greatly aroused. Moses also was displeased.

11 So Moses said to the LORD,

“Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me?

12 “Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them, that You should say to me, ‘Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child,’ to the land which You swore to their fathers?

13 “Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? For they weep all over me, saying, ‘Give us meat, that we may eat.’

14 “I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me.

15 “If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now—if I have found favor in Your sight—and do not let me see my wretchedness!”

16 So the LORD said to Moses: “Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them. Bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you.

17 “Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone.

18 “Then you shall say to the people, ‘Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat, for you have wept in the hearing of the LORD, saying, “Who will give us meat to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt.” Therefore the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat.

19 ‘You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days,

20 ‘but for a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised the LORD who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, “Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?” ’ ”

21 And Moses said, “The people whom I am among are six hundred thousand men on foot. Yet You have said, ‘I will give them meat, that they may eat for a whole month.’

22 “Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to provide enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them,

to provide enough for them?”

23 And the LORD said to Moses, “Has the LORD’s arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not.”

24 So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD, and he gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tabernacle.

25 Then the LORD came down in the cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the Spirit that was upon him, and placed the same upon the seventy elders, and it happened, when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, although they never did so again.

26 But two men had remained in the camp: the name of one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them. Now they were among those listed, but who had not gone out to the tabernacle. Yet they prophesied in the camp.

27 And a young man ran and told Moses, and said, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.”

28 So Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, one of his choice men, answered and said, “Moses my lord, forbid them!”

29 Then Moses said to him, “Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the LORD’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!”

30 And Moses returned to the camp, both he and the elders of Israel.

31 Now a wind went out from the LORD, and it brought quail from the sea and left them fluttering near the camp, about a day’s journey on this side and about a day’s journey on the other side, all around the camp, and about two cubits above the surface of the ground.

32 And the people stayed up all that day, all night, and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers); and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp.

33 But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was aroused against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague.

34 So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving.

Numbers 11:10-34

GRAVES OF GREEDINESS – R. 5306

NUMBERS 11:4-34

“The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working.”

– James 5:16

THE ISRAELITES remained at Mt. Sinai about a year. This was a time of preparation. The people were learning important lessons, as a result of their new conditions, so different from those of Egypt. The component parts of the Tabernacle were prepared, and it was set up as a meeting place between God and the people. God was represented in it by the pillar of cloud, which rested upon the top of the Tabernacle, and which at night had a flame like a torch at its top.

God’s presence on the inside of the Tabernacle was seen only by Moses and Aaron, in conjunction with their privileged services. He was represented by the glorious Shekinah brightness, which rested upon the Mercy Seat. Thus the Tabernacle became the center of the nation’s life and interest in relation to their God, who was their Captain and Leader, and who communicated to them through the mediator of the Law Covenant – Moses.

The people had flocks and herds; and these would necessitate their being at some distance from the Camp, but the pillar of cloud by day and its fiery torch at night would always indicate the center of the Camp, and always guide their minds to the thought that they were God’s adopted people, to whom, by first right, belonged the gracious promises made to Abraham.

Similarly, antitypical Israelites may realize that God has called them from the world to be His peculiar people, and may well exclaim, “God is in the midst of her, she shall not be disturbed” – overthrown! The center of our interest is our great Advocate, who on our behalf has entered into the Most Holy, and is proceeding with His great work of antitypical Atonement.

THE SIN OF MURMURING

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.
Heb. 3:12

Those who become the people of God, who accept Him as their Guide and Leader, should never murmur, never complain. To do so is to dispute the Divine Wisdom and the Divine promises, and to that extent to break their covenant of faith, obedience and loyalty. St. Paul reminds us that the murmuring of the Israelites on this occasion carries such a lesson to us (Hebrews 3:7-19; 4:1-11), which appears great or small to us, according to our standpoint and standard. The Lord’s dealings with the Israelites show us that justice, love, mercy, loyalty to God and to principle are in the Divine estimation the highest qualities, and violations of these the most serious crimes. If this is not the way we have looked at matters, it behooves us to change our viewpoint and to take that of the Almighty.

This murmuring against the Lord was on the score of the manna, for which at first the people had been so thankful. They allowed their minds to grow so vexed that they wept like children as they thought of the meat and garlic and flesh pots of Egypt. They murmured against the Lord and against Moses in desiring that they might have back

the conditions which they had left. Little did they comprehend the true situation. Had they been returned to the bondage in which they previously were, after even a year's experience in freedom, their lot would have seemed much more wretched than ever.

It was with Israel, however, as often with us, "Distance lends enchantment to the view." As they looked backward, they forgot the trials and difficulties of the bondage of Egypt. As they looked about them, they forgot their comforts, privileges, liberties under Divine leadership. Like peevish children, they reasoned not clearly.

MOSES TOO GREATLY BURDENED

The result of the murmuring was severe upon Moses. He was the people's representative before the Lord, and the Lord's representative before the people. Murmuring against the Lord in their experiences meant murmuring against Moses also. Heart-broken, that Prophet sought the Lord, pleading that his burden was too heavy, that the people cried to him as children to a father, and that he could endure it no longer. He rehearsed that the Lord had promised to take this people as His people and to bring them to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He urged, therefore, that if this burden must remain with him it would be better for him to die: "Kill me, I pray Thee, out of hand, if I have found favor in Thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness."

Then it was that God directed the institution of the Jewish Sanhedrin – seventy of the heads or the Elders of the people, to be the court of judges, responsible to the people and to deal with them, to hear their murmurings and to counsel them properly. In this arrangement, while Moses was still the head of the nation, the seventy Elders shared his responsibility before the people, and would more or less, therefore, be his defenders with the people.

By Divine direction Moses made out the list of these Elders, and directed them to meet him at the Tabernacle. All but two of them came. There God manifested the honor he had bestowed upon Moses as the head of the people, by communion with him, and then, as foretold, placed a share of the responsibility of leadership upon the seventy. This was indicated by their miraculous prophesying. This prophesying became a sign to the Elders themselves and to all who heard it. Even the two who remained in the camp prophesied at the same time. The Lord thus indicated that they should be co-laborers with and under Moses in respect to the guidance and direction of the people.

QUAIL IN OVER-SUPPLY

God then sent word to the Israelites through Moses, the message probably being conveyed through the seventy Elders selected from all the different tribes, that He was about to send them flesh food, such as they had been murmuring for. He declared He would send a thirty-day's supply for the whole people. Even Moses was astonished, though he trustfully gave the message. Under the Lord's providence, a strong wind across the Red Sea drove thousands of small birds, quail, to the vicinity of Israel's Camp and for a considerable distance all around it. As a result, the people ate freely, and prepared dried quail for future use for a full thirty-days' supply, as the Lord had said. Two days and nights they ceased not to gather in the quail.

Some agnostics have questioned this statement, thinking it to be a declaration that the birds fell in a solid mass two cubits high. The proper thought is that the birds, driven by the wind across the sea, were so fatigued by their flight that they flew low down, about two cubits in height above the ground, where they were easily caught with the hand or hit with sticks and captured. A writer on conditions in that vicinity says:

“These quail cannot sustain themselves long on the wing when exhausted. They would be easily taken when they flew at a height of about two cubits (three feet) above the ground.”

Those who had been murmuring discontentedly suddenly got their desire for flesh food; and they ate it so greedily and so much of it that an insidious pestilence broke out amongst them, a fever from over-eating, called “a fire from the Lord.” Many died and were buried there, and thus the place was called “Kibroth-Hattaavah,” which signifies “Graves of Greediness.” Thus did the Lord permit the murmurers, the unthankful, to do themselves injury and to cut themselves off from further opportunities for murmuring.

The most happy condition of mind conceivable is the one of full rest and confidence in the Lord – satisfied with God’s appointments and provisions. And this is especially appropriate to the Spiritual Israelites, and particularly the Royal Priesthood, who have made a full surrender to the Lord, a Covenant by sacrifice, which includes all earthly rights and interests. Happy is it for such if they can sing with the spirit and with the understanding also:

“Content whatever lot I see,
Since ‘tis my God that leadeth Me.”

The spirit of discontent looks away from the Heavenly Manna of Divine provision, longing for other food of their own provision or of other earthly supply. The Lord grants such an opportunity of feasting to the full on what they are desiring, and as a result, the murmurers cease from being members of the Lord’s family and have no further opportunity of partaking of the Manna He provides in sufficient quantity.

To give an illustration: the Bible supplies the Manna of Divine Truth. The Truth needs to be gathered, and to be ground and to be baked, but it is God’s provision. It is wholesome, it is nutritious, it is the very thing that we, as the people of God, need for our strengthening and perfecting. Yet some crave the flesh pots of Egypt – the world’s theories. Then He allows these to come within their reach. They fill themselves with Higher Criticism and Evolutionary theories, and as a result perish as New Creatures, cease to be the people of God, cease to walk in the Master’s footsteps. They are consumed by the fire, or fever, which the errors they crave produce.

GRAVES OF GREEDINESS

Greed, selfishness, stands connected with sin of every kind. It leads to every form of immorality, to satisfy its selfish propensities. It leads to injustice and untruthfulness in its endeavor to acquire a large share of the blessings of God. It leads to anger, malice, hatred, envy, strife and murder in its endeavor to get and to hold a superabundant share of this world’s goods. Selfishness is thus unrighteousness, and “all unrighteousness is sin.” As we think of the graves of greediness filled with the Israelites, we are reminded of

how many Spiritual Israelites have made similar mistakes. Greedy for the things of this world, they have neglected their Covenant with the Lord and the higher interests of the life to come. Jesus said that the thorns that sprang up amongst the wheat and choked it were the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches; in other words, greediness.

Oh, how much all the followers of Jesus should be on guard against this spirit of the world! It is not our suggestion that none should look out properly to have a reasonable share of the blessings and comforts of the present life. The danger is that of setting our hearts upon these things, coveting them and serving them, in an idolatrous manner, and thus causing our spiritual interment, over which might well be inscribed “Graves of Greediness.”

THE TEXT OF THIS STUDY

The text assigned evidently is meant to apply to the prayer of Moses for help and relief. “The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working.” God granted the prayer of Moses, which was of a proper kind in that it was requesting help whereby the will of God might be fully submitted to, that the people might be rightly instructed to bow to the Divine arrangements. It availed much; it brought the desired result; it was in harmony with the Divine will.

On the other hand, the prayer of the unrighteous will avail much also in an opposite direction. The murmurings of the people were classed as their prayers. They got what they desired; but with it they got, not the Divine blessing, but a punishment. Let us take heed to how we pray, and that we pray for things in harmony with the Divine will. Thus will our prayers bring blessings upon our heads, and not injury.

SELFISH PRAYERS ANSWERED

We know of many prayers answered; some of these were uttered selfishly, not with the desire to know and to do the Lord’s will, but with the desire to have the Lord do according to the human will and its selfish desire. Such prayers are always dangerous. God sometimes answers them.

We note one instance told us by a mother. She was a true Christian woman and had given her son to the Lord; but when he fell seriously sick and lay at death’s door and the physicians said that he could not recover, the mother went before the Lord in prayer and earnestly pleaded, not that God’s will should be done, but that her will might be done – that her son’s life might be spared. Almost miraculously, she says, her boy began to recover. For a time she rejoiced that she had had a triumph.

Later on, however, she learned a very bitter lesson. The son grew to manhood, but was far from a comfort to her. He had a vicious character, which often brought the mother pain and tears. She said afterwards, “I have rued that prayer, which was contrary to God’s will, and which He answered according to my will. I see better now. I have learned my lesson. Henceforth I will seek to know and to do the Lord’s will, and will pray that His will, not mine, be done in all my affairs. My selfishness brought me years of misery, which I had assumed would be years of pleasure and comfort.” How careful we should be to “abide in Him and in His Word”!

Moses' Prayer in Psalm 90

A Prayer of Moses the man of God.

- 1 Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.
- 2 Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.
- 3 You turn man to destruction, and say, "Return, O children of men."
- 4 For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night.
- 5 You carry them away like a flood. They are like a sleep. In the morning they are like grass which grows up:
- 6 In the morning it flourishes and grows up. In the evening it is cut down and withers.
- 7 For we have been consumed by Your anger, and by Your wrath we are terrified.
- 8 You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your countenance.
- 9 For all our days have passed away in Your wrath. We finish our years like a sigh.
- 10 The days of our lives are seventy years. And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow. For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.
- 11 Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath.
- 12 So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
- 13 Return, O LORD! How long? And have compassion on Your servants.
- 14 Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days!
- 15 Make us glad according to the days in which You have afflicted us, the years in which we have seen evil.
- 16 Let Your work appear to Your servants, and Your glory to their children.
- 17 And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands for us. Yes, establish the work of our hands.

QUALITIES AND ATTRIBUTES OF JEHOVAH

– R. 5209

THE SCRIPTURES declare a “beginning of the creation of God.” His qualities and attributes were the same then that they are now; for the Scriptures also declare His unchangeableness – “the same yesterday, today and forever.” – Hebrews 13:8; Psalm 90:1,2.

The completeness of the Divine perfection is such that companionship is not necessary to the happiness of Jehovah. The One who “inhabiteth eternity” is self-centered. The creation of angels and of man was indeed His pleasure, because, benevolently, He desires to do good, to give capacity for pleasure and to afford it opportunity for gratification. Furthermore, the highest good of His creatures calls for an exhibition to the full of all the elements of Divine character – Divine Justice, Love, Power and Wisdom.

BELIEF IN SATAN LOGICAL

The declaration of the Bible respecting the Father’s Power is that “the eyes of the Lord [the intelligence of Jehovah] are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.” (Proverbs 15:3.) This statement implies that there are things **evil** as well as **good**; things which God approves and things which He disapproves. This citation comes the nearest to a suggestion of God’s omnipresence contained in the Scriptures.

The fact that the Lord has **knowledge** of all conditions of things is not out of harmony with the other fact that He **permits** conditions which He **disapproves**, and which He declares that He will ultimately destroy. “All the wicked will He **destroy**.” – Psalm 145:20.

If we accept the great Divine premise that the Bible is the Word of God, then we are bound to accept the declaration that there is a being called Satan, that he is the “god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4), and that he now works in the “hearts of the children of disobedience.” (Ephesians 2:2.) These words imply not only that there are evil **principles** at work in this world, but that behind them there are evil **spirit beings**, of whom Satan is the inspirer and **through whom he is working**.

Certain statements are made respecting Satan which could not properly be applied to a principle of evil, or to a working of error; as, for instance, Jesus declared that Satan was a “murderer” from the beginning – and a “liar.” (John 8:44.) Errors and principles are not murderers and liars. It would be a misuse of language to make such application. Only an intelligent being can be a murderer or a liar. Hence the whole tenor of the Scriptures upholds the assertion that there is such a being as Satan and that he is in opposition to God.

If we were to suppose the everlasting continuance of Satan as a being, as an adversary of God, the matter would seem strange to us, because irreconcilable with our conception of Divine Power. We have the statement of the Scriptures respecting his reign and ultimate destruction. (Hebrews 2:14.) With this information we have a reasonable, logical thought on the subject. When we consider the Scriptural presentation further, that originally Satan was **not** an **evil** being, but that he made himself evil by the

exercise of personal liberty and became the enemy of God, the subject seems to be clear and reasonable. In fact, this is the only rational solution to the problem of his existence.

To suppose that there is no Satan is to suppose that God has permitted His Word to deceive mankind in this respect, or that the Devil is a manifestation of God Himself – a position which is unthinkable. Nor is it logical to say that there is a Devil, an opponent of God, and at the same time to maintain that God is all in all, and omnipresent – everywhere present. But we do not find this latter statement to be Biblical. The Scriptural proposition is that at the close of the Millennial Age, when Christ shall have conquered sin and Satan, when Satan shall have been destroyed, and when the Kingdom of the Universe shall be in absolute harmony, then God will be all in all. (I Corinthians 15:28.) **To all eternity** there will be **no opposition** to His will. There **is** opposition now, however, in many places and at many times. But ultimately, God will have full control.

THE OMNIPOTENCE OF JEHOVAH

To say that God is **all** Power is sophistry of language which often misleads the one questioning as well as the one attempting to answer him. The statement is not correct. If God is all Power, then He is not Love or Justice or Wisdom. He would thus be limited to the one great attribute of Power, or force. Such cannot be the thought entertained by any logical mind. It is, nevertheless, a form of statement that is often used, perhaps unintentionally, but very injuriously to the reasoning faculties.

The Bible nowhere says God is all Power. There is a marked difference between **being** power and **exercising** power. God is all-powerful. He has the ability to exercise power **in any** direction to the extent that He **wills**. If He had chosen, He could have so created Satan that he could not think or do other than in harmony with the Divine will; or He could have exercised His power to crush the Adversary and thus have destroyed him long ago. But He has permitted Satan to exist for six thousand years, in the sense that He does not restrain the Devil from doing evil. The Scriptures, however, tell us that God will eventually destroy him.

The scope of the exercise of Divine Power is the Universe, but it is difficult for our finite minds to comprehend the meaning of this word – **Universe**. Astronomers tell us that by the aid of photo-astronomy they can see nearly 125,000,000 suns – the centers of solar systems like our own, with supposedly more than a billion of planets more or less like our earth. These, we may assume, are in process of development, are in preparation for inhabitants, whom the great Creator will in due time provide. From the Scriptural standpoint, however, the great work of human creation began with our earth. What a boundless thought we have in the mere suggestion that the billion worlds are to be peopled, and that the lessons of righteousness and sin, of life and death eternal, now being taught to humanity, will never need to be repeated!

We stand appalled at the immensity of space and at the law and order which everywhere reign! We heartily assent to the words of the Prophet David, “Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.” (Psalm 19:2,3.) The person who can look

upon this wonderful display of superhuman power and believe that these worlds created themselves, shows to the majority of us that, if he has brains, they are sadly disordered, unbalanced. Whoever, after mature thought, concludes that there is no God, that everything came to be what it is by chance or by the operation of some blind force – that person is described in the Scriptures in the following words, “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.” – Psalm 14:1.

As scientific instruments demonstrate to us the immensity of the Universe, we perceive that the Prophet used very moderate language indeed in his description of the majestic power and greatness of the Creator, when he represents Jehovah as weighing the mountains in His balance and holding the seas in the hollow of His Hand. (Isaiah 40:12.) From His standpoint, a thousand years are but as a watch in the night. (Psalm 90:4.) How insignificantly small we all feel in the presence of our God! No wonder some great men are inclined to say that humanity is too insignificant from the Divine standpoint to be worthy of the least consideration – much less to be objects of Divine care and providence!

THE OMNISCIENCE OF JEHOVAH

To say that God is all **Knowledge** is also an inaccurate statement. If God were all Knowledge, how could He be all Power? God **has** all Knowledge, possesses all Knowledge. But this is a different matter. If we say, “The boy has a hoop,” we do not mean that **he** is a hoop. To **be** a hoop and to **have** a hoop are not the same. God is **omniscient**; that is, He **knows all things**. This very fact proves that He is a personal God. There can be no knowledge without personality. Knowledge implies cognizance of external things. Amongst the things outside the Divine Person are things both good and evil.

When we read that God created man in His own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26,27), we may know that man is not God. He was merely made in the **image** of God. Because God is perfect, therefore the human being made in His image would be satisfactory to God. That human being had knowledge. But he neglected the Word of God, and thus he learned something by his neglect. What he learned is mentioned in the Scriptures. “He is become as one of Us [the **Elohim**], to know good and evil.” (Genesis 3:22.) This statement proves that God knows good and evil.

If God did not know evil from good, then He could not be our Instructor. By His laws, His principles, God sets before our minds that which is right and that which is wrong. Adam knew how to discriminate between right and wrong, but his disobedience increased his knowledge of both good and evil. In his fallen condition man cannot always determine between them. Therefore God gave Israel a Law, and man’s knowledge of that Law assists him to discriminate between good and evil.

One of old time said, “Thou art a God which hidest Thyself.” (Isaiah 45:15.) How true! As a result the world by wisdom knows not God. He is near in His Wisdom and Love, yet He can be seen only by those whose eyes of understanding have been opened. But we are glad that the time is coming when all the blind eyes shall see clearly. “As truly as I live,” says Jehovah, “all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.” “The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

(Num. 14:21; Hab. 2:14.) Then all shall see what God hath wrought, and our temporary blindness will but accentuate the glorious brightness of His Wisdom, Justice, Love and Power.

"GOD IS LOVE"

God is Love in the sense that the term Love represents the central principle of the Divine character. There is nothing contrary to love in God. The Scriptures do not teach that there is nothing except love anywhere – that God is everywhere and love is everywhere. But they teach that God is a loving character. This does not militate against the other statements that God is just, wise and powerful. But this quality of Love best of all represents the Divine Being. All of His Justice is in harmony with His Love. There is no exercise of Justice or Power in an evil sense, for all His attributes work together for good to all His creatures.

The Scriptures encourage us to reason from the known to the unknown. They tell us that although God is so great, so wise, so powerful, He is also just and loving. And the more we consider the matter, the more reasonable the Bible description of the Almighty appears. His Power we see demonstrated. The Wisdom of One so great cannot be doubted. When we come to consider, Could One so wise and so powerful be unjust or ungenerous? Our hearts answer, No! No one is really great who is devoid of justice and love. So surely as our God is Jehovah, He must possess these qualities.

When we came in contact with the Bible, and particularly after we learned something of its teachings and got rid of the misrepresentations which gathered about it during the Dark Ages – then we began to recognize it as the Message of Jehovah to His creatures. It informs us that the great Creator of the Universe is not only Almighty and All-wise, but loving and kind, with Justice as the foundation of His Empire. (Psalm 89:13,14.) From the Bible we learn, too, that our Creator has been pleased to make us in His own image, in His own moral likeness, to the intent that we may enjoy Him and the fruits of His righteousness to all eternity.

All the Power, all the Justice, all the Wisdom, of God must be used in accordance with His own character, which is Love. It will therefore be loving Wisdom, loving Justice, which He will use toward all creation in the exercise of His loving Power for their good. He created man. He permitted Adam to disobey His Law, telling us that He knew in advance what man would do and that He permitted man to do wrong. – Isaiah 46:9,10.

In permitting sin to enter the world, God had two ends in view. He purposed to give an illustration to the angels respecting the results of obedience and of disobedience. He also intended that the human family should gain a lesson from this experience. Thus we know that God's arrangement from the beginning has been for a resurrection of the dead. "As all in Adam die, even so shall all in Christ be made alive." – 1 Corinthians 15:21,22.

If we were to take any fragment of Scripture as a basis for a system of doctrine, we would find ourselves either teaching universalism on the one hand, or claiming that God has no Wisdom, or that He purposed the evil, or what not. We would get into all sorts of confusion. But when we see the perfect adjustment of God's Justice, Wisdom, Love and Power, and realize that He has good purposes respecting the evil, that He

has fully marked out what it shall do and what it shall not do, either in its present influence, or in its ultimate influence, this gives us confidence in the character of God.

THE PERMISSION OF EVIL

From only one standpoint can Divine Wisdom and Love be discerned in connection with the history of mankind. It must include the Age about to be ushered in – the period of Messiah’s reign of righteousness. This will be the time when every member of Adam’s race, sharing the penalty of sin and death because inheriting his weaknesses, will be set free from these; the time when the full knowledge of the glory of God shall be granted to every human being, and when a full opportunity will come to each, by obedience, to gain life everlasting.

The lesson thus far taught is the goodness and the severity of God – His goodness in bringing us into being, and His severity in the punishment of Father Adam’s wilful transgression; also to both men and angels, Justice, *unswerving* Justice. The next lesson to be taught to God’s intelligent creatures is that God is Love. The foundation for these lessons is already laid in the Ransom-sacrifice of Jesus, through and on account of which He becomes the world’s Redeemer and Restorer. A few can believe this Message by faith; but not many have the ear of faith or the eye of faith. Only the saints are able to appreciate this great fact at the present time.

That which is now secret and understood only by the few is shortly to be made manifest to every creature in heaven and in earth. All will then see and be able to appreciate the great fact that the redemption accomplished by the sacrifice of Jesus is world-wide and means a full deliverance from the sin-and-death condemnation which passed upon Adam and all of his race, to all who will accept the same as a gift from God. The remainder will be destroyed in the Second Death.

THE SECOND DEATH THE ESSENCE OF WISDOM

As for the Second Death, we easily see that if God created man in His own image, man must of necessity be a free moral agent; otherwise he would not be in God’s image. If he was created a free moral agent, he must have the power or privilege to will wrong as well as right. If he exercise his power in the direction of evil, God has the power to destroy him. On the other hand, if he live in harmony with righteousness God has the power to grant him life to all eternity.

The destruction of the wicked in the Second Death is the essence of Wisdom. As to the declaration that God is too pure to behold evil (Habakkuk 1:13), the thought of the original seems to be that God’s character is so pure and so righteous that He will not continue to behold evil. He will not permit evil to exist to all eternity, for this condition would not be pleasing to Him.

This very thought implies that there is evil to behold. If not so, how could He behold it? But this is all consistent with the Divine Plan. Ultimately all evil shall be destroyed. Ultimately all creatures which are “in heaven and on earth and such as are in the sea” shall be heard saying, “Blessing and honor and glory and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever.” – Revelation 5:13.

RUTH

The Faith of Ruth

16 But Ruth said:

“Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you. For wherever you go, I will go. And wherever you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.

17 Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me.”

Ruth 1:16-17



Naomi and Her Daughters-In-Law by Gustave Dore, 1832-1883

KING DAVID'S GREAT-GRANDMOTHER – R. 5613

RUTH 1

“Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.” – Ruth 1:16

IT is said that when Benjamin Franklin was American Minister in Paris, he spent an evening with some of its literary people, during which he was called upon to contribute to the entertainment. Drawing from his pocket a manuscript prepared for the occasion, he remarked, “Reading a very ancient book, I came across a very charming bit of literature, which I believe will prove as interesting to many of you as to myself. I have copied it; and if you will permit, I will read it.” It was the story of our lesson – indeed, the entire story of the Book of Ruth. The narrative tells that the audience was delighted and desired to be informed where in ancient history so beautiful and idealistic a tale could be found. They were more than surprised when he told them that he had copied it from the Bible; for France at that time, in its official and literary circles, was agnostic, if not atheistic.

The story of the Book of Ruth gives us a little glimpse into the affairs of the Israelites, showing us that there was a deep spirit of religion underlying the surface of wars and captivities, etc., which naturally most impress themselves upon our attention in every history of every people. The opening was at Bethlehem, “the city of David,” where centuries later Jesus was born, “David’s Son and David’s Lord.” The religious sentiment of the family is shown by the import of their names. Elimelech, the husband’s name, signifies “My God is King.” His wife’s name, Naomi, is said to mean “The pleasure of Jehovah.” They had two young sons, Mahlon (sickly one) and Chilion (pining one).

They became discouraged because of the invasions of their enemies and the frequent loss of the fruits of their labor, and finally, because of a severe drouth, which almost produced a famine, they left their home, crossed Jordan into the land of Moab, and dwelt there for ten years. There the two boys married. Both died, leaving widows; and Elimelech died. Evidently the leaving of the Land of Promise, the Land of the Covenant, to live amongst a people who were idolators, and who were not in covenant relationship with God in any way, had not resulted greatly to the benefit of the family; for when Naomi concluded to return to her native land, she had practically nothing.

It is worth while here for us to learn a lesson to the effect that it is never good policy to sacrifice our religious interests for our temporal interests. With all Christians the motto should be “God First.” It will not do to say that perhaps they moved to Moab that they might do a little missionary work; for although the Moabites were the descendants of Lot, and therefore related to the Israelites and had spoken to some extent the same language, nevertheless God’s Covenant was merely with the descendants of Abraham, and the others were aliens, strangers, foreigners, from the commonwealth of Israel, like all other Gentiles. Nor would it have been proper for them to attempt to convert the Moabites; for God had not called the Moabites, but merely the Israelites – as we read, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.” – Amos 3:2.

However, many Christians have made the same mistake that this family made; and if Christians indeed, they were all the more responsible, because the Christian has a higher relationship with God and should have a clearer knowledge of His will and more

of the “spirit of a sound mind.” It was unwise to take two boys into a heathen land, where they were likely to be contaminated; instead, every reasonable influence should have been thrown about them to preserve their loyalty to Jehovah.

Doubtless Naomi realized all this, as indicated by her words in the lesson, “It grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me.” Here again we perceive that the hand of the Lord against her was really in her favor, and that it had a proper influence upon her and brought her back to the Land of Promise.

TWO BEAUTIFUL CHARACTERS

Naomi (the pleasure of Jehovah) must have been a beautiful character. This is evidenced by the deep affection manifested toward her by her two daughters-in-law. They both preferred to join her and to go to her homeland, to leave their own home associations; and they started with her. But as she reflected that they would be strangers in a strange land and would pine for home, even as she was pining now, she tenderly urged them to reconsider – to go back to their home and kindred, their habits and customs, and to remarry, etc.

One of them so concluded, and kissed her good-bye; but the other one, Ruth, broke forth in such eloquent terms that her words have become permanently identified with classic literature:

“Entreat me not to leave thee,
And to return from following after thee;
For whither thou goest, I will go;
And where thou lodgest, I will lodge;
Thy people shall be my people,

“And thy God my God:
Where thou diest I will die,
And there will I be buried:
The Lord do so to me, and more also,
If aught but death part thee and me.”

When we say that Ruth was converted, we of course do not mean that she became a Christian or that she became an heir of Christian promises; for there were none such until after Jesus, by His death, opened up the “new and living way” beyond the Veil. She was converted to Judaism, and this is a fresh testimony to the faithful living of Naomi. – Verses 16,17.

THE VALUE OF POSITIVE DECISION

One thing here is worthy of note; namely, the positiveness with which Ruth made her decision. It was not a proposal to try for a time how it would go to live in Judea. It was a decision unto death. In this respect all true conversions are alike. The Christian, for instance, did not really become a Christian until he made just such a definite, positive consecration of himself to leave the world, its affairs, its loves, its hopes and ambitions, and to spend and be spent even unto death in the service of the Lord. The value of

positive decision in respect to life we can hardly overestimate. Thousands of lives are blighted because of lack of decision. Positiveness for God is the only condition in which we can hope to “make our calling and election sure.”

True to God’s promise to the Jewish people, Naomi and Ruth were blessed in their return to the Lord – to His people – to His Land of Covenant and Promise. We are to remember that all the promises to Fleshly Israel were earthly, while all those to Spiritual Israel are Heavenly.

Both the nobility and the wisdom of Naomi’s character are manifest in the course which she pursued on arriving in Bethlehem practically penniless, and unable to retrieve the interest of her husband and her sons in their share of the land. She did not beg, nor request Ruth to beg. There was no false cry nor false modesty. Ruth went out, like other poor women, to glean handfuls of grain after the reapers. Under the Law it was a part of God’s provision for the poor that no one should reap the corners of his field, but should leave these for the poor. Naomi counseled Ruth to go gleaning in the fields of one of her wealthy relatives, named Boaz.

KING DAVID’S GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

As Naomi had surmised, the wealthy Boaz took note of the modest young woman who daily gleaned in his fields; and subsequently he learned that she was a relative through marriage. He pursued the course of the Jewish Law, and Ruth became his wife. Obed was the name of their son, Jesse was the name of his son, and David was the youngest of Jesse’s sons. Thus Ruth the Gentile became identified with the royal family as an ancestor, and with King David’s greatest Son and Lord – Jesus.

The Bible is a very honest Book. It does not disguise the fact that Rahab, the harlot of Jericho, was received into the Jewish nation by marriage and became an ancestor to King David, Solomon and Jesus. It does not disguise the fact that Ruth was by nature a foreigner, a Gentile, and at one time an idolatress. No other book is so honest. Similarly the New Testament, with wonderful candor, tells all the details of how one of His own disciples betrayed the Master, of how all forsook Him and fled, of how the subsequently noble St. Peter denied his Master with curses, of how St. Peter and St. John, when preaching in the Temple, were perceived by the people to be ignorant and unlearned.

Similarly the weaknesses and sins of King David and others of the royal family are in no sense covered or disguised. They are all laid bare and reproved, their punishments stated, and the repentance of the culprits noted. We dare trust such honest writers, even as in the history of today we would be willing to trust such writers. Indeed, we do not know of any history today that would compare with the Bible history in candor.

HOW TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN

In these Studies we make no attempt at impassioned appeal; but rather, in the words of Jesus, we suggest that each one, when considering whether or not he will join himself to the Lord, become a follower of Christ, shall first quietly “sit down and count the cost,” as the Master directed. We do, however, earnestly urge the importance of decision, and

Prayers of The Righteous

a positive decision, as being essential to proper peace of mind and to proper Christian progress, and to an inheritance with the saints under the terms of this Gospel Age. – Colossians 1:12.

Those who do conclude to give their hearts to God should know that “there is no other name given under Heaven or amongst men” whereby we can be recovered to God’s favor, so as to be permitted to enter the House of Sons, than the name of Jesus. In His name means in, by and through all that His name stands for to have faith in God, obedience to His terms, etc. But when the decision is reached, it means, “Thy God shall be my God.”

Decision is reached to join the House of Sons through Christ. Be it noticed that we have not recommended the joining of any denomination, nor does the Bible. The instruction of the Bible is that each, to be a member of the House of Sons, must be joined to the Lord – to Christ, and through Him to the Father – in order to be an heir of God and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ. Such as do this have their names written, not on an earthly roll of membership, but “in the Lamb’s Book of Life,” “whose names are written in Heaven.”

Their next step should be to say, “Thy people shall be my people.” And so surely as any of God’s people are found, they are all brethren of one family, whether they be found amongst Roman Catholics or Baptists, amongst Methodists or Presbyterians, amongst Lutherans or Anglicans, or whether they be found outside of all denominations. God’s people are all one, because by one Spirit they are all baptized into the one Spiritual Body, the Head of which is Christ, whose Spirit must pervade all His members. – 1 Corinthians 12:13.

Not only should we seek for the people of God, but we should acknowledge and fellowship them, whether they be white or black, rich or poor, learned or ignorant; for “ye are all one in Christ Jesus,” and “One is your Master, even Christ.”

The proper course for all those who come into Christ is to inquire for and search out “the old paths” – the footsteps of Jesus and the Apostles, their teachings, their practises – and not to be influenced by modern digressions, philosophies and sciences falsely so-called, or by creeds and theories of the Dark Ages. “They shall all be taught of God” is a promise which belongs to the entire Household of Faith; and the Word of God is “meat in due season,” and is the strength provided for their strengthening, upbuilding and preparation for a share in the Kingdom.

*Thus says the LORD: “Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it. Then you will find rest for your souls.
Jeremiah 6:16*

RUTH'S CHOICE

Excerpt from R. 4089

"Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." – Ruth 1:16



These words of Ruth serve to remind us of one of our duties. We who by nature were Gentiles (as Ruth was a Moabitess) have by God's grace become Spiritual Israelites; and should determine that henceforth former conditions, interests, pleasures and relationships are gone forever. To us "old things have passed away and behold all things have become new."

How forcefully this lesson is brought to our attention by the Psalmist's words, which prophetically represent the Church, and urge her to "Forget also thy Father's house and thine own people: so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty; for he is thy Lord – worship thou him." (Psa. 45:10,11.) It is expected that those who have had the high honor of betrothal to the great King's Son, the one "altogether lovely," will become so enchanted with their future prospects as to be almost oblivious to the things of this present time, except as to "things needful."

"Only for Jesus! Lord, keep this forever
Sealed on my heart and engraved on my life!
Pulse of all gladness and nerve of endeavor,
Secret of rest and the strength of our strife."

Next to the Lord himself are his people, and whoever loveth not him that is begotten of God does not really love God. And to love God and his people means that we will delight to meet with them. Where opportunities for fellowship in praise, prayer and the study of the divine Word exist and go unimproved it marks a coldness or at least a lukewarmness of our love for God and holy things, which argues unfavorably as respects even our sharing the Bridegroom's throne.

To counteract the influences of sin and worldliness and to grow in grace let us resolve to fully cast in our lot with the Lord's faithful, saying, in Ruth's words,

"Thy people shall be my people and thy God my God. Where thou dwellest I will dwell and there will I be buried."

HANNAH

Hannah's Vow to the LORD



Hannah's Prayer,
Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, 1794-1872

9 So Hannah arose after they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the tabernacle of the LORD.

10 And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD and wept in anguish.

11 Then she made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head."

12 And it happened, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli watched her mouth.

13 Now Hannah spoke in her heart. Only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard.

1 Samuel 1:9-13

Family conditions of the Israelites at a time not long after the days of Samson and of Ruth show us the deep religious sentiment prevailing amongst many of the people. The Tabernacle of the Lord, styled the Temple, was located at Shiloh, a few miles north of Jerusalem. The priest in charge was Eli. The people by Divine direction went annually to worship the Lord, to offer sacrifice, etc., at the Feast time, the Passover.

The father and the mother of Samuel were of these annual worshipers before Samuel was born. It was on the occasion of one of these visits that Hannah made earnest prayer to the Lord for a son, vowing that if her petition was granted, her son should be devoted to the Lord's service for life. Her prayer was answered. The child was born and named Samuel, which signifies In God's Name. When he was weaned he was presented to the Lord through Eli, the priest – to be the latter's servant, assistant, in the service of the Tabernacle and the service of the priest's home, which was connected with the Tabernacle. R. 5615

The prayer of Hannah at the presentation of Samuel to the Lord's service (Verses 1-10) is a poem or psalm, and seems to have been inspired and prophetic. Compare its language and sentiment with the poetic-prayer-prophecy of Mary, our Lord's mother. – Luke 1:46-55. R. 1813

Hannah's Prayer

1 And Hannah prayed and said:

My heart rejoices in the LORD. My horn is exalted in the LORD. I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation.

2 No one is holy like the LORD, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God.

3 Talk no more so very proudly. Let no arrogance come from your mouth, for the LORD is the God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed.

4 The bows of the mighty men are broken, and those who stumbled are girded with strength.

5 Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, and the hungry have ceased to hunger. Even the barren has borne seven, and she who has many children has become feeble.

6 The LORD kills and makes alive. He brings down to the grave and brings up.

7 The LORD makes poor and makes rich. He brings low and lifts up.

8 He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and He has set the world upon them.

9 He will guard the feet of His saints, but the wicked shall be silent in darkness. For by strength no man shall prevail.

10 The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken in pieces. From heaven He will thunder against them. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed.

1 Samuel 2:1-10

SAMUEL

Samuel Prays for Israel at Mizpah

5 And Samuel said, “Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you.”

6 So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out before the LORD. And they fasted that day, and said there, “We have sinned against the LORD.” And Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah.

7 Now when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel had gathered together at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines.

8 So the children of Israel said to Samuel, “Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines.”

9 And Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. Then Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him.

10 Now as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But the LORD thundered with a loud thunder upon the Philistines that day, and so confused them that they were overcome before Israel.

11 And the men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and drove them back as far as below Beth Car.

12 Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen, and called its name Ebenezer, saying, “Thus far the LORD has helped us.”

13 So the Philistines were subdued, and they did not come anymore into the territory of Israel. And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.

14 Then the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath, and Israel recovered its territory from the hands of the Philistines. Also there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.

15 And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.

SAMUEL THE JUDGE – R. 1882

1 SAMUEL 7:5-15

“Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.” – 1 Samuel 7:1

SAMUEL succeeded Eli as Judge in Israel, and was the last of the judges, the office of Judge being superseded by that of king. Chapter 12 contains his farewell address as judge, after he had anointed Saul to be king. But nevertheless it is written that “Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.” (Verse 15.) In a sense – in the estimation of the people – the office of judge was superseded by that of king, and Samuel’s term of office ended with Saul’s elevation to the throne. But in God’s reckoning he was a judge over and above the king to the end of his life; and in this capacity, under God’s direction, he anointed Saul as king, and later he anointed David to be Saul’s successor.

Prior to the events of this lesson Samuel had spent some years in endeavoring gradually to influence the public sentiment toward repentance and reformation; and finally he gathered them together at Mizpeh that there he might intercede with God on their behalf, and that they might there make a solemn confession of their sins to God and covenant afresh to walk in his ways. This solemn return of the nation to God was, in answer to the prayer of his faithful servant Samuel, followed by an immediate manifestation of the Lord’s acceptance and favor toward them in delivering them from the yoke of the Philistines.

In observing these remarkable providences on behalf of the nation of Israel, we should never lose sight of the fact that these special dealings with that nation were peculiar to them only; and that because they had come into covenant relationship with God. God’s care and favor were over that nation only, of all the nations of the earth. Even their national penalties for sin were marks of the divine favor; for God wisely disciplined them for their good – to purge them from sin, to correct them and keep them near himself. And this divine favor was never taken from them until, as a nation, they rejected and crucified the Son of God. Since that time they have had no favor. Nor will God’s favor return to them until, as Paul states, the fullness of the Gentiles shall have come into possession of the chief blessing, which time is now at hand.

In the interim the special favor of God has been shown to the spiritual seed of Abraham, the faithful overcoming saints of the Gospel age. As God led and disciplined and delivered and cared for his ancient people, so now he bestows the same attentions upon his faithful church, both collectively and individually. And how often we are similarly impelled by a sense of his care and love to sing –

“Here I’ll raise my Ebenezer, hither by thy help I’m come!”

We now are God’s covenant people: let us be faithful followers; “for, as many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the Sons of God.”

Samuel's Address After Israel Chooses a King

16 “Now therefore, stand and see this great thing which the LORD will do before your eyes:

17 “Is today not the wheat harvest? I will call to the LORD, and He will send thunder and rain, that you may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking a king for yourselves.”

18 So Samuel called to the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day, and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel.

19 And all the people said to Samuel, “Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins the evil of asking a king for ourselves.”

20 Then Samuel said to the people, “Do not fear. You have done all this wickedness, yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart.

21 “And do not turn aside, for then you would go after empty things which cannot profit or deliver, for they are nothing.

22 “For the LORD will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you His people.

23 “Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you, but I will teach you the good and the right way.

24 “Only fear the LORD, and serve Him in truth with all your heart, for consider what great things He has done for you.

25 “But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.”

1 Samuel 12:16-25

SAMUEL'S FAREWELL ADDRESS – R. 3222

1 SAMUEL 12:13-25

“Only fear the Lord and serve him in truth with all your hearts.”

SAMUEL the Prophet stands out on the pages of sacred history a very noble character – very similar in many respects to Moses. He had served the Lord and the people faithfully for a long period, and then, at the urgent request of the people and with God's assent, he had anointed Saul their king. The latter had been received rather half-heartedly, but the battle with the Ammonites and the great victory which the Lord granted to his people on that occasion united their hearts to him who had been the visible leader in that victory, and Samuel perceived that the right time had come for a public coronation of the king, and the formal transfer of allegiance to him as the Lord's representative in the temporal affairs of the nation. Accordingly, a general convocation of the people was called to meet at Gilgal – one of the several prominent places for public gatherings – one of the places at which Samuel was in the habit of holding court when, as a kind of supreme judge, he went at different seasons of the year to various parts of the territory of Israel to hear and to decide causes and differences which the elders of the tribes could not adjudicate satisfactorily.



Upon the assembling of the people, the prophet Samuel opened his address (vss. 1-5) by calling upon God and the people to witness to his own rectitude of character in all of his dealings with them for the many years in which he had served them; to his justice in seeking to decide their various questions righteously; to his honesty, in that he never received even the smallest bribe, nor permitted anything to vitiate his judgment; neither had he been an oppressor of his people, but had always sought their good. With united voice the people concurred in the excellence and purity of his administration – a wonderful tribute, one which would be almost inconceivable in our day, in which we find that even the best and noblest officials are sure to have enemies, traducers, backbiters, slanderers. We are not to suppose that Samuel was merely eulogizing his own administration, but are, rather, to attribute to such a noble character a nobler

object. He wished to make a lasting impression with this address and this transfer of authority to King Saul; and, to make his words more impressive and more effective in the interests of his successor and in the interests of the Lord's people, he impressed upon his hearers the fact that his entire life had been one of devotion, and that they might well understand that his words now were in full accord with all the course of his previous life. They would thus realize that he had their best interests at heart, that he was thoroughly loyal to the Lord, and that his example, as well as his advice, would be beneficial to them. Perhaps, too, he would thus set before the people a standard of what they might look for and hope for from their new king, and before the king a standard of the ideal after which he should pattern his rule.

Next, he called attention to God's faithfulness to them in the centuries past, from the time that he adopted them as his people and made a covenant with them through Moses and became their heavenly King. He recounted to the people the many deliverances which the Lord had wrought for them through various agents whom he had raised up. He would not wish them to think of the recent victory over the Ammonites as being the only one; but he desired that they recognize it, in common with all previous victories, as from the Lord, by whatsoever hand they were effected. He would have them discern that they exercised great ingratitude in forgetting that the Lord had all this time been their King, and in preferring an earthly king to the government he had established. Nevertheless, now that God had granted their request and given them an earthly king, they must not fail to recognize that he was only the representative of their real King, the heavenly One. Otherwise, their condition would be deplorable in every way. They had the king of their choice and God had set him over them: let the matter thus stand, and from this new standpoint they should go on to make the best of their condition; and to do this, would be to give close attention to the commandments of the Lord.

Obedience to the Lord would bring blessings both to the people and their king, and disobedience and rebellion or any measure of irreverence toward the Lord and his commandments would bring upon them divine disfavor and injury. Not that the Lord would vindictively render evil for evil, but the hand of the Lord would be against them in the same sense that the current of the river is against the persons who attempt to go contrary to it. Divine justice has its steady flow. It is irrepressible; it opposes anything that comes against it, and favors anything that goes in harmony with it. We can recognize something of this principle in various laws of nature; as, for instance, gravitation. Let us also recognize that the principles of divine government operate in a very similar manner. As fire burns the evil or the good when they come in contact with it, and as the law of gravitation operates in respect to all, whether good or bad, who come into the line of its influence, so the principles of divine justice operate automatically.

The correctness of the foregoing statement may be questioned by some, who may say that in the majority of cases justice does not seem to operate; that those who tempt God are set up, and those who work wickedness and deceit often prosper. We reply that in order to understand our position it must be remembered that God's government has never been established in the world except over the one nation of Israel; and, hence, only in that one nation should we expect to find the laws of retribution operating automatically. The Lord said of Israel, "You only have I known [recognized] of all the families of the earth." (Amos 3:2.) Again, the Apostle asks, "What advantage

hath the Jew?" and, answering, declares, "Much every way; chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God." God entered into obligations with Israel that if they, as a people, would obey his laws and keep his statutes, they would be blessed in proportion to their faithfulness and obedience; and if they should fail of obedience, they would be correspondingly punished; that he would permit to come upon them various chastisements – diseases, etc. – as the natural results of the violations of the principles of his government. But such an arrangement has not been made with other nations at any time in the world's history. With spiritual Israel God's blessings and chastisements are spiritual, and do not extend to temporal affairs. In proportion to their faithfulness they grow spiritually strong and beautiful; and in proportion to their unfaithfulness they grow spiritually weak and receive chastisements and lose divine favor. It is not true with the spiritual Israelite as it was with the natural Israelite, that by obeying the Lord he would be blessed temporally in all his undertakings. On the contrary, to the spiritual Israelite the Lord gives the express declaration and encouragement: "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall [in this life] suffer persecution"; "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you"; "Ye know that it hated me before it hated you"; "Blessed are ye when men shall say all manner of evil against you for my sake: rejoice and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven" – in spiritual things, not in temporal matters. – 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 John 3:13; John 15:18; Matt. 5:11,12.

When the Millennial Kingdom shall be established, and, in harmony with the petition of our Lord's prayer, God's Kingdom shall come, and his will be done on earth as in heaven – then the laws of righteousness will work automatically again, and "every transgression shall receive its just recompense of reward," and every proper endeavor will bring its meed of blessing and uplifting influence – restitution. The divine regulations operating toward fleshly Israel in the days of Samuel differ from those to operate toward the whole world in the Millennial age, in that the latter will have a greater prophet than Moses, a greater priest than Aaron, a greater king than Saul. The Lord's Anointed will include all the graces, powers and qualities represented in these types, but on a perfect scale and backed by divine wisdom, justice, love and power, and will put down all insubordination and permanently establish righteousness upon a proper basis throughout the world, eventually destroying all who will not come into accord with its principles.

Samuel proceeded to do a miracle before the people – to cause a thunder shower in the middle of harvest. In Palestine they have the early and the latter rains. The spring rains usually end in April, and the fall rains begin in October or November. A writer on the subject says, "In ordinary seasons, from the cessation of the showers in spring until their commencement in October or November, rain never falls, and the sky is usually serene." The wheat harvest which the prophet pointed out to them as just in order, must have been the first of June and, hence, nothing could have been further from the expectation of the people than a thunder-shower at that time. The bringing of it at the prophet's announcement, was to remind the people how completely their affairs and interests were in divine power. They were to discern that the recent victory need not have been theirs except as the Lord had been pleased to favor them and grant them the victory; and that simply by bringing unfavorable showers upon their harvest the entire fruitage of their labors of many months might be quickly spoiled and they be reduced to starvation, and in that way become more thoroughly subdued than by any foreign invasion. The prophet calls their attention to the wickedness of their course

in the rejection of God as their King, and to this power of God, which could easily be exercised did he wish to requite them according to their dealings with him.

The people saw the point. They discerned that if it were to rain a few days they would lose their all; they recognized that they were wholly in the power of God, and entreated Samuel to pray for them, confessing not only the wrongs they had done in seeking a king, but also their sins; “We have added unto our sins.”

As the Lord’s mouthpiece, the prophet assured the people that they need not fear God’s taking vengeance upon them, notwithstanding their wrong course. On the contrary, they should more fully than ever determine to turn to the Lord whole-heartedly, and let their mistake and the trials and difficulties that would come to them as a result of it prove a blessing to them in drawing their hearts nearer and nearer to the Lord, their true King, who never sought anything but their highest welfare. So it should be with us. If at any time we find that we have taken a wrong course which is irretrievable, we may expect it to bring the disappointments as the Lord foretold; but he may permit it to bring, as well, some blessings in the way of contrition of heart, and humility toward the Lord, and greater zeal, watchfulness and faithfulness for the future. Thus, even some of the blunders of life may become stepping-stones to higher planes of grace and truth.

The sentiment of verse 22 is very beautiful, and, doubtless, was very encouraging to the Israelites in assuring them of God’s continued love and favor toward them because of his having adopted them as his people. Applying this verse to spiritual Israel, we may take great comfort from it, too. If it was a favor to natural Israel to be adopted as the Lord’s peculiar people, as the house of servants, how much greater is the blessing to spiritual Israel, adopted of the Lord as the house of sons under the chief Son, Jesus; “whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end!” (Heb. 3:6.) It is well that the Lord’s people be called upon to fear, to reverence, the Lord; but if the Scriptures were entirely made up of commands and reproofs, the Lord’s people would all surely have been discouraged long ago. On the contrary, with the reproofs and corrections, the Lord gives us very precious testimonies respecting his love and mercy, his goodness and long-suffering kindness, to encourage us. All the members of the body of Christ laboring against the course of this world and against public opinion and against the weaknesses of their own flesh and against the great adversary Satan, need spiritual encouragement – assurances that the Lord is for them. The Apostle points this out, saying, “If God be for us who can be against us?” – what will all the opposition against us amount to if God be on our side? He again encourages us with precious words, reminding us of the unchangeableness of God and of the fact that he has already done great things for us and is preparing to do still greater things. If while we were yet sinners Christ died for the ungodly, much more shall his favor be with us now that we are adopted into his family and are seeking to walk in his ways as members of the body of Christ.

The grandeur of the Prophet’s character shines out in the twenty-third verse again: he seems to have none of the petty animosities which some smaller creatures might have under the circumstances, and was a patriot to the core of his heart, as well as a faithful representative and ambassador of the Lord and mediator of his people. He says, practically: “Nothing that you have done toward me – rejecting me in choosing King Saul – shall in any manner or degree hinder my love for you and my prayers on

your behalf. God forbid that it should! I should consider this a sin against the Lord who has placed me as a kind of representative of him to you, and of you to him; and I certainly would be failing of my duty and privilege did I neglect this important office of mediator. You may rely upon it that I not only will refrain from pleading against you with the Lord, but that I will petition him on your behalf.”

The nobility of Samuel’s course may well be copied by the Lord’s people under various circumstances in life. When those who are near and dear to us flag in their love and devotion, they need all the more our sympathy and our prayers; and, as our dear Master showed us, even our enemies are to be prayed for and have our good wishes – that the Lord would grant them in his providence such opening of understanding, such experiences as in divine wisdom would be for their highest welfare to bring them into full accord with himself, and thus back into harmony with us and all who are in harmony with him. The prophet indicates that, although he was ceasing to be their judge and ruler, he would not cease to be their instructor in the good and right way so long as the Lord’s providences might permit him to serve them, and so long as they would accept his aid.

Recurring, however, to the principal point of his instructions, he points out that reverence for the Lord, serving him in truth with all their heart, was not only a proper course, but a course which would bring them the Lord’s blessing. And as a help to our flagging zeal, we should continually remind ourselves of the Lord’s great blessings to us. As we learn to appreciate the goodness of the Lord, if rightly disposed at all, the influences will be to strengthen us and to make us more and more loyal to him. Failing to seek with our whole heart the Lord’s service after we have become his people and entered into covenant relationship with him, receiving of his favors and blessings in this life, and also, by promise, in the life to come, would mean wickedness which, persevered in, will surely bring destruction. Faithfulness to God should be the keynote of all our desires. “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.” – Psa. 19:14.

DAVID

Psalm 19

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

- 1 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork.
- 2 Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge.
- 3 There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.
- 4 Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun,
- 5 which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoices like a strong man to run its race.
- 6 Its rising is from one end of heaven, and its circuit to the other end, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.
- 7 The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul. The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.
- 8 The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.
- 9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever. The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
- 10 More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold. Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
- 11 Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward.
- 12 Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults.
- 13 Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins. Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression.
- 14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.

ACCEPTABLE TO GOD – R. 1296

APRIL, 1891

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.” – Psalm 19:14

How beautiful in the sight of right-thinking men is a well balanced, self-possessed and disciplined character; and in contrast with such, how unlovely are the undisciplined and ungoverned – the selfish, the unjust, the unkind and the violent-tempered. Naturally, the one awakens in us emotions of pleasure and admiration, and the other, of pain. And if such is the appreciation of virtue and the abhorrence of the lack of it among men who have lost much of the original image of God, with what a keen appreciation must they be observed by a pure and holy God.

Men of the world, who have no personal acquaintance with God, have no special thought as to how they appear in his sight; but with what carefulness should those who love him and who value his approval study to conform their conduct to his pure and holy mind. True, all the justified and consecrated, notwithstanding their imperfections and short-comings through inherited weaknesses, are acceptable to God through Christ, whose robe of righteousness amply covers us; but the measure of our acceptableness to God, even through Christ, is only to the extent that, while availing ourselves of his imputed righteousness, we are earnestly striving to attain actually to the standard of perfection. By so doing we manifest our actual appreciation of the divine favor. With what confusion and chagrin would one be covered who, in the midst of a fit of violent temper, or an unjust or mean transaction unworthy of his dignity or his profession, should be suddenly surprised by the unexpected appearance of a beloved friend of high and noble character. And yet the eye of such a one is ever upon us. And only to the extent that we dismiss this thought from our minds, or else that we undervalue the Lord’s opinion and approval, can we allow the evil propensities of the fallen nature to run riot.

Realizing the downward tendency of the old nature, how constantly should the above prayer of the Psalmist be in the minds of God’s consecrated children. But how, one inquires, may the difficult task of subduing the inherent depravity be accomplished? It is hard for one, particularly under exasperating circumstances, to control a hasty or violent temper, for another to bridle a gossiping tongue; and especially when the trials of life have put their colored glasses on the eyes and slightly soured the disposition. It is hard for another to be strictly just in his dealings with his fellow-men. And then what a host of inherent weaknesses there are, which every one realizes and knows that he must strive against, if he would be acceptable with God. The thoughts of our hearts are not manifest to fellow-men until we express them in words or actions; but even the very thoughts and intents of the hearts are all open and manifest to God. What a comfort to the honest-hearted!

The Psalmist repeats this inquiry, saying, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” and then replies, “By taking heed thereto, according to thy Word.” And then he frames for us this resolution: “I will meditate on thy precepts and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.” (Psa.

119:9,15,16.) Here is the secret of a pure and noble life, acceptable to God. It is to be attained, not merely by prayers and righteous resolutions, but in addition to these, by careful, painstaking **heed**, by systematic and diligent effort at self-cultivation, by the careful and persevering weeding out of evil thoughts and the diligent and constant cultivation of pure, benevolent and noble thoughts, and by nipping in the bud the weeds of perversity before they bring forth their hasty harvest of sinful words and deeds.

But observe, further, that this heed or care is to be taken, not according to the imperfect standard of our own judgment, but according to God's Word. The standard by which we test our lives makes a vast difference in our conclusions. The Psalmist further commends this standard to us, saying: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." [That is, if we take heed to our ways according to God's law, it will turn us completely from the path of sin to the path of righteousness.] The testimony [the instruction] of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple [the meek, teachable ones – clearly pointing out to them the ways of righteousness]. The statutes [the decrees, ordinances and precepts] of the Lord are right [the infallible rules of righteousness], rejoicing the heart [of the obedient]. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean [not a menial, servile fear, but a noble fear, begotten of love – a fear of falling short of his righteous approval], enduring forever. More to be desired are they [the law and the testimony of the Lord] than gold; yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb. Moreover, by them is thy servant warned [concerning the dangers of the way and the snares of the adversary, and concerning everything which is calculated to discourage, or to hinder his growth in grace], and in keeping of them there is **great reward**."

"Who [in the use merely of his own fallible judgment and without the standard of God's law] can understand his errors [can rightly judge himself]?" But when, as we measure ourselves by this standard, we detect and deplore our short-comings, let us remember the Psalmist's prayer: "Cleanse thou me from secret faults" – thus supplementing our efforts by our prayers.

But there is still another part of this prayer which the Lord thus puts into our mouths. It reads: "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." Let us consider what kind of sins would be presumptuous sins. To presume signifies to take for granted without authority or proof. A presumptuous sin would therefore be taking for granted and asserting as truth something which God has not revealed, or the perversion of what he has revealed. To claim and hold tenaciously as a part of God's plan any doctrine, merely on the ground of fallible human reason and without divine authority, would therefore be a presumptuous sin. Of this nature is the sin of those who malign the divine character by boldly teaching the blasphemous doctrine of eternal torment without warrant from the Scriptures, and in direct contradiction of them. And there are many other sins of greater and less degree which partake of the same character. But the words here seem to refer directly to some particular error into which there is danger of drifting – "Then shall I be innocent from **the great transgression**" – evidently, **the sin unto death** referred to by the apostles also (1 John 5:16; Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-31). Such a sin would be that of presuming upon the love of God to bring us salvation, even though we should wilfully refuse it through the channel

which he has appointed – the precious blood of Christ, shed for our redemption.

Well indeed may we pray and strive to be kept back from presumptuous sins – sins of pride and of arrogant self-will which does not meekly submit to the will of God. Let us, beloved, beware of the slightest tendency toward pride and self-will, or the disposition to be wise above what is written, or to take for granted what God does not clearly promise. “Then,” indeed, if we watch and strive against the very beginning of that proud and haughty spirit which surely presages a fall, we shall be “innocent from the great transgression.”

“Blessed is the man whose *delight* is in the law of the Lord, and who doth meditate therein day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.” (Psa. 1:1-3.) If we make the Word of God the theme of our constant meditation, its principles will soon be assimilated and become part of our mental make up, making our characters more beautiful and commendable both to God and to our fellow men; and in harmony with this habit of the mind the acts of life will speak. The purified fountain will send forth sweeter waters than formerly, bearing refreshment and good cheer to all who come in contact with it. It will make happier homes – better husbands, better wives and better children. It will sweeten the temper, soften the voice; dignify the language, cultivate the manners, ennoble the sentiments and lend its charming grace to every simple duty. It will bring in the principle of love and cast out the discordant elements of selfishness. Thus it will make the home the very garden-spot of earth, where every virtue and every grace will have ample room to expand and grow.

It will not only thus favorably affect the individual and the home-life, but it will go out into the avenues of trade, and truth and fair-dealing will characterize all the business relations; and thus will God be honored by those who bear his name and wear the impress of his blessed spirit.

While the heights of perfection cannot be reached so long as we still have these imperfect bodies, there should be in every child of God a very perceptible and continuous growth in grace, and each step gained should be considered but the stepping-stone to higher attainments. If there is no perceptible growth into the likeness of God, or if there is a backward tendency, or a listless stand-still, there is cause for alarm. Let us constantly keep before our eyes the model which the Lord Jesus set for our example – that model of the complete fulfillment of the will of God, in which the whole law was kept blamelessly. Let us follow his steps of righteousness and self-sacrifice as nearly as a full measure of loving zeal and faithfulness and loyalty to God will enable us to do, and we shall have a blessed sense of the divine approval now and the glorious reward of divine favor in due time.

1 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful, 2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither, and whatever he does shall prosper.

Psalm 1:1-3

PSALM 51

A Prayer of Repentance

1 To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness. According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.

4 Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge.

5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.

6 Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice.

9 Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

11 Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.

13 Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You.

14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.

15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise.

16 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it. You do not delight in burnt offering.

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise.

18 Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion. Build the walls of Jerusalem.

19 Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering. Then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.

THE PRAYER OF THE PENITENT – R. 1396

PSALM 51:1-13

“Create in me a new heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

This draws our attention to the darkest stain upon the history of the Prophet David – the matter of the murder of Uriah and the taking of his wife. Skeptics are wont to point to that great, double sin and to sneer: “And that was the ‘man after God’s own heart,’ according to the Bible’s grand standard of morality.” But the fact is that it was when David was a young shepherd just coming to manhood that he was after God’s own heart. And yet in connection with this very matter of this, David’s greatest sin, there is something which shows forth his better character which was “after God’s heart:” and this is brought before us by this lesson. The commendable features are:

(1) He did not attempt to justify his course by saying that all the kings around about did such things and worse, and that it was generally conceded by their subjects that a king had a right to do as he pleased;

(2) he not only did not deny the wrong, but he did not even try to see what he could say in self-defense; he did not plead his peculiar temptation nor that it was above that of others, from the power he exercised as king; but he confessed fully and heartily in such a manner as convinces all that his *heart* was really better than his evil conduct had seemed to indicate. We have no right to condone David’s crimes, but we have the privilege of noting those other qualities in him which to some extent were an offset to his weaknesses.

And it is well, too, that the Bible attests its own truthfulness in thus faithfully preserving the record of the sins of its great characters alongside the records of their faith and service. Of no other book which stands as the foundation of a religion is this true. Others tell only the good and leave the evil untold; but the Bible tells of the weaknesses of its greatest heroes except our Lord Jesus: of Paul’s persecutions; of Peter’s denial and blasphemy; of David’s sins; of Abraham’s errors, etc.

Yet this, which worldly wisdom would consider a serious drawback, God saw to be the proper thing; and many of God’s people have been greatly blessed by these very records of human weakness and sin. They but corroborate God’s testimony that *all* have sinned; that there is *none* righteous; that *all* need the grace of God to forgive the past and to lift them out of the miry pit of sin and its consequences. And many a sinner has thus been taught to have hope toward God for forgiveness and to realize that God who offers him his grace has had compassion upon others who were out of the way when they turned to him with true repentance.

Verses 1-3. “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is continually before me.”

David thus plead for mercy; and although he realized finally that God’s favor was

restored to him, he knew nothing of the real philosophy of the matter – **how** God could be just and yet be the justifier of those whose sins merited wrath. Ah, yes! the standpoint of the sons of God, during this Gospel age, is much more blessed. Our Father in heaven not only tells us of our forgiveness and reconciliation to his favor, but he gives us the particulars so that we may see **how** he has done it without sanctioning our sins or excusing them and without violating his own just law on the subject. He shows us that Christ our Lord was the Lamb of God whose death as our substitute and sin offering taketh away the sins of the world; that by his stripes pardon and healing may be granted to whosoever accepts the grace offered through him. Indeed, David's sins were not blotted out nor forgiven; for although the Lord restored to him divine favor and communion, he punished him severely for his sin, as he had foretold by Nathan the Prophet (2 Sam. 12:11,12), Absalom's rebellion being the means employed.

True, the penalty exacted was not the **full** penalty of sin, for that would have been lasting death. God showed mercy on David (as to all Jews under the Law Covenant established upon the basis of the typical sacrifices) in that he made allowance for his fallen condition and hence punished his sin, not with everlasting death, but with trouble, etc., in connection with Absalom's rebellion, as above stated.

And as with David and others under the typical Law Covenant, so, too, it is with God's children under the New Covenant in Christ. The death of Christ as our **ransom-price** cancels the original sin of Adam, and also such portion or degree of our sins and shortcomings as are **involuntary** and contrary to our real sentiments. But whatever proportion of a sin is wilful, designed and agreed to by us, has a penalty attached to be inflicted in either the present or the future life. And in the case of all who shall be members in the Anointed body, God declares that such sins shall be punished in the present life – saying through the Apostle "Some men's sins go before to judgment [during the present life], others they follow after" into the next life, when some shall be beaten with many and some with a few stripes. And again it is specified that in the cases of all accounted worthy to be of the glorified Church, they are chastened now in order that they may not have part with the world in the condemnation (trial) of the world in the next age. – 1 Tim. 5:24; Luke 12:48; 1 Cor. 11:32.

Verses 4 and 5. David's confession here is to God – the wronged Uriah was dead. Anyway, in that day it was esteemed a king's privilege to have the bodies and lives of his people subject to his will; and doubtless other kings habitually did as bad. But David had been enlightened and knew better, and although his offenses would have been lightly passed over by others, David realized his guilt before God and besought his mercy. He confessed his sin that others might know, when the chastisements of the Lord should come, that God's judgments and the king's troubles were just punishments and not violations of God's covenant promises.

Verses 5-12. After confessing in verse 5 his original sin – his impairment through the fall – he shows in verse 6 his clear appreciation of the divine plan. Although fallen and weak in the flesh, and therefore unable to do perfectly, God looks for and demands purity of **heart** (purity of motive or intention) and this David realized he had not manifested. Hence his prayer in succeeding verses is not that the Lord shall excuse him in sin, but that his heart may be cleansed and brought into harmony with God's character and plan. Alas! how strange that some living under the still clearer light of

the Gospel dispensation fail to see what David so clearly expresses, and instead some even charge God with inspiring and causing all sin and crime and wickedness. But David was right, and these would-be wise ones have become darkened and foolish in their vain imaginations.

Verse 13. What a grand principle is here set forth. It is eminently proper that those who would be used of the Lord as teachers to instruct transgressors, whether in this or the coming age, should be fully consecrated to God – clean – pure in heart. And the only way to get to this condition is to lay hold by faith upon the merits of the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, and to have our sins blotted out by him, and then, too, to be renewed in spirit, sanctified through the truth.



KING DAVID’S REPENTANCE

Excerpt from R. 3253

The **14th verse** repeats the same thought in a different form. If the Lord will deliver him from his **guilt** in connection with his sin, his tongue shall thereafter sing loudly the Lord’s righteousness – not David’s righteousness. This is the song that all the blood-washed may sing, “True and righteous are all thy ways, Lord God Almighty. Thou hast redeemed us from amongst men.” None of us have any right to sing our own righteousness, for as the Apostle declares, “There is none righteous, no, not one.” The mission of the cleansed ones is to accept and use the Lord’s mercy towards them, to extol his righteousness, to acknowledge their unworthiness and to call upon others to recognize this fountain of righteousness and forgiveness.



David's Prayer, 1886

“O Lord, open thou my lips: and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.” This expression implies that none need expect to have a proper opening of their mouths to show forth

the Lord's praises, and give the call from darkness into his marvelous light, unless the Lord shall first have opened their lips with his mercy and truth; for otherwise how could any expect to tell the glad tidings of great joy which shall be unto all people? This equally implies that all who have had forgiveness of sins should be in a condition of spirit to make a full consecration of their all to the Lord, and then all such should expect an unsealing of their lips, that the message of God's truth and grace may flow out from them for the instruction and blessing of others – as it is written, "Grace is poured upon thy lips." "Thou hast put a new song in my mouth, even the loving-kindness of our God." While these are appropriate specially to our dear Redeemer, they are appropriate also to every member of "the Church which is his **body**," and all claiming to be of "the body," who have never had their lips unsealed to confess the Lord to the extent of their opportunity, have reason to question everything pertaining to their relationship to the Lord.

In **verses 16 and 17** the King shows that he had acquired a deep insight into the meaning of some of the typical sacrifices; – though probably, by inspiration, he wrote more wisely than he understood. As we have seen in our study of Tabernacle Shadows of Better Sacrifices, only the Day of Atonement sacrifices were sin offerings, the burnt offerings and peace offerings of the remainder of the year representing the consecration to the Lord and his service. Grasping this thought prophetically, to whatever extent he also grasped it intellectually, King David expressed his realization that the Lord is pleased rather with a broken and contrite condition of heart than with burnt offerings, which were but types. So, too, we learn that nothing that we can give the Lord, even after our acceptance in Christ, has any value in his sight until first of all we have given him ourselves, – our hearts, our wills.

Let us ever keep in memory that a broken and contrite heart the Lord never despises, will never spurn. Therefore into whatever difficulty any of the Lord's people of the New Creation may stumble, if they find themselves hungering for the Lord's fellowship and forgiveness, if they find their hearts contrite and broken, let them not despair, but remember that God has made a provision through the merit of Christ which enables him to accept and justify freely from all sin all that come unto him through Jesus – through faith in his blood. There is a sin unto death – a sin unto the Second Death – from which there will be no recovery, no resurrection; but those who have broken and contrite hearts on account of their sins may know that they have not committed "the sin unto death," for their condition of heart proves this, as the Apostle declares: "It is impossible to renew again unto repentance" any who have committed the sin unto death – willful sinners against full light and knowledge. Let all, therefore, rejoice in the grace of our God, who is able through Christ, his accepted way, to save unto the uttermost all who come to him, laying aside sin and its desires.

"Now, if any man [of the Church stumble into] sin [through weakness and temptation – not intentionally] we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." (1 John 2:1.) Such, therefore, may come with faith to the throne of the heavenly grace that they may obtain mercy and find grace to help in every (future) time of need. (Heb. 4:16.) But, like David, their prayers and hopes should be for a restoration of divine favor and not for escape from chastisements needful to their correction. God forgave David, but also chastened him. – 2 Sam. 12:11-14.

Surely King David must have learned a great lesson in mercy from this sad experience. How many times must he have called to mind his response to Nathan's parable, "The man that hath done this thing is worthy of death: and he shall restore the lamb four fold, because he did this thing and because he had no pity!" Alas, poor David! these words showed that he had a mind, a heart, that was no stranger to justice and pity in other men's affairs, and hence that he was the more guilty in his much more serious violations of justice and compassion. "Blessed is he that is not condemned in that which he alloweth," – who is not condemned by his own declarations in respect to the affairs of others. Oh, how merciful to the failings of others it should make us when we remember our dear Redeemer's words, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses"; and when again we remember that we may not even pray for forgiveness of our sins unless we from the heart forgive those who have injured us and again desire our fellowship.

THE PSALM OF REPENTANCE

Excerpt from R. 5681

The important lesson here is that we shall keep close accounts with God. No child of God should go forth in the morning without an earnest petition to Him for Divine supervision of his affairs and for help to walk in the right path. No child of God should retire at night without a retrospective glance on all the day's pathway, to discern to what extent it has been a profitable one and has brought him a day's march nearer the Heavenly Home. Or, if perchance something has occurred of which he should feel ashamed, it is none too soon to go at once to the Throne of Heavenly Grace to obtain mercy and find fresh help for future times of need.

The child of God thus keeping daily accounts with the Father and with the Redeemer, will abide in Their love and not be in danger of falling into any such great sins as these noted in this lesson. Even King David, we may be sure, would have fallen into no such sins had he not allowed gradually to arise earth-born clouds of fleshly hues between the Lord and himself.

"Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free Spirit. Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto Thee."

Although the Holy Spirit was not given to the Ancient Worthies in the same sense that it is given to the Church, it was nevertheless the manifestation of God's favor toward them in their affairs, as the king here intimates. We are to remember that from Moses down to John the Baptist, according to the Scriptures, there was a House of Servants under Moses; but that during this Gospel Age there is a House of Sons, begotten of the Holy Spirit, under the chief Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. – Hebrews 3:5,6.

PSALM 32

A Psalm of David. A Contemplation.

- 1 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.
- 2 Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
- 3 When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long.
- 4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me. My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah
- 5 I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah
- 6 For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You in a time when You may be found. Surely in a flood of great waters they shall not come near him.
- 7 You are my hiding place. You shall preserve me from trouble. You shall surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah
- 8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will guide you with My eye.
- 9 Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you.
- 10 Many sorrows shall be to the wicked, but he who trusts in the LORD, mercy shall surround him.
- 11 Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

In **Psalm 51** David makes public confession of his sin and of God's mercy in forgiveness. In **Psalm 32** he gratefully records the blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile – no deceit, no hypocrisy, but all of whose doings are open and transparent, and manifestly wrought in righteousness. Here he declares, "I acknowledge my sin," and he testifies to the Lord's forgiveness (vs. 5); and for this divine forgiveness he exhorts all sinners to pray to God in a time when he may be found (vs. 6); i.e., before their hearts become calloused and set in an evil course.

Then, even in the midst of the troubles consequent upon his sin, which he meekly and patiently bore, David learned by faith to rejoice in the Lord, saying, "Thou art my hiding place: thou wilt preserve me from trouble, thou wilt compass me about with songs of deliverance;" for he will not suffer any tribulation to overwhelm his trusting saints upon whom he has set the seal of his pardoning love.

Then David voices the Lord's sentiments toward all his trusting obedient children thus, as though the Lord were answering back to his expressions of humble confidence and trust, saying, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will counsel thee, mine eye shall be upon thee [margin]. Be not as the horse or the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, else they will not come near unto thee" – [R.V.] will not submit to control.

"Many sorrows shall be to the wicked [as long as they remain wicked. David had proved that by sad experience – vss. 3,4.]; but he that trusteth in the Lord [which necessitates also the departing from iniquity], mercy shall compass him about." Therefore, said the confident faith of this repentant one to whom had been restored the joys of salvation, "Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, ye righteous; and shout for joy all ye that are upright in heart."

If God thus restored to his penitent and believing servant the joys of his salvation, and made the bones which he had broken to rejoice (Psa. 51:8); if he created in him a clean heart, and renewed a right spirit within him (Psa. 51:8,10), who then shall lay any thing to the charge of his beloved? As freely as God forgave, so must all his people; and therefore we rejoice to recognize David as one of the ancient worthies – worthy of our love, our confidence and a noble example for our imitation of the many graces that adorned his character. And in nothing did the king give us a more worthy example than in the victory over himself to which attention has just been called. Especially in considering his exalted station, his prominence before the nation, the deeply disgraceful crimes of which he was guilty, the acknowledgment of which would be so humiliating, and the consequent loss of esteem and confidence he must expect from the whole nation, and the appreciation which he doubtless had of the esteem he had so worthily held for so many years, and the keen sense of the disgrace which such a nature must have when brought again to his sober senses – when we consider all these things, the victory gained by David over himself in humbling himself and repenting, is one of the greatest and grandest achievements on the pages of history; and his course is one to be commended to every child of God who realizes that he has to any degree departed from the right ways of the Lord. R. 2016

2 Samuel 22:1-51

David's Prayer of Praise to the LORD

(also found in Psalm 18:1-50)



David praising God

1 Then David spoke to the LORD the words of this song, on the day when the LORD had delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul.

2 And he said:

“The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,

3 the God of my strength, in whom I will trust, my shield and the horn of my salvation, My stronghold and my refuge, my Savior. You save me from violence.

4 I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised. So shall I be saved from my enemies.

5 “When the waves of death surrounded me, the floods of ungodliness made me afraid.

6 The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me. The snares of death confronted me.

7 In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried out to my God. He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry entered His ears.

8 “Then the earth shook and trembled. The foundations of heaven quaked and were shaken, because He was angry.

9 Smoke went up from His nostrils, and devouring fire from His mouth.
Coals were kindled by it.

10 He bowed the heavens also, and came down with darkness under His feet.

11 He rode upon a cherub, and flew, and He was seen upon the wings of the wind.

12 He made darkness canopies around Him, dark waters and thick clouds of the skies.

13 From the brightness before Him coals of fire were kindled.

14 “The LORD thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice.

15 He sent out arrows and scattered them, lightning bolts, and He vanquished them.

16 Then the channels of the sea were seen, the foundations of the world were uncovered, at the rebuke of the LORD, at the blast of the breath of His nostrils.

17 “He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters.

18 He delivered me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me, for they were too strong for me.

19 They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the LORD was my support.

20 He also brought me out into a broad place. He delivered me because He delighted in me.

21 “The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness. According to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me.

22 For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God.

23 For all His judgments were before me, and as for His statutes, I did not depart from them.

24 I was also blameless before Him, and I kept myself from my iniquity.

25 Therefore the LORD has recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness in His eyes.

26 “With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful. With a blameless man You will show Yourself blameless.

27 With the pure You will show Yourself pure, and with the devious You will show Yourself shrewd.

28 You will save the humble people, but Your eyes are on the haughty, that You may bring them down.

29 “For You are my lamp, O LORD. The LORD shall enlighten my darkness.

30 For by You I can run against a troop. By my God I can leap over a wall.

31 As for God, His way is perfect. The word of the LORD is proven. He is a shield to all who trust in Him.

32 “For who is God, except the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God?

33 God is my strength and power, and He makes my way perfect.

34 He makes my feet like the feet of deer, and sets me on my high places.

35 He teaches my hands to make war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.

36 “You have also given me the shield of Your salvation. Your gentleness has made me great.

37 You enlarged my path under me so my feet did not slip.

38 “I have pursued my enemies and destroyed them. Neither did I turn back again till they were destroyed.

39 And I have destroyed them and wounded them, so that they could not rise. They have fallen under my feet.

40 For You have armed me with strength for the battle. You have subdued under me those who rose against me.

41 You have also given me the necks of my enemies, so that I destroyed those who hated me.

42 They looked, but there was none to save, even to the LORD, but He did not answer them.

43 Then I beat them as fine as the dust of the earth. I trod them like dirt in the streets, and I spread them out.

44 “You have also delivered me from the strivings of my people. You have kept me as the head of the nations. A people I have not known shall serve me.

45 The foreigners submit to me. As soon as they hear, they obey me.

46 The foreigners fade away, and come frightened from their hideouts.

47 “The LORD lives! Blessed be my Rock! Let God be exalted, the Rock of my salvation!

48 It is God who avenges me, and subdues the peoples under me.

49 He delivers me from my enemies. You also lift me up above those who rise against me. You have delivered me from the violent man.

50 Therefore I will give thanks to You, O LORD, among the Gentiles, and sing praises to Your name.

51 “He is the tower of salvation to His king, and shows mercy to His anointed, to David and his descendants forevermore.”

DAVID’S GRATITUDE TO GOD – R. 2031

2 SAMUEL 22:40-51

“The Lord is my rock and my fortress, and my deliverer.” – 2 Samuel 22:2

THIS entire chapter is one of David’s songs of praise and gratitude to God for his goodness and his loving providences which had been so manifest toward him ever since his anointing by Samuel the prophet, and doubtless before that as well. It calls to mind another expression of one of his psalms, – “Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous; for praise is comely for the upright.” (Psa. 33:1.) Indeed, the writings of David, and all the prophets and apostles as well, abound in fervent expressions of praise and thanksgiving to God. They not only praise the Lord themselves, lovingly and gratefully recounting all his mercies, but, with impassioned eloquence and holy enthusiasm, they call upon all the sons of men, and every thing that hath breath, and even inanimate nature, to laud and magnify his holy name. The worshippers are also bidden to bring with them to the concert of praise every musical instrument of human device; and grateful reverence exclaims, – “Blessed be his glorious name forever, and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen!” – Psa. 33:2,3; 50:1-6; 72:19. See also Exod. 15:1-21.

As we thus consider that, by the voice of inspiration, the whole human race is called to praise and worship and thanksgiving, we are led to consider further the relationship which the spirit of praise has to the Christian or godly character. David says, it is “comely for the upright.” But why so? It is because loving gratitude is one of the divinely implanted instincts of a soul bearing the image of God, and one which should therefore be cultivated. It is this element of the intelligent creature that is designed to be responsive to the divine goodness and benevolence; and it is this element of character in man which makes fellowship and communion with God possible. If the goodness of God could awaken in us no sense of grateful appreciation; if we were wholly dead to such sentiments, there could be no pleasure on God’s part in manifesting his goodness to us, and there would be nothing in us to call out his love; and so also nothing, of all his goodness and grace, would awaken love in us. But since for the divine pleasure we are and were created (Rev. 4:11), God endowed his intelligent creature with this element of character which, being responsive to his own goodness, institutes a lively and delightful fellowship with himself, which is the chief end of human existence, both on the side of the creature and of the Creator. – Psa. 16:11; Prov. 11:20; 15:8.

Rejoicing and the spirit of praise are thus seen to be indissolubly linked together in the divine economy; and so David links them, saying, “Rejoice in the Lord, for praise is comely,” thus making the two almost synonymous. To see this principle illustrated take as examples the dog and the hog. Neither can have any appreciation of the divine goodness, neither being created in the mental or moral likeness of God, and hence being utterly incapable of knowing or thinking of him. Man is the highest being that they can know in any sense or degree; and that is first, because man is visible and tangible to them, and second, because they have some similar faculties, though very inferior and exercised within a much narrower sphere. The dog has in him to a considerable degree the sense of gratitude: feed and caress him, and he shows signs of gratitude and affection, and a desire to reward you with a manifestation of appreciation. He

wags his tail, looks kindly into your face, licks your hand, caresses you with his head and watches to see what errand he can do for you. But the hog, on the contrary, makes no demonstration of appreciation: he takes all he can get without even so much as a look of recognition; his eyes are always downward, and his snout continually rooting in the earth for more; and a grunt is the only sound to which he gives expression. A hog, therefore, can have no pleasure in man; nor can man find any pleasure in the hog. There is no bond of fellowship whatever, and man therefore tolerates his existence only until his flesh is fit for the slaughter and the market, while between the dog and his master there is strong friendship which, when cultivated, gives pleasure to both, and they become life-long friends, irrespective of any commercial value.

It is plain, therefore, that in the cultivation of the spirit of praise, thanksgiving and loving appreciation of all the manifest goodness of God, is the Christian's secret of a happy life. And in order to the cultivation of such a spirit it is necessary that we continually call to mind his acts of mercy and of grace; that in our prayers we frequently tell him how all his goodness is remembered, how every fresh evidence of his love and care causes faith to take deeper root and makes the sense of his presence and favor more fully realized; and how through such experiences our love and joy are made to abound more and more. We love him because he first loved us; and every time we see some new mark of his love, our love, if we have truly appreciative hearts, is called out more and more, and we are made to rejoice in God, in whose presence is fulness of joy. It is to this end that our Lord encourages our frequent coming to God in prayer with large requests for his favor, saying, "Ask, and ye shall receive, **that your joy may be full.**" – John 16:24.

We observe that in Israel the spirit of praise was cultivated by calling to mind and recounting what the Lord had done for them. "If I do not remember thee," says David, "let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth." – Psa. 137:6. See also Exod. 15:1-21; Deut. 7:17,18; 8:2; 15:15; 32:7; 1 Chron. 16:12; Psa. 20:7; 63:5-7; 143:5,6; 77:10-12.

*I remember the days of old. I meditate on all Your works. I muse on the
work of Your hands. I spread out my hands to You.
My soul longs for You like a thirsty land.
Psa. 143:5-6*

So must the Christian continually call to mind the works of the Lord, especially his own individual experience of the Lord's leading and care and deliverances from dangers and snares and the wiles of the adversary. If we keep these things in mind and meditate upon them, our appreciation of God and his goodness grows, and the spirit of love and praise takes possession of the heart, and thus we are made to rejoice in the Lord always, and in everything to give thanks. So also the soul is made to hunger and thirst after God and to realize that God alone is its satisfying portion, and to desire more and more of his fulness. Thus, as the Psalmist suggests, our prayer will be, "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." – Psa. 42:1.

This same principle of gratitude and praise, which reciprocates loving kindness and generosity, is that which also makes human friendship and fellowship possible and delightful. In our intercourse one with another, if the kindnesses we show awaken no

sense of appreciation, receive no acknowledgment, and their repetition is expected as a matter of course, there can, in the very nature of things, be no such thing as fellowship. True, as Christians, we may not relax kindness and generosity on this account; for we, like our heavenly Father, are to be kind to the unthankful as well as to the thankful (Matt. 5:44-48); but when this goodness awakens no appreciation, no love, fellowship becomes impossible.

In David's thanksgiving for victories over his enemies we observe that those enemies were the enemies of the Lord and his people, whom David was commissioned of God to conquer. These battles he undertook in the strength which God supplied, and the victories he properly ascribes to God, the rock of his salvation. The words, regarded from the standpoint of the future, are also prophetic of the victories of Christ, of whom David was a type, and to whom Jehovah will grant victory full and complete over all his enemies, – the enemies of God, the enemies of truth and righteousness. The whole strain of thanksgiving, thus viewed in its wider application to the conquests of Christ, is eloquent in its prophecy of his glorious victory, as well as in praise to Jehovah. (1 Cor. 15:27,28.) The prophecy of a future wider dominion, contained in verses 44-46 can only be considered as fully applicable to the wider dominion of Christ.

The Golden Text is a blessed assurance applicable to all of the Lord's people, and it is amply verified to all those who delight themselves in the Lord, who meditate upon his goodness and render to him the praise that is due to his holy name. – "The Lord is my rock [upon which I may safely build my hopes], and my fortress [in which I may safely hide], and my deliverer [in every time of trouble]."

1 A Psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah.

*O God, You are my God. Early will I seek You.
My soul thirsts for You. My flesh longs for You in a dry and
thirsty land where there is no water. 2 So I have looked for
You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory.
3 Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall
praise You. 4 Thus I will bless You while I live. I will lift up my
hands in Your name. 5 My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow
and fatness, and my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips. 6
When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night
watches. 7 Because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow
of Your wings I will rejoice. 8 My soul follows close behind You.
Your right hand upholds me.*

Psalm 63:1-8

David's Praise to God

10 Therefore David blessed the LORD before all the assembly, and David said:

“Blessed are You, LORD God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever.

11 Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty, for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and You are exalted as head over all.

12 Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might. In Your hand it is to make great And to give strength to all.

13 “Now therefore, our God, we thank You and praise Your glorious name.

14 But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You.

15 For we are aliens and pilgrims before You, as were all our fathers. Our days on earth are as a shadow, and without hope.

16 “O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have prepared to build You a house for Your holy name is from Your hand, and is all Your own.

17 “I know also, my God, that You test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of my heart I have willingly offered all these things, and now with joy I have seen Your people, who are present here to offer willingly to You.

18 “O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep this forever in the intent of the thoughts of the heart of Your people, and fix their heart toward You.

19 “And give my son Solomon a loyal heart to keep Your commandments and Your testimonies and Your statutes, to do all these things, and to build the temple for which I have made provision.”

20 Then David said to all the assembly, “Now bless the LORD your God.” So all the assembly blessed the LORD God of their fathers, and bowed their heads and prostrated themselves before the LORD and the king.

1 Chronicles 29:10-20

SOLOMON

Solomon Requests Wisdom

5 At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask! What shall I give you?"

6 And Solomon said: "You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You. You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.

7 "Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in.

8 "And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted.

9 "Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"

10 The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.

11 Then God said to him: "Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice,

12 "behold, I have done according to your words. See, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you.

13 "And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days.

14 "So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days."

15 Then Solomon awoke, and indeed it had been a dream. And he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, offered up burnt offerings, offered peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants.

SOLOMON'S WISE CHOICE – R. 2046

1 KINGS 3:5-15

IT is important to observe that the text of this lesson is the record of a dream. (Vss. 5,15.) The dream was from the Lord. In it the Lord suggested the question to Solomon, and also a proper answer to the question. Then he expressed his pleasure at the suggested answer, and told how he would reward the spirit which it manifested. “And Solomon awoke, and behold, it was a dream.” Yet in all the subsequent years of his reign Solomon realized the blessings mentioned in that dream just as surely as if the suggested prayer had been actually his, and, indeed, we may assume that upon awaking Solomon endorsed the wise prayer of his dream, although his subsequent course as a king does not indicate that those noble sentiments always actuated him. God was using Solomon as a type, and his reign was in some sense to prefigure the glorious reign of Christ, “the Prince of peace.”

Starting with unusually bright prospects – with a future all aglow with the promises of God, if he would faithfully walk uprightly before him, with the counsel, instruction and assistance of his father David and of the prophet Nathan, early placed upon the throne of Israel and in favor with all the people, amply provided with abundant treasure for the great work of building the temple and commissioned of God to do it, we see him neglecting the instruction of the Lord suggested in the prayer of his dream; and, overcome by the temptations of power, he is seen perverting the blessings of God to selfish ends. Instead of wisely and justly considering the best interests of the nation and humbly remembering that he was elevated to the kingly office for the purpose of serving his brethren, Solomon became the oppressor of his people, while he indulged himself in more than heart could wish.

But while his wealth and magnificence attracted the attention of the world, his policy toward the nation finally led to the disruption of the kingdom under his son and successor, Rehoboam; for though “the king made silver and gold at Jerusalem as plenteous as stones,” they were not in possession of the masses of the people, who felt oppressed, but were displayed in the follies of royalty, – in magnificent palaces for himself and his heathen wives, and in gardens and raiment and chariots and soldiers, etc. – See 1 Kings 12:4.

His career ended in the glory of an unhealthy temporal prosperity. Yet it served well the purpose of God in foreshadowing the higher and real glory of Christ's Kingdom. It was the glory of Christ's Kingdom to which special reference was undoubtedly made in Solomon's inspired dream. In so far as that dream was fulfilled in Solomon and his reign it prefigured the glorious and peaceful reign of David's greater Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. The prayer suggested in the vision was indeed the attitude of *his* heart. *He* truly sought the wisdom of Jehovah for the blessing of his dominion; and to this end he cheerfully submitted himself to the divine will in all things. It was this disposition of heart in our Lord Jesus, that pleased the Father, who therefore gave *to him* the wise and understanding heart, and has added also riches and honor of which the riches and honors of Solomon were typical. And as there was none like *him* before him, so there shall be none after him. “His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.” He truly shall be the

“Prince of peace;” and in the beginning of his reign the glorious spiritual temple of God, the Church (which Solomon’s magnificent temple foreshadowed), shall be completed, and filled with the glory of the Lord.

“I AM BUT A LITTLE CHILD”

Excerpt from R. 4290

We have nothing to indicate that Solomon ever became very haughty, proud, though he certainly would have been a marvelous man had his great wisdom and honor and wealth not affected in some degree the childlike simplicity which he expressed to the Lord in this dream, saying, “O Lord my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father; and I am but a little child; I know not how to go out or come in [how to conduct myself in public or in private before the people]. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give thy servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and evil; for who is able to judge this thy great people.” – Vs. 7-9.

The simplicity of this prayer is beautiful. In it Solomon recognized his own littleness and need of assistance and God’s greatness and ability to help. He recognized also that the people were not his, but God’s; and that he was not really the king, but God’s servant appointed to judge or rule the people according to Divine standards. He recognized that good might appear evil and evil might appear good to his imperfect judgment; and his prayer, therefore, was for wisdom; not that he might be reputed the wisest man in the world, nor for any other selfish purpose or ambition, but that as God’s servant he might faithfully and wisely administer the duties of his office, and honor God and bless his fellow-Israelites. Would that all rulers and judges today might have a similarly humble opinion of themselves and a similarly broad appreciation of the duties and the responsibilities of their office, and a similarly child-like faith in God’s ability to guide them, to use them, to bless the work to which he has appointed them! Would that they could recognize that all people are God’s people, and that they themselves must render an account to God which will be exacting to the extent of their knowledge and ability.

When Solomon awoke and found that it was but a dream, doubtless there was a measure of disappointment in connection with it, but it brought before his mind, clearly and distinctly, just the condition of heart and mind most pleasing to the Lord. And be it remembered that for a considerable number of years Solomon maintained his humble attitude of heart and faithfulness to God. He returned to Jerusalem and there, through the agency of the priest, made various additional offerings and sacrifices to the Lord, the flesh of the peace-offerings constituting a feast for his servants, including many of the royal citizens. Thus was his reign reverently and wisely inaugurated and the foundation laid for his personal prosperity and that of the nation, which, as God’s representative, he both ruled and served.

Solomon's Prayer of Dedication



22 Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven,
23 and he said:

“LORD God of Israel, there is no God in heaven above or on earth below like You, who keep Your covenant and

mercy with Your servants who walk before You with all their hearts.

24 “You have kept what You promised Your servant David my father. You have both spoken with Your mouth and fulfilled it with Your hand, as it is this day.

25 “Therefore, LORD God of Israel, now keep what You promised Your servant David my father, saying, ‘You shall not fail to have a man sit before Me on the throne of Israel, only if your sons take heed to their way, that they walk before Me as you have walked before Me.’

26 “And now I pray, O God of Israel, let Your word come true, which You have spoken to Your servant David my father.

27 “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!

28 “Yet regard the prayer of Your servant and his supplication, O LORD my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which Your servant is praying before You today:

29 “that Your eyes may be open toward this temple night and day, toward the place of which You said, ‘My name shall be there,’ that You may hear the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place.

30 “And may You hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and when You hear, forgive.

1 Kings 8:22-30

DEDICATING THE TEMPLE OF GOD

Excerpt from R. 5714

There is an important thought in connection with a dedication which some seem to overlook. It was necessary for the Tabernacle to be dedicated, or set apart to God, before He deigned to recognize it and to use it. Similarly with all of God's people; it is necessary that they should positively and formally dedicate themselves to God and to His service before being recognized of Him and filled with His Spirit. It is not enough that they should know of Him and of the Lord Jesus Christ, and be persuaded of these things – not enough even that they should know something of the glories of the Coming Age as revealed in the Word of God. It is necessary, also, that they make formal dedication of themselves to God, fully surrendering their own wills that God may come into them by His Holy Spirit and, accepting their sacrifices, constitute them thereafter His tabernacles.

When the Temple was ready for dedication, Solomon presented it to God with the prayer which constitutes the basis of today's Study – a prayer beautiful in simplicity and indicative of King Solomon's perception of the great truth that God is a personal God, whose dwelling-place is not everywhere, but in Heaven. It shows us that the king fully understood that the Temple which he had made, like the Tabernacle before it, merely represented God's power and grace amongst His people. The presence of the Temple indicated that there were sinners who needed to be atoned for by its arrangements, and that mercy and forgiveness would be needed and that prayers toward God would be appropriate. "Hear Thou in Heaven Thy dwelling-place; and when Thou hearest, forgive."

So during the Millennium, all the world will have the opportunity of approaching God through His great Temple of which Jesus is the Chief Corner-Stone, and the Church the living stones under His Headship. And God will hear the prayers thus properly presented, and will forgive the sins of the people; and as a result the work of Restitution will progress to a grand completion.

As Solomon dedicated the Temple, so the Church of Christ will be dedicated, formally presented to the Father. The great Antitype of Solomon will do this; namely, the Lord Jesus Christ, presenting us all as His members, as the Temple which is His Body, reared up on the Third Day – the Third Thousand-Year Day from the time of His death – the dawning of the Great Sabbath. (John 2:19-22.) As a result of the dedication, the glory of the Lord will fill the House. The fact that the typical Temple was filled with the glory of the Lord before it was entirely completed seems to imply that at this present time there will be some manifestation of God's favor toward His Church in glorification while yet the work of construction is not quite finished. However, it is difficult to read prophecy in advance of its fulfilment. We must wait to see what will be the fulfilment of this feature.

ASA

Asa's Prayer for Help

2 Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God,
3 for he removed the altars of the foreign gods and the high places, and
broke down the sacred pillars and cut down the wooden images.

4 He commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers, and to
observe the law and the commandment.

5 He also removed the high places and the incense altars from all the
cities of Judah, and the kingdom was quiet under him.

6 And he built fortified cities in Judah, for the land had rest; he had no
war in those years, because the LORD had given him rest.

7 Therefore he said to Judah, "Let us build these cities and make walls
around them, and towers, gates, and bars, while the land is yet before
us, because we have sought the LORD our God. We have sought Him, and
He has given us rest on every side." So they built and prospered.

8 And Asa had an army of three hundred thousand from Judah who
carried shields and spears, and from Benjamin two hundred and eighty
thousand men who carried shields and drew bows. All these were
mighty men of valor.

9 Then Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a
million men and three hundred chariots, and he came to Mareshah.

10 So Asa went out against him, and they set the troops in battle array in
the Valley of Zephathah at Mareshah.

11 And Asa cried out to the LORD his God, and said,

"LORD, it is nothing for You to help, whether with many or with
those who have no power. Help us, O LORD our God, for we rest
on You, and in Your name we go against this multitude. O LORD,
You are our God. Do not let man prevail against You!"

12 So the LORD struck the Ethiopians before Asa and Judah, and the
Ethiopians fled. . . .

14 Then they defeated all the cities around Gerar, for the fear of the
LORD came upon them, and they plundered all the cities, for there was
exceedingly much spoil in them.

2 Chronicles 14:2-12,14

KING ASA'S PRAYER FOR VICTORY

Excerpt from R. 3392

2 Chronicles 14:1-12

Asa called into requisition his army, which numbered only about one-half that of the invading foe, but his confidence was in the Lord, and he cried unto him in prayer for help that the war might result favorably to the Lord's people, the Jews. His recorded prayer is beautiful for its simplicity of faith: –

“Asa cried unto the Lord his God, and said, Lord, there is none beside thee to help between the mighty and him that hath no strength: help us, O Lord our God; for we rely on thee, and in thy name are we come against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee.”

The Lord blessed the forces of the Jews. The enemy was discomfited, scattered, routed, and pursued through the land of the Philistines, who evidently were in league with them as enemies of the Jews. This was one of the most remarkable victories ever achieved by the Jews over any foreign nation.

Following the custom of Asa and David and Moses, and others of bygone times in Israel, it is the habit of Christian peoples of our day to offer up prayers for success in war. We recall well the prayers that were offered for the armies during the civil war of this country; we remember the accounts given of the prayers of the British and Boers during the recent British war; we remember in the Spanish war the prayers of the Catholics of Spain and of Italy for the success of the Spanish forces, and how the Pope's blessing was given to the Spanish war vessels. We have heard lately of how the Czar of Russia, on learning of the outbreak of the war, repaired to the Cathedral for prayer to God, and how the leading Russian generals have similarly gone to confession and to prayer and for other public recognitions of the Almighty and appeals to him for success to the Russian arms in the present war with Japan. We have seen pictures in the public press of how the regimental standards, flags, are blessed by the Czar and assisting priests, and the telegraphic reports declare that an image of the Virgin Mary, which was taken with the army in wars of long ago that were successfully waged, is to be taken to the far East as a kind of talisman to give good luck to the Russian side of the warfare. How shall we view these appeals? Shall we view them as others do as being on a parity with the appeal of Asa in our lesson? Shall we consider that they are equally appropriate in God's sight and that they are bringing a blessing and victory? We answer, No. The prayers offered for the success of the Confederate armies did not bring them victory; the prayers and blessings upon the Spanish forces and vessels brought them no victory; the prayers of the Boers brought them no victory; the prayers of the French in their war with Germany brought the former no victory; the prayers of the Russians have in no sense of the word stayed or turned the tide of battle as yet.

GOD'S INTEREST AND CARE AND OURS

We would not be understood as declaring or even implying that God has no interest in the affairs of the world, and that he does not in any measure take a hand in the results of the wars of our time. Quite the contrary. We believe that the Lord's power, especially

in this day, especially in this time of “harvest,” is supervising and shaping the affairs of the nations with a view to bringing about the grand consummation of the age so long foretold in the Scriptures, which will result in a great time of trouble through a social, political and financial upheaval which will prepare the way for the Kingdom of God’s dear Son in its due time. But we deny the propriety of Christians attempting to pray or otherwise direct the Lord in connection with these matters, and the outworking of the divine program, which we cannot fully and clearly comprehend. No nation in the world today is God’s nation in the sense that Israel was his people. With no nation in the world today has God made a covenant such as that which subsisted between himself and Israel for the centuries between the giving of the Law at Sinai and the rejection of the Lord at the time of his crucifixion. No nation or kingdom in the world can claim divine authority or right or backing. The title, “Christian nations,” is entirely a misnomer, unauthorized by anything in God’s Word. All these nations, from the Scriptural standpoint, are “kingdoms of this world,” Gentile kingdoms. The Lord acknowledges none of them, but describes them unitedly as great Babylon, which in due time would fall and give place to the glorious kingdom which the Lord has promised – the antitype of the Jewish kingdom under a still more favorable covenant, under a still better Mediator, under a still more grand and glorious king than David or Solomon or any other.

The proper attitude, therefore, for the Lord’s consecrated people to occupy is that of neutrals. “Ye are not of this world, even as I am not of this world; for I have chosen you out of the world, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.” The fruit which the Lord’s people are to bear is not strife and enmity and vain glory, but love, joy and peace in the holy Spirit. This does not mean either that we are to quarrel with the world and seek to bring all mankind to the same position that we occupy. On the contrary, we are to realize that the world is of one nature and the Lord’s consecrated and accepted ones are of a new nature; that the Lord has not given to the world the same law that he has given to his consecrated ones, and that he is not expecting of the world the same course of conduct that he is expecting of the house of sons begotten of his Spirit, adopted into his family and guided by his Spirit and his Word.

Let the world fight its fight: the Lord will supervise and the results will be glorious eventually. Let us who belong to the new nation, to the new Kingdom that is not of this world, who use no carnal weapons, but the sword of the Spirit – let us fight the good fight of faith, lay hold upon the glorious things set before us, and not only stand ourselves, but help all those begotten of the same Spirit and members of the same heavenly army corps to stand, complete in him who is the Head of the body, the Captain of our salvation. By and by God’s loving care over all his creatures will be manifested in the glorious Kingdom of his dear Son, which shall bless and rule, instruct and uplift mankind in general. “The groaning creation” will then be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God – so many of them as will then accept the blessing. Then all will see that God so loved the world as to give his Son to die for us and to thus open the way for his Kingdom blessings.

**THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH MORE
FAITHFUL THAN ISRAEL**

Excerpt from R. 2362

2 CHRONICLES 14:2-12

“Help us, O Lord our God: for we rest in thee.” – 2 Chronicles 14:11

Thus the three years reign of Abijah, although a very short one, seems to have been a good reign in many respects. Nevertheless, his loyalty to the Lord did not lead him to make a thorough reformation, and to utterly put away the groves and high places devoted to improper worship, which began to be established in Solomon’s day, and consequently he failed to have the Lord’s approval, as it was subsequently pronounced upon his son, Asa. “Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God.” “The heart of Asa was perfect all his days.” – 2 Chron. 15:17.

Likewise today there are those who are on the Lord’s side, and get a blessing as a result, who, nevertheless, fail to have the Lord’s hearty approval. It is not sufficient that we outwardly acknowledge the Lord to be our God: if we would have the fullness of the divine approval we must be zealous, not only in having the Lord on our side, but zealous also and faithful in serving his cause. Such faithfulness means activity in the cause of truth, and effort to bring others into full accord with the divine law.

Asa’s course was approved more than that of his father, Abijah, because, as it is stated, ***his heart was perfect***: he was not serving the Lord because it would be the most profitable course for himself and for the nation – not merely to obtain divine blessing – but he served from a heart that was in harmony with God, and which wished to accomplish the divine will. So a right heart made of Asa a great reformer: he destroyed the idols out of the land, and the groves and high altars, some of which were dedicated to false gods, and some to Jehovah, – the latter being, nevertheless, contrary to the divine instruction, which was that no other place of sacrifice should be recognized than the one – the Temple. Asa’s fidelity to God laid him open to the charge of narrowness and bigotry on the part of those who at that day considered themselves broad-minded, liberal. Asa even destroyed the idol which his mother had set up; and because she was using her influence in favor of idolatry he removed from her the dignities of her position as a queen. All this showed a great loyalty to the Lord, and indicated that Asa’s zeal for the Lord was a zeal from the heart, and not a mere caprice, nor from a selfish motive.

In harmony with the divine covenant, a great blessing rested upon Asa and upon his kingdom, and during the first ten years of absolute peace he fortified his country, and strengthened the kingdom. It was now twenty-five years since Shishak had his victory over Rehoboam, and carried away the gold and treasures of the kingdom: and now another Egyptian army came against Asa, probably intent upon getting more booty. But as God, according to his covenant with Israel, had prospered the Egyptians because of unfaithfulness on the part of Rehoboam and his people, so now the Lord, under the same covenant, prospered Asa and his army, because of their faithfulness to him, and gave them a great victory over the Egyptians.

That Asa and the people might know assuredly that their victory was of the Lord, a

Prayers of The Righteous

So they gathered together at Jerusalem in the third month, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa.
2 Chronicles

prophet was sent to them, saying: “Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: The Lord is with you while ye be with him; and if ye seek him he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him he will forsake you. . . . Be ye strong, therefore, and let not your hands be weak.” This message, we are informed, encouraged Asa to still further prosecute the warfare he had been waging for some time against idols: the result was the utter abolishment of idols “out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities which he had taken.” More than this, as his zeal, and the zeal of his people increased, a great convention was held – a holiness convention – and “they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart, and with all their soul, resolving that whosoever should not seek the Lord God of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman; and they swore unto the Lord [to this effect] with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets and with cornets, and all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire, and he was found of them; and the Lord gave them rest round about...and there was no more war unto the five and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa.” – 2 Chron. 15:12-15,19.

15:10

Many Christian people, making the very serious mistake of not noticing the difference between the covenant which God made with fleshly Israel, and the different covenant and different regulations with spiritual Israel, have naturally fallen into the mistake of seeking to follow after the course of natural Israel, improperly. For instance, while it was perfectly right for Asa to interfere with the other religions in the land under his control, and to overthrow the false worship, and to burn the idols, and to destroy the altars and groves, it would be entirely wrong for any Christian king, president, governor, mayor, or one of any other position, to attempt to do similarly with the religious arrangements of others of today, either in Christendom or in heathen lands. The duty of the spiritual Israelite is to worship the Lord according to the dictates of his own conscience, and to leave everybody else free to do the same – not molesting him, his institutions or arrangements in any manner whatever.

The only way in which he would be permitted to interfere with others would be by preaching, by making known to them the true God and the true worship; – and even in this he would have no privilege to intrude upon others contrary to their wishes, but may merely make known the good tidings to those who have “ears to hear” – to those willing to be taught. It was a wrong view of this matter, and a copying of Israel’s doings, and of the things which God approved in Israel, which, misunderstood and misapplied, undoubtedly led to many of the religious excesses and violations of justice, as well as of love and mercy, during the Dark Ages. It was a failure to recognize the *different* law of this Gospel Age, over spiritual Israel, that led to much of the religious persecution of the dark ages, the burning of church edifices of so-called heretics, the burning of the heretics themselves, and of their Bibles, their persecution by Inquisitions, etc., etc. Christendom in general is outgrowing these false ideas, especially in Great Britain and the United States, where religious liberty for all denominations, all religions, and toleration for all creeds is recognized, demanded and enjoyed, in harmony with the enlightened judgment of their peoples. But those who thus recognize religious liberty as the proper thing now, very generally fail to see how or why anything else than religious liberty could have been proper at any other time. Such are inclined to look upon the Bible as not up to date – as countenancing bigotry, persecution, etc., and so long as they regard the matter from this standpoint they are in great danger of

a growing agnosticism and infidelity. Let us understand clearly, therefore, why the course of Asa was approved of God, and blessed, while a similar course today, in any nation of Christendom, would be disapproved of the Lord, and of those who have his spirit.

The explanation of the difference is that Israel, as a nation, took upon itself a special covenant with God at Mount Sinai, by which every individual of that nation, including the children, became bounden nationally and individually, to God, to be his people; while God bound himself to them to be their God, their king, their protector. In the compact or covenant the people further guaranteed that they would neither have, nor make images of, nor worship any other god. That covenant constituted Israel God's peculiar people; they became his typical Kingdom; he was the recognized King amongst them, and so it is written, "Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord, as King, instead of David his father." (1 Chron. 29:23.) It was God's throne all along, and earthly representatives sat upon it. Hence, so long as that nation was preserved as a kingdom amongst the nations, it was bound by the will or law of its King, the Lord, which specifically demanded that all idolatry should be put away. And as we have previously seen, God separated this one nation from all the other nations of the earth, in order that he might make of them a typical nation or kingdom, foreshadowing in them the "holy nation" of spiritual Israelites which he is now gathering out of every kingdom, people, nation and tongue, and which shortly he will organize under Immanuel, to be the Kingdom of Heaven, and to rule and bless all the families of the earth. – 1 Pet. 2:9,10; Luke 12:32.

NATIONAL REFORM OF OLD – R. 4724

2 CHRONICLES 15:1-15

"Be strong, therefore, and let not your hands be weak; for your work shall be rewarded."

THIS Study shows us a young king whose environments in youth had been unfavorable, in that his father was far from being a good man, and his early years were under the influence of a grandmother who was an idol worshipper. In the midst of this unfavorable setting Asa quickly developed a loyalty to God and soundness of judgment beneficial to his kingdom. We have all had experience with characters of this kind. We have occasionally seen children of evil parentage who seemed to see the evil of the parental course, and to be nauseated therewith, and by this led into right paths. It has at times appeared as though Divine Providence occasionally interposed in prenatal influences which made the child very different in bent of mind from either of its parents. St. Paul seems to indicate something of this kind in his own case when he declares that Divine Providence had favored him from his mother's womb. (Galatians 1:15.) Nothing in this, however, interferes with the will of the individual – his free agency.

Asa did much to abolish idolatry in his kingdom, and to sway the minds of the people to reverence and obedience of Almighty God. In consequence, he had peace for ten

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years, during which time he encouraged his people and spurred himself on to activity in the training of an army, and in the completing of fortified cities on the extremity of his kingdom, for protection against attacks of enemies.

Following the ten years of peace came Zerah, an Ethiopian prince, and an army of a million and three hundred chariots of war, to attack the kingdom of Judah. After the custom of the times they foraged on the country through which they passed, appropriating, devastating, etc. – “taking spoil.” This was the very occasion for which Asa had made preparation during his ten years of peace. He went forth with his army to beat the invader. Nevertheless, his faith looked up to God for the victory, realizing that with him was the power to give or to withhold victory. In the battle which followed, Asa and his army were successful; their foes were smitten, discomfited, scattered, and the spoils went with the victory.

RENEWED CONSECRATION TO GOD

1 Now the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded. Returning from the victory with hearts grateful to God they were met on the way by a Prophet – Azariah – who in the name of the Lord counselled the king and his people that they had all done well and faithfully, and that, therefore, God’s blessing was with them, and that the continuance of Divine blessing would depend upon their faithfulness to God and to the requirements of his Law. The hour of victory is a more dangerous one than the hour of distress; the heart is more apt to be proud and self-conscious and to feel its own importance. The Divine warning helped the King and his people to appreciate the situation and to take a firmer stand than ever for righteousness. A second and more thorough reformation was thus inaugurated – no idolatry was thenceforth permitted in the kingdom under penalty of death, and the Lord’s blessing continued with the kingdom – Judah.

2 And he went out to meet Asa, and said to him: “Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin.

THE GOD OF BATTLE

The LORD is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you, but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. Benevolent people, interested in peace congresses, etc., sometimes inquire how we should understand the fact that the God of the Old Testament Scriptures was a God of Battle – sometimes commanding war and the utter destruction of many. The answer to this question can be appreciated only when the situation is viewed from the proper standpoint, which is this:

2 Chron. 15:1-2 The whole world was lost in sin and was under condemnation to death as unworthy of life, unworthy of Divine favor. Whether, therefore, God permitted them to die by famine, pestilence, or by what we sometimes designate natural death, mattered not – the death sentence must sooner or later be executed against them at any rate – all must go down to the tomb. We thank God, however, that his gracious plan has provided a redemption of Adam and all of his race from the tomb and from death, and a full opportunity eventually, by resurrection, to come to a true knowledge of God and righteousness, and, if obedient thereto, to return ultimately to Divine favor and to more than was lost in Eden – all of this recovery accomplished through Calvary.

The nation of Israel was no exception to this reign of sin and death, but God chose them as a nation to make of them types, shadows, illustrative of his gracious purposes. It was to this intent that he entered into a typical Covenant with them, through a typical

Mediator, under a typical Atonement for their sin, effected by typical sacrifices for sins. They became his typical people, and he their king, whom they pledged themselves loyally to obey.

Thus in a figurative way Israel stood as representatives of God and his righteousness in the midst of an idolatrous world, and, later, when the ten tribes broke away, it left the kingdom a specially representative kingdom of God, to which the loyal-hearted of all the tribes religiously resorted. From this standpoint God's promise to this nation was his Divine blessing in giving them peace and earthly prosperity in proportion as they would be loyal to him, and war, famine, pestilence, insurrection, trouble, in proportion as they would neglect their Covenant with him and fail to render obedience to him as their Monarch, as their God. All of God's dealings with that nation typed greater blessings for the future. We are not to understand that either then, or since, any other nation has occupied this same relationship toward God, nor that he similarly rewards and punishes faithfulness or unfaithfulness with particularity in each nation.

Spiritual Israel, St. Peter tells us, is a "Royal Priesthood, an holy nation, a people for a purpose, that they should show forth the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light." This Spirit-Begotten Israel is not an earthly nation, has no earthly wars with carnal weapons. This Holy Nation has no promise of earthly peace and prosperity, as rewards of obedience to God, but, contrariwise, is assured that in the world she shall have tribulation, hatred, opposition, suffering and that her reward will be spiritual. She will now have the peace of God which passeth all understanding, and by and by, through the "First Resurrection," "an abundant entrance into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

LESSONS WE MAY LEARN

Nearly every page in history may teach lessons to those who are desirous of learning them. The experiences of King Asa may, for instance, give us the lesson that in the years of our youth we should properly put away all idolatry of money, of fame, of honor of men, and should seek to know and to do the will of the Lord from the heart. In the early years of life we should erect the fortresses of character which will serve us as a defence against attacks of the world, the flesh and the Devil in our later years, and when the battle comes, thus prepared, we are still to look to the Lord for victory, realizing the force of the Apostle's words, "When I am weak in myself then I am strong in the Lord."

Nor should a great victory elate us and make us careless and self-sufficient. Warned of the Lord as was Asa, we should make our consecration still more thorough and thus continue to fortify ourselves, that we may be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

12 Then they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul. And all Judah rejoiced at the oath, for they had sworn with all their heart and sought Him with all their soul, and He was found by them, and the LORD gave them rest all around.

2 Chronicles 15:12,15

JEHOSHAPHAT

JEHOSHAPHAT succeeded his father, Asa, as King of Judah, following well in his footsteps and “in the first ways of his father David,” copying after David’s earliest course of devotion to the Lord. He sought not unto Baalim (plural of Baal), the various forms of Baal-worship which, as we have seen, had become the worship of the ten tribes, as it was the worship also of the various nations about them. The spectacular features of Baal-worship and the licentious orgies connected therewith were evidently strong attractions to the depraved heart, and must therefore have exercised continually a seductive influence upon the people of Judah, who worshiped the unseen God, of whom no images or idols or sensual worship were permitted.

The result of this course on the part of the king and the kingdom was the divine blessing, according to the covenant, resulting in peace with the nations round about and prosperity in temporal things – “riches and honor in abundance.” Rightly exercised by these blessings, the king’s heart was “lifted up,” not in pride and self-adulation, but with encouragement, as recognizing the fulfillment of the divine promises in the blessings enjoyed. This stimulated the king to still further energy in the Lord’s service, and to a still further movement in the putting away of the “groves and high places.” These had been prohibited and destroyed by his father Asa, but apparently some had still been preserved by the people in a kind of secret way, or had sprung up again, like thrifty weeds, so as to need continual attention and removal. We may suppose that these were not all high places and groves of Baal, but that some of them were attempted modifications or “improvements” in the worship of Jehovah.

So amongst Christians, there are some who are continually seeking innovations, variations from and additions to what the Lord instituted, in which they take pleasure, to the neglect of the Lord’s wishes and regulations. It is hard for such to learn that “obedience is better than sacrifice,” that the following of the Lord’s will is far better and more acceptable in his sight than any amount of unauthorized denominational contrivance and “machinery.” Every alteration of the divine arrangement must eventually prove injurious.

Perceiving the necessity of knowledge, as a basis for faith and obedience, the King Jehoshaphat very wisely instituted a general system of instruction throughout his kingdom, so that the people in general might become intimately acquainted with the Word of the Lord. Thus he was laying the ax of truth at the root of the evil tree of idolatry and disobedience, and preparing the people for a more hearty obedience to the demands of the Lord and the worship of the one God, Jehovah, with all their heart.
R. 2365

*And he commanded them, saying,
“Thus you shall act in the fear of the LORD,
faithfully and with a loyal heart.”
2 Chronicles 19:9*

A GOOD KING'S ERROR – R. 3393

2 CHRONICLES 19:1-11

“Deal courageously, and the Lord shall be with the good.”

JEHOSHAPHAT is noted as one of the best kings in the history of Judah. He was the son of Asa, of our last lesson. He had been reigning twenty years at the time of the events narrated in this lesson. He was a still more vigorous reformer than his father Asa, his record being that he utterly destroyed all the groves where idolatry was practised, the implication being that his father had permitted some of them to remain. Additionally he established the true religion throughout his kingdom, and evidently was zealous for righteousness in every sense of the word. The record certainly shows his reign in the most favorable light.

He got into error through ambition. He made a marriage alliance for his son with the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel of the ten-tribe kingdom – Israel. Doubtless his ambition was that ultimately through this union the two nations might become again united as one under his son. Alas! how many good men and good women have been injured by ambition and expediency. How many parents think more of the earthly prospects of their children than of their real happiness and spiritual prosperity. However good and noble and well intentioned such parents may be, their course in such matters indicates lack of faith in God or lack of submission to his will, without the realization that his arrangements faithfully carried out will mean greater blessing than any other.

ALLIANCES WITH EVIL DANGEROUS

The ambition which led to the intermarrying with the royal family of Israel led also to fellowship and sociability between the two royal families, and the effect, as might have been expected, was an evil one. “Evil communications corrupt good manners,” says the Apostle. A son once asked his mother why she did not permit him to play with certain boys of the neighborhood. She replied that she feared their influence over him would be for evil. He inquired why she should not expect that his good example would influence these neighbor boys rather than that their example would influence him unfavorably. By way of illustrating her thought, she requested her son to bring her a tumbler full of clean water and a bottle of ink and a pen. When he had brought these she asked him to put a drop of the ink into the tumbler of water. He did so, and she asked him to notice the clouded effect that even a drop of the ink produced; and then suggested that he put one drop of the water into the ink bottle and note how little change would be manifested. The lesson is a good one: there is a corrupting power in evil, a downward tendency to which nothing in righteousness corresponds, and reversely.

The lesson to us is that we need to “keep ourselves unspotted from the world,” and, more than this, to seek divine aid in so doing – to appropriate to ourselves the instructions and encouragements, the reproofs and exhortations of God’s Word. A little leaven of sin can affect a whole community; it has a power of self-development in fallen human nature that righteousness does not possess. The more we realize this the more we are led to look to the Lord for the great relief that the world needs, and the more we are inclined to pray as well as to labor that the Lord’s Kingdom may come, and that

*A little
leaven
leavens the
whole lump.
Gal. 5:9*

through it righteousness may be established in the world, and the divine will be done eventually on earth as it is done in heaven.

The sociability between the king of Judah and the king of Israel led the former to visit the latter, and on such an occasion the host proposed that he would attempt to retake from the king of Syria a certain city that had once belonged to Israel. He requested his guest, the king of Judah, to accompany him to the battle, which was evidently expected to be a victory. Out of courtesy, and from his desire to cultivate the friendship of Ahab, Jehoshaphat yielded and accompanied him, the result being a disastrous battle from which the king of Judah barely escaped. The Lord, through the prophet Jehu, sent him a message on his return from the battle, saying, “Shouldst thou help the ungodly and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee” – indicated by his ignominious return without any evidence of divine favor especially promised to the kings of Judah so long as they were in harmony with God.

BE YE SEPARATE, SAITH THE LORD

This whole matter teaches an important lesson for the Lord’s people: it is for us to seek first the Lord’s will in every matter and to leave to him the direction of our affairs and interests. We should be specially on guard against associations with the ungodly – against fellowships, matrimonial alliances, etc., as between them and ourselves and families. We are not to wonder so much that one of the best kings of Judah should commit such an error, but we do wonder that members of the Royal Priesthood, begotten of the holy Spirit, could ever be so negligent of their relationship to the Lord and responsibility to him and to their children, that they should to any extent follow the course of Jehoshaphat; and yet we well know that those who thus attempt to take the guidance of their own affairs and the affairs of their children into their own hands, and hence to ignore the Lord in the matter, are a considerable number. As we grow in grace and in knowledge, and sometimes profit by our mistakes, we should be more and more free from them and therefore more and more pleasing to the Lord.

The Lord’s instruction to the new creation is that we should not only love righteousness, but hate iniquity; we should not only love and fellowship with all who are the Lord’s people, but we should strictly avoid the fellowship of those who are not his people, who are enemies of righteousness. This does not mean that we are to hate the wicked, but that, hating the wickedness, we will avoid any fellowship with those who are in sympathy with it, realizing that they are either blinded to the right or ensnared and influenced by the Adversary. What fellowship hath light with darkness, truth with error, righteousness with sin? Let all who love righteousness depart from iniquity: “Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord’s house.”

2 And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to King Jehoshaphat, “Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Therefore the wrath of the LORD is upon you. 3 “Nevertheless good things are found in you, in that you have removed the wooden images from the land, and have prepared your heart to seek God.”

2 Chronicles 19:2-3

While thus reproving Jehoshaphat, the Lord graciously mentioned his approval of his course in destroying the idolatrous arrangements and the tendency of the king's heart to seek the Lord. Evidently the experience was a profitable one and led Jehoshaphat to still greater zeal for righteousness, for he went out amongst the people, either personally or through heralds and representatives, and effected a religious revival, bringing the people back to a higher appreciation of the Lord and observance of his statutes. Evidently the king had a very high sense of justice and honor, as indicated by his judicial appointments in all the cities of his kingdom. His message to the judges, "Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment. Wherefore, let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons nor taking of gifts." These are grand sentiments, worthy of a saint of this Gospel age! Surely such a king would be a blessing to any people because of his approximation to the divine ideal of righteousness. What may the world hope for when the great king Immanuel – whose right the kingdom is, and who shortly will take it in the name of Jehovah – shall exercise the powers of the kingdom, and with superhuman knowledge and wisdom shall order the affairs of the world in the highest interests of every creature, in accord with the principles of righteousness.

JUSTICE IS THE FOUNDATION OF GOD'S THRONE

Very evidently the majority of people – even Christians, "saints" – have not sufficiently high ideals respecting justice. The more we realize what a detestable thing injustice is in the sight of the Lord, the more must we strive to exercise ourselves continually along this line. Justice is not so high an attribute in some respects as love, but it is of primary importance, for the adage is a true one that we should be just before we are generous. The Lord's people should make sure that they render to no man in any respect less than is due him in business transactions, in social affairs, in private conversation, in every way. The saint is to go beyond this, and not only be just but generous – to render nothing less than justice to any, and to be willing to accept from others less than he might justly demand if they seemed not so highly to appreciate the principles of Justice.

We are to remember the wide difference that exists between the Lord's people and the world, and are not to measure ourselves with others in this respect. The majority of the world have not been in the same school as we – the school of Christ – as it is written of the Lord's people, "They shall all be taught of God." As we have been learning in the highest school from the best of teachers for years, it would be strange indeed if we did not have a higher standard both of justice and of love than that which generally prevails amongst men. Let us learn to cultivate justice, let us be diligent students in the school of Christ, that we may be fitted for the graduation tests and thus be accounted worthy to be associated with our Lord as teachers in the great Millennial age school, in which the whole world of mankind shall receive instruction along these lines.

The officers of the court were largely selected from amongst the Levites – the tribe specially consecrated to the Lord's service. Apparently the king could not have acted more wisely in all these matters; nevertheless we are not to expect the kings of Christendom to follow his example and select only consecrated men for judges, court officers, police duty, etc. The kingdoms of this world will by and by become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Anointed, and then undoubtedly during that Millennial period

only the consecrated will be granted positions of power, authority or responsibility in connection with the government of the world. At present, however, the “god of this world,” the “prince of this world,” Satan, has largely to do with all the politics of the world, and sees to it that the majority in places of influence and power are faithful to himself.

True, there is today outwardly a good moral tone and a general desire on the part of the public not to be abused or defrauded by those in ruling positions, and a certain amount of decency and order must be maintained and a high standard must be claimed. Nevertheless, we are all witness to the fact that there are various standards of honesty, and that the majority of people both in and out of office have standards that are too low. It is not for us to specially pry into the present condition of things, which rather seems to us to be as good as we could expect, better than we could have hoped, all things considered. We rejoice, nevertheless, that the time is coming when absolute perfection will be secured in the conduct of the world’s affairs. God is now selecting his Royal Priests to be his kings and ministers in the administration of the affairs of the Kingdom of his dear Son. Let us be faithful, and learn well the lessons of the present time, that we may be counted worthy a share in this honor.

“JUDGE RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT”

Jehoshaphat’s charge to the Levites who constituted this superior court at Jerusalem is grand also. “Thus shall ye do in the fear of the Lord, faithfully, with a perfect heart. And whensoever any controversy shall come to you from any brethren that dwell in their cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and judgments, ye shall even warn them that they trespass not against the Lord, and so wrath come upon you and upon your brethren.” The judging between blood and blood would signify the decision as to the degree of culpability in the event of a murder – to determine, as we do today, whether or not the death were manslaughter, accidental killing, or in the second degree – murder unpremeditated or incited by anger or fear – or, third, if it were murder in the first degree, intended, premeditated. Similarly they were to discern which offences were against the common law, which against the divine law, and which against the usages of society, and were to see that justice would be meted out to all. As we think over those conditions of olden time, we wonder how such matters as these – such evidences that people of thousands of years ago were just, noble, thoughtful, reverential – are regarded by our Evolutionist friends. They seem inclined to think that at that time mankind must have been near the monkey scale of intelligence, but the facts are against them. Here was a king in whose empire justice was no doubt dispensed equally as well as it is with us today in this most favored land at this most favored period.

The closing words of the lesson constitute our Golden Text – “Deal courageously, and the Lord shall be with the good.” We commend these words to the Lord’s faithful people. Whoever has a duty to perform let him not fear, and while seeking to do unpleasant tasks in a kindly manner, both justly and lovingly, let us fear not man, but rather fear the Lord and be intent on pleasing him. May the words of our mouths as well as the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer!

Jehoshaphat's Prayer for Help

2 Then some came and told Jehoshaphat, saying, "A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea, from Syria, and they are in Hazazon Tamar" (which is En Gedi).

3 And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

4 So Judah gathered together to ask help from the LORD, and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD.

5 Then Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court,

6 and said:

"O LORD God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You?

7 "Are You not our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever?

8 "And they dwell in it, and have built You a sanctuary in it for Your name, saying,

9 'If disaster comes upon us--sword, judgment, pestilence, or famine--we will stand before this temple and in Your presence (for Your name is in this temple), and cry out to You in our affliction, and You will hear and save.'

10 "And now, here are the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir--whom You would not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them and did not destroy them--

11 "here they are, rewarding us by coming to throw us out of Your possession which You have given us to inherit.

12 "O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us, nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You."

13 Now all Judah, with their little ones, their wives, and their children, stood before the LORD.

14 Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, in the midst of the assembly.



King Jehoshaphat Trusts God from JW.org collection

15 And he said,

“Listen, all you of Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you, King Jehoshaphat! Thus says the LORD to you: ‘Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God’s.

16 ‘Tomorrow go down against them. They will surely come up by the Ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the brook before the Wilderness of Jeruel.

17 ‘You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem!’ Do not fear or be dismayed. Tomorrow go out against them, for the LORD is with you.”

18 And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem bowed before the LORD, worshipping the LORD.

2 Chronicles 20:2-18

ELIJAH

Because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.

Matthew 24:12

The Lord Jesus declares that at a certain time in the Gospel Age, and apparently pointing down to our day, “because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.” The Revised Version given here is stronger than our Common Version rendering. It is not only **many** who will grow cold, but **the** many, the majority, of professed followers of Christ. How truly the Master’s words have been fulfilled! Iniquity is inequity, injustice, unrighteousness. Our text might properly read, “Because unrighteousness shall abound, the love of the many shall grow cold.” We are in the time against which the Lord sought to especially guard us. How few comparatively have heeded the warning!

The *Studies in the Scriptures* point out that in God’s arrangement the Prophet Elijah was a type of The Christ in the flesh – Jesus being the Head of the antitypical Elijah and the Church being His Body. The three and a half years, 1260 days, of Elijah’s experiences while hiding in the wilderness from Queen Jezebel were symbolic, and corresponded to the 1260 years of the true Church in the wilderness condition, where she had fled from the antitypical Jezebel. (Revelation 12:6,14; Daniel 7:24,25.) Elijah’s coming out of the wilderness prefigured the coming out of the true Church of God from her wilderness hiding after the year 1799 A. D., when Jezebel’s power was broken, and the copious rains following represented the wide circulation of the Bible since that date.

The Church of Christ, the watching ones, are now in a particular time of waiting. The Elijah class is soon to be taken beyond the veil. The Elisha class will be left until later, to wash their soiled robes in the blood of the Lamb in the “Great Tribulation” just before the world. It seems that the Lord is now especially testing His people. Among many of the people of God love has waxed cold, because unrighteousness is abounding everywhere. Many today profess to believe things that they do not believe. Empty forms of godliness prevail. Love of pleasure is rampant. As a result many professed Christians are lukewarm or cold. They say, “Look at what the church systems are doing. What is right for our church leaders is right for me.” Thus many are taking a very wavering course. R. 5856

Coming back to the picture: Queen Jezebel represented her daughters, her kind, her family. The Prophet Elijah represented the true people of God in the present time. The Queen did not persecute him, but threatened him; and again he fled into the wilderness – not for a specified time, however. The people in general were not under the same kind of restraint as previously. The priests of Baal never regained their influence. Elijah went again into the wilderness and was there nourished for a time; it was not the previous nourishment of the 1260 days by the ravens, but an especially provided food for a time.

To our understanding this food especially provided for Elijah, after his experience

with the priests of Baal and after his fleeing from Jezebel, represents the special Message that is now feeding the people of God. After Elijah had reached the wilderness, there was an inclination on his part to feel discouraged; and he said, “Ah, Lord God! . . .” – this signifying his discouragement. But the Lord strengthened him and gave him a special food, in the strength of which he went to Mt. Horeb. This mountain represents the Kingdom of God, the Messianic Kingdom. And we believe that by this spiritual food we are now brought to the time when the Kingdom is to be established.



Elijah on Mt. Horeb

When Elijah got to Mt. Horeb the Lord gave him three witnesses. (1 Kings 19:1-18.) The wind rending the mountains represents the present war. The great earthquake symbolically represents a social revolution, the like of which was never before in the world, and which we believe is due to come very soon. This will not come as soon as the war begins, but the war might continue while the earthquake is on. This was not all. The third demonstration was a great fire, which consumed everything before it. This represents wide-spread anarchy, which will prevail in the world, following the social revolution. Then after the fire Elijah heard the “still, small voice,” representing the Divine Power, which will bring the blessings to the world. R. 5629

*11 Then He said, “Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.”
And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the
mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was
not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the
earthquake. 12 And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire.
And after the fire a still small voice.*

1 Kings 19:11-12

If we would have before our minds the proper example to be followed, the proper courage to be exercised, our pattern would be Elijah, whose loyalty to God was so thoroughly attested on every possible occasion. . . . Elijah stands for or represents the little flock with whom the Lord is specially pleased and who will with the Redeemer constitute the Kingdom class by and by. R. 3401

Elijah's Prayer to the True God

30 Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down.

31 And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, "Israel shall be your name."

32 Then with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. And he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold two seahs of seed.

33 And he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood, and said, "Fill four waterpots with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood."

34 Then he said, "Do it a second time," and they did it a second time. And he said, "Do it a third time," and they did it a third time.

35 So the water ran all around the altar, and he also filled the trench with water.

36 And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said,

"LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word.

37 "Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again."

38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench.

39 Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces. And they said, "The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!"

1 Kings 18:30-39

“JEHOVAH, HE IS THE GOD.” – R. 2332

1 KINGS 18:30-40

*“And when all the people saw it they fell on their faces, and they said:
Jehovah, he is the God.” – 1 Kings 18:39.*

THE three and a half years of drouth no doubt had an humbling effect upon King Ahab, as well as upon the people of Israel. No doubt they began to wonder where the matter would end; and to recognize it as more than an accident – as a judgment. The question would be whether it was a judgment from Baal or a judgment from Jehovah; for the people, as a result of their extended acquaintance with idolatry had a comparatively weak faith respecting the unseen Jehovah, who permitted no image or likeness of himself to be made or to be worshiped. The Lord’s time had come for awakening Israel, and starting a reformation movement amongst them, and Elijah, who had been sought by the King throughout the surrounding nations, was instructed to present himself before Ahab, with a promise that rain should follow; and was permitted to be the Lord’s agent in drawing the attention of the people to the true God, who alone has power over the elements.

Although Ahab realized that the famine was a judgment of the Lord, nevertheless, after the custom of the natural man, he ignored personal responsibility, and affected to charge the evils to Elijah, saying to him, “Are thou he that troublest Israel?” It is always so with the faithful mouthpieces of the Lord. Since they cannot prophesy smooth things, but must present the truth in reproof of unrighteousness, therefore the world and the nominal Israelite hate them. They do not seem to realize that the difficulty lies in themselves, and their sins, and their separation from the Lord. But Elijah, humble yet unabashed, did not hesitate to tell the king the truth of the matter, assuring him that the trouble in Israel came from his own wrong course.

The drouth had so humbled Ahab that he did not resent the Prophet’s arraignment of his sin: perhaps also he hoped that through the prophet’s favor the embargo of the drouth and famine might be lifted. At all events he very promptly complied with Elijah’s request that the people of Israel be assembled at Mount Carmel, together with the priests of Baal. Accordingly there was a great concourse to the flat, table-top of Mount Carmel, where Elijah awaited them, the king also coming with them; but Queen Jezebel sullenly remained at the palace in the capital city of Samaria.

Elijah, full of zeal for the Lord, and full of indignation against the idolatry, and probably counseled respecting his course by the Lord, had a plan prepared by which to demonstrate to Israel which was the true God and which the false one. In the presence of the people he made a proposition to the priests of Baal for a contest to prove the question. This proposition was so reasonable, and the interest and expectation of Israel so great, that the priests of Baal dare not refuse. They, four hundred and fifty in number, were to build an altar and to make a sacrifice thereon to their god, Baal, while Elijah would build an altar and offer a sacrifice thereon to Jehovah, and whichever god would answer by fire would thus be attested as the true God. If Baal were powerful enough to answer the prayers of his priests and to accept the offering of the altar, then the people might understand that it was because Baal was offended with them that

they had experienced the drouth and the famine. But if Jehovah had the power, and would answer with fire, it would be proof to the people that the drouth and the famine were from him, and signs of his indignation because they had worshiped Baal.

The proposition could not be rejected: the priests of Baal prepared their altar and their sacrifice, and had the advantage of the noon-day heat of a tropical sun, sufficient almost of itself to ignite the fat of the sacrifice. They desired and prayed that the test might be granted; they cut themselves with stones until the blood gushed out, claiming that it must be because some of them, as priests of Baal, had trespassed against him, that their prayers were not heard. They kept this up for hours, until near sunset – Elijah meantime, in the hearing of the people, pouring upon them the sharpest sarcasm – the sarcasm of truth, not of falsehood. He suggested that they pray louder, as peradventure their god might be a little deaf; he urged them to keep it up, peradventure Baal might be on a journey, or attending to other business, or asleep. Thus he was giving to Israel in general the most telling lesson possible, considering their lethargy on religious subjects. He was preparing them for the final demonstration which he was about to give, that Jehovah is the true God, the only God who had power to answer both by fire and by water.

Mark how thorough the Prophet's faith in God, and how thoroughly he demonstrated that there could be no room for deception in connection with his offering. Twelve stone crocks of water were poured upon the sacrifice and the wood, and filled the trench around about it; the sun was losing its power, and the offering was thoroughly drenched, and all things were thus ready for a thorough test of Jehovah's power to send down fire.

Elijah stated the matter to the people: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If Jehovah be God, follow him; but if Baal be God, then follow him." The test was to show which was the true God, and which was the false god, and incidentally which the true and which the false prophets. Then Elijah prayed a beautiful and proper prayer. He did not say, "O Lord, cause Israel all to know how great, I Elijah, am, as a prophet of the Lord," but "Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art Jehovah God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again [– recalling them again by their experiences and these signs to be thy people]."

The answer by fire was prompt, and the effect upon the people great. They promptly acknowledged Jehovah, and slew the priests of Baal. Then, while Ahab and the people rejoiced in Elijah's promises that the long hoped for rain would come, and went to their homes to rejoice and feast, the prophet remained upon the mountain to pray for that which God had definitely promised. Once he prayed, and sent his servant a distance to look for indications, but no answer. Again he prayed, and sent his servant again, but no evidence of response. After having been used of the Lord so mightily, in the matter of the sacrifice, Elijah might have gotten to feel too much of his own importance, if his prayer for rain had been too promptly responded to. Opportunity was given for fear and doubt, that the Lord would fail to keep his engagement, respecting the rain. But knowing the sureness of the Lord's word, Elijah did not doubt; he prayed again and again, and sent his servant each time to see what evidences there were of the Lord's answers to the prayers, until finally, when he had prayed for the seventh time, and inquired for a sign, the young man returned, saying that he saw a small cloud about the

Prayers of The Righteous

size of a man's hand. Then Elijah ceased his prayer, and realized that the beginning of the fulfillment had come.

There is a lesson in this also for the Lord's people of today, that, as our Lord said, "We ought to pray and not to faint," not to grow weary in looking for, asking for and expecting the spiritual blessings which the Lord has ***promised*** us. Many of the prayers which fail of fulfillment, fail because the petitioners ask amiss; for things which God has not promised. Others fail, because of lack of faith. The prayer of faith is that which is offered, "nothing doubting," and whose hope is based upon a definite ***promise*** of the Lord. For instance, to us as new creatures, the Lord has declared, "Your heavenly Father is more willing to give the holy spirit to them that ask him, than are earthly parents to give good gifts [of an earthly kind] to their children." He that seeketh the spirit of holiness, the showers of divine grace, findeth them. To him that knocketh, the stores of divine favor shall be opened.



Elijah on Mt. Carmel prays for rain.

The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

James 5:16-18

Elijah Prays for Rain

41 Then Elijah said to Ahab, “Go up, eat and drink, for there is the sound of abundance of rain.”

42 So Ahab went up to eat and drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel. Then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees,

43 and said to his servant, “Go up now, look toward the sea.” So he went up and looked, and said, “There is nothing.” And seven times he said, “Go again.”

44 Then it came to pass the seventh time, that he said, “There is a cloud, as small as a man’s hand, rising out of the sea!” So he said, “Go up, say to Ahab, ‘Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you.’”

45 Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. So Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel.

46 Then the hand of the LORD came upon Elijah, and he girded up his loins and ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

1 Kings 18:41-46

Elijah Prays to Die

1 And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword.

2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.”

3 And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

4 But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said,

“It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life,
for I am no better than my fathers!”

5 Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, “Arise and eat.”

6 Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again.

7 And the angel of the LORD came back the second time, and touched him, and said, “Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.”

8 So he arose, and ate and drank, and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God.

1 Kings 19:1-8

**“FAINT NOT BECAUSE OF EVIL DOERS.
FOR IN DUE TIME THEY SHALL BE CUT OFF.”**

PSALM 37:1,2 – R. 3407

1 KINGS 19:1-8

“In my distress I cried unto the Lord, and he heard me.”

ELIJAH, flushed at the victory over the priests of Baal, was not thereby made haughty or boastful toward the king, though evidently he anticipated that the drouth and now finally its abatement, with abundant rain and with the attendant manifestation of divine power, would work a reformation in Israel. King Ahab and the rulers of Israel were evidently converted, at least temporarily, from Baal to Jehovah, – as evidenced by their willingness to permit the execution of the 450 priests of Baal. There was one person, however, on whose condition of heart Elijah had not counted, and that was Jezebel the queen, who really was at the bottom of the false religious system in which, as we have seen, her father had been at one time a chief priest in Zidon.

When the queen heard the result of the day’s procedure she was angry – angry with God, angry with the Prophet Elijah for having shown up the falsity of Baal, angry with her husband the king for having permitted the demonstration to proceed to the disadvantage of Baal, and for permitting his priests to be executed. She was furious, and sent a message to Elijah – according to the customary form of those times – declaring that he would be as dead as the priests of Baal within twenty-four hours. Canon Farrar thus graphically pictures the queen, her message, etc. He says: “We can imagine the bitter objurgations which she poured upon her cowering husband for having stood quietly by while **her** prophets and Baal’s prophets were being massacred by this dark fanatic, aided by a rebellious people. Had **she** been there all should have been otherwise! . . . The oath shows the intensity of her rage – like that of the forty Jews who bound themselves by the oath that they would not eat or drink until they had slain Paul – and the fixity of her purpose, as when Richard III declared that he would not dine until the head of Buckingham had fallen on the block. She presents the spectacle so often reproduced in history and reflected in literature, of a strong woman completely dominating a feebler consort.”

GOD’S REPRESENTATIVE INTIMIDATED

The message sent to Elijah was evidently a boast and threat designed to intimidate him and to cause him to flee the country, the very effect it did produce. Jezebel was quite probably at heart afraid to have an encounter with the man who, as God’s representative, was able to produce the results testified to by her husband and by the rain: she was too shrewd to risk a defeat, and her course prospered. Poor Elijah, so courageous previously, so ready to risk his life, was now panic stricken and fled to Beersheba, the farther part of Judea. Even then he did not feel himself safe, because Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, was a close friend to Ahab, king of Israel; so leaving there his boy servant, who is supposed to have been the son of the widow of Zarephath, he continued his flight southward through the wilderness to Mount Sinai – Horeb.

It is useless for us to speculate how Elijah might have done otherwise than he did – how

he might have boldly stood up for the Lord, denounced the Queen, rallied the heads of the tribes of Israel and carried forward to a general completion the reform movement which he began. We are to remember that Elijah was a type, and hence that his doings as well as his words were in a particular sense and degree ordered of the Lord – beyond any knowledge or motives of his own. It is only when we view this entire narrative of Elijah and Ahab and Jezebel from the standpoint of a type of more wonderful things coming afterward on a larger scale – only then can we grasp in any measure the force and meaning of the lessons taught through these types.

ANTITYPICAL FEATURES

Although we have already noticed this matter, we cannot pass the story now without brief reference to the antitypes. We see in John the Baptist the repetition of the type, he being a fresh type corresponding to Elijah, as Herod corresponded to Ahab, and Herodias was an advanced type of Jezebel. Similarly John the Baptist, like Elijah, sought to effect a reformation in Israel, and similarly he failed. Let us glance very hastily at the antitype of these things portrayed in the book of Revelation. There the antitypical Jezebel is distinctly pointed out, and, in harmony with commentators since the Reformation time, we understand the antitype to be the apostate Church, the Papacy, – the civil government of the Roman empire in its decisions corresponding to King Ahab, consequently the agent of the antitypical Jezebel in accomplishing her desires, in propagating her system and destroying the prophets of the Lord. As had been predicted, so it was fulfilled: “She wore out the saints of the most high God,” and “was drunken with the blood of the saints.” – Rev. 17:6; 18:24.

In the antitype, if Papacy represents the woman Jezebel, and if the civil power was the antitype of Ahab, where is Elijah? We answer that the antitypical Elijah all through this Gospel age has been made up of the Lord’s faithful people, the saints – a body of many members, yet in all a “little flock.” We have already shown that the antitypical Elijah, who must first come and do his work before the second advent of Christ in the glory of his Kingdom, is the true Church of Christ in the flesh – of which Jesus was the Head, of which the Apostles were prominent members, and to which number all the true saints of the Lord from then to the end of the Gospel age, while in the flesh, must belong. This Elijah class was invisible during a large portion of this long period of nearly nineteen centuries. As Elijah the Prophet disappeared just prior to the drouth and was not seen and could not be found during the drouth, so with the antitypical Elijah class. As a class they disappeared about the year 300 and were not seen for about three and a half symbolic years, namely until the time of the Reformation, about 1550, even as Elijah disappeared after announcing the drouth and did not reappear until nearly the conclusion of that period of three and a half literal years. The drouth really began about 539 A.D. and the copious showers of refreshing came three and a half symbolic years later in 1799 A.D.

This period of three and a half years, equaling forty-two months of 1260 days, is particularly mentioned in all three of these different forms in Revelation. (12:6,14; 13:5) The whole world is witness to the great drouth that prevailed throughout Christendom from the year 300 until the time of the Reformation. It is particularly known as the period of the “Dark Ages.” With the reappearance of the Elijah class prominently before the world, represented in the reformers of Luther’s time, we have some measure

of reassertion of the proper worship of God. The Reformation work up to the year 1799 was preparatory, just as the work of Elijah on Mount Carmel and with the priests of Baal was preparatory. Then followed the great shower of blessing, scattering the Word of God throughout the whole world in every language under heaven. Nearly all of the present Bible Societies were organized between 1803 and 1815. There has been a great and refreshing shower of Grace and Truth come to the world. The antitype of Ahab, civil government, has to a considerable extent recognized the general truth of the matter, but they are more or less closely affiliated with and under the influence of the Jezebel system, and alas! as Revelation clearly points out, Jezebel today has daughters – systems termed Protestant – which, nevertheless, copy largely the mother’s spirit. It is through the influence of the daughters that the antitypical Elijah may expect future persecutions, instigated by the mother, accomplished through the daughters, as typically represented in the case of John the Baptist, beheaded by Herod at the instance of Salome, but at the instigation of Herodias – Jezebel. This, however, is looking down to a period in the future.

ELIJAH IN THE SLOUGH OF DESPOND

Elijah under the juniper tree, praying God that he might die because he had been no more successful than his fathers had been in the mission of restoring Israel to the true worship, is almost amusing when we think of the fact that the Prophet had fled panic stricken a few days before to escape Jezebel’s threat against his life. Why thus flee from death and yet pray the Lord for death? The Prophet’s experiences and conduct are but an illustration of what frequently occurs. Amongst the Lord’s people some of strong faith at times become discouraged, panic stricken, fearful. For the moment they seem to forget whose servants they are, and the almighty power that is behind them, able and willing to make all things work together for good to his faithful ones.



Elijah sleeps under a broom tree.
Lutheran Stock Photos

The fact of the matter is that all of the Lord’s consecrated servants devoted their lives to sacrifice when they became followers of the Lamb, and if they could but realize their consecration continually, they would be ready for the consummation at any moment at the Lord’s pleasure and by whatever means or channel his providences may permit. The Lord’s consecrated ones of the Elijah class are to remember that not a hair of their heads could fall without their Father’s knowledge and permission, and the attitude of their hearts should be that expressed by our dear Redeemer – the Head of the

Elijah body – “The cup which the Father hath poured for me, shall I not drink it?” The language of their hearts should be that expressed by the poet:

***“Content whatever lot I see,
Since ‘tis my God that leadeth me.”***

Doubtless the Prophet’s discouragement of heart was but a natural consequence of the tension under which he had been for some time laboring in his zeal for the Truth and the exciting conditions attending his fear and flight. He slept under the juniper tree, but was awakened that he might partake of specially provided refreshments: further rest and further supplies of food brought him strength for a farther journey. We may take from this two lessons: First, a natural one, that however earnest and zealous the Lord’s people may be, they need rest and food, and these cannot be neglected with impunity if we would be strong and courageous in mind and heart. Second, the feastings and fastings of the typical Elijah may well represent special blessings and refreshments of the Truth in the experiences of the Church during the past centuries, and also represent certain fastings. Elijah’s reaching Horeb, the Mount of God, would seem to typify the Kingdom in its incipient establishment in the end of this age – which various Scriptures teach us was reached in 1878. There certain lessons, refreshments, etc., were evidently due to come to the Elijah class, and so we have found it. Of this we will learn more in our next lesson.

The Golden Text suggests a personal application of Elijah’s experiences to all of the Lord’s people at any time. Whatever our distresses, whatever our discouragements, whatever may be our Ahabs and Jezebels, we may find consolation by carrying our every trial and difficulty to the Lord in prayer. No affair of life that comes to the Lord’s people, sorrow or anguish or distress of mind in any sense, is too small to bring to the Lord. “Cast all your care upon the Lord, for he careth for you,” is a very consoling and very encouraging suggestion from the Word. However, the Lord’s people are to learn more and more distinctly, as their years of membership in God’s family and tutelage in the school of Christ go on, that they are not to ask the Lord to guide their efforts according to their wisdom, that they are not to request that their wills shall be done either on earth or in heaven, but rather, telling the Lord their burdens, great and small, they are to realize and appropriate to themselves his sympathy and love, and to apply to their own hearts as a balm the consoling assurances of his Word, that he is both able and willing to make all of their experiences profitable to them if they abide in him with confidence and trust. His grace is sufficient for us, his strength is made perfect in our weakness.

ELISHA

OTHER RESTITUTION TYPES – R. 5781

2 KINGS 6:8-23

ELISHA AWAKENS THE SHUNAMMITE’S SON – PUNISHES HIS SERVANT GEHAZI – ENTRAPS THE SYRIAN ARMY AND RENDERS THEM GOOD FOR EVIL – IMPORTANT LESSONS IN RIGHTEOUSNESS.

“The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them.” – Psalm 34:7

IN TODAY’S Study we note Elisha’s awakening of the Shunammite’s son, his punishment of his servant Gehazi with leprosy, and his entrapping of the Syrian army. (2 Kings 4:8-37; 5:20-27.) While these things may not find exact counterpart in the events of the coming Kingdom, they nevertheless represent principles which will be in operation then – the principles of reward for right doing, of punishment for intentional wrong-doing, and of sympathetic restraint and instruction. All these principles will operate during Messiah’s Kingdom; and under these the world will gradually make progress. “When the judgments of the Lord are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.” – Isaiah 26:9.

AWAKENING THE SHUNAMMITE’S SON

Millions of people will long remember a most touching scene in the PHOTO-DRAMA OF CREATION, representing the death of the Shunammite’s son, and showing how Elisha awakened the lad from the sleep of death and restored him to his parents. Perhaps no more touching film was ever produced. Few saw it without tears. It pictured the coming Restitution work of the Millennium, when all the sleeping dead will be awakened, to resume their lives and to complete their education in the school of experience under more happy and more favorable conditions than any enjoy at the present time, except the Church – those who during this Age are blessed of the Lord with hearing ears, eyes of faith and obedient hearts.

GEHAZI SMITTEN WITH LEPROSY

Gehazi had in many respects been a faithful servant to Elisha. As a result, he had blessings of knowledge which the majority of people did not possess. With the knowledge came responsibility; hence the severe punishment inflicted upon the man for hypocrisy and deception. We are reminded of the text which declares that if a good man depart from his well-doing and sin wilfully, his past good deeds shall not be remembered, even as it is with the evil-doer who, coming to God with full repentance and change of heart, is forgiven and received into God’s family. His past evil is entirely ignored, except as it

may bear its fruit in certain weaknesses of mind or body. – Ezekiel 3:17-21; 18:20-24; 33:10-16.

When General Naaman perceived the great miracle accomplished in his cleansing from leprosy, he returned to Elisha, offering thanks to God and desiring the Prophet to receive the presents which he had brought. But Elisha would receive none of them. In this he manifested what we believe is always the Lord's Spirit – never to sell spiritual things for money. It is for this reason that some ministers now object to taking up collections, holding fairs or soliciting money in any manner. Their contention is that whatever is given to the Lord's service should be given with a free hand and a ready heart. "The Father seeketh such to worship Him as worship Him in spirit and in truth." (John 4:23.) It is a privilege to give to the Lord and His Cause; for the Almighty is not poor, that He should need our gifts. All the gold and silver are His, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. – Haggai 2:8; Psalm 50:10.

Under such a noble example Gehazi should have profited, but did not. He allowed covetousness to come into his mind. He had seen the rich Babylonish garments, and thought how fine it would be if he could have some of these and plenty of changes of linen garments. He would be like a prince. He had perceived that General Naaman regretted that his presents were not accepted. He pursued, and told the general that the Prophet had said that while he did not desire any of the garments or other things for himself, he had concluded that he might use some of these for his servants, and that he would accept gifts for them. The ruse was successful. The servant was recognized as the one seen at Elisha's place. The goods were joyfully given to him. He hid them away secretly, until the Prophet called him, told him all about the matter and pronounced his punishment – leprosy.

So will it be in the coming Age. Any disobedience will meet with swift punishment. Of the judges of that time it is written that they will not judge with the hearing of the ear nor with the sight of the eye; they will judge righteously. – Isaiah 11:3,4.

ELISHA'S CAPTURE ATTEMPTED

It was probably after the death of General Naaman that the king of Syria declared war against the Israelites. To his surprise he found that every move he made was checkmated. If he planned to capture a certain city, it seemed as though the Israelitish king knew every detail. Thus his endeavors came to naught. He looked for a traitor amongst his own people in his own household, or for some explanation. Then it was told him by one of his servants, "Behold, the Prophet Elisha is in Israel and makes known to their king all thy counsels, even those of thy bed-chamber." Apparently the knowledge of Jehovah and Elisha had spread from General Naaman to some of the household of the king.

Intent upon his conquest, the king sought to capture Elisha. If he could not get some profit out of the man for himself and his side, he could at least keep him from communicating with the king of Israel. He sent spies to find where Elisha dwelt, and located him at the little city of Dothan. Thereupon he sent a good-sized force, quite sufficient to surround the city and make it impossible for Elisha to escape – horses, chariots, etc. He would do two things – not only capture a city, but capture the Prophet.

In the morning early, Elisha's servant looked forth and beheld the companies of the enemy on every side, barring every way of escape. He was terrified and said, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" Promptly came the answer, "Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." The servant did not appreciate this; for he had not come to realize fully what Divine powers were with his master. Then Elisha prayed that the eyes of the young man might be opened; and he beheld angelic hosts, horses and chariots of fire around about Elisha. This was sufficient to give the young man the needed courage and to assure him of God's Power.

Just what kind of vision this was makes no particular difference. Undoubtedly it was merely a vision, without any reality; but it served its purpose. God's Power surrounds all of His consecrated people in an unlimited measure. These powers are exercised by spirit beings, entirely invisible to men. The important thing is to get the right thought – that under all conditions Omnipotent Power stands behind and completely surrounds those who are His. Nothing can befall this special class except in accord with the Divine program. Whatever may occur in their experience will be of Divine foreknowledge and permission; hence the promise to this class is that all things shall work together for their good. – Romans 8:28.

THE SYRIAN HOST CAPTURED

The Prophet exercised a supernatural power of blinding the Syrian host; but just what the power was or how it was accomplished we can only conjecture. Doubtless their eyes were wide open; and doubtless they saw the hills, valleys, roads, etc.; but the eyes of their understanding were closed, apparently, in some hypnotic manner. Elisha gave them to understand that he would lead them to the proper city; and he did so, guiding them straight to the city of Samaria, in through its gates. There, surrounded by the hosts of the capital, he broke the hypnotic spell. Their eyes opened; and they perceived that they were in the hands of their enemies, who, with drawn swords and leveled spears, offered no opportunity of escape. They had been entrapped, but not to their injury – for their good, for their instruction.

The king of Israel inquired of the Prophet whether or not he should smite these and destroy them, or what. The answer was, "No; feed them and let them return peaceably to their own home." The king caught the spirit of the proposition, and not merely gave them bread and water, such as might be given prisoners, but made them a bountiful feast – treated them royally, treated them as friends. Then they were set free to go to their own land, there to tell the strange experience that had occurred and to demonstrate to their king the impossibility of successfully fighting against the kingdom of Israel under such circumstances.

Elisha Prays

11 The heart of the king of Syria was greatly troubled by this thing, and he called his servants and said to them, “Will you not show me which of us is for the king of Israel?”

12 And one of his servants said, “None, my lord, O king, but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom.”

13 So he said, “Go and see where he is, that I may send and get him.” And it was told him, saying, “Surely he is in Dothan.”

14 Therefore he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city.

15 And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?”

16 So he answered, “Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”

17 And Elisha prayed, and said,

“LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.”

Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

18 So when the Syrians came down to him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, and said,

“Strike this people, I pray, with blindness.”

And He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

19 Now Elisha said to them, “This is not the way, nor is this the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek.” But he led them to Samaria.

20 So it was, when they had come to Samaria, that Elisha said,

“LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see.”

And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw, and there they were, inside Samaria!

21 Now when the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, “My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?”

22 But he answered, “You shall not kill them. Would you kill those whom you have taken captive with your sword and your bow? Set food and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master.”

23 Then he prepared a great feast for them, and after they ate and drank, he sent them away and they went to their master. So the bands of Syrian raiders came no more into the land of Israel.

2 Kings 6:11-23

OUR UNSEEN GUARDIANS – R. 3440

2 KINGS 6:8-23

“The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.” – Psalm 34:7

OUR LESSON is based upon a miracle which the Lord wrought through Elisha the Prophet. As already noted, the kingdom of Syria lay to the north and east of the kingdom of Israel, and the two were not separated by natural boundaries, such as mountains, seas, etc. Consequently wars between the two countries were not infrequent. We recall that in one of these raids of the Syrians upon the Israelites, Naaman’s wife’s maid was taken captive. We recall that when Naaman came to the king of Israel the latter thought his coming merely a pretext for another war. Our lesson calls our attention to a later determination upon the part of the king of Syria to invade Israel, get spoil, etc. Several plans of attack were devised to raid one city or another, but each time these raids were frustrated, for the Syrian army found the cities they attacked freshly prepared for defence. The king concluded there was a traitor in his court or camp who disclosed his secret plans and arrangements to the king of Israel, and instituted a search for the traitor. His counsellors, however, had heard of Elisha – perhaps through Naaman or those who accompanied him at the time of his healing. These explained to the king of Syria that a more likely interpretation of the matter was that the Prophet Elisha revealed to Israel’s king all plots and schemes against the interests of the nation.

Although the king was evidently a man of force, he was not wise in his determination to ascertain the location of Elisha and to capture him first, and thus to secure a free hand in looting the cities of Israel. He might have known that if Elisha could inform the king, he could be equally well informed in matters respecting himself. But thus it is with all who leave the wisdom of God out of their calculations. The Apostle sums up the matter for them, saying, The wisdom of man is as foolishness with God, for the world by its wisdom knows not God and does not take into consideration the boundlessness of his wisdom and power. The Christian, on the contrary, recognizing divine power and wisdom and coming into accord with the same, is thereby blessed. Whatever was the measure of his wisdom and prudence as a natural man, this would be certainly intensified by his participation in the wisdom which cometh from above – “the spirit of a sound mind,” the Spirit of the Lord.

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.
2 Tim. 1:7

As soon as the king learned that Elisha was at the little town of Dothan he sent an army, including horses and chariots, to surround the city and to make sure of capturing the Prophet. The latter doubtless understood in advance, but working in harmony with the Lord’s arrangement he did not flee the city. He was entirely restful in mind respecting the matter, but his servant was greatly alarmed – he thought of the Prophet and himself being carried prisoners to Syria to thenceforth be bondmen, etc. Elisha, however, comforted him with assurances respecting the divine power which encompassed them, much greater than the power of their enemies. Then, not only as a lesson to the servant, but also doubtless intended of the Lord as a lesson for his people all the way down through the ages, Elisha prayed that the young man’s eyes might be opened that he might see and realize the true situation. At once the servant perceived that all around the city the entire hill was amply protected against the surrounding hosts – “horses and chariots of fire” around and about Elisha and himself. We must assume that the

horses and chariots of fire were in the nature of a vision granted to the servant and to us, as illustrative of the divine power and protection given. Thus viewed, what the servant saw was an active parable, a picture similar to the symbolic pictures of Revelation – serving the intended purpose most thoroughly, most completely, and giving to the eyes of his understanding a proper conception of the divine power present with the Prophet.



Elisha's Army of Angels

DIVINE PROVIDENCE ALL ABOUT US

*Do not fear,
for those
who are
with us are
more than
those who
are with
them.
2 Kings 6:16*

This is the center of our lesson and is in full accord with other Scripture statements, as, for instance, the Golden Text, the latter giving a picture, not of horses and chariots representing power, but an encampment representing a continued and abiding presence of the divine representatives, safely guarding all the interests of the Lord's faithful ones. The Apostle assures us that the angels of God are ministering spirits sent forth to minister unto and to serve those who shall be heirs of salvation, the saved ones of this Gospel Age – not only the overcomers of the little flock, but also the overcomers of the great multitude. All of these, because believers in Christ, because at heart faithful, because fully consecrated to the Lord and begotten of his Spirit, are the special and happy objects of his grace, ministered to and served by the invisible messengers. Our Lord Jesus sets forth practically the same thought in his declaration, "Their angels do always behold [have access to] the face of my Father." (Matt. 18:10.) The Master's words seem to imply at least one or more angels having charge over the consecrated ones, the very elect. He uses a still different figure of speech in illustrating the matter, as though he would assure us that these messengers would not be delayed in caring for our interests, would not be hindered by more important heavenly business, but would at once have direct access to the divine presence and attention, so that our interests would have all needed consideration.

Gathering together these various pictures, we have as a whole before our minds something like this: Our great all-wise, all-powerful heavenly Father has numberless messengers at his command, and has deputized and appointed many of these to care for the interests of his cause on earth – especially to watch over and minister unto the very elect. Nothing can by any means, therefore, harm these, except as the heavenly Father sees that the earthly injury or disadvantage would prove profitable either to the individual new creature or to the Lord's general cause. This is in full accord with his general assurance that all things shall work together for good to them that love him.

Such a use of the heavenly messengers by no means invalidates the thought that the Lord's earthly children are frequently used of him as ministers, servants, the one to the other. Indeed we may be assured that the invisible messengers or servants, generally if not always, are required to act through human instrumentalities – preferably through the very elect. Of this kind of service done by the brethren one for the other under the

supervision of divine power and messengers, we have illustrations in the harvest work: for instance, supervised by our present Lord and his heavenly hosts, yet in the main carried on by the members of his body still in the flesh. Again we have illustrations of the same in the declaration of Psa. 91:11,12, "He shall give his messengers charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." Doubtless the heavenly messengers are connected with this work, yet nevertheless the work itself is apparently, we may say surely, done through human instrumentalities – the Church in the flesh. For instance, the Lord in this present harvest time has given his messengers, the leaders of his consecrated people, "a charge," a message, a word of warning, counsel, advice, – an opening of the Word of Truth, an enlightenment of their understandings, – that they should bear up all the members of the "feet" class, all of the very elect in this time of serious trial, testing and stumbling, lest at any time any of this class should stumble through the peculiar trials of the present time. How manifestly this is fulfilled: the harvest message in its various features, bearing on every phase of Truth now due and every phase of error now being brought forward, is God's keeping power by which, according to his guarantee, we know that nothing shall by any means hurt the "feet" members of the true "body of Christ."

It is for us to rejoice in these blessings and favors of the Lord and to increase our faith; and the lesson under consideration is a help in this connection, as showing us how even before the house of sons was organized, the Lord had power and exercised it in the house of servants in a way that illustrates to us the abundance of that power.

With the morning light the Syrian soldiers drew near to the village of Dothan, making inquiry for the Prophet, who, by prayer, brought upon them "blindness." The original word, however, does not signify total blindness, but rather a visual indistinctness, somewhat akin perhaps to mesmeric or hypnotic conditions as they are known today. The Prophet proposes to lead them to Elisha and his home, the latter being in the city of Samaria and thither he led them. When they were within the walls of the city and completely, therefore, at the mercy of the king of Israel and his warriors, the Prophet dispelled the illusion, and, opening the eyes of their understanding, made himself known to them and introduced them to the king of Israel, etc. The latter inquired of the prophet whether he had led them there to be smitten, to be destroyed as the enemies of the Lord and of the kingdom, but his answer was, No; that he should set a feast before them of royal bounties and send them back to their king and friends – in a word, that he should figuratively "heap coals of fire on their heads." This was done, and the result is given us in a few words, "So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel."

The closing incident of our lesson is worthy of appropriation by spiritual Israelites. So long as we are the Lord's we may have absolute confidence respecting the results in all of life's affairs, and this confidence in God should tend to make us more generous and kind toward our enemies – to all those who would despitefully use us or persecute us. So far from seeking to do them injury in return or to speak evil of them in return, the admonition of the Lord is, "If thine enemy hunger feed him, if he thirst give him drink, for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." "A soft answer turneth away wrath." A return of good for evil may not at once make a friend of an enemy, but it will at least bring blessing to our own hearts, and is much more likely to bring blessing to the enemy than if we should return him evil for evil.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Rom. 12:21

JONAH

Jonah's Prayer From the Belly of The Fish

1 Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish's belly.

2 And he said:

"I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, and He answered me.

"Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard my voice.

3 For You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the floods surrounded me. All Your billows and Your waves passed over me.

4 Then I said, 'I have been cast out of Your sight. Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.'

5 The waters surrounded me, even to my soul. The deep closed around me. Weeds were wrapped around my head.

6 I went down to the moorings of the mountains. The earth with its bars closed behind me forever.

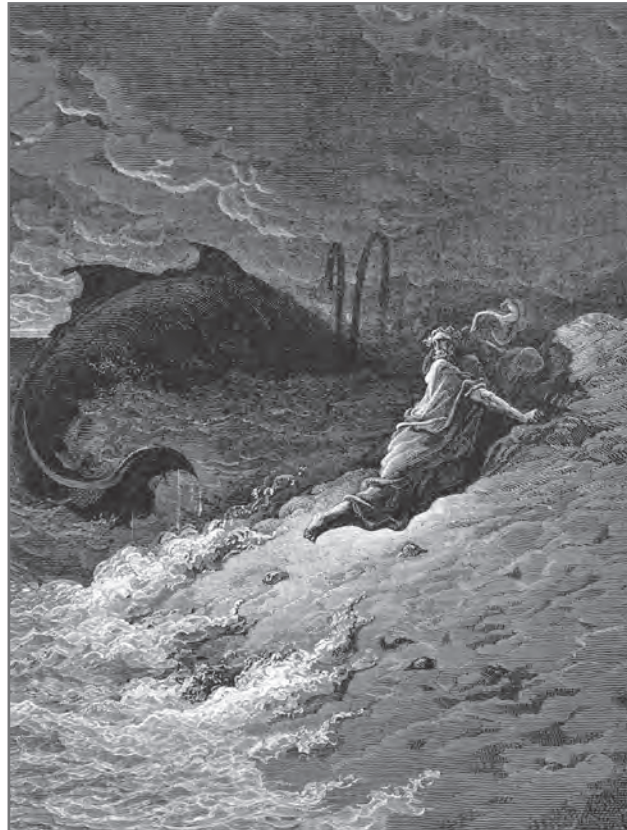
Yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD, my God.

7 "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer went up to You, into Your holy temple.

8 "Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own mercy.

9 But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving. I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD."

10 So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.



Jonah Cast Forth by The Whale, Gustave Dore

Jonah 2:1-10

The Bible tells of several who were released from Sheol, but of two the very word is used. The Prophet Jonah, swallowed by the great fish, was in its belly parts of three days. He calls it his tomb-belly – a sheol-belly. While there entombed, he cried unto the Lord in prayer, and the Lord delivered him. Jesus tells us that Jonah’s experiences typified His own – that as Jonah was buried in the sheol-belly of the fish, He would be buried in the Sheol of earth. As Jonah came forth on the third day, so Jesus came forth. St. Peter points out that this was prophesied of Jesus, saying, “Thou wilt not leave My soul in (Sheol or) Hades” – the tomb. He says that God fulfilled this by raising Jesus from the dead. –Acts 2:27. OV362

GOD’S PITY FOR THE HEATHEN – R. 4785

JONAH 3:5 TO 4:11

“Go, ye, therefore, and teach all nations.” – Matthew 28:19

SKEPTICS have long been inclined to treat the story of Jonah’s experiences in the belly of the great fish as a seaman’s yarn. Many pulpiteers even laugh at the account of Jonah’s experiences as suitable only for the credulous and not for wise, “Higher Critics.” Nevertheless, the Great Teacher refers to Jonah and his experiences in the belly of the great fish, and those who believe the Scriptures will seek no better ground for their faith in the story than this. Nor is Jonah’s account without a considerable parallel. One of the New York journals recently gave a detailed account, profusely illustrated, showing how a sailor, overboard, was swallowed by “a great sulphur whale,” but after several hours escaped, his skin made purplish from the action of the digestive fluids of the whale’s stomach.

*“For as
Jonah was
three days
and three
nights in
the belly of
the great
fish, so will
the Son of
Man be
three days
and three
nights in the
heart of the
earth.”
Matt. 12:40*

So far as we know, Jonah’s case was the only one in which anyone spent parts of three days and nights in the belly of a fish. True, the throats of the majority of whales seem too small to admit a man. We remember, however, that they are quite elastic. The great sulphur variety is of enormous size and is said to have a throat capable of swallowing a skiff (much larger than a man) and less flexible. Besides, the Bible description of the matter tells us specifically that God prepared a great fish. No one who has a proper appreciation of the powers of the Almighty would question for an instant the ability of God to prepare a special fish, either at the moment or, foreknowing Jonah’s course, long in advance. The exceptional character of Jonah’s experience constituted him a type of Jesus, who, in death, was swallowed up of the earth, as was Jonah by the fish; and as our Lord was liberated from his prison-house, so was Jonah.

PREACHING TO THE NINEVITES

Our special lesson, however, is connected with Jonah’s preaching to the Ninevites. Nineveh was a great city outside the pale of Judaism and therefore at that time outside the lines of Divine favor; for from the giving of the Law until three and a half years after the Cross, God’s favors were exclusively confined to the Jewish nation under the terms of the Law Covenant – Cornelius, the centurion, being the first Gentile to receive evidence of Divine favor at the close of the period of Israel’s exclusive favor.

In the cases of the Sodomites, Ninevites and Amalekites, Divine Justice decreed that their iniquity had come to the full, and that for them to live longer would be unwise, and for them to be cut off in death would not only hinder them from further degradation, but also furnish to mankind a general lesson, to the effect that there is a limit to the Divine permission of evil. The fact that these people were thus condemned and overthrown did not signify that they had ever enjoyed salvation, or even an offer of salvation. Like all of Adam's children, these people were under the sentence of death, "Dying thou shalt die"; "As all in Adam die." They were merely cut off from further life under present conditions. Their opportunity for future life by resurrection from the dead was not interfered with. Neither they nor others had yet been redeemed.

Hence the future life, secured by the redemptive work of Jesus, was in no sense interfered with by the sentence of death issued against them en masse. Indeed, the Jews were not saved either. The offer of salvation made to them under the Law Covenant did not give them eternal life; as St. Paul declares, "By the deeds of the Law shall no flesh be justified in God's sight." If the Jews were justified by the Law, then Christ died in vain.

The offer of life given to the Jew was merely to prove to him, and ultimately to all, the impossibility of any obtaining life under the Divine Law without Divine assistance – without the Savior and his work at Calvary and additionally his work for the world as the Mediator of the New Covenant, during his Messianic reign of a thousand years. In harmony with this the Apostle declares, "Christ brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." And again, "There is none other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved." And again, "This great salvation began to be preached by our Lord." – Hebrews 2:3.

THE NINEVITES REPENTED

Jonah's preaching was that within forty days God would destroy Nineveh. But the people, impressed by his message, repented of their sinful course and sought Divine forgiveness. The King's proclamation was that "neither man nor beast, herd nor flock taste anything; let them not feed nor drink water, but let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and beast, and let them cry mightily to God; yea, let them turn every man from his evil way and from the violence that is in their hands." The Lord hearkened to the Ninevites, accepted their repentance, and permitted their national life to continue for a time.

We are, of course, to understand that God knew the end from the beginning – that he knew that the Ninevites would repent and that he would not blot them out within forty days, in accordance with Jonah's preaching. Nineveh did pass away utterly, great city as it was, but not within forty literal days. Possibly the time meant by the Almighty was what is sometimes termed prophetic or symbolical time, a day for a year – forty days, forty years.

The lesson shows us how much greater is the compassion of the Almighty than that of his imperfect servants of human kind. God was pleased to have the Ninevites turn from their sins to hearty repentance. He was pleased to grant them an extension of earthly life. But Jonah was displeased. His argument was, There, God did make a fool of me. He told me that this great city would be destroyed within forty days and I preached it.

But all the while he must have known that it would not be destroyed within forty days. God has brought discredit upon me and I am now to be regarded as a false prophet.

2 So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish, for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. 3 "Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!"
Jonah 4:2-3

Jonah was more interested in himself and his own reputation than in the Ninevites and their interests. The Lord's servants must not be so! Self should be lost sight of; as the great Apostle Paul advises, "Love seeketh not her own"; and again, "Christ pleased not himself." – 1 Cor. 13:5; Rom. 15:3.

GOD REPENTED OF THE EVIL

The query arises in some minds, How can God repent and change his mind if he knows the end from the beginning? The answer is that the word **repent** has a wider meaning than is generally appreciated. Humanity uses it only in respect to a change of purpose. But, as modern dictionaries show, the word may mean either a change of action or a change of purpose, or both. God's purposes do not change. He never repents of them. But he does change his **conduct**.

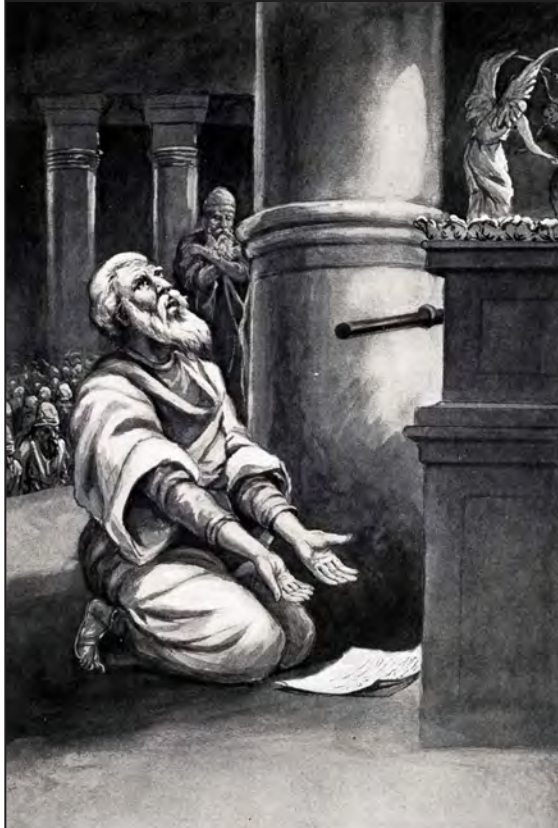
Thus Israel, his favored people for centuries, were cut off and God's dealing towards them changed. But God's purposes never changed toward Israel. He foreknew and foretold their rejection of Jesus and his rejection of them, and how later on they would be re-gathered to their own land and be forgiven and be blessed by Messiah when he assumed his Messianic Office as King of kings and Lord of lords – "the Prince of the kings of the earth."

The Lord taught Jonah a lesson respecting his sympathy for a gourd, an inanimate thing, and his lack of sympathy for the Ninevites. So it is with many preachers and others. They have sympathy for the flowers, for the birds, for the lower animals, for children and, to some extent, for all mankind under the distresses of the present time. Nevertheless such people sometimes become angry at the bare suggestion that God does not intend to roast the Ninevites, Sodomites, Amalekites, or anybody else, to all eternity and that his gracious purposes for the world in general will be manifested in giving all an opportunity to attain to human perfection, a world-wide Eden and everlasting life, if they will hear and obey the Great Messiah – whose Head is Jesus and whose members, the elect Church, have been in process of selection and preparation throughout this Gospel Age.

Our Lord declared that the Gospel was to be preached no longer to the Jews only, but to all nations. The preaching was not intended to convert all nations, and has not done so. It was intended to gather a saintly few from all nations, and this it will soon have accomplished.

HEZEKIAH

Hezekiah's Prayer



Hezekiah receives Sennacherib's letter

14 And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it, and Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD.

15 Then Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said:

“O LORD God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.

16 “Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear. Open Your eyes, O LORD, and see, and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God.

17 “Truly, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands,

18 “and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods, but the work of men’s hands—wood and stone. Therefore they destroyed them.

19 “Now therefore, O LORD our God, I pray, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the LORD God, You alone.”

2 Kings 19:14-19

TWO PRAYERS AND THEIR ANSWERS – R. 2381

2 KINGS 19:20-22,28-37

“God is our refuge and strength; a very present help in trouble.”

– Psalm 46:1

HEZEKIAH, king of Judah, is one of the most notable characters of Old Testament history, and our present lesson relates to him. The preceding lesson showed us the beginning of his reign, accompanied by a great religious reformation and revival amongst the people. The present lesson shows him under severe trials, and how they developed and manifested his faith in the Lord, and the Lord’s responses to his trust and prayers.

The Assyrian king, Sennacherib, had invaded the northern or ten-tribe kingdom, and carried its people captive, and had placed peoples of other nationalities in the land in their stead; and eight years after that conquest he determined upon an invasion of the kingdom of Judah. Already, one after the other, the Assyrians had conquered various nations, and were now evidently bent upon conquering Egypt, but first were disposing of the intermediate kingdoms, and Judah was the last of these which lay on the route between Assyria and Egypt. Bent upon conquest and mastery, rather than upon destruction, Sennacherib, while laying siege to some of the intermediate countries, first sent letters and subsequently his representative and general, Rabshakeh, with an armed host to Jerusalem, demanding the full surrender of the kingdom, that the people might be deported to other lands, as the people of the ten tribes had been.

These letters and the message were full of boastings of the power of Assyria, and the conquests already made, and promised the people of Judah homes and circumstances similar to those then enjoyed, the object, apparently, being to establish the Assyrian empire on a firm basis by obliterating as far as possible the feelings of patriotism in the various peoples conquered. Not only did these messages boast of the power of Sennacherib, as exemplified in other wars, but taking cognizance of the fact that Israel trusted in Jehovah, they first declared that the Assyrians were sent there by Jehovah for the very purpose of overthrowing the kingdom, and taking the people captive, and secondly declared that their trust in Jehovah was vain, because the various nations which had been conquered trusted severally to their own gods, and yet all alike failed; and that Israel’s God, Jehovah, could do nothing more for them than could the other gods for the other peoples, against the mighty power of Assyria, which was rapidly becoming a world-empire.

Hezekiah’s first move was to placate his adversary, by becoming his vassal, and paying annual tribute, and as a preliminary step in this direction he sent Sennacherib a present of great value, gold and silver, ivory couches, etc., – even stripping the gold and silver ornaments from the Temple for this purpose. Herein we believe he greatly erred, and it would appear to have been as a consequence of this failure to at once recognize Jehovah as the almighty ruler and preserver of his people and typical kingdom, that the Assyrians were permitted to assail them, and to destroy many of the outlying smaller cities, and to besiege Jerusalem, the capital city, with fortresses, etc. Nevertheless, when it came to the extremity, Hezekiah’s faith in the Lord increased in proportion as the power of the Assyrians was manifested, and the condition of his

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own city and people became the more critical. Then it was that he did what he should have done at the very beginning – he, with Isaiah, the prophet (his faithful friend and adviser and supposed tutor in earlier years), joined together in prayer to the Lord (2 Kings 19:1,2,14-19), in the Temple, laying before the Lord the letters received from the haughty Sennacherib, and recounting his boastful words, beseeching the Lord to have mercy upon his covenanted people, who now, more than for centuries, were seeking to please and serve him, and to grant them deliverance from their enemies, when there seemed no hope from any other quarter.

*Because
your rage
against Me
and your
tumult have
come up to
My ears,
therefore
I will put
My hook in
your nose
and My
bridle in
your lips,
and I will
turn you
back by the
way which
you came.
2 Kings
19:28*

It was in answer to this prayer that Isaiah sent to Hezekiah the message of our lesson: “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, that which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib, king of Assyria, I have heard,” etc. The remainder of Isaiah’s message was evidently intended to be the answer which Hezekiah should send to Sennacherib, through Rabshakeh, that the people of Jehovah laughed to scorn his boastful message and ultimatum. The answer calls attention to Sennacherib’s boastful pride and his blasphemy of the only true God, the God of Israel. The threat of the hook in the nose and the bridle in the mouth is figurative, representing the manner in which bullocks and horses are controlled: thus would the Lord control the Assyrian army. “Isaiah said unto him, Thus shall ye say to your master [Hezekiah], Thus saith the Lord, be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria has blasphemed me. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumor, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own hand.” (2 Kings 19:6,7.) The message calls attention to the success of the Assyrian monarch previously, and points out that it was because the Lord had so permitted, designed and foretold, but points out, also, that Sennacherib is equally under the divine power, and on the present occasion, having blasphemed Jehovah, would be unsuccessful, would be turned back, while his people, Israel, and their king Hezekiah, would be heard and succored.

Spiritual Israelites may draw valuable lessons from the foregoing. We should beware how at any time we lose sight of the Lord’s power on our behalf, no matter how threatening or great or dark the evil which assails us. A proper faith will look up to God, under such circumstances, and relying upon his promises will seek his aid, rather than seek to purchase deliverance from the great adversary, Satan, by any compromises. But how many, on the contrary, are disposed to do as Hezekiah did, purchase peace with things consecrated to the Lord, – to compromise the truth: for instance, if threatened with the disfavor of friends or neighbors or employers, how many are willing to conciliate such adversaries by a more worldly course, by subtracting from the time, influence, means, etc., consecrated to the Lord, considerable portions to be given to worldly service, or to secure domestic peace or social advancement, or commercial prosperity. So surely as the Lord’s consecrated people do this, we may expect that the Lord will permit to come upon them the very difficulties which they dread and seek to avert by unholy compromise.

They need just such a lesson; and as a faithful father will give needed chastisements and corrections to his son, so the Lord deals with those who have been adopted into his family. But with the world in general matters are different; God’s special dealings and special corrections are the manifestations of his special care for those whom he is now selecting from amongst mankind for a great future work, for which they need

to be prepared, and for which unlimited faith and trust in the Almighty are absolutely essential. As David expressed it, "Before I was afflicted I went astray:" in other words, it was because he went astray, and because he was a consecrated servant of God, therefore, instead of permitting him to go far astray he was corrected in order to bring him back. So with all who have entered into the New Covenant, and accepted the call to joint-heirship with Christ; they are not permitted to go astray and make compromises whose tendency would be to lead them further and further astray from faith and trust in the Lord. Therefore they are chastened, and happy it is for all of Spiritual Israel who, like Hezekiah, permit the divine chastisements to develop more and more of faith and obedience.

It required great faith and courage on the part of Hezekiah and his princes, and the people of Judah in general, to resist the great power of Assyria, and to send to Sennacherib such a reply as the Lord had indicated, yet evidently their faith and trust were developed in proportion to the difficulty; and shortly they beheld the fulfilment of the Lord's declaration respecting the Assyrians. Rabshakeh returned to meet Sennacherib, and to give him Hezekiah's answer, and then, apparently was fulfilled the catastrophe upon Sennacherib's army, referred to in our lesson.

In one place this is called "the blast of the Lord," from which some have supposed that it was a simoon, or sandstorm, not uncommon in the vicinity of the Arabian desert. In the lesson it is spoken of as the smiting of the angel of the Lord, and others have assumed from this that it was a pestilence which broke out in Sennacherib's army and destroyed in one night one hundred and eighty-five thousand of his warriors; because elsewhere pestilence is spoken of as being the work of a destroying angel or messenger. (See 2 Sam. 24:16,17.) Jewish tradition ascribes the destruction to a pestilence. The word "angel" here, as often elsewhere in the Scriptures, does not necessarily refer to a member of the angelic order of beings, but simply signifies "messenger;" and God is as able to use winds or waves, lightnings or sandstorms, or pestilence, as any other agency in the execution of his will. "Who maketh the winds his angels, and flaming fire his servants." – Psa. 104:4.

*Behold,
I will send a
blast upon
him, and he
shall hear a
rumour, and
shall return
to his own
land, and I
will cause
him to fall by
the sword in
his own land.*

Egyptian history contains an account of the remarkable departure of Sennacherib's army, and ascribes its retreat to an invasion of field mice, which gnawed the quivers and bowstrings and the thongs by which their shields were managed. But some have suggested that this is the Egyptian figurative way of speaking of a pestilence, because with them the mouse was a symbol representing pestilence. There are many other notable instances in history in which, apparently, divine providence has similarly intervened and protected those whom it was not the divine will should be further injured. For instance, the notable case of the Spanish Armada, designed to work great havoc upon the people of Great Britain, and apparently well qualified to do the work, was destroyed by a remarkable storm. Similarly, Napoleon's army, which had invaded Russia, and was encamped at Moscow, was, it is said, forced to retreat because of a heavy fall of snow, which is said to have caused the death of 20,000 of Napoleon's horses, and compelled the retreat which involved the almost complete destruction of his army, numbering over a quarter of a million. In the churches of Moscow the narrative of the destruction of Sennacherib's army is read on the anniversary of the retreat of the French from their city, as marking a similar interposition of divine providence.

*2 Kings
19:7 KJV*

As the Israelites accepted the overthrow and turning back of Sennacherib's forces as of divine interposition, although the sceptically inclined might view it differently, and ascribe it to natural causes, so Spiritual Israelites often find that God's answers to their prayers, and fulfillments of his promises are of such a kind that the trustful may see in them the hand of God, while those living less near to the Almighty will see in them nothing but the casualties of nature. Thus it is that our own spiritual condition has much to do with our joy in the Lord, and our appreciation of his care over us, and of the fulfillment of his promises. All of the divine leadings are along this line, namely, "According to thy faith be it unto thee." He who will not exercise faith in God cannot have the joy and peace which come to and are intended for believers only. It is the proper thing that as the Lord's people we should not only trust him for his goodness and providential care, and call to mind his promises, and plead them before him in our supplications, but it is also equally proper that we should seek to see at every step of life's journey how divine providence is directing our way, and causing all of life's affairs to work together for good to those who love God. Such expectations of divine care, and such waiting for it and looking for it, are evidences of true faith, and pleasing to the Lord. Accordingly, he assures us that without faith it is impossible to please him and again he assures us, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith."

In those days wars were not accomplished so quickly as at the present time, and the Israelites might well have been fearful that the retreat of Sennacherib's army was only temporary, and that he would come upon them again, and hence the Lord gave them a sign; viz., that although they had been hindered from planting their crops that year they should have a sufficiency of food from that which would spring up of itself, and likewise the year following. The sign was fulfilled, and the people understood that they were effectually delivered: and although Sennacherib lived for some twenty years after his retreat, he did not again attempt to conquer the land of Judah, and subsequently was assassinated by his own sons, as was set forth in the Lord's prophecy. – Verse 7.

Assyrian history records, on tablets and cylinders of baked clay (the books of those days), Sennacherib's many victories, but they make no mention of this disaster which the Lord brought upon him, just as upon Napoleon's tomb in Paris are inscribed the various battles of his wars, but Waterloo is omitted. The first features of Sennacherib's victory over Judah are described in these words, on what is known as the "Taylor cylinder," now in the British Museum: "Because Hezekiah, king of Judah, would not submit to my yoke I came up against him, and by force of arms, and by the might of my power, I took forty-six of his strong fenced cities; and of the smaller towns, which were scattered about, with the march of a host and surrounding of a multitude, with attack of ranks, and force of battering-rams, and mines and missiles, I besieged and captured a countless number. From these places I took and carried off 200,150 persons, old and young, male and female, together with horses and mules, asses and goats, sheep and oxen, a countless multitude, and Hezekiah himself I shut up in Jerusalem, his capital city, like a bird in a cage, building towers round the city, to hem him in, and raising banks of earth against the gates, so as to prevent his escape. . . . Then upon this Hezekiah there fell the fear of the might of my arms, and he sent out to me the chiefs and the elders of Jerusalem, with thirty talents of gold, and eight hundred talents of silver, precious stones, of large size, couches of ivory. . . woods of every kind – an abundant treasure. . . all these were brought to me at Nineveh, the city of my dominion, Hezekiah having sent them by way of tribute, as a token of submission to my power." Thus

Sennacherib boasts of Hezekiah's mistake, but wholly omits Hezekiah's subsequent victory, through prayer and the manifestation of divine power.

ANOTHER DEFEAT AND ANOTHER VICTORY

In consequence of this marked deliverance of Judah from the superior power of Assyria, we read, "And many brought gifts unto the Lord at Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah, King of Judah; so that he was magnified in the sight of all nations from henceforth. . . . And Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honor, and he made himself treasuries for silver and gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and shields, and for all manner of desirable instruments," etc. (2 Chron. 32:22,27,30.) But prosperity is often a severer test of character than adversity, and hence we read, "But Hezekiah rendered not again, according to the benefit done unto him, for his heart was lifted up. Therefore there was wrath upon him and upon Judah and Jerusalem. Notwithstanding, Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants in Judah, so that the wrath of the Lord came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah." – 2 Chron. 32:25,26.

"In those days Hezekiah was sick unto death." It was somewhere in this period of time, we may not be certain exactly when, but evidently the sickness had somewhat to do with Hezekiah's prosperity and consequent pride; but his sickness, in the midst of various great projects for the advancement of his country, and the welfare of his people, was a sore disappointment to Hezekiah, and led him to the Lord in prayer.

Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD, and said, "Remember now, O LORD, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what is good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

Isaiah 38:2-3

Doubtless he realized from the nature of the message delivered to him by Isaiah, that his sickness and premature death were penalties for his failure to render unto the Lord according to the multitude of his blessings. And so realizing, the king prayed most earnestly for forgiveness and help, promising that henceforth "I shall go softly all my years. . . . We will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord." Isa. 38:9-22 records, in poetic form, Hezekiah's resolves, and is evidently the embodiment of his previous prayer, with thanksgiving for his deliverance: for the Lord was gracious to him, accepted his prayer, covered his sins, and healed him. The prophet was sent back to him with the message of his recovery.

The king, anxious to assure himself that he was indeed the subject of a divine miracle, requested a proof of the increase of his life fifteen years. Isaiah proposed that the proof should be that the sun's record on the sun-dial should be suddenly advanced ten degrees, but Hezekiah thought it would be a still greater miracle if it should be turned back ten degrees, and his request was granted. The possibility of such a miracle has been questioned by many, who have insisted that it could in no way be possible, that it would involve not only stoppage of the motion of the earth upon its axis, but an impossible retrograde movement, to be accomplished in a moment of time. However, Professor Garbett, writing for a magazine called *Knowledge*, declares that he knew of an afternoon some years ago when, on many sundials in Southern England, there occurred exactly the wonder described in the book of Kings.

Prayers of The Righteous

8 “Behold, I will bring the shadow on the sundial, which has gone down with the sun on the sundial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward.”

Asked by Astronomer R. A. Proctor to describe it, he writes as follows: – “The shiftings of the shadows on the dial, that Isaiah predicted to sick Hezekiah, are liable to occur at any place, when these two circumstances occur: **(1)** That the upper atmosphere is in that condition which causes two bright parhelion or mock suns to appear on opposite sides of the sun; and **(2)** that the lower air contains drifting clouds, massive enough to hide often two of the three [apparent suns]. When the real sun and eastern mock sun are hidden, there is only the western [mock sun] to cast shadows, which then coincide with what the sun would cast an hour and a half later; but if the cloud shift so as to hide the west parhelion, and disclose the eastern, the shadows instantly become such as the sun cast an hour and a half earlier. . . . On March 29, 1858, these effects occurred, had any one been looking, on every dial of Portsea, and very probably of much of Hampshire besides. The parhelia were present and bright enough at about 11 A.M. and still better at 1 P.M.”

So the sun returned ten degrees on the dial by which it had gone down.

But the fact that Joshua’s long day can be accounted for by the reflected light of the sun in clouds of a peculiar kind, and the fact that the turning back of the shadow for Hezekiah can be accounted for somewhat similarly, as above, by no means lessens either of these as miracles; because they were not accidental, but specially given as proofs of divine power. The fact that we may learn **how** the divine power acted in the fulfillment of the divine prediction subtracts nothing from the miracle, just as in the case of Hezekiah’s recovery the fact that a fig poultice was applied, and that God thus made use of a means to an end, detracted nothing from the miraculousness of his recovery. As children of God, this is an important lesson for us to have deeply engraven upon our memories: God still uses natural means for the accomplishment of the exceeding great and precious promises of a spiritual kind, which he has bestowed upon us. Has he not promised us grace to help in every time of need? It is not necessary that we should suppose that this grace will come to us without a channel; it probably will come through a human channel. Has God promised to us meat in due season to the household of faith? It is reasonable for us to expect that it will come to us, as his other mercies and blessings have come, from his Word, and through the helpfulness of the fellow-members of the body of Christ, whom the Lord will make use of in serving the meat to the household of faith. – Matt. 24:45.

Isa. 38:8

Hezekiah’s experiences in respect to the Lord’s remarkable answers to his two prayers seem to have wrought in him a commendable faith and trust, so that subsequently, when servants of the king of Babylon visited him with a present, and to congratulate him upon his recovery from sickness, and to view the wonderful aqueducts and evidences of engineering skill which he had accomplished, and when Hezekiah unwisely had shown these foreigners the great wealth of his treasures, etc., and Isaiah was sent to reprove him for this, and to tell him that the king of Babylon would ultimately come and despoil the city of its treasures, etc., but not in Hezekiah’s day, he said, with prompt resignation to the divine will, “Good is the word of the Lord, which thou hast spoken.” He said, moreover, “For there shall be peace and truth in my day.” – Isa. 39:3,8.

Similarly all who are learning to trust the Lord, or who have tasted that he is gracious, should more and more be coming to this attitude of heart and mind: to a recognition of the fact that all God’s ways are perfect, so that they can say, “Though he slay me yet will I trust him.” “I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.”

See also R. 3588: *A Good Man’s Prayer Answered*

Hezekiah's Prayer of Thanksgiving

9 This is the writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick and had recovered from his sickness:

10 I said,

“In the prime of my life I shall go to the gates of Sheol. I am deprived of the remainder of my years.”

11 I said, “I shall not see YAH, the LORD, in the land of the living. I shall observe man no more among the inhabitants of the world.

12 My life span is gone, taken from me like a shepherd's tent. I have cut off my life like a weaver. He cuts me off from the loom. From day until night You make an end of me.

13 I have considered until morning—like a lion. So He breaks all my bones. From day until night You make an end of me.

14 Like a crane or a swallow, so I chattered. I mourned like a dove. My eyes fail from looking upward. O LORD, I am oppressed. Undertake for me!

15 “What shall I say? He has both spoken to me, and He Himself has done it. I shall walk carefully all my years in the bitterness of my soul.

16 O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit. So You will restore me and make me live.

17 Indeed it was for my own peace that I had great bitterness. But You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, for You have cast all my sins behind Your back.

18 For Sheol cannot thank You. Death cannot praise You. Those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your truth.

19 The living, the living man, he shall praise You, as I do this day. The father shall make known Your truth to the children.

20 “The LORD was ready to save me. Therefore we will sing my songs with stringed instruments all the days of our life, in the house of the LORD.”

Isaiah 38:9-20

DANIEL

Daniel's Prayer of Thanksgiving Upon Interpreting the King's Dream

20 Daniel answered and said:



Daniel by Gustave Dore

“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His.

21 And He changes the times and the seasons. He removes kings and raises up kings. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding.

22 He reveals deep and secret things. He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him.

23 “I thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers. You have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of You, for You have made known to us the king’s demand.”

Daniel 2:20-23

Daniel's Prayers After King Darius Signs the Decree

7 “All the governors of the kingdom, the administrators and satraps, the counselors and advisors, have consulted together to establish a royal statute and to make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions.

8 “Now, O king, establish the decree and sign the writing, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter.”

9 Therefore King Darius signed the written decree.

10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.

11 Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.

12 And they went before the king, and spoke concerning the king's decree: “Have you not signed a decree that every man who petitions any god or man within thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?” The king answered and said, “The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter.”

Daniel 6:7-12

THE PRAYERS OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN

Excerpt from R. 3638

Public praying is much more common in the East than it is here. The Mohammedans are very numerous in all parts of the East, and at certain hours of the day, at the striking of the clock, all business is suspended and every Mohammedan engages for a moment in worship. Some fall on their knees, others stand with bowed heads and closed eyes, others stand with the face turned upward in prayer. The spirit of reverence appears to prevail more generally with them than with us, and the man who has no gods, no religion of any kind, is greatly disesteemed. It was, therefore, not at all contrary to usual custom that Daniel, who like others of the time was on the first floor, had an upper chamber for quiet and rest and prayer from the remainder of the house, and reached usually by an outside staircase.

This little pavilion had its windows to face toward Jerusalem, for the prophet remembered the words of the Lord through Jeremiah that, at the end of the seventy years of desolation, Israel would be brought thither again; and we may be sure that, trusting the great Abrahamic Oath-Bound Covenant, he was expecting great things eventually for his nation. It was his custom to go to this little room three times a day to kneel before the Lord in prayer and thankfulness. Ordinarily nothing would be thought of such a matter, but the conspiring princes, who had already noticed this, concluded that Daniel was so thoroughgoing, so truthful, so honest, so bold, that the decree which they got the king to sign, that all worship should be to him alone for thirty days, would not change Daniel's course one iota. They were quite correct in their surmises, and Daniel, hearing of the decree, undoubtedly understood that the purpose and object of it was to entrap him and cause him to be devoured by lions – thus to get rid of him, thus to put out his light, thus to free themselves from his surveillance and honesty, thus to secure to themselves liberty and prosperity in their program of graft.

Daniel continued to worship the Lord as before. He would not sell his conscience, he would not deny his God, he would not pretend that he was praying to or worshipping Darius. Had the king's decree been of a different kind, Daniel's course might properly have been a different one. For instance, had the king decreed that none should worship in public or in the sight of others any other god, then Daniel might consistently have worshiped in private; but since all worship other than that of Darius was forbidden, the question was different and no compromise was possible. All of the Lord's people should be extremely careful about compromising the conscience. Our consciences may require education, because through the fall our judgments may be warped and twisted and need to be corrected; but conscience must be followed in any event. As the education comes in modifications may result, but no change or modification must be made that conscience will not approve; any other course than this would not be safe for the Lord's people today or at any time.

Another thought connected with this is the propriety and necessity for prayer. We have been surprised occasionally to hear of some professed follower of Christ urging the impropriety of prayer – that all of life should be a prayer, and that there should be no formal kneeling before the Lord in worship and thanksgiving. Such a proposition is astounding to us – the logic of it is incomprehensible. True, indeed, we are to pray

without ceasing. Our entire lives are to be so devoted to the Lord and to his cause, and our minds are to be so filled with appreciation of his goodness, and our faith in him is to be so constant and so bright, that we will always have in mind his will in every matter, and thus be in the praying attitude of heart continually; but we hold that no Christian can maintain this heart attitude without going to the Lord in a more particular and formal manner, and preferably upon the knees, and if possible sometimes at least in solitude – “Enter into thy closet and pray to thy Father who is in secret.”

Nothing in this, however, would interfere with the thought of family prayers, nor with the still further thought of prayers in the Church, which is the Lord’s family circle. Our Lord gave his sanction to this, not only by going aside for private prayer but also at times by praying with and for the disciples. For instance, the prayer recorded in John 17 and the words of the apostles commend praying in the Church, and even call attention to the propriety of praying in such a tone and voice as could be understood by the others present. Those who contend to the contrary, the Apostle intimates, are doing so about matters which they do not understand. However capable such may be they should be given no place of prominence in the gatherings of the Lord’s people. First, let them learn before calling upon them to be leaders in the flock. The same principles apply to those who contend against the observance of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. They should be kindly treated, for even our enemies should be kindly treated, but none should be selected as servants in the Lord’s flock who have not a respect for and a knowledge of the faith once delivered to the saints, and a respect for all the institutions established by the Lord and his apostles.

THE KING WAS TROUBLED

Shortly after the signing of the decree the princes reported Daniel as having violated its terms, and then and there the king’s eyes were opened and he beheld the trap into which his vanity had gotten him. In accord with the theory that the king was the vicegerent of his god was the law of the Medo-Persian empire that every decree by its king was inviolable – unchangeable. No doubt there was a policy behind the establishment of such a law. No doubt the great men of the empire desired fixity, so that when the king had made a positive promise or decree respecting them he could not at the instance of another change the arrangement and thus subject his princes and counsellors to his caprice. The king was greatly displeased with himself that he had fallen into this trap, and was displeased undoubtedly with the princes who had entrapped him. The words “with himself” are lacking from some of the reliable manuscripts, which makes the displeasure all the broader to include his counsellors. He appreciated Daniel as a man of God and as an able servant of the empire, and set about at once to do everything in his power to annul his own decree – “he labored until the going down of the sun to deliver him,” but he found no excuse.

Ordinarily, when the kings desired to be released from some decree, they called upon their wise men and magicians, who usually were skillful in suggesting a way out of the dilemma; but in this case it would appear that there was a combination of all the wise men and rulers of Babylon against Daniel. They now had him in their power, and would suggest nothing in the way of release. On the contrary, they held up before the king that he was bound by his decree and that he could not do otherwise than execute it, because a failure to do so would mean a dishonor to the empire in having

broken its laws and would endanger his throne, etc. Perceiving the king's endeavor to rescind the decree, the counsellors called upon him in a body to impress the necessity for its execution. In compliance Daniel was cast into the den of lions. It was probably a lion pit surrounded by high walls, just as we have to-day in some parts bear pits. The entrance to this pit from certain protected enclosures was through a door, and there the lions were enclosed at night by a stone, which, pushed across the entrance to the pit, served as a door and was fastened. The king's sealing wax was placed upon this and also the seal of his counsellors, thus indicating that the pit might not be opened except with the consent of both the king and his counsellors.

What must have been the feelings of the aged prophet and ruler as he realized the condition of things, and as the king talked with him and told him of his inability to gain the consent of his counsellors to any change in the decree, and of his deep sorrow in connection with the execution of the sentence. How well Daniel had let his light shine is evidenced by the words of the king in this address – "Daniel, thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee." We may reasonably suppose, too, that a man so firm and strong in his faithfulness to the Lord and to principle could go to the lions' den without fear. Some one has said that one with God is a majority; the Prophet has said, "Greater is he who is on our part than all they that be with them." Although Daniel did not live under the favored conditions of this Gospel age and its influences of the holy Spirit, he did have what by the Lord's arrangement is common to all mankind, namely, strength and courage in proportion to his honesty of heart and faithfulness.

On the one hand he knew that God was able to deliver him from the lions if he chose to do so; on the other hand he knew that if the Lord permitted the lions to devour him he could give him strength and courage to endure the pain and trials, with other Jews who looked forward in hope and anticipation to the glorious Millennial time when Messiah should reign, when all of his faithful will be blessed, yea, when all the families of the earth will receive a blessing. Why should such a man have special fear or dread as respects a den of lions? Much more, why should we, if likewise faithful to our trusts and obligations to the extent of our ability, and if living in the enjoyment of our privileges and with the still greater light upon the divine plan – why should we fear or quake under such circumstances? God is able to deliver us from every evil, and has promised that whatever may come to us shall work for our good, because we love him and are called according to his purpose. It requires faith to pass through such an ordeal triumphantly, and it requires character and obedience behind that faith to give it strength; and above all it requires that behind the faith and the character shall be the realization that Christ is our sufficiency, that he not only has redeemed us with his precious blood but that he lives to succor us.

We have known many instances where the strength and fortitude granted to the consecrated ones to endure trials and difficulties and hardships uncomplainingly has told the worldly friends, louder than any professions could tell them, of the power of our God and of the peace of God which passeth understanding, which rules in our hearts. Thus it should always be. The trials and difficulties of life shall not overwhelm us if we trust in the Lord. Our hearts may be joyful in him notwithstanding persecutions and difficulties

Daniel's Prayer for The People

3 Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

4 And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession, and said,

“O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments,

5 “we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments.

6 “Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings and our princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land.

7 “O Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us shame of face, as it is this day—to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those near and those far off in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of the unfaithfulness which they have committed against You.

8 “O Lord, to us belongs shame of face, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against You.

9 “To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him.

10 “We have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in His laws, which He set before us by His servants the prophets.

11 “Yes, all Israel has transgressed Your law, and has departed so as not to obey Your voice. Therefore the curse and the oath written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against Him.

12 “And He has confirmed His words, which He spoke against us and against our judges who judged us, by bringing upon us a great disaster, for under the whole heaven such has never been done as what has been done to Jerusalem.

13 “As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us, yet we have not made our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth.

14 “Therefore the LORD has kept the disaster in mind, and brought it upon us, for the LORD our God is righteous in all the works which He does, though we have not obeyed His voice.

15 “And now, O Lord our God, who brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and made Yourself a name, as it is this day

--we have sinned, we have done wickedly!

16 "O Lord, according to all Your righteousness, I pray, let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people are a reproach to all those around us.

17 "Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate.

18 "O my God, incline Your ear and hear. Open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name, for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies.

19 "O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name."

Daniel 9:3-19

DANIEL is set before us in the Scriptures as one whom the Lord loved. His standing with the Almighty is strikingly presented through the Prophet Ezekiel, where the Lord, speaking of the sureness of his judgments about to come upon the land of Judah, said, "Tho these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness." (Ezek. 14:14.) These words were spoken by Ezekiel shortly before the desolation of Jerusalem, while Daniel was in Babylon, where he had risen to a position of great prominence; and his fame no doubt had reached his home. Daniel was carried captive with Jehoiachim, king of Judah, and many of the nobility of the land of Israel, eighteen years before the final captivity in the days of Zedekiah, when the land was left desolate without an inhabitant, and the seventy years of desolation began. Daniel was fourteen years old when carried captive to Babylon, and consequently lived to the extreme age of over one hundred years. – Dan. 1:21.

27 But God has chosen the foolish

things of the world to put to shame the wise,

and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty.

1 Cor. 1:27

The Book of Daniel is one of those against which the "higher critics" expend special energy, some being inclined to call it a fiction, while others declare it to be a history of the period of Antiochus Epiphanes (over three hundred years after Daniel's death) and that it was written by some unknown writer who attached Daniel's name as a disguise. Modern science and the higher critics are very much opposed to anything in the nature of positive prophecy – anything claiming to be of direct divine inspiration, and in any sense of the word attempting to foretell the future. The Book of Daniel is preeminently marked with these characteristics, and hence it, more than any other book of the Old Testament, has the reprobation of these gentlemen. But the Lord forewarned us, through the Apostle and the Prophet, of these wise men, whose wisdom would become a trap and a snare unto them, so that "the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid [obscured]." – Isa. 29:14; 1 Cor. 1:26-29.

Our Lord also pointed out that these things are hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed unto babes – made clear to those who make no boast of wisdom according to the course of this world. (Matt. 11:25.) How true to facts we find this to be! While many of the great and learned are stumbling themselves into higher criticism and other forms of infidelity, the Lord’s “little ones,” meek, humble, teachable from the Father’s Word, are being instructed, and are growing in grace and in the knowledge of the truth.

To those who have clearly in mind the presentations and interpretations of Daniel’s prophecies as presented in MILLENNIAL DAWN, VOLS. I., II. and III., there is no need for elaborate arguments to prove that this wonderful Book of Daniel is not a fiction, but more wonderful by far than any fiction that could have been written. And to them it will be useless to declare it a history of events which transpired 167 B.C. and falsely set forth as a prophecy by Daniel; for they see fulfillments, past, present and to come, far larger and grander and more wonderful than anything which occurred at the date named – they see in these fulfillments unmistakable evidence of superhuman intelligence, and that, as Daniel declared, the most high God therein revealed the secrets of his plan still future. R. 2492

Daniel had been shown many visions, as recorded in chapters 2,4,7 and 8 of this prophecy, all of which showed great prosperity and exaltation to heathen or gentile kingdoms; but his special interest was in Israel, and he had not been informed concerning Israel’s future. He knew, however, from Jeremiah’s prophecy (Jer. 29:10; 2 Chron. 36:20-23), that the desolation of Judea would continue seventy years; and knowing that period to be nearly complete (Dan. 9:2), he prayed earnestly for the return of God’s favor to Israel (verses 17-19) B64

For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. Jer. 29:10

Daniel, who was thinking specially of Israel, and of the fulfillment of God’s promises to the fathers, perceived that all that he had heard could not occur in 2300 literal days, especially when Gabriel said to him, “But shut thou up the vision, for it will be fulfilled after many days.” And though he knew not how long each symbolic day would be, he was made sick at heart by the thought of so many evils as were coming upon God’s people – though he saw not the change of that name from fleshly to spiritual Israel. We read, “And I, Daniel, languished and was sick for some days”; and “I was astonished at the vision, but none could interpret it.” And well it was for Daniel, and for all God’s children from then to the Time of the End, that the dread significance of that vision of papal power and persecution, and of saintly suffering, was not more clearly revealed in advance. Our merciful Heavenly Father, while willing to prove his people in the furnace of affliction and persecution, in order to prepare a people for the exceeding and eternal weight of glory promised, deals with us upon the principle – “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

Daniel, who was more interested in Israel than in the Persian “ram,” or the Grecian “goat,” knew from Jeremiah’s prophecy that the seventy years of captivity in Babylon was a punishment upon Israel for sins, and so now he judged from the vision of coming persecutions (instead of exaltation and glory as he had expected) that it betokened Israel’s sin and God’s wrath; hence he prayed earnestly for forgiveness of Israel’s sins, and for the fulfilment of the promises made to the fathers. This is told in few words in Dan. 9:2-19. Daniel saw not the scope of the divine plan as we may now behold it; nevertheless, his earnestness and faith in the promises were pleasing to God, who

Prayers of The Righteous

therefore revealed to him something more concerning this vision – an increase or further elaboration of it, in those features which specially pertained to fleshly Israel. Daniel supposed that the end of the seventy years' desolation of the land of Israel, while its people were in Babylon, was to be thus prolonged, or continued, for many (2300) days. God corrects this error by sending Gabriel to inform him that the captivity would end when the seventy years were complete, and that the city of Jerusalem and the temple would be rebuilt, though in a troublous period, etc.

It was while Daniel was praying over the vision of the 2300 days, which he misunderstood to mean a prolonging of the 70 years captivity in Babylon, that Gabriel was sent to further **explain that misunderstood vision**, thus (Dan. 9:21-27):

C106,107

20 Now while I was speaking, praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God, 21 yes, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering. 22 And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand."

Daniel 9:20-22



Daniel Visited by the Angel Gabriel

23 "At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are greatly beloved. Therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision." Daniel 9:23

HABAKKUK

Habakkuk's Prayer

1 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, on Shigionoth.

2 O LORD, I have heard Your speech and was afraid. O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known. In wrath remember mercy.

3 God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of His praise.

4 His brightness was like the light. He had rays flashing from His hand, and there His power was hidden.

5 Before Him went pestilence, and fever followed at His feet.

6 He stood and measured the earth. He looked and startled the nations. And the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills bowed. His ways are everlasting.

7 I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction. The curtains of the land of Midian trembled.

8 O LORD, were You displeased with the rivers, was Your anger against the rivers, was Your wrath against the sea, that You rode on Your horses, Your chariots of salvation?

9 Your bow was made quite ready. Oaths were sworn over Your arrows. Selah You divided the earth with rivers.

10 The mountains saw You and trembled. The overflowing of the water passed by. The deep uttered its voice and lifted its hands on high.

11 The sun and moon stood still in their habitation. At the light of Your arrows they went, at the shining of Your glittering spear.



The prophet Habakkuk praying

12 You marched through the land in indignation. You trampled the nations in anger.

13 You went forth for the salvation of Your people, for salvation with Your Anointed. You struck the head from the house of the wicked, by laying bare from foundation to neck. Selah

14 You thrust through with his own arrows the head of his villages. They came out like a whirlwind to scatter me. Their rejoicing was like feasting on the poor in secret.

15 You walked through the sea with Your horses, through the heap of great waters.

16 When I heard, my body trembled. My lips quivered at the voice. Rottenness entered my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble. When he comes up to the people, he will invade them with his troops.

17 Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls--

18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD. I will joy in the God of my salvation.

19 The LORD God is my strength. He will make my feet like deer's feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills. To the Chief Musician. With my stringed instruments.

Habakkuk 3:1-19

A PROPHECY NEARING FULFILMENT – R. 5383

“Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

– Habakkuk 3:17,18

HABAKKUK’S entire prayer, recorded in this chapter of his prophecy, is so symbolical that it would be scarcely in keeping with it for us to give the words of our text the plain, simple interpretation that we would be otherwise inclined to give. This simple interpretation would be that although the conditions were such that famine stalked everywhere, and there was nothing of earthly hope, nevertheless God’s people at any time and in any place would rejoice in God and give Him the glory.

It would seem very strange, however, if the Prophet should wind up the whole chapter, so highly symbolical, with anything so plain and literal as we have suggested. With so much imagery in his mind, it would seem but reasonable that the words should be interpreted in keeping with their context, and that we should regard it as the Prophet’s expression of some deep truths. Much of the language of the Bible is figurative; and in our common conversation we also use many figures. For instance, in the Scriptures a vine is a figure used for the Church: As our Lord said, “I am the Vine; ye are the branches.” – John 15:5.

The flock of God – the sheep – are common figurative expressions for the same class. Our Lord speaks of the Little Flock. We are His sheep. The Jews were also referred to as God’s sheep, by the Psalmist David, in Psalm 74:1; 79:13, etc.

So with the word olive. The olive tree is mentioned by St. Paul in referring to the special people of God, His peculiar people – those in relationship with Him. He speaks of the natural olive tree – shows that the Promise applied originally to the Jewish nation: “In thee [Abraham] and in thy Seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” He says that because of unbelief the natural branches were broken off. Thus we locate the vine and the olive both as representing the Church of Christ, from different points of view.

When the Little Flock shall have passed beyond the veil, there will still be the Great Company of the Lord’s people left here. Many of these will apparently continue in Babylon until the time of trouble shall cause Babylon to fall. And by the fall of Babylon these will be set free. Before all this is made plain to them, they may use the language of our text, and later come to see clearly. In the 19th of Revelation this company are spoken of as rejoicing in the fall of Babylon and saying, “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him; for the Marriage of the Lamb is come, and His Wife hath made Herself ready.” (Vs.7.) All things had seemed to them to be failures; and now they see that God’s Plan has not failed, but has been fulfilled.

EARTHLY GOVERNMENTS A FAILURE

The Church has not yet blessed the world. The fruit of the Vine will feed the world in the coming Age. Neither the olive nor the vine will give life to the world at the present

time. This will come in the New Dispensation, during the Messianic reign.

The Lord has used the word **field** to represent the world: “The field is the world.” The world have been hoping to better their affairs. They have been hoping to manage matters successfully. And so the various universal empires have sprung up. First the Babylonians tried to give the world a better government, but their efforts were of no avail. Then the Medes and Persians tried, and also failed. Next the Greeks and later the Romans took the reins of universal government, and likewise failed. Finally Papacy came forward, claiming to be the Kingdom of Christ that would rule the world. She failed. Of late years Socialism has come to the front, saying that it can better the world, but the prospects for social improvement are no better.

“NO HERD IN THE STALLS”

The expression, “herd in the stalls,” seems a little obscure. The Scriptures liken our Lord Jesus to a bullock – and in the coming Age mankind, on reaching perfection, will be symbolically represented by a bullock. The suggestion of the Prophet David is that mankind then shall offer **bullocks** on God’s altar. (Psa. 51:19.) This cannot refer to the Church in the present time; for in the Atonement Day **type** the Church is represented by a **goat**, and our Lord – a perfect Man when His sacrifice was made – is represented by a bullock. But in the end of the next Age, when the world shall be **perfected**, they shall offer **bullocks** on the altar. This represents how mankind will make a full consecration of themselves, their **perfect powers**.

We know nothing better in the application of the bullock than that suggested by the Psalmist. At the close of this Gospel Age, when all the Church shall have passed beyond the veil, there will be no perfect men. In other words, there will be a point of time when the Church will be glorified and when the Ancient Worthies will not yet have appeared. The people will stand amazed, not seeing any way out of their troubles. Only those who have the light of the Lord’s Word will be able to appreciate the condition at all.

Those who will then understand – the Great Company – will rejoice in the Lord. They will be able to trust in God, even though conditions in the world are distressing, and the Ancient Worthies not yet here to take hold of matters. They will see that the conditions are really leading up to the great blessing – that the great Time of Trouble is the necessary preparation for blessing. And they will say, Let us rejoice and give glory to the Lord, for the Bride hath made herself ready! We see in this glorification of the Church the beginning of the great blessing. Soon we may expect to see the Ancient Worthies here. Then will come the fulfilment of all God’s gracious promises. So we will not lose heart, but will trust in the Lord.

Our Lord Jesus spoke of the Great Company – the foolish virgin class – in His Sermon on the Mount. (Matt. 7:21-23.) After the last member of the Little Flock has gone beyond the veil, the Great Company will be thoroughly awakened and will say, “Lord, Lord, may we not come in? We are ready now, dear Lord; we see where we have made our mistake. We see matters differently; we realize what privileges and opportunities for sacrifice we once enjoyed, but missed. May we not enter even now?” But the Lord will answer, “Depart from Me. I do not recognize you.” This word **depart** does not mean that they will depart into eternal torment, as we once thought. The Lord does not

say, “Depart, ye cursed,” for **cursed** means to be set apart for punishment. He merely says, “Depart from Me.”

The Kingdom of Heaven is elsewhere (Matt. 25:1-12) likened unto ten virgins who took their lamps and went forth to meet the Bridegroom. Five of them were wise and took oil in their vessels with their lamps; but five were foolish virgins and took no oil with them. When the Bridegroom came, the foolish virgins said to the wise ones, “Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.” But they could not do so, they had enough only for their own lamps. After the wise virgins had entered with the Bridegroom, the door was shut. Then came the other virgins saying, “Lord, Lord, open unto us!” But he answered, “Verily I say unto you, I know you not.”

These words of our Lord, “I know you not,” do not mean that these were not virgins. What do they mean? He means that, having recognized His Bride, He does not know any other woman. These were desiring to be recognized as a part of the Bride. And the Lord says, I do not recognize you. My Bride is complete. So the foolish virgin class are rejected from a place in the Bride class, but they are received as associates and assistants. Their rejection will give them cause for grief. Realizing that the **door of opportunity** is closed to them, they will cry, Oh, we have lost the great prize! They may become despondent. We do not know.

SORROW TURNED INTO JOY

But this Great Company are afterward pictured as saying, Let us be glad! Let us rejoice! Let us glorify God, because the Bride has been taken! Should any one say to them, But **you** are not of the Bride class, their reply might be: Nevertheless, the blessings are coming to all – **even** to us! The Bride class are the First-fruits of God’s people. It is our own fault that we failed to get into the Bride class. If we had seen a while ago as we now see, we would have striven harder and we should not have failed. We would not have listened to what Babylon had to say, We would have “run with patience the race set before us.” We were stupefied by the “doctrines of demons.” (1 Timothy 4:1.) We are glad that we are now awakened. We rejoice that God’s Plan is being so gloriously outworked. Our lamps are burning now. We are blessed as never before. Let us be glad and rejoice in that the Bride is glorified.

“CUT OFF FROM THE FOLD”

“The flock shall be cut off from the fold.” As applied to the elect Church, this is viewed from the earthly standpoint. There is an earthly fold and a Heavenly fold. We are now in the fold on earth. We must die in order to enter into the glory that is promised us – to enter into the Heavenly fold.

Our Lord Jesus was cut off from the earthly fold when He died. And as with our Lord, so with us. We must be cut off from the fold here before we can enter into the fold above. It may appear to the Great Company for a time as though all things are **failing**, and not **coming to pass**; but from God’s standpoint the fig tree will be budding and the **olive** will be bringing forth her fruit. There will be no miscarriage of God’s purposes. The Church will reach her full glorification, and then the vine will bear glorious, ripe fruitage for all mankind.

EZRA



Ezra Kneels in Prayer by Gustave Dore

Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel, for the people wept very bitterly.

Ezra 10:1

Ezra's Prayer

5 At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God.

6 And I said:

“O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens.

7 “Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been very guilty, and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and to humiliation, as it is this day.

8 “And now for a little while grace has been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage.

9 “For we were slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage, but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem.

10 “And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments,

11 “which You commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, ‘The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land, with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from one end to another with their impurity.

12 ‘Now therefore, do not give your daughters as wives for their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons, and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave it as an inheritance to your children forever.’

Prayers of The Righteous

13 “And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us such deliverance as this,

14 “should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people committing these abominations? Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed us, so that there would be no remnant or survivor?

15 “O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as it is this day. Here we are before You, in our guilt, though no one can stand before You because of this!”

Ezra 9:5-15



Ezra Reading The Law to The People by Gustave Dore

EZRA WAS a learned Jew who headed a great reformation movement. As God's agent he was largely responsible for the maintenance of the Jewish faith and nation. His family had been amongst the many carried captive by Nebuchadnezzar. Like many others that became rooted in the new soil of Babylonia, they were not among the fifty-three thousand to return to Jerusalem when King Cyrus gave the opportunity. Ezra, imbued with a spirit of religious fervor based upon a faith in God and His Word and promises to Israel, headed another company bound for Jerusalem – seventy-eight years after the return of the exiles. R. 4911

GATHERING AND WINNOWING – R. 3658
EZRA 8:21-32

“The hand of our God is upon all those for good that seek him.”

A PREVIOUS lesson showed us how the rebuilding of the Temple had been delayed for about twenty years, with various discouragements, by the returning exiles from Babylon, but was finally finished, the people being spurred on in their zeal through the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah. With the completion of the Temple came a lull in the zeal of the people and a corresponding deadness in religious matters for about fifty years. We must sympathize with the struggles of those poor people against the unfavorable conditions surrounding them. Their city wall was still unbuilt, they were exposed to the malevolence of their neighbors, who hated the Jews, largely because of their refusal to mingle with the Samaritans, a thing which the former were not permitted to do according to the law of Moses.

Added to this unfriendly relationship to their nearest neighbor was the fact that they were continually subject to trouble, loss of life and loss of property from marauding bands. They did not connect these losses and disadvantages properly in their minds, nor see that, rightly received, all these matters would have been working together for good to them, and that anything which would not have been for their welfare the Lord would have hindered. Instead they grew careless and indifferent to religious matters, losing considerably the zeal which first brought them from Babylon. Indeed many of them concluded that they would affiliate more with the Gentiles round about them, thus setting at naught the divine counsel – would seek worldly alliances for themselves and their children. As a result, with many of them religion reached a very low plane – their law was disesteemed and disobeyed.

God, however, still had his eye upon the nation which he had chosen, and which, according to divine purpose, must be sifted yet kept together until the coming of Messiah and the establishment through him of Spiritual Israel. In harmony with this we find that at this time the Lord stirred up the love and zeal of others residing in Babylon, chiefly the children of some who had declined to participate in the first return under Zerubbabel or were too young to go or to exercise their own volitions at that time. It was nearly seventy-five years after the return of the first company of about 50,000 under the decree of Cyrus that Ezra, a young man filled with religious zeal, became the

leader of a company of the Jews still residing in Babylon, and went up with them to inspire and revive those who had first returned and their children and grandchildren meantime born in Palestine. Our lesson relates to the return of this second company.

THE KING'S ASSISTANCE

Xerxes, the Persian king who took Esther to be his queen, and who exalted Mordecai, her uncle, to be chief minister of state in the Persian empire, had been murdered by a palace conspiracy, and his son Artaxerxes was the reigning monarch at the time Ezra undertook the expedition in question. Three things were necessary for the success of the project: First, the king's promise or decree; secondly, money not only for the expenses of the expedition but also to properly forward the work at Jerusalem and encourage those who had become discouraged there; thirdly, the interest of the Jews required to be aroused so that a sufficient number of volunteers might be found. The king furnished the money and gave the necessary authority. This might seem remarkable did we not remember that in the Lord's providence his acquaintance at his father's court as a boy would more or less associate him with Mordecai and other Jews prominent in the empire and inspire him also with a respect for the God of the Jews.

Ezra belonged to the priestly family and evidently was very sincere, not only inspiring the king with confidence in the project but also enlisting the sympathy and cooperation of many of his fellow countrymen to the number of about 1,700 – probably including the families of some of them. These were volunteers – no one had a right to insist upon their going. Some may have gone with more or less of a spirit of adventure, but doubtless having knowledge of conditions at Jerusalem the majority were thoroughly enthused with a religious ardor for God and for his law. Knowing what we do through the records of Ezra's thorough-going character, teaching, practices, we may be sure that no other class would be attracted to the standard raised by him in this expedition. An illustration of his spirit is furnished in the first verse of our lesson.

A certain point for the assembling of those who would return with him had been established at the river Ahava. The first condition enjoined on the assembly was a day of fasting, and we may be sure also a day of prayer to the Lord for his blessing upon the expedition – “That we might humble ourselves before our God and seek of him a straight way for us and for our little ones and for all our substance.” It was a great undertaking in those days to set out upon a journey of over eight hundred miles and requiring slow travel, made necessary by the presence of women and children in the company and the absence of vehicles. The journey required about four months' time. True, there was a shorter road through the desert, but that would have been much more unfavorable in every way, and extra hazardous on account of the Bedouin tribes of the desert, who would have sought to take from them the treasures of gold and silver which they took along and which are estimated at between two and three million dollars in our money, but really equivalent to much more than this when measured by the standard of the value of labor now as compared with then.

SPIRITUAL ISRAEL'S TESTINGS

Seeking to apply this lesson to spiritual Israel, we see during this Gospel age somewhat similar siftings and tests of the Lord's people. We find to-day that some of the children

of the most devout reformers have lapsed into measurable indifference respecting the holy things of the Lord and his law, and are disposed, like the Israelites of the first return, to not only fellowship the world but to amalgamate with it in customs, in habits, in social functions. The spirit of separateness and consecration which enthused their forefathers is dying out, leading to a mixed or Churchianity condition not at all pleasing to the Lord and calling for reformation. On the other hand we see spiritual Israelites coming forward from Babylon with great zeal for the Lord and his cause, and if perhaps we wonder, we find a solution of the matter to be that some of these inherited a blessing from their parents, and we remember the word of the Lord that he would show mercy and favor to many generations of them that love and reverence him.

Ezra seems to have been led to the announcement of the fast by a realization of his own weakness and of the dangers which would beset the Israelites on the journey. Relying upon the Lord's promises given to natural Israel, that they would be blessed in temporal things while obedient to the divine precepts, he had almost boasted of this matter to the king Artaxerxes, saying, "The hand of our God is upon all them that seek him for good, but his power and his wrath are against all them that forsake him." It had been on the strength of this faith and this testimony that the royal decree had gone forth and the moneys had been subscribed, and Ezra felt that now to ask the king for a troop of soldiers for the protection of himself and his associates would have implied at least their doubt of the favor of God toward them or of his ability to protect them.

Realizing the perils of the situation and the danger from enemies, and that he was responsible in great measure for the lives of those who would be under his direction, and that under the circumstances he could not ask for soldiers, Ezra felt all the more the necessity for going before the Lord in prayer and with fasting, and hence the fast was enjoined upon all the people. We cannot doubt this did them good, tending to direct their hearts to the Lord as the great Captain of their Salvation, awakening in them the thought that the whole expedition was based upon faith in the Lord and in his promises as respects the future and the present life.

FASTINGS OF SPIRITUAL ISRAELITES

That there is an advantage in fasting and prayer to the spiritual Israelite is beyond question. Our case is not exactly that of the Israelites under Ezra, and yet there is some similarity. We are not guaranteed earthly blessings or earthly protection against earthly adversaries. As spiritual Israelites, however, we have a still higher guarantee, for in our estimation our spiritual interests as new creatures are higher and grander than all of our earthly interests, beyond comparison. We have the guarantee that, whatever shall befall us, the Lord is able and willing to overrule it for good if we trust in him. It is in proportion as this gracious promise of the Lord fails to be appreciated by us that we look to the world for protection. The very experience of realizing danger and feeling timidity may prove indeed a superior blessing to us if it will but lead us nearer to the Lord – through fasting and prayer.

Fasting, as we have seen heretofore, signifies self-denial. The thought is not the weakening of the body by absolute abstention from food, but rather a disciplining of the body by abstaining from delicacies, relishes, etc. No doubt such fastings are profitable to us in other ways than one. They not only relieve the physical system of over pressure,

but with many tend to clarify the mind and make it more acute, more spiritually inclined. We all recognize this as a fact whether we can explain the philosophy of it or not. To all believers, especially to all starting upon a course of consecration, of self-devotion to the Lord and to his cause, we commend fasting in reasonable and proper ways, the denying to one's self the gratification of natural passions, and in general the living moderately, abstemiously, using this world and its comforts and blessings as not abusing them – the using of them in so far and in such a manner as will be to the highest advantage as new creatures in Christ. With the consecrated Christian this is not only the incident of a day but the course of a life. His every day is a fast day, a day of self-denial as respects any and everything sinful, and as respects any and everything that would not inure to the spiritual advantage of himself or others.

CONTINUOUS BAPTISM AND FASTING

Our fasting is like our baptism – it has a definite point of beginning and a definite point of ending. It begins with our baptism even unto death and it ends in death. These self-deniers, these fasters, are the self-sacrificers, the overcomers of the world, to whom the Lord has promised his special blessing of spiritual favors, peace, joy and all the fruits and graces of the Spirit in the present time, and by and by the everlasting blessedness of fellowship with himself in all the joys and perfections and completeness of the Kingdom condition – glory, honor and immortality.

Ezra says, “So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was entreated of us.” This verse could be applied in full measure to the spiritual Israelites who, under the lead of the great High Priest of our profession, are travelling to the New Jerusalem. Their fasting and prayers to the Lord for protection and help along the narrow way and for success to the journey's end are heard, and the Lord assures us in advance that all such petitions are granted. It is our Father's good pleasure to give the holy Spirit to those who ask, and to make all things work together for their good, and to bring them under the leading of the great Chief Shepherd and ultimately to the Kingdom. In other words, “He is faithful who has called us, who also will do it.” (1 Thess. 5:24) – he will do all he has promised to do, exceedingly more abundantly than we could have asked of him or expected. The whole matter is with us: if our consecration is based upon faith in the redemptive work of our Lord, if it is a full and complete consecration, and if we live it out day by day, the results will be all and more than we ever expected.

“LET EVERYTHING BE DONE DECENTLY AND IN ORDER.”

Our lesson shows that Ezra divided the wealth contributed by the Jews throughout Babylonia and Persia and by the king amongst twelve prominent men of the Levitical tribe, strict count being kept of what each received and he being held responsible for the delivery of that amount to the properly constituted representatives of the Jews at Jerusalem. Thus our Lord, who is the Captain of our journey and who is bringing us to the heavenly Kingdom, gives to every one of his followers pounds and talents for which they must ultimately give account.

In verse 28 Ezra said to these twelve men, “Ye are holy unto the Lord and the vessels are holy, and the gold and silver are a freewill offering unto God, the God of your fathers. Watch ye and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the

Levites and the princes of the fathers' houses of Israel at Jerusalem in the chambers of the house of the Lord." The chambers of the Temple were the little rooms of the court, separate from the Temple yet connected therewith. In these the officiating priests lived, and in them were stored the treasures belonging to the Temple and its service; they were, therefore, the safety deposit vaults of that time for the Lord's treasury.

We can see the responsibility that rested upon those men, yet still greater responsibility rests upon us who have received of the Lord's spiritual gifts and treasures, his great Truth. If it was required of those men handling earthly treasures that they should be faithful and watchful, diligent, much more may this be reasonably required of us – "A charge to keep I have, a God to glorify." All of these lessons should come to us as fresh reminders of our responsibility, not for our discouragement, but reversely to make us more watchful, more careful, more zealous, more appreciative of the riches of God's grace committed to us. Those of old time were to hide their treasure, but we are commanded to show ours on every occasion – "Let your light so shine before men, that they seeing your good works may glorify your Father who is in heaven." The more we let our light shine, the brighter it will shine; the more we use and display the riches of God's grace entrusted to us, the more valuable will be our treasure and the more safe we will be, for it is a treasure which our enemies will not really covet, and our faithfulness in acknowledging the Lord in all our ways will assure us of his protection and care.

AT THE JOURNEY'S END

Ezra and his company, after a four months' journey, arrived safe at Jerusalem, the Lord having indeed kept them and delivered them from the marauding bands of enemies on the journey. Then it was that Ezra's real work began. He found matters at Jerusalem and throughout Judea in a much worse condition than he had anticipated, and was used of the Lord in instituting a very radical national reformation which proved a great blessing to the people, though it sifted out some of their number.

Ezra magnified the Law, showing the people how the calamities that had befallen them as a nation were all foretold in the Law and were all the result of a failure to keep that Law, and the proper course now was not only to rebuild the Temple, as they had done, but to go back to the Law and seek to keep it inviolate to the best of their ability. He pointed to the fact that they had made unlawful unions with the tribes and nationalities surrounding them, and that the only course remaining was to separate themselves from all heathen people. This involved special trouble and trial in cases where Jews had married heathen wives, and Ezra's course would be roundly denounced by the entire civilized world today; but evidently he did the proper thing at the proper time in God's estimation, and was the divine instrument in sharply separating between the Jews and other peoples. This spirit has persisted amongst the Jews ever since, and the effect has been what the Lord desired, the keeping of that nation and people comparatively separate and distinct from all others. True, it wrought great hardship upon the wives who were put away and the children who were thus alienated, though much the same course is today prescribed by law against the Mormons, and the wives of plural marriages and bigamists.

A lesson for spiritual Israelites may be found herein, though not according to the

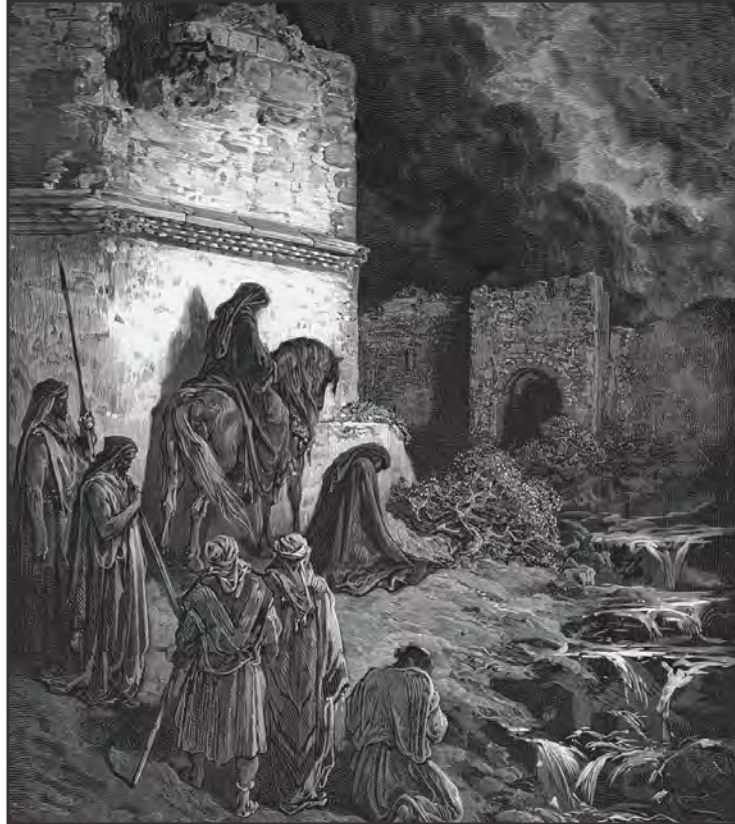
exact letter of Ezra's teaching. The spiritual Israelite is directed by the Captain of our Salvation, through the Apostle Paul as his mouthpiece, to be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers in marriage, and to have as little as possible to do with the world in general. Nevertheless the spiritual Israelite is enjoined that if the unbelieving husband or wife remain and it be possible to live together in unity even under trying circumstances, they should do it; but if the unbelieving one depart, let him depart, consider it to be of the Lord's providence that the Israelite should be free from a vexatious alliance, though he would not be free to remarry.

"HOW LOVE I THY LAW!"

The call of Ezra's teaching, enforced by the word of the Lord through the Law upon the Israelites who had gotten into worldly conditions and alliances, must have been very similar to the proclamation of Present Truth today amongst Protestants. After having come out of Babylon to the extent of leaving Roman Catholicism, they have become involved with the world in a system which may very properly be termed Babylonish – Churchianity. The Lord's people have entered worldly alliances through worldly sects and parties, contrary to the divine injunction and the spirit of the divine law, which commands us to be subject in religious matters to the Lord and to him alone. These misalliances with the daughters of Rome are so general in our day that only the Israelites indeed will have the spiritual ears to hear the message or the spiritual courage to break off the improper union, to stand out separate from all earthly alliances as the people of God, recognizing one Head of the one Church whose names are written in heaven – recognizing as brethren all who are united to that one Head, and repudiating all false bodies of Christ (churches) as well as the false heads to which they are united.

This is the particular trial apparently of our day. The voice of the Lord is being sounded forth in every quarter of Christendom, saying, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, Come out of her, my people, that ye partake not of her sins and receive not of her plagues." The churchianity of Protestantism is but a transplanting of the spirit of Babylon to new ground, and brings into bondage all those who will associate with these sects and parties; and all who would be in full accord with the Lord and have his fullest blessing must be faithful to his message and stand firm and loyal to him at any cost. To such and such alone the message of the Lord is now going forth, proving a glorious blessing and uplift, bringing them nearer to the Lord and into closer fellowship with those who are truly his and most completely under the blessings and provisions which he has made for his faithful.

NEHEMIAH



Nehemiah Viewing the Ruins by Gustave Dore

1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel, 2 that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah, and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. 3 And they said to me, “The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.”

4 So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days. I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

Nehemiah 1:1-4

Nehemiah's Prayer

5 And I said:

“I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments,

6 “please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father’s house and I have sinned.

7 “We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.

8 “Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations,

9 ‘but if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.’

10 “Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand.

11 “O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name, and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.” For I was the king’s cupbearer.

Nehemiah 1:5-11

THE VALUE OF PRAYER – R. 4912

NEHEMIAH 1

“The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

– James 5:16

THIRTEEN YEARS after Ezra’s company returned to Jerusalem, Nehemiah went thither with an escort and full authority from the king of Persia to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and to restore its gates. It would appear that Ezra’s reformation, while very helpful to the people, brought against them the violent opposition of their neighbors, as was to have been expected. The Jews, now considerable in numbers, were despised by their neighbors who wished to drive them out of the land. The wall of the city was poor and did not withstand the attack.

Josephus says that Nehemiah, wealthy and favored of the king of Persia, resided in the king’s palace at Shushan. He was a pious man and deeply interested in the land of his fathers. While walking one day he overheard two men talking in the Hebrew tongue, and accosted them. They had been to Jerusalem and had returned. One of them proved to be his own relative. He gladly inquired respecting the holy land, the holy city, God’s temple, and concerning the Jews who had returned from Babylon. The sad story of their trials and the desolation of the city and its exposure to enemies touched his heart and led him to prayer. That prayer is the subject of this lesson.

ANSWERING OUR OWN PRAYERS

Undoubtedly, the recorded prayer of Nehemiah is merely an epitomized statement, for we read that he made the matter a subject of earnest prayer for four months before he reached the point of action where God used him in the fulfillment of his own petition. This reminds us of how our Lord instructed His disciples, saying, “Pray ye the Lord of the Harvest that He would send forth more laborers into His Harvest.” While the disciples thus prayed it would imply that they would be laboring in accordance with their prayers, that they would be doing all in their own power to forward the Harvest work as well as to interest other laborers in the same. Thus it must always be that earnest effort will accompany prayer. Prayers not accompanied by efforts brand themselves as insincere. The prayer which is not of faith is sin – unscriptural, sacrilegious.

THE SOUL’S SINCERE DESIRE

The poet has well defined prayer as being “The soul’s sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed.” Another has well declared that it “is the Christian’s vital breath” – that is to say, Christian character cannot be maintained without prayer any more than a human life could be maintained without breathing. Who has not noticed that all the great Bible characters used of the Almighty were accustomed to go to Him regularly in prayer and to seek for guidance from Him in respect to every matter. Even the great Redeemer, holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners, needed to pray to the Father – needed His fellowship and communion – needed to be in touch with the Infinite One. Several of His prayers are recorded, and we are told that He spent the entire night in prayer on more than one occasion.

Some may ask, Would the Almighty change His plans in answer to our petitions? Assuredly He would not. Indeed, on the contrary, we are cautioned in the Scriptures to ask only according to His will. We are warned that if we ask amiss our petitions will not be answered. Hence the necessity for studying God's Word and being enlightened thereby respecting the Divine program that we may ask in harmony with every feature of it and receive strength and encouragement through the answer to our petitions.

The Redeemer gave us the keynote to this, saying, "If ye abide in Me and My words abide in you, ye may ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you." (John 15:7.) Alas! how few seem to note the two limitations of this promise:

(1) The one asking must be *in Christ* – abiding in Him. This means that the petitioner has turned from sin, has accepted Christ and the terms of discipleship. It implies that he has made a full consecration of his life to the Lord and become a new creature in Christ Jesus. Such, abiding in Christ, may pray to the Father.

(2) After having come into membership and fellowship with the Head, the Messiah, these must ask in harmony with God's Word and promises; in order to know what things to ask for they must search the Scriptures, which are sufficient, "that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished." There are many things for which we may pray, the answer to which would not involve any change in the Divine plans. We are not to understand that all the little incidents of life are foreordained and predestinated. So far as the world is concerned, many of its affairs are purely of chance under the permission of natural laws with which God does not generally interfere. It is in the affairs of His consecrated people that God assures us He takes a special interest. These are so supervised by His providence that He guarantees His children that all things shall work together for good to them.

WHAT TO PRAY FOR

God is pleased to make use of the little talents possessed by His consecrated people, and their usefulness as ambassadors for God and for Christ, in their own families and own cities, will avail in proportion to and depend very much upon the earnestness of their prayers and endeavors. Those who pray for opportunities to serve the Lord and His cause and who watch for the fulfillment of their prayers in the open doors of opportunity will surely have them. "He that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

The baptized in Christ may pray for earthly necessities, as in the Lord's prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread;" but we are not to pray for more than the bread and water which the Lord has authorized His people to pray for. The true Christian, instead of thinking about what he shall eat, what he shall drink, and wherewithal he shall be clothed – instead of making earthly things the subject of his prayers, will be thinking of and praying about his higher, his heavenly interests. More particularly he will be concerned respecting his spiritual food, spiritual clothing, spiritual growth in grace and knowledge and love, and for these particularly he will pray and strive.

Our Lord declares, "After all these things (food and clothing) do the Gentiles seek; but seek ye first (chiefly) the Kingdom of God and His righteousness." God's people

are consequently to attain a joint-heirship in Messiah's great Kingdom according to the Divine invitation that we should be "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord." We are to seek possessions in that Kingdom with our Lord in His throne, by seeking to develop characters which will have divine approval and make us fit for that high exaltation. Our Lord speaks of these as seeking the righteousness of the Kingdom – that Kingdom which will be established amongst mankind for the very purpose of enforcing righteousness; and whoever will be a joint-heir with Christ must love righteousness and hate iniquity, and must develop this character before he dies in order to hope for a share in this Kingdom and its glory, honor and immortality. For this he will be seeking, striving, praying – above all else.

NEHEMIAH'S FAITH AND WORKS – *Excerpt R. 2526* **NEHEMIAH 4:7-18**

"Watch and pray." – *Matthew 26:41*

NEHEMIAH'S earnest desire to spend himself and his service for the Lord's glory and for the blessing of his people inspired his prayers, and such prayers always bring an answer of some kind: such prayers mean faith and cooperating works. Charles Reade, the converted novelist, briefly sums up the circumstances by which Nehemiah's heart-burden was brought to the favorable attention of the king, as follows: –

"The answer came **(1)** through an arbitrary, self-willed and passionate king, who a few years before had issued an edict against Jerusalem, and put a stop to the building of its walls. (Ezra 4:8-24.) **(2)** It came through Nehemiah himself, and the feelings which prompted his prayer. The burden of his spirit and the earnestness of his fasting and praying left their marks on his countenance. Usually he was able to conceal his heart's sorrow (2:1); or during these four months it was the turn of others to serve the king. When he came again before the king the change was apparent, and the king noticed it. 'Why is your countenance sad?' No reply. 'You are not sick?' Still no reply. 'This is sorrow and nothing else.' Then Nehemiah was sore afraid, and I will tell you why. His life was in danger. Even a modern autocrat like Louis XIV expected everybody's face to shine if he did but appear, and how much more an Artaxerxes. If he had ordered this melancholy visage away to prison or death it would have been justified by precedent."



Nehemiah Builds the Wall

God gave Nehemiah favor with the king so that he not only was permitted leave of absence to engage in the work which his heart yearned for, but in addition he was appointed Governor of Judea, with letters instructing other governors en route to Jerusalem to grant him necessary aid, together with a safe military escort. Apparently the preparations for the journey occupied nearly a month, and the journey itself about three months, bringing Nehemiah and his retinue of servants to Jerusalem about July.

It will be remembered that Ezra, in making this journey through a country infested with thieves and brigands, would not ask a military escort from the king lest it should seem a reflection against the divine providential care, of which he had spoken to the king: but Nehemiah, being offered the escort, did not permit any spirit of bravado to hinder his acceptance of it. In both cases we see that the right course was pursued, though in some respects the conditions were opposites. Spiritual Israelites need to learn both of these lessons – to trust fully in the Lord’s provision, be it great or small, and in no case to refuse reasonable safeguards, when under the Lord’s providence they are furnished. We remember that one of our Lord’s temptations was along this line – to perform a hazardous action for which there was no necessity – to leap from the pinnacle of the Temple. Frequently the Lord’s people are beset by the great Adversary to attempt foolish or impossible or unnecessary things, simply to **show their faith**. Such should take a lesson from our Lord’s reply in his temptation, “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God:” – we are not to tempt divine providence, nor to expect miracles to be wrought on our behalf where the divine arrangement has not made them necessary.

Arrived at Jerusalem, Nehemiah did not at first tell the chiefs of the Jews of his purposes; but secretly, in company with his personal attendants, he took a survey of the condition of the city walls by moonlight for three nights, meanwhile maturing in his mind the plan he was about to suggest. There is a valuable lesson here for spiritual Israelites: how necessary it is that if we desire to do a good work we first thoroughly inform ourselves respecting the needs of the case, so that our course of conduct may be both reasonable and efficient. This is none the less true and important if the walls which need repairing and building are the walls of spiritual Zion, the Church of the living God, the holy Jerusalem; nor less so if they are the walls of our characters, our own hearts, our own dispositions. We want to take a full survey of the weaknesses and deficiencies in order to be able, under the Lord’s direction and by his assistance, to build up ourselves in the most holy faith, and to similarly build up others of the true Zion. Inspection properly precedes intelligent and profitable reformation of any kind.

Nehemiah did not begin his work by chiding his brethren with unfaithfulness to God or lack of enterprise, etc.; such a course would have further discouraged them, and would have made them feel antagonistic, and perhaps to say, “You will see how it is yourself when you are here a few years,” and some would then have taken pleasure in his failure to do more than they had accomplished. Neither did he begin by boastfully saying, “I have come here to do such a work, and within an incredibly short time you will see it accomplished; I will accomplish in days what you have failed to accomplish in as many years.” To have taken such a course would have been to arouse the opposition of the very ones without whose aid his mission, humanly speaking, would be sure to be a failure.

Many Christian people can learn a valuable lesson here: the lesson that whoever desires to be a co-worker with God should work in the Lord's way and be guided by the spirit of love – for love does not think unkindly or ungenerously or slighting of the efforts of others, nor is it boastful. On the contrary, its trust is in the Lord, and its boast therefore must be in him. This lesson is valuable to us also in respect to individual efforts in our own hearts – to build up good characters acceptable in God's sight through Christ Jesus. We are to remember that nothing is gained, but much to be lost, by thinking or feeling boastfully of what we hope to attain in self-control and character-likeness to the Lord: nor is much to be gained by mourning and weeping over misspent opportunities of the past. The proper course is to begin work afresh with confidence, not in ourselves, but in him who called us and who has given such exceeding great and precious promises. This is our way to success in individual development, and also in our labors upon the walls of Zion, as it was Nehemiah's successful method for the building of the natural, typical Jerusalem.

In answer to his prayer and earnest study, God gave Nehemiah great wisdom and tact in his work, and calling together the chief representatives of the people he laid before them his plans, in which they were *all* to be associates and partners in whatever blessing and honor might accrue from this service. His plan was to divide the work on the wall so that each person of prominence and capability should have a certain share of the work and the responsibility, as well as of the subsequent honor of success. Moreover, his plan was that each should undertake the building of the wall nearest to his own residence: he would not only be interested in having the work done, but also in having it substantial, **(1)** because of the credit for the rapid and good workmanship, and **(2)** because he would be anxious that the wall should be strong in the vicinity of his own home.

There is a lesson here for us: our Lord declares that he gave “to every man [in the Church] his work” (Mark 13:34), represented by his talents, and each should seek to know his talents and to use them, and should not attempt the use of talents not given him, and a work therefore not committed to him. Again, each of us should begin “over against his house:” we, too, should begin our reform work at home.

In our experience in character-building, the same lesson of turning everything to good account may be profitably applied; for instance, if by nature we are quick and impulsive, let us not only seek to restrain such impulsiveness from speaking evil and wrong, but let us exercise it in the speaking of that which is good and profitable for edifying, gradually accustoming ourselves to use this talent in a favorable and not in an unfavorable manner. Have we large combativeness, let us, while seeking to restrain this quality of our being as respects evil doing and injury to others, learn to exercise it kindly, lovingly, in opposing wrong, “*in contending* earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.” And so with all the so-called baser organs of our fallen, unbalanced condition – they may all be turned to usefulness and helpfulness if but rightly directed by our wills and the spirit of a sound mind – “the mind of the Lord.”

NEHEMIAH'S CONSECRATION AND PRAYER – R. 2524

NEHEMIAH 1:1-11

“Prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day.”

ALTHOUGH the book of Nehemiah is a historical one – that is to say, not a prophetic or inspired one – we are nevertheless to regard its historical presentations as having been supervised by divine providence and intended for the instruction and edification of God's people. In these respects it corresponds to the books of Judges, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Esther, etc., and in these respects it differs from the prophetic books which present to us directly the words of divine inspiration. This book is sometimes recognized as the Second book of Ezra, because its narrative is the sequel to that of the book of Ezra. Undoubtedly, however, Nehemiah was the writer of the major part of it, additions being made of other features by some other historian. Portions of the book are apparently copied from the State archives and written in the third person, while Nehemiah evidently was the writer of the portion presented in the first person.

Dr. Howard Crosby calls attention to the fact that altho the Book of Nehemiah is strictly historical, it nevertheless in a very remarkable manner outlines or shadows in various parts a Christian's experience. He says: –

“It is interesting to see how admirably the Book of Nehemiah tells the story of the soul's renewal. In the **first chapter** is the conviction and confession of sin and unrighteousness; in the **second**, the determination to rebuild with God's grace; in the **third**, the actual rebuilding of the soul's defences in sanctification; in the **fourth**, the attacks upon the soul from without; in the **fifth**, the assaults from within; in the **sixth**, the sly temptations of the Adversary, in the guise of reasonableness; in the **seventh**, the successful accomplishment of the spiritual work and ordering of the soul in godliness; in the **eighth**, the study of the Word; in the **ninth**, the Christian's faith confessing its weakness; in the **tenth**, the covenant relationship emphasized; in the **eleventh**, the systematizing of the advanced soul in the godly life; in the **twelfth**, the thankful acknowledgement of God in everything; and in the **thirteenth**, the sad exhibition of the Christian's fall, and need of the renewed influences of the spirit. When, on the close examination of the book, we see how exactly this outline is filled up, we can hardly believe that such a spiritual application was not intended in the recorded history. It is probable that Bunyan took his Mansoul from the study of this book.”

Nehemiah informs us that he held the office of Cup-bearer to the king of Persia, at his palace, Shushan – the principal of the three Persian capitals. In ancient times the Cup-bearer was a confidential favorite with the monarch, highly trusted; he had access to the king's presence continually, and not merely on state occasions, as the political officers. His office was in the nature of trusted friend and counsellor, through whom instructions were sent, not only to the king's household servants, but also to ministers of the realm. Such trusted servants were expected to have a general oversight, especially of the household, and to be able to guarantee the king against conspiracies upon his life; he was expected to taste of the king's food in his presence as an assurance or guarantee that it had not been poisoned. In presenting wine to the king, it was the custom for this officer to pour out a sample for himself, and from this probably originated the title of Cup-bearer. Somewhat similarly, in Great Britain, various persons of high rank are

known as Chamberlain, Master of the Household, etc.

It may be inferred from various statements of chapter five, especially vss. 16-18, that Nehemiah had inherited great wealth, and we must think of him as a young man, gifted, educated, and highly honored by the monarch in the position which he held. That it was not impossible for Hebrews to occupy confidential and high positions in the Persian empire is shown in the cases of Daniel, Esther and Mordecai.

We saw in a previous lesson (August 27) that those who returned to Jerusalem under the proclamation of Cyrus were for the most part the poorer of the captives who had not prospered exceedingly in the provinces of Babylonia. Nehemiah's parents had possibly been too comfortably situated and too prosperous to take a deep interest in the return. Nehemiah himself, as a young man in good position, had probably not given great thought to the fact that God's chosen nation was at this time for the most part a homeless people, and that the holy city was in a deplorable condition. Josephus informs us that while walking outside the city wall Nehemiah noticed some travel-stained strangers, was attracted to them by their Hebrew language, and conversing with them found one of them to be a relative of his, and that they had recently returned from Jerusalem, which they described as being in a deplorable condition.

The Lord evidently permitted this circumstance, which exercised a great influence upon the mind of Nehemiah, stirring up the naturally good soil of his heart not only to sympathy with his persecuted co-religionists at Jerusalem, but also to consider the whole question of Israel's rejection from divine favor, and the forewarnings of this rejection given in the Law and the prophets, and the promises of a return of divine favor with the return of Israel to a proper condition of heart. As he thought upon the question his entire nature was stirred, plowed to its very depths; and he resolved that he would not only pray the Lord for divine blessing upon the true holy city, but that he would consecrate himself and the wealth which God had committed to his care, and his favored confidential relationship with the king – all these he would devote to the answering of his own prayers.

He realized, however, that the work he was undertaking was of no small magnitude: he realized that to express to the king a sympathy for his own nation and its captive city might readily be misunderstood to be a lack of loyalty, and that thus he might not only fail to have the king's favor and assistance in connection with the project, but might, on the other hand, arouse his opposition and enmity, not only against himself, but also against his people. And at that time for a Chamberlain to arouse his monarch's ill-will might readily mean, not merely his removal from office, but the confiscation of his property, or even the taking of his life.

With these facts before our minds, we not only gain an exalted opinion of Nehemiah's consecration to the Lord and the service of his people, but we also perceive the reasonableness, nay, the necessity, for his continuing in an attitude of mourning, fasting and praying, and waiting for the Lord to open a favorable opportunity for nearly four months before that opportunity came. – Neh. 1:1; 2:1.

The mourning probably came first; then followed the fasting, self-denial, self-correction, that he might know the better the mind of the Lord on the subject; then

discerning what he concluded was the Lord's will in respect to himself, the use of his time, talent, influence and means in the relief of his brethren, and consecrating his all fully to this service, his mourning, fasting and praying continued until the day that the Lord opened to him the door of opportunity, thus accepting his offer, his sacrifice.

We may pause here to note the fact that all Christians today should have much of the spirit, the disposition, of Nehemiah. Being Israelites after the spirit and not after the flesh, their interest will chiefly be in the prosperity of spiritual Israel. Numbers of these, like Nehemiah, are still in Babylon, and a few of them, like him, possess wealth and influence there. Such as take note of the dishonor and contempt and abuse aroused against their faithful brethren will be touched with love and sympathy for the brethren. Their hearts will thus be turned longingly to look for the promises of God respecting spiritual Zion and her ultimate deliverance, and they will feel an earnest desire to be with and of the Lord's faithful ones, and such true fellowship will make them ready to sacrifice their temporal interests in the Lord's cause as well as to fast and pray for it. Those with such a spirit will be sure to have an increase of divine favor which will permit them to sacrifice their all and to share the privations and oppositions to which their brethren are subject, and being in a right condition of heart they will appreciate this as being a great *privilege*, a *great honor*.

Such, however, will do wisely if they follow Nehemiah's course of earnest prayer and constant seeking for the opportunity which will permit them not only to make their sacrifice, but to make it most effectively as respects the Lord's cause.

Our previous studies on this subject showed us that the wall of Jerusalem had been considerably repaired after the return from Babylon, but this repair work had been discontinued by imperial decree because of the representations made by the rulers of the Samaritans, who, we remember, were provoked by the refusal of the Israelites to permit them to join in the work and to consider them as Israelites; subsequently this hatred was intensified by Israel's course in instructing the people that those who had married Samaritan wives had violated the divine command. We cannot doubt that the return of these wives would be taken as a gross insult by the Samaritans, who evidently felt that under all the circumstances they were at liberty to oppose these poor Jews in every way in their power, even resorting to open attacks upon the people and the breaking down of the walls, the burning of the gates, etc. They felt secure in this lawlessness, because the imperial government of Persia showed the Jews no favor.

However, we see that God used this very matter of trouble upon the Jews to raise up for them wealthy and friendly brethren yet in Babylon to come to their relief. Just so it is sometimes with the spiritual Israelite – the trials and difficulties which seem most discouraging and disadvantageous are often the very means which God employs for stirring up others of his people and bringing them needed relief. This again emphasizes the lesson which is taught throughout this narrative of Nehemiah respecting trust in the divine supervision of his people's interests, and the propriety of our not only trusting God but seeking to cwork with him along the lines of his providence.

The condensed statement of Nehemiah's prayers which he furnishes us is interesting and instructive. The opening sentence reminds us of the opening statement of that which we designate the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy

name.” It is an acknowledgment of the divine greatness and relatively of the petitioner’s littleness. It is a recognition also of God’s faithfulness: His name is honorable, his character is unassailable, his ways just and true. Nehemiah, after acknowledging God’s faithfulness toward those who love and obey him, acknowledged that the entire difficulty which had led to all the trouble upon Israel resulted from their sins – their neglect of God and his promises, their failure to keep their part of the covenant.

And properly he included himself in this matter, for heretofore he had been like the others, chiefly careful for the things of this life, and tho doubtless honest and honorable in his dealings, he had been neglectful of the great promises of which he was an heir with the others of his nation. Although he had not been sharing personally in the severe afflictions, he now shared them sympathetically with the faithful ones who had returned to the Land of Promise, and he might therefore voice a prayer for all. He summarizes the divine threatenings and promises expressed by Moses’ lips (Deut. 28), expressing his thorough confidence in the Lord, that as the punishments predicted had been meted out to Israel as a people, so assuredly the promises of the regathering could be relied upon implicitly. – Rom. 11:29,32.

There are lessons here profitable to all Israelites indeed who are in trouble because of past unfaithfulness to their covenant. All such should remember that the very fact that their indifference and neglect of the Lord has separated them from him according to the declaration of his Word, only proves the fact that God who is the same yesterday, today and forever is ready and willing to receive them back into harmony and favor if they but retrace their steps. To all such the Lord says, “Draw nigh unto me and I will draw nigh unto you.”

Nehemiah’s prayer reminds us also of the fact that Israel was not gathered at the first advent because as a nation they did not come into the attitude of heart here exemplified by Nehemiah. Had the whole nation been of Nehemiah’s attitude at our Lord’s first advent the gathering of the elect would have been accomplished there: the Bride class would have been selected from the twelve tribes, the Kingdom would have been established, and the work of blessing all the families of the earth would have begun there. But as we have already seen* the unreadiness of that nation resulted in their receiving a “double” of chastisement from the Lord – so that they have since received as long a period of punishment without favor as they previously received with favor. And now their “double” being ended, the Lord’s message to them is, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people; speak ye comfortably unto Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her appointed time is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, for she hath received at the Lord’s hands **double** for all her sins.” (Isa. 40:1,2.) Now the recovery of Israel is due and is in progress, and as soon as the spiritual Israel is complete and glorified the light will begin to shine upon fleshly Israel. – Rom. 11:25-27.

*See MILLENNIAL DAWN, VOL. II, Chap. 7.

Thus we see that Nehemiah’s prayer has not yet been fully answered. The Lord has not yet gathered the natural seed of Abraham, who have faith in him, from the uttermost parts of the earth: but we do see that he is ready to do this quickly now, so soon as he shall have gathered the spiritual seed to heavenly conditions through the first resurrection. The gathering of natural Israel will not of course include all Jews, but

merely such of that blinded people as maintain their Abrahamic faith in the divine promises. And these doubtless will be gathered through a great time of trouble through which fleshly Israel may still expect to pass. Their favor-time has commenced, and hence the “Zionist movement,” but it will be requisite as a part of the favor, which shall bring them near to the Lord and back to the Land of Promise, that they shall endure great persecutions, from which the Lord shall deliver them.

But although Nehemiah’s prayer was not fulfilled on the large scale he had before his mind, because the Lord’s due time had not yet come and because the people were not then ready for such blessing, nevertheless his prayer was **answered**, for he was granted the desired opportunity to devote himself, his influence, his wealth and his time to the Lord’s cause. And even though the results were far from what he expected, we may be sure that they brought to his heart a rest and a blessing; and we may be sure also that they brought him into that condition of mind which was pleasing to the Lord, and we may reasonably expect that Nehemiah will be one of the class mentioned by the Apostle in Heb. 11:39,40, for whom is reserved a share in the earthly ministration of the Millennial age under the glorified Church.

A lesson for the spiritual Israelite in this is that although his prayers may not be answered in the manner he had anticipated, nevertheless he may rest assured that all things are working together for good to him; and that the Lord’s way eventually will work out a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory. Therefore let us, as spiritual Israelites, perform our consecration and pour out before the Lord our prayers in harmony with his promise, and realize that in the end, when we shall know as we are known, we will see clearly that the Lord was answering our prayers in the most efficacious manner.

See also R. 3662: **EFFECTUAL FERVENT PRAYER**
 NEHEMIAH 1:1-11

Our object in referring to this case is that all of the Lord’s people may have the suggestions which it offers, in harmony with those of Nehemiah’s prayer, namely, that God is able to shape all our earthly affairs for us, and that a part of our lesson is to learn to trust him. He will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but with the temptation will also provide a way of escape. He does indeed permit us to be tried as gold in the furnace, yet as gold is not permitted to be consumed in the furnace, so the Lord will not permit us to receive injury under any conditions so long as we are trusting in him.

2.

Prayers of the Faithful at The Great Transition of The Ages

For four thousand years and more the promises of God, clothed in more or less of obscurity, had been given to mankind, intimating that ultimately the great curse of sin and death which had come upon the world through father Adam's disobedience in Eden would be rolled away, and instead of a curse, a blight, would come a blessing of the Lord with life-giving refreshment. In various types, figures and shadowy promises this lesson had come down through the ages to the time of our Lord's birth, especially amongst the Jews, who were the divinely favored and covenanted people. And since the Jews were of a commercial spirit, many of them were to be found in all parts of the civilized world; and thus amongst every people the faith in the one God and the hope of Israel through a Messiah were more or less made known, so that at the time of our Lord's birth we read, "All men were in expectation" of a soon-coming Messiah. Doubtless this expectation was built upon the interpretation of Daniel's prophecy, which we now see clearly marked the year of our Lord's majority, when he was thirty years of age and made his consecration to his work and received the begetting of the holy Spirit, his anointing as the great antitypical High Priest and as the great antitypical King over Israel and the world. R. 3700

Prayers of The Righteous

The time of our Lord's birth was an auspicious one in several respects, and very evidently divine wisdom had exercised itself in respect to the world's affairs by way of preparation for this important event:

(1) The spirit of world-conquering that began with Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was favorable to it, in the sense that it brought the various families or nations of mankind into closer contact with each other, broadening their ideas.

(2) This policy had resulted in the transplanting of peoples from one land to another, and thus had made them more cosmopolitan in their sentiments.

(3) Israel and Judah, thus transplanted in their captivity to Babylon, became so attached to the new conditions that comparatively few of them availed themselves of the offer of Cyrus to return to their own land, only about fifty thousand of all the tribes, out of several millions. The Jews among the Gentiles were by no means lost and had by no means abandoned all of their hopes in the Abrahamic Covenant nor all of their faithfulness to the Mosaic Law – although they were lax in these matters and too full of a love of gain and ease to cultivate the spirit of Israelites indeed. Nevertheless, they had their influence amongst all the nations with whom they dwelt, and were witnesses to the hopes of Israel in the one God and in a coming Messiah, the Son of God, to be the world's Deliverer.

(4) The triumph for a time of the Greek Empire had brought to the civilized world a highly developed literature – the Greek language had reached its zenith, and was the literary language of the civilized world.

(5) The Roman Empire had conquered the world and was in the height of its power, and as a result there was a time of universal peace, and hence a more favorable time than any before for the announcement of the Gospel and for the safety of its representatives in passing from nation to nation.

(6) Israel itself had reached probably its highest development, intellectually, morally and religiously, and additionally we are told in the Scriptures that “All men were in **expectation**” of the Messiah's coming. – Luke 3:15.

It was just at this most appropriate time, as divinely arranged for, that Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor, issued his decree respecting the taxing of his worldwide empire. The decree was not merely an assessment of taxes, but was rather a census, or enrollment for taxation. But instead of sending assessors to the people, according to the present custom, the arrangement then was that every male citizen must report himself at the headquarters of his own family line. This was the occasion for the coming of Joseph and his espoused wife, Mary, the mother of Jesus, to Bethlehem, their native city or family city, for they were both of the house of David (tho through different lines), and Bethlehem was “the city of David.” Thus in a providential manner and by a decree over which they had no control whatever, Joseph and Mary were brought to the very city in which most appropriately the great heir of David should be born, as had been foretold by the prophet. – Micah 5:2.

The noting of these little incidentals by which divine providence prepared for our Savior's birth and for the sending forth of the Gospel message, are strengthening to the faith of the Lord's people. Realizing God's care in the past over even the little things, gives a foundation for confidence in his wisdom and provision for the features of his plan which are yet future – the fulfillment of all the exceeding great and precious promises which centered in him who was born in Bethlehem. And so also a realization of the divine providence in the larger affairs of the divine plan stimulates faith also in the Lord's providences as respects the personal and more private affairs of his people. Let us more and more realize that, as even the smallest incidents connected with the birth of our Savior were ordered of the Lord, so also he is both able and willing to order all of the affairs of his spiritual children. Let us reason with the Apostle that, if God loved us while we were yet sinners, so as to make such careful provision for our redemption, much more now that we are no longer rebels, aliens, strangers, foreigners, but have become his sons, fellow-heirs with Christ and all the saints, we may have confidence in his love and in his providential care, that according to his promise all things shall work together for good to them that love him – to the called ones according to his purpose. – Rom. 5:8-10; 8:28.

The same decree that brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem brought many others of the numerous family of David, and as the inns or hotels of that time were comparatively limited in numbers and in capacity, it is not surprising that the inn proper was full of guests when Joseph and Mary arrived. Indeed, it was rather the custom for many travelers to carry with them their own lodging outfit, and to provide for their own conveniences in the courtyard connected with the inns. And hence the experiences of Joseph and Mary were by no means exceptional. When therefore the Babe Jesus was born, a manger became his most convenient cradle.

Had the people assembled at Bethlehem realized who this was that had come to their city – that he was from the heavenly courts, that he was the Logos made flesh, that he had come to “save his people from their sins” – how gladly they would have welcomed him into the inn and have given to his use and comfort its choicest apartments! But they knew him not, and hence lost this great privilege of ministering to him. Similarly, in every city and town where the Lord's people are (his true saints), there are many who would make them welcome and give them the best at their disposal, did they but recognize them as the messengers of Jesus and of the Heavenly Father; but as the Apostle says, “The world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.” (1 John 3:1.) The disciple must not expect to be above his Lord, and hence, even when going upon missions of mercy and benevolence and as ambassadors for God, we should expect that the Lord's providence would furnish for us, not the most palatial conditions, but more probably very humble conditions. And when we find it thus we should rejoice that to some extent at least we have experiences which harmonize with those of our Lord. The Lord's people will obtain a blessing in proportion as they are prepared to receive all opportunities for God's service as divine favors and to appreciate them, no matter how humble the conditions: and it is noteworthy that neither Joseph, nor Mary, nor Jesus, nor the disciples, nor the Evangelist who recorded the incident, offers the slightest complaint or suggestion of dissatisfaction with the arrangement provided by divine providence. In proportion as they would have felt dissatisfied with the arrangements provided, in that proportion the divine plans would not have worked for their good.

R. 2555

MARY



The Annunciation by Gustave Dore, 1873

26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women!"

29 But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. 30 Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

31 "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. 32 "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. 33 "And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

Luke 1:26-33

Mary's Prayer Magnifying God

46 And Mary said:

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

48 For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.

49 For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name.

50 And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation.

51 He has shown strength with His arm. He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

52 He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.

54 He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy,

55 as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.”

Luke 1:46-55

The Scriptures explicitly point out: **(1)** That the Lord chose for the mother of Jesus a holy woman “blessed among women,” who had “found favor with God” (Luke 1:28,30,42); **(2)** Mary was full of faith and the joy of the Lord, to be an instrument in his plan: and **(3)** not regarding fear of reproach from Joseph or the world, she lived rejoicing in God, saying – “My soul doth magnify Jehovah; my spirit rejoiceth in God my Savior.” (Luke 1:45-47) Thus we perceive that the mind of Jesus’ mother, instead of being antagonistic to his perfect development, cooperated to that result. E102

“Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.”

Luke 1:45

ZACHARIAS

57 Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son.

58 When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her.



Zechariah Gives Name to John the Baptist, by Riccardo Cessi, 1892

59 So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child, and they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias.

60 His mother answered and said, "No. He shall be called John."

61 But they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name."

62 So they made signs to his father---what he would have him called.

63 And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John." So they all marveled.

64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God.

Zacharias' Prophecy Praising God

68 "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people,

69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David,

70 as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began,

71 that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us,

72 to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant,

73 the oath which He swore to our father Abraham:

74 To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear,

75 in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.

76 "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest, for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways,

77 To give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins,

78 Through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us,

79 To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Luke 1:68-79

Prayers of The Righteous

13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John."

Luke 1:13

In harmony with the message of the Angel Gabriel, John the Baptist was born. On his eighth day he was circumcised and named. The family relatives urged the name of his father, but the father and mother named him John, and immediately Zacharias' dumbness departed. His faith had been helped. He had triumphed over all doubts and manifested this by giving the name mentioned by Gabriel. The name John has a beautiful signification – "The favor of God."

As a man John was peculiar in that he had no other aim or object in life than to be God's messenger – to proclaim His Anointed One and to prepare the people for the trying experiences and character-test which Malachi had declared would come with the revealment of Messiah, who would "sit as a Refiner, to purify the sons of Levi, that they might offer to God an acceptable sacrifice." So it was that John in his ministry declared, "The Kingdom of God is at hand." Believe the good news. Repent, reform. Get ready for a share in that Kingdom.

THE PROPHECY OF ZACHARIAS

St. Peter distinctly tells us respecting the Old Testament Prophets, that "Holy men of old spake and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." He intimates that frequently they uttered deeper and broader truths than they themselves comprehended – truths which only the future would fully reveal. This is true of the prophecy of Zacharias, in this lesson. **Verses 68-70** constitute the first division of this prophecy; praise to God, the Fountain of every good and perfect gift, comes first. To Him all honor and praise are to be given for the fulfilment of His gracious promises of old, "for He hath visited and brought redemption to His people; He hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David," in harmony with the promises. Here, after the usual manner of prophecies, the thing about to be accomplished is spoken of as though it had been done.

As John the Baptist was born but six months before Jesus, it follows that the begetting of Jesus had already taken place at the time of this prophecy. The Holy Spirit spoke of the things begun, but not yet accomplished, as though finished: "He hath visited and brought redemption for His people." This word **redemption** applies not only to the redeeming work accomplished by Jesus in the consecration of His life at baptism and down to the completion of His sacrifice at Calvary, but it is comprehensive enough to take in the entire work of reclaiming humanity.

A small section of our race, the "elect," is being reclaimed during this Gospel Age; but the Scriptures assure us that the Messianic reign of a thousand years will all be for the purpose of redeeming or bringing back from the power of sin and death Adam and so many of his children as shall be willing to accept the Divine favor, when brought to their knowledge. The import, therefore, of this first strophe or section of the poetic prophecy is, The Lord be praised that the time has come beginning the great blessing which He long ago promised.

DELIVERANCE FROM ENEMIES

The second section or strophe of this prophetic poem runs from **verse 71 to 75**. It relates to the deliverance of God's people from the power of their enemies. One

important thought here is that none but God's people will ever be delivered from the enemies here referred to. However, there have been many in the past, as there are at present, enemies through wicked works – not because of intentional wickedness, but because blinded by the god of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, the weaknesses of their fallen flesh, etc.

During Messiah's reign of a thousand years, when all the blind eyes will be opened and all the deaf ears will be unstopped, and when the knowledge of the glory of God's character will be clearly revealed and the horribleness of sin be fully manifested – then many, now led captive by Satan at his will, will bow the knee to Emmanuel and confess to the glory of God. In other words, as Jesus said, His consecrated followers are His "little flock" of the present time. But during His glorious reign He will gather another flock. As He said, "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold – them also I must bring, that there may be one fold and one Shepherd." – John 10:16.

"One fold and one Shepherd" does not signify that all of the sheep will be of the same nature. On the contrary, the Apostle tells us that God's Plan is ultimately to "gather together under one Head (Shepherd) all things, both in heaven and in earth." (Ephesians 1:10.) Of these "all things" the Church, the Bride, will be chief, on the plane of divine nature. The Great Company, cherubim and angels will follow in order, and redeemed and restored mankind in human perfection will be the lowest order in the Divine fold.

St. Paul tells us about the enemies from whom ultimately all of God's people shall be delivered. Satan is an enemy. He shall be bound for a thousand years and ultimately shall be destroyed. Sin is an enemy, which will be stamped out in its various phases during Messiah's Kingdom. And we read, "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" – and with it will go the tomb. Adamic death will be no more. None will be under its power. The resurrection power will release all. Only those who sin wilfully, deliberately, will die the Second Death, which is not an enemy.

THE PREPARATORY WORK

The third section or strophe of this prophetic poem tells us of a work to be accomplished before the grand consummation of the destruction of all enemies and the lifting up of all accounted worthy to be sons of God. This is recorded in **verses 76-79**. It tells how John the Baptist would be the forerunner of the Lord's special Servant, Jesus, to pave the way for His great work. That great work would be to give the knowledge of salvation to thousands who were already God's people, to show them the "high calling" of this present Age. Thus in God's tender mercy the Church sees and is enlightened by the "Morning Star" or "Day Star" before the Sun of Righteousness arises to scatter the darkness of mankind during Messiah's reign. This lesser light of the present time shines into the hearts of believers with sanctifying power and sets them afire with zeal for the Truth. They in turn shine forth upon those who are sitting in the shadow of death. This "Day Star" guides the feet of the saints in the way of peace, even while still in the time of trouble and before the New Dispensation is ushered in. R. 4940

THE ANGELS

- 1 And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.
- 2 This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria.
- 3 So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.
- 4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David,
- 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.
- 6 So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered.
- 7 And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Luke 2:1-7



Birth of Christ by Susan Comish

The Angels Praise God

8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.



10 Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.

11 “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

12 “And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

14 “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

It was a fitting climax that, after the one angel had told the surprised shepherds of the good tidings of great joy for all people and was ready to depart, he should be joined by an angelic host, singing, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” This was but a reiteration of the Gospel message already delivered. It declared that the work which should be accomplished by the babe just born, should redound to the highest glory and honor of Jehovah God, his Father. It declared also that through this work to be accomplished by Jesus should come to earth divine good will and consequently peace, – and all that these would imply in the way of blessings of restitution and privilege of attaining everlasting life. R. 2557

THE GLORIOUS PROCLAMATION – R. 3700

LUKE 2:1-20

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord.”

THE message of the angels to the shepherds on Bethlehem’s plains sounds more and more precious to each child of God in proportion as he grows in grace and knowledge. As his eyes and ears of understanding open more widely to the lengths and breadths of God’s great plan of the ages, that prophetic message is the more highly esteemed as an epitome of the entire Gospel. Nor can our attention be too frequently called to the great event which lies at the foundation of that message – our Savior’s birth.

It matters not that December 25th is not the real anniversary of the Savior’s birth, but probably the anniversary of the annunciation by the angel Gabriel, the anniversary of the Virgin Mary’s conception, our Lord being born nine months later on the calendar, or about October 1. One so great, whose birth, death and resurrection from the dead means so much to the human family, may be remembered and celebrated any day, every day, by all who appreciate what he has done for our race. Since, then, the majority of Christian people have become habituated to the celebration of December 25th as our Lord’s birthday, we need make no protest, but join with all in celebrating that day with rejoicing of heart, giving gifts and remembrances one to another, thus copying divine favor, which gave to mankind the Son of God as a gift of mercy and love for our redemption.

For four thousand years and more the promises of God, clothed in more or less of obscurity, had been given to mankind, intimating that ultimately the great curse of sin and death which had come upon the world through father Adam’s disobedience in Eden would be rolled away, and instead of a curse, a blight, would come a blessing of the Lord with life-giving refreshment. In various types, figures and shadowy promises this lesson had come down through the ages to the time of our Lord’s birth, especially amongst the Jews, who were the divinely favored and covenanted people. And since the Jews were of a commercial spirit, many of them were to be found in all parts of the civilized world; and thus amongst every people the faith in the one God and the hope of Israel through a Messiah were more or less made known, so that at the time of our Lord’s birth we read, “All men were in expectation” of a soon-coming Messiah. Doubtless this expectation was built upon the interpretation of Daniel’s prophecy, which we now see clearly marked the year of our Lord’s majority, when he was thirty years of age and made his consecration to his work and received the begetting of the holy Spirit, his anointing as the great antitypical High Priest and as the great antitypical King over Israel and the world.

FROM BETHLEHEM TO NAZARETH

In olden times there were honorable cities and mean cities. Nazareth was generally recognized as one of the latter, while Bethlehem was distinctly one of the former – the City of David, Israel’s beloved king. The Scriptures explain to us that Mary, our Lord’s mother, and Joseph, her husband, were both of the lineage of David, and that in a seemingly accidental manner the prophecy was fulfilled which foretold that Messiah

would be born in Bethlehem. – Micah 5:2.

The Roman empire at that time bore rule over the whole world, the Jews being subject to it, but waiting expectantly, restlessly, for the coming Messiah, who would deliver them from being subject people and make of them the ruling caste in his Kingdom, the dominion of the world. Rome's great emperor, Caesar Augustus, was in power at this time, and had sent forth his decree for a polling or census of the whole world for purposes of taxation, etc. Luke informs us that it was in response to this royal decree that Joseph and Mary went up to their native city to be enrolled, and that thus it was that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and on account of the great concourse of people at the same time and for the same purpose, accommodations being scarce, the stable of the inn, or khan, was used by some as a lodging. Joseph and Mary, being of the late comers, were forced to occupy these humble quarters, and thus it was that the King of glory, whose Kingdom is by and by to rule the world, was in the time of his flesh born in a stable and cradled in a manger.

THE ANGELS AND THE SHEPHERDS

Noble shepherds those must have been to whom the Almighty sent the angelic message respecting the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, which has rung down the ages and reached our ears – the message which thrills us the more in proportion as we are able to grasp its meaning. First a single angel appeared to the shepherds and allayed their fears, saying, "Fear not; behold I bring you good tidings." It would appear that fear is one of the dominating impulses of the human mind, especially in conjunction with any revelations from the Lord. Men realize – even the best of the race – that they are imperfect and that the Almighty and his laws are perfect. Instinctively the world seems to realize that a curse or condemnation of the Almighty rests upon it, and instinctively it fears a further curse and further condemnation, realizing its continual and increasing sinfulness. The same is true today with all except the comparatively few who are well informed respecting the divine character and plan. Thus the subject of religion is generally obnoxious to the world in general – a subject which they prefer to avoid, because of a feeling of guilt and a dread of further knowledge and condemnation.

It is for the true children of God today, as it was for the angels at that time, to assure the world that God is better than all their fears – that God so loved the world as to redeem them from the just sentence of death, the curse that came upon all as inheritors of Adam's imperfection and sentence.

"Good tidings" is another translation of our word "gospel." How beautiful the thought that the gospel is really and truly good tidings. Alas, for the misrepresentations of God's plan, under which so many of his professed people misrepresent his character and his Word, and apply the term "gospel" to their various messages from the dark ages, teaching purgatory and eternal torment as the portion of the race. Let us get away from this false thought and get the truth that the gospel is good tidings. The angel elaborated, saying that his message was good tidings of great joy, which should be unto all people. Ah, thank God, his plan is wider and deeper and higher and grander than anything we had ever conceived. The gospel message is not merely to be good tidings to the comparatively few that now have ears to hear and eyes to see its beauties, but in God's due time it is to be good tidings of great joy to all people.

As every member of Adam's race shared in his fall and in the curse of death which came upon him as a result, so every member of the race was included in the great redemptive sacrifice which our Lord Jesus offered and which was finished at Calvary. God's plan in Christ, as it is being worked out and shall ultimately be accomplished, will mean great joy for all people, and the tidings of this were given at the very moment of our Lord's birth, because he was the one through whom all the glorious things of the divine purpose and plan shall ultimately be accomplished.

THE CAUSE, THE LOGIC, OF THE MESSAGE

The message took cognizance of the fact that it was to reasonable people, who would want to know why the unchangeable God, who had once pronounced a curse, should at any time so amend and alter matters as to supplant the curse with a blessing. The messenger states the philosophy of the divine plan, "Unto you is born this day a Savior, which is Christ [Messiah] the Lord." There we have the key to the entire Gospel statement of how God could be just and yet be the justifier of sinners who accept Jesus. The word "Savior" here signifies life-giver, and how beautiful is the thought that as death is the wage of sin, the curse upon the race, this Messiah who was born is to be the one who will rescue the race from the sentence by giving them life again. The explanation of how he would give life was not given, nor was it necessary at that time; but now, in the light of developments, and with the explanations furnished through the Spirit in the New Testament, we see how that our Lord's voluntary sacrifice of his life, dying the just for the unjust, settled the claims of divine justice against Adam and thus incidentally against all who shared his sentence.

Truly the more we see of the divine plan for our salvation, which began to take shape in the birth of Jesus, the more we feel like shouting with the angelic choir praises to the God of heaven, thankfulness for his mercy to the children of men. It mattered not that the babe born in Bethlehem was the Savior only in prospect, that he could not even be anointed to do his work until he reached manhood's estate thirty years later; it mattered not that even then it would be necessary for him to lay down his life gradually through three and a half years of his earthly ministry, to be finished at Calvary; it mattered not either that the resurrection was still three days after that, and his ascension forty days later, and that the blessing in general would be deferred for nearly nineteen centuries thereafter. As the angels could sing and rejoice at the first budding of the divine plan of salvation, so also can all who have faith in the ultimate outcome rejoice with joy unspeakable and give praise to God in the highest and to his Son our Lord.

"SAVED BY HOPE"

Although nearly nineteen centuries have rolled away since that angelic message was delivered, it has not yet been fulfilled except in a limited measure by faith to those who have the eye of faith and the ears of faith, in all a "little flock." But the tidings of great misery for nearly all people has been spread abroad in the name of Christ, much to the discredit of the divine plan and to the dishonor of the divine character. Instead of carrying joy the message has very generally carried grief and sorrow, especially to the kind hearted and more generously disposed. Indeed we may say that no message of the Lord Jesus, either true or false, has ever reached all people. Even today, after nineteen

centuries of propaganda, only a comparatively small portion of the human family have ever heard of the only name given under heaven and amongst men whereby we must be saved – “nor is there salvation in any other.” – Acts 4:12.

What, then, shall we say of the salvation which is come to those who have truly accepted Christ as their Savior, and who are today rejoicing in him as such, and who by faith are seeing the salvation of God begun in their own hearts and yet to be fully accomplished under the whole heavens? This the Apostle calls the salvation by hope. His words are, “We are saved by hope.” (Romans 8:24.) We are not saved actually; we are still surrounded by sin, pain, sighing, crying and dying; the curse is not yet rolled away. All that the best of the Lord’s people have received is salvation by hope, by faith. Yet this anticipation of the future salvation, of the resurrection from the dead, of a participation in the glory, honor and immortality of the divine nature promised to the faithful, is so strong, so clear, that those who possess it are enabled to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, even in the midst of trials and difficulties and weaknesses and unfavorable conditions incident to the curse which still rests upon the race.

A PROPHECY OF GOOD THINGS

Yes, the angelic message was a prophecy of good things to be accomplished for the Church and the world during the Millennial age. The Church is to have the first blessing. The first resurrection is to be composed only of the blessed and holy who shall live and reign with Christ during the Millennium, the thousand years in which Satan shall be bound, and when the good influences of truth and righteousness shall enlighten the whole earth. The declaration of the Scriptures is that the deliverance of the Church will come early in the morning of that Millennial day, as the prophet declares, “God will help her early in the morning.” – Psalm 46:5.

But much as we rejoice in the glorious hopes of the Gospel set before us who now see, who now believe, who now rejoice with joy unspeakable, we are glad that the divine mercy and love are of such lengths and breadths and heights and depths as to encompass the whole world of mankind, and to provide a blessing for every member of Adam’s race through him who loved us and bought us with his precious blood.

It will be during the Millennial age that this prophecy of the angel will have its fulfilment, and the great Savior who has already redeemed us by his sacrifice will stand forth as the King, the glorified Messiah, and establish his dominion of righteousness in the world for the blessing and uplifting of every member of the race. In harmony with the words of the Apostle, those will be times of refreshing, “times of restitution of all things spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began.” (Acts 3:19-21.) If the Lord had based the hope of the world upon some works of merit or righteousness of the world’s doing, then indeed we might have feared – indeed the more we know of the world the less hope we would have. But, on the contrary, the Lord has based the entire proposition for the future blessing, not upon our worthiness, but upon the worthiness and sacrifice of his Son – To you is born a Life-giver, which is Messiah the Lord.

How it adds to our enjoyment of the coming age blessings to know that the trials and difficulties of this present Gospel age are subject to the divine supervision in the interest of the little flock that is now being gathered in advance from amongst men –

the “elect,” the Church. We see how the present trials and difficulties are the chiselings and polishings necessary to our development in the fruits and graces of the holy Spirit in the character-likeness of God’s dear Son, our Lord, our Hope, our Bridegroom. How joyful the thought that soon the elect number called from the world to be the Bride, the Lamb’s wife, will be completed and enter into her glory. How precious the thought that then they shall be privileged with their Lord and Master to extend the divine favor of blessing and uplift to the world. What higher honor or privilege or blessing could possibly come to any?

THE ANGELS’ SONG

It was after the giving of the message of good tidings and great joy by the heavenly one that a host of angels appeared to the shepherds, saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men.” This, too, is a prophecy. It is not yet true, but will be fulfilled in every particular in God’s due time, which we believe is now nigh, even at the door. Not yet does God receive glory in the highest, not yet is there peace amongst men. Quite to the contrary. God’s name is blasphemed, not only by those who vulgarly and in ribald jest take the divine name in vain, and not merely by the heathen who worship devils and think they are gods, but even by Christian people God’s name is blasphemed every day. For be it known that blasphemy is any dishonorable misrepresentation of another. God be merciful to us, for at some time or other every one of us doubtless has blasphemed the holy name in this manner – by misrepresenting the divine character and divine plan, by picturing the God of love and mercy and justice and truth as the originator, the planner, the perpetuator of the eternal torment of the great mass of his creatures, born in sin and shapen in iniquity, born to sin as the sparks to fly upward.

But the Lord had mercy upon us because we did it ignorantly. And we also should have compassion upon others who still ignorantly misrepresent our God, and our energies should be continually bent to their assistance, that the eyes of their understanding might open more widely to perceive the lengths and breadths and heights and depths and know the love of God which passeth understanding.

Noting that peace on earth and good will to men have not followed the Savior’s birth thus far, and discerning that this is a prophecy of what is to be accomplished during the Millennium, many have been inclined to change the translation of this verse so as to have it read, “On earth peace amongst men, in whom he is well pleased.” However, by thus changing it the statement would not be true, for even the Lord’s people have no peace on earth. Whatever peace they have is in their hearts, and based upon their faith in the Lord and in the glorious things which he has promised. Our Lord himself and the apostles testified to this, assuring us that whosoever in this present time would live godly should suffer persecution, that a man’s foes would be they of his own household, etc. (2 Tim. 3:12; Matt. 10:26.) Let us not confuse ourselves nor abridge the testimony of the Word, but with the eye of faith look forward to the day of Christ in which all these glorious things shall have their fulfilment, in which peace shall indeed fill the whole earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, bringing divine favor and rolling away the curse from the entire groaning creation, as pointed out by the Apostle. – Rom. 8:22.

Not even with the inauguration of the Millennium will this prophecy be fulfilled: not until its close, when the human family shall have been lifted by the Kingdom regulations out of sin, sickness, pain, sorrow and death, up, up to all that was lost in Adam – not until then will there indeed be glory to God in the highest, not until then will there be peace amongst men. Nor are we to understand that the entire race will be appreciative of the divine love and favor even after they have fully seen the righteousness of God in Christ manifested. On the contrary, the Scriptures seem to clearly teach that there will be a class who will then prove unfit for life eternal, unappreciative of the divine favor, and it is with pleasure that we learn that all such shall be utterly destroyed from amongst the people in the Second Death. Thus eventually, by the close of the Millennium, Satan and all wilful wrongdoers having been destroyed, the time will come as declared in the Scriptures when all voices in heaven and in earth and under the earth shall be heard praising God, him that sitteth upon the throne, and the Lamb forever and ever. Hosanna! Glory to God in the highest! Peace and good will to men! will be the final shout of a redeemed race when the great plan of salvation shall have been fully outworked according to the divine plan set forth in the Scriptures.

FROM GLORY TO A MANGER

The time of our Lord's birth is quite clearly fixed. We have gone into the subject in detail in "Dawn" Vol. II., and will not here repeat. The notable census made by order of Caesar Augustus included the civilized world of that day, and according to Jewish custom each family and tribe were enrolled therein. Both Joseph and Mary, being of the Davidic line, went to the city of David – Bethlehem. The city is a small one on a hillside. Nearly all of it appears to good advantage in the cut on preceding page.

The inns or hotels of that land are very different from ours: they are neither hotels nor drinking saloons, but entered from a courtyard, as in the cut. Various large unfurnished rooms are at the service of the traveller, who carries with him his wraps, in which he sleeps, and his food and utensils for such light housekeeping as he may choose to do. Stalls for horses, camels, etc., are provided on the ground floor, and in the event of a crowd, as on such a census occasion, it is no uncommon thing for people, finding the upper large rooms all crowded full, to make themselves nearly as comfortable in the stabling department. Thus it came that the Lord was ushered into the world, which as the Logos he had made (John 1:2), in a most humble manner.

It was there that the shepherds found the babe, as predicted by the angels, and went forth proclaiming the fact; but Mary made no boasts but waited for God's due time.

THE SHEPHERDS

15 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.”

16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.

17 Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child.

18 And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

19 But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.



Adoration of the Shepherds by Jan Hoff

20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

Luke 2:15-20

The vicinity of Bethlehem is a pastoral country, and today is covered with flocks. It was the custom at that time for the shepherds to remain with their flocks by night as a guard against thieves as well as against wild beasts. It was in this vicinity that David (afterward king), when a shepherd-boy protecting his flocks, slew on one occasion a lion and at another time a bear. The shepherds as a class were not particularly well educated people as respects schools, and yet many of them were thoughtful and thus secured, in their leisure time while watching their flocks, by reflection and by conversation, considerable knowledge, so that they might be termed an intellectual and thinking class of people – their minds being turned more to reflection on large subjects than are the minds of some who are constantly immersed in trade and mechanics. The shepherd whom God honored in making him king of his typical kingdom, was a great poet, and evidently much of his time while shepherding was given to the muse, and one of his most beautiful poems (Psalm 23) represents Jehovah himself as the Shepherd of his people, – his flock, for which he cares. It was to men of this thoughtful class, and no doubt men familiar with David's Psalms, and with the Messianic hopes therein set forth, that the Lord sent the first message respecting his Son made flesh.

The description of the appearance of an angel, and of the fear which the brightness of his countenance engendered, is both simple and natural. All mankind more or less feels instinctively a fear of the supernatural, a trepidation at the very thought of being in the presence of the holy angels. And this is proper as well as natural, for all realize their own imperfections through the fall, fearing more or less that the results to themselves would be unfavorable if divine justice were laid to the line and to the plummet in respect to their affairs. All seem instinctively to realize their need of mercy at the hands of him with whom we have to do. And so it was with these shepherds; they were affrighted as they beheld the heavenly visitor in their midst; but his message was not one of justice nor in any sense of condemnation, but of divine mercy. He soothed them with the words, "Be not afraid; for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be unto all people." Can we wonder that joy took the place of fear in their hearts as they heard the gracious words? Surely not. And so it is with all who from that day to the present time have heard this true Gospel message, not merely with the outward ears, but truly, with the ears of their understanding – comprehending it.

The angel further explained his great Gospel message, showing its basis, and declaring that all the good things mentioned should come to pass because the Savior, Messiah, had been born – the one so long looked for in Israel, the promised seed of Abraham in whom not only Israel should be blessed and exalted to honor, dignity and cooperation, but in whom also "all the families of the earth should be blessed." And let us here remark that the order of presentation used by the heavenly messenger, and evidently divinely ordered, is the proper presentation of this subject which should be adopted by all who seek to be used of the Lord as his ambassadors in the calling of the elect Church. First, there is the grand pronouncement of divine favor and blessing, that it is a cause for joy, and that ultimately it shall extend to every creature; secondly, there is the specific explanation of how all this is to be accomplished – through a Savior, a Deliverer, who, as stated in our Golden Text, in order to deliver his people from the wages of sin, death, into eternal life and blessing, must first of all save them *from* their sins. And we see from other Scriptures that this salvation *from* our sins signifies not only the payment on our behalf of the penalty for Adamic sin, but also, subsequently, man's instruction in righteousness and lifting out of sin; in which uplift each one is

required to cooperate to the extent of his will and of his ability.

So all teaching of the grace that is to come to mankind should be coupled with the philosophy of the salvation – the Savior made flesh and the flesh devoted or sacrificed for our sins, and the Savior glorified, that in due time after the selection of his Church he might, with her, according to the divine plan, establish his Kingdom of righteousness for the uplifting of the world of mankind out of ignorance, superstition and general degradation into which the great Adversary has gotten them through the fall and through his subsequent blinding and misleading. In this connection it is well to remember that our Lord's name, **Jesus**, signifies **Savior**, and that all who would be of the elect Church must have the spirit of the Bridegroom (as well as by faith be covered with the garment of his imputed righteousness): and that his spirit is one of **opposition to sin to the extent of self-sacrifice**. We also are to “resist unto blood [death] **striving against sin**.” – Heb. 12:4.

Then the angel gave the shepherds an intimation of the humble conditions under which this great King of earth was born into the world – as a babe, wrapped in swaddling bands and lying in a manger. This was necessary, not only to their identification of Jesus, but necessary also to bring down their thoughts from the great and grand **results** to its humble **beginnings**, lest they should be misled in their expectations. And as it is with every part of the divine plan, so also it should be in respect to all of our proclamations of the same. We are not only to tell of the future glory and greatness and grandeur, but we are to tell also of the present humiliation – not only of our Savior who humbled himself to take a low estate amongst men, and to die for our sins, but also to point out that the “elect” are called to walk in his footsteps, under similarly humiliating circumstances – to suffer with him, if they would reign with him; to die with him, if they would live with him. And thus also the prophets spoke not only of the glory that should follow, but also of the sufferings of Christ (head and body) which must precede the glory. (1 Pet. 1:11.) The lesson to every one who has ears to hear it is, “No cross, no crown.” Let us, then, humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, and rejoice in every step of the humiliation, that he may exalt us in due time to share the glories of his Son our Lord, and to share with him the grand work of blessing all the families of the earth.

It was a fitting climax that, after the one angel had told the surprised shepherds of the good tidings of great joy for all people and was ready to depart, he should be joined by an angelic host, singing, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” This was but a reiteration of the Gospel message already delivered.

The shepherds having heard of God's grace manifested their interest by visiting and paying their homage to the Savior: and so each one who has heard of the grace of God with an appreciative heart can do nothing less than **seek** the Lord and do him reverence and serve his cause by proclaiming the gracious message with which he has been favored. Let us each do so, and thus more and more increase in our hearts the joys of the Lord and our appreciation of his grand gospel. R. 2556

It is worthy of notice that the announcement of the Savior's birth was not made to an assembled world, in whose most vital interest he had come; nor even to assembled Israel, the chosen people of God; nor yet to **all** of those who, like Simeon and Anna, with devout hearts had long been looking for the hope of Israel. But it was made to only a few devout shepherds who were watching their flocks by night. The grand truth was one to be received **by faith**; and it was sent through humble, but trustworthy, human agents, who were the honored instruments in God's hands. And any who proudly despised the instruments were unworthy of the good tidings.



The Nativity by Gustave Dore, 1873

The announcement was one which modern "orthodoxy" could not justify; for it was the very reverse of its bad tidings of great misery to nearly all people. The Angels' message was, "**good tidings** of GREAT JOY TO ALL PEOPLE; for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

The tidings are of redemption and restitution and everlasting life for all who will accept this blessing on the terms on which it is offered; – viz., faith in Christ as the Redeemer, and full repentance from sin, which of necessity implies the forsaking of sin and the cultivation of righteousness. Christ was born to be a Savior by subsequently giving his life a ransom for all. These good tidings – this miracle of divine goodness and mercy to fallen and doomed men – met a marvelously cold and indifferent reception. The world in general, though apprised of the fact and its import, manifested no faith nor interest in it, while it is written that he came unto his own people (the Jews), and they received him not. But the jubilant heavenly hosts, who were capable of appreciating what fallen men could not appreciate, and will not until their blind eyes are opened and their deaf ears unstopped, broke out in a rapturous strain of heavenly melody, saying,

***"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace,
good will toward men."**** R. 1674

*This expression – "good will toward men" – as rendered by a majority of translators is confirmed by the latest found manuscript, the Lewis manuscript of the Gospels, discovered in 1892 in the convent at Mt. Sinai.

SIMEON



Simeon Holding Jesus, by Andrey Shishkin

25 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

27 So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law,

28 he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said:

Simeon's Prayer

29 "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word.

30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation

31 which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,

32 a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel."

33 And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him.

34 Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against

35 (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Luke 2:25-33

WHEN JESUS was forty days old, Joseph and Mary took Him to Jerusalem and presented Him in consecration in the Temple. This was in accordance with the custom which related specially to the first-born in each family. Although the first-born of the entire nation were passed over at the deliverance from Egypt, they had been exchanged for the one tribe of Levi, which had been specially devoted to God's service; nevertheless, the same principle was exemplified in respect to the first-born of each mother. It was to be devoted specially to God and His service.

The significance of this we see when we remember that the elect Church, being gathered during this Gospel Age, is styled the Church of the First-borns. Again, St. James tells us that we are "a kind of first-fruits unto God of His creatures." The clear intimation of all this is that after the Church shall have been gathered to heavenly glory by the power of the First Resurrection, the Kingdom then to be established will bring blessings to all the families of the earth, giving them also the opportunity of becoming sons of God, on the earthly plane, by restitution processes. – Acts 3:19-21.

Incidentally we remark that it is the custom of some parents to make a formal consecration of their children to God in the presence of believers. The influence upon the children cannot be other than beneficial, as in future days they shall look back and realize the parental care and love and devotion thus manifested in the giving of the very best they possessed to the Lord (the fruit of their bodies). Doubtless very many children will thus experience a beneficial influence upon their minds as respects their own consecration to their Creator.

Furthermore, we believe that the parents who thus give their best to the Lord are really bringing to themselves great blessings. Trials and difficulties are sure to come, but in all of these their children belong to God. And if they can pray, Thy will be done, then they may have a peace and receive a joy in the Spirit which others cannot know. Of course, this does not take the place of the child's personal consecration when it reaches the age of discretion and judgment, but we believe that the blessed influence will be helpful to the child in mature years, assisting to a right decision for God, for Truth and for righteousness.

At the time of the consecration ceremony at the Temple, an aged Prophet came forward and took the babe Jesus in his arms and praised God. The record is that in some manner God had revealed to him that the accomplishment of the gracious promises made to Abraham was nigh, and that he should not die until he had seen the Deliverer of Israel. By some power Divine this aged Prophet recognized Jesus, and, after saying, "Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation" – the way in which Thy salvation shall come to Israel and to all the families of the earth – he proceeded to say, "which Thou hast prepared in the presence of all people – the Light of the world and the Glory of Thy people Israel."

"SET FOR THE FALL AND RISING AGAIN OF MANY IN ISRAEL"

Simeon, addressing Mary, declared prophetically that the Child was "set for the fall and the rising of many in Israel, and for a sign [mark or standard], which shall be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." How wonderful a prophecy! It reminds us of the words of St. Paul, that our Lord is "a stone of stumbling

and rock of offence” to many in Israel, that many stumbled, being disappointed. And St. Paul told also of the rising again of many who stumbled. He declares, “Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for, but the election hath obtained it and the rest were blinded” – stumbled – turned aside from Divine favor. (Rom. 11:7.) Nevertheless he assures us that as soon as “the elect,” the Church of Christ, shall have been completed, by the power of the First Resurrection, then Divine favor shall return to natural Israel, through Elect Spiritual Israel: “They shall obtain mercy through your mercy.” – Romans 11:25-33. R. 4942

VERSES 25-31. Simeon was one of the kind of characters to whom God reveals his truth – a just and devout man, waiting in faith for the consolation of Israel. “Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart.” And the holy spirit was upon him, so that, being thus inspired, he prophesied concerning the infant Jesus.

VERSE 32. Under divine inspiration, therefore, Simeon declared this child to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Israel. John also pointed to him as the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. (John 1:9.) And Paul adds, “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who will have all men to be saved [from their blindness and deafness], and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Tim. 2:4.) As the vast majority of mankind have never been thus enlightened, and thousands more have been only partially so, it follows logically that the full enlightenment of the world tarries until the Millennial reign of Christ shall call forth all that are in their graves – when “the Sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in his wings.” Then he will enlighten the whole world, and believing Israel will glory in him.

Simeon’s further prophecy of **verse 34** is partially fulfilled. The world has witnessed the fall of Israel from divine favor, and their sad condition as outcasts for nearly two thousand years, because of their rejection of Christ. And now the time for their rising again has come (beginning A.D. 1878): and they will be raised up nationally to all the favor from which they fell nationally. Today we are witnesses of the regathering of Israel, preparatory to the turning away of their blindness and their coming again into divine favor and blessing.

“And for a sign which shall be spoken against.” This has been true all through the age; and the reproach of the cross has not yet ceased.

VERSE 35 had reference to Christ’s tragic death, and the test of faith thereby instituted, both in that day, and even to the end of the age, thus (by the test) revealing the thoughts of many hearts, – proving which are loyal and faithful to God as true soldiers of the cross, and which are not. It is not probable, however, that Simeon, who spoke thus under divine inspiration, understood fully the import of his words. R. 1674

ANNA

Anna Gives Thanks

36 Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity,

37 and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

38 And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.



Simeon and Anna recognize the Messiah

A saintly woman, Anna, a Prophetess, over a century old, resided in Jerusalem and in the precincts of the Temple courts. She, also, moved by the Holy Spirit, recognized the Babe and gave praise to God and mentioned the matter to the saintly ones who were waiting for the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise – “for the consolation of Israel.”

If the seeing of Jesus as a babe was worthy of praise and thanks, still more was it a cause of gratitude to God for those who beheld Him at the age of thirty, consecrating Himself a living sacrifice even unto death, and who realized that He had been begotten again by the Holy Spirit to be a New Creature, of the divine nature. Those who saw the Master’s faithfulness in performing the sacrifice of His consecration during the three and a half years of His ministry beheld still more for which to give God praise. And when He had finished His course at Calvary and was raised from the dead the third day, and forty days later ascended up on high where He was before, happy were they who recognized that further development of the Divine Plan for man’s salvation – the blessing of all the families of the earth.

Anna, a prophetess, a devout, faithful soul, recognized and pointed out the infant Redeemer. It will be observed that she was of the tribe of Aser – another evidence of what we have frequently called attention to in connection with the Anglo-Israel question, that the entire house of Israel (twelve tribes) was represented at Jerusalem in our Lord’s day, and not the tribes of Judah and Benjamin only. R. 1674

THE WISE MEN

The Faith of the Wise Men

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem,

2 saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.”

3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

5 So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

6 *‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah, for out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.’”*

7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared.

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.”

9 When they heard the king, they departed, and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was.

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.

11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Matthew 2:1-11

GIFTS TO OUR KING – R. 3702

MATTHEW 2:1-12

“My son, give me thine heart.” – Proverbs 23:26

OUR lesson is concerning the wise men of the East, who came seeking the new-born Jesus, the King of the Jews, with presents of myrrh, frankincense and gold, and doubtless we shall be able to gather from this incident some valuable suggestions respecting our obligations to the great Messiah, and the propriety of renewing these and increasing them now at the beginning of another year.

The wise men – according to tradition, three in number – arrived in Jerusalem and began making inquiries respecting the newly-born Jewish King. The news soon spread, and the holy city was in commotion because, according to the prophets, Messiah, promised for centuries, was due to appear about that time; and we read again, “All men were in expectation of him.” This expectancy naturally would be heightened by the coming



We Three Kings by Simon Dewey

of the wise men or magi from a far country – supposedly Persia – to show homage to Messiah. The news spread, and finally reached the royal palace and King Herod himself. The latter, doubtless on his own account, felt a kind of jealousy toward any being who would be likely to share in any measure the royal honors and dignities and thus to detract from his own importance. But additionally, no doubt, he felt that as the representative of Caesar’s government, the protege of the Roman Empire, it was his duty to see to it that no king should arise in the land under his jurisdiction, whose title or claims would in any measure conflict with those of the Caesars.

THE BRIGHT MORNING STAR

Herod, therefore, sent for the wise men. Feigning a deep interest in their quest, he made a critical inquiry of them how they knew about Messiah in their far-off country, how they knew where to look for the babe. They replied that they had seen his star in the east. The eastern magi were astrologers, and affected to read in the stars the history of nations and individuals – they were astrologers rather than astronomers. To what extent the Lord may have written the history of nations and of men in the arrangement of the stars, we will not attempt to decide, but assuredly for the world in general the starry heavens have been the great book of God, as the Psalmist explains, “Night unto night showeth knowledge.” With the written Word of God in our possession now we neither have need of traditions of men nor of old wives’ fables nor of astrologers’ guides, because “we have the more sure word of prophecy; whereunto you do well that you take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place until the day dawn and the day star arise in your hearts.” – 2 Pet. 1:19.

Without attempting to determine how much or how little truth attaches to astrology, we have the assurance that there was a truth connected with the manifestation of a special, peculiar star which guided the wise men of the east to know of Messiah's birth and to know to which country he belonged, so that they came to the capital city of that country. Moreover the Lord may have given them some additional explanation of the matter, even as he subsequently warned them in a dream. Herod cunningly affected to be deeply interested in the wise men in their search for Messiah. He called the wise men of Judea to assist. These were not astrologers, but men learned in the Law and in the prophets – chief priests and scribes. Thus he put the wise men of Israel into conjunction with the wise men of the east, inquiring where the prophets had foretold that the Messiah should be born. They promptly answered, "Bethlehem of Judea," and for that city, only six miles distant, the eastern magi set out, with the promise that they would return again and identify to him particularly the babe king and where he might be found, ostensibly that the king might also go to worship at his feet, but really that he might improve the opportunity and use such knowledge for the destruction of the babe Jesus.

En route for Bethlehem the miraculous star which they had seen in the far east appeared to them again, apparently as a ball of light or of fire travelling near the earth, and serving as a guide until they had rejoicingly reached the very house and found the babe and his mother. Professor Charles A. Young, LL.D., of Princeton University, asserts that it is not a rare occurrence for stars to suddenly blaze up in the heavens and for a time to be the brightest, and then suddenly fade in a year or two; and that such a star was observed in 1901. Our thought, however, is that the latter was merely the appearance of a star, a bright electrical luminous spot.

WISE MEN OF THE EAST

"We are informed by Tacitus, by Suetonius and by Josephus that there prevailed throughout the entire east, at this time, an intense conviction, derived from ancient prophecies, that ere long a powerful monarch would arise in Judea and gain dominion over the world."

– Farrar.

"Virgil, who lived a little before this, says that a child from heaven was looked for, who should restore the Golden Age and take away sin."

– Jacobus.

"Confucius had prophesied the appearance of such a deliverer; and a deputation of his followers going forth in search of him were the means of introducing Buddhism into China."

– Abbott.

"But the clearest of all these prophecies was one by Zoroaster. The Nestorians say that Zoroaster was a disciple of Jeremiah, from whom he learned about the Messiah and talked concerning him to his disciples."

– Persian Missionary.

In this connection we should remember that Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego

were at this time princes of Persia and intimate with the wise men of that country, which was at that time the principal nation of the world. It is easy to see how traditions would be handed down through that channel, and especially may we suppose that Daniel's prophecy respecting the time of Messiah's birth would be well known to the disciples of Zoroaster, Persia's wise men. Furthermore, there were Jews scattered abroad throughout that country who still more or less kept alive the thought of Israel's hope for the great Messiah so long promised of God, prophesied of as the bringer of blessings not only to Israel but through them to all the families of the earth.

MYRRH, FRANKINCENSE AND GOLD

God chose as messengers of his good tidings not only wise men but reverential men, men of faith; and his choice of these messengers from the east to arouse the people of Judea and Jerusalem and to be heralds of the great King was not an exception to the rule. Although heathen men, in the sense of not being of the nation with which God had thus far dealt and to whom he had thus far confined his gracious promises, they were, nevertheless, good men, reverential men, who delighted to know of the coming blessing of peace on earth and good will amongst men through whatever channel or nationality the Lord should be pleased to find his representative and messenger.

In one respect many of Christendom could learn numerous important lessons from these wise Gentiles. No false patriotism stood in their way to hinder their appreciation of any manifestation of divine favor to the children of men. And when they found the Savior they were nothing daunted by the fact that his home surroundings were of the humbler sort. They worshiped him in three senses of the word:

- (1) They fell before him, prostrated themselves, thus physically expressing their reverence.
- (2) They worshiped him in their hearts and with the tongue gave expression to their rejoicing and confidence.
- (3) They opened their treasure-box and presented to him three gifts appropriate to royalty: the myrrh representing submission, frankincense representing praise, gold representing obedience.

"PRESENT YOUR BODIES LIVING SACRIFICES, HOLY, ACCEPTABLE UNTO GOD, YOUR REASONABLE SERVICE."

The reverent spirit of these noble heathen men who had so little light, so little knowledge respecting the great Messiah and his work, will bring to our cheeks the blush of shame as we reflect that, favored with still brighter light to guide us to the Lamb of God, having seen his star in a still better and truer sense, having been guided to him by the prophecies, having found him not only a babe, but one that in prospect would bear our sorrows and carry our griefs and make his soul an offering for sin, that we by his stripes might be healed, what manner of oblation should we pour at the feet of him who loved us and bought us with his precious blood? With what deep reverence have we bowed the knee, prostrated ourselves, given outward evidence through our bodies of full submission to our great King, of whom we not only know but of whose gracious provisions for us and for the world of mankind we have heard, not uncertainly, but with the voice of him who speaketh from heaven? Have we offered our myrrh? Have

we shown a willingness for service even to the extent of bitterness, a joy to honor the King to the extent of suffering with him? Have we worshiped him in heart, not with an outward form of godliness without the power – in other words, have we offered him the frankincense of heart adoration, appreciation, and gratitude?

Have we laid at his feet our earthly substance – our gold? Have we realized that all that we have and all that we are are offerings far too small to be worthy of acceptance by the great King Immanuel? Is this our present attitude? and will it be our attitude through coming days even until the end of the present pilgrimage?

The Apostle's words, "Present your bodies living sacrifices, holy and acceptable unto God, your reasonable service," apply not only to the primary consecration of our hearts to the Lord, but are, as the Scriptures express it, a covenant of sacrifice, an agreement to die daily to self and to be alive daily more and more in the Lord's service, to glorify him in our bodies and spirits which are his. If this has not been our attitude in the past shall it not be our future course? Shall we not in any event continue to grow in knowledge, to grow in love, in service, in worship and in the privilege of laying our little all at the feet of him who is our gracious heavenly King, whose Kingdom is so soon to be established and who has invited us to sit with him in his throne, to share his glory, to be participants as spiritual Israel in the great work of pouring out blessings upon the world of mankind, every kindred, people, nation and tongue?

"MY SON, GIVE ME THINE HEART"

Our Golden Text is well worthy of our remembrance here. It is not applicable to sinners, who are not sons in any sense of the word. There is a message to sinners, namely, a call to repentance, to the forsaking of sin and to the acceptance of the justification secured by the precious blood. But it is only to those who have repented of sin and who are seeking to live a repentant life and so far as possible to make restitution for wrongs of the past, and who are trusting to the precious blood of Christ – reconciled to God through the death of his Son – it is to these that this Golden Text is applicable, "My son, give me thine heart."

When we give our hearts it includes all that we have and are in the highest and noblest and fullest sense – that which was illustrated by the three gifts of the wise men is all represented in this brief statement, "Give me thine heart." Whoever gives his heart to the Lord fully and unreservedly, gives his body, gives his worship and reverence and praise, and gives his earthly treasure, time, talents, influence, money – all – to be used in joyful service for the glory of the King.

To those who have never taken this step we urge a prompt acceptance, irrespective of the gracious hopes we have of a transcendent reward of glory, honor, immortality. As the Apostle declares, it is our reasonable service. Reasonable people ought to be glad of the knowledge that God is willing to accept our service, and of the opportunity to present themselves under the covering of the merit of the dear Redeemer's robe of righteousness.

To those who have already accepted the Lord's favor, who have already presented their bodies living sacrifices, who have already given the Lord their hearts, we urge

a remembrance of the fact that the sacrifice once put upon the altar must remain there, and that the longer it remains the more joyful should be the service, the more appreciated every opportunity for sacrifice, the more thankful should be the heart and the more rich should be the experience in the peace of God which passeth all understanding, ruling in our hearts and preparing us more and more through the graces of the Spirit for the glorious things which God hath in reservation for them that so love him and so reverence his Son.

The wise men who sought the Babe of Bethlehem with worship and gifts, symbolized, perhaps, the great fact that those are truly wise who ever since have sought the Divinely appointed King and who bring to him the incense of their devotion, and as gifts all their talents and powers. Such lay their very lives at the Savior's feet, as St. Paul explains: "living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God." – Rom. 12:1 R. 4534

BEHOLD!

*Behold the Babe! There is for Him
No room but in the stable dim.
Among the placid oxen there
He sleeps, all innocent and fair.
Heaven's brightest gem in casket rude encased;
The world's Redeemer in a manger placed.*

*Behold the Man! A lonely form,
Erect before the howling storm
Of angry voices and the rude
Revilings of the multitude.
Amid the buffetings of human hands,
The Son of God, the world's great hero stands.*

*Behold the King! To Him is given
Authority in earth and heaven.
In glory on the great white throne
He sits, encircled by his own;
While loud His praise the choir celestial sings;
The Man of Sorrows, now the King of kings.*

-W. H. Pepworth

3.

Recorded Prayers of The Savior

"I and My Father Are One!"
- John 10:30 -

This text is considered a proof that our Lord Jesus is entitled to the name Jehovah – that he was both the Father and the Son; or that he had no Father and was not a Son. Having vague, mysterious thoughts respecting “trinity,” a remarkably large number of otherwise intelligent people seem to forget that there **is** any other kind of oneness than **personal** oneness. On the contrary, however, in **all other uses** of the word the thought is that of **harmony** – oneness of plan, purpose, will, mind. How blind a theory can make us is well illustrated by the fact that our Lord’s own explanation and illustration of the manner in which he and the Father are one is very generally overlooked. He said in prayer to the Father –

*“I pray not for the world but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine . . . neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which believe on me through their word; **that they all may be ONE**, as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be **ONE IN US**. . . **that they may be ONE, even as we are ONE**: I in them and thou in me, that they may be **MADE PERFECT IN ONE**.”* John 17:9,20-23

Here the oneness of the Church, for which the Lord prayed, is specially stated to be exactly the same as the oneness between the Father and the Son. That the oneness of the Church is **oneness of mind** and **not a personal oneness** needs no discussion. Evidently the thought in the Redeemer’s mind was oneness of heart, oneness of purpose, oneness of will, amongst his followers; and **that oneness identical with the oneness between the Father and himself**. And this oneness was to be **attained** on the part of the Church in the same manner exactly as the oneness between the Father and the Son was **attained**. The Son was at one with the Father because he fully accepted as his own **the Father’s will**, saying, “Not my will but thine be done.” So each member of the Church is to come into perfect harmony with the Father, and with the Son, by doing not their own wills, but by setting aside their own

wills and accepting the **will of Christ**, which is the **will of the Father**. Thus, and thus only, will the Church ever come into the oneness for which our Lord here prayed, and which he refers to as of the same kind as the **oneness** between the Father and himself. How strange that any should attempt to misuse and pervert these our Lord's words, to make them support the unreasonable and unscriptural doctrine of a Trinity – three Gods in **one person**. On the contrary, how beautiful and reasonable is the Scriptural **oneness** of the spirit of the Father and Son and Church. E75, E76

"He That Hath Seen Me Hath Seen The Father"

God's mind, God's will, was **fully represented** in his Only Begotten Son, our Lord, when he was made flesh and dwelt amongst men. He therefore was the best, the closest, the most positive representation of God that it was or ever would be **possible to give to mankind**. In seeing and knowing the Lord Jesus intimately, Philip and the other Apostles knew the Father in the most absolute sense possible for humanity to know him. They knew him in the most absolute sense possible for the Father to **reveal** himself to mankind. There never was, there never would be, there never could be, a clearer, a more absolute, a more complete manifestation of God to man than in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ; for when "made flesh" he was "God manifested [Greek, rendered **apparent**] in the flesh." (1 Tim. 3:16) Similarly the Apostle declares of the Church, the faithful members of Christ – We are delivered unto death, "that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest [Greek, rendered **apparent**] IN OUR MORTAL FLESH." 2 Cor. 4:11 (E78)

I DELIGHT TO DO YOUR WILL, O MY GOD

AT JORDAN our Lord made a consecration of Himself, even unto death. That is to say, He was baptized, immersed. He said, "Henceforth, I shall have no will of My own. Whatever is Your will, Father, shall be My will. I shall do anything that You will have Me do; not merely those things required in obedience to the Divine Law – failure to do which would be sin – but all the things written in the Book. I have given up My life. Direct Me through Your providences and through Your words that I may see Your will and do it." This was not a giving away of life in the sense of giving it to the **world**; for He was giving Himself to **God**. When He made His consecration unto God, He was prepared to face even death itself and to give up His existence if such should be the Father's will. – Psa. 40:7,8; Heb. 10:7.

Following His consecration He began His ministry. As He advanced in the service of fulfilling the Father's will, He submitted Himself to everything that was written in the Book. The language of His heart was, "Lo, I come (in the volume of the Book it is written of Me), to do Thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7), and in His submission of Himself He gave out His power, strength, to such an extent that it is stated that great multitudes of people out of all Palestine and beyond, "came to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases; and they that were vexed with unclean spirits; and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch Him; for there went virtue [vitality] out of Him and healed them all." (Luke 6:17-19.) He kept back nothing for the purpose of recuperating His vigor, but was daily yielding His life in obedience to what He understood to be the Father's will; He was, therefore, doing the things pleasing to God – everything that God wished to have Him do, as well as the things written in the Law.

When on the cross our Lord cried, “It is finished!” He had “poured out His soul unto death”; He had “made His soul an offering for sin” (John 19:30; Isa. 53:12,10); He had permitted His life to be taken from Him in obedience to the Father’s arrangement. These things had all been prefigured in the type. On such a day and in such a month the passover lamb must be slain. Our Lord recognized everything particularized in the Law – whether by direct command or in type – as God’s will. He declared that men did not take His life from Him, in the sense of doing something that He was unwilling to have them do. He had truly said, “I delight to do Thy will, O My God; Thy Law is within [in the midst of] My heart” (Psa. 40:8), and He permitted them to put Him to death, because He was submitting to God’s will.

So great was His love for and His confidence in Jehovah, that He was eager to carry out the Father’s plan for the blessing of mankind, whatever the cost might be to Himself. Nowhere in the Scriptures is the statement made that Christ came to **sacrifice Himself**. What the Scriptures say is that He came to **do the Father’s will**. He did not refuse to drink the “cup” which the Father prepared for Him, but drank it to the dregs. And for His obedience to this Will, even unto death – no matter how long or how short a time the Father should be pleased to have that life continue – He received the reward. He gave over **all** into the Father’s hands. **This** was a **sacrifice**; for He had a right to use His life. But His obedience to His Father’s will led to the sacrifice for which He obtained the reward. R. 5805



*7 Then I said,
“Behold, I come.
In the scroll of
the book it is
written of me.
8 I delight to do
Your will, O my
God, and Your
law is within
my heart.”
Psa. 40:7-8*

JESUS THANKS THE FATHER

Jesus Prays

Matthew 11:23-27

23 “And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades, for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

24 “But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you.”

25 At that time Jesus answered and said,

“I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.

26 “Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.

27 “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”

MORE TOLERABLE FOR SODOM

Excerpt from R. 4599

IN the cities of Capernaum, “his own city,” Bethsaida, and Chorazin, situated on the Sea of Galilee, the majority of our Lord’s notable miracles were performed. Nevertheless, even in these cities, the majority rejected his Messiahship. Today’s study tells how the Great Teacher arraigned the people of those cities for their unbelief, declaring that if the mighty works done in them had been done in the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon they would have repented. Hence it will be more tolerable for the people of those cities than for the people of Capernaum in the Day of Judgment.

We must rid our minds of the old and fallacious thought that the Day of Judgment will be a period of twenty-four hours. We must see that from God’s standpoint a day simply signifies a period or an epoch; as, for instance, a twenty-four hour day, a forty-year day in the wilderness, and the thousand-year day of Christ, the Millennium. The latter is the day referred to in our text as the Day of Judgment. Only a few of mankind have their Day of Judgment or trial now. These few are specially blessed with eyes of understanding to see and with ears of understanding to appreciate the special privileges of this present time. The great mass of mankind are thoroughly blind and deaf to the spiritual things connected with the present calling and election of the Church.

Respecting these the Master thanked the Father, “Because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.” (Vs. 25,26.) The Great Teacher did not mean that he was glad, thankful, that his message was hidden from the majority, that they might slide down into eternal torture in darkness. Oh, no! Surely not! He did mean that he appreciated the Father’s wisdom in not allowing any but those of proper condition of heart to see and clearly understand the present call of the Church. For the uncontrite of heart to see, to understand, would mean two things: –

- (1)** They would oppose God’s Plan the more;
- (2)** They would come under greater responsibility themselves.

Hence we with the Master may be glad of the wisdom displayed in the Divine arrangement of hiding certain features of the great Plan of the Ages from all except the “very elect.” “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear (reverence) him and he will show them his Covenant.” – Psa. 25:14.

“Thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven (highly exalted in privilege and opportunity), shalt be brought down to hell (to hades, to the grave, to destruction); for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.” (V. 23.) The reason is clear. The people of Capernaum were evidently harder-hearted than the people of Sodom and, from the Lord’s standpoint, were more blameworthy. What shall we say, then, of our day of still greater privilege in many respects – Bibles in every home, preaching in every city, education in every family? What might not the Lord reasonably expect of us? R. 4599

“BROUGHT DOWN TO HELL” – *Excerpt from R. 5075*

TODAY’S STUDY links well with the closing of our lesson of a week ago. We there heard Jesus say that it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the Great Judgment Day of a thousand years, in which He will reign and give the world a full knowledge of God and a full opportunity of returning to Him – more tolerable for the Sodomites than for some who have enjoyed greater privileges and rejected them.

Today’s study tells of how our Lord upbraided the city where most of His mighty works had been done, because they repented not, because they did not note the power of God in their midst and gladly receive the Message, the indications of Divine favor. Such, Jesus declared, will be less prepared to appreciate the Kingdom in the future than will some who have never known Him. Tyre and Sidon, heathen cities, would have repented with far less preaching. It is but in harmony with Divine justice, therefore, that when the Great Day of God’s favor and of the Messianic Kingdom shall dawn, the people of Tyre and Sidon shall have things still more favorable than the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida.

Capernaum, above all the other cities of Palestine, was favored, because there our Lord did most of His miracles, and uttered more of His wonderful words of life than anywhere else. In this sense of the word Jesus declared that Capernaum had been exalted up to heaven – highly lifted up in point of privilege and Divine favor and blessing. This being true, it meant that in justice Capernaum’s fall would be proportionate. She would fall from the heights of heavenly privilege and favor down to hell – to the grave.

“I THANK THEE, O FATHER”

It was in Jesus’ day as it has ever since been, that not many of the great or rich or wise or learned had ears to hear the Gospel Message. The difficulty with this class is that the things of the present life so fill and satisfy that they have no hungering for the better things. They have their consolation now, they have their pleasures now; they say, Soul, take thine ease now, look out for number one, and do not feel too much interest in or concern for other people and their troubles; there are millions of poor, groaning fellow-creatures, and if you stop to sympathize with them you will mar your own pleasure.

Thus it has been that the majority of the followers of Jesus in every Age have been chiefly the poor of this world, rich in faith. There are two ways of viewing this matter. On the one hand we can rejoice with the poor and less influential who have received the Gospel Message, that doubtless their poverty, etc., were favorable factors to their advantage. And, similarly, we can sympathize with the great and rich and learned, that their earthly blessings are blinding them to the still greater opportunities of this Age, so that not many of them will be of the Kingdom class – not many of them members of the Bride company, joint-heirs with Jesus in His Messianic Kingdom.

But hearken again to the words of Jesus – how peculiarly they read: “I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight.” How strangely those words once sounded to us, when we supposed that all who failed to receive the Message of Jesus, all who failed to make their “calling and

election sure” to membership in the Bride class – all such would suffer some kind of an eternal torture!

How strange it seemed that Jesus should thank the Father that these things were hidden from some of the grandest and noblest and most brilliant of our race! We could not understand. But now, how clear! how plain! Jesus was preaching the Kingdom, and all who rejected His preaching rejected the Kingdom, and will lose it. This does not mean that they may not receive ultimately a blessing **under** that Kingdom, when it shall rule the world, and when all that are in their graves shall come forth to receive those very blessings which Jesus died to procure for them – the blessings of a trial, or judgment of a thousand years, to determine whether they will be accounted worthy of everlasting life, or of everlasting death, destruction.

Now we see what Jesus intimated, namely, that there is a wisdom in God’s course in this matter which is not apparent on the surface. Had those rich and great seen fully, distinctly, clearly the true situation, it would have increased their responsibility; their condemnation in not receiving and accepting Christ would have been greater. Besides, some of them, of strong character and determination, might have been impelled thereby to take a course of still more violent opposition than they did take; or, if they had known and seen the Truth, it would have made them either opposers or defenders of it. If they had defended Christ, then He would not have been crucified, and the Divine Plan would not have been carried out; or, if they had intelligently permitted His crucifixion, they would have had a tenfold condemnation. St. Peter declares that the extenuating circumstance connected with our Lord’s crucifixion was ignorance. He declared, speaking by inspiration at Pentecost, “If they had known, they would not have crucified the Prince of Life.”

FEW KNOW THE FATHER OR THE SON

All men are to be brought to a knowledge of God. The Scriptures declare, “The knowledge of the glory of God shall fill the whole earth.” Jesus declared that no one can know the Father except as first they come to know the Son, or as the Son reveals the Father to him. Hence those who have failed to recognize Jesus as the Son of God have not yet come to the full appreciation of their privileges. Blessed are our eyes, that now they see, and our ears that now they hear, that we may know Messiah, and through Him know the Father; and Jesus may come in to us and sup with us, and we with Him. – Rev. 3:20.

We are glad that all mankind in due time will be brought to a clear knowledge and full opportunity. But oh, how much greater is our blessing, besides the privilege of now being the sons of God, and joint-heirs in his glorious Kingdom! We may well rejoice with the Lord in His thanks to the Father, not only that some cannot hear, see, or understand, but also that some of us can hear, see and understand the Divine Message **now**, and thus share its blessing.

The special call of God through Jesus, therefore, is to the poor, the broken-hearted, the heavy laden, the unsatisfied: *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*”

JESUS' PRAYER WHEN RAISING LAZARUS

Jesus' Prayer

38 Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.

39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days."

40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"

41 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying.

And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said,

"Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.

42 "And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me."

43 Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!"

44 And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."

John 11:38-44



Before commanding Lazarus to come forth our Lord prayed audibly before his disciples and before the multitude of mourners. Here our Lord gave sanction to public prayer, showing that when he objected to the prayers of the Pharisees on the street corners, it was because the time and place, etc., were unsuitable and because they prayed to be seen and heard of men. But in his own case he was acknowledging the Father that all those who stood by might take knowledge that not by his own power, but by the Father's power, as the Finger of God, he worked these miracles. R 4162

Before performing the miracle our Lord lifted his eyes to heaven in acknowledgment of the Father's power and that he was acting as the Father's agent and representative. What a manifestation

we have in this of true humility. It was so in all of our Lord's utterances; he freely acknowledged that he had come to do the Father's will and not his own; that the Father was above all, and that what he did in the way of wonderful works was but the Father's power. His prayer was in the nature of a conversation as between a Son and his Father, "I know that thou hearest me always; but for the sake of them which stand by, I said it."

From this we may assume that it would have been entirely consistent on our Lord's part to have proceeded to speak as the Father's representative without offering prayer, but that he offered his petition in acknowledgment of the Father's power for the sake of the hearers that they might know that he did nothing of himself, that he claimed nothing of himself. We, his disciples, have in this a beautiful example of what should be our course on every occasion. In all our ways we should acknowledge the Lord – not only whether we eat or drink or whatsoever we do, to do it to the Lord's glory, and in a manner pleasing to him, but we should be careful to glorify him, to let it be known that we claim nothing of ourselves either as to wisdom or ability in the expounding of the divine plan. Our conduct should be simple, unassuming, devoid of boastfulness, in everything manifesting humility of heart and simplicity.

“Rather be nothing, nothing –
To him let their voices be raised;
He is the fountain of blessing,
Yes, worthy is he to be praised.”

As might have been expected, this wonderful miracle, the revival of a man dead more than three days, created no little stir. No wonder that we read that many of the Jews seeing these things believed. It would be wonderful indeed that they could disbelieve under such conditions. We remember, too, that subsequently the Jews sought the more to take the life of Jesus because of the fame of this miracle. Verily, the truth of God is either a savor of life unto life or of death unto death. All we know of divine power and goodness either affects us favorably or unfavorably, to draw us nearer to the Lord or to separate us the more from him if we are not at heart disposed for righteousness. . . .

R. 3530

FATHER, GLORIFY THY NAME!

Jesus' Prayer



23 But Jesus answered them, saying
“The hour has come that the Son of
Man should be glorified.

24 “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless
a grain of wheat falls into the ground
and dies, it remains alone, but if it
dies, it produces much grain.

25 “He who loves his life will lose it,
and he who hates his life in this world
will keep it for eternal life.

26 “If anyone serves Me, let him follow
Me, and where I am, there My servant
will be also. If anyone serves Me, him
My Father will honor.

27 “Now My soul is troubled, and what
shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this
hour’? But for this purpose I came to
this hour.

28 “Father, glorify Your name!”

Then a voice came from heaven, saying, “I have both glorified it and will
glorify it again.”

John 12:23-28

Having thus assured [his disciples] that the beginning of his glorification was not far distant, our Lord makes very impressive the necessity of his death, by saying, “Verily, verily,” – that is, Truly, truly, most positively, emphatically, I give you the illustration that my glorification, according to the divine arrangement, must come through my death, even as a grain of wheat would remain but one grain unless it were planted, and through the dying of one grain life and being were given to a number. Had our Lord chosen to do so, he at one time had the privilege of remaining alone, – of not dying on our behalf. Had he followed this course we would still have been unredeemed and he could have brought forth no fruitage. But he had consecrated his life; he had voluntarily engaged to sacrifice himself on behalf of Adam and his race, in compliance with the Father’s will, and hence he declares that if now he would love his life he would lose it; that on the contrary, instead of seeking to save himself he must indeed hate or **despise** the present life in comparison with the future and eternal one which the Father had promised him as a reward for obedience unto death. . . .

“Now is my soul troubled” – my feelings are turbulent; I am in a commotion. Shall I pray, Father deliver me from this hour? Shall I not, on the contrary, remember that for this very cause I am come to this hour, that I might endure, and that willingly, rather than ask to be delivered? I might ask the Father for a certain kind of deliverance which would not invalidate the engagement which I made, that I would give my life in obedience to his will. I might ask him to permit some calamity to befall me which would result in my death and thus save me from the peculiarly trying and ignominious conditions incident to my apprehension and execution as a criminal – as the worst kind of a criminal, a blasphemer against my Heavenly Father. Such a deviation would seem to me not an unreasonable concession for one who has shown his faithfulness to the Father’s will in all things. And yet I will not ask even this concession. Rather, I will submit my will to the Father’s will most absolutely, and carry out to the very jot and tittle the spirit as well as the letter of my covenant. Let the Father’s will be done in every particular; it must be the wisest and best, else it would not be his plan. It is for this very purpose that I came to this hour, that I might manifest, demonstrate, to the Father my devotion, my most implicit obedience to his will. Proceed, Father! Glorify thine own name and in thine own way, at whatever the cost to me!

Then a voice was heard, a voice which some understood and which others misunderstood, as is always the case with the voice of God. The world heareth no message; believers hear the message partially; but the begotten sons, in perfect accord with the Father, hear and understand fully. No doubt our Lord received a blessing through this message from the Father, and yet he assures us that it was not specially sent for him, but rather as a demonstration for the benefit of the disciples – that they might note that God attested his teachings. God does not today speak to his people by such an audible voice; but he speaks none the less forcibly to us – through his Word and through his providences. Yet now, as then, some hear and appreciate more than others. Some, who have the word of God in their hands appreciate it only as another book, and likewise discern not God’s providences in the affairs of his people. Others see in the Lord’s Word a message, a good message, and reverence the book and see in his providences something of the divine care and provision in connection with the body of Christ. But only the spirit-begotten sons, the members of the body of Christ, today, like the Head eighteen hundred years ago, hear the Father’s Word, with distinctness and clearness and understanding. R. 2758

JESUS' PRAYER FOR ONENESS

JOHN 17

Jesus' Prayer for The Divine Family

1 Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said:

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You,

2 “as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.

3 “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

4 “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.

5 “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

6 “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.

7 “Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You.

8 “For I have given to them the words which You have given Me, and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You, and they have believed that You sent Me.

9 “I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours.

10 “And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them.

11 “Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.

12 “While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept, and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

13 “But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.

14 “I have given them Your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

15 “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.

16 “They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

17 “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

18 “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

19 “And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.

20 “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word,

21 “that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

22 “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one:

23 “I in them, and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

24 “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

25 “O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You, and these have known that You sent Me.

26 “And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

John 17:1-26

“I PRAY FOR THEM.” – R. 3351

JOHN 17:15-26

ON THE NIGHT of the institution of the memorial of his death, our Lord, so far from being concerned wholly with himself and his approaching crucifixion, was specially thinking of and praying for his disciples. The closing verse of John 16 records his words of admonition, “These things have I spoken unto you that in me ye may have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” These words spake Jesus and lifted up his eyes to heaven in prayer for his disciples, saying, “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me; for they are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thy own name those whom thou hast given me.”

Our Lord’s entire life furnishes an illustration of what the Apostle commends to all the Church in the words, “Pray without ceasing.” Our Lord evidently was always in that prayerful attitude of heart, which was filled with thankfulness to the Father in respect to all of life’s affairs, which recognized his guardian care, which trusted him, confided in him and in every distressing circumstance looked to him to overrule and to cause all experiences to work for good. But our Lord’s constant attitude of prayer without ceasing did not hinder his more particular devotions when he turned aside from the affairs of life to speak to the Father in secret – sometimes briefly and sometimes spending a whole night in prayer in the mountain solitude. Though he loved his disciples they were not yet begotten of the Holy Spirit and could not fully comprehend matters from his standpoint. The Father alone was able to comprehend the full situation, and hence the very isolation of our Lord from all human help drew him the nearer and the oftener to the Father in prayer.

So it is or should be with the Lord’s followers. Proportionately as we grow in his character likeness we will similarly pray without ceasing and in everything give thanks, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord, realizing him as the center of all our hopes and ambitions and joys. And similarly we will avail ourselves of the privilege of more formal approaches to the throne of grace, to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Similarly also, in proportion as at times we may find that our dear ones either of earthly or spiritual relationship are unable to sympathize with our experiences, we may be profited by such a lack of earthly sympathy in that the experiences will send us the more frequently to the heavenly Comforter from whom we will derive the greater blessing and joy.

THE CHURCH NOT THE WORLD

In this prayer, as elsewhere throughout the inspired Word, a sharp line of distinction is drawn as between the Church and the world. A great loss is sustained by those who do not see this, for it wonderfully assists in the “rightly dividing of the Word of Truth.” “God so loved the world,” Jesus “by the grace of God tasted death for every man,” and was a propitiation for the sins of the whole world, yet he is not of the world, and those who become his disciples are not of the world. “Ye are not of the world even as I am not of the world.” The losing of the clear line of distinction between the Church and the

world has been a serious injury to true Christianity.

The world has appropriated some of the promises and customs and ceremonies which more or less resemble or counterfeit the graces of the Church, and this is called civilization, and thus a large proportion of the world are to-day mistakenly recognized as part of the Church. This is to their disadvantage, for not discerning that those who are of the Church must be begotten again, that in the resurrection they may be born again, they are merely deceiving themselves. It is a disadvantage also to the true Church, the true followers of the Lord, whose new natures must contend with the weaknesses of the flesh, and whose flesh seeks to justify itself by common custom, and to claim that to go much beyond the common standard is to be fanatical, extremists. The Lord's people need to remember that, judged from the standpoint of the world and the nominal Church, they must be extremists if they would come up to the standards set for them by the Lord and the apostles – standards illustrated in the lives of Jesus and the apostles, in their self-denials even unto death.

Our Lord prayed not for the world, because the Lord's time for dealing with the world had not yet come – would not come until after the selection of the Church, the body of Christ. He prayed for the apostles especially, because they would be his special representatives in the world, and his prayer included also all of the five hundred brethren who up to that time had believed on him with sincere hearts. Not only so, but (v. 20) he extended the petition so as to cover all of a similar class even to the end of the age – all who should believe on him so thoroughly, so sincerely, that their faith would separate them from the world to be his disciples, his followers in the narrow way in very truth.

WHAT HE DID NOT PRAY FOR

As we look out over the world today and take a view of the nominal Christian Church, and attempt to put ourselves in the place of the nominal Christian believer and his professed view of matters, and if, then, we suppose that the Lord prayed for the present condition of things, his prayer would be something like this:

I pray that my followers may become very numerous, very wealthy and very learned, that they may be the notables of the world. I pray that they may be divided up into great denominations, some holding one fragment of truth and some another, blending the same with much of inconsistency and error. I pray that there may be a dignified class, self-satisfied and reverential in form, who may be known as Episcopalians. I pray for another dignified class who will hold the Westminster Confession of Faith, and subsequently in 1902 supplement it with a briefer statement which, in effect, will contradict it. I pray for another great schism under the leadership of Wesley, which shall mingle with its devotions many worldly customs and attractions, and shall prosper greatly and be able to boast the building of one church every day in the year. I pray for another great sect or party of my followers, to name my name and be the followers of Luther. I pray for the great Roman Catholic Church, which will claim to be my kingdom, claim to reign in power and great dignity and honor over the kingdoms of the earth, claim that its head and representative is my vicegerent, the spiritual emperor of the world. I pray that its cunning policy may keep my Word from reaching the public, and that it may represent my great sacrifice for sins in its innumerable sacrifices of the

mass, and that it may prosper and “wear out the saints of the most high God.”

I pray also for all the little sects and parties and splits, that they may prosper, that each may think that they have the truth and be satisfied with their creeds, and be hindered from searching the Scriptures to know therefrom the way, the truth and the life. I pray for all these that they may be thus scattered and separated and have fences between each other. I pray further that they may not only have denominational lines to separate them, but, additionally, political lines and lines of national prejudice, so that millions of them of one party or nationality may threaten and make war upon and slaughter those of another nationality or party. I pray that these national distinctions amongst them shall run so high that it will require hundreds of millions of dollars every year for armies and weapons and battleships to fight each other or to threaten each other or to intimidate each other. I pray all this that the heathen world may be charmed with the glorious effect of my teachings upon Christendom, and that all the heathen may say with one voice, Let us also become partisan and sectarian. Let us also arm and fight. Let us also learn of the practices of these Christian nations that they do not have the entire monopoly of profanity and drunkenness and debauchery, that we may share in these.

WHAT OUR LORD DID PRAY FOR

Very different was our Lord’s petition. His prayer represents his disciples as being a small minority in the world, hated of the world, opposed by the world, misunderstood by the world, not many great, not many wise, not many learned, not many rich, not many noble – chiefly the poor and altogether a “little flock.” The characteristics of the disciples whom Jesus personally gathered were to be expected in all who should afterward be gathered to him as his true followers.

Notwithstanding the great array of Christian nations and Christian sects, the Lord “knoweth them that are his;” and in harmony with this prayer he has not during the age separated his people from the world, but left them in the world, merely separating them so far as the heart is concerned – “I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil.” We are not to say that the evil is good, we are not to say that the world has become saintly; it is still evil. Christendom is practically in the same condition to-day that Judaism was in when it crucified the Lord and persecuted his followers.

Then the chief sect of the Jews called themselves God’s holy people (the meaning of the word Pharisee), and the whole nation stood on a plane of outward morality which the Lord declared was in his sight a farce. He called the leaders whited sepulchers, inwardly full of corruption. He told them that while they washed the outside of the cup they left it filthy within; that while they made broad their phylacteries and prayed in public, in their hearts they were far from a condition of holiness or love – so far that they would be willing to wrongfully take a home from a poor widow if the outward forms of the law permitted and if the transaction would not bring too much reproach. (Matt. 23:14,23-28.) It is much the same to-day; there is an outward gloss or veneer that in many cases is hypocritical, an outward form of worship, a drawing near with the lips while the heart is far from him, busy with fashion and dress and pleasure and money-making idolatries, if not with grosser sins.

Our Lord prayed that his true followers might be kept by heavenly power free from such conditions – out of sympathy with them, not of them. And we believe this has been true all down throughout this Gospel age. We believe that the Lord’s prayer has been fulfilled, and that his scattered little flock, the branches of the true vine, have flourished in heart, spiritually, keeping up a separate life entirely from the nominal system, which is only a part of the world. We believe that the same is true to-day, and that these in the world but not of it are now, in the harvest time, being called out of Babylon, “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins and receive not of her plagues.” But as the entire number of Israelites who returned from Babylon when the opportunity offered was only about 50,000, so we may expect here that the Lord has so arranged matters respecting the popularity of error and the unpopularity of the Truth, that the number ready and glad to forsake all to follow the Truth and the right will be few.

“SANCTIFY THEM THROUGH THY TRUTH”

The prayer, continuing, points out two things – first, how the Lord’s followers will be kept, and, secondly, why they will be kept. **(1)** They will be kept because they are not of the world, because they have taken a positive stand on the Lord’s side, because they have reckonedly died to the world and sin and been begotten again of the holy Spirit to newness of life. **(2)** They will be kept in the world, but not of it, by the power of the Truth in their hearts. The Truth will sanctify or separate them. Not any truth, not all truth, but the Truth – the Truth of the divine revelation respecting the divine character and the divine plan, and their relationship to these. Summing this all up the Lord declares, “My Word is Truth” – the Truth which only sanctifies and separates my disciples from the world.

We are aware that “doctrine” has become very unpopular in every quarter of the world and in the nominal Church. No wonder! The doctrines, the creeds, of the various sects and parties of Christendom are so mingled with error, so offensive to the spiritual senses of the spiritual mind, that they could have no pleasure in partaking of such things from their tables. The prophet describes the matter, saying, “All tables are full of vomit” – every creed formulated in the Dark Ages is necessarily repulsive to-day. But the Truth, “Thy Word is Truth,” never becomes stale, never becomes rancid or offensive; it is still the Bread from Heaven, it is still the Word of Life; and all who are of the Truth, all who have progressed from being merely babes in Christ and by partaking of the meat of his Word have come to an appreciation of it, all who have been weaned from the milk and drawn from the breasts, can say with the poet respecting the wonderful story of the divine plan,

“IT SATISFIES MY LONGINGS AS NOTHING ELSE CAN DO”

The Truth has a sanctifying power in the heart because it fills the longings of the heart. Every heart has talents and appeals which demand operation, activity. Something must be supplied to meet the hungerings and thirstings of these various talents and qualities of the mind. If the exceeding great and precious promises of the divine Word be not received into the heart to satisfy its cravings or longings, it will feed upon other things; and the world, the flesh and the devil are all crowding upon it, offering various attractions, some of which will be received if the heart be not filled and kept filled. Thus

our Lord's parable represents a heart swept and garnished, with the devil cast out, and then that heart, still empty, is represented as being re-entered by seven devils. Our hearts need not only to be cleansed from sin through justification of life, through faith in Christ, but they need also to be filled with the Lord himself; and our Lord, who calls himself the Truth, furnishes to our hearts various truths as food, as nourishment, as filling our hearts and satisfying our cravings, and by thus filling he sanctifies those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, and thus separates them completely and keeps them separate from the world, its spirit, its hopes, its aims, its ambitions.

GOD'S POWER IN GOD'S TIME

Have we love for righteousness? We cannot hope to find it in the world, nor hope to establish it here under present conditions. We are obliged to admit that nothing short of God's promised Kingdom can establish righteousness; hence our hearts, as Noah's dove, return to the Lord as the center and fountain of righteousness. Have we a desire for peace and joy? Our past experience in the world convinces us that, while the whole world is seeking for happiness, it has not found it. We who have found the Lord have found the secret of happiness, the Christian's secret of having every day a happy one. Do we long for power and influence that we may exercise them for good? The Word of Truth assures us that it is impossible to find them in present conditions, but that we shall, if faithful, attain to the power and glory, honor and immortality, in the First Resurrection, and that then our grandest hopes and ideals will be realized in the Kingdom blessings that will come to all the families of the earth. Do riches seem attractive to us? The Scriptures hold out the true riches, and assure us that in following the Lord all things are ours by faith now, and shall be actually ours by and by, when we become our Master's associates in the heavenly Kingdom.

Our Lord declares, "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." It is evident enough how the Father sent the Son, who left the glory which he had with the Father before the world was made flesh and dwelt amongst us; but in what sense are we sent into the world, we who are born of the world? Of course the apostles were specially sent once, but all the Lord's followers are sent in a sense or degree. We are not sent until we are separated from the world to be his in heart and in truth. Then he gave us a commission or a message, a work to do in the world in his name and for the cause which he represents, namely, the cause of righteousness. So, then, the true followers of the Lord are ambassadors for God, representatives for Jesus. As he was in the world, so are we in the world; hence he calls upon us to walk as children of the light, to oppose sin in ourselves, and to use our influence in all proper ways in opposition to sin and in favor of righteousness and truth and right.

GLORY SHARED WITH CHURCH

Continuing our Lord declares, "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." This seems to carry with it the thought, elsewhere suggested in this prayer, that our Lord had by this time come to a full realization of the Father's plan, namely, that his disciples were to be developed for the purpose of becoming his joint-heirs in the Kingdom, sharers in his glory. At first thought such a sharing of the great glory of the Kingdom might appear to be a lessening of the great glory of Jesus, just as the appointment of the seventy elders of Israel to be associates

with Moses in judging Israel seemed at first to be a contraction or diminution of the dignity or authority of Moses.

But as Moses in the type was very meek, and gladly welcomed all the elders to joint-service, saying, "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them!" (Num. 11:29), so the Lord Jesus, so far from feeling that the gathering out of the Church to be his joint-heirs in the Kingdom would diminish his glory, joined heartily in the divine plan, and declares here that he set himself apart, he separated himself from that feature of the glory and dignity of the Father's reward that his followers might have a share in it, that they might become his joint-heirs, being set apart and brought to this honor through the Truth, through the great and precious promises bestowed upon them. This same thought seems to be presented in the words (vs. 22,23) – "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them, that they may be one even as we are one: I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."

The love of God pervades our hearts so that selfishness has no room there, and thus it was that our dear Redeemer, instead of feeling jealous that any others should be exalted to the divine nature, participators in the Kingdom, in this prayer to the Father declares his full acquiescence in the plan, his hearty cooperation, his joy to have it so. What a thought this gives to us as the prospective Bride, already espoused to the heavenly Bridegroom. He is pleased to exalt us from our lowly estate to be one with himself in his Kingdom, in his throne, in his Father's love.

Wonder of wonders! Where will the divine compassion cease! While we were yet sinners, under divine condemnation of death, we were loved and redeemed at a great price; and now, having been redeemed, we hear the voice celestial saying, "Come up higher," yea, even to the throne, to joint-heirship with the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Could we keep ever before our minds this grand display of love and unselfishness how thoroughly it would scatter from the minds of all who are seeking to be copies of God's dear Son every thought of rivalry one with another. How it would cause us to rejoice in the growing usefulness and advancement in the Lord's service of every member of the body. How we should more and more feel what the Scriptures describe as "in honor preferring one another," and which rejoices in the prosperity of a brother, in his growing usefulness in the Church, in the growing evidences of his favor with God and man. Those who can thus rejoice in the prosperity of the fellow-members of the body have another evidence of their growth in the likeness of our great and glorious Head. Those who are without this sentiment should strive for it and be very discontented until it is attained.

"THAT THEY ALL MAY BE ONE"

The spirit of trusts and combinations which is abroad in the world and which is permeating everything has the effect of combining congregations, combining denominations, and in general is leading on rapidly to the formation of great religious trusts, whose development will be a serious menace to the liberties of the Lord's truly consecrated people, but not an injury to their spiritual interests. On the contrary, it will prove a blessing to the Lord's little flock in that it will more particularly differentiate

them and confirm to them the teachings of the Scriptures, separating them the more completely from the nominal systems and the binding in bundles of the tares, giving them the while the confirmations of the Scriptures, which clearly predict this condition in the end of this age as preceding the collapse of great Babylon. – Rev. 18:21.

Our Lord's prayer, "That they all may be one," has been fulfilled throughout the age. All who have been truly his have had a oneness of heart, a oneness of purpose, a oneness of spirit, with the Father and with the Son – a fellowship divine which cannot be produced by earthly creeds and fetters. So it is to-day, and so it is always between those who are truly the Lord's. They know each other not by outward passwords or grips or signs, but by the touch of faith and love which it gives and which each recognizes. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, in that ye have love one for another." "We know we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." True, we love all men and seek to serve all as we have opportunity, but, as the Apostle explains, "especially the household of faith," especially those who love the Lord and are trusting in the precious blood, and are fully consecrated to him and, so far as they are able, doing his will and seeking to further know that will day by day.

This union between those who are the Lord's people is evidently not the union of person. The Lord's followers are not one in person but in spirit. And this is the illustration which the Lord gives of the oneness which exists between himself and the Father – they are not one in person but one in spirit, purpose, will; for our Lord declares that he always does the Father's will, those things which are pleasing in the Father's sight. And thus we abide in his love and abide in him by doing his will, which is the Father's will, and thus Father and Son and the Church, the Bride, are all one – in spirit and in truth.

WITH CHRIST, SHARING HIS GLORY

Our Lord's words (v. 24), "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me go with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me." This is not a petition, but a declaration of the Lord's will, as though he were saying, Father, I understand that this is thy will in respect to these my followers, and I will it also, acquiescing in this great and liberal arrangement which thou hast made. I will be glad to have my followers ultimately on the same plane of glory with me, and that they may there be blessed by seeing and sharing the glories thou hast conferred upon me whom thou hast loved always even before the foundations of the world – even before the arrangements were made for these my disciples.

The closing words of the prayer are beautiful and give us an insight into the Lord's confidence in the Father and fellowship with him. He knew the Father, and so he has declared respecting us that this is the highest evidence that could be granted us of our acceptance with the Father and of our participation in the life eternal which he has provided, namely, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Our Lord declares, "O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me." And I have made known unto them thy name, thy character, thy greatness, thy goodness, thy love, thy benefactions, and will make known still further as they are able to bear it, as they grow in knowledge of the Truth, that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them.



Look to God and Live by Dan Wilson

How wonderful is this love of God and love of Christ! How impossible it seems for us to measure its lengths and breadths and heights and depths! Those who have accepted the Lord as their Redeemer and have entered into covenant relationship with him, giving him their little all and accepting from him a participation in all these blessings of his provision, if ever cast down because of weakness or opposition or what not, should call to mind this great love which the Father has for us and which the Son shares, the love which not only redeemed us while we were yet sinners, but which since then has called us to such wonderful blessings and privileges, making us joint-heirs with Christ our Lord, if so be we suffer with him; – this love will not be lightly turned away, this love would chasten us rather than permit us to fall away into the second death; this love will finally deliver, either in the

little flock or in the great company, all who continue to trust in Jesus and continue to hold the faithful Word. But in proportion as this love of God dwells in us richly, in proportion as Christ is enthroned in our hearts, in that same proportion we will have a responsive love which will delight to do those things which are pleasing in our Father's sight and acceptable to our Lord, and in the same proportion we will be loth to do anything which would bring a cloud between the Lord and our souls.

Let us, then, have fresh courage because of what we discern of the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of love divine, and let this love of God constrain us to greater zeal and devotion to him and to his cause.

17 May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height-- 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:17-19

THE ONENESS OF THE DIVINE FAMILY – R. 3160

“I pray for them. . . which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them.”

– John 17:9,10



THERE is a touching pathos in this prayer of our Lord for his disciples as he was about to leave them, which draws us very near to his loving heart; especially when he adds, “Neither pray I for these alone [then present with him], but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one – I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them as thou hast loved me.” – Verses 20-23.

As we come to consider this beautiful expression of the Lord’s sentiments with reference to the Church, we catch a glimpse of the glory of the blessed oneness of the divine family. It is a oneness of purpose, a oneness of confidence, a oneness of sympathy, a oneness of love a oneness of honor, and a oneness of mutual

possession. This oneness our Lord described as already existing between himself and the Father, but so far as his disciples are concerned it was and still is only prospective; and its full accomplishment is the ideal goal toward which we are taught to aspire.

But let us study this exemplified oneness more closely that we may be enabled the more fully to enter into it. In the first place we notice that the one purpose which is common to both the Father and the Son is the Father’s purpose, which was gradually revealed to the Son in due time and order, whose it also became by adoption. Since Jesus himself said, “Of that day and hour knoweth no man; no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father” only (Mark 13:32), it is manifest that the revelation of that plan to him was a gradual one; and that he was led into the knowledge of its various features as they became due to be worked out through his instrumentality. Thus he was allowed to **grow** in knowledge; and thus, too, he was spared the sad spectacle of subsequent trouble which also lay along the pathway of the divine plan. Thus, while he joyfully worked out the grand plan of creation (John

1:3; Prov. 8:22-31), he probably knew nothing of God's purpose for the subsequent permission of evil and the necessity for the great work of redemption. Before he came to that test of faith in God his confidence in his almighty power, wisdom and love had been firmly established by the experiences of the past. For centuries he had seen his mighty works, marked his wondrous wisdom and experienced his tender love. Could he doubt him, then, when another feature of his plan made manifest the great work of redemption and restitution, and gave to him the privilege of undertaking this work also, for the joy that the Father set before him? No; doubtless he did not at first realize the depths of humiliation and sorrow through which he must pass; but, step by step, along the painful way of humiliation and suffering, his faith in the Father, founded upon his previous experimental knowledge, sustained him, as it is written – "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many." – Isa. 53:11.

We next notice between the Father and the Son a beautiful oneness of confidence. The Son trusted the Father fully – at first, because it was easy and natural. Created in the likeness of God, trust in the Being who brought him into existence was spontaneous, and experience served but to develop and establish it. And the Father trusted the Son fully – first, because he recognized in him the inherent principles of righteousness and truth and filial loyalty which he himself had given him; and, as the course of time and experience developed and the more firmly established his Son in righteousness, his confidence in him became firmly established. And so strong was the Father's confidence in the subsequent fidelity of his beloved Son, that he did not hesitate to declare the results of his faithfulness thousands of years before he even began the work of redemption. He even declared all the special features of the work, by the mouth of his holy prophets at various intervals for four thousand years before he began the work. And still he declares that the work shall in due time be gloriously accomplished. How wonderful and how beautiful is this mutual confidence!

We further notice a oneness of sympathy between the Father and the Son. The Son glories in the Father's plan, saying, "I *delight* to do thy will, O my God." He delighted in it because he discovered therein the worthy features of his Father's glorious character; and though his faith may have been temporarily tested by the permission of evil, his knowledge of God's character and resources, and of the depth of his wisdom did not permit him to doubt, but held him still in loving trust in his infinite goodness and grace, and, therefore, in readiness to acquiesce fully in the measures proposed for the final triumph of righteousness and truth.

And the Father was likewise in loving sympathy with the Son, not permitting him to be tried above what he was able to bear; and not leaving him to bear any trial alone, but always granting him the light of his countenance and a joyful sense of admiring approval (John 11:42; Matt. 3:17), except when, for our sakes, he permitted him for a moment to feel that he was forsaken; when, in the anguish of his soul, he cried out at this unusual experience, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Now, mark the oneness of love manifested. In every act we have already noted we have seen it expressed. It was mutual love that delighted to manifest and express mutual confidence, that gloried in the same loving and benevolent purposes, that sympathized fully with each other's thoughts and feelings, and that delighted in the close and blessed relationship of Father and Son. The Father did not treat the Son as a servant and hide

Prayers of The Righteous

his purposes from him; but delighted to take him into his confidence in so far as his wisdom and prudence dictated – *i.e.*, as the truth became meat in due season to him. And, in turn, the Son did not serve the Father as a hireling, but as a son with a common interest. The Father declared, “This is my beloved Son;” and the Son said, “I *delight* to do thy will.”

How blessed the fellowship! It was a fellowship of joy and a fellowship of suffering – of joy in a common anticipation of the future glory; and of suffering in mutual participation of the preliminary trials to secure that end. The Son suffered in his humiliation and his dying agony; and the Father suffered in giving his only begotten Son – an intensity of suffering which the loving, yearning hearts of devoted parents can best imagine and appreciate.

There was further a recognized oneness of possessions clearly expressed by our Lord, who declared, “All things that the Father hath are mine.” (John 16:15.) And the Apostle says, God hath appointed the Son the “heir of all things,” and hath “set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.” – Heb. 1:1,2; Eph. 1:20,21.

And, lastly, we notice a oneness of honor. In honor each seems to prefer the other. The Father says: Let all men honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. (John 5:23.) God has made him the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person, and exalted him to his own right hand, to the chief seat of power in his kingdom, giving him all power in heaven and in earth. – Heb. 1:2,3; Matt. 28:18.

In the work of creation he has set him forth in great prominence and glory, saying, “Without him was not anything made that was made.” In the work of redemption and restitution God has set him forth so prominently that his name is the theme on every tongue, almost to the eclipse of the Father’s own glory, who of necessity is himself greater than the Son (1 Cor. 15:27), and to whom the glory pre-eminently belongs, as the Son also declares, saying, “My Father is greater than I;” and again, “I can of mine own self do nothing;” “the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.” – John 5:30; 14:10,28.

The Son’s corresponding anxiety to glorify the Father is most marked in the instance when, realizing that he was approaching the dreadful hour of his dying agony he exclaimed, “Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name” – even at this cost to me. (John 12:27,28.) Again we hear him say, “Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.” (John 17:1.) And when the great work of redemption and restitution is accomplished, we see him delivering up the Kingdom to God, the Father, and subjecting himself to his further direction, that Jehovah himself may be universally recognized as all in all. (1 Cor. 15:24,28.) And we, like him, may surely trust that his purposes for the ages to follow will but the further express and emphasize the same lines of his glorious character – his justice, his wisdom, his love and his power.

Glorious oneness! who could suggest an improvement to its wondrous beauty and

completeness? But the wonder and joy increase when we learn that it is also our privilege to come into this same blessed oneness with God. What! we inquire – the very same oneness as above described? Yes; undoubtedly it is our privilege to enter into the very same relationship and privileges and blessings. To this end consider the exceeding great and precious promises and see that it is ours to have the same oneness with God – of purpose, of confidence, of sympathy, of love, of honor and of possession.

The same plan of God is presented to and adopted by us, and we also are invited to become coworkers with God in carrying it out (2 Cor. 6:1); and in so doing we are counted in with Christ Jesus as filling up the measure of the sufferings of the anointed body necessary to the accomplishment of that plan. Our heavenly Father also similarly manifests his confidence in us – in the loyalty of our hearts toward him and in the sincerity of our consecration to him – even though he recognizes our inherent weaknesses and our inability to carry out fully our own determinations. But, notwithstanding this, so great is his confidence in our sincerity and integrity of heart, that, on our profession of faith and consecration, he fully accepts us as his sons and heirs, supplementing our weaknesses and shortcomings with the all-sufficient merit of our Redeemer, in whom we humbly trust. And not only so, but as sons, honored and beloved, he makes known to us, also, his secret counsels, which others cannot know (Matt. 13:11), and invites us to confide in him as children, and to speak to him freely of all that concerns us, in full assurance of his loving interest, even in our smallest affairs. (Psa. 103:13,14.) And then he commits a portion of his great work to us. He gives us certain talents, certain portions of his goods, and tells us to invest them for him according to our best judgment as to the profitableness of the results, not dictating all the minutiae of the management as to hireling servants, but merely submitting to us the general principles which should govern us. Thus, for instance, he gives us his plan as to the work in hand, with such general directions as, not to cast our pearls before swine; to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves; to give meat *in due season*; to do good to all men as we have opportunity, but especially to the household of faith; and to observe the times and seasons, and the character of the work in each – seed-sowing in the spring, and reaping in the harvest time; etc., etc. Thus with general directions he sends us forth – not like machines, to do a monotonous treadmill service, but as intelligent beings, to use our brains as well as our hands and feet. So he counsels us to “*study*” to show ourselves workmen approved, and to *consider* and *think*, and not to be “as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle.” (Psa. 32:9.) Then, according to our zeal and faithfulness, not only in the use of our hands, but also of our brains, in the Lord’s service, his confidence in us increases and we are entrusted with more and more of his goods and given a corresponding sense of our heavenly Father’s approval. And the mutual confidence and fellowship of purpose and work, draw our hearts closer and closer to the heart of the Eternal, and the joyful realization of sonship and mutual interest and confidence and sympathy fills our hearts.

We are also assured of the same love from our heavenly Father which he exercises toward our Lord Jesus. The statement seems almost startling; but yet, hearken to our Lord’s prayer – “I pray for them. . . that they may be one. . . that they may be made perfect in one...that the world may know that thou hast. . . loved them *as thou hast loved me.*” (John 17:20-23.) In amazement we inquire, How can this be? Our Lord Jesus was always in perfect harmony with the Father; a son who gloriously reflected

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his likeness; but it has not been so with us: we were sinners and had nothing in us worthy of love. Yes, but we have been washed and cleansed, and, however imperfect our earthen vessels may still be, our hearts are perfect in his sight who is able to read the heart. And, as he sees us with a perfect heart – a perfect purpose and intention – striving to overcome the weaknesses and disabilities of our imperfect flesh, and with painful, yet determined, effort to do his will, and humbly trusting in the provisions which he has made for our redemption from the fall, God recognizes in us that which is worthy of his love. And so our Lord Jesus gives us clearly to understand that the Father loves us, even as he loved the Son.

And not only is this equality of the Father's love for us as for Christ Jesus thus declared, but it is also manifested; for we are called to be **joint-heirs** with his Son, and partakers of his glory; and even as all things are his, they are also said to be ours. – Rom. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:21-23.

While such is the oneness between the heavenly Father and all his anointed sons, it is blessed also to mark the same oneness between Christ Jesus and his anointed brethren. The Lord Jesus does not selfishly grasp all the glory and seek to retain it for himself, but the rather with admiration he contemplates their acquired worthiness and says, They “are mine and I am glorified in them” (John 17:10); and he would have them all bound up together with himself in the Father's love. He would also have them with him, beholding and sharing the glory which the Father had given him from the foundation of the world – the glory of his mighty creative works, with all the other evidences of his Father's love. – John 17:22-24.

Thus all the divine family are bound together in one bond of love and fellowship and confidence and sympathy and harmony and common interest; and the honor and glory of one are the honor and glory of all. The Lord's prayer abounds with petitions for this oneness. Mark the expression (verse 21) – “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee” [thy spirit or disposition and purposes and aim being common to us all]. Hence, he would have us adopt the same Father's spirit, aim and purpose, and devote all our powers with zeal and faithfulness to the accomplishment of the Father's will. Amen, so let it be.

JESUS' PRAYERS AT GETHSEMANE

Jesus' Prayers in The Garden

36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there."

37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed.

38 Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me."

39 He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying,

"O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

40 Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What? Could you not watch with Me one hour?"

41 "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

42 Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying,

"O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done."

43 And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy.

44 So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

45 Then He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.

46 "Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand."

THE AGONY IN GETHSEMANE – R. 1801

MARK 14:32-42; MATT. 26:36-46; LUKE 22:39-46; JOHN 18:1

“The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”

AS WE CONSIDER the solemn scenes of this lesson, let it be with reverence and deep gratitude, remembering it was our load the Master bore, that it was the chastisement of our peace that was upon him, and that with his stripes we are healed.

The narrative, so familiar to every Christian, is one full of precious lessons, especially to those who, by his grace, are endeavoring to follow in the Lord’s footsteps. We observe:



Jesus praying in agony

(1) that when the Master realized that his hour of betrayal and fierce temptation was close at hand, having first comforted, counselled, and prayed for and with his disciples, his next strong impulse was to seek a solitary place for prayer and communion with God, that he might find grace to help in time of need.

(2) We note also his love for his disciples, and his desire for their love and sympathy in return. “Having loved his own, he loved them to the end.” And because he loved them, and knew that they loved him, he permitted them to accompany him to the place of prayer, that they might watch and pray with him. Leaving all but Peter and James and John at the entrance of the garden, as a sort of outer guard against the sudden intrusion of his betrayer upon his last hour of prayer, he advanced with the three – the three in whose ardent natures he seemed to find the most active and consoling sympathy – and, with an earnest appeal to them to watch and pray, he left them and went about a stone’s throw beyond. Three times did he rise from prayer and return to them in anguish of soul to feel the touch of human sympathy, saying, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.” It was a sorrow, an agony, which, of itself, would have worn him out shortly – an intense mental and nervous strain which caused him to sweat great drops of blood.

It was no sign of weakness in the Master that he thus craved human sympathy. His was no coarse, stoical nature, insensible to pain and shame and loss; nor was it a proud, self-centered nature which stood aloof from human fellowship, although those with whom he associated were so far beneath his glorious perfection. Gracefully he condescended to men of low estate, and esteemed them brethren beloved, of whom he was not ashamed. His was a refined nature, keenly appreciative of all that is lovely and pure and good, and correspondingly sensitive to pain from everything to the

contrary of these. Human degradation and human woe must continually have borne heavily upon him during all his earthly life. But in this awful hour all the griefs and burdens of the whole world were rolled upon his shoulders, and he was to suffer as though he himself were the sinner – to suffer death, extinction of being, trusting alone in the Father’s grace for a resurrection. Into this one hour were crowded, not only the mental realization of death and the physical agony and shame, the cruelty and torture of a horrible death, but also the sense of desolation to be experienced when even his beloved disciples, overcome by fear and dismay, should forsake him; and the sorrowful reflections upon the irretrievable loss of Judas, and upon the course of the Jewish nation – “his own” people, who despised him and were about to call down upon their own heads the vengeance of his blood, saying, “His blood be upon us and on our children.” He foresaw the terrible calamities that in consequence must soon overwhelm them. Then the degradation of a whole guilty world, which must continue to groan and travail in pain until by his sacrifice he should gain deliverance for them from sin and death, caused him to feel the burden of responsibility to an extent which we can only approximate, but cannot fully comprehend. And in addition to all this was his knowledge of the fact that every jot and tittle of the law with reference to the sacrifice must be perfectly fulfilled according to the pattern in the typical sacrifice of the day of atonement.* If he should fail in any part of the work, all would be lost, both for himself and for men. And yet, though a perfect man, he realized that the flesh, however perfect, was unequal to the task.

*See TABERNACLE SHADOWS, page T39.

How much depended upon our Lord’s fortitude in that awful hour, alone and defenceless in the darkness of overwhelming night, awaiting the certain arrival of his betrayer and the will of his persecutors maddened with hate and full of the energy of Satan! Oh, how the destinies of the world and of himself seemed to tremble in the balances! Even the perfect human nature was not equal to such an emergency without divine aid, therefore it was that he offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him who was able to save him from death, by a resurrection. The necessary comfort was provided through the Prophet Isaiah (42:1,6), by whom Jehovah said, “Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth: . . . I, the Lord, have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee [from falling or failure], and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles. . . . He shall not fail nor be discouraged.”

When the fearful ordeal in Gethsemane strained the powers of endurance almost to their utmost tension his prayer was only, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.” Then, though the cup might not pass from him, an angel came and ministered to him. Just how, we know not, but probably by refreshing his mind with the precious promises and prophetic pictures of the coming glory, which none of his disciples had sufficiently comprehended to thus comfort him in this hour when the gloom of thick darkness settled down upon his soul, crowding out hope and bringing a sorrow exceeding great, “even unto death.” Ah, it was Jehovah’s hand upholding him, blessed by his holy name! according to his promise, that he might not fail nor be discouraged.

The result of that blessed ministry was a reinforced courage which commands the

deepest admiration. It was not a courage born of stoical indifference to pain and shame and loss, but a courage born of that faith which is anchored fast within the vail of the divine promises and power. With his eye of faith upon the glorious victory of truth and righteousness, when he should see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied – satisfied with the eternal joy and blessedness of a redeemed world, with the welcome and wealth of the Father’s blessing, and the love and gratitude of every loyal creature in heaven and in earth – yes, comforted and encouraged thus with a realizing sense of the rewards of faith and faithful endurance to the end, he could now calmly and even courageously, go forth to meet the foe. Yes, this was the victory by which he overcame, even his faith, and so we also are to overcome.

Now commenced the realization of the dreadful forebodings of Gethsemane. Mark his calm, dignified fortitude, as he addresses Judas and the Roman soldiers, and its effect upon them. They were so overpowered with the grandeur and nobility of this wonderful man that they could not have taken him had he not voluntarily placed himself in their hand. Notice, too, his kind consideration for the bewildered and weary disciples, and his loving excuse for them, “The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak,” and his request to the Roman soldiers at the time of his arrest that they might be permitted to go their way (John 18:8), that so they might escape sharing in his persecutions. So through all the trial and mocking, and finally the crucifixion, his courage and solicitude for the welfare of others never failed.

As we thus view our Lord under a trial so crucial, and mark how the hand of Jehovah upheld him, let it strengthen the faith of all who are endeavoring to walk in his footsteps, to whom he says, Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world: and this is the victory that overcometh, even your faith. (John 16:33; 1 John 5:4.) Has not the Lord, Jehovah, commissioned his angels also to bear up the “feet” of the body of Christ, lest at any time they be dashed against a stone (lest some overwhelming trial should prove too much for them)? (Psa. 91:11,12.) Yes, as surely as his hand upheld the Head, our Lord Jesus, so surely will he bear up the feet. “Fear not, little flock: it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom,” though through much tribulation ye shall enter it. The angels are all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation. Though their ministry is unseen by us, it is not therefore unreal, but potent for good. Our fellow-members, too, in the body of Christ are all the Lord’s active messengers to each other, thus in turn sharing the privilege of bearing up the feet.

But to have this help in time of need we must invoke it. Every day and every hour is indeed a time of need; hence our necessity of living in an atmosphere of prayer – to pray without ceasing. And if the Lord needed often to seek retirement from the busy scenes of his active life to be *alone* with God, to keep the close bond of loving sympathy established, surely we need to do so; and in so doing we shall always find grace to help in time of need. In seasons of heavy trial the darkness may indeed so deepen upon the soul, as in our dear Lord’s case, as almost to shut out the stars of hope; yet if, like the Lord, we hold on to the omnipotent arm of Jehovah and meekly say, “Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done,” his grace will always be sufficient; and with the Psalmist we can say, Though my flesh and my heart fail, yet God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever (Psa. 73:26); and, with the Lord, our hearts will respond – “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”

GETHSEMANE – WATCHING AND PRAYING

– R. 2773 Partial Article

MATTHEW 26:36-46

“Not my will, but thine, be done.” – Luke 22:42

NO ONE CAN thoughtfully read this lesson of our Lord’s dark hour in Gethsemane, and his “strong cryings and tears unto him [the Father], who was able to save him out of death” (Heb. 5:7), without feeling that there is something thoroughly incorrect in the idea so prevalent amongst Christian people that our Lord Jesus was his own Heavenly Father, Jehovah; and that it would have been a pretence, a mockery of prayer, for him to have supplicated as here represented, unless it were true also that instead of being in any sense the Father, he was simply what he claimed to be, the Son, the sent of God, the only begotten of the Father, the first-born of all creation, the beginning of the creation of God. (John 10:29; 1:14; Col. 1:15; Rev. 3:14.) There is absolutely no other standpoint from which the language of our Lord and the apostles and his course of conduct are reasonably interpretable. On this point the earnest truth-seeker is referred to MILLENNIAL DAWN, VOL. V.

Our previous lesson closed with our Lord and his disciples leaving the upper room, where they had commemorated his death. They went to the Mount of Olives, to an orchard there, known as Gethsemane, – the name signifying “oil-press place,” probably because olives were there pressed and the oil extracted used both for light and for food. One of the Evangelists speaks of it as the “garden of Gethsemane,” but the word garden, as used in olden times, corresponds more nearly with our word orchard; it was not a flower-garden. There is a small enclosure now on the side of Mount Olivet, about 150 feet square, which is reputed to be the place of our Lord’s agonizing prayer. It contains eight very old and very gnarled olive trees, and whether the exact spot or not, it represents it sufficiently well.

Our Lord probably had two reasons for going forth as he did that night. First, realizing that he would be arrested by the traitor Judas and the band he would bring, our Lord probably did not wish to bring commotion or trouble upon the friend who had so kindly permitted him the use of the upper room. Secondly, he desired the still quiet of midnight, out upon the hillside where he could be alone with God, to pour out his soul in prayer and obtain the strength necessary for the ordeal at hand. In harmony with this last thought, we find that when our Lord reached the entrance to the orchard he left eight of the disciples there, as an outer guard, so to speak, or as pickets, to give notice; and took with him the same three disciples whom he had specially honored on other occasions, Peter, James and John: Peter, the bold and impulsive, James and John, the so-called “sons of thunder” – the three most courageous, most zealous, most earnest, of his disciples. These he wished to have nearest to himself in this time of anxiety. And yet, on this occasion, he desired to be still more alone in his prayer, for even these truest friends could not appreciate the situation: “of the people there were none with him.” Hence he left these and went a stone’s throw further, where he prostrated himself upon his knees, and with his face to the earth, as the various accounts show, and thus, alone, he communed with the Father.

The different accounts of our Lord's experience on this occasion, grouped together, show us that mental anguish seemed to come upon him here with a force of poignancy he had never before experienced; and that the load became increasingly heavy – “sorrowful even unto death,” a sorrow which almost crushed out his very life, says Matthew. Mark says (14:33) that he was “sore amazed,” as though the sorrow had come upon him unexpectedly, as though he were bewildered. Luke, who was a physician, says that he was “in an agony,” a contest, a struggle, the language used in the Greek implying a struggle of increasing force and severity, so that “his sweat became as it were great drops of blood;” and this bloody sweat is not unknown to physicians today, altho very rare. It marks an extreme tension of feeling – sorrow nigh unto death.*

*Prof. Tischendorf shows that this account of our Lord's bloody sweat is not found in the Vatican MS, and that altho it appeared in the original Sinaitic MS. it was crossed out by a later critic. The passage is therefore doubtful, or at least questionable.

Infidelity has suggested that this account of our Redeemer's sorrow, tears and prayers, attests his weakness. They argue that there have been many martyrs of various religions who have faced death with boldness, stoical firmness, sometimes with smiles, and that this account shows Jesus to have been cowardly, and inferior instead of superior to others. But there is a philosophy connected with the matter which they seem not to grasp. There is a dullness and numbness connected with fallen, degraded, coarse manhood that can regard pain and death with indifference, – which permits them either to undergo it themselves without great emotion, or to inflict it mercilessly upon others without compassion. We are glad that Jesus was not one of those cold, stoical icebergs, but that he was full of warm, loving, tender feelings and sensibilities; and that we can realize consequently that he is able to sympathize with the most tender, the most delicate, the most refined, the most sensitive, more than any other human being. He must have felt keenly the conditions under which he had placed himself, in laying down his life on our behalf; because the more perfect the organism the more sensitive and high-strung the feelings, the greater the capacity for joy and the greater the capacity for sorrow: and our Lord being absolutely perfect must have been immeasurably more susceptible to the influences of pain than others.

Besides this he had a perfect life, unforfeited, and knew it, and realized that he was about to part with it; while others of the human family possess only a forfeited or condemned existence and realize that they **must** part with this sometime anyway. It would therefore be a very different matter for our Lord to lay down his life than for any of his followers to lay down their lives. Supposing 100 to represent perfect life, our Lord had the full one hundred units to lay down, while we, being more than ninety-nine-hundredths parts dead, through trespasses and sins and condemnation, could at most have only the one-hundredth part to lay down. A cold, stoical indifference to the loss of life, based upon knowledge that it could last but a short time longer anyway, would therefore be a very different thing from the clear knowledge which our Lord had, based upon his experiences with the Father “before the world was,” and the realization that the life he was now about to lay down was not forfeited through sin, but was his own voluntary sacrifice.

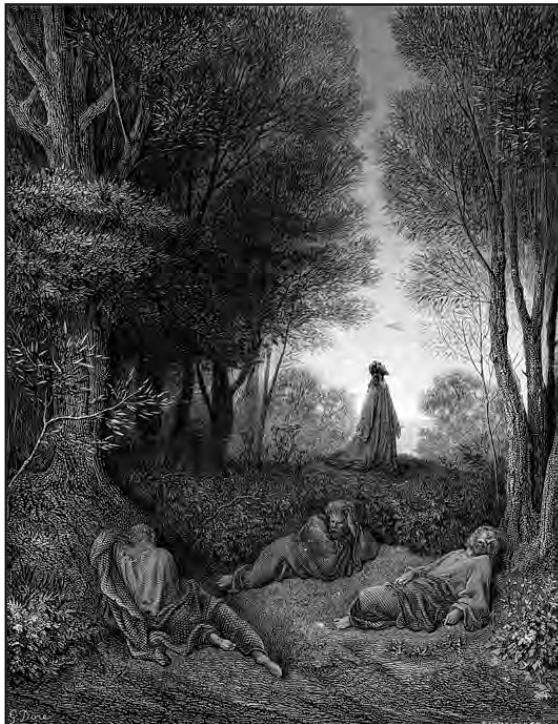
There can be no doubt that this thought of the extinguishment of life was an important factor in our Lord's sorrow. The Apostle clearly intimates it in the words (Heb. 5:7),

“Who in the days of his flesh. . . offered up prayers and supplications, with strong cryings and tears, unto him who was able to save him from [out of] death, and was heard in [respect to] that he feared” – extinction. Intent continually upon doing the Father’s will, day by day had passed in self-sacrifice, until now, in a few hours, the whole would be complete; and the thought of this brought with it another thought, **viz.:** Had he done the Father’s will perfectly? Could he claim, and would he receive the reward promised him, a resurrection from the dead?

Had he failed in any particular to come up to the exact standard of perfection his death would have meant extinction; and altho all men fear extinction none could know the full depth and force of its meaning as could he who not only had the perfection of life, but had recollection of his previous glory with the Father before the world was. For him the very thought of an extinction would bring anguish, terror of soul. This thought seems not to have come to our Lord with the same force previously. It was this, therefore, that bore down upon him now so heavily as an astonishing sorrow unto death. He saw himself about to suffer according to the Law as an evil-doer, and the question naturally arose, was he entirely blameless, and would the heavenly judge thoroughly acquit him whom so many were disposed to condemn?

After praying awhile he went to the three disciples, in whom he had greatest confidence, and who, more than any others, were his tried and trusted companions, but he found them asleep. Luke explains that their sleep was the result of sorrow. The night and its lessons had been impressive; the memorial supper, which they did not fully understand, nevertheless left a weight of sorrow upon them, as the Master had intimated that it represented his death, and had further intimated that one of their number would betray him. The reaction from the sorrow brought a measure of stupor. Very gently our Lord upbraided them: “Could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray lest ye enter

into temptation.” It is not merely that you need to watch on my account; you need to be in a watching attitude on your own account. An hour of severe trial is upon us all; watch and pray lest ye fall in this evil time.



Christ in The Garden by Gustave Dore

Then our Lord went to pray again. We are told that his prayers were in the same words; that is to say, that the same sentiments were expressed; and again a third time similarly: the one matter was weighing upon his heart. Could he rely upon it now, that having sought to do the Father’s will, that having finished his course, he had done it acceptably? Could he have full assurance of faith that God would save him out of death by a resurrection? In answer to his petition a heavenly messenger was sent to comfort him, to assure him, to strengthen him. We

Prayers of The Righteous

are not informed what message the angel brought, but we can see that it was a message of peace, and that he brought assurances that our Lord's course had the Father's approval, and that he would be brought again from the dead by a resurrection. These were quite sufficient to give our Lord all the strength and courage necessary for the ordeal before him; and from that moment onward we find him the coolest and calmest of the notable figures brought to our attention. When approached by Judas and his band he was the most calm and self-possessed of all; when before the chief priest, Caiaphas, it was the same way; when before Pilate the same; when crucified, the same; he had found peace in the message that he was approved of the Father, and that all the gracious promises of glory, honor and immortality were his, and now he could pass through any ordeal.



The Agony in The Garden by Gustave Dore

The Scriptures assure us that our Lord was tempted in all points like as we (his brethren) are, and we see in this his experience in Gethsemane an illustration of one of the most severe trials which come to the Lord's people. It would seem as though the Adversary at times attempted to discourage us by making us think that the trials and difficulties of the "narrow way" of sacrifice will be all unavailing anyhow, and that we might as well give up. When such thoughts come to those who are earnestly and faithfully seeking to fulfil the conditions of their consecration vows they constitute one of the severest trials that could overtake them; if they have given up this world and its affections, hopes, aims, desires, exchanging all these for the heavenly, then anything which seems to becloud the heavenly hopes, leaves them in a darkness more utter, more dense, than they could have known had they never seen and appreciated the glorious promises. And what course should we pursue at such a time? We should follow the example of our Lord, and seek the Father's face, anxious to know whether or not everything is all right with him; anxious for some assurances that while the world may hate us, and say all manner of evil against us falsely, we still have his approval; anxious for some fresh assurance that it will be well with us, that the Lord will grant us a part in the better resurrection to life eternal.

But while we draw this correspondency between our experiences and those of our Lord we should not forget that there is an immeasurable difference; that we are of the dying and ninety-nine-hundredths parts dead already, and that therefore we cannot so fully appreciate the meaning of death nor the meaning of life eternal; and besides all this we have the example of our Lord, and the further assurance that our share in the First resurrection is not to be attained through perfection of our own, but through

his perfection, provided we shall have attested to the Lord our full loyalty of heart, of intention, of will, however imperfect the results of our efforts to glorify him in our bodies and spirits.

The Evangelist records that our Lord prayed, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” It may be that our Lord meant by this, If your infinite love and mercy see it possible in any manner to accomplish your purposes of salvation for mankind without it being necessary for me to die, then grant it to be so. But if this were the Lord’s thought it would imply that he had not fully grasped the Father’s plan of a restitution for mankind, made possible through a *ransom price* for Adam and his sin; for, seeing this, our Lord could not have supposed that anything short of the full ransom could secure the results. Quite possibly, however, the thought which bore heavily upon him was the realization now coming vividly to his mind that if apprehended as a blasphemer it would be the policy of his enemies not to destroy him secretly, but to deliver him over to the Romans; and he could realize the influence and power they would exert to secure the performance of their wishes, and he knew that the Roman method of execution was that of crucifixion, and he knew also that the Scriptures explicitly said, “Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.”

Here, then, seems to have been the centre of his thought: I shall be esteemed of all my countrymen as forsaken of God, and as accursed of him; I shall die as a blasphemer, as a malefactor; whereas my every sentiment is, and has always been, fealty, loyalty to the Father. This, we believe, was the special feature of our Lord’s anxiety, called the “cup” of sorrow, which he wished, if possible, might be removed. We believe that he knew his *death* to be necessary, unavoidable, as he had many times informed his disciples; but that it was this ignominious form of death, “even the death of the cross,” that staggered him; for it not only bespoke shame and misrepresentation before the people, and those whom he loved and to whom he sought to do good, but it carried with it also the thought that he was accursed of God; and if accursed of God he could have no hope for a realization of the glorious promise of a resurrection. But when assured through the angel that he would not be actually accused of God, even though he would for a time take the place of the accursed Adam and be “made a curse for us,” his race, then even the cross and its shame could be endured with fortitude.

THREE PRAYERS ON THE CROSS

Forgive Them

32 There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death.

33 And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left.

34 Then Jesus said,

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”

Luke 23:32-34

We find no mention in the Scriptures of *forgiving* on God’s part without the requirement of repentance. The passage which reads, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34), might be considered to refer to a pardon without repentance; but we remark that these words are not found in the oldest Greek MSS. – the Sinaitic and Vatican. R. 1694



Arrived at Calvary, Golgotha, the wooden crosses were laid upon the ground, the victims stretched thereon, and nailed by hands and feet; then the soldiers lifted the crosses and set them into already prepared holes or sockets. The torture of these experiences can better be imagined than described. It was a most cruel death, though perhaps not more cruel than some other forms by which the Lord's followers and others have died. It was not the pain, not the suffering that was our ransom price – it was the death. The penalty upon father Adam was not the amount of pain he should suffer, but the fact that he must lose life. And so some of Adam's children have lost their lives with great pain, others with little suffering, but over all the sentence reigns, "Dying thou shalt die." It was sufficient in some respects that the Lord should have died, no matter how, but in other respects this was not sufficient. Under the Mosaic law it was decreed, "Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree." (Gal. 3:13.) That vilest sentence or curse against sinners under the Law Jesus bore, that he might not only be the Redeemer of the world in general but also the Redeemer of the Jew, as it is written, "He was made a curse for us" – experienced the sentence of the accursed ones under the Law.

It was supposed that it was just about the time that the cross was dropped into the sockets, which would be one of the most agonizing moments of the entire experience, that our Lord in the midst of his agony prayed for his enemies, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." It certainly would be just like our dear Master to utter such a prayer, and we feel very sure that it was the sentiment of his heart, as it was also that of the first martyr, Stephen, who cried in dying, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." It is but truthful, however, for us to note the fact that these words credited to our Lord are omitted from the Vatican MS., which is one of the very oldest; and although they appeared in the Sinaitic, they were subsequently stricken out of the latter as though their authenticity were doubted. We cannot, however, have any doubt that the words represented our Master's sentiments toward his enemies, for they are in full accord with his instructions to his followers, Love your enemies, do good to them that persecute you, and pray for them. R. 3901

My God! My God!

45 Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land.

46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying,

**“Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is,
“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”**

47 Some of those who stood there, when they heard that, said, “This Man is calling for Elijah!”

Matthew 27:45-47

These words are known as the fourth word or message from the cross. They mark to us the depth of our Lord's anguish. He was dying as the sinner's redemption price, as the substitute, in order that God might be just and the justifier of all who believe in Jesus, and that he might grant them in due time a resurrection from the dead and a return to the Father's favor and to eternal life – to all that was lost in Adam. To be our substitute he must in everything suffer all that we were doomed to suffer as sinners. This included not only his loss of life, but also his cutting off from all fellowship with the Father. A moment, as it were, would do; but there must come that moment of darkness, of separation, and we may readily understand that this was the darkest moment in all of our Lord's experiences, still darker than Gethsemane, which was merely a foreshadowing of this experience. How glad we are that we can see the philosophy, the reason why this experience came to our Lord! And as we realize this, may it more and more fill our hearts with appreciation of the blessings which are ours through Christ; the privilege of return to the Father's fellowship and love, so that we can apply to ourselves the Master's words, “The Father himself loveth you.” (John 16:27.) R. 4173

Our Lord's crucifixion took place at the sixth hour, nine o'clock in the morning – appropriately as represented in the type, for this was the hour of the morning daily sacrifice, and his death occurred six hours later, at three o'clock in the afternoon which, according to the Jewish reckoning, was the ninth hour. This also was appropriately represented in the type, for the daily evening sacrifice was offered at this hour. It was fitting also that nature should veil her glories before such a scene, and that there should be darkness. We are not, however, to suppose that it was a dense darkness, but simply darkness, as stated. Nevertheless, it must have been supernaturally dark for, as it was the full of the moon, a solar eclipse could have lasted but a few minutes at most.*

It was now that our Lord uttered those agonizing words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" He had borne, with wonderful fortitude, the contradictions of sinners against himself, and Peter's denial, and the fact that all of his disciples fled from him, and that his last hours were spent amid the jeers of his enemies; but when the moment came that the Father's fellowship of spirit was withdrawn from him, that was more than he could bear, and it is claimed that he died of a literally broken heart, and that this was evidenced by the fact that both blood and water proceeded from the spear-wound inflicted shortly after his death.

It may be questioned by some whether or not this was a failure of our Lord's faith merely, and not an actual withdrawal of the Father's favor and communion. We hold, however, that the philosophy of the subject proves that it was the latter, and that this was a necessary part of our Lord's suffering as the sin-bearer. The penalty of Adam's transgression was not only death, but additionally separation or alienation from him of divine favor and communion: consequently, when our Lord Jesus took Adam's place and suffered in his room and stead, the just for the unjust, that he might redeem us to God by his precious blood, – it was not only necessary that he should die on our behalf, but it was also necessary that he should experience the full cutting off and separation from the Father, which was a **part of the penalty** of Adam's transgression. He was not alienated or separated from the Father as a sinner throughout the three and a half years in which he was laying down his life; neither did he suffer the full penalty during those three and a half years; but the moment of crisis came at the cross, and for at least a brief period he must be deprived of the Father's fellowship, and must thus die – **as a sinner**, for our sins; in order that "as by a man came death, by a man also should come the resurrection of the dead." R. 2316

Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. John 16:32

Jehovah's sustaining power must necessarily be withdrawn and the bitter dregs of the cup of suffering be drained to make the sacrifice complete. But when the heart and flesh failed, it was difficult to realize the significance of this: hence the startled inquiry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Through all his sufferings the divine grace had thus far sustained him, but now he must sink beneath the rod and be cut off from the favor of Him in whose favor is life, that so, by his stripes, we might be healed. R. 1816

* *Correction:* We should have said – "As it was at the full of the moon, a solar eclipse even for a few moments was an impossibility." – EDITOR.] R. 2489



Jesus' Last Words

44 Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.

45 Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two.

46 And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said,

“Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit.’ ”

Having said this, He breathed His last.

47 So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, “Certainly this was a righteous Man!”

Luke 23:44-47

The last verse of our lesson tells of our Lord's last agonizing cry with a loud voice – consuming the remainder of his strength. His words elsewhere recorded were, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” We have already noticed the serene calmness of our dear Master from the time in Gethsemane when the angel strengthened him with the assurance that his course had thus far been pleasing and acceptable in the Father's sight. But it was necessary that he should have the sinner's bitter experience, even to the extent of being entirely cut off from fellowship with the Father. In God's providence, however, this was not prolonged, but merely “for a moment.” The Father hid his face from his beloved Son in the sense of withdrawing all spiritual fellowship and communion: for a moment, therefore, our Redeemer was left in a depth of darkness, and his agonizing cry pictures the loneliness of his heart. It was not enough that of the people there were none with him – it must come to this, that the Father should temporarily withdraw sustaining strength and assistance.

Yet our Lord triumphed, and his final words as he breathed his last were, “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit,” and having said this “he gave up the ghost.” The word ghost was at one time used as a synonym for spirit, and the meaning of this statement is that our Lord gave up his spirit, his breath of life. In other words, he breathed out his last breath, he let go his hold upon life.

But what was meant by the words, “Into thy hands I commit my spirit” – my breath, my life? We answer that when God created Adam he first formed him and then gave him the gift of life. The right to this gift Adam forfeited by disobedience. He was able to transmit to his posterity a spark of vitality, but not perfection of life, because he had lost all right to that. Hence Adam and each member of his race in dying surrenders his life to God under the divine edict that they were unworthy of life, that they could not have it nor claim it either soon or ever. But with our Lord Jesus it was different: he had a life that was not derived from Adam, but, transferred from a heavenly condition, he had a right to life, and it was this life to which he had a right that he was now laying down on behalf of, and as a redemption price for, Adam and his race. In letting go his hold on life he surrendered it to the Father, who had already promised that his life being thus surrendered should entitle him to a higher life under still greater favor, and this he received when he arose from the dead on the “third day,” for, as the Apostle declared, “He was put to death in the flesh, but quickened [made alive] in the Spirit” – a spirit being. – 1 Pet. 3:18. R. 3903

If human hearts were unsympathetic and unappreciative of the great transaction, nature was not, for she, as a witness to the wonderful scene, veiled her face in darkness and trembled. The rending of the veil between the Holy and the Most Holy would seem to teach symbolically that a way into the Holy of Holies had been opened. The Apostle seems to interpret it thus in Heb. 10:19-22.

Our Lord Jesus, faithful and trustful to the last, commended his spirit in his dying moments to the Heavenly Father, whose promises supported him during his eventful life, and now were his strength in his dying hour. R. 1988

*Therefore,
brethren,
having
boldness to
enter the
Holiest by
the blood of
Jesus, 20 by
a new and
living way
which He
consecrated
for us,
through the
veil, that is,
His flesh.
Hebrews
10:19-20*

4.

Jesus' Example and Instruction

APPARENTLY Jesus usually prayed alone. We read that on some occasions He spent the entire night in prayer to God. How inconsistent that would have been if He Himself were the Father, who for a time was with men and outwardly appeared as the “Man Christ Jesus”! But how consistent is the thought of Jesus’ prayer to the Father when taken in connection with His own declaration: “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28); “I came not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me” (John 6:38); “Of Mine own self I can do nothing; as I hear [of My Father], I judge.” – John 5:30.

Instead of being the Father masquerading as a man, Jesus was the Logos, the Word, or Message of God, whom the Father had sanctified and sent into the world to be the world’s Redeemer, and who by and by is to be its King, to deliver it from the power of Satan and sin, and to restore the willing and obedient to the Divine likeness, the Father’s favor and everlasting life. – Isaiah 25:6-8; Romans 8:21.

Realizing the importance of His mission, Jesus kept properly in touch with the great Author of the Plan of Salvation, His Heavenly Father. His prayers were not mockeries; they were sincere. He worshiped the Father in spirit and in truth, as He declared all must do who would be acceptable to the Father.

No doubt the disciples noted the Master’s frequency in prayer, and the blessing which He seemed to receive therefrom. Instead of urging them to pray, Jesus by His example taught them to desire the privilege and blessing of prayer. In due time they requested instruction, saying, “Lord, teach us to pray!” R. 5378

Pray In This Manner

Our Lord's Prayer

Matthew 6:5-13

5 “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

6 “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

7 “And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

8 “Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

9 “In this manner, therefore, pray:

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

13 And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

Our Lord's Prayer

Luke 11:1-4



The Lord's Prayer by James Tissot

1 Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.”

2 So He said to them, “When you pray, say:

**Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth
as it is in heaven.**

3 Give us day by day our daily bread.

**4 And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive
everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead
us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil
one.”**

THE MODEL PRAYER

Excerpt from R. 2004

All of our Lord's recorded prayers are beautiful in their simplicity, trustfulness and unselfishness; but the one usually termed "the Lord's prayer," given as an example of a proper prayer, is certainly in every way a model, which we do well to follow closely in all our petitions. – Luke 11:2-4; Matt. 6:9-13.

(1) Its opening address is full of filial reverence and trust, – "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name!" What could be more sweet and childlike! What could be more reverent than this bold approach, direct to the throne of the heavenly grace!

(2) It does not proceed hastily to the lesser things of a personal character, but, recognizing that God takes knowledge of all of earth's affairs, and has a gracious and sufficient remedy already provided, the model prayer acknowledges this, and thus expresses faith and interest in God's plan as revealed in his Word, saying: "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." Yes, indeed, it is not only fitting that all who approach God in prayer should previously have searched to know something of what he has revealed concerning his will and plan, but also that after learning of it they should thus confess faith in God, that his plan, when fully executed, will more than meet all the necessities of our case. This is not a petition that God would bring in his Kingdom before his appointed time, nor an expression of an impatient longing for it; but an expression of hope and trust and patient waiting for that which we know will more than meet all proper expectations, and fulfill all the promises of God's Word. It also signifies our allegiance to the Kingdom and its laws and spirit; and hence implies that so far as we are concerned, we will do all in our power to conform our lives to its precepts even now.

(3) Then coming to personal desires, it requests only the necessities, – the "bread and water," which God assures us shall be sure to all who are truly his. It asks, "Give us this day our daily bread." The request is not for wealth, nor luxuries, nor overplus, nor dainties and delicacies. It is simply an acknowledgment of God as the great Provider, and of our reliance upon him and his promises, leaving quantity and quality and everything else to divine wisdom and love, to be ordered to our highest good.

(4) Although our sins have been forgiven, and we have been received into the family of God as sons before we have any right to pray "Our Father," yet we are very humbly to feel that we stand as "sons" by grace in Christ, and not in merit of our own. We therefore appropriately acknowledge that we are trespassers, daily, who do not and cannot do the will of God perfectly, praying, "Forgive us our trespasses," our shortcomings.

(5) Next we acknowledge a principle of God's justice, that mercy will be extended through Christ only in proportion as we realize the spirit of divine mercy, and are willing to exercise it toward others who come short of perfection in their dealings with us; hence we add, "**as** we forgive those who trespass against us." This is equivalent to a bargain with God, that we accept his terms of mercy, and will expect none, except as we

ourselves exercise it toward others. What a thought! If fully appreciated, how it would influence all of God's sons to be kind and generous toward each other and toward all men *in thought* as well as in word and deed. – See Matt. 5:24; 6:15.



Pray in this manner

(6) “And lead us not into temptation;” or, rather, since chastisements and temptations (or trials) are necessary to our discipline and preparation for the Kingdom (James 1:2-12), we must understand this as the *Emphatic Diaglott* indeed renders it, “Abandon us not to trial.” Since the trial of our faith worketh patience,

experience and hope (1 Pet. 4:12; Rom. 5:3-5), and is needful for our perfecting in holiness (1 Pet. 1:6,7), the Father will not hinder us from having temptations, even though he himself tempteth no man. (Jas. 1:13.) A man is *tempted* when he is led astray and enticed by his own selfish, fallen desires; he *sins* when he yields to those desires. (James 1:14.) But in the hour of trial, temptation, who could come off conqueror without the promised “grace sufficient for every time of need” which will succor us and not permit us to be tempted above what we are able to bear, but will with the temptation provide also a way of escape? – 1 Cor. 10:13.

(7) “But deliver us from evil,” or, as some prefer it, Deliver us from the Evil One.* The great Adversary is as much on the alert to entrap us through the weaknesses of the flesh, as our Lord is ready to deliver us and give us victory. We are not sufficient of ourselves for such a contest against the powers of darkness, and hence have need frequently of this petition to the throne of grace, for as the Apostle declares, “our sufficiency is of God.” – 2 Cor. 3:5.

*The remaining sentence with which this prayer is usually closed is spurious – not found in the ancient Greek MSS. It would appear to have been added at the time when an earthly exaltation of the Church had led some to believe that the Papal glory was the glory of God's Kingdom.

PRAYER A GREAT PRIVILEGE – R. 5021

MATTHEW 6:1-18

“Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men to be seen of them: else ye have no reward with your Father which is in heaven.”

– Matthew 6:1 (R.V.)

THE MASTER in today’s lesson tells of proper and improper giving of charity. He extends the subject and explains proper and improper prayers and finally proper and improper fasting. In all these He denounces hypocrisy, theatrical display. His followers are to be actuated solely by a desire to please the Heavenly Father and have His approval. There may be times and places where the giving of charity in the presence of others would be perfectly proper, or praying in the presence of others would be entirely right, and where fasting might come to the knowledge of others without reproach.

The point which the Great Teacher makes is the motive actuating us. If we are actuated by a selfish motive, if we are seeking show and applause or earthly gain, the procedure cannot bring Divine approval or blessing – “Blessed are the pure in heart.” We may be seen to do good or to pray or to fast, but we are not to do our charities, our praying and our fasting **to be seen**. Of such the Lord says, “They **have received** their reward” – nothing more is coming to them; they get the publicity sought.

THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER

Prayer is a privilege. Jesus did not command His disciples to pray, nor did He even give them a form of prayer until they requested it. “Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed.” The Lord’s people must feel their need of Divine grace and help in order to appreciate the privilege of approaching the throne of heavenly grace. The trials and difficulties, the sorrows and temptations of life frequently impel God’s children to prayer. It marks a better, a higher Christian development when they love to come to the Throne of grace, not only in their sorrows, but also in their joys, to give thanks, to praise, to worship, to adore.

It will be noticed that our Lord did not tell about how the world should pray, but merely taught His disciples: “when **ye** pray.” As a matter of fact, the Gentiles, the world of mankind in general, have no access to the Throne of grace. Only those in covenant relationship with God (Jews and Christians) ever had any Divine assurance that their petitions would be accepted by Him. This may cause surprise to some, so general is the custom of encouraging and exhorting everybody to pray. A brief glance at the situation, however, shows us the fixed principle underlying the matter. Let us note it. The world in general, the race of Adam, was alienated from God through wicked works. Adam was under a covenant with God by which he enjoyed the privileges of a son of God. This included fellowship, communion, prayer and Divine supervision and care even to the extent of everlasting life. But Adam’s disobedience broke that covenant, abolished that covenant-relationship and all its privileges. (Hos. 6:7, R.V.) The only ones who now enjoy the privilege of prayer are those who have been accepted of God back into covenant-relationship. The natural Israelite was so accepted under the Law Covenant; hence the Temple at Jerusalem was called the House of Prayer. It was specifically for the Jewish nation, but all nationalities had the privilege of becoming Jewish Proselytes

*But like
men they
transgressed
the covenant.
There
they dealt
treacherously
with Me.
Hosea 6:7*

and thus of being received into all the privileges of Jews, which included the privilege of prayer.

Our Lord, on the basis of His better sacrifice for sins, made holy and acceptable to still higher privileges of prayer such as became His disciples, His footstep followers. These, from Pentecost onward, were called sons of God and enjoyed the begetting of the Holy Spirit. At first these were only Jewish believers, but in due time the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles was broken down, and all Gentile believers, from the time of Cornelius onward, were accepted as spirit begotten sons and granted all the privileges of prayer. – Acts 10.

These Gentiles did not come into relationship with God through the Mosaic Law Covenant, but through the Covenant of sacrifice, under which they were called and accepted as joint-sacrificers with Christ: “Gather together My saints unto Me, those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice.” (Psa. 50:5.) Only such Gentiles as accept Christ and enter with Him into this covenant of sacrifice can, during this Age, become sons of God and enjoy the privileges of sonship, of which prayer is one. The habit of inviting people out of covenant-relationship with God to pray is both unscriptural and unreasonable. God heareth not sinners (John 9:31); those who come to Him through Christ are acceptable only because Jesus is their Advocate. It is plain to be seen, then, that those who approach God in their own names – without having accepted the Advocate and His terms of discipleship – such can have no standing with the Father and their prayers are unacceptable.

Now we know that God does not hear sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. John 9:31

Instead of exhorting our friends and neighbors to pray to God and to trust for the fulfillment of their prayers, we should give them the Scriptural counsel, to repent of sin and by faith to accept the forgiveness of their sins, according to the testimony of God's Word, by making a full consecration of themselves to be the footstep followers of Jesus. Then, as sons of God, they would have all the privileges of sonship in this present time as well as the glorious prospects hereafter.

VAIN REPETITIONS OF THE HEATHEN

All are heathens or Gentiles – all of the world who have not left the world and come into covenant-relationship with God through Christ. Such outsiders, not understanding the Only Way, the Only Door of God's favor, vainly suppose that they will be heard for their much speaking, and therefore repeat their prayers. Some use praying wheels; others use beads; and still others repeat hundreds of times certain ejaculations.

None are heard except those of Jesus' followers, and Jesus counsels these not to think that the length of their prayers would make them acceptable with the Father. They have no need to offer long prayers, because, as Jesus said, “Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him.” Why then should we ask at all? Because this is the Divine arrangement, and evidently with the purpose of stimulating our faith and of giving us the greater and the more frequent blessings. God thus deals with us as with dear children whom He loves and whom He would educate into the practices of life most helpful to themselves. When Jesus had long prayers to offer they were never uttered in public; He went apart into the mountain. So with His followers; they are to go aside and have their communion with the Father chiefly in private, although

fellowship in public prayer in gatherings of the Lord's people is distinctly approved.

A FORM OF SOUND WORDS

Responding to the request of His disciples Jesus gave a sample of a proper prayer. We note its brevity, its simplicity, its directness, its orderliness.

(1) It opens with an ascription of praise and a plea that we are coming as children to a father: "Our Father, which art in Heaven, hallowed [adored, honored] be Thy name." God's Name represents His character, His Kingdom, His personality. First of all, then, we ascribe honor, reverence, majesty, glory to our great Creator, who through His appointed way we delight to call our Father in Heaven.

(2) Next in order we acknowledge the Divine rule, authority. This means that our hearts are submissive to the will of God, for joy or sorrow, for pleasure or pain, for life or death, and we are continuing to express our confidence in the Divine power and promise that ultimately the Divine will shall be as fully and completely done in the earth as it is now done in Heaven: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is done in Heaven." In this we recognize the coming of Messiah's Kingdom and indirectly our own hopes connected with that Kingdom – that we, if faithful, shall be associated with the Lord in His glorious Throne, in dispensing the blessings of Divine power and mercy to mankind, so as to effect the regeneration of all the willing and obedient of mankind.

(3) Our daily needs, our daily bread, is next the subject of request: "Give us this day our daily bread." How simple! God has promised that our bread and our water shall be sure in the sense that He will not forget us and our needs. In our petitions we merely suggest that we are waiting confidently upon the Lord, nothing doubting His willingness and ability to perform His promises. He has not promised, nor are we to ask for an abundance, wealth, riches, nor are we to specify fine food or luxuries. The thought is, Father, grant us daily such provisions for life's necessities as seemeth to Thee best for us. And should Divine Providence ever fail to make the provision, the believing soul is to recognize that it is neither from oversight nor from lack of power, but because Divine Wisdom sees best thus to deal with us.

(4) "Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors." Here is emphasized the Master's teaching that only the merciful shall obtain mercy, that only the forgiving shall be forgiven. This has no reference whatever to the forgiveness of their original sins – they are past and gone forever to those who remain under the blood; they were covered when we accepted Christ and entered into covenant-relationship with Him. But we have daily shortcomings, weaknesses, imperfections, frailties, trespasses against the Divine Law. These we are to acknowledge, and Divine arrangement has been made for their forgiveness in harmony with our prayers, with but the one proviso, viz., that we appreciate the matter so deeply that we ourselves are acting upon the same principle in our dealings with others.

(5) "Lead us not into temptation [to abandon us there]." We feel our own weakness, imperfection; hence, while knowing that we must be brought in Divine providence into positions of trial and testing, we may well pray not to be abandoned there, not to be left

to our own strength, but that in harmony with the Lord's agreement His grace may be sufficient for us.

(6) The Bible assures us that there is an Evil One, and that he has great power and influence amongst men, that he is "the Prince of the power of the air," and "the god of this Age." How appropriate that we should request the Lord not to abandon us to the Devil's wiles!

The words, "For Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever, Amen," are not found in the oldest Greek manuscripts, and are therefore properly omitted in the Revised Version as being no part of the Scriptures. The kingdom or rule of the present time are not of God. His Kingdom and power and glory are not in evidence. We await the establishment of Messiah's Kingdom for the overthrow of Satan's Empire, and the binding of the Adversary for a thousand years, and the ushering in then of the Divine Kingdom and power and glory, forever.

"AFTER THIS MANNER PRAY YE."

Excerpt from R. 2251

"Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name." This address of God as our Father, as we have just seen, does not imply the fatherhood of God to all mankind; for on the contrary we remember that our great Teacher declared to some, "Ye are of your father, the devil." And the Apostle declares that **we were** "children of wrath" even as others still are. We have "escaped the condemnation that is on the world," and have been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God's dear Son – out from amongst those who are children of wrath into the family of God; so that now, as sons of God, all who believe in Jesus may pray, **"Our Father, which art in Heaven."** This portion of the petition is an address of reverence, an acknowledgment of God's greatness, and implies our humility and littleness. It implies that the worshiper reverences God and is not undertaking to address him in a light or irreverent manner: even his very name is revered as holy by the true worshiper.

"Thy Kingdom come: thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." This petition is not in the nature of a demand, nor even an expression of impatience. Rather it is an acknowledgment on the part of the worshiper that he has **faith** in the divine promise that a Heavenly Kingdom shall in God's due time be established in the earth. It is an acknowledgment that the worshiper not only believes God's promise but that he is in sympathy with it and desires the Lord's Kingdom – longs for it. It thus implies that he is not in sympathy with sin, nor with the kingdoms of this world and the present order and its imperfect social, financial, political and ecclesiastical arrangements. It is an acknowledgment, furthermore, that the worshiper is longing for the condition in which no sin will be possible; – in which God's will shall prevail on earth as well as in heaven. It thus implies that he is out of harmony with sin and in harmony with righteousness, truth, goodness. It is an acknowledgment, nevertheless that God's will

is not done on earth, that his Kingdom has not come to earth as yet; for when his kingdom comes, when Christ, the appointed King, shall take unto himself his great power and reign, the result will speedily be as shown in the Scriptures, that Satan will be bound, evil in general restrained, and on the contrary knowledge, peace and blessing shall fill the whole earth. (Rev. 20:1-3; 21:1-5; 22:1-6.) There is no attempt here to tell the Lord, what must be done, and how and when his Kingdom must be established: the rightly instructed worshiper is supposed to know that he who made all things is thoroughly competent to govern and direct and overrule all things, and that he is “working all things according to the council of his own will.” The worshiper, it is supposed, has gone to the divine Word for instruction and will continue to receive his instructions there respecting the divine purposes: in this petition he is merely expressing his full acquiescence to the divine arrangement and rejoicing therein.

“Give us this day our daily bread.” The words of Matthew here differ slightly from those of Luke. Literally translated Luke’s statement is, “be giving continually our daily bread.” Matthew says “this day,” while Luke says “day by day.” The thought is practically the same, however. It is not an appeal to God for superabundance and much goods laid up for many days; nor is it a request for luxuries: but merely asking, Lord, give us those things which are needful to us daily. Contentment is the very spirit of this petition. Whoever prays to the Lord after **this manner**, and from the heart, will surely be a very thankful and very contented person. And this petition is as broad as the divine promise respecting earthly things would warrant. “Thy bread and thy water shall be sure,” leaves no room for requests for luxuries. Moreover, while this petition is the only one in the prayer of an earthly character, the only one taking hold upon earthly affairs and interests, it also may be understood as relating to spiritual things; indeed, we believe it will be so applied by all God’s children, in proportion as growth is made in grace and knowledge and spirituality. The spiritually minded will be asking for the spiritual food, the spiritual necessities, day by day and will more and more realize that as the Heavenly Father clothes the lilies and feeds the ravens, so, much more, he will care for the temporal interests of all who are seeking first the Kingdom of Heaven and its righteousness, – the righteousness which it will enforce.

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” What a thought! Who can offer a prayer “after **this manner**” and yet be under control of the evil spirit – filled with malice, anger, envy, hatred, strife, being unforgiving, unthankful, resentful, backbiters, slanderers? All these works of the flesh and the devil proceed from evil conditions – not one of them is prompted by true love, such as the Lord inculcates and his spirit inspires. The very essence of Christian principle is love, sympathy, forgiveness of the faults of others, even as we realize we have faults ourselves and that God has graciously forgiven us these for Christ’s sake. Our Lord emphasizes the importance of this forgiving spirit before we can be children of our Father in Heaven, saying, in another place, “With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged;” and with what measure ye measure others, your own conduct shall be measured. (Matt. 7:2.) We remember, also, that he gave a parable illustrating the subject, representing his forgiven disciple as a servant who owed ten thousand talents, whose debt he had freely set aside, and did not press; but when that follower manifested so different a spirit that, finding a fellow servant who owed a few pence, he treated him unmercifully, then the Lord’s mercy and generosity were likewise withdrawn from him. – See Matt. 18:23-35.

Let every Christian in approaching the throne of the heavenly grace, daily inquire of his own heart, whether or not he has forgiven those who are indebted to him, as he desires that God should freely forgive him for Christ's sake. This does not mean the forgiving of financial indebtedness and destruction of our account books, except that on the debtor willing but unable to pay, we should have mercy and patience, even as we hope for mercy of our Lord. Its special application is to moral obligations, transgressions and indebtedness. Nor does this imply that we should pay no attention to the transgressions of others against ourselves – that we should not recognize offences. True, we should not be swift to take offense, we should be slow to anger, we should never take offense unless offense is most evidently *intended*. And then, while we may not forgive in the absolute sense until our forgiveness is asked, according to divine pattern on this subject, yet we should be always in a forgiving attitude of mind: that is to say, we should harbor no vindictive or malicious feelings, we should have no feelings except those of love and sympathy, and a desire to forgive the wrong that has been done us, as soon as possible, and an anxiety to make the way of reconciliation as smooth and easy as possible for the wrong-doer; and we should be on the alert to discover and prompt to rectify any missteps or wrong doings on our own parts.

And ***“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”*** The thought here is slightly obscure; for we all remember that “God tempteth no man.” Amplifying the sentence so as to give us what we believe is the literal translation of it, and adding in brackets some suggestive words to make more plain our conception of the Lord's full thought here, as it was understood by those who heard him, this passage reads thus: – “And bring us not into temptation [merely], but [also] deliver us from the Evil One.” It is a part of the divine arrangement to bring us or permit us to be put into positions of trial or testing. We are not to rebel against the divine wisdom in this matter, but quite to the contrary to acquiesce in it, and to realize that trials are essential to our development. Hence, instead of praying to be kept from temptations, our prayer rather is that when our Lord in his providences brings us into places of testing, he will also stay with us during the trial, and let his grace be sufficient for us, and not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able to bear, but with the temptation provide also a way of escape – delivering us from the Evil One, Satan.

“For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.” These words, although found in our Common Version and in some of the Greek manuscripts, are not found in the *oldest* Greek MSS., the Sinaitic and the Vatican. These would therefore seem to have been human words added to the words of our Lord. So far as this earth is concerned, these words have not been true throughout the Gospel age; the dominion of the earth has not been the Lord's; the power of earth has not been the Lord's; and the glory of the earth has not been the Lord's. On the contrary, Satan has been “the prince of this world” and has worked in the hearts of the children of disobedience, and has blinded the minds of them that believe not the gospel. And the kingdoms and powers of this world have been Satan's, and God's people are waiting for God's Kingdom to come, as represented in *verse ten*, to overthrow the kingdoms of this world, and to establish the Kingdom of righteousness: to bind Satan and to destroy the works of the flesh and the devil.

Pray Through Me

Jesus said to him,

**“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to
the Father except through Me.”**

John 14:6

Jesus directed His followers to pray to His Father, for He Himself directed His prayers to the Father in Heaven. Our sins are against God, the Heavenly Father, and His Law is thus ignored and broken, but we have an Advocate through whose merits we can come to the Father, but this Advocate does not stand in the place of the Father. “No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.” If we merely come to the Advocate and do not proceed further we are not going to the Father. We must come to the Father in the Name and through the merit of the ONE who redeemed us.

At the same time, I cannot imagine how there can be any objection of the Father or anybody else to our offering a petition or thanksgiving to our Savior for all that He was so willing to do for us. The Scriptures clearly tell us: “All men should honor the Son as they honor the Father.” To come to the Son and to respect Him and to offer him a petition and to give Him our praise and thanksgiving would not be to come to Him and seek His forgiveness for sins we had committed. He Himself gives us this injunction: “OUR Father, forgive us our trespasses.” Q734

Jesus was the first One who made the Covenant of Sacrifice. Holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners, He presented His body a living sacrifice to God, saying, "Lo! I come, as in the volume of the Book it is written of Me, to do Thy will, O My God." (Psalm 40:7,8; Hebrews 10:7.) Thus He surrendered His will, and with it everything and every power He possessed. During the three and a half years of His ministry, He zealously carried out this Covenant unto death, even the death of the Cross. For this cause God highly exalted Him, giving Him the perfection of the spirit nature, to which he attained at His resurrection – glory, honor and immortality forever. – Phil. 2:8-11.

The work of this Gospel Age is to call out from amongst the sinner race such as may have a similar spirit, or disposition, to that which Jesus had. None, like Him, are holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners; but what they lack in this respect is made up to them by the imputation of the merit of Jesus, so that, as the Apostle declares, they are accepted of God in the Beloved One. And being thus accepted, they are privileged to enter into the same Covenant of Sacrifice which Jesus entered into. With Him, they say to the Father, Lo! we present ourselves in harmony with everything written in Your Book, to do Your will even unto death. It is the same Covenant! and in describing this, the Apostle declares that we walk in Jesus' steps and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ. – 1 Pet. 2:21; Col. 1:24.

Many seem not aware that only such as are in covenant relationship with God have any right to go to God in prayer, to ask either forgiveness of sins or anything else. Nevertheless, this must be clear to every one who will think on the subject. God declares that He heareth not sinners, and that He has made only one provision whereby any may come to Him. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me," He declares. (John 14:6.) He is the Advocate for those who become His disciples and who engage to walk in His steps; but He is not the Advocate for the world – merely for the special class, His followers. In due time, at the close of this Age and the opening of the Millennium, He will become the Mediator for the whole world, will make satisfaction for all their sins, and will take over every member of the race under His Divine supervision. His Mediatorial Kingdom is arranged with this in view. Even then, the world will not go to the Father with their sins nor with their prayers, but merely go to the great Mediator between God and men – between God and the world. They will have blessings and favors then abundantly, under the arrangement provided; but they can have nothing now. The only ones who can get God's favors at the present time are those who come by the appointed Way – through the Covenant of Sacrifice.
R. 5690

From this standpoint the privilege of prayer is a very wonderful one: it implies that the suppliant is on terms of intimate acquaintance with the great Creator of the universe, so that he is welcomed into the divine presence and heart. In accord with this the symbolical representation is that the prayers of the saints of God ascend before him as a sweet incense – the heavenly Father is pleased to receive the humblest worship and reverent petitions of his child adopted into his family through Jesus Christ. R. 3805

Pray Together

19 “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.

20 “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

Matthew 18:19-20

The Lord’s people are encouraged to take part in the prayer meeting, and individually they are to approach daily the Throne of Grace. Our Lord has declared that where two or three are met together in His name He will be in their midst. When a petition is made having something of general interest, we are to unite our hearts that the blessing may be spread abroad and extend to many hearts. The suggestion is that the Lord’s people should do considerable of their praying in fellowship, in cooperation. But this would not hinder our private praying to the Lord, hourly if need be. R. 5745

Our Lord himself set us the example of offering prayer in public; not only in the presence of his disciples frequently, but also in the presence of unbelievers at least once – at the tomb of Lazarus. (John 11:41,42; See Luke 10:21.) That which is generally termed “The Lord’s Prayer” was not only uttered in the presence of the disciples, but is a sample of a collective prayer. It addresses “Our Father,” not My Father; it requests forgiveness of “**our** sins,” not my sins; as “**we** forgive” others, and not as I forgive others. It is a sample of a collective prayer, specially. R. 2023



THE CHURCH PRAYED FOR PETER

Excerpt from R. 4347

St. Peter is supposed to have been imprisoned in the famous Castle of Antonio, possibly in the very same room in which our Lord was arraigned before Pilate, and the same one to which Paul was subsequently taken when mobbed in Jerusalem. Peter had a guard of four quaternions (four soldiers each), who relieved each other every three hours. Two of the four were chained to Peter’s arms, one to each arm, and a third was outside the door and a fourth in the passage leading to the outer iron gate. The power of Divine grace helping in every time of need and giving peace amid alarms, is well illustrated in this case by the fact that under all these circumstances St. Peter was fast asleep when the angel of the Lord came to deliver him. The proprieties of the case are also illustrated by the fact that Peter’s friends, the Church, were not asleep, but praying for

him. It was not for him to pray for himself deliverance from the power of Agrippa, for he had already consecrated his life unto death, and properly should feel quite ready to lay down his life at this time, if such proved to be the Lord's will in respect to him. For him to have asked for the prolongation of his life would have been to ask amiss, and would have manifested a wilfulness incompatible with a full consecration to the Lord's will. But with the Church it is different. They could with all propriety, while expressing to the Lord their confidence in the Divine supervision of the Church's affairs, tell him also of their love for St. Peter and of how much his sacrificing in the service of the Truth had done for them and was doing for them. They could properly enough express the hope that it might be the Lord's will that he should continue with them for their joy and comfort and upbuilding in the "most holy faith." It should not surprise us either that this prayer-meeting on St. Peter's account lasted all through the night and, for aught we know, other meetings of the same kind may have been held besides the one referred to in this lesson, which was at the home of Mary, the mother of Mark, the writer of the Book of Mark and the cousin of Barnabas, presumably the unnamed person of Mark 14:51.

It may be asked, Would it not have been appropriate for the Church to have offered prayer and then to have retired as usual, leaving the results entirely with the Lord? We reply that the examples given us in the Scriptures fully warranted the all-night prayer-meeting and even its continuance for several days. Do we not know of our Lord's remaining all night in the mountain at prayer? Do we not remember his long and repeated prayers in Gethsemane? Do we not remember the Apostle's exhortation to the Church, "Praying without ceasing, and in everything giving thanks"? Giving this a liberal construction as signifying a prayerful attitude of mind and continued looking to the Lord for his grace and guidance, nevertheless our Lord's parable of the importunate widow and her repeated comings and her reward all teach the same lesson of importunity. Besides, our Lord thus applied the parable, saying, "Shall not God avenge his very elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily." – Luke 18:7,8. . . .

The Lord certainly does not wish us to understand that he has no oversight, arrangement or plans of his own, nor that the Divine arm may be moved by our prayers in any direction at our pleasure, at any time. On the contrary, the Lord assures that all of his purposes shall be accomplished and that his Word shall not return to him void, "but shall prosper in the thing whereto it was sent." (Isa. 55:11.) Nothing can alter the definite, fixed outlines of the Divine program. But the Lord has evidently left certain of the filling in of our experiences subject to change or modification. These minor details he is ready to use for the blessing of his people, for the development of their faith. Thus in St. Peter's case the Lord was doubtless intending a deliverance in some manner, because he had a further work for him to do, but he allowed it to come about in such a manner as to indicate it as a reward of the faith of those who prayed for him. Otherwise the deliverance might have come sooner or later, and in response to faith or works along some other line.

The Lord evidently desires to cultivate in us a quality of faith, trust. Therefore he has made faith a condition for all of his blessings of the present age, and distinctly tells us that without faith it is impossible to please him, and that he desires us to "walk by faith and not by sight." – 2 Cor. 5:7.

Pray Alone

Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there.

Matthew 14:23

After the multitudes had been fed, toward the close of the day, they evidently were loth to leave the company of one so able and willing to care for their necessities, and probably it was to expedite their dispersion that our Lord urged the apostles to start in their boat for Capernaum.

Our Lord, after dispersing the multitude, sought the solitude of the mountain in prayer. Though he sometimes prayed with his disciples in their hearing, so that they recorded the words of his prayer, it is evident that he was not content with merely these opportunities, but frequently sought the Father alone, as he has counseled his disciples to do, saying, "Enter into thy closet [private apartment] and pray to thy Father in secret." (Matt. 6:6.) All Christians of experience have realized the value of such secret personal communion with the heavenly Father, nor are we surprised that our Lord Jesus felt the need of a similar communion. His knowledge of the Father, and his fellowship with him before the world was made, so far from satisfying him and rendering prayer unnecessary, rather stimulated his desire for further fellowship and communion, especially as he was alone in the world – even his beloved disciples, not having yet been begotten of the spirit (John 7:39), could not enter into fellowship with him in respect to spiritual things, nor appreciate the trials which came to him as a perfect man, in a way in which they do not come to fallen humanity. He needed such fellowship with the heavenly Father for the refreshment of his own zeal, for the keeping warm of his own love and devotion, which was the basis of his consecration and his daily sacrificing of himself as a man, even unto death.

There is no intimation given that our Lord spent much time at prayer, morning and evening, yet we may reasonably suppose that he never neglected to seek the Father's face; but these brief seasons of worship and prayer daily were evidently supplemented by occasions like the one mentioned in this lesson, in which our Lord spent, apparently, considerable of the night in prayer and communion with the Father. There is a lesson in this for the Lord's people. The duties of life, pressing upon us daily, are not to be neglected; each is to feel, as our Lord expressed it, "I must be about my Father's business," and this would imply, ordinarily, short prayers, which our Lord commended, saying, "When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be ye not therefore like unto them; for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him." (Matt. 6:7,8.) And the example

of a prayer, given his disciples, is brief. Nevertheless, in proportion as we feel the importance of the great work in which, by the Lord's favor, we are privileged to be co-laborers with him, our hearts should be and will be drawn to seasons of spiritual communion; – not necessarily a prayer in the sense of making requests of the Father, for much of such seasons will doubtless be devoted to thanksgiving for the mercies and favors already experienced, and for the gracious promises upon which we base our faith for the future, and communion with the Lord, in the sense of pondering his will respecting us, and how we may most acceptably serve and please him. R. 2649



To Be With God by Simon Dewey

We may be sure that in this miracle [of feeding the multitude] as in the others, our Lord intended to inculcate some important lesson of faith or practice – not so much for the public as for his special followers, his disciples. We may presume, therefore, that he had a twofold purpose in sending them away by ship while he remained and dismissed the multitude, telling them that his discourses and miracles were at an end. One of these purposes doubtless was private fellowship and communion with the Father in the mountain – apart from the multitude – apart even from his beloved twelve apostles. There are times when we love to join our hearts and voices with others at the throne of heavenly grace, and come as a company of the Lord's people into fellowship and communion with him, and there are other times when we seem to need individual, personal, private communion with God, as our Lord seemed to have required on this occasion.

Our Lord's second object was, doubtless, to give his disciples opportunity for thinking over the miracle and talking it over by themselves in his absence. They might thus speak more freely one with the other, and get more benefit than if he had been with them, and they would have been under a certain degree of restraint in his presence. The Lord wished this great lesson to be thoroughly impressed upon their minds: it would be helpful to them in future years to remember how he had power to increase their temporal food without human interference and independent of human conditions. It would be a lesson also respecting the spiritual food, that they should not despise the day of small things; that if sent by him to break the bread of life to the people, they should not be fearful and hindered by reason of unpropitious conditions prevailing, but should have full confidence in him that he had the power to overrule in all the affairs of life, that all his gracious purposes might be accomplished. R. 3333

Pray In Secret

5 “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 6 “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

Matthew 6:5-6

We have been surprised occasionally to hear some professed follower of Christ urging the impropriety of a form of prayer in words, and of assuming any particular posture in prayer, or of praying at any stated time, asserting that kneeling in prayer is unnecessary – that all of life should be a prayer. Such a proposition is astounding to us – the logic of it is incomprehensible. True, we are to pray always, to be always in the spirit of prayer, to be so devoted to the Lord that we shall ever manifest in our lives the beauty of holiness, that we shall be shining lights in the world. But we hold that **no Christian** can maintain this heart attitude, or glorify God in his life, without going to the Lord in a particular and formal manner, and preferably upon his knees, and if possible in solitude at certain times. “Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to Thy Father which is in secret.” – Matthew 6:6.

Our dear Master’s constant attitude of prayer did not hinder His more particular devotions when He turned aside from the busy affairs of His life to converse with the Father in secret – sometimes briefly and sometimes spending the entire night in prayer in the mountain solitude. The very isolation of the Lord from all human help drew Him the nearer and the oftener to the Father in prayer and communion. So it is, or should be, with all the true followers of the Master. As we grow in His character-likeness we will, like Him, pray without ceasing, in everything giving thanks, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord, recognizing Him as the center of all our hopes and our joys.

We all realize at times the inability of even our dearest ones to enter fully into and appreciate our sorrows and our needs. They are unable to sympathize with us fully in our struggles and our trials. This realization should send us, as it did our dear Lord, the more frequently to the Throne of Grace, where we are always sure of having the ear of One who understands us perfectly and can make all needful allowance for our frailty; who knows the limit of our ability to do and to be, in our imperfect flesh; and who can give us the perfect sympathy which none other can give. He never fails to hear and to heed the cry of His children, even though He may for a wise purpose in love defer for a time a visible answer to their pleas. R. 5480

“COME, MY PEOPLE.” – R. 1787

“Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.”

– Isaiah 26:20

THERE is an affectionate tenderness about these words of our Heavenly Father which helps us to realize his great love for his people, and his special care over them. Through his prophet, taking the standpoint of the end of this age, he is forewarning us of a great time of trouble which is just imminent (verses 5,6,21) – “a time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation,” when the whole present order of things, civil, social and religious, shall be swept with the besom of destruction. Yet in the midst of it all he would have his people in rest and peace in him, as saith the prophet, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.” – Verses 3,4.

And again the Lord had another of his prophets put into our mouths those beautiful words of trust and confidence – “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth [the present social order] be removed, and though the mountains [governments] be carried into the midst of the sea [overthrown by the turbulent sea of world-wide anarchy]; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swellings thereof. . . . The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.” (Psa. 46.) Surely, “like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.” – Psa. 103:13.

But while appreciating very gratefully this special love and care for us as his people, in the comfort, encouragement and protection afforded us by our Heavenly Father in the midst of the world’s great tribulation, we would come far short of having his spirit if we should regard the matter with self-complacency, forgetful of his great love for the whole world also, which, veiled behind the clouds of his righteous indignation against their sins, in wisdom strikes the heavy blow which will shatter all their idols and humble their pride in the dust, that so the sore wounds of his wrath may prepare for their everlasting healing. If God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish [eternally], but have everlasting life,” he loves them still, and it is his love that wields the rod for their correction. So also would he have his people regard his judgments, and while rejoicing in the sunshine of his favor, because by faith and obedience they have come into an attitude which can receive it, he would have them share his spirit towards the world; and while the blows of his righteous indignation fall heavily upon them, he would have us point them to the cause of their calamities and to the only remedy – “In returning [to God] and rest [in him alone] shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.” “Be still,” saith the Lord, “and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” – Isa. 30:15; Psa. 46:10.

*Gather
My saints
together to
Me, those who
have made
a covenant
with Me by
sacrifice.
Psalm 50:5*

But who are those whom the Lord is pleased to designate by the endearing name, “My people?” Does this class include every one upon whom his name is named? No, for that would include a great number of false professors. As the Psalmist expresses it, it includes all those who have made a covenant with God by sacrifice (Psa. 50:5) – all the consecrated and faithful children of God, however young or weak they may be, whose

hearts are fixed firmly and resolutely to be true loyal and obedient children by his assisting grace.

To be numbered among the people of God is a very great privilege; but it means much more than many seem to understand – much more both on their part, and on God’s part. On their part, it signifies, not merely a name to live, in some great organization which bears the Christian name, but that they have become sons and heirs of God through Christ, that they have fully consecrated themselves to God to follow in the footsteps of his dear Son, that they have renounced the vain pomp and glory of the world and have solemnly covenanted to live apart from its spirit, ambitions, hopes and aims; and not only so, but that, in pursuance of that covenant, they are striving daily to be faithful, and meekly to take up their cross and follow their leader and head, Christ Jesus.

On God’s part it signifies the fulfillment of all his gracious promises to such through Christ, both for the life that now is, and for that which is to come. It signifies that in the present life we have his fatherly love, care, discipline, counsel, teaching, protection and encouragement to the end, and that afterwards we shall be received into his glorious presence and everlasting rest and joy and peace. Oh, how blessed to be the people of God! even in the present life the reward of his favor is beyond computation. Through all the age God has permitted his people to be scattered as sheep in the midst of wolves, and as wheat in the midst of tares; but now the harvest of the age is come, and their gathering together unto him is due. They have been growing in the midst of that great organization, the nominal Christian church, which God calls Babylon (confusion), but which men call Christendom (Christ’s Kingdom). Upon this great system which has appropriated the name of Christ while misrepresenting his teaching and his spirit (although in possession of his Word of truth and of many advantages of precept and example from his saints so long permitted to dwell in her midst), God is about to pour his indignation, which will involve the whole world with it; but before doing so, he forewarns his people to come out of her (Babylon), that they be not partakers of her sins, and that they receive not of her plagues. (Rev. 18:4.) But while calling them thus to come out of Babylon, he calls them also to come into another place, or condition rather – “Enter thou *into thy chambers* and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself . . . until the indignation be overpast.”

The place of hiding is the secret place of the Most High, under the shadow of the Almighty. (Psa. 91:1-9.) This secret place of the Most High, Beloved, is the place of intimate communion and fellowship with God, through the blessed privilege of prayer and through faith in his precious Word and his promised providential care.

“When all around our souls give way,
He then is all our hope and stay.”

Oh, how precious is this hiding place! What rest and refreshment we find in the midst of the commotion that is even now bestirring the whole world, but especially the nations of Christendom – rest from the pride and folly of man in their abortive efforts to readjust the present unsatisfactory social order; and rest from the strife of tongues in an equally vain attempt to evolve the clear principles of truth and righteousness from the present confusion of human traditions. (Psa. 31:20.) Here we find rest, peace,

light and joy, which the world can neither give nor take away.

Few indeed are those who can understand our motives in thus withdrawing from the world and from the various organizations of the nominal Christian church to walk alone with God; and many are the reproaches which such must endure for his name's sake. But fear not; "shut thy doors [of faith] about thee," and heed not the reproaches; turn a deaf ear to them, and "Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread" (Isa. 8:13); and, "Above all, take [for the conflict before you] the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."

It is well, especially in this time of greatest need, that the Lord's people should consider the value of this portion of the Christian's armor, and that the doors of their faith should thoroughly shut them in to the secret place of the Most High. When the reproaches fall thick and fast, when they are told that they have left the faith and gone after fables, that they have incurred the Lord's displeasure, and that their sufferings for Christ's sake are the penalties they deserve, when their names are cast out as evil and they are separated from the company of those whom they have long regarded as the Lord's people, because they bear his name, ah, then is the time for firmly grasping the shield of faith and for adopting the triumphant language of the Psalmist:

"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? . . . Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident In time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me: he shall set me upon a rock. . . . When my father and my mother [my most trusted human friends] forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me: thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." – Psa. 27:1,3,5,10; 23:1,4; also 56:4.

It is to inspire such a faith as this that the Lord has offered us, in addition to all his precious promises, so many encouragements to simple, childlike trust in him, and that he has bidden us turn a deaf ear to the reproaches of men, saying – "Hearken unto me, **ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law**; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. . . . I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be made as grass, and forgettest the Lord, thy Maker, that has stretched forth the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, and hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? . . . I have put **my words** in thy mouth, and I have **covered thee in the shadow of mine hand**, that I may plant the heavens [establish the new heavens], and lay the foundations of the earth [the new earth], and say unto Zion [the people tried and proved by these afflictions to be the worthy heirs of the new Kingdom – the new heavens and earth], Thou art **my people**." – Isa. 51:7,12,13,16.

What condescension on the part of the Almighty to thus consider our weakness when the darts of the enemy wound our hearts, and to pour in the balm of his consolation. He would not have one of his children whom Christ has made free to come again under

the bondage of “the fear of man which bringeth a snare.” (Prov. 29:25.) He would have every man in Christ realize his liberty from sin and superstition and his solemn accountability to God for all his thoughts and words and doings. – “Sanctify **the Lord of hosts himself**, and let **him** be your fear, and let **him** be your dread.”

Just here the words of the Apostle Paul (1 Thes. 5:21; Gal. 6:4) are worthy of special notice – “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good,” and “Let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone and not in another.” Thus every individual in Christ is reminded of his own personal responsibility in matters of faith and conduct. Not until he has proved what is truth and righteousness, accepting the Word of God as the only standard of authority, is it proper to take a resolute stand; but, having proved “what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God,” nothing should be able to unsettle his faith or turn him from the line of duty, and no fear of man should bring him again into the snare of bondage to superstition or human traditions or opinions of others. If each individual prove his own work – his faith in the doctrines and his conduct in life – by the square and compass of God’s Word, “then shall he have rejoicing in himself and not in another” – *i.e.*, his faith, no matter through what privileged human agent or agency it may have been received, will be so established by the Word of the Lord that it will be **his** own, and in no sense dependent upon another.

It was the neglect of this principle, of the right and duty of the individual judgment in proving all things by the inspired Word, that brought upon the Church the snare of the great apostacy, which set up infamous popes to dictate in matters of faith and conduct and subvert the consciences of men. Let us remember the command, “Sanctify **the Lord of hosts himself**, and let **him** be your fear, and let **him** be your dread.” Let us fear and dread to displease him; let us see to it that we know and love righteousness and that we have the law of God, not in our heads only, but also in our hearts, for so shall we ever find acceptance with him; and to such, who in faith continually rely upon the Lord, who go forth, strong in the strength which he supplies through faith, to do valiant service for truth and righteousness, comes also the blessed assurance, “Fear not, little flock, it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.”

While the storm of trouble that is to engulf the whole world will affect all men, both individually and collectively, the Lord’s people, who seek only to draw yet closer to him, entering more fully into the secret place of communion and fellowship and rest in him, and shutting the doors of faith about them, will there be safely hidden from the alarm and fear and trembling that will take hold upon all other classes; and while they patiently endure its effects upon their temporal interests, they will rejoice not only in the knowledge of God’s overruling providence, in the whirlwind and in the storm as well as in the calms of life, but also in his blessed assurance that his wrath will be thus revealed only “**for a little moment**,” and then will his righteous Kingdom be manifested in power and great glory, and they shall shine forth as the sun.

“Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.” Oh blessed invitation! Lord, we will trust in the covert of thy wings.



SECRET PRAYER

Excerpt from R. 489

. . . Secret prayer is a test of sincerity. Public worship may be attended from various motives, good or bad. But private devotion, secret prayer – what can induce it but the motives pure and lofty, the desire heaven-inspired and heaven aspiring, the thirst after righteousness, the love of God! Who that loves not God or desires not to love Him, can have any business with Him in private or will seek a private interview? The hypocrite may pray in public, and he may pray in his family. Here others see him. But he will not pray in secret. If he attempt it, he will soon abandon it, for he expects from it neither profit nor pleasure. There is hope for a man as long as he is mindful of his secret devotions. He may have left his love, and the things which remain may be ready to die. But the fact that he still feels after God in secret places, if happily he may find Him, is evidence, first of his own sincerity; secondly, that the Spirit of divine grace is with him, and drawing him to the fountain of life.

The closet removes all the external restraints to devotion. The sentiments of the public service are suited to the general sympathy; and this measure of emotion is not transcended, except in cases of overwhelming power and overflowing feeling, when the impetuous tide breaks through all restraints. But there are no restraints whatever in the closet. There, no feeling need be suppressed. The tear may flow. The passion of penitence may be indulged. The agony of prayer may be exercised. There are none to be annoyed, none to pass the harsh judgment, none to ascribe your feeling to weakness or hypocrisy. In that lone place there is no ear but God's to hear. And are there not confessions to be made which no ear but his should hear? In that lone place there is no eye but God's to see. And who but God can understand and sympathize with your secret sorrows? He is thy father – thy father in heaven. "Cast all your care upon him, for he careth for you." And this is the promise of Jesus: "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." A father loves his sick and sorrowful child most. So Jesus has an especial love and sympathy for him that has no helper. "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you, and ye shall be comforted."

The closet is favorable to devotion. It not only removes hindrances, but it furnishes helps. It shuts out things visible. We leave the dusty and crowded thoroughfare of the world, and turn aside to rest a little in the sweet shade of the tree of life – to drink of the spring that gushes from the rock to commune with God and think of heaven. The world is not there, pride is not there, passion is not there. Eternity is there, God is there, Jesus is there, the Holy Spirit is there, angels are there. We feel as Jacob felt as he lay down to sleep on the rocky knoll, and awoke in the midst of hovering angels. "And he said, surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. . . ."

The Christian comes forth from his closet refreshed with grace, filled with the Spirit, his graces shining, like the face of Moses when he came down from the mount of communion. . . . It will be manifest to yourself, and visible to others. . . . You shall run and not weary, walk and not faint, and mount up with wings like an eagle.

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Pray For Your Enemies

**Bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.
Luke 6:28**

**But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do
good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully
use you and persecute you.
Matthew 5:44**

Many bring upon themselves persecutions for foolishness' sake and for being busybodies in other men's affairs. Let us heed the Apostle's word along this line and avoid persecutions or sufferings for evil doing of any kind; but, as again it is declared, if any man suffer as a Christian let him glorify God on this behalf. (1 Pet. 4:16.) It is well, too, that we preserve in this matter as in all others the spirit of a sound mind. There are, for instance, some that evidently imagine themselves persecuted when really they are very kindly treated, and are the victims of their own morbid imaginations. The Lord's people should be so filled with the spirit of thankfulness and gratitude and appreciation that they would be in no danger of erring in this matter. They should be so generous in their thoughts of the motives and intentions of their friends and neighbors that they would be in no danger of misapprehending them and feeling persecuted by those who are really their well-wishers.

As perfect love casts out fear, so also it casts out these false impressions of evil doing or intention toward us. The benevolent heart, full of love for others, will rather prefer to suppose that slights are unintentional oversights, or to put some other similar good construction upon the conduct of their friends, only yielding to an appreciation of persecution when its intention is unmistakable. Even then it should think generously of the persecutor, realize his share in the fall and be disposed to pray for those who despitefully use them and persecute them. Blessed are such ones who thus hold to righteousness and the spirit of love toward their enemies and persecutors, and who may be sure, therefore, that they are being persecuted for their fidelity to truth and righteousness and not for personal idiosyncrasies and peculiarities. Blessed are they, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. The Lord is looking for those who are so faithful

to the principles of righteousness that they will exercise it toward their enemies even when being persecuted by them and on its account. If the Kingdom of heaven is for such it is assuredly but a little flock. Let us strive the more diligently to be of that little flock – to make our calling and election sure. R. 3736



BE YE KIND one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." "For if ye do not forgive those who trespass against you, neither will your Father in Heaven forgive you." This means that if we would insist upon having from others abject acknowledgement of everything that is wrong, and if we carry this matter of judgment to an extreme, it would indicate that our own hearts are in a wrong condition. And then the best thing that could be done for us by the Lord would be to give us some of our own medicine. By this He would be teaching us a corrective lesson, that thus we might become sympathetic toward others.

This matter, then, of forgiveness and sympathy toward the world, is one that God inculcates or enjoins upon His children after they come into His family. And this is in order to give us education. "For what son is he whom the father correcteth not?" "For if we be without chastisement, . . . then are. . . we not sons." These lessons are intensified to us as we grow in grace and in knowledge. – Hebrews 12:7,8.

As our knowledge increases, we see how all fell through one man's disobedience. And this gives us a basis for sympathy. And our sympathy increases as we become more mature children of God. God desires this, that by the time we are ready to graduate, we will be very helpful. This should become the pleasure of our hearts – to be sympathetic with our enemies, no matter how they treat us. We know that they are doing these things because of the Adversary's influence over them. And we should desire to bless them and to do them all the good we can. The fact that they have done evil to us should not alter our attitude toward them – to do good unto all men as we have opportunity, praying for those who despitefully use us and persecute us.

The thought would not be that we should especially devote our prayers to our enemies and persecutors, but rather that we should pray *for* them instead of *against* them. Some who are immature in spiritual things might think, "I will pray to God to punish them." But Jesus says we are not to do that. "Pray for your enemies." What shall we ask for them? He does not tell us this. The best thing we could ask for them would be that we might be used, or useful, if possible, in breaking this superstition upon them, that the eyes of their understanding might be opened. That is the very best thing we could ask for them. We may pray for them along that line, and God will bless *us*. And if it is possible for us to be helpful to them, God will show us how to do it. R. 5275

Persist in Prayer

Parable of the Persistent Widow

1 Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart,

2 saying: “There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man.

3 “Now there was a widow in that city, and she came to him, saying, ‘Get justice for me from my adversary.’

4 “And he would not for a while, but afterward he said within himself, ‘Though I do not fear God nor regard man,

5 ‘yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.’”

6 Then the Lord said, “Hear what the unjust judge said.

7 “And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?

8 “I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”

Luke 18:1-8

JESUS spoke a parable, of which the *gist*, or *import* is, "That men ought always to pray and not to faint." That parable tells how even an unjust judge would, because of importunity, heed an appeal for justice and would finally yield to its demands, although he cared little for the principle itself. In the parable the woman was importunate in her petitions for justice against those who were doing her injury. The Lord seems to inculcate just such importunity in prayer, and gives this as an illustration of how His people should continue in their prayers; not that they should pray all the time, in the sense of never getting off their knees, or of never doing anything except to pray, but that they should *continue* in their prayers and not grow faint or disheartened. R. 5310

ANSWERS OFTEN DELAYED

Excerpt from R. 4983

The answer to our prayer is not always granted immediately; but after we have made sure that our requests are in accord with the promises, those things which lie very close to our hearts become our continual prayer, associating in our minds with all of life's duties and interests, the heart gravitating continually toward the thing we have desired of the Lord, and on suitable opportunities repeating to Him the request. This is the kind of prayer which the Lord commended, saying, "Men ought always to pray and not to faint." (Luke 18:1.) The Lord's people ought to continue asking for the right things with some degree of persistency, and should not grow weary, hopeless, faithless, faint in their hearts.

Doubtless there are many reasons why the Lord does not promptly grant all of our requests which are in accordance with His will, in harmony with His Word. We may not know all of these reasons; but some of them are apparent. Undoubtedly one reason for the Lord's delay in answering us is often to test the strength and the depth of our desires for the good things that we request of Him.

For instance, He informs us that He is more willing to give His Holy Spirit to us who ask than are earthly parents to give good things to their children. Yet the giving of His Holy Spirit is a gradual process; and we are enabled to receive it only in proportion as we are emptied of the worldly or selfish spirit. It requires time to become thus emptied of self and prepared for the mind of Christ; in some it requires longer for this than in others; but all need emptying in order to receive the refilling.

He that seeketh findeth, but the more he seeketh the more he findeth; to him that knocketh it shall be opened, but his continual knocking and his increasing interest in the knocking means his increasing desire to enter, so that as the door of privilege, of opportunity, swings slowly open before him, his courage and his strength increase as he seeks to avail himself of the opening. Thus every way the blessing is greater than if the Lord were to answer the petitions hastily.

We are to think of our Heavenly Father as rich and benevolent, kind and generous, yet *wise* as well as *loving*. We are to suppose that He will have pleasure in giving us the desires of our hearts if those desires are in harmony with His plan, which He has

already framed on such lines as to include not only our very highest and best interests, but the highest and best interests of all His creatures. Then, whatever comes, His well-informed children can have all the desires of their hearts, because their hearts are in full accord with the Lord; and they desire nothing of the Lord except the good things of His purpose and promise.

PRAYER - ITS USE AND ABUSE

Excerpt from R. 5707

The Lord uses this parable as an illustration of our coming to the Heavenly Father – not that the Heavenly Father is an unjust Judge nor that the Church is a widow, but that the parable is merely an illustration of the reward of importunity in prayer. The woman’s persistency in continually coming to the judge illustrated what Jesus wished to emphasize. In concluding the parable, He says that if an unjust judge would grant this poor widow her petition because of her continued asking, what might we expect of our Heavenly Father? When His children cry unto Him day and night, He is sure to hear their prayers. This implies that the prayers are proper ones for the Lord to answer. We cannot think that God would do anything but that which is just



The Persistent Widow

and right and proper, and in harmony with this thought the instruction to the Lord’s people is that in coming to the Lord in prayer we should make sure that we ask only for the things pleasing to Him. Therefore Christians who live near to God are the best qualified to offer prayer that would be acceptable and would be answered.

BLESSINGS EASILY GAINED NOT APPRECIATED

Our lesson teaches continuity in prayer – not merely that we pray once, and then say, “I have prayed about this matter, and now I will leave it.” But the question may arise, “Why continue to ask? God knows every need. Why not leave the entire matter with Him?” The Scriptures seem to answer this question by showing us that we need to ask for our own benefit, that we may be ready to appreciate the answer when it comes. If we get things without our realization of our need of them, they would come to us so easily that in our fallen condition they would be unappreciated.

Indeed it is true that the majority of people receive daily many, many blessings that they are never thankful for; they do not appreciate them. God sends the sunshine and the rain, as our Lord Jesus told us, upon the evil and the good; and He intimates that these are great blessings from God. Yet how few people really appreciate the rain as a blessing from God! How few, when they see the sunshine, appreciate the blessing God is sending to them through the sunshine! Because these blessings are very common, and come without the asking, they are very little appreciated by the majority.

But the Christian, having the eyes of his understanding opened, appreciates more and more all these blessings as from the Lord. Therefore as he comes to realize his needs, and what is promised in the Lord's Word, he knows that he may advantageously go to the Lord in prayer that these needs may be supplied. His heart has come into that receptive attitude where he is ready to receive God's blessings thankfully and profit by them.

PERSEVERANCE IN PRAYER NECESSARY

Excerpt from R. 5832

There is a difference also between prayer and supplication. Prayer would be any petition, great or small; whereas supplication would mean a special desire for a thing – an earnest entreaty. Whether it be ordinary prayer or be supplication – an intense form of prayer – we should always come in the spirit, with appreciation of the fact that we are coming into the presence of the great Jehovah, and that it is a privilege accorded to only a very few at this time.

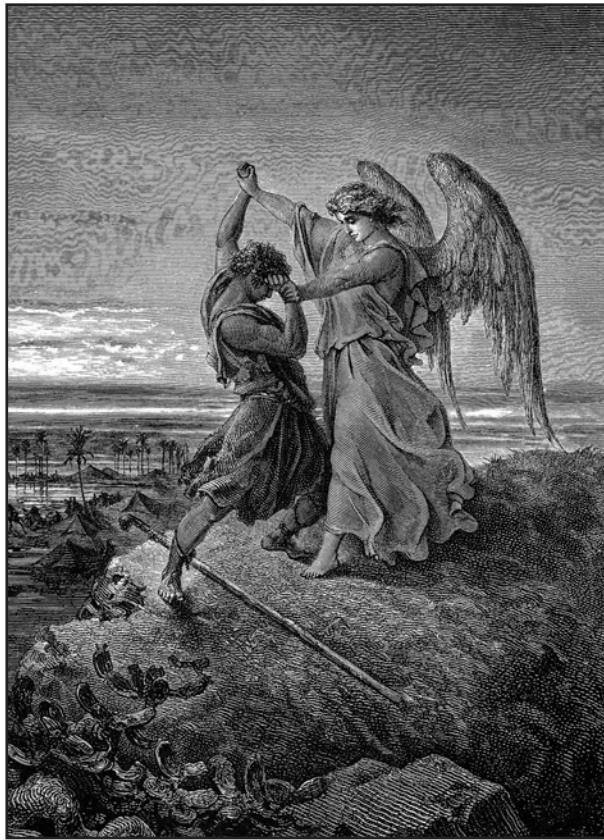
And we are to “watch thereunto, with all perseverance.” If we really believe that the Lord has indicated that we should pray, and that it is His will to give us the things we need, and above all His Holy Spirit, then we should be alert to note when we receive the answer to our petitions. If we pay no attention to our prayers after they are uttered, never look to see whether they are being answered, this would indicate that we have not really appreciated our need. It would seem that this is the reason why God does not answer many of our prayers more quickly. We should learn to watch for the answers to our prayers, and thus learn the lesson of appreciation and gratitude to Him as we realize that He has granted us our request.

We are, then, to pray with **perseverance**, not watching merely for a few hours for the fulfillment, nor merely for a day or a week. The Lord might see best to defer the fulfillment of our petition, either to test our faith or to bring us into a better condition to receive the blessing. Perhaps we have all had these experiences, and were thus more hungry for the answer when it came. We are to be sure that the Lord is never indifferent to the pleading of His children, and will pursue the course which is best for us, just as would a faithful teacher with his pupil, and as would a loving parent with his child. Our Father in Heaven wishes to give us His best things, and will not withhold anything that is really good. (Psalm 84:11.) But He requires sometimes that we shall wait for a considerable time. At other times, there may be a speedy answer to our petitions.

Whether we are on our knees or in the busy walks of life our hearts should go out continually to the Lord for His guidance in all our affairs and experiences, that we may serve Him in a manner that will be pleasing and acceptable to Him, that we may be shielded from temptations that without His aid would be beyond our endurance, and that He will in His own due time deliver us from all evil and imperfection and grant us a place in His Heavenly Kingdom. Dear brethren, let us constantly put into practise the injunction of our Master, “Watch and pray, lest ye **enter into** temptation.” – Mark 14:38.

SHOULD WE WRESTLE IN PRAYER?

But although the Scriptures enjoin upon us **persistence** in prayer, and the parable of The Importunate Widow also teaches this, nothing in the Word of God, in our judgment, warrants us in doing what some people call “wrestling with God in prayer.” We believe that our God is willing to give us the things that are best for us, and anything that God is not willing to give us we should not desire. We should not strive to induce the Lord to do anything that He is unwilling to do, but should wish that only His will be done. At the time when Jacob wrestled with the angel, we would understand that he did the right and proper thing. Any of us in the same position would have done well if we had followed his course. That was a rare occasion. Jacob was returning to his home for the first time since he had fled to Padan-Aram from his brother Esau, and he feared that Esau might still seek his life. And now the Lord had manifested Himself to Jacob in the form of this angel. The angel could have broken away, but he permitted Jacob to get into that earnest attitude where he said: “I will not let thee go unless thou bless me!”



Jacob Wrestling With The Angel, Gustave Dore 1855

But we do not need to wrestle with God for His special blessing. We already have this blessing. We are not servants crying for a crumb. The Lord has put upon us His best robe; He has given us His Holy Spirit. But He has promised us certain things conditional upon our asking, and He wishes us to continue to come to Him in faith, in simple, earnest prayer – not **wrestling** in prayer.

Excerpt from The Question Book, p. 539

We are to recognize a distinct difference between the “vain repetitions” of the heathen, which our Lord condemned, and the “continuing instant in prayer,” “in everything giving thanks,” in “praying and not fainting,” acts which our Lord and the Apostles enjoined. (Rom. 12:12; Luke 18:1, etc.) This difference the Lord illustrated in the case of the woman who came to a judge repeatedly, asking that he avenge her of her enemy. Although the judge was not a man who would act justly, yet he did her justice on account of her persistence. In commenting upon her course, our Lord said that if an unjust judge be moved on account of importunity to do justice, how much more a just judge!

The thought illustrated in the parable is that of a person who cries to the Lord that injustice is being done--as with the Church at the present time. We all realize that we are suffering injustice. We cry, “O Lord, deliver us! deliver us from the Adversary!” Will God never deliver the Church? For eighteen hundred years the Church has been praying thus; and God has not answered this prayer. Will He never answer? Our Lord intimates that we should not lose faith. We are to have full confidence in His promises. Injustice will not forever obtain. The time will come, we are told, when Satan shall be bound and deceive the people no more. --Rev. 20:2,3

Therefore we do right to pray, “Thy Kingdom come,” week after week, year after year, century after century. To grow faint or grow weary in prayer would not be right. The proper course is to believe that God will fulfill what He has promised; and that all will come out in harmony with His will.

On another occasion our Lord gave a parable wherein one asked his neighbor for food and was refused. (Luke 11:5-8.) He asked again. Finally the neighbor gave it to him on account of his importunity, on account of his patiently persisting. This parable, also, emphasizes the thought of importunate prayer. God has the blessing, and not only is able to give it, but has promised to do so. The delay in granting the request is because His due time has not come. Hence we are not to give up nor to become weary, but to be constant in our prayers.

5 And He said to them, “Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, 6 for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him’, 7 “and he will answer from within and say, ‘Do not trouble me. The door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot rise and give to you’? 8 “I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.

Luke 11:5-8

Ask, Believing

And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.

Matthew 21:22

ASK IN FAITH, NOTHING DOUBTING

Excerpt from R. 2005

“Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. Mark 11:24

Our prayers are not to be “vain repetitions,” formal requests for what we do not expect. We are to “ask in faith, nothing wavering.” (James 1:6.) And whatsoever things ye ask “believe that ye [shall] receive them,” for whatsoever is not of faith is sin, hypocrisy. – Mark 11:11,24; Rom. 14:23.

The child of God must therefore be a close student of his Father’s Word; because he is expected to ask that he may receive, that his joy may be full; and he is cautioned to ask only for such things as his Father has expressed a willingness to grant; and he must ask in faith or not at all.

There can be no doubt that in this matter of prayer, as in other matters, our Heavenly Father designs to cultivate faith in his people. He tells us that “Without faith it is impossible to please God;” and that “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith.” Hence, only those who exercise faith, and ask in prayer for the promised favors, are really ready to receive them according to God’s judgment and arrangement. This being the case, it should be the prayer of God’s people today, as amongst the Apostles, “Lord! increase our faith.” And thus praying, and laboring to this end, each would be more and more helped in overcoming the world and its faithless influences.

True faith is not credulity. It is critical, and believes only upon good evidence. It criticizes closely and distinguishes clearly between the teachings of men and the substantiated Word of God. But, having found the Word of God, it trusts it implicitly, knowing that its Author cannot lie; and that all his purposes and promises will be accomplished.

True faith, then, makes sure of its ground by giving careful heed to the Lord’s Word; and then, asking according to that Word, it has confidence in the results, and waits and prays and watches, perseveringly and patiently. “Watch and pray,” and “believe that ye shall receive,” were our Lord’s frequent injunctions. He spake a parable about an unjust judge who was moved by the importunities of a poor widow to do her justice; and then inquired whether God, the true judge, would not in due time hear his elect Church, and avenge their cause justly, though he wait a long time, – until his own “due

time.” And we are told that he uttered this parable to the purport that God’s people ought to pray continuously, and “not to faint [yield].” – Luke 18:1.

Whatever might be our natural inclinations with reference to definiteness and persistency in prayer, we must take our instructions from the Scriptures; and, overcoming our natural predilections, we must as “little children” and as “dear children” conform our views and conduct to the instruction which is from above. Let us all, therefore, remember the words, “Ask [in my name] and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.” (John 16:24.) The Heavenly Father has multiplied mercies, blessings and providences in store for his obedient and faithful children **who will ask for them**.

True, some of these proper and authorized and much desired requests are long delayed; – for instance, the Church for more than eighteen centuries has prayed, “Thy Kingdom come! Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven.” God has heard, but has not answered yet. Nevertheless all who have thus prayed for and desired the Millennial Kingdom have been blessed by their faith in that Kingdom not seen as yet, – but evidently now very near. However, other requests – for daily food and for succor in temptation and deliverance from the Evil One, – have been promptly answered.

In this connection notice specially that the privilege of prayer, or any other favor of God, is not granted for selfish purposes. A thing which might be properly desired and asked for in one case might be improper if asked for from some other motive. To desire and ask for something good in itself, in order that we might be glorified before our fellows, is a wrong request, because of a wrong motive.

The desire for a good thing, simply for ease and convenience, is an improper, selfish motive. The Apostle refers to such cases, saying, “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, to consume it upon your desires,” – i.e., for vain-glorious purposes or other selfish reasons. (Jas. 4:3.) To ask for some good thing simply to make a test of it, thereby to establish our faith, is seemingly an improper request, for none but the **faith-full** are promised anything.

Besides, God’s plan is that we should walk by faith and not by sight. Hence, we not only should not ask anything unauthorized, but as we grow in spirituality our petitions will be chiefly for spiritual favors; and even in asking for these we should be particular not to specify **how** they are to come. And we should look for the answers to our prayers in natural rather than supernatural channels, since God’s usual method is to use supernatural means only where the natural means are inadequate.

The graces of the holy Spirit are specially stated to be open to our requests and corresponding efforts: Your Heavenly Father is more willing to give the holy Spirit to them that ask it, than earthly parents are to give good (earthly) gifts to their children. – Luke 11:13.

Ask, Abiding

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will
ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

John 15:7

“ABIDE IN ME, AND I IN YOU”

Our Lord Jesus was thoroughly informed regarding proper prayer. We have His own testimony, “I know that thou hearest Me always.” He never had a refusal, because he always asked the things in harmony with the Father’s will. There must be two conditions met in order that our prayers may be answered. We must first have accepted Jesus as our Savior, and then have made a consecration to God in His appointed way. These steps must both be taken before we can be in Christ at all. When accepted of the Heavenly Father in Christ Jesus, we become New Creatures in Him. It is to the New Creature that all God’s promises apply. Whoever has not become a New Creature by being begotten of the Holy Spirit is outside of all these promises – but not outside of hope; for we see that, in God’s Plan, there is a broad hope for all the world. But in this “acceptable time,” none can offer acceptable prayer except in this special appointed way.

There is but one sheep-fold in the present time. Only those who are in this fold are in God’s favor. These have a right to pray. But there is a second consideration, after consecration has been made; namely, Are these **abiding** in Christ or are they going out of harmony with Him? God’s Word must **abide** in us – not merely that we should once have read the Bible through, or that we read so many verses or chapters each day – but the Word must **remain** in us, its teachings and principles must be assimilated and incorporated into our lives. Thus we shall be able to see what God’s mind is, what is pleasing to Him, what we should ask for and what we should not ask for, under His terms. All who thus abide in Christ, and in whom His Word abides, may ask “what they will.” They may ask anything that is guaranteed in God’s Word, and this means that they may ask whatsoever they will; for His Word dwells in them richly, and they would not think of asking anything not authorized therein. R. 5707

PRIVILEGES OF THE SONS OF GOD – R. 5219

“Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of.” – Matthew 6:8

THESE words were not addressed to the world in general; for the whole world is lying in sin, altogether out of relationship with God. These words were not addressed even to the ordinary Jew; for the Jews are also members of the Adamic race, which is out of harmony with God, and their Covenant was not one of sonship, but of servants. Moses was faithful as a servant over all his house. (Hebrews 3:5.) We never find Israelites referred to as sons of God. In the prophecies there are references made as to what God would do for them in the future. But there is no direct statement that He was their Father, or that they were His children.

We all see that this was so. It would have been improper that this should be otherwise, for the Sin-Atonement has not yet been made for the world. Neither a Jew nor one of the world today has a right to call God his Father, nor to think of Him as his Father. The only ones who have a right to call God “our Father,” are those who have come into covenant relationship with Him through Christ. Through this relationship, the Apostle John says, “Now are we the sons of God.”

We are not yet in the Kingdom, to be sons of God without imperfection; but in the future, in the moment of our “change,” we shall be “sons of God without rebuke,” and be like our Master and share His glory. But in the present time we are sons of God, and have this blessed privilege, this honor, of calling God our Father, because we have received His Holy Spirit. We have this treasure of the Holy Spirit in earthen vessels, and walk by faith, not by sight. All those who have come into the Body of Christ by full consecration are sons of God by faith, and are permitted to call themselves such, to realize Him as their Father, and to think of the testimony of the Scriptures as fully and completely referring to themselves.

SONS OF GOD BY FAITH

But the question is, Why did the Lord use these words to the early disciples before He appeared in the presence of God on their behalf and made an imputation of His merit for them? Were they not really under the Law Covenant still? We answer, Yes. They were still under the Law Covenant. Only by faith were they permitted to call God their Father. They had accepted Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life, had accepted Jesus as the Sent of God, the One who would ultimately accomplish all that He had come to do. They were to manifest their faith by calling God their Father, calling themselves the sons of God – although we find that they did not really speak of themselves as the sons of God.

It was some time after our Lord’s death that their faith began to grasp this privilege. The Jews would have been afraid to call themselves sons of God, or to call Him their Father. If they had spoken of themselves as sons of God, they would have thought that they were doing something reprehensible. When Jesus spoke of Himself as the Son of God, they said that He was a blasphemer. – John 5:18; Luke 22:70,71.

We find from the context that the Lord is advising us that we should not think of our

petitions to the Heavenly Father as being for His information. Our Lord said, practically, “You have not an ignorant Father. The heathen go through great supplications, as though their God was asleep, or indifferent, when they petition him. But you, as My disciples, know of God as your Heavenly Father; and as a good earthly father loves his child and makes provision for it, so your Heavenly Father knoweth the things you have need of before you ask Him. It is not necessary for you to give Him advice; for He knows your needs better than you do, and is aware that some of the things for which you ask would be injurious.”

THE DIVINE OBJECT IN ANSWERING PRAYER

Why then do we ask at all, since He is our Father, and, as a loving Father, makes all the provisions necessary and needful? We answer that our instruction to pray is intended to awake a further realization of the fact that all of our blessings come from the Heavenly Father; otherwise we should fail to get a great spiritual blessing from contemplating His love and care. He would not have us get the blessing in the same way that trees take in moisture. He would have us to be intelligent, to consider that He is our Father. He knows our needs and has made provision for them. He wishes us to exercise faith in respect to His care and to all the things promised.

The Divine object, then, in answering prayer is that we may have a stimulation of faith in connection with our receiving daily blessings – both temporal and spiritual. The Lord knows the things that the world has need of, and He is making a general provision for the world. He has already arranged a way by which the world ultimately will return as sons on the human plane, and He is making all things to work together for good to them in a general and broad way. God has a great Plan of redemption through Jesus, and a great Plan of exalting the Church to be with her Lord in the Heavenly Kingdom. Then that Kingdom shall pour blessings upon the earth for the rolling away of the curse, and for the Restitution of mankind to the original perfection of Adam in Eden.

To whatever extent any one has an ear to hear, it is proper to tell him about these good things. But only those who have the ear to hear are to be specially instructed at this present time. The knowledge of God’s grace at this time has been especially for the called-out ones. The remainder of mankind has been allowed to remain in ignorance. It is quite proper that, as they begin to be awakened, they should hear a little and understand a little; but we are certain that the world cannot see the deep things of God. As the Apostle tells us, “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” Again he tells us that “The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.” – 1 Corinthians 2:14,10.

WHO MAY PRAY

The Lord is not dealing with the world; for they are not in covenant relationship with Him and, therefore, they cannot please Him now. His last dealing with the world was when they were condemned in Adam. They had no right to life. They were sinners and must die. He has not yet completed the arrangement for the healing of the breach. He has been getting ready for that New Covenant arrangement for the restoration of the world.

The only ones who are now in relationship with Him are the members of the Body of Christ. "If ye abide in Me and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." If we go out of relationship to Christ, then we have no right to pray. But if we maintain this relationship, if His Word abides in us, if we are conforming our lives to His will, and if we are in harmony with His will and the Spirit of His Word, we may ask what we will, and it shall be done.

Those who are abiding fully in Christ would not want anything except God's will to be done. And if they have His Word abiding in them richly, they will know what things they may properly ask for. But if they are ignorant of God's will in the matter, then they would surely say, "Not my will, but Thine be done!" So whatever would be the petition, they would get it, because they desire God's will to be done.

THE PRAYERS OF THE NEW CREATION

Excerpt from R. 4983

While assuring us that the Father cares for us, and is well pleased to have us come to Him with sincere hearts, the Master informs us of the conditions upon which we may expect an answer. He says, "If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." – John 15:7.

"ABIDE IN ME"

The conditions of the above statement, or promise, are two; the first is, **abiding in Christ**. But what is it to **abide in Christ**? Only those can abide in Christ who are **in** Christ, who have come into Him by faith, repentance and consecration; and to abide in Him means that the faith will abide, the repentance for sin and the opposition to it will abide, and the consecration to the Lord and His service will abide, and it will be manifest that our will has been wholly consecrated – swallowed up in the will of Christ.

The other condition is also a weighty one: "If My Word abide in you." Ah! how evident it is that our Lord meant to associate Himself and His Word, the Scriptures, in the minds, in the hearts, in the lives of all who are truly His! They must search the Scriptures to know the will of the Lord; to know what He has promised and what He has **not** promised; to know what they may ask and what they may **not** ask; and, ascertaining these, one fully consecrated – one controlled entirely by the will of God – will not want to **be**, to **have**, or to **do** anything except that which will be pleasing to the Lord in respect to himself.

When this position has been reached, the will of Christ governing him, the words of Christ abiding in him, we can readily see that whatever would be asked by one thus well informed with respect to the Divine promises and fully submissive to the Divine will would be things which the Father would be pleased to grant in answer to his requests.

Prayers of The Righteous

These requests would probably be as simple as was the Master's petition when He prayed, "Not **My will**, but **Thine**, be done!" (Luke 22:42.) In such a condition prayers are **always** answered; but in such a condition the prayers would be very modest. One's prayers under such circumstances would be more a thanksgiving for blessings, an expression of confidence and trust, and the committal of his way unto the Lord, confidently realizing the promise that to him under such conditions, **all things** (even seeming disasters and troubles) shall work together for good. Hence, whatever came, such a one could realize his prayer answered. He could rejoice evermore because he is prepared to rejoice in tribulation as well as in prosperity, in the path of service. He has no will to oppose whatever God permits, knowing that it will work out good.

Such, amongst the Lord's people, **could** not pray that their own will be done; for they **have no will** except **God's**. Those who abide in Christ, and in whom His Word abides, can pray for their enemies and those who despitefully use them and persecute them, though they cannot pray God to open the blinded eyes of their enemies at once, nor in **their** way. Realizing from the indwelling Word of God's promise that the blinded eyes shall all be opened to the Truth, they can abide His time. Going to God in prayer they may express their forgiveness of their persecutor, their interest in him, and their patient waiting for the day when "the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth as the waters cover the sea" – **ocean deep** – and His will shall be done on earth even as it is done in heaven. – Isa. 11:9.

The trouble with many is that they do not avail themselves of the great stock of divine grace set apart for the benefit of those who, abiding in Christ, and his word abiding in them, do ask, do seek and do find. Let no one suppose that all prayer must be selfish. Quite to the contrary, we have a wide field of prayer-liberty in full accord with the Lord's Word and will. R. 2006

WITH CHRIST APART

*Have you and I today
Stood silent as with Christ apart from joy or fray
Of life, to see His face
To look, if but a moment at its grace
And grow, by brief companionship more true,
More nerved to lead, to dare, to do,
For Him at any cost? Have we today
Found time in thought our hand to lay
In His, and thus compare
His will with ours, and wear
The impress of His wish? Be sure,
Such contact will endure
Throughout the day, will help us walk erect
Thru storms and flood; detect
Within the hidden life, sins dress its stains;
Revive our thoughts of love for Him again;
Steady the steps which waver; help us see
The footpath meant for you and me.*

-Author Unknown

Ask In My Name

Until now you have asked nothing in My name.
Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.
John 16:24

The cultivation of the spirit of praise, thanksgiving and loving appreciation of all the manifest goodness of God, is the Christian's secret of a happy life. And in order to the cultivation of such a spirit it is necessary that we continually call to mind his acts of mercy and of grace; that in our prayers we frequently tell him how all his goodness is remembered, how every fresh evidence of his love and care causes faith to take deeper root and makes the sense of his presence and favor more fully realized; and how through such experiences our love and joy are made to abound more and more. We love him because he first loved us; and every time we see some new mark of his love, our love, if we have truly appreciative hearts, is called out more and more, and we are made to rejoice in God, in whose presence is fullness of joy. It is to this end that our Lord encourages our frequent coming to God in prayer with large requests for his favor, saying, "Ask, and ye shall receive, ***that your joy may be full.***" – John 16:24.
R. 2031

The child of God must therefore be a close student of his Father's Word; because he is expected to ask that he may receive, that his joy may be full; and he is cautioned to ask only for such things as his Father has expressed a willingness to grant; and he must ask in faith or not at all. R. 2005

THE CHRISTIAN'S JOY – R. 1948

*“Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy;
at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore.” – Psalm 16:11*

WHEN we consider how much is said in the Scriptures about joy and rejoicing among God's people, we are deeply impressed with the thought that our heavenly Father is very solicitous for the happiness of his children, even in the present life. The worldly minded cannot see this, they look upon the lot of God's children as a hard and joyless one, and upon God as a hard Master, without concern for the happiness of his children. This, however, is only because the natural man cannot receive the things of the spirit of God, because they are spiritually discerned. But the spiritual-minded have meat to eat that the world knows not of; and their hearts rejoice, and their joy no man taketh from them.

How strange it seems! says the world. Why, there was Paul, a man of great talent and opportunity who might have been somebody in the world: he wasted his talents, was a poor man all his days, homeless, friendless, knocked about and persecuted, a sort of religious fanatic. But Paul, viewing the matter from the standpoint of his spiritual discernment, said, “I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation” (2 Cor. 7:4); for he was one of that anointed body who, like his Lord and Head, could say, “I foresaw the Lord always before my face; for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved. Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad.” – Acts 2:25,26.

So the Psalmist bids all the anointed body rejoice, saying, “Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous; for praise is comely for the upright.” (Psa. 33:1.) And Isaiah, speaking for the same class, says, “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with jewels.” – Isa. 61:10.

This blessed joy, which so wonderfully lifts the soul above all the vicissitudes of the present life, is, as the prophet expresses it, joy in the Lord, not a joy in earthly possessions, or earthly hopes or ambitions. These earthly things are all so transitory and so changeable that a single blast of adversity may sweep them all from us; but not so is it with those whose hearts are centered in God and to whom he has shown the path of life. These have learned to estimate the things of this present life according to their true values; they see that all of its joys are both transient and unsatisfactory and that the only real value in it is in the opportunities it affords for experience and discipline and education in the things of God and for hearing the call of God and making our calling and election sure. In thus making the proper use of the present life – walking in the path of life which God shows us through his Word – we have the present joys of hope and faith in the things unseen, but sure and eternal; knowing also that by and by in the immediate presence of God we shall have fullness of joy, and pleasures for evermore at his right hand – the chief place of favor.

But while the fullness of joy in its widest sense is reserved for that blessed time when we shall be like the Lord and see him as he is (1 John 3:1,2) and be in his presence and at his right hand (in his chief favor), there is a fullness of joy in the presence and favor

of God which is the privilege of every Christian now. Our capacity for joy now is not what it will be by and by, but it is possible now to have our little earthen vessels as full as they can hold of the joy of the Lord. And day by day it is our privilege to realize the presence and favor of God, if, by walking in the path of life, the path of obedience and loving service, we draw near to God. “If a man love me,” said our Lord Jesus, “he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him.” – John 14:23.

In such company as this, can any Christian fail utterly to realize some measure of joy in the Lord? No, if his faith grasps the promise and holds it, the realization of joy in the Lord is sure to follow, and the more firmly his faith lays hold upon the promise the more will he realize its fulfillment, and the more fully will his joys abound; for in the presence of the Lord is fullness of joy, no matter what may be the conditions and circumstances.

In the blessed realization of this experience and the assurance of faith which it gave, in the midst of all his labors, Paul exclaimed, “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” – Rom. 8:33-39. It was this strong persuasion, this confident faith, of the Apostle that gave him such joy in the midst of all his tribulations. His faith laid hold upon the promises of God with a strong and steady grasp, and love and gratitude impelled him to prompt obedience to the will of God and ardent zeal in his service; and evidently the Lord’s promise was fulfilled to him in the abiding presence of Father and Son with him at all times and under all circumstances.

This blessed privilege is ours also, if by faith we enter fully into the Lord’s will and favor. And with a blessed realization of the abiding presence of our heavenly Father, and our Lord Jesus at all times, and of their love and favor, and a faith that lays hold of all the exceeding great and precious promises of God, what soul may not rejoice and be glad, even in the midst of deep sorrow or great tribulation? In the Lord’s presence, no matter where we are, is fullness of joy. Let us cultivate the Lord’s acquaintance more, drawing near to him in prayer, in the study of his precious Word, in meditation upon all his goodness, his providential care, the marked manifestations of his grace in our own individual experiences, and his precious promises which are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus. Thus “draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (James 4:8), he will manifest himself to you and take up his abode with you.

It is indeed the will of God that all his children should be happy in him, that they should be always rejoicing; and if any one lacks this blessing, he is living below his privileges. Beloved, let us not be contented to live beneath our privileges. Let us appreciate the favor of God to the extent of seeking for it more and more diligently, remembering the exhortation, “Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.” All the riches of divine favor are ours if in faith and humility we claim them and place ourselves in position to receive them as directed through the Word of God. “Ask and

receive, that your joy may be full." And your joy can no man take from you, so long as you abide in Him who is our life, our joy, our rest, our hope.

*"Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you.
Matt. 7:7*

"Why should the children of the King
Go mourning all the day?"
"Children of the Heavenly King,
As we journey let us sing!"



Whatever may be our natural inclinations as regards constancy and definiteness in prayer, we must take our instructions from the Word of God. We must overcome our natural tendencies along this line. Let us as true, obedient children conform our views and our conduct to the words of counsel which our Father has given us. Let us remember the promise of the Master,

"Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." – John 16:24. R 5836

Breathe on us, Lord; Thy radiance pour
On all the wonders of the page
Where hidden lies the heavenly lore
That blessed our youth and guides our age.

Grant skill each sacred theme to trace,
With loving voice and glowing tongue,
As when upon Thy words of grace
The wondering crowds enraptured hung.

Grant **faith**, that treads the stormy deep,
If but Thy voice shall bid it come;
And **zeal**, that climbs the mountain steep,
To seek and bring the wanderer home.

Give **strength**, blest Savior, in Thy might;
Illuminate our hearts, and we,
Transformed into Thine image bright,
Shall teach, and love, and live, like Thee!

– *Prayer of the Consecrated (partial),*
Poems of Dawn, p. 103

Ask For The Holy Spirit

9 “So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you.

10 “For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

11 “If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish?

12 “Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?

13 “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

Luke 11:9-13

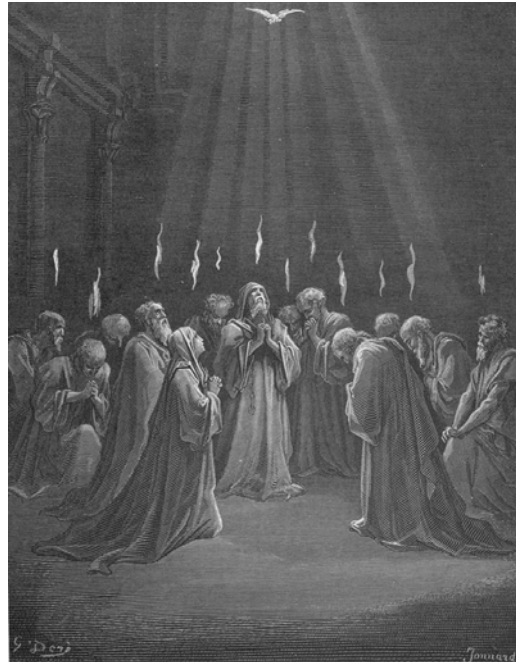
We are to remember that our Lord when on earth was in the fullest sense the Representative of the Father in the flesh. He was indeed “God manifest in the flesh.” And those who were of the right attitude of heart were able to see the character of the Father in the Son. Those who believed on Jesus were accepted and treated in many respects as though they had been already fully received of the Father. The Scriptures, however, declare that the Holy Spirit had not yet come. We see that the Spirit could not be given in begetting power until Jesus had died, and had entered into the presence of God to make reconciliation for the sins of the Church. Forty days after the resurrection of Christ, He ascended to Heaven to present His merit, imputing it on behalf of all who would become His disciples during the Gospel Age, the period of the High Calling.

*“Behold,
I send the
Promise of
My Father
upon you,
but tarry in
the city of
Jerusalem
until you are
endued with
power from
on high.”
Luke 24:49*

Even though the Holy Spirit had not yet been bestowed, Jesus told His disciples that they might pray, “Our Father.” This was in view of the condition of sonship into which they were so soon to be ushered. God is not the Father of any others than those who come to Him in His appointed way – through His Son as the Ransom-price, having made a full surrender of themselves and their all to God. While our Lord was still in the flesh, His true followers were sons in a prospective sense. And yet, after the Master’s death and resurrection, He told them to tarry at Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on High. The Father would defer the answer to some of their prayers. He would not give them the blessing just at the time it was asked. There might be some good reason for withholding it until some future time – as in the granting of the Holy Spirit in begetting. Yet they were to hold themselves in the proper attitude of faith,

that they might be ready for the blessing when it should come from on High.

Their prayer might properly have been: "Heavenly Father, we have learned that at the proper time Thou wilt give us the Holy Spirit. We perceive that Thou hast already given Thy Spirit to Jesus our Master; that at the time of His baptism He received an unction from on High. And so we wait for the Holy Spirit – we wait to receive this unction, this blessing from Thee." And those who tarried in the upper room after the ascension of the Lord, received at Pentecost this very blessing, the Holy Spirit – in its due time. R. 5833



The Descent of The Holy Spirit, G. Dore

[Regarding] the lessons which the "brethren" must learn, and possibly having specially in mind the correction of the tendency to judge one another, our Lord gives instructions how these wrong qualities may be eradicated. We

are to ask of the Lord the needed measure of love and sympathy which will hinder us from judging others, and which will help us in correcting our own defects. If we ask sincerely, truly, we will receive his grace and help in this direction. And while asking, it is our duty to be seeking the things which we lack, the holy spirit of love to fill our hearts; and if we seek it we shall find it. We are to knock upon the Lord's store-house of grace and blessing by continued efforts, as well as prayer without ceasing, and as a result it will surely be opened to us. The asking, the seeking, the knocking, will all imply faith in the Lord, which will be pleasing in his sight, and it will also imply faithfulness on our part and a desire to be conformed fully to the Lord's will. And these good desires of our hearts shall be gratified, because, as an earthly parent would respond to his child's request for earthly food, so will the Lord respond and supply grace in every time of need to his children. He will not deceive us nor give us evil things, when we desire the good, but will do for us exceedingly abundantly more than we could ask or think; for is not our heavenly Father much better than any imperfect human father could possibly be?

Luke's reference to this discourse (11:13) declares that the good thing that God will be pleased to give these asking, seeking, knocking ones, is his holy spirit. And this is exactly what is needed, as an offset to the unholy, unloving, selfish, judging and fault-finding spirit of the flesh, which must be cast out. The antidote for the poison is that we should be filled with the holy spirit, the spirit of love, for "love worketh no ill to his neighbor;" love "suffereth long and is kind;" love "is not puffed up" to see the faults of others and to be blind to its own; it "vaunteth not itself" to be a general critic, fault-finder and "accuser of the brethren." Love is sympathetic, helpful, the spirit of God. – 1 Cor. 13:4; Rom. 13:10. R. 2590

“HE SHALL GIVE YOU ANOTHER COMFORTER.”

– R. 2455

JOHN 14:15-27

CONTINUING his discourse to his troubled disciples at the time of his instituting the Memorial of his own death, our Lord not only promised to come again and receive them to himself in due time, but additionally he promised the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, during the interim of his absence. Since he was about to lay down the human nature he could no longer be with them as the man Christ Jesus – in his resurrection he would become again a spirit being like unto the Father, and could no more be seen by his disciples than the Father could be seen by them, until the time would come when the entire Church, complete, would be “changed,” made “like him” (and like the Father) and see him, and be with him, and share his glory. His resurrection “change” made necessary either the leaving of his disciples alone, without any help or aid during the Gospel age, or else that help be granted them in some other manner. The few occasions on which our Lord appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, for a few moments each, were miraculous manifestations, simply for the purpose of assuring them that he was no longer dead, and that having risen from the dead he was no longer controlled by human conditions. Hence, as a part of the lesson, the flesh bodies in which he manifested himself appeared miraculously and disappeared likewise – he came and went as the wind. – John 3:8; Luke 24:26,31; Acts 1:3,4.

The holy spirit would be another Comforter, but the comfort would be of the same kind. Indeed, our word “comfort” does not properly represent the thought of the text, which rather is, to strengthen, to sustain: the holy spirit would not be merely a consoler of woes, a soother of fears, in the sense of our word comfort, but it would quicken their understandings, strengthen their zeal, and energize them for doing and enduring such things as divine providence might permit to come upon them for their correction in righteousness, and in order to make them “meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.”

The holy spirit or holy influence that should come to the Church and abide with it through the age, to supervise and direct in the interest of the faithful, was to be a representative of both the Father and the Son. Indeed, the thought that the holy spirit is the representative of the Lord Jesus with the Church is so strongly put that sometimes the Lord himself and his spirit or influence are spoken of interchangeably; as for instance, when he said to them, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:20.) And again, “I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you [through the holy spirit].” And again, “In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I [through the holy spirit] in you, ...and I will manifest myself to him [through the holy spirit]. . . . And we [the Father and the Son] will come unto him, and make our abode with him [through the holy spirit].” – Vss. 18,20,23.

Thus it is that those who receive the holy spirit, the spirit of the truth, the spirit of love, the spirit of the Father, the spirit of Christ, are enabled to see Jesus, and have a new life begun in them. (Vs. 19.) They **see** with the eyes of their understanding, and do not walk in darkness. They **hear** the voice of the Lord, saying, “This is the way; walk ye in it.” They **taste** the good Word of God, and realize that he is very gracious. They **feel**

the love of God shed abroad in their hearts, producing in them love for the brethren and all the good fruits of the spirit – meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, brotherly-kindness, love. – Isa. 30:21; 1 Pet. 2:3; Rom. 5:5; Col. 3:12,13.

These experiences, however, are promised conditionally – they are not promised to those who have never heard of the grace of God, but to those who have heard, to “as many as the Lord our God shall call,” who, hearing his commandments, are moved by responsive love to do them. Such have the Father’s love, such have the love of the Son, and such shall have the fellowship both of the Father and the Son through the medium or channel of the holy spirit. This is declared in the 15th and 16th verses, and again in the 21st, 23d and 24th. Not only are faith and obedience of the heart necessary, before any can come into the spirit-begotten condition, but a continuance and growth in faith and in obedience are necessary in order to a continuance and growth in the spirit of holiness, or the holy spirit, the spirit of fellowship with the Father and with the Son.

It is one thing to have a begetting of the spirit, and quite another matter to attain to that condition urged by the Apostle, saying, “Be ye **filled** with the spirit.” (Eph. 5:18.) The measure of our filling will correspond with the measure of our emptying of the spirit of selfwill, and filling with the spirit of faith and obedience. And although the obedience cannot do otherwise than manifest itself in the daily life, nevertheless it is the obedience of the **intention**, of the **will**, of the heart, that the Lord regards in his consecrated people, and not merely the control of the earthen vessel. Hence, some whose hearts are thoroughly loyal to the Lord may be pleasing to him, while not the most pleasing to some of those with whom they come in contact; while others, “highly esteemed amongst men” because of outward moralities, may be an “abomination” in the sight of God, because of coldness or dishonesty of heart. (Luke 16:15.) Nevertheless, he that hath the new hope in him, and the new spirit, will seek to purify himself, not only in his thoughts, but also in his words and deeds and all his affairs, inward and outward. – 1 John 3:3.

It should not be overlooked that, altho the holy spirit, like all other favors, is of the Father, it, like all others of his gifts, comes to us through the Son, and not by any direct relationship between the Father and us. As we saw in our previous lesson that our prayers addressed to the Father are to be answered by the Son, – “Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son: If ye shall ask anything in my name I will do it;” – so we see in this lesson that the gift of the holy spirit comes to us, not because of any direct relationship between the Father and us, but at the instance of our Lord Jesus. “**I** will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter” – at my request and my account the Father will do this for you. (Vs. 16.) The same thought is again expressed in vs. 26, “The holy spirit whom the Father will send in my name.”

The lesson to us here is, that our only standing before the Father as yet is a **reckoned one** – in Christ, as members of his body, – our Lord Jesus represents the Father to us and represents us to the Father. The comfort and strength of the holy spirit imparted to us is the Father’s, the spirit of truth, all of which emanates from the Father: it reaches us not directly, but only through our Lord and Head, Jesus. In a word, we have no standing whatever with the Father, and will not have any, until by his grace, through our Lord Jesus, we shall have been “made meet for the inheritance of the saints in

light,” and by the “change” of the first resurrection shall be perfected in his likeness, which is the divine likeness: then and thereafter, being actually perfect, and not merely reckonedly perfect, we may have an individual standing with the Father, but not before.

Hence it is that if any one lose his relationship to Christ through the loss of his faith in the precious blood, or through the loss of the holy spirit, through wilful sin, such an one falls out of the protection, the care, the covering of Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant, – and falls into the hands of the living God, – which means a judgment according to facts and works; and to all imperfect creatures this means death. (Heb. 10:31.) Hence also the exhortation of the Scriptures, that we abide in him, that we remain under the blood of sprinkling, that we abide in his love. – John 15:4,6,10; 1 John 2:24-29.

Our Lord pointedly declares that he who does not seek to please him by conforming to his instructions, thereby manifests that he does not love him. (Vss. 23,24.) Surely there can be no better test of love than devotion, and no better test of devotion than obedience. Our enlightened consciences render hearty assent to the Master’s words, and with the Apostle we exclaim, “The love of Christ constraineth us, for we thus judge that, if one died for all, then all were dead, and that he died for all, that they who live [justified and begotten to newness of life] should henceforth not live unto themselves, but unto him who died for us, and rose again.” – 2 Cor. 5:14,15.

The Master pointed out to us distinctly that in keeping his sayings we are not merely pleasing and obeying him, but that he is in all this matter the mouthpiece of Jehovah, the Father, and consequently that in pleasing and obeying him we are pleasing and obeying the Father. This much he could tell them while still with them, but he had many things that he desired to make known to them, and that were necessary for them to know, but that they could not receive as yet, because the holy spirit had not yet come upon them, and could not until after the ransom sacrifice had been made at Calvary and offered in the Holy of Holies, after he ascended up on high, there to appear in the presence of God for us. – John 7:39; Heb. 9:24.

Our Lord’s assurance is that this Comforter or strengthener, the holy spirit of the Father, sent on account of and at the instance of Jesus our Redeemer, Mediator and Head, will be our instructor – using various instrumentalities for bringing the instruction to us – the Word of truth, the writings of the apostles, and the various helps and agencies which the Lord, through the holy spirit, has and shall from time to time, as needed, provide to his flock.

How beautiful, how consoling to their troubled hearts, and how refreshing to ours, is the legacy of love and peace left to us by our dear Redeemer, as expressed in the 27th verse! “Peace I leave with you, **my peace** I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” This peace and joy which surpasseth human understanding, was not given to the world, nor is it given to the nominal Christian professor, nor to the formalist and ritualist, however zealous they may be. It is intended for and can be had only by those who receive riches of grace through the holy spirit – those who by obedience to the truth and its spirit grow up into Christ their living Head in all things. Such have peace, deep and abiding, and ever increasing proportionately as they come to comprehend with all saints through faith

and obedience the riches of divine grace – the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of the love of God.

This is not worldly peace, not the peace of indifference and carelessness, not the peace of sloth, not the peace of self-indulgence, not the peace of fatalism; but it is the peace of Christ – “my peace.” Looking back we can see that the Master preserved his peace with God under all conditions. It is a peace which implicitly trusts to the divine wisdom, love, justice and power, a peace which remembers the gracious promise made to the Lord’s faithful – that nothing shall be any means hurt his faithful, and that all things shall work together for good to them that love God. This peace can accept by faith whatever divine providence permits, and can look through its tears with joyful expectancy for the ultimate blessings which the Master has promised, and of which the present peace and joy are merely foretastes.

“ASK AND IT SHALL BE GIVEN YOU”

Excerpt from R. 3805

Although our Lord did not teach his disciples to pray until they requested instruction, this was evidently not because he was unwilling to assist them, but because he wished them to realize and desire further teaching. It may be argued by some that no one needs instruction in how to pray, but that thought is not borne out by this lesson. Evidently there are proper and improper prayers. We might as well say that no one needs instruction in singing or in playing music. We do sometimes say that singers and players are born with the talent, nevertheless the most talented musicians by instruction reach their proficiency.

And so with prayer. We have already seen that great mistakes have been made as to who may pray and as to what may be properly prayed for, and we have already considered the Lord’s outline respecting a proper form of prayer, beginning with ascriptions of praise and thanks and proceeding to expressions of confidence in God and the promises of his Kingdom, continuing with acknowledgments of our dependence upon his provisions day by day, and ending with expressions of confidence in his power and goodness to protect us and ultimately to deliver us. This is the general form which our Lord commends to us as proper in approaching the throne of grace. On the other hand, however, it is interesting for us to note that the Lord does not wait until we have become proficient in the use of language and in the form of expressing our petitions to him, but that so gracious and broad are his arrangements that we may come in imperfection and with stammering tongues to tell him of our devotion, our appreciation, our confidence, etc., in any manner that we please. The suggestion is, however, that in proportion as we appreciate the privilege of prayer, we will desire to use the privilege in the manner most acceptable to the great One whom we thus approach.

Why should the Lord wish us to ask before he would give his blessing? For a wise purpose, we may be sure! He would have us feel our need, he would have us appreciate

the privilege, he would have us look for the response, and in all these experiences he would develop us as his sons of the New Creation. Therefore we are to ask and seek and knock if we would find the riches of God's grace, and have opened to us more and more the wonderful privileges and mercies and blessings which he is so willing to give to us as we develop in character and in preparation for his mercies.

It was to illustrate this that the Lord gave the parable of this lesson respecting the householder who was short of food for the entertainment of his visitors. He was represented as importunately urging upon his neighbor the necessities of the case, and ultimately thus succeeding. Our Lord instructs us that we should be so earnest in our desires for the Kingdom, for the honor of the Father's name, for the daily portion of the bread of life, for deliverance from the evil one, and for God's keeping power in every trouble, and in all of life's affairs his supervision, that we continually go to him day by day, hourly and momentarily, watching and praying without ceasing, and in everything giving thanks, accepting by faith the promises of his Word that all things shall work together for our good. To such the blessings are on the way, sometimes coming in one form and sometimes in another, but generally in ways not anticipated and generally larger by far than anything we had asked.

"YE BEING EVIL KNOW HOW"

Choosing an illustration from life our Lord reminded the disciples that few if any earthly parents, if their children cried to them for blessings, would give them injurious things instead. What kind of a father if asked for bread would give his child a stone, if asked for fish would give him a serpent, if asked for an egg would give him a scorpion? Certainly such parents would be few, if any. The force of our Lord's language is seen if we remember that the bread of oriental countries very much resembles a stone, being about the size of a large hand and baked in an oven provided with stones and whitened with the ashes. Some kinds of serpents resemble certain kinds of fish, too. And there is a small white scorpion which rolls itself up in the shape of an egg. Basing his argument upon these illustrations, which would commend themselves to his hearers, our Lord proceeds to institute a comparison as between the dealings of earthly parents with their children and the dealings of God with his children. His words are, If ye being evil, being imperfect through the fall, more or less selfish in all of your thoughts and words and dealings, still would be disposed to give good gifts to your children, how much more would your heavenly Father give the good gift of all gifts, the holy Spirit, to them that ask him for it.

The clear intimation is that this should be the essence of our petitions to our heavenly Father, for more of his holy Spirit, and that we should look to the experiences of life, its trials, disappointments, discouragements, oppositions, not as being really injurious to us, not as being stones, scorpions and serpents, but as being blessings in disguise, if we receive them in the proper spirit. The Lord is able to make all things abound in the interest of his children, the New Creatures in Christ Jesus. These know from experience that some of their severest trials and disappointments of an earthly kind have worked out for them development of character, elements of the holy Spirit, which they probably could not have so well received in any other manner. Hence, when we pray to the Lord for his blessings, we are with patience to wait for them, and to seek them and to find them in the various circumstances of life which his providences

will permit. Remembering that the holy Spirit is the spirit of meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, brotherly kindness, love, we may well ask ourselves how else could the Lord work out for us these elements of character which we desire did he not permit to come upon us the trials and difficulties of life necessary to their development.



Jesus teaching the disciples

ASKING, SEEKING, KNOCKING

Excerpt from R. 3354

Our Lord's words in conclusion of the lesson are very soul-satisfying to those who have faith: "I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." We have the Master's words for this, but we are to remember the order as already expressed to us in prayer; we are to ask nothing that will not be hallowing and honoring to our heavenly Father's name; we are to ask nothing that would be an interference in any measure or degree with the coming of his Kingdom, or the doing of his will on earth as in heaven; we are to ask in harmony with the divine plan, and to be assured that that divine plan, revealed in the Word and prayed for by us, will ultimately be fully accomplished, and that it will be a most heart-satisfying portion when we do receive it.

The asking, seeking and knocking are to be done by us individually. We may ask the Lord for a share in the Kingdom, and may labor for it, praying his blessing upon our labors; but we may not attempt to direct the divine arrangement and to ask the Lord to specially favor others in connection with the Kingdom. Because some one is related to us and very dear according to the flesh, is no reason why we should conclude that the Lord would necessarily choose such an one for a member of his Bride. On the contrary, we are to preach the Word to such an one, to tell him of God's goodness and grace, and of the Kingdom, and of the blessing, and to encourage him to make a consecration of himself to the Lord; and, in connection with that consecration, we are to urge him to ask for himself, to seek for himself and to know for himself that he may receive and find and enter into the blessed favors of the Lord.

EVERY GOOD AND PERFECT GIFT COMETH FROM THE FATHER.

Our Lord appeals to the fatherly spirit in man, reminding his hearers of how they would delight to give good gifts of food to their children, how they would not only not give them something poisonous or injurious when they asked for good blessings, but they would not even give them the injurious things when asked for. Much more is our heavenly Father good, kind, benevolent, and disposed to bless his children. Much more will he give to us the right things. We have thought of this frequently when hearing some of our dear friends praying that the Lord would baptize them with fire, as he promised in the Scriptures. We are rejoiced to think that God, in his goodness, would not answer that prayer, would not take advantage of the misunderstanding of the matter, and answer a prayer which would be so injurious to the petitioner. What they desired was a measure of divine blessing; what they were asking for was the curse, or trouble which came upon the chaff in the end of the Jewish age, and which is again to come upon the tares in the end of Gospel age.

We trust that the Lord's people will more and more cultivate a spirit of prayer, and that so doing they will more and more appreciate their relationship to God as children, and come to him as to a father, with simplicity, with sincerity. We are not at all advocating the thought that is today so prevalent, of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. That false doctrine finds no place in the Word of God. God does not stand sponsor for the depraved race as it now appears. He was the father of Adam in his perfection, but these imperfections, which have come to have so prominent a place in the children of Adam, the Lord declares to be of the Adversary, and to some he said, of his day, Ye are of your father, the devil, and his works ye do. In order to get back again into the family of God, as Adam was, a son of God, before he sinned, it is necessary for us to go by the appointed way – through the merit of Jesus, the merit of his sacrifice for our sins. More than this, having been thus justified as sons on the human plane, we have been accepted in the beloved one to sonship, as New Creatures in Christ. It is from this standpoint that we come to the Father, from this standpoint that we have our fellowship, and from this standpoint that we are hoping, trusting, believing that all things are working together for good to us, because we love God and have been called according to his purpose.

THE HOLY SPIRIT THE SPECIAL OBJECT OF PRAYER

Excerpt from R. 5707

The reason why the prayers of so many Christians are unanswered is that their prayers are for things God has not told us to pray for or that they were not offered in sincerity. They have asked for wealth or temporal blessings, or perhaps for the conversion of a specified number of souls at their revival meeting, or something else unauthorized, or they have not really desired what they asked for, if it was for spiritual blessing. The Lord might grant a request for some temporal thing to a babe in Christ who prayed in his ignorance, not being properly instructed. But it would be different with an advanced Christian. The little child at the table might ask for something improper and violate the rules of etiquette without blame; while a person of mature age, advanced in education and in knowledge of etiquette, should know better. The things for which the Lord's children should especially pray are specified in His Word. The Holy Spirit is the special gift of God to His children.

When we come to know that the Holy Spirit is the influence, the disposition of God, then we know what we are praying for. We want more and more of the Holy Spirit of God, that it may make us more gentle, more kind, more loving; we want more and more of the mind of Christ (mind and Spirit being used here interchangeably). We realize that we must strive to have this mind of Christ. If we day by day cultivate the spirit of the Devil, we cannot expect ever to attain the mind of Christ. If we determinedly cultivate the Spirit, the mind, of Christ, then the spirit of the Adversary can gain no entrance into our hearts; and we shall become more and more sound in mind. We come to know more and more the perfect will of God as we are filled with His Spirit. Thus we are being prepared for an abundant entrance into the everlasting Kingdom.



In the concluding verses of the Study, Jesus admonished that the prayer should be with fervency or earnestness, and not merely lifeless, formal words. He gave the illustration of the man who at first refused to be disturbed, even by his friend, but was finally moved by the earnestness of his friend's petition. So when we pray for God's Kingdom to come and His will to be done, as it delays long, we are not to think that our prayers are unheeded. We are praying in harmony with the Divine promise, and although we are not hastening the Kingdom by our prayers we are entering into a blessing of rest through faith, by continually bringing before our minds these promises of God, and thus waiting upon the Lord for the fulfilment of His promise.

What God really wishes to give to His people is His Holy Spirit. Because of the imperfections of the flesh none of us can be filled with the Spirit at first, as was our perfect Master. But as we come to God desiring to be filled with His spirit, desiring to be in harmony with Him, desiring to be in His character-likeness, by the seeking we find, and to our knocking the door is opened. R. 5379

Pray With Humility

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

9 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

11 “The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.

12 ‘I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I possess.’

13 “And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’

14 “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other, for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Luke 18:9-14

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING, AND HUMBLY

– R. 3841 Partial Article

LUKE 18:1-14

“God be merciful to me a sinner.”

AGAIN we have a lesson on Prayer, from various standpoints. The disciples needed to learn certain lessons respecting prayers, and our Lord gave the instruction through two interesting parables. The first lesson was respecting persistency: that they should continue to pray and not faint, nor grow disheartened and discouraged because of the delay in the answer. They were to be assured of the real character of our God, of his willingness to hear their petitions and to give them all necessary good things in the proper manner and at the proper time. The delay of the answer was to work out for them a blessing of increasing faith and trust. . . .

See “Persist in Prayer” on p. 268

Taken as a whole, the lesson to the Lord’s people through this parable is that we are to have patience, not attempt to render vengeance upon our opposers, but to love our enemies and to do good to them that spitefully use us, and to look to the Lord for such relief as he sees proper to send; and though we find the full measure of relief long deferred, we are to have rest and refreshment through faith that the time is coming when all the gracious promises will be abundantly fulfilled, “According to thy faith be it unto thee.”

Those who believe little of the Lord’s promises, who trust him little, will pray to him little, will exercise little faith, and will have little joy and blessing in consequence. Those, on the contrary, who have faith, and who go continually to the throne of grace and appreciate the Lord and trust in the glorious outcome of their prayers and labors, will have joy now and fullness of joy by and by.

PRAYERS OF THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS NOT ACCEPTABLE

The Pharisees were a very moral class amongst the Jews, devout, at least outwardly, very exact, though inwardly, the Lord tells us, they were far from right. He alone was competent to make the terrible arraignment that they were like sepulchers, beautifully whitened on the outside but inwardly full of corruption. There is a similar class in Christendom today, who are outwardly moral, very particular, exact, scrupulous, and yet not pleasing to the Lord. They are proud of their righteousness, and seem to fail to realize that if they are naturally less depraved than some others they have nothing therein to boast of, because they are still far from being actually perfect. This parable is intended to show that God would look with more sympathy, more compassion, upon the more depraved man if he were the more honest and more humble rather than on the morally better but less humble.

The parable pictures two men going up to the Temple according to the Jewish custom to pray: the one was a self-righteous Pharisee, a moral man, in many respects a good man, but very conscious of all his righteous deeds and perfunctory observances of divine rules; the other man was of a lower class and cast, who had more weaknesses and blemishes and who realized his condition. The Pharisee, we are told, stood

and prayed with himself: apparently his prayers did not ascend to the Lord, and it would be strictly true, therefore, to say that he prayed with himself, heard himself pray, congratulated himself in the prayer, and rejoiced in his own self-consciousness generally. His prayer was not the kind which the Father invites, for he seeketh such to worship him as worship him in spirit and in truth; and it seems impossible for any one to come before the Lord in a proper manner who does not appreciate his own weaknesses, imperfections, blemishes, and acknowledges these and seeks the divinely arranged means for covering them.

PRAYER OF THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS

The Pharisee said, “God, I thank thee that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.” It is quite true that such a prayer uttered truthfully would imply a compassion of heart for which we might well give thanks to God. All Christians by virtue of their relation to God, the covering of their sins, the begetting of the Spirit, the transforming work progressing in their hearts, have every reason to give thanks to the Lord that they differ from the majority of their fellow-creatures. But they have nothing whereof to boast, for, as the Apostle remarks, What have we that we have not received from the Lord? Who hath made us to differ? (1 Cor. 4:7.) If, therefore, the difference between ourselves and others be recognized as of the Lord and his work of grace in us and not of ourselves, this is the proper attitude of heart, and all who have this realization may properly enough give thanks to the Lord that in this respect they are different from others because he hath made us to differ, because by his grace we are what we are.

The difficulty with the Pharisee of the parable was that he prayed with himself, congratulated himself, and merely pretended to give thanks to the Lord for these differences. He did not thank the Lord that he had made him to differ, but thanked the Lord that he had made himself to differ – he was trusting in his own works of the flesh, which could never be acceptable to the Lord, and was, therefore, as a Pharisee, rejecting the imputed righteousness of the Atonement Day sacrifices. The condition would be similar today to us if we boasted in ourselves in any sense or degree. Such a man offering such a prayer should know that it does not go to God, that it was merely self-adulation and that he profiteth nothing by it. We are in the right attitude when we realize that our sufficiency is of God, who has made us to differ and who keeps us by his own power, covers us with the robe of Christ’s righteousness and is preparing us for the glory, honor and immortality which he has promised us if we are faithful in obedience to his lessons and guidance.

All the Lord’s people should be able to assure themselves at the throne of grace that they are not extortioners, not unjust, not adulterers, nor like other men. This is all in harmony with our Lord’s declaration, “If ye were of the world the world would love its own: but because ye are not of he world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” We are to be glad if we find these evidences of our separateness from the world, but we are not to boast of them nor to consider that they are of our own institution nor attempt to take credit for them. As already shown, we are what we are by the Lord’s grace.

The Pharisee as a part of his boast claimed that he fasted twice in the week, as well as

gave tithes of everything that he acquired. In this fasting he was going beyond anything that the Law required, and doubtless felt that he was to be especially commended therefor. But not so from the Lord's standpoint – works can never justify us. If we were to fast, starve ourselves to death, it would not be meritorious; no works can be of value except as based upon proper recognition of our own imperfections and proper acceptance of divine justification, which is granted to us now through faith in Jesus, and which in that day was typically imputed to all the members of the Jewish nation through the typical sacrifices of their Day of Atonement. As for fasting, the Lord's people today will find plenty of things from which they may well fast. Fasting simply signifies self-denial, and self-denials of food are not the greatest nor the most estimable in God's sight, we may be sure. There are other desires of the flesh which all who are the Lord's true followers are to strive to control and diminish and starve out, that they might proportionately flourish and be nourished spiritually and made strong.

BOASTING OF GIVING TITHES

The tithe-giving was proper. God had enjoined, as a mark of respect for him, that one-tenth (or tithe) of all increase of herd or flock or field should be set apart peculiarly to his service: and obedience to this arrangement was nothing to boast of, particularly when it is remembered that the Lord is the bountiful giver of all good. Where then was the room for pride and boasting in connection with such tithe-giving? It showed a self-satisfied condition of heart, unready to make the still greater consecration required of all who would be accepted as members of the house of sons, the followers of Jesus, who are expected to consecrate their all to the Lord, and thenceforth to act as stewards who will be prepared to give an account of the use of every dollar, every talent, every opportunity. Are the saints inclined to boast of their self-denials or services? Let them reckon the matter carefully and see how little the most energetic is able to accomplish, and then doubtless with shame many will confess how little of all they desired to accomplish they have been able to render unto the Lord.

"GOD BE MERCIFUL TO ME A SINNER"

The publican was a sample of those who made no profession of great piety. Humble-minded people, they realized that they did not live up to the grand requirements of God's perfect Law, and, discouraged by the assertions of the Pharisees that they could obey and live up to those requirements, these more humble-minded ones were often in a discouraged attitude, and sometimes in consequence lapsed into carelessness and sinful ways. In the parable the publican stands afar off; he did not approach close to the holy precincts of the Temple; he stood at a goodly distance. He recognized the great difference between God's perfection and his own personal unworthiness, imperfection and sinfulness. He smote upon his breast, upon his heart, as though indicating that he accepted the divine sentence of death as well deserved, merited, yet he appealed for mercy – Lord have mercy upon me, I am a sinner! Although outwardly not as moral nor as good a man as the other, judged by any human standards, inwardly, from God's standpoint, his was the better heart of the two, the more hopeful. He was not trusting in himself, and was in a better condition, therefore, to receive the grace of God upon the only terms upon which it could be obtained, humble faith. Our Lord indicates that of the two this one – outwardly less noble, less moral – was inwardly more acceptable to the Father, justified rather than the Pharisee. And then, as a lesson based upon this,

comes the word,

“EVERYONE THAT EXALTETH HIMSELF SHALL BE ABASED; AND HE THAT HUMBLETH HIMSELF SHALL BE EXALTED”

Is it not remarkable that so frequently throughout the Scriptures the Lord calls attention to the great necessity for humility, assuring us that without it, whatever may be our conditions, our qualifications, we could by no means enter the Kingdom. In the parable just considered this quality of humility is illustrated in the publican, the lack of it is illustrated in the Pharisee. To reason the matter out we can see that only the humble minded could possibly be prepared to confess themselves sinners and unworthy of divine favor and love, needing justification, forgiveness, provided for us in Christ. Not only so, but even after exercising such humility and coming to the Lord and being accepted of him, if the humility be lost our gracious standing in Christ is forfeited. Pride signifies self-satisfaction, and the corresponding ignoring of the all-sufficiency of our glorious Head, who said to us, “Without me ye can do nothing.” – John 15:5.

Alas, that so many of those who have some knowledge of God and of his plan of salvation are hindered from laying hold in a proper manner by a lack of humility and readiness to see their own faults, confess them and to accept divine mercy and grace. Alas, also, that so many, after having exercised faith and been washed from their old sins, are through lack of humility led to haughtiness, high-mindedness, which in one way or another is sure to work injury to us as New Creatures – sure to blast the prospect for a share in the Kingdom in which only those who humble themselves shall be exalted.

“GOD BE MERCIFUL TO ME, A SINNER.” – R. 1972

Luke 18:9-17

“The publican, 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 18:13

WHILE the Pharisee presents to our minds the extremes of conceit, selfishness and hypocrisy it is always well to remember that there are many approaches to that disposition which give sure signs that those who have and who are cultivating them will by and by mature the same kind of fruit unless they change their course. The spirit of meekness, which is the spirit of all true children of God, is the very opposite of the spirit of proud, boastful self-righteousness. It is only this spirit that can gain the ear of the Lord and bear away the answers of peace, as illustrated in the case of the publican so strikingly in contrast with that of the Pharisee.

How this calls to mind the words of wisdom and of warning to guard against every approach to a spirit of pride and vain glory: – “Be sober, and watch unto prayer”; “Be sober, be vigilant” against “your adversary, the devil; I say. . . to every man. . .

not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly"; "In simplicity and godly sincerity" have your "conversation in the world." (1 Pet. 4:7; 5:8; Rom. 12:3; 2 Cor. 1:12.) It is the intoxication that comes from imbibing the spirit of the world that leads to that foolish boasting of which a man in his sober senses would be ashamed, and such intoxication is an abomination in God's sight and is unworthy of the least of his children; for every sober man must realize that he is far, very far, short of perfection. Boasting, therefore, is only an evidence of ignorance and of intoxication with the worldly spirit.

To further enforce this teaching, our Lord calls attention to the beautiful, artless simplicity of childhood as a pattern in this respect of what all must be who would enter the Kingdom of God. To be a child in guilelessness and simplicity, however, is one thing, while to be a child in understanding and development of character is another; and it is in the former, and not in the latter respect, that we are to be children. And it is in this respect that the people of God are spoken of as his "little ones" (Luke 17:2), and by the beloved John as "my little children." They may be old in years and gray-headed, but their hearts are young and preserve the sweet simplicity of childhood. On the other hand, they may be ripe in character and learned in the wisdom of God, as was the Apostle Paul, who said, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man I put away childish things." And the same apostle also says, "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men." "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." – 1 Cor. 13:11; 14:20; 16:13.

The simplicity of childhood, realizing its need, confesses it and asks mercy, instead of attempting to deceive itself by philosophizing. In this respect we must continue "children," we must continue to admit our own imperfection, continue to admit our need of mercy, continue to trust in the precious blood provided to cleanse us from all sin, if we would continue to have the Heavenly Father's ear and favor, and if we would continue to be "**justified**" in his sight.

We urge upon all the importance of sincere prayer; – private or "closet" prayers, "family" or "household" prayer and "social" prayer with fellow-Christians. Each has its special importance to everyone who is running the heavenly race; and each has Scripture sanction. They need not be lengthy: indeed few of the Scriptural examples of prayer were so; but they must be sincere, from the heart and not a lip service. Heart prayers are always accompanied by efforts of life in harmony with the prayers; while lip prayers are usually in contradiction of the living epistle. Prayer without corresponding endeavor is like faith without works; it is a dead, worse than useless, thing.

Prayer is required, not to change God's plans, but to bring our hearts into such a condition as will prepare us to receive and appreciate the blessings which God has freely promised and which he delights to grant to his children. Hence our requests should be such only as God has authorized us to ask and expect. Our requests should be unselfish: The Apostle remarks that some ask and receive not because they ask amiss (not in harmony with the Lord's arrangements), to consume the things asked for upon selfish desires. – James 4:3.

16 But Jesus called them to Him and said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of God. 17 "Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."

Luke 18:16-17

Pray For The Work

1 After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go.

2 Then He said to them,

“The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”

3 “Go your way. Behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. . . .

16 “He who hears you hears Me. He who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.”

Luke 10:1-3,16

“HE THAT HEARETH YOU HEARETH ME.”

– R. 3346 Partial Article

LUKE 10:1-16

*“Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would
send forth laborers into his harvest.”*

THE HARVEST work during the three and a half years of our Lord's ministry seems to have been crowded chiefly into the last nine months of that period. We have followed the course of the gradual unfoldment of the Truth, then due, and now, about five months before our Lord's crucifixion, we take note of his statement that the fields were white for harvesting, and the laborers few. The first verse of our lesson records the sending forth of the seventy men, two by two, as advance missionaries to proclaim the Kingdom of God near at hand, and thus to prepare the people for the later arrival of Jesus in the various cities of Israel east of the Jordan.

These seventy were not apostles in the special sense. They were additional to the twelve apostles – they were evangelists; they had not as large experience with the Master and his teachings, nor so important a work to do as that assigned to the twelve. Nevertheless, any service to the Lord is an important service, and to the extent that they did the Lord's will they represented him. They were undoubtedly a part of the “five hundred brethren” mentioned by the Apostle as having seen our Lord after his resurrection. (1 Cor. 15:6.) As the twelve apostles corresponded to the twelve tribes of Israel, so the seventy evangelists corresponded to the seventy elders of Israel appointed by Moses in the wilderness and afterward represented in the Jewish Sanhedrin, which numbered seventy.

As the seventy elders appointed by Moses, and their successors, the Sanhedrin, were the elders of Israel, so in a general way these seventy whom the Lord sent forth in the end of the Jewish age represented all the leaders or elders amongst his people today. Elsewhere we have shown what are the present duties and responsibilities of elders as respects the Lord's flock;* and have also shown how at the present time these are chosen or set apart under the Lord's direction where his guidance is sought and the instructions of his Word followed. We have also shown that in a general way all of the people are fully commissioned in the same sense or degree to speak officially or as the mouthpieces of his body. To the extent of their abilities and time-given opportunities all are privileged to tell the good tidings of great joy to all who may have the ear to hear. But special blessing and special privileges in connection with the service of the Truth attach to those who in any particular manner are selected through the Lord's instrumentality for the service of the Truth – either as chosen elders of local companies of the Lord's people or as chosen pilgrims or accepted colporteurs. Each may serve according to opportunities and the divine blessing.

*See MILLENNIAL DAWN, Vol. VI., chap. 6.

THE JEWISH HARVEST AND OURS

We see that the Lord designated the end of the Jewish age as the “harvest” time, for the reaping of the wheat of that people and the gathering of them into the garner of

the Gospel dispensation, and for the rejection and symbolical burning of the chaff of that people in the great time of trouble which came upon them gradually after the rejection of Messiah, and was fully accomplished in the destruction of their nation in A.D. 70. We are specially interested in everything connected with that harvest time after learning that it was a figure or type or foreshadowing of the harvest time in the end of this Gospel age – the harvest in the midst of which we now find ourselves. Our Lord called attention to these harvest conditions at the same time that he sent forth the laborers, possibly indeed before commissioning them. Sympathizingly he drew the attention of the believers of that time to the ripeness of the conditions around them, and urged them to pray to the Lord for laborers to assist in garnering the true wheat.

Apparently it was those who prayed to the Lord and felt an earnest desire for the prosperity of the Lord's work, and the finding of the Israelites indeed who consecrated themselves to this service, this evangelistic ministry. But no matter whether they were taught first and prayed first and gave themselves to the work afterward, or whether they gave themselves first to the work and prayed afterward – the praying and engagement in the service were associated in the Lord's mind and evidently in the minds of those who participated in that harvest work. And so it is today. As we look all about us we see nominal Christendom like a great wheat field, ripe and ready for the reaping. The true children of God greatly need the message which would gather them to the Lord out of all sectarian bondage, and all who have the Lord's Spirit feel drawn to render the assistance necessary, at any cost of personal inconvenience, etc. . . .

"HOW SHALL THEY PREACH EXCEPT THEY BE SENT?"

Our Lord intimated that it would be a great honor for any to be sent forth, and intimated also that none could engage in the service unless they were sent forth by him – the Lord of the harvest. We are not then to consider that any and everybody may engage in this work today any more than in the harvest of the Jewish age. We are to pray for the privilege and opportunity of service, and when it comes to us are to seize it and use it with zeal, as appreciating the privilege of being co-workers together with the Lord in the greatest and grandest work imaginable. There is a distinctly drawn line as to who are privileged to engage in this work. The harvesters acceptable to the Lord can surely be none others than those who are fully consecrated to him and accepted as members of the body of Christ. If others engage we cannot expect for them the success and blessing that we are authorized to expect for such as the Lord sends forth. In harmony with this suggestion we find that unbelievers, book agents and book stores are not successful in handling our publications. The blessing seems to go only with those who are consecrated to the Lord and with those of their families who are pleased to cooperate with them in this harvest under their direction.

AS LAMBS AMONG WOLVES.

Our Lord's illustration, that his representatives sent forth would be as lambs among wolves, seems a very strong and almost overdrawn statement of the case until we get the proper standpoint of observation. Those represented as wolves were Jews, Israelites, nominally God's favored people for centuries – the natural heirs of the Abrahamic covenant and promises. They were the people who according to the flesh were the Lord's sheep, as represented in the twenty-third Psalm, "The Lord is my Shepherd."

Yet how grievously they had lost as a whole the proper sheeplike characteristics is clearly indicated by our Lord's words likening them to wolves. The sheep is an innocent and almost a helpless creature, harmless; the wolf is ravenous, destructive, selfish. Doubtless, our Lord's words seemed harsh even to his disciples, who, accustomed to the selfishness of the world, failed to see it from the same standpoint as viewed by our Lord, who was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, in the most absolute sense and degree. Our Lord, however, "knew what was in man" and judged not by the outward appearances. What, therefore, might have been an uncharitable judgment and saying on the part of the apostles was not so on our Lord's part. His own experiences less than six months afterward, and the experiences of his faithful disciples, all attested the wisdom and justice of the term "wolves" as applied to the self-righteous, Sabbath-keeping, street-corner praying, tithing scribes and Pharisees, who had the form of godliness but not the power of it in their hearts and lives.

Continuing to draw lessons from the Jewish harvest and to apply them in this harvest, we begin to realize that nominal Christendom of today is likewise wolflike rather than lamblike, and that those who receive the Lord's message and go forth in his name now are similarly as lambs amongst wolves. The Apostle draws a picture, not of the heathen world, but of the nominal Christian Church of today, when writing to Timothy he prophetically described the conditions in the end of this age. His words are, "In the last days perilous times shall come." "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but having itching ears will gather to themselves teachers after their own desires; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." – 2 Tim. 3:1-5; 4:3,4.

"AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST!"

The last verse of the lesson is most impressive, most encouraging, most stimulating. The Lord would have us know that when sent out with his message and under his direction we fully represent him, so that he that heareth us heareth him. What a wonderful honor is thus conferred upon the most humble of the Lord's mouthpieces, "He that despiseth you, despiseth me, and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me." If as the Lord's people we could always have this thought with us, it would certainly be a blessing to us in two ways:

(1) It would prompt us to feel the dignity of the smallest service rendered to the Lord's cause. It would banish fear of man and all feelings of weakness and trepidation. Recognizing ourselves as the Lord's representatives we would be courageous to go anywhere, to do any service called for in his commission and providential leading.

(2) This thought would bring to us such a sense of our responsibility that all the affairs of the present life would seem trivial and insignificant in comparison to the one great thing that we do – our heavenly mission and commission. We would be more dignified in manner, more earnest in our service as well as less careful of what man might say of us. Our whole concern would be that we might please him who hath chosen us to be soldiers in his Royal Legion, to be ambassadors and heralds of the Kingdom and of its terms and conditions.

Watch and Pray

Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Matthew 26:41

When thus considered, not as a begging arrangement, nor as an occasion of instructing the Lord as to our wills, but as a season of union and communion of heart with the Father, in which we may relieve our burdened or perplexed hearts and realize Divine sympathy, calling to mind Divine promises, reviewing Divine care, and expressing our confidence in God's many promises, thus bringing those promises afresh and close to our hearts, as though God now audibly uttered them in our hearing – thus considered, how proper, yea, how necessary is prayer to the true child of God! He cannot live without it. To break off this communion would be like stripping a tree of its leaves; their removal would stunt and hinder its development.

But to suppose that Christian life depends *solely* upon prayer without earnest study of God's Word, is like supposing that a tree could flourish from its leaves only, without roots and soil. Both are needful. As good soil and roots will produce leaves and fruitage, so, likewise, the promises of God's Word absorbed by us will naturally lead to good works and to communion with God in prayer, without which the fruits of the Spirit would soon wither and disappear.

No wonder, then, that Jesus both by precept and by example said, "Watch and pray" (Matt. 26:41), uniting the conditions necessary to our development. Some *pray* and neglect to *watch*; others *watch* and neglect to *pray*. Both these errors are serious; and it is not possible for us to decide which is the more serious neglect, since either would work disastrous loss of the great "prize" for which we are running.

Nowhere is prayer defined as a *duty*, though its *necessity* is stated. The Father desireth such to worship Him as worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23); and it would be contrary to this principle to define prayer as a duty, and to stipulate a set time or place or a formal manner. The earnestness of the service and the peculiarity of the circumstance will regulate the frequency and the subject matter of prayer. R. 4984

"OFFENDED BECAUSE OF ME"

Excerpt from R. 4488

So far as our Lord's personality was concerned, we may be sure there was no cause of offense in him; he did nobody harm, but did everybody good. It was his doctrines that offended the people, and not his personality; nevertheless, their resentment was against his personality rather than against his doctrines, which were too strong for them to attack.

On one occasion we remember when they took up stones to stone him, Jesus expostulated with them, saying, I have done a good work and ye all marvel. Why, then, are you about to stone me? They answered that it was not for anything personal, but because of his doctrine. The Adversary deluded them, and made the words of him who spake as never man spake to appear false and God-dishonoring, whereas they were very true.

Our Lord said, "Marvel not if the world hate you; ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own. But now ye are not of the world, because I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." This implies that in proportion as we follow closely in the Master's footsteps our experiences will be proportionately similar to his. We shall be hated, not because of evil deeds to others, but because whoever is out of harmony with the truth of God's Word will be out of harmony with those who speak the truth, and verily think that they do God a service in opposing them.

Notice also that the world that will hate you is not the heathen world, not the Gentile world, but the worldly who pose as God's people. This was so with Jesus. He preached, not to the Gentiles, but to the holy nation of the Jews, God's consecrated people. And those who hated him and delivered him unto death were of his own nation, and even Judas of his own disciples. So we also should expect, in harmony with our Lord's words, that the worldly who will hate us will be the worldly-spirited ones, adversaries prominent in the Church, and some of them, perhaps, close to us as fellow-disciples.

Seeing these things in advance, being thus fore-warned, shall we not be fore-armed, so that none of these experiences may move us from our constancy and faithfulness? Let us remember the Apostles of old, and how the smiting of the Shepherd affected them, and scattered them, and confused them, so that of the two who followed him at all one in terror denied him with cursing, while the other, the loving disciple, viewed the Master sympathetically, but afar off.

Our Lord had forewarned them, and had instructed them how they might have been better prepared for this trial, but they had not heeded his words, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." Hence in the moment of temptation they were overwhelmed, scattered. The lesson to us is that we should watch and pray, and by faith draw very near to the Master, and be full of confidence in the Divine plan, and remember the assurance that all things are working together for good to them that love the Lord, to them that are called according to his purpose.

Watching and praying will cultivate confidence and faith in God, and preserve us from the trepidation and fear and stumbling which will surely upset many others; because from this standpoint of faith we shall know how to apply in our own time and under our own circumstances our Lord's words to Pilate, "Thou couldst have no power at all over me except it were permitted of my Father." God is still at the helm, and is still working all things according to the counsel of his own will. It is for us to come close to the Lord and to wait for the development of his plan with absolute confidence and fearlessness – except in the sense that we should fear to leave undone anything directed in his Word.

Thus our Lord feared in Gethsemane, and in due time received Divine assurance and the strengthening of his heart, and the calm rest and peace which properly accompanied that assurance. So it will be with us "after that we have suffered awhile" and our faith has been properly tested, the Lord will give us succor and "grace to help in every time of need."

WATCH AND PRAY LEST YE ENTER INTO TEMPTATION

Excerpt from R. 2773

In the case of our Lord and the apostles we see illustrated the value of watchfulness and prayer in the dark hour of trouble. Our Lord followed the direction he gave to the disciples: he watched, he prayed, he got a blessing, he was strengthened, and came off victor. They did not watch and did not pray, failing to realize the necessities of the occasion, and as a result we find them scattered, bewildered; – and one of them, the very strongest of them all, who boastingly had said a little while before, "Though all men forsake thee yet will not I," was so overpowered by his surroundings, and so weak through lack of the very strength he should have obtained through watching and prayer, that he denied the Lord with profanity.

Whenever we find the Lord's people attempting to live a life of holiness and consecration, yet ignoring the injunction of our Lord to watch and pray, we know that they are unwise; and that however much they may be virgins, pure ones, they are foolish: they cannot hope to gain the victory over self and sin and the Adversary, single-handed, alone. If the Master himself needed strengthening, surely we also need it; and if he received it in response to supplications with strong cryings and tears, it is an intimation to us of the way in which God is pleased to bestow the full assurance of faith which is able to strengthen us as good soldiers to endure any and everything in his name and service. Those who seek the Lord earnestly and in prayer are as sure to receive a blessing as was the Lord Jesus himself; and altho there will not come to them the same kind of heavenly messenger to comfort and encourage them, nevertheless a heavenly messenger of another kind will surely be sent. It may be in the person of a fellow-disciple, able to enter into and sympathize with us in our trials as difficulties, as none of the apostles could sympathize with our Lord or assist him. Or it may be that the messenger sent will be one of the apostles themselves, through the many gracious

words of inspiration which God has communicated to us through them in his Word. But however the strength may come, it must be the assurance, not of men nor of angels, but of God, that we are pleasing and acceptable to him, – and that we may claim and expect the exceeding great and precious things which he has in reservation for them that love him.

So to speak, we are now in the hour of trial which cometh upon the whole world to try them. The present is represented in the Scriptures to be “the hour of temptation” or testing at the close of this age. It is the Gethsemane hour, in this sense of the word, to all who are the Lord’s true people, fully consecrated to him. It is the hour, therefore, in which we, like our Lord, should be seeking the Father’s face to receive the full assurance that we are his, and that he is ours; and that we may rely confidently on his strength to carry us through this time. It is the time in which we are to make sure, as we sometimes sing:

*O let no earthborn cloud arise
To hide thee from thy servant’s eyes.*

It is a time in which those who neglect the Master’s words, “Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation,” will be sure to enter into temptation, and be tolerably sure to fall therein. And the fall will be severe, – and even though, like Peter, they should afterward be recovered out of it, it will be with weeping.

Some make the mistake of praying without watching; others make the mistake of watching without praying; but the safe and only proper method is that which our Lord directed, to combine the two. We are to watch, and to be on our guard against the encroachments of the world, the flesh and the devil. We are to watch for all the encouragements of the Lord’s Word, the evidence of their fulfillment, the signs that betoken his presence and the great changes of dispensation just at hand. We are to watch for everything that will strengthen us in faith and hope and loyalty and love; and while watching we are to pray without ceasing. We are to pray together as the Lord’s people; we are to pray in our homes, as families; we are to pray in secret, in private. We are to have the spirit of prayer in all that we say and do: that is to say, our hearts should be going out continually to the Lord for guidance in all of life’s affairs, that we may do with our might what our hands find to do, in a manner that will be acceptable to him, and that we may be shielded by him from temptation that would otherwise be beyond our endurance, and that we may be ultimately delivered from the Evil One and have a place in our Lord’s Kingdom. Brethren and sisters, let us more and more remember and put into practice, in every home in which the *Watch Tower* is a visitor, these words of our Lord, “Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.”

WHAT AND WHY WE WATCH

Excerpt from Harvest Gleanings II, NS227



Jesus teaches his disciples

Let us now look at the other ingredient in this prescription which the Lord gave for our benefit and which so many of us have proven to be beyond price. If we pray why should we watch? For what should we watch? On another occasion our Lord intimated that the reason, the necessity for watching as well as praying, lies in the fact that we have an adversary, an invisible foe, who seeks to seduce us, turn us aside from our vows of consecration to the Lord and his way of righteousness. Our Lord says that this adversary is the devil, and we understand that the devil is not only a personal being but that he has many minions or associates, the fallen angels who kept not their first estate when on trial before the flood. (Jude 6)

Not only so, but Satan has millions of representatives and agents in the world – millions who are his agents without really being aware of the fact. According to our Lords testimony on one occasion, we may understand that the whole world of mankind is divided into two hostile camps, the one a little flock under the guidance and control of Jesus their invisible Lord and Head, whose will they seek to do, the other the remainder of the world, who unwittingly are in the service of Satan because they are in the service of sin, and because, as the Apostle expressed it, “His servants you are to whom you render service.” Rom. 6:16

From this standpoint, with this view before our minds, how many agents our great adversary has who unconsciously are working for him, working for sin, working against the Lord, and hence are the opponents of the few who have tasted of the grace of God, who have accepted the divine conditions and who have consecrated themselves to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. No wonder we are urged to watch as well as to pray, to watch against these various seductive influences of the adversary through the world

and its spirit operating through social, financial and Churchianity channels to draw us away from that full consecration to the Lord and to the Truth to which we have already pledged our lives. From every standpoint of opposition there will be more or less seductive allurements on the part of the flesh seeking gratification.

Our safety is in watching and praying, not that we can hope that by watching and praying we can escape temptations but that holding fast to the Lord and being covered with the mantle of his love and mercy these temptations will all be overruled for our good, developing us in heart and character in the likeness of our Lord. Well has the poet expressed this sentiment, saying:

“O! watch, and fight, and pray;
The battle ne'er give o'er;
Renew it boldly every day,
And help divine implore.”

“Ne'er think the vic'try won,
Nor once at ease sit down;
Thine arduous work will not be done,
Till thou hast gained thy crown.”

True, the Lord could answer our prayers by defending us from every adverse influence, by shielding us from every temptation, by making us immune to all manner of temptations. But for him to do this would be to change his own plans, and hence he will not do it. And when we come to understand what the divine plans are, and how the watching and resistance of sin are necessary to our proper development as the Lord's people, we will no longer be expected to be “carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the prize, and sailed through bloody seas.”

Our Lord's object in the special call of the Church during this Gospel age is the development of a class of people into the character-likeness of his dear Son, our Redeemer. That means a condition of heart that will be in opposition to sin, that will have its special delight in opposing sin, that would die rather than yield to sin. We must remember, however, that we have this treasure of a new mind in an earthen vessel, our mortal bodies (2 Cor. 4:7); we must remember that to will is present with us but that the performance is another matter. To will right is of absolute necessity from the very beginning of our Christian course. He who wills adverse to righteousness and truth and goodness and the Lord, is not begotten of the holy Spirit. Every one that is begotten again wills to do right, wills to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. But with all our willingness we have difficulty in performing, because of the adverse conditions of our own flesh and because also of the adverse conditions of the world about us. So, then, the present life, with its praying and watching, is the Lord's time; in it he tests us respecting our faith and our obedience to him and his principles. If we realize the temptations about us and have faith we will sorely appeal to the Lord for his promised assistance. We will surely not neglect the throne of grace. If we do neglect it, it is a sign that we are lacking in faith, that we are in that respect not fit for the Kingdom, because all who are inheritors of the Kingdom must have faith – “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith.” Heb. 11:6; 1 John 5:4 (NS227)

35 “Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning,

36 “and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master,
when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and
knocks they may open to him immediately.

37 “Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes,
will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself
and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them.

Luke 12:35-37

WATCHING AND ITS REWARD

Excerpt from R. 2692

LUKE 12:35-46

“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.” – Matthew 26:41

PRAYER IS GOOD; it is absolutely indispensable to Christian life. It means, not only a living faith, but a growing faith. Experience will prove that neglect of either private prayer (Matt. 6:6) or prayer in the congregation of the Lord’s people (Acts 12:12; 1:14; 16:13; 1 Cor. 11:4,5; 14:13,14) is sure to lead to leanness of soul and lukewarmness in respect to spiritual things – unfaithfulness, coldness, death. On the contrary, communion with the Lord in prayer brings increased confidence in the Lord’s supervision of our affairs; increased faith in all the exceeding great and precious promises of his Word; increased realization of his leadings, past and present; increased love for all the brethren of Christ, and increased solicitude for their welfare and spiritual progress. Prayer is thus closely and actively identified with progress in spiritual things, progress in the fruits of the spirit, toward God, the brethren, and all men.

Our Golden Text suggests, however, that more than praying is necessary. Praying that does not fully represent the sentiments of the heart is apt very quickly to degenerate into a mere form of words – drawing nigh to the Lord with the lips while the heart is far from him, – perhaps enwrapped in business or pleasure or sin. Whoever, therefore, would make progress in the spiritual way must not only pray with the spirit and with the understanding, but he must also watch – against the sinful tendencies of his own flesh – self-gratification, selfishness; also against the allurements of the world toward so-called worldly pleasures, worldly ambitions, honor amongst men, the love of money, etc.; also against the wiles of the Adversary, whose deceitful attacks usually come upon the Lord’s people as “an angel of light” – to deceive them into forms and ceremonies of Churchianity, substituting before the mind and affections and consecrated intentions, human sentiments and methods and works and objectives, as instead of “the hope

set before us in the Gospel" (Col. 1:23) and its various exceeding great and precious promises, by whose incentive the Lord has called us to walk and to run, by faith and not by sight, following in the footsteps of our Redeemer.

Our lesson itself deals particularly with the watching; but in harmony with the Golden Text we know that all true watchers must also be prayers, and that all fervent prayers will also be watchers. Prayer represents the faith; watching represents the works which must accompany it, so long as it is a living faith; for, as the Apostle declares, Faith without works is dead – it speedily loses its vitality, its value, its very existence.

Our Lord gave a parable, as was his custom in teaching, to illustrate this lesson of the necessity for watchfulness.

A wealthy householder is represented as absent for a considerable portion of the night at a wedding-feast, and expecting on his return that the servants of the household would be awake and alert to receive him and any company he might bring with him. It was expected of such servants that they would not only not retire to bed, but that they would not even get drowsy. To give their master a proper reception they should be thoroughly awake, quick to hear and to respond to his knock, and to "open unto him immediately." Hence, in the parable, such servants are represented as having their loins girt about and their lamps burning brightly. The custom of Orientals at that time was to wear long, loose, flowing robes. These, when they were resting, were loosened at the girdle, but when attending to business they were drawn tightly at the waist with a girdle or belt, preventing them from interfering with proper service. Lamps, which were the mode of illumination, were also necessary in the night, and should not be permitted to grow dim, but be trimmed as necessity required.

Our Lord points out that such faithful servants would be appreciated by their master, and that he would give them a reward – he would honor them by treating them as his friends, and bring forth to them of the good things from his pantry. He would indeed gird himself as a servant and serve these faithful ones: and for the master of the house to do this would imply the bringing forth of the very best that he possessed. But in order to fulfil the conditions and be thus acceptable to their master they must be ready in whatever hour of the night he might come.

The parable, without question, refers to the second coming of our Lord Jesus, and points out to all of his faithful servants the proper attitude of watchfulness and preparation to receive him at whatever time his second advent should occur. It also indicates that it was the Lord's good pleasure not to reveal definitely and positively to his people when to expect his arrival, but rather that all the way down through this night-time which we designate the Gospel age, and which must necessarily precede the morning of the Millennial day, they should be continually awake, alert, waiting for him, ready to receive him at any moment. They should have the loins of their minds girt up and be active in thought, in word and in deed, in every matter pertaining to the Master's service, that they might be approved of him; – the lamp of the divine Word, so necessary to their enlightenment, should be with them, and well supplied with the oil of the holy spirit – and well trimmed, in the sense of rightly dividing the word of truth, and seeking to understand through it their proper attitude of heart and conduct, to be pleasing to their Master.

Prayers of The Righteous

The parable is a very simple one, and could scarcely be misapprehended by the class for whom all parables are intended – the consecrated Church. These realize at once that the central thought with them, as the Lord’s servants, must be such readiness of heart and mind and character as will be pleasing to the Master when he shall come to gather his “jewels,” – his watching, faithful servants. This thought of the return of the Lord, and of the blessings which he has promised to his faithful ones at that time, is the great incentive set before the called ones of this Gospel age. It is for the Master’s favor and the consequent exaltation with him to a share in his Kingdom, then to be established, and a share in the great work of blessing the world of mankind, then to be accomplished, that all of the saints are seeking, watching, praying, striving.

Well has the Apostle said, “He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he [the looked-for Master] is pure.” It is this hope that leads the faithful servants continually to the lamp of the divine Word, to trim it and to thereby keep themselves thoroughly awake, quick of ear and quick of eye in respect to any and every thing relating to the will of the expected Master, and such conditions of heart-purity and robes of righteousness as would be pleasing and acceptable in his sight at his arrival.



Jesus At The Door by Del Parson

Let all watchers fully appreciate this parable, and be on guard against every ensnare-ment of the Adversary, and against the stupefying influence of the world and its spirit, and against the selfishness and weaknesses of his own flesh; and let each put on the graces of the spirit, and assist his fellow-servants in these preparations, that thus an entrance may be ministered to him into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. – 2 Pet. 1:4-12.

*“Take heed, watch and pray,
for you do not know
when the time is.”*

Mark 13:33

WATCH AND PRAY

*CHRISTIAN, seek not yet repose,
Hear thy gracious Savior say,
"Thou art in the midst of foes:
Watch and pray."*

*Principalities and powers
Mustering their unseen array,
Watch for thine unguarded hours:
"Watch and pray."*

*Gird thy heavenly armor on,
Wear it ever, night and day;
Ambush'd lies the Evil One:
"Watch and pray."*



*Hear, above all, hear thy Lord,
Him thou lovest to obey;
Hide within thy heart His words:
"Watch and pray."*

*Watch, as if on that alone
Hung the issue of the day;
Pray that help may be sent down:
"Watch and pray."*

Poems of Dawn, p. 111

The disciples at the First Advent did not realize how near they were to the experiences of Gethsemane and Calvary. It may be so with us now, for aught we know. Therefore we realize the importance of our lives being such as the Lord has marked out for us. Watch ye, lest ye fall in the hour of temptation! The hour of temptation was upon them; therefore it was important that they keep themselves in the right attitude. And so should we do now, when we believe the Age is closing. There may be peculiar tests, which the Lord may not wish us to know – they would not be such tests if we knew of them in advance. Therefore we should be on guard that we may be found loyal and faithful, and that we may demonstrate our faithfulness unto death in the way that the Lord has prepared for us. R. 5599

5.

A NEW AND LIVING WAY OPENED: Prayers of the Early Church

Various things are recorded as taking place at the moment of our Lord's death – an earthquake shook the ground in the neighborhood of the cross, and in the Temple at Jerusalem the great veil which separated between the Holy and Most Holy was torn, not from the bottom toward the top, as would be the expectation if it were the result of wear, but from the top to the bottom, as indicating that it was a manifestation of divine power. The veil or curtain is described as being sixty feet long and thirty feet wide, and its thickness about four inches. Josephus describes it as “of Babylonish texture, a wonderful stretch of white, scarlet and purple.” The rending of this curtain represented symbolically the opening of the way between heaven itself and the heavenly condition of those in the world. Christ has opened to us a new and living way through the veil – that is to say, through the sacrifice of his flesh. True believers are represented as being now associated with Jesus as priests in the Holy, or outer apartment of the two. Here we have fellowship with God through the light of the golden candlestick, through the bread of the golden table, and through the incense that we are permitted to offer on the golden altar, and from this standpoint we can now by faith see beyond the veil – catch glimpses at least of the heavenly estate which God hath in reservation for them who love him, for the called ones according to his purpose, for the Christ, Head and body. R. 3371

THE EARLY CHURCH

Waiting for The Holy Spirit

8 “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

9 Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. . . .

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey.

13 And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James.

14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

Acts 1:8-9,12-14

Then the Lord, who was walking with them, when they reached the Mount of Olives, lifted his hands and blessed them, and he was parted from them and went upward; and a cloud received him out of their sight. (Luke 24:48-52; Acts 1:6-15) They began to see something more of God's plan now. The Lord who came down from heaven had returned to the Father, as he had told them before he died – had gone to prepare a place for them and would come again and receive them – had gone afar to receive the promised kingdom, and to return (Luke 19:12); and meantime they were to be his **witnesses** in all the earth to call and make ready a people to receive him when he would come to be glorified in his saints, and to reign King of kings and Lord of lords. They saw their new mission, of proclaiming to every creature a coming king from heaven, “with all power in heaven and in earth,” to be a much more important work than that of the preceding years, when they heralded “the man Christ Jesus,” and followed him who was “despised and rejected of men.” Their risen Lord was changed indeed, not only in his personal appearance – appearing sometimes in one way and place, and again in a different way and place, manifesting his “all power” – but he was changed in condition or nature also. No longer did he appeal to the Jews, nor show himself to them; for since his resurrection none saw him in any sense except his friends and followers. His words, “Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more,” were thus verified.

Thus was the faith of the apostles and of the early Church established in the fact of the Lord's resurrection. Their doubts were scattered, and their hearts rejoiced; and they returned to Jerusalem and continued in prayer and supplication and study of the Scriptures, waiting for the adoption promised by the Father, and their endowment with spiritual understanding, and with special miraculous gifts of power, to enable them to convince true Israelites, and to establish the Gospel Church, at the day of Pentecost. Acts 1:14; 2:1 (B121)



Prayer at times may properly and profitably be offered in the presence of fellow-believers and audibly, as the prayer of all and in which all are interested and join. . . . The record respecting the early Church seems to imply that they met together as one family and that their prayers as well as their hymns and song-prayers were general, in common, for the benefit of the whole company present. This is implied in the account given in Acts 1:14 where it is declared, “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.” Again, the words of one of their prayers are quoted in Acts 1:24; evidently this prayer was uttered audibly and in common. Again in 1 Cor. 14:16 the Apostle shows the thanksgiving of the congregation was and should be presented before the Lord not only audibly but in a language heard and understood by the worshipers, so that all might be able to say “Amen” to the thanksgiving and petition. R. 2251

If you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say?

1 Corinthians 14:16

THE EARLY CHURCH

Continuing Steadfastly in the Spirit

38 Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

39 “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

40 And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.”

41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. . . .

46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,

47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Acts 2:38-43, 46-47

Evidently the Lord was guiding in respect to every feature of the establishment of the Church, and it was on this account that so large a number as three thousand persons were prepared to accept the message, – to accept Jesus as their Redeemer and King, and to avow themselves his followers, his disciples. It is not necessary that we should suppose that they were all baptized in the one day, nor are we, indeed, certain that they all avowed their allegiance to Messiah in the same day; but that as a result of that one day's preaching about three thousand were added to the Church. These were not added to a denomination, a party, a sect, but were additions to the one Church, the body of Christ, – members added to the one head of the Church. We do not read that their names were enrolled as members of the Church, nor that they took certain vows, nor that they assented to certain confessions of faith. He who accepts Christ as his Redeemer and as his instructor, who pledges himself to obedience to him, and to walk in his footsteps, has taken the only obligation which the Scriptures define as marking those who are probationary members of the true Church. And it is still proper to make an outward acknowledgment or sign of this acceptance of Christ by a symbolical baptism. The real baptism, the real consecration of the heart, or will, its burial into Christ, takes place first; the outward or symbolical representation of this in water is the good confession by which the individual shows, in God's appointed way, to his fellows or to whoever may witness, that he has died to the world and become alive toward God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

That the new converts were "Israelites indeed" was demonstrated by the fact that they did not speedily fall away and become cold. On the contrary, we are informed that they continued stedfast, recognizing the teachings of the apostles – that God specially used them as his representatives and mouthpieces for the instruction of his Church. They thus continued in fellowship with the household of faith, and this would imply meeting with them every first-day of the week to celebrate the Lord's resurrection, to unite their prayers at the throne of grace, and to build one another up in the most holy faith. Breaking the spiritual bread on these occasions, they also united in a common meal, in remembrance of the Lord's first meeting with them and making himself known after his resurrection in the blessing and breaking of bread. (Luke 24:35.) This has no reference to the Memorial Supper, which was celebrated yearly, and not with bread alone, but also with the cup, of equal importance.

"Fear came upon every soul" – reverence – an appreciation, to some extent at least, of the wonderful relationship to God into which they had been introduced, and of the wonderful power of God working in their midst, and especially manifested through the miracles and signs which the apostles were thus permitted to perform for the establishment of the faith of the justified. . . .

The early Church, full of love for the Lord and for each other, is a beautiful and in many respects an ideal picture, in which we can rejoice: no wonder it is recorded that they had joy, gladness, in their hearts, and in their thanksgiving to God, and that the people in general, their neighbors, were pleased with them and rejoiced in their loving spirit.
R. 2932

THE EARLY CHURCH

Prayer for Boldness

23 And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.

24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said:

“Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them,

25 “who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: ‘Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things?

26 The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the LORD and against His Christ.’

27 “For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together

28 “to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.

29 “Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word,

30 “by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.”

31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

Acts 4:23-31

The Church, young in faith, had no doubt been greatly distressed by the imprisonment of the leading disciples; and when they were released, then a general meeting for rejoicing and praise to God was held, thanking the Lord for the courage given to the Apostles, for the promises of His Word, and for the miracle which had led up to all this. As a consequence, we read that all were so encouraged that “they spake the Word of God with boldness”; and that “with great power gave the Apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them all.” R. 5840

VERSE 23 shows the beautiful bond of sympathy that existed among the various members of the early Church. They shared each others joys and sorrows and comforted and encouraged one another to be firm and true to God in the midst of the severest trials.

VERSES 24-30 record their prayer of thankful acknowledgment of the favor of God in the deliverance of these two faithful witnesses, thus showing that they did not attribute their success in convincing the people to their own eloquence or power, but to the favor and blessing of God.

While the kings and rulers, civil and religious, set themselves in determined opposition and take counsel together against the principles of truth and righteousness that are now being brought to the front and urged upon the attention of all mankind in the heated disputes between capital and labor, between rulers and subjects and between the clergy and the laity of all Christendom, they little realize that they are arraying themselves against the mighty power of the Lord of hosts, who will surely lay justice to the line and righteousness to the plummet, and effectually sweep away every refuge of lies. – Isa. 28:17.

VERSES 29,30 are a petition for special grace and courage, in view of the threatenings of persecution, that they might not grow faint-hearted, but, being filled with the spirit, might speak the truth with great boldness, regardless of the consequences to themselves; and for such miraculous endorsement of their teachings as he would be pleased in his wisdom to grant.

What a sweet, Christlike spirit was manifested in this prayer. Mark the love and harmony and sympathy among the brethren; the love and zeal for the truth which was evidently paramount to every other consideration, their gratitude and humble recognition of the divine favor, and the realization of their own weakness and desire for more and more of the power from on high and for special aid to enable them to endure hardness as good soldiers of the cross. Such is the proper attitude of the Church at all times; and such a spirit and such a prayer are sure to bring to the Church now as well as then the same answer of peace and joy. It is written that they were all filled with the holy spirit, and they went forth from that place of prayer and spoke the Word of God with boldness. The place also where they were was shaken while the blessing of the spirit came upon them. This, like the gifts that were then given, was evidently to supply what was then needed – an aid to their faith – in an hour of trial just at the beginning of their great work. R. 1425

And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Acts 4:33

THE EARLY CHURCH

Seven Chosen With Prayer

2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.

3 “Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;

4 “but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch,

6 whom they set before the apostles, and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

7 Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Acts 6:2-7

At the time of the ascension “about one hundred and twenty” were reckoned as being in full and deep fellowship in Christ; ten days later at Pentecost three thousand converts were added; shortly after five thousand more as recorded in our last lesson; later (Acts 5:14) “multitudes, both men and women, were added to the Lord;” still later, “the number of the disciples was multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great multitude of priests were obedient to the faith.” (Acts 6:1-7.) This period of gathering the ripe wheat and establishing them in the doctrines of Christ was a very necessary prelude to the period of trial, persecution and suffering which shortly followed. The persecution, however, was no less a divine mercy than the previous peace and prosperity: the divine rule for the Gospel Church evidently is that each member shall be “made perfect through suffering.” The stoning of Stephen was merely the beginning of the general persecution which in one form or another has continued ever since, and must continue until the last members of the body of Christ shall have proven themselves faithful even unto death and been accounted worthy of the crown of life mentioned in our golden text.

Stephen, it will be remembered, was chosen as one of the assistants of the apostles and was known as a deacon – minister or servant – the original intention being that the service should be chiefly with reference to the temporal interests of the Church. His choice would indicate that he was considered at the time a man of ability, and that faithfulness to the work entrusted to him led on to still greater privileges and opportunities for service. Accordingly we find him in this lesson ministering spiritual things with imbue ment of the spirit and ability closely approaching that of the apostles. He was full of faith and power, says our common version, and no doubt truly, but the oldest manuscripts render this “full of grace and power.” Both were true, because he could not have had the grace and the power without the faith. “This is the victory which overcometh the world, even your faith.” In Stephen’s case the faith working by love had produced zeal for the Lord and his cause; and the faith and zeal blended with the spirit of holiness gave Stephen extraordinary grace and power, as pointed out in verse 8. And the same combination will produce like grace and power in all of the Lord’s people in proportion as these elements of character are found in each. R. 2108

Notice that in the early Church the laying on of hands was used also to indicate **consent**; as, for instance, in the case of the Church at Antioch when it chose Paul and Barnabas to be its missionaries and representatives in Gospel work. This congregation fasted and prayed and laid their hands upon Paul and Barnabas, and thus sent them away. The laying on of hands in this case did not imply the communication of any gift, but merely denoted representation. . . . We suggest that in our judgment the choosing and fasting and prayer are still the proper acts in connection with the congregational recognition of the elders – whether local or traveling; but that the laying on of hands, which could communicate no gift of the spirit, and which in the custom of our country no longer indicates representation, is no longer the proper thing. Indeed, we consider it the improper thing in view of the customs and practices in general, because it would be liable to be misunderstood, and to give the impression that the users hold the theory in common with many that an apostolic succession has been continued with power to authorize and commission and to imbue the subjects with supernatural abilities. . . . R. 1957

STEPHEN

Stephen's Prayer

51 “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.

52 “Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers,

53 “who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.”

54 When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.

55 But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God,

56 and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”

57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord,

58 and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

59 And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying,

“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

60 Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice,

“Lord, do not charge them with this sin.”

And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Acts 7:51-60

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR

Excerpt from R. 2108

ACTS 6:8-15; 7:54-60

“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

– Revelation 2:10

Stephen’s discourse before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:1-53) marks him as having been a man of great ability. It reads more like the language of the Apostle Paul than that of any other New Testament writer. And the Apostle Paul, then Saul of Tarsus, is supposed to have been one of his hearers, a member of the Sanhedrin.

The closing of Stephen’s address (**verses 51-53**) laid upon the Jewish people, and especially upon the Jewish Sanhedrin as the representatives of the religious law, the full responsibility for the death of the “Just One” – as his betrayers and murderers. This pointed application of Scripture and facts, as might have been expected, only aroused the evil hearts of the judges. Of those converted by Peter’s discourse it was said, “They were pricked to the heart;” but of these it is said, “They were cut to the hearts” by the words of truth – the evil of their natures was aroused to the full, they gnashed on him with their teeth – they were exceedingly incensed.

(55-58) Full of the holy spirit, Stephen was wholly unmoved by their manifestations of anger. He was testifying for God and for the truth, and instead of fear of man his heart was brought into the closer sympathy and union with the Lord. The Lord knew all about the termination of the trial and what the sentence would be, and no doubt gave Stephen a vision of heavenly glory – of the Father, and of Christ at the right hand of his majesty. This no doubt was for the strengthening of Stephen’s own faith for the martyrdom just at hand; and perhaps also intended to act as it did upon his unjust judges. His declaration of the vision which he saw capped the climax of their indignation, at his supposed opposition to God and to Moses and to themselves as representatives of the Law. They construed this to be additional blasphemy – that Jesus of Nazareth, whom they condemned as a blasphemer, and whose crucifixion they had procured, was acceptable to God; and not only so, but made next to the Father – at the right hand of God, or place of power and influence. Using this as a pretext, they terminated the trial and executed the sentence of stoning – stopping their ears as though they would thus say, what no doubt some of them actually felt, that such an exaltation of Jesus next to Jehovah, far above Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the prophets was gross blasphemy which they could not justify themselves in hearing and felt bound to resent by stoning the blasphemer.

According to the Law, those who heard the blasphemy did the stoning; and they laid their outer garments at the feet of Saul, which would seem to indicate that he not only consented to the verdict that Stephen was a blasphemer worthy of death, but that he was one of the leaders in the prosecution, as well as an influential man in the Sanhedrin.

(59-60) Without attempting to dissuade them from their course, Stephen offered up prayer to the Lord, and a beautiful prayer it was – not only for the preservation of his

spirit, but also that the sin might not be laid to the charge of his murderers.

Thus he “fell asleep.” This testimony respecting Stephen is in full accord with the testimony of other Scriptures. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the prophets “slept” with their fathers in death; and the Apostle, after enumerating some of the faithful ones of the past (who were stoned, etc., in hope of a better resurrection), grouping them all together, says (Heb. 11:39,40), “These all. . . received not the promise; God having provided some **better thing for us**, that they without us should not be made perfect.” They all are represented as sleeping and waiting for the morning – the resurrection morning – the Millennial morning – the morning of which the prophet David spoke, saying, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning;” the morning of which the prophet Job spoke, saying, “Hide me in the grave until thy wrath be past [the reign of death during the present age with all of its concomitants of sorrow, trouble and pain, are evidences of divine wrath]. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.” Our Lord, speaking of the resurrection morn, the same great day of awakening from the sleep of death, corroborates Job’s statement, saying, “All that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth.” (John 5:28,29.) Stephen slept with the others, but as one of the overcomers of the new dispensation he will have a share in the first resurrection (Rev. 20:6), and thus awake earlier in the morning than others not winners of the prize of the high calling of this Gospel age. – Psa. 46:5, margin.

The expression “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” signifies that Stephen understood that the spark of life, the spirit of life, was passing from his control; and by this expression he gave evidence of his faith in a future life, committing it wholly to the care of him who redeemed him from the power of the grave and who is shortly to deliver therefrom all who trust in him.

Stephen’s faithful witness unto death was followed in turn by that of many others likewise faithful unto death and heirs of crowns of life according to the promise. The beneficent influences of the gospel of Christ have since Stephen’s day so permeated the civilized world, and so affected it, that the followers of Christ are not at present in danger of being stoned to death for preaching his gospel. Nevertheless, the Apostle’s words still hold good, “All who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” It is still necessary to suffer with Christ, if we would be glorified with him and share his coming Kingdom. But the persecutions of today are more refined than in any previous period. The faithful today are not stoned with literal stones or shot with literal arrows or literally beheaded, but it is still true that the wicked shoot out arrows at the righteous, “even **bitter words**,” and many because of faithfulness are reproved and slandered and cut off from fellowship – beheaded for the testimony of Jesus. (Rev. 20:4.) Let all such emulate Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Let their testimonies be given with radiant faces like his. Let their eyes of faith perceive Jesus at the right hand of the majesty on high as their Advocate and Deliverer. Let their words be with moderation as were Stephen’s, and let it be true of them, as written of him, “full of grace and power” and “filled with the holy spirit.”



Stephen's attitude in receiving his persecution was most noble. He prayed for himself and for his enemies – that the latter might be forgiven, so far as he was concerned; – they will have enough to answer for and to receive “stripes” or just retribution. For himself, that the Lord would receive his spirit. . . .

Stephen's attitude under persecution may well commend itself to us: our love for the Lord and our benevolent sympathy with all the gracious features of his plan should lift us above any and everything like vindictiveness or spitefulness against our enemies; and should permit us to see that their mistreatment of us, is largely because they are blind to the truth. They know not us, even as they knew not the Lord; and, as he said, if they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, and said all manner of evil against him falsely, we must not be surprised if the same should be our lot. We know, therefore, to count it all joy when we fall into such matters; and should rejoice that we are counted worthy of a share with the Lord in the trials and difficulties of this present time, that in due time we may be made partakers also of the glory to follow. With us also the one thought should be the pleasing of our Lord and the attainment, through him, of the life everlasting – having him to care for our spirit of life, and to revive us again in the resurrection in due time.

In the midst of his prayer he fell asleep – he died. Commenting on these words an “orthodox” writer says: “Though the pagan authors sometimes used sleep to signify death, it was only a poetic figure. When Christ, on the other hand, said, ‘Our friend, Lazarus, *sleepeth*,’ he used the word, not as a figure but as an expression of a fact. In that mystery of death in which the pagan saw only nothingness, Jesus saw continued life, rest, waking – the elements which enter into sleep. And thus in Christian speech and thought, as the doctrine of the resurrection struck its roots deeper, the word ‘dead,’ with its hopeless finality, gave place to the more gracious and hopeful word, ‘sleep.’ The pagans’ burying place carried in its name no suggestion of hope or comfort. It was a burying place, a hiding place, monumentum, a mere memorial of something gone; ...but the Christian thought of death as sleep brought with it, in the Christian speech, the kindred thought of a chamber of rest, and embodied it in the word cemetery – ***the place to lie down to sleep***” – ***Word Studies***. . . .

Viewed from God's standpoint, quite possibly the testimony which Stephen gave at the close of his life was a most beneficial one; first in its influence upon the believers, in teaching them by precept and example faithfulness, even unto death; and that the Lord's people could die as they lived, – joyful through the faith that is in Christ. His death also probably bore a valuable witness to some of his enemies. Quite possibly the Apostle Paul's first favorable impressions toward Christianity were received through his witness of the courage and zeal of this noble martyr, – whose spirit of Christ he doubtless witnessed in others of the hated “sect, everywhere spoken against.”

So with us; we know not which act in life may glorify the Lord most, or whether our living or dying would be most helpful to his cause. We are to leave this in the Lord's hands, and to remember that our course in any event must be one of faithfulness, and that if faithful nothing can by any means harm us, but all things must work together for our good. R. 2958

CORNELIUS

1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment,
2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.
3 About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, “Cornelius!”
4 And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, “What is it, lord?” So he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.
5 “Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter.
6 “He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.”
7 And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually.
8 So when he had explained all these things to them, he sent them to Joppa.

24 And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.
25 As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him.
26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up. I myself am also a man.”
27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together.
28 Then he said to them, “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

34 Then Peter opened his mouth and said: “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.
35 “But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.
36 “The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ---He is Lord of all.

Acts 10:1-8. 24-28, 34-36

“LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY”

Excerpt from R. 5832

IN THE beginning, when Adam was in harmony with God, he was in the condition represented in the Scriptures as covenant relationship with God. The Word declares that Adam broke this holy Covenant. (Hosea 6:7, margin.) He became a sinner; and his children, born later, were sinners with him, through heredity. Instead of being born in covenant relationship with God, the children of Adam were born aliens. But God has had dealings with a few who exercised special faith and a desire to come into harmony with Him. Abel, the second son of Adam, was one of these. He approached God with an animal sacrifice and was accepted. Enoch and Noah also came into a condition of fellowship with the Lord by faith, even though they were still legally under the condemnation passed upon Adam, the Ransom-price not yet having been given.

Later on, God entered into covenant relationship with Abraham, because of his great faith and obedience; and afterwards with his son Isaac; then with his grandson Jacob. Still later, God entered into relationship with the seed of Jacob, under the Law Covenant at Sinai. The Lord had changed the name of Jacob to Israel – “a prince with God” (Genesis 32:24-30); and the whole nation of Israel, the descendants of Jacob, were received as God’s people, and were treated as if without sin. They had the privilege of going to Him in prayer. But the sins of the Jewish nation were only typically blotted out from year to year. The blood of bulls and goats could never really take away sin, and the Jews held only the relationship of servants to God.

The Gentiles were altogether without God. They had no privilege of prayer. We come down to the beginning of the Gospel Age and to the case of Cornelius. We read that he was a just man, who gave much alms to the people and prayed always. But his prayers could not be accepted, even after Jesus died. The death of Jesus did not bring Cornelius into covenant relationship with God. But when the seventy symbolic weeks of Jewish favor had been fulfilled, the due time had come for the Gospel to go to the Gentiles. God was then ready to receive him, and He sent an angel to him, who gave him this message from the Lord: “Cornelius, thy prayers and thine alms have come up for a memorial before God.” The prayers and the alms of Cornelius had risen up as an incense before the Lord.

3 About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, “Cornelius!” 4 And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, “What is it, lord?” So he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. 5 “Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter.”

Acts 10:3-5

Had God not accepted these offerings before? No. They had been noted of God, but had not been received. God’s way of receiving – except in a limited or typical way previous to the Gospel Age – is by certain definite means which He has appointed – through an Advocate in this Age, and through a Mediator in the next. “No man cometh unto the

Father but by Me,” says Jesus. Even when the due time had arrived, Cornelius could not come until God sent him word how to proceed.

KNOWLEDGE OF TRUTH NECESSARY

The angel of the Lord said to Cornelius: “Send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter, who shall tell thee words whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.” (Acts 11:13,14.) Those words were necessary to his saving – to the bringing of him into covenant relationship with God. Cornelius, being obedient, sent for Simon Peter, who gave him the necessary instruction for drawing nigh unto God through Jesus. And unless we come to the Father through Christ, our prayers would not be received any more than those of Cornelius had been.

What St. Peter told Cornelius was to the effect that God had provided a great Sin-Offering; that Jesus had tasted death for every man; that now, in advance of dealing with the world, God is taking out a Little Flock, to be joined with Christ in the blessing of the world. When Cornelius heard the good Message, he believed with all his heart; and likewise those who were with him. Doubtless he had heard of Jesus before, but now he understood the matter. He had been in the right condition of heart all along. He had been praying and fasting. But even so he could not be accepted of God except through Jesus. He must have Christ as his Advocate.

HOW JESUS BECOMES OUR ADVOCATE

But what does it mean to have Jesus as our Advocate? It means that first, we must accept Him as our Ransom from sin and death. Next, He tells us, “If any man will be My disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.” By merely believing that Jesus died, and that He was holy, etc., no one can become His disciple. “The devils also believe, and tremble.” But justification to life comes when we receive the Lord on His terms. Then He becomes our Advocate.

No one has a right to expect an answer to prayer except one who has become a disciple of Christ through full consecration. And whosoever cometh to the Father by Him shall in no wise be cast out. (John 6:37.) There is but one exception to this rule, and this is a class of minors, children lacking the full age of responsibility and of comprehension of these matters, one or both of whose parents are disciples of Christ. That age of responsibility would vary – in some it might be from twelve to fifteen years of age, and in some even later. But whoever reaches the point of full comprehension and responsibility, and does not consecrate himself to the Lord, would lose the privilege of prayer. In the case, then, of a minor child, either of whose parents is consecrated, he would have a right to look for answers to his prayers to God.

The Lord does not hinder any one from bowing the knee. Savages do so right along, but their prayers do not ascend up to God. The Jews were at one time an exception as regards prayer, but they were a typical people. That arrangement, however, was temporary, and has passed away. But soon they will again have the privilege of prayer, through the great Mediator; and all the world may join them in this privilege. Jesus will not be the Advocate for the world. This arrangement is only for the Church of the present Age.



Peter, in discoursing on the matter, evidently had his mind more widely opened than ever before to a realization of what our Lord meant in giving the general commission to preach the Gospel, not merely to the Jews, but to whoever would have an ear to hear. Peter was not expecting “ears” amongst the Gentiles; but now he perceived that God was not a respecter of nations and features, etc., but that the message was open for all, and he did his best to present it. He proceeded to show that Jesus, as the Messiah, was not evidenced merely by the things connected with his ministry, and the ministry of his followers; but that all these things were foreknown to God, and planned, and foretold through the holy prophets of Israel, and that only in and through the name and merit of Jesus, – only to those exercising faith in him, was God pleased to show a reconciled face, and from such only was he willing to take away all sin and shame, and to adopt them into his family.

Cornelius and his devout household and friends had been waiting for just such a message of divine grace; and as the words fell from Peter’s lips they were quickly and gladly appropriated in the hearts of his hearers, who were by this time accepting Jesus with the same fullness and appreciation as Peter himself. Their hearts being thus in the right condition before God, it would have been appropriate for Peter to have said to them, Now brethren, your proper course will be to be baptized into Jesus by a water baptism, – symbolizing your faith in him and your full consecration to be dead with him, as his faithful followers. But Peter was not ready to take such a step, we may be sure. He was surprised that God was willing that the Gentiles should even know about the wonderful provisions of salvation in Jesus; which of itself would have been a blessing. But he was not yet prepared to expect that the Gentiles would be received of the Lord on practically the same terms, and with exactly the same manifestations of divine favor as were the Jews. To make good Peter’s insufficiency of knowledge to baptize them, and to lay his hands upon them that they might receive the gifts of the spirit, – and as a lesson to Peter also, – the holy spirit was given to Cornelius and his companions without the laying on of hands – in the same manner that it was bestowed upon the assembly at Pentecost.

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.
Acts 10:44

Peter quickly learned the lesson, and undoubtedly his readiness to learn it was in large measure due to his humility and sincerity of heart, the fullness of his consecration to the Lord, and his desire that the divine will should be done in every particular. Peter and his companions from Joppa, “they of the circumcision,” were astonished at God’s favor upon the Gentiles, yet they were not envious. They were glad to welcome as cleansed, as brothers, all whom the Lord indicated that he had received into his fellowship. The result of this outpouring of the spirit was a grand testimony meeting. The record is that they “magnified God,” praising him, rejoicing in their acceptance.
R. 2988

45 And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, 47 “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.

Acts 10:45-48

SAUL

Saul's Time in Arabia

13 For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.

14 And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace,

16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,

17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.

Galatians 1:13-18

The Apostle as a chosen vessel was to have a very conspicuous part in the Divine program, in the introduction of the Gospel, and his own humility was a very essential matter. . . .

Saul had been praying and fasting for three days and nights and now realized the Lord's forgiving love, as manifested in the sending of Ananias, in harmony with his dream and with a recovery of a measure of his sight. With this evidence of Divine favor he would start afresh. First he would be baptized and thus symbolize his allegiance to the Crucified One. Then he would eat for the refreshment of his body that the strength might be used in the service of his new Master.

Presumably the Apostle felt his need of special preparation for the ministry of the Cross of Christ. At all events it is presumed that it was shortly after his conversion, shortly after his preaching at Damascus, that he turned aside into the desert of Arabia. It is possible that those three years were spent studying out the various features of the Divine Program.* Doubtless there he received visions which filled him with enthusiasm for the work of his great message, the blessings of which have come down through all age and are still with us. R. 4357

* Undoubtedly Saul--later Paul--spent this time in prayer and communion with the Father. Perhaps these three years were spent studying and learning about his mission and his new standing in Christ. -Editor

We are to recognize that the Apostle Paul had special information from the Lord. He tells us so. He says he had visions and revelations more than all the other Apostles. And he declares that the Lord revealed to him things not proper to be uttered at that time. He must not explain these visions; their meaning was a secret intrusted to him. (2 Cor. 12:4.) The Apostle's mind being thus illuminated, he was able to write with great intelligence, clearness and power, so that we, with the increasing light upon the Holy Scriptures now due, might be able to see a depth to his writings, and get a grasp on the Truth, not otherwise possible. And we do. Nearly all of our knowledge of the deep things comes from St. Paul's Epistles, because he had this light and it permeated all that he wrote. So we today are able to explore and to understand many things which were secrets, known only to the Apostle Paul in his day. R. 5339

*How he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.
2 Corinthians 12:4*

THE CHURCH AT THE HOME OF MARY

The Church Prays All Night

1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church.

2 Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

3 And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

4 So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover.

5 Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.

Acts 12:1-5

THE CHURCH PRAYED FOR PETER

Excerpt from R. 4347

St. Peter is supposed to have been imprisoned in the famous Castle of Antonio, possibly in the very same room in which our Lord was arraigned before Pilate, and the same one to which Paul was subsequently taken when mobbed in Jerusalem. Peter had a guard of four quaternions (four soldiers each), who relieved each other every three hours. Two of the four were chained to Peter's arms, one to each arm, and a third was outside the door and a fourth in the passage leading to the outer iron gate. The power of Divine grace helping in every time of need and giving peace amid alarms, is well illustrated in this case by the fact that under all these circumstances St. Peter was fast asleep when the angel of the Lord came to deliver him. The proprieties of the case are also illustrated by the fact that Peter's friends, the Church, were not asleep, but praying for him. It was not for him to pray for himself deliverance from the power of Agrippa, for he had already consecrated his life unto death, and properly should feel quite ready to lay down his life at this time, if such proved to be the Lord's will in respect to him. For him to have asked for the prolongation of his life would have been to ask amiss, and would have manifested a wilfulness incompatible with a full consecration to the Lord's will. But with the Church it is different. They could with all propriety, while expressing to the Lord their confidence in the Divine supervision of the Church's affairs, tell him also of their love for St. Peter and of how much his sacrificing in the service of the Truth had done for them and was doing for them. They could properly enough express the hope that it might be the Lord's will that he should continue with them for their joy and comfort and upbuilding in the "most holy faith." It should not surprise us either that this prayer-meeting on St. Peter's account lasted all through the night and, for aught we know, other meetings of the same kind may have been held besides the one referred to in this lesson, which was at the home of Mary, the mother of Mark, the writer of the Book of Mark and the cousin of Barnabas, presumably the unnamed person of Mark 14:51.

It may be asked, Would it not have been appropriate for the Church to have offered prayer and then to have retired as usual, leaving the results entirely with the Lord? We reply that the examples given us in the Scriptures fully warranted the all-night prayer-meeting and even its continuance for several days. Do we not know of our Lord's remaining all night in the mountain at prayer? Do we not remember his long and repeated prayers in Gethsemane? Do we not remember the Apostle's exhortation to the Church, "Praying without ceasing, and in everything giving thanks"? Giving this a liberal construction as signifying a prayerful attitude of mind and continued looking to the Lord for his grace and guidance, nevertheless our Lord's parable of the importunate widow and her repeated comings and her reward all teach the same lesson of importunity. Besides, our Lord thus applied the parable, saying, "Shall not God avenge his very elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily." – Luke 18:7,8.

In one sense of the word the fears and sufferings of the Lord's people and their trials and difficulties ascend to the Lord in prayer and call to Divine Justice for vengeance, recompense, punishments, without any word from his people to this effect. Rather their petition should be in line with Stephen's prayer for his enemies, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Nevertheless, as Abel's blood is said to have cried to the Lord

for vengeance, so the blood of his saints is said to cry unto him day and night, “How long, O Lord, dost thou not judge and avenge?” – Rev. 6:10.

The Lord certainly does not wish us to understand that he has no oversight, arrangement or plans of his own, nor that the Divine arm may be moved by our prayers in any direction at our pleasure, at any time. On the contrary, the Lord assures that all of his purposes shall be accomplished and that his Word shall not return to him void, “but shall prosper in the thing whereto it was sent.” (Isa. 55:11.) Nothing can alter the definite, fixed outlines of the Divine program. But the Lord has evidently left certain of the filling in of our experiences subject to change or modification. These minor details he is ready to use for the blessing of his people, for the development of their faith. Thus in St. Peter’s case the Lord was doubtless intending a deliverance in some manner, because he had a further work for him to do, but he allowed it to come about in such a manner as to indicate it as a reward of the faith of those who prayed for him. Otherwise the deliverance might have come sooner or later, and in response to faith or works along some other line.

The Lord evidently desires to cultivate in us a quality of faith, trust. Therefore he has made faith a condition for all of his blessings of the present age, and distinctly tells us that without faith it is impossible to please him, and that he desires us to “walk by faith and not by sight.” – 2 Cor. 5:7.

CONTRASTING EXPERIENCES OF THE SAINTS

Excerpt from R. 3002

ACTS 12:1-9

*“The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that
fear him, and delivereth them.” – Psalm 34:7*

It was at the season of Easter, or, more properly, the Passover – “the days of unleavened bread.” The time of his arrest was too close to this religious festival to make it proper for such a public execution as Herod had determined upon. He would reserve his show of zeal for the Jews’ religion until this festival was at an end. Meantime, the infant Church at Jerusalem was evidently sadly perplexed by the trend of affairs – at a loss to know how to interpret the Lord’s providences. Doubtless they held their memorial of the Redeemer’s death at this time, as we now do, and their hearts were sadly stricken with a realization of the fact that the Lord’s faithful must all drink of his cup – of ignominy and death. Altho a considerable number of Jews had accepted Jesus, as we saw in a previous lesson, apparently the majority of the believers were scattered abroad, but few of them residing in Jerusalem. These few it seems met in little groups, in private houses, for prayer and praise, for study of the Lord’s Word and for building one another up in the most holy faith; and such a meeting was in progress during this eventful Passover week. We are informed that the burden of their prayer was for Peter.

Well instructed by the apostles, we may be sure that they strove not to ask amiss; and that they copied the Master's petition, at least in so far as the expression, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done." We have no record that the Church met in prayer for James, though quite possibly it did; neither are we bound to suppose that if they had not met and prayed for Peter, Herod would have succeeded in killing him also. It is sufficient for us that we remember that God has plans of his own, irrespective of the plans and prayers of his people, and that all of his good purposes will be accomplished; but it is well that we should note also his good pleasure that his people should come so fully into accord with him and his plans that they would neither be surprised nor disappointed in their fulfillment.

Probably James' death was accomplished suddenly, while, as we have seen, Peter was held over in bonds. This gave the Church time to consider how much she had already lost, and how much she might lose further were not the Lord to interpose for her protection. No doubt they reasoned that they had already sustained a great loss; and no doubt Peter's life and his service seemed much more precious to them since the loss of James. In any event, the Lord's people were getting a blessing through their experiences and through their prayers. Peter also was getting a valuable experience; and doubtless the Lord was overruling in the matter so that a great blessing and stimulus to the faith of all, would ensue through Peter's release.

Peter, his heart filled with the peace of God which passeth all understanding, was enabled to sleep peacefully in the prison, notwithstanding the unfavorable conditions in which he was placed, and his expectancy that on the morrow he would be called before the king and publicly executed. What a blessing is this rest of heart, this ability to entrust to the Lord all of life's affairs! It is written, "He giveth his beloved sleep." (Psa. 127:2.) We cannot say that the Lord's people are never troubled with insomnia, sleeplessness, but we can say



Liberation of St. Peter by Jusepe de Ribera

that many, previously troubled with the cares of this life, exciting to nervousness, have by the Lord's grace been enabled so to cast all their care upon him that it has in great measure controlled their nerves and brought back to them the ability to enjoy sweet refreshing rest in sleep. Nothing is more favorable to this peace of heart than a **full consecration** to the Lord – "all to his wisdom resigned:" it entitles to a **full confidence** in the divine promises, – through faith in the divine wisdom, love and power, which has guaranteed that all things shall work together for good to those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

continued on next page

6 And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers, and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. 7 Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison, and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" And his chains fell off his hands.

Acts 12:6-7

Peter was aroused from his sleep, loosed from his chains, bidden to arise and fasten the girdle usually relaxed in slumber, to put on his sandals, – wrap himself in his outer cloak and follow the messenger, the light of whose glory filled the prison cell. The doors opened before them; they passed the sentinel unobserved, and Peter was led from the castle of Antonia into the city proper. There the heavenly messenger left him. There is a simplicity to this narrative which, even on the surface, commends it as truthful. Were it a fiction doubtless the author would have stated matters altogether differently. He would have represented the angel as doing homage to the apostle, or delivering to him some complimentary message from the Lord, or lifting him up or putting on his sandals and fastening them for him, or assisting in girding him or putting on his mantle. He would have had him give Peter certain directions at the time of leaving, etc. But this simple account merely represents the angel as doing for Peter what he could not do for himself, and no more, and leaving him without a word as soon as he had brought him properly into the city.

The record shows that Peter was so surprised with what had transpired that he for a time fancied himself in a dream, in a trance, – expecting that he would awaken shortly to realize himself still bound; but the cool morning air, between three and six o'clock, and being left alone, brought him to his senses and convinced him that he was actually at liberty. He knew well the usual meeting place, and thither he bent his steps. It was the home of Mary, mother of John Mark – cousin of Barnabas, (so "sister's son" should read in Col. 4:10.) John was his Hebrew name and Marcus his Latin name. It was this Mark who was the Evangelist, the author of the Book of Mark, – the same who accompanied Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey.

11 And when Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people." 12 So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. 13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. 14 When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate.

Acts 12:11-14

Although the hour was an unusual one, the inmates of the house were awake, the prayer-meeting was still going on at the very time when the Lord was answering the petition. Peter's knock on the outer door was responded to by the little maid-servant of the family, Rhoda (Rose), who, child-like, discerning the voice of Peter (for it was customary to make inquiries before opening the door) was so surprised and delighted that she neglected to open the door before running back to give word to the assembled disciples.

The fact that the praying ones were amazed, astonished, and could scarcely believe that it was Peter who had come, does not prove that they had not faith in their own prayers. Rather, we may say that their faith in prayer was well attested by their continuance in it all night, and to such an hour in the morning, and that they were not asleep at the time Peter knocked; but, knowing something regarding the prison and the appointment of four quaternions of soldiers, they would reasonably expect that whatever answer might come to their prayers would not be a release of Peter under such circumstances, but might rather be some interference at the time of the trial, something to change the mind of the king, who would be the judge in this case, and thus to bring about Peter's release. But "God works in a mysterious way his wonders to perform," and not infrequently his ways are not as our ways, and sometimes we learn valuable lessons under just such circumstances. Doubtless the faith of some was shaken considerably by the death of the Apostle James; doubtless they queried concerning the lack of the manifestation of divine favor and interference for the protection of the Apostle and for his preservation as a helper in the Church. But if they were thus tempted and tried, and their faith sorely tested for a while, they had now, in Peter's experience, a valuable lesson on the other side – an illustration of God's power to intervene when he will and how he will on his people's behalf. . . .

Our trials and difficulties are not, therefore, to be esteemed as the results of divine carelessness in respect to our interests, but as the outworkings of divine providence for our good. Those who are able to view the matter from this standpoint are thus enabled to learn some of the very best and most helpful of life's lessons, and are thereby prepared for the glorious things coming; whereas those who allow faith to falter in times of trial, and who will walk with the Lord and have confidence in him only when they are the recipients of miraculous favors, are correspondingly weak, and correspondingly unprepared for the Kingdom. And as these lessons are necessary to the individual, so they are necessary also to the Church as a whole, as in the case of James and the Church in our lesson. So far as James was concerned, it could matter little to him which way the Lord effected his "escape" if, in the Lord's wisdom, he had finished his course, perfected his character and stood the test. As for the Church, it could learn an important lesson; viz., that God, while pleased to use the Apostles and various agencies in the prosecution of his work, was not at all dependent upon them, but that one or all of them could be dropped out, and yet the Lord be thoroughly competent to manage his own work and to accomplish all the gracious promises of his Word.

APOSTLE PAUL

Paul Prays to Be Healed

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

9 And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

As respects the Lord's people expecting miraculous healing in answer to prayer: we do not think that they should expect miraculous healing, or pray for it. All of God's people are surely welcome at the throne of grace, and they are invited to bring all their burdens and cares there and to obtain mercy and find grace to help in every time of need. But the **saints** are never invited to pray for their own physical healing. They are, however, assured that it is the Father's good pleasure to give the **holy spirit** to them that **ask it**. And the intimation clearly is that physical ailments, sorrows and pain work out for God's people the graces and fruits of the spirit if properly received and patiently endured. It is to those so afflicted that the Lord speaks as to St. Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee." With this assurance the Apostle could glory in **afflictions**; and so may we also learn to do. – 2 Cor. 12:7-10.

This one prayer of the Apostle, repeated, he tells us, three times, is the only prayer for physical healing by any of the apostles, so far as the Bible-record shows. It was offered early in the Apostle's experience, before he had learned that his high calling was not to health and wealth and earthly blessings and ease in their enjoyment, but to **sacrifice** all these, that thus becoming a sharer in the sufferings of Christ he might attain to the heavenly condition – glory, honor and immortality – by and by. Thus also our dear Redeemer prayed not for earthly blessings for himself, and used not his powers selfishly. He could have commanded the stones to become bread, but he would not, and fasted forty days. He could have asked, and would have received for his defence and deliverance from his persecutors, twelve legions of angels; but he would not do so – instead he would endure whatever the Father might permit to be poured into his cup of bitter experience; accepting only the common blessings of nature open to all mankind. When weary he **rested**, or became so weak that he could not carry his cross, and sank under it. But he would not pray for strength. It would have been in opposition to his covenant or **consecration unto death** to have thus sought divine aid in resisting death. R. 2837



The Apostles, too, had the gift of healing as well as privilege of prayer, but they did not use these selfishly. In all the records we find no instance of the exercise of the gift of healing on behalf of any of the apostles or any of the church; nor have we any record of prayer for health, or other earthly luxuries, being offered by any of them for themselves or each other, except in one case – that of Paul (2 Cor. 12:7-9), and his request was not granted; but he was told that instead he should have a sufficiency of grace to compensate and enable him to bear it patiently. This should command the attention of all.

Although Paul's request for himself was refused – God seeing that his affliction of weak eyes could be made to work to divine glory and his own advantage – yet his gift to heal others was marvelous: "And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul, so that from his body were brought unto the sick, handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them." (Acts 19:12.) R. 2006

PAUL AND SILAS



Paul and Silas in prison

Paul and Silas Pray in Prison

25 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

26 Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.

Acts 16:25-26

FULL DELIVERANCE PROMISED TO GOD'S SAINTS

– R. 5757

*“He shall call upon Me and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble;
I will deliver him and honor him.” – Psalm 91:15*

WHEN considering the above text, we are naturally interested to know who or what class would be thus favored of God and whether or not we might become members of that class. The context seems to show that the Psalm is prophetic and refers to the Lord Jesus and the Church – The Christ as a whole. No doubt it has been true in a certain sense of some others. For instance, when Abraham called upon the Lord, God heard him in his troubles and blessed him. And the Lord will yet give him great honor, because he loved and trusted God. The same might be said of the faithful ones all through the Jewish Dispensation. But the Psalm seems to refer especially to The Christ. These are the ones who bear the closest relationship to God. Their love is manifested in a special sense by their faithfulness to the will of God, their faithfulness in honoring His name, their faithfulness in upholding His Truth, in being willing to die in God's service, in laying down their lives for the brethren, in developing the fruits of the Holy Spirit; for all this is included in their covenant.

It is this class, therefore, that the Lord will answer when they call upon Him; it is this class that He will deliver and honor, will care for in trouble. All who come to God, must necessarily, before they can be accepted, enter into a Covenant of Sacrifice with Him through Christ, giving up their will – loving the Lord and His will better than themselves and their own will or the will of any other. Of course, a large proportion of those who proclaim themselves to be Christians are merely nominal Christians – Christians in name only, who never made a covenant with God.

Of those who do enter into this Covenant, not many, judging from what we can observe, carry it out faithfully, submitting their lives and their every interest to God's will. Noticeable examples of the faithful ones of the past were our Lord Jesus and His Apostles. And there have been others, of course, of this faithful class throughout this Gospel Age, now closing. All these are styled by Jehovah His jewels, and are to be made by Him into a glorious diadem, the Lord Jesus being its brightest and choicest gem. These are to show forth during eternal ages Jehovah's Wisdom, Justice, Love and Power. Throughout this Gospel Age God has been working in these to will and to do His good pleasure.

CONDITIONS OF OBTAINING THE PROMISE

But God works in no one contrary to that one's own will. If we wish to step out from under Christ's instruction, there is nothing to prevent us. God **would** that we remain, but is not willing to urge upon us, to press upon us, this matter. God wishes only such to worship Him as worship Him in spirit and in Truth, because they love Him. This class who seek faithfully to do the Lord's will because they love Him may call upon Him in every trouble and difficulty. His answer will not come in an audible voice, and may not come in the manner that we expect; but He will answer in the best way the petitions of His saints which are asked in harmony with His will, His Word. That is, as Jesus said, “If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you [if you remember and act upon

My teaching], ye may ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you”; for those thus abiding in Him would ask only those things which God has provided for them, only such things as His providence has arranged for them, only such things as His Word authorizes His saints to pray for. The Lord has promised these that they shall have their requests. He has been blessing and caring for His people throughout the Gospel Age. Their needs are often supplied before they call. They are to have the Word of God clearly in mind that their prayers and endeavors may be in line with His will. Thus their **disappointments** will be **His** appointments, and will be accepted as of the Lord.

THE BLESSINGS OF TRIBULATION

“I will be with him in trouble,” is the promise. The intimation here is that the Lord will not, necessarily, prevent our getting into trouble. We might see the trouble coming and pray to the Lord, but He might not deliver us from the trouble. And we should not ask that we might be spared the affliction if His Wisdom sees it is best for us to have it. The trouble might prove very beneficial to us.

The Lord has already told us in His Word that we are to rejoice even under tribulation; for tribulation, rightly received, will work out for us a “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” So while the Lord does not promise us that we shall **escape** trouble, He does promise that with the trouble He will give His children consolation of heart, sustaining grace, that will enable them to rejoice in the midst of their tribulation. (2 Corinthians 4:6-18; 12:9,10; Isaiah 43:1,2.) This was exemplified in our Lord Jesus and in the Apostles. Paul and Silas were able to sing praises to God in prison with their feet fast in the stocks and their backs bleeding from the whippings which they had received. They could rejoice in tribulation for Christ’s sake.

The Lord is ever with His people; therefore they should not be discouraged. His children have the comfort and assistance of the letter of the Truth and the spirit of the Truth. But they have all these blessings only in proportion as they are willing to exercise **faith**; for the glories promised are not yet theirs in reality; these are theirs only by promise now.

OUR FULL DELIVERANCE

“I will deliver him and honor him.” The deliverance of the Lord’s saints, in the fullest sense of the word, will be by their participation in the First, Chief Resurrection. Our Lord Jesus was delivered from all His trials and afflictions when He was raised from the dead. The promise to the Church also is that we shall be delivered when our resurrection “change” shall come to us. “Sown in weakness,” we shall be “raised in power”; sown an animal body, we shall be “raised a spiritual body.” This will be the full deliverance, and with it will come the promised honor and exaltation.

There are deliverances, of course, for the children of God at the present time, according to our need. And the Lord gives us a certain kind of honor, but not usually the kind of honor that the world appreciates. This honor may come mixed with such tribulation as would make it not desirable in the world’s eye. But the honor that will come to the saints in the end will be such as all will know and will appreciate. All the members of Christ will share in the Kingdom glories and honors with their Head. He and the

members of His Body glorified will reign in the Father's Kingdom, and will be associated together throughout all eternity in the great work of God.



Heathen religions have holy books, and prayers, and occasional mournful chants by their priests or priestesses, but they have no singing of hymns in worship. These seem to have been confined first, to the Jews, and secondly, to their successors in grace, Christians; but now, alas! they are taken up by all classes, and some times prostituted to the uses of Mormonism, Christian Science, Spiritism, Theosophy, etc.

How greatly this conduct of Paul and Silas differs from the recorded conduct and sentiments of some of the greatest and most notable and most stoical on the pages of history. Of Ovid, the famed poet and philosopher, it is declared – “There is scarcely one of his many letters which he wrote during his short exile, which is not full of unmanly lamentations.” Of Seneca, a noted writer of Paul’s day, it is written that his books were “full of most sounding professions of stoic superiority to passion and pain, yet, when exiled, he broke into abject complaint.” Similar things are said concerning Cicero, and Napoleon Bonaparte is another example. Yet all these men, even in their exile, were surrounded by wealth and luxury: but here we have before us two men who had forsaken all for the privilege of being God’s ambassadors, representatives of Christ, suffering to bear the message of divine grace to the sin-blinded and unthankful; – yet under most distressing circumstances, with their backs lacerated from the beating, with their feet in the stocks, and their whole bodies therefore pained and uncomfortable, with seemingly no cause for thankfulness that the worldly could discern, they were filled with love and gratitude to God, and their hearts overflowed in songs of praise. Surely they were actuated by super-human hopes and joys!

The Lord’s response to the faith, prayers and praise of his servants, by an earthquake, is of course out of the ordinary course of his providences; but the case was an extraordinary one. These were extraordinary servants, the work given them to do in establishing the Church was an extraordinary work. And evidently something extraordinary was needed in the case of the jailor, who, though an honest and well disposed man, was not expecting any blessing of religious instruction from the prisoner under his care: yet, as soon as he grasped the situation he became as teachable as a child at the feet of his prisoners, inquiring the way to eternal life. It is worthy of note that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ has little effect upon any who receive it otherwise than in meekness: those who oppose themselves and fight the truth at every step are not of the kind, nor in the condition to be blessed by it: hence the Lord’s instruction to “preach the gospel to the *meek*. R. 2182

*Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.
Hebrews 13:15*

APOSTLE PAUL

Paul Prays With The Ephesian Brethren

17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.

18 And when they had come to him, he said to them: “You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you,

19 “serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews,

20 “how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house. . . .

32 “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. . . .

35 “I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

36 And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

Acts 20:17-20,32,35-36

Having commended them to the Word of God, the Apostle draws attention to his own mode of life, while with them, as a proper illustration of the effect of the Gospel in a sanctified heart – as a proper example of an overseer and elder in the Church, which they should seek to copy. He could speak of these things now, to these fellow-elders, in a manner that he probably would have hesitated to speak of them to the Church at Ephesus while still ministering to them, as, by some, it might have been considered boasting. He would have these brother-elders and overseers note that in his ministering to the Church at Ephesus he had not coveted their silver or gold or apparel, but instead had labored with his own hands, and had thus in all things set before them an example of how they also as elders (presbyters) and overseers (bishops, episcopos) ought to help the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

The Apostle could point thus to himself as an example of a proper servant of the Church, because he had so closely followed the example of the great Head, Jesus. It is blessed to receive, but still more blessed to give. God himself is the great Giver, continually bestowing favors upon us, and not upon the good only, but also upon the evil – even providing a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. These words of our Lord (“It is more blessed to give than to receive”) are not recorded in any of the Gospels. Dr. Philip Schaff tells us that “outside the inspired memories of the Gospels we possess the record of some twenty sayings of Jesus which have floated down to us.” This quotation by the Apostle Paul is one of these, of whose authenticity we can have no doubt; and surely it is in full accord with our dear Redeemer’s conduct. He emulated the Father in that he continually gave, gave, gave to others. He did not selfishly see how much comfort and ease and honor he could secure for himself, but made himself of no reputation, for our sakes, daily giving his life for the assistance of others in matters temporal, as well as spiritual, until finally he completed the sacrifice at Calvary, having given on our behalf all that he had.

36 And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. 37 Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him, 38 sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.

Acts 20:36-38

At the close of the conference, when we may suppose the sailing of the vessel was announced, the Apostle knelt with the brethren from Ephesus, in prayer, the tenor of which may well be imagined. Then the parting took place, and doubtless the dear brethren began to realize more fully than they had ever done before what great blessings God had bestowed upon them through the Apostle’s ministries, and the thought that they should never see him again filled them with sadness, and they wept as they accompanied him to the ship.

Doubtless the Apostle consoled them with the reflection that the time of partings would soon be over and the blessed eternity of union and fellowship soon begin, when they would meet not only one another, but above all meet the Redeemer himself and all the faithful in Christ Jesus. R. 3173

APOSTLE PAUL

Prayer for Ephesian Brethren

15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,

16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:

17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,

18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power

20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,

21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

Ephesians 1:15-21

Prayer for Philippian Brethren

- 3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,
4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy,
5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now,
6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work
in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. . . .
- 9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in
knowledge and all discernment,
10 that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be
sincere and without offense till the day of Christ,
11 being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ,
to the glory and praise of God.

Philippians 1:3-6,9-11

Paul's two years in Rome, awaiting the due processes of the law – the arrival of witnesses from Jerusalem, the formulating of charges, etc., – were years of special advantage to the work of the Lord. Here Paul was for the time safe from his enemies, the Jews, and free, under the protection of his lenient and favorably disposed captors, to preach the gospel to all who would hear, both Jews and Gentiles.

The opportunity was faithfully used. Here he preached the gospel of the Kingdom, and taught the doctrines of Christ with all confidence and freedom; from here he wrote and sent letters to distant Churches; and he prayed for them (Eph. 1:16; 3:14; Phil. 1:4,9), and sent messengers and helpers to them. (Eph. 6:21; Phil. 2:19,25.) The epistles to the Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and to Philemon were all written from Rome.
R. 1570

THE FAITHFUL SERVANT'S PRAYER

*Lord, **speak to me**, that I may speak
In living echoes of Thy tone;
As Thou hast sought, so let me seek
Thy erring children, lost and lone.*

***O lead me**, Lord, that I may lead
The wandering and the wavering feet;
O feed me, Lord, that I may feed
Thy hungering ones with manna sweet.*

***O strengthen me**, that while I stand
Firm on the Rock, and strong in Thee,
I may stretch out a loving hand
To wrestlers in the troubled sea.*

***O teach me**, Lord, that I may teach
The precious things Thou dost impart;
And wing my words, that they may reach
The hidden depths of many a heart.*

***O give** thine own sweet rest to me,
That I may speak with soothing power
A word in season, as from Thee,
To weary ones in needful hour.*

***O fill me** with Thy fullness, Lord,
Until my very heart o'erflow
In kindling thought and glowing word,
Thy love to tell, Thy praise to show.*

***O use me**, Lord, use even me,
Just as Thou wilt, and when, and where;
Until Thy blessed face I see,
Thy rest, Thy joy, Thy glory share.*

-F. R. Havergal, R. 993

6.

The Vital Breath of The New Creature

The poet has well defined prayer as being “The soul’s sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed.” Another has well declared that it “is the Christian’s vital breath” – that is to say, Christian character cannot be maintained without prayer any more than a human life could be maintained without breathing. Who has not noticed that all the great Bible characters used of the Almighty were accustomed to go to Him regularly in prayer and to seek for guidance from Him in respect to every matter. Even the great Redeemer, holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners, needed to pray to the Father – needed His fellowship and communion – needed to be in touch with the Infinite One. Several of His prayers are recorded, and we are told that He spent the entire night in prayer on more than one occasion. R. 4913

We find that the encroachments of the Adversary and of the world and of the flesh are liable to discourage us or to entangle us with the things of the present life. But the Lord has made it so possible for us to approach Him that we can go to Him with *any* trial, *any* difficulty, and be sure that our petition has Divine attention and will have Divine aid. We have spoken of our fleshly weaknesses as sometimes hindering us from prayer. There is a disposition on the part of many Christians, after having done something that has wounded the conscience, to avoid going to the Lord in prayer for awhile, to dread to go, to feel ashamed to go – thinking that they will feel better about it afterwards. This course is fraught with great danger; for it is likely to hinder our spiritual growth. Therefore it should not be permitted. We should realize that there is all the greater need of our going then to the Throne of Heavenly Grace. The Lord has known of our weaknesses in advance. He knew beforehand of our failure, and wished us to profit by the experience, that we might, in harmony with our prayers, become stronger against sin, against everything displeasing to Him. R. 5745

Prayer is the vital breath of the New Creature. We cannot control, nor get the best out of our old bodies except we conform to our Lord’s instruction to pray. If prayer was appropriate for our Lord, who was perfect, if He needed to go often to the Father in prayer, even so it is necessary for us to go to the Lord in prayer that we may be more and more transformed by the renewing of our minds. This does not mean that we should be always *on our knees*, but that we should go with regularity. R. 5310

Prayers of The Righteous

THE privilege of prayer which God has provided for his people is one of the greatest boons imaginable. “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb. 4:16.) The mercy has been provided by God in the great sacrifice of Christ, sufficient to cover all “the sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;” but we must by faith approach the throne of grace in order to obtain this mercy. So, also, with all of our necessities as new creatures in Christ; grace to help for every time of need lies waiting for us to claim it – at the throne of grace. Although our Heavenly Father knoweth what we need, and has made so abundant a provision for us, yet he will be inquired of, solicited, by his people, for these mercies which he assures us he is far more pleased to give than are earthly parents to do good unto their children.

God’s appointment that his people should approach him in prayer is, therefore, not for the purpose of informing him of our needs, for these he knows far better than we do, but for our spiritual profit, that we may be kept in close touch with him, that we may continually realize his love and care and grace toward all who have come into the divine family through Christ and the New Covenant. For this reason, while sending rain and sunshine upon the world in general, God holds in his hand many favors, great and small, for “his people,” which he will bestow only in answer to their faith and prayers.

Prayer is not a privilege merely, but also a necessity; – commanded as indispensable to our Christian growth. (Rom. 12:9-13; 1 Thes. 5:17.) Whoever loses the desire to thank and worship and commune with the Father of mercies, may rest assured that he is losing the very spirit of sonship, and should promptly seek and remove the barrier – the world, the flesh or the devil. Every additional evidence of the Lord’s confidence in us by the revealing to us of his character and plan, so far from diminishing our worship and prayers, should multiply them. If our hearts are good soil they will bring forth the more abundantly. R. 2004

Prayer seems to be the natural attitude of the human mind toward the Almighty. Even the heathens have a disposition to pray. Their fears, their hopes, all lead them to appeal to some great Power beyond themselves. But the people of God, who know of His Wisdom, Power and Love, and who have met the conditions of acceptable prayer, are alone authorized to come to the Throne of Grace. We realize what a blessing it is to have access to God, access to His presence – to have the ear of the Almighty Ruler of the Universe. We know that with the emperors and kings of earth it is very difficult to gain a hearing; and that with people of great prominence it is not easy to secure an audience. Yet the great God has made provision that His people may come to Him and make their petitions known. R. 5833

“HE IS FAITHFUL AND JUST” – R. 4931

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” – 1 John 1:9

WE KNOW of no heathen religion which teaches a god of mercy and love and kindness. Heathen deities are represented as powerful, ferocious, terrible. The people fear them as demons, but know nothing about the God of Love. Alas! that we must say it, but there are many Christians who, misled by the creeds of the Darker Ages, do not recognize, do not worship the God of the Bible – the God of all Grace, concerning whom we have the declaration, “God is Love.”

The Psalmist’s words give us a proper conception – “But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared” – revered. (Psa. 130:4.) We can see readily enough that the Almighty must be the very embodiment of Justice – not, however, a justice of the kind we were taught, which was really a great injustice. God was just in sentencing Father Adam to death because of his disobedience to the Divine Law. He was just in making that sentence applicable to all of Adam’s posterity. Had He let the sentence rest and allowed man to die like the brute beast, without any hope of a future life, we would have had no ground for complaint. It would have been simple Justice.

But God commended His love to us, and it is His love which constrains us to seek Him and to desire to serve Him and to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. God’s will meant the requirement of Justice and He opened up the way by which He could be just and yet be the Justifier of those who believe in Jesus, who become His disciples, to take up their cross and follow Him; and having thus arranged for the satisfaction of these, God purposes to give a blessing to Adam and his race in a way which would do them the most good. And this showing of the Divine character is not merely to bring laudation to the Almighty, but specially for the purpose of making His creatures acquainted with His character, that they may have great confidence in Him throughout eternity, and that, seeing the beauties of His character, they may copy the same and thus be more abundantly blessed.

SALVATION’S FIRST STEP

The first step of God’s Plan is the selection of a special class, a saintly few from amongst mankind. They are chosen for a purpose. In them God would show forth the exceeding riches of His Grace and His loving kindness in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:6,7), in lifting sinners from the miry clay to so glorious a station as He has promised them – the divine nature, far above angels, principalities and powers. Additionally He proposes to use them and their experiences with sin, and their victories over sin, by making them joint-heirs with Christ in the ruling and blessing and judging of the world by and by.

Following the completion of the Church of the First-borns will come the later borns. It is the Divine intention, not only that the Church shall attain to the liberty of the sons of God on the spirit plane, like unto the angels, but it is His purpose also that humanity in general shall be granted an opportunity to become sons of God during Messiah’s reign: “For the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption [death and sin] into the glorious liberty of the sons of God” [human sons, such as Adam

was in his perfection, free from sin and death, possessed of the full liberty which God provided for all in full fellowship with Him]. – Romans 8:21.

IF WE CONFESS

Our text undoubtedly refers to those now called of God to be members of the Bride of Christ, and sharers of the liberty and glory of sonship on the spirit plane. Nevertheless it states a principle which will be applicable also during the thousand years of Messiah's reign. None then need expect to make progress on the Highway of Holiness except first they confess their sins and turn from them and accept the proffered blessing of Messiah, who then will be reigning for the very purpose of destroying sin and uplifting sinners.

Applying the text to the present time, we see that it does not refer to sinners in general, but to the Church of Christ, as again we read, "If we sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ." So this confession of sins does not relate to the world, who have not yet become children of God through faith and consecration. This statement corresponds to the one in our Lord's prayer which says, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

"JUST TO FORGIVE US"

Those who have become new creatures in Christ by faith and obedience – those who have taken up their cross to follow Him and have been begotten of the Holy Spirit – God has agreed to forgive all their unwilling trespasses upon request. Hence the Apostle John here says that it will be merely just on God's part to fulfil to His holy ones this promise which He has made to them. Reasoning upon the same subject St. Paul urges, "Let us come with courage to the throne of heavenly grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." – Heb. 4:16.

It was evidently because the Lord foresaw that His people might become so abashed by their repeated failures through inherited weaknesses of their flesh that He provided this special exhortation for their encouragement. This is a point well to be remembered. At this, the close of another year and the opening of a new one, we urge that all Christians keep daily record with the Lord and never retire to rest without obtaining this grace of forgiveness and help. But if any have delayed the matter and a cloud has come between them and the Lord, let them surely avail themselves of these promises in the close of this year that they may start the New Year with a clean slate – with the smile of their Father's face upon them, and with the fellowship of their Redeemer and with fresh resolves for earnestness and carefulness in walking in His steps.

WEARY AND HEAVY LADEN

There are other Scriptures which apply to those of the world who have not yet become the Lord's people, and who are not therefore included in our text. This class we refer to are included in the Lord's words, "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, and ye shall find rest to your souls." (Matt. 11:28,29.) There is no rest of heart in the restless striving of selfishness and sin, yet these sometimes work out experiences which lead the weary to

the great Sin-Bearer, the Friend above all others.

What more opportune time than the beginning of the year to make the one great contract with the Lord which will make us disciples indeed – the covenant of self-sacrifice, self-denial, self-renunciation, taking up the cross to follow the Lord’s leading whithersoever He goeth, knowing that the end of the journey will be glorious and blessed; yea, and that the trials on the way toward the Heavenly Kingdom will be blessed and overruled for good, because Jesus will be a sharer also in them.



CHRISTIAN, WALK CAREFULLY!

Excerpt from R. 5491

If we realize that through lack of proper watchfulness, or through some infirmity of the flesh, we have taken a wrong step, contrary to the Lord’s will and to our interests as New Creatures in Christ, let us lose no time in retracing the step and in calling upon the Father for forgiveness. “We have an altar whereof they have no right to partake who serve the [typical] tabernacle”; an altar not sanctified by the blood of bulls and goats, but by the precious blood of Christ; and we are urged to “come boldly [with holy courage and confident faith] to the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 13:10; 4:16.) How blessed this Throne of Grace, this Mercy Seat, provided by our Father’s love! How undone we should be without it! Yet, beloved, let us walk with great carefulness – let us never presume upon the mercy of our God by being careless of our steps. Let us, instead, with earnest prayer and watchfulness, “work out our own salvation with fear and trembling,” while our Father “worketh in us both to will and to do His good pleasure.” – Philippians 2:12,13.

“Christian, **walk carefully!** oft wilt thou fall,
If thou forget on thy Savior to call.
Safe shalt thou walk through each trial and snare,
If thou art **clad in the armor of prayer!**”

PRIVILEGES OF THE THRONE OF GRACE – R. 5744

“Let us therefore come boldly to the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” – Hebrews 4:16

WHILE these words of the Apostle have always been applicable to the people of God, they are especially important to us, for we realize that we are now living in this very evil day to which he referred in his letter to the Ephesians; that it has already come, and that only those who have put on the whole armor of God will be properly equipped to withstand the assaults of the enemy. His instruction that the Christian supply himself with the whole armor of God indicates a need for the armor, a difficulty in withstanding the attacks to be expected in this day, and the fewness of those who will eventually stand. The exhortation is not to take merely the shield of faith, not merely the helmet of salvation, not merely the breastplate of righteousness, not merely the Sword of the Spirit, not merely the sandals of preparation, not merely the girdle of Truth; but **all** of these. The implication is that we shall **need** all of these if we stand all the assaults to be expected in the evil day.

Alas, how few seem to realize the importance of this armor which God has commended! Their difficulty is the result of their not recognizing the time in which they are now living, of their not being sufficiently awake, of not being zealous to search the Scriptures, and to arm themselves therewith for the battle of the Great Day of God Almighty.

But with all the preparation the earnest Christian may make, he should see to it that there is a direct and continual communication between his heart and his Lord. In the Bible God has given us His Message, His promises, His instruction, in advance. Elsewhere St. Paul has declared that this Word “is sufficient, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work.” We appreciate this assurance and also realize our own unworthiness, our littleness and our imperfections. But despite all these our Lord has assured us that we may approach with courage the Throne of Heavenly Grace and there obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need – and forgiveness of sins.

This promise of forgiveness does not include the thought of original sin; for that is forgiven us at the time when we consecrate ourselves to the Lord; and therefore it need not be remembered day by day. But, having surrendered our will to the Lord and having started out in the narrow way, we should know what our reasonable service to Him would include. (Romans 12:1.) We have need of every provision that He has made for us. It is our daily transgressions that require daily forgiveness. Any one, therefore, who would be a good soldier of the Lord Jesus must keep in close touch with Headquarters. This he is privileged to do by coming daily to the Throne of Grace.

If we would contrast the privilege of approaching God with that of approaching earthly potentates, we would see a marked manifestation of God’s favor to us. With the King of England or the German Kaiser or any other earthly sovereign, the dignity of the throne is maintained so that it is difficult for any to approach. One must earnestly desire to do so. And if he would come into the king’s presence, he must wear a certain style of dress, observe a certain etiquette, and also have a proper introduction. If the king were gracious, an interview might then be granted. But our God, the Mighty Creator of the

Universe, has graciously granted to each one who has been begotten of the Holy Spirit the privilege of bringing everything to Him in prayer – all his needs, all his difficulties – and of calling Him by the endearing name of “Father.” What wondrous grace!

Then each of God’s children before approaching the Throne of Grace should seek to know what things are approved of the Lord and what things are disapproved. It should be the one ambition of the child of God to know the Father’s will and to guide his affairs accordingly. But taking it for granted that our hearts are fully submissive to the Lord’s will, the Apostle is here describing the Christian soldier who has put on the whole armor of God, or who is putting it on, and who is seeking to come up to the highest standard. He will need, with all his armor, to cultivate and to use the privilege of prayer. – Ephesians 6:18.

THE MANNER OF ACCEPTABLE PRAYER

The foregoing reference tells us how prayer should be offered – “praying always **with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.**” We should lay emphasis on the words “**in the Spirit.**” Contrast this sort of prayer with others which are not “in the Spirit,” but merely formalistic. We know that the heathen have great formalities in their prayers. The Chinese, for instance, have a wheel on which certain prayers are inscribed, and they think that the more times the wheel is turned around the more times the prayer goes up to their god. These are vain repetitions. But the Chinese are heathen – they have not learned of the true God. Others approach the true God, using vain repetitions, not knowing what they want or what is best for them or what is God’s will. Some Christians use printed forms of petition which are not really their own sentiment or spirit, but which as worshipers they offer to the Lord in a more or less perfunctory manner. Some prayers are represented by beads. These are used by our Roman Catholic friends. Each bead represents a prayer, and the repetition is supposed to help the worshiper. He counts these beads over and over, repeating his prayer over each bead.

All these endeavors on the part of humanity, heathen and Christian, to approach God in prayer indicate that there is a recognized need of Divine assistance. But God is not to be approached in a merely formal manner. He is not to be mocked. If we should approach an earthly king in such a perfunctory way, he would see through the hollowness of the petition and would resent it. And so we may know that if we come with merely a lip service to God our prayers will not be heard. We must remember, too, that only those prayers are acceptable to God which come from those in covenant relationship with Him through our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no other way by which we have a right to come to the Almighty addressing Him as “**Our Father.**”

Reverting again to the text, “Praying always, with all prayer and supplication – in the Spirit,” we understand the Apostle to mean that with every prayer we offer, whatever may be our petition, there should be an earnestness of spirit. The prayer must always be offered “in the spirit,” with heart-appreciation of what we are doing. Otherwise it would not be acceptable to God. It must be a “**supplication,**” an earnest entreaty. When we pray to God, we are to “watch thereunto, with all perseverance” – having importunity in prayer, not soon growing weary if our petitions do not seem to be quickly answered. We are not to pray for the things that the Word of God does not justify us

in believing are the Lord's will, but for the things which we believe are His will; and we are to **really desire** what we ask for. Then we are to watch for the fulfilment of our prayers, and thus be prepared for the blessing when it comes. Our Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask Him. – Matthew 6:32,8.

SELFISH PETITIONS UNJUSTIFIED

The object of prayer, then, is to benefit **ourselves**, and to bring us into that attitude of mind which will be in heart-readiness to receive our Father's blessing. God does not wish to give His choicest blessings where they would be fruitless. When He gives us these blessings, He purposes that our hearts shall be in that condition which will assimilate them and bring forth fruitage. We must ever be in an attitude of full submission to His will. We know that our Heavenly Father not only has the fullest knowledge of our needs, but is waiting to bestow His richest gifts upon His children, as soon as we are ready for them. Then let us never come before Him with vain, meaningless repetitions.

While the world would pray merely for food, clothing, temporal blessings or for victory over their enemies, we as God's children should yield up our wills to Him and pray in the words of our Master's exemplary prayer: "Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done." Then, "Give us this day our daily bread," whether it be little or much – not saying what kind of food, but simply receiving what He sees we need. We have placed these matters entirely in the Lord's hands. We ask especially for the **spiritual** Bread. Our prayers are to be along the lines of the **Spirit** and not of the **flesh**. We are to pray only incidentally for the earthly things, because we have consecrated our bodies to God. Since the body is to die, since it has been accepted as a sacrifice, we are to seek to perpetuate that body which we have given to the Lord only long enough for our spiritual development and testing and for the completion of whatever work He has for us to do. We are also to be willing and glad to surrender it as soon as the Lord is ready to consummate the sacrifice. We have it now only as the instrument of the New Creature.

As New Creatures, then, we are to pray always in harmony with the interests of this new nature. We are to hunger for the Bread from Heaven and to feed upon it. We are to develop the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit. We read that the Father is more willing to give good things to them that ask Him than are earthly parents to give good gifts to their children. So then, we are not only to pray in the Spirit, but as the Lord's Word indicates, our prayers are to be along the lines of the Spirit, of the New Creature, whose needs are first in our sight and in the Lord's sight, and whose interests the Lord is especially pleased to bless and to have us consider and pray for.

THE CHRISTIAN'S VITAL BREATH

The logical conclusion of all this is that the Lord's consecrated people would have little to pray for of an earthly kind, realizing that with the Church the end is not restitution, but sacrifice unto death, and then the glorious resurrection. Therefore the prayers of the consecrated should be for grace to meet in a faithful spirit our various trials and difficulties while we are putting on the armor, and likewise after we have put it on, and are learning how to use the Sword of the Spirit, how to resist the Adversary, and the foes entrenched in our own flesh – our Philistines. We need much grace to be rightly

exercised by the trials and the assaults of the enemy and to realize that all these things are to work together for good to us who love God, who are “the called according to His purpose.” We are learning day by day how to “make our calling and election sure.”

The Lord’s people are encouraged to take part in the prayer meeting, and individually they are to approach daily the Throne of Grace. Our Lord has declared that where two or three are met together in His name He will be in their midst. When a petition is made having something of general interest, we are to unite our hearts that the blessing may be spread abroad and extend to many hearts. The suggestion is that the Lord’s people should do considerable of their praying in fellowship, in cooperation. But this would not hinder our private praying to the Lord, hourly if need be, telling him of our realization of our faults and our weaknesses and asking for the application of the precious merit of our Savior’s sacrifice to remove every spot and every wrinkle from our garments. Such prayer is the very essence of the Christian’s life, his “vital breath.”

We find that the encroachments of the Adversary and of the world and of the flesh are liable to discourage us or to entangle us with the things of the present life. But the Lord has made it so possible for us to approach Him that we can go to Him with **any** trial, **any** difficulty, and be sure that our petition has Divine attention and will have Divine aid. We have spoken of our fleshly weaknesses as sometimes hindering us from prayer. There is a disposition on the part of many Christians, after having done something that has wounded the conscience, to avoid going to the Lord in prayer for awhile, to dread to go, to feel ashamed to go – thinking that they will feel better about it afterwards. This course is fraught with great danger; for it is likely to hinder our spiritual growth. Therefore it should not be permitted. We should realize that there is all the greater need of our going then to the Throne of Heavenly Grace. The Lord has known of our weaknesses in advance. He knew beforehand of our failure, and wished us to profit by the experience, that we might, in harmony with our prayers, become stronger against sin, against everything displeasing to Him.

ONE OF SATAN’S CHIEF METHODS OF ATTACK

The Adversary has to do, no doubt, with seeking to interrupt our prayers, our communications with the Father. One of our hymns declares that

“Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees.”

We need not go to this extreme of thought, that Satan really does so tremble; but we may know that he realizes something of the power of prayer in the life of the child of God, and one of his chief lines of attack is to seek to cut off our communication with the Lord. Just as in warfare a skilful general seeks to cut off the enemy from its communication with headquarters, with its base of supplies, so with Satan. If he could succeed in cutting off our communication with the Heavenly Courts, we would be so much more liable to fall under his mischievous and wicked assaults. Then we would indeed be helpless, without Divine direction.

Is it asked, What could Satan do to cut off our communication? We reply that there are various ways of intruding upon the human mind – thoughts may enter the mind while

the child of God is at prayer or at other times – thoughts of business, of pleasure, of sin, of worldly interests and projects, etc. We do not know how much power the Adversary is given in connection with the Lord's people. We **do know** that he is powerless to interfere with their **will**. But he has power to stimulate certain organs of our minds, so that unless we are very alert we might be cut off from proper fellowship with the Lord, and our Christian courage might become more or less weakened. Thus we would be proportionately less able to resist the world, the flesh and the Adversary.

It is, therefore, proper to take every precaution to keep the lines of communication with our Heavenly Father well open. For instance, in private prayer, if there is a tendency toward drowsiness or toward thoughts going to other things, then we might lift the head, if it be bowed; or if the eyes be closed, we might open the eyes, and raise them. We are to see to it that in all our prayers and supplications these are in the Spirit, that they are not perfunctory, not formalisms. We are to see to it that they are the real expressions of our heart. We may say that a few sentences of real heart-prayer will accomplish more good for the child of the Lord than any amount of lip service. We advise that any who have difficulty in keeping the mind concentrated while in prayer should rather intensify and shorten their petitions and that in all their prayers they should see that the things they desire and pray for are in harmony with the Lord's Word – in the interest of the New Creature.

Talking With My Father

*I love to talk to my Father
In the quiet hours of the night.
Then the trials of the day seem to vanish away
And hide themselves from my sight.*

*I love to talk to my Father!
He's never too tired to hear.
If the day has seemed long and things have gone wrong
He seems especially near.*

*I thank Him for all of my blessings,
And yes, for the trials that come too.
What tree would grow strong if no storms came along?
'Tis Winter brings Spring fresh and new.*

*I ask Him for strength to press onward,
To help me my burdens to bear.
And so for the morrow, no troubles I borrow –
Remembering for me He doth care.*

– Alice M. Ripper

Groanings Which Cannot Be Uttered

*Studies in The Scriptures:
The At-One-Ment Between God and Man
pp. 287-291*

“The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered; and he that searcheth the heart, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit.” Romans 8:26,27

This expression, intended to convey to God’s people an understanding of the heavenly Father’s love and care toward them, has been sadly misunderstood by many. They tell us that the holy Spirit groans for them to the Father; and some attempt to give audible utterance to the groans themselves; and by some it is supposed that the amount of groaning which they do, somehow helps the holy Spirit in the matter, compensating for the groanings which it cannot utter – though they cannot see just how. It would indeed be strange, if the holy Spirit were a person, and, as the catechisms assert, “equal in power” with the Father and the Son, that he should find it necessary to address the Father and the Son on behalf of the Lord’s people, with unutterable groans. Our Lord Jesus said that we might come direct to him and that we might come direct to the Father, assuring us, “The Father himself loveth you.” Yet from this scripture under consideration some have gotten the idea that we must needs go to the Father and to the Son through the holy Spirit as a mediator, who would groan for us, and intercede for us, that we might be accepted of the Father and of the Son. This is in harmony with the prevailing confusion of thought respecting the holy Spirit and its office.

The error of this interpretation is further noticeable when we consider that if the groans could not be uttered they would not be groans at all; for what is not uttered is not a groan. But this passage would appear equally strange and inconsistent, if we were to interpret it to mean that the holy Spirit, the influence or power of Almighty Jehovah, is unable to express itself intelligently. We know that in past ages God’s mind, will, Spirit, found abundant expression through the words and deeds of the prophets, and we cannot suppose that he has any less power or ability today. What, then, can this scripture signify – “The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered”?

The mistake is in supposing that it is God’s Spirit which supplicates. On the contrary, the Spirit which maketh intercession for us is ***our own spirit***, the spirit of the saint, which supplicates God, and often fails to express itself properly. A glance at the text, with its connections, will make manifest the propriety of this interpretation. The Apostle had just been writing of the sin-burdened humanity groaning in its fetters. He assures us that it shall be granted liberty from the bondage, when the Church, the “sons of God,” under the Captain of their Salvation, shall have been glorified. (Verses 19-21) He then passes from the ***groanings*** of the world to the present condition of the Church, in which ***we groan***: “Ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the deliverance of our body.” Verse 23

The renewed or transformed mind or spirit in the Church, once worldly, is now holy and spiritual: but our bodies are still human, and have the Adamic imperfections. Hence we, as new creatures, are burdened by the flesh, and groan for the promised deliverance into Christ's likeness in the first resurrection. The Apostle explains that we may, by faith, reckon the earthly body dead, and think of ourselves as new creatures perfected, and thus realize ourselves **saved now – "saved by hope."** (Verse 24) Then, having shown how we may reckon ourselves, he explains to us that from the divine standpoint we are reckoned as "new" and "holy" and "spiritual" beings: he shows that God, viewing us from this standpoint, recognizes not the flesh and its weaknesses and imperfections – but the spirit, the mind, the intentions, the will, the "new creature," devoted to his service. God knows when our holy spirit (new mind) is willing and the flesh weak, and he judges us not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.

It was our begetting of the Spirit, our adoption of a new will, fully consecrated to the Lord, that brought us into a new relationship to God, and into these new hopes wherein we rejoice: and so "likewise the spirit [our new, holy mind] also helpeth [maketh up for] our [bodily] infirmities. For we know not [even] what we should pray for as we ought [much less are we always able to do as we would like]; but the spirit itself [our holy mind] maketh intercession [for us – omitted by oldest MSS] with groanings which cannot be uttered [in words]. And he that searcheth the hearts [God] knoweth what is the mind [Greek *phronema* – inclination] of [our] spirit, because he [or it – our spirit] maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God."

In other words, God is pleased to accept the heart desires of his people, both in prayer and in service, notwithstanding the imperfection of their flesh – their earthen vessels. And he does accept these heart desires.

How fortunate for us, in our ignorance and weakness, that our heavenly Father accepts the intentions of our hearts instead of our words; for frequently his people have seriously asked amiss! We think of this whenever we hear God's people pray that God would baptize them with the holy Spirit and with fire. The prayer is offered in a good conscience, and with a desire for a blessing only; but not understanding the passage of scripture which he quotes, the petitioner really asks for a blessing to be followed by a curse. The prediction that Christ would baptize with the holy Spirit and with fire was made by John the baptizer. The blessing portion of this came upon the waiting Church, at Pentecost, and subsequently upon all the faithful "remnant" of Israel, but its latter feature was fulfilled upon the rejected Jewish nation – in the baptism of fire, destruction, trouble, which wholly destroyed their polity in the year A.D. 70. But very graciously God does not answer his people's prayers according to their asking, but according to the intentions of the petitioner – he granting them blessing only.

Some have had the experience of being overtaken in a fault, and trapped by the Adversary through some weakness of the fallen human nature: they felt almost disheartened as they approached the throne of the heavenly grace in prayer. They had no words for utterance, but merely groaned in spirit to God, "**being burdened.**" But the heavenly Father did not insist that they must formulate the petition in exactly proper language before he would hear them: instead he graciously answered their heart's desires, the unexpressed groans of their heart, which sought his forgiveness, his blessing and comfort. He answered the unuttered prayers, granted strength and blessing, with a

blessed realization of forgiveness.

This is the Apostle's argument in this whole connection, and it will be observed that he sums up the argument by saying, "What shall we say then? [In view of the fact that God has made every arrangement on our behalf, ignoring our weaknesses and imperfections, which are contrary to our wills, and not reckoning them as our deeds – and ignoring the lameness of our petitions, and our inability to express our desire, and on the contrary, making arrangements to bless us according to the spirit of our minds, as we are unable even to give utterance to our groans in our imperfect prayers, we will conclude –] If God be [thus] for us, who can be against us?" Verse 31

*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?
Rom. 8:31*

See also p. 368

COMMUNION WITH OUR FATHER

*Oft when alone in prayer I kneel
Before my Father's throne;
I cannot tell Him all I feel,
Nor make my wishes known.*

*With heart subdued, and head bowed low,
I lean upon His breast,
And while the tears unbidden flow,
My love for Him confess.*

*I have no boon to ask of Him,
Save that His will be done,
To make me holy, pure within –
An image of His Son.*

*But as He smiles and draws me near –
His Spirit from above
Floods all my soul with peace so dear,
And fills my heart with love.*

*Though from my gaze He hides His face,
My soul, from self apart,
Hath found its happy resting place
Close to His loving heart.*

– Lizzie C. Ramsdell

Intercession

Romans 8:1,14-27

*We walk in the Spirit, not in the flesh,
Begotten Sons of God, adopted, blessed.
Eagerly waiting, we long for our change.
Persevering in hope, our time we gauge.
Praying, watching with anticipation,
Our eyes behold, the plan of salvation
Unfolding perfectly in God's due time.
He purposed it in love for All Mankind.
The whole creation groans—the earth itself—
Trees and plants, beast and fowl, fishes, whales, reefs—
Every living creature—Man at the helm—
Cries out for relief in this sin-sick world.
Our spirit groans within us too. We know
The days are dark and getting darker still.
We long for the world to be filled with peace.
The Sons of God know what will bring release:
The very last member who shall complete
The Christ—Head and Body—will finally meet
Beyond the veil the Savior and his bride,
At long last eternally glorified!
How we ache with an ache deep in our soul.
Loss for words—they are inexpressable.
We try to express, we long to express,
But words fail to convey our sentiments.
God's Spirit makes intercession for us,
For when we know not what we ought to pray,
God draws us close to His heart, assures us
No words, nor utterance needed to say,
For He searches our heart and knows our mind.
The Spirit itself makes supplication.
Then face upturned we can breathe, whisper, cry:
Abba Father!*

- T. A. Blackwell

7.

THE APOSTLES' INSTRUCTION ON PRAYER:

New Testament References

**14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.
15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you
received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."
Romans 8:14-15**

St. Paul points out to us that the natural man, no matter how wise or educated or talented, cannot understand and appreciate fully the deep things of the Bible, because God has caused them to be so written that only the spirit-begotten can fully comprehend them. "They are spiritually discerned." (1 Corinthians 2:14.) Thus the Church of Christ is a company of regenerated beings. Once they were members of the Adamic race and, through sin, "were children of wrath, even as others." (Ephesians 2:3.) Now they are reckoning themselves as dead to the Divine sentence upon Father Adam. They have accepted Jesus as their Redeemer, and the sacrifice of His life as the Atonement-price for their sins.

When they accept the invitation to become followers of Jesus, He becomes their Advocate with the Father; and by the arrangement of the Divine Plan His meritorious sacrifice is applicable to them as a covering for sins past and imperfections future, and affords them opportunity to be accepted of the Father, begotten of the Holy Spirit and eventually to attain joint-heirship with Himself in the Kingdom, "if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together." – Verse 17.

These regenerated, spirit-begotten children of God are not yet perfected; but if they continue in the School of Christ, the faithful will eventually reach perfection on the spirit plane as sons of God, led by the Spirit. These, on the authority of the Scriptures, exercising faith, are enabled to call upon God as their Father – "**Abba**, Father." Through the Word and through their own experiences these receive the witness of the Spirit of the Lord that they are God's children and joint-heirs with Jesus – the grand perfection being dependent upon their suffering with Him. These have no obligation any longer to the flesh; for they are New Creatures. These are no longer to live after the flesh, but in harmony with the Spirit of God as revealed to them through the Word of God.

These New Creatures, sons of God, in their weakness and ignorance might ask amiss. But the Lord would not deal with them according to their imperfection of asking; He would accept the spirit of their request. The groanings and desires of our spirits, our minds, will be taken by the Lord as instead of our imperfect utterances in prayer; for God, who knoweth all things, yea, the thoughts of our minds (spirits), accepts these. All such may know that "all things work together for good to them" – because they love God – because they have been called according to His purpose. – Verse 28. R. 5837

See also pp. 363-366

"Abba:" an Aramaic word for father, used by Jesus and Paul to address God in a relation of personal intimacy. -Dictionary.com

10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another, 11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, 12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer.

Romans 12:10-12

No advice that the Apostle could give to the class addressed could be more vitally important than this. . . .

Prayer, communion with God, is indispensably necessary to our spiritual welfare; and the appreciation of the privilege of communion with the Most High and with our Redeemer, or the lack of such appreciation, as the case may be, indicates tolerably clearly our fervency or our coldness with reference to the things of the Lord. People may be fervent in serving schemes or plans of their own, or human systems and theories, and have little desire for prayer; but those who serve the Lord and his truth from a hot, fervent heart, will so realize their imperfection and their own inability in the divine service, that they will desire and will continually seek the Master's guidance and direction with reference to the service they are rendering to him.

If, therefore, we ever feel a growing indifference, either to private prayer or to public worship or to social prayer-meetings, we may be assured that it is a very dangerous sign of one of two things.

(1) Either that our love is growing cold, or

(2) that our love is misplaced, misdirected, placed upon some earthly scheme or ambition, and is not fervent toward the Lord. And whichever is found to be the difficulty should be corrected at once. The appreciation of prayer, like the growth of love, and like the increase of fervency of spirit, is a matter for development; and the best fuel, as above suggested, is the consideration of the divine mercies already enjoyed. R. 2212

13 Let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. 15 What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. 16 Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? 17 For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified. 18 I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all, 19 yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

1 Corinthians 14:13-19

Respecting the gifts of faith: At the very beginning of this Age gifts of speaking with tongues, gifts of interpreting tongues, gifts of healing, etc., were bestowed so that they might be exercised for the benefit of the people. It would require a great deal of faith to be able to say, as did Peter to the impotent man at the temple, “Arise and walk.” One would need the “gift” in order to do this. And so with those who spoke with tongues. It would need to be a miraculous gift which would enable them to master any unknown language.

Those gifts which God chose to give were granted because the Church was in its infancy and needed them for encouragement. The gifts were given also for a witness, because the Church did not then have the Bible. The Old Testament was heard only occasionally in the synagogues of the Jews. The New Testament had not as yet been written. The early Church needed some means for instructing one another. Had it not been for these gifts there might have been frivolity, etc., among them. And so one would arise and speak in an unknown tongue; a gift of interpretation would be given to another, and he would rise and give the interpretation. These gifts were given amongst them as a sort of drawing power to cause the Lord’s people to assemble themselves together. Thus was the Word of God sent out for a time through this imperfect channel.

We should not think that a higher development was indicated by the possession of these gifts, but, rather, these gifts were granted during the infancy of the Church, and we should not pray for them. The Scriptures show that either they were the gifts possessed by the Apostles or else, subsequently, they were the result of the impartation of the holy Spirit and laying on of the hands of the Apostles; as, for instance, when Philip, the deacon, sent the Apostle that he might lay hands upon the people that they might receive the gifts; evidently Philip had not the power to do this of himself.

As to the desire for speaking with unknown tongues, the Apostle gave them a warning reproof. He said, “I would rather speak five words in the Church with my understanding

– that by my voice I might teach others also – than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.” (1 Cor. 14:19.) He tells them that if any man possessed the gift of speaking with tongues, let him pray that he might interpret – that he might be able to express himself intelligibly to those to whom he was speaking, rather than in dark sayings. And then he proceeds to say that this strong desire for emulation in the possession of the gifts did not of itself indicate deep consecration to God. He tells them that if they spoke with the tongues of men and of angels, it would profit them nothing, if they did not have love. The possession of an unknown tongue did not imply that a man had reached a higher attainment and relationship to God.

He says that the fruits of the Spirit are more to be desired, which are these – meekness, gentleness, patience, fortitude, self-control, long-suffering, brotherly-kindness, love. St. Peter tells us, “If ye do these things, ye shall never fall, for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” (2 Pet. 1:10,11.) But we might have all the gifts of the early Church and have no evidence whatever that we would be sure of a place in the Kingdom. Love excels all the other virtues, because it is the most enduring. R. 4732



What is true of our families is not less true of God's family, of which we are members – the body of Christ. To bind us together in love, God has arranged to make the various members more or less dependent on each other for the blessings he is willing and ready to bestow. Thus he would unify the body of Christ in his method of providing spiritual food, as the human body is dependent as a whole upon its various members for the natural “daily bread” which God thus supplies.

This being true, we should not only neglect not the assembling of ourselves with those of *like* precious faith, personally when we *can*; and at least through the medium of the printed page, but when assembled how sweet and refreshing, and how appropriate, to ask our Father's blessing upon the meeting; that the spirit of love may pervade the members of Christ's body there assembled, and that the truth might be discerned by sincere and truth-hungry souls, so that all might be more and more filled with the self-sacrificing spirit of that truth, and thus be built up in the most holy faith and love, and made meet for the Master's service both now and hereafter. Can it be doubted that to the extent that such prayer is the expression of the sentiment of all, it will bring an answer at the moment of its utterance, by impressing upon all solemnly the object of the meeting and the blessings to be expected and enjoyed? It is ever thus; as we draw nigh to God in prayer we bring the blessings promised nigh to ourselves by bringing our hearts into a condition of readiness to enjoy the blessings promised the seeker.

While the offered prayer is to God it should not be forgotten that in harmony with the foregoing statement (that the prayer influences of all who join in it) that Jesus and the Apostle indicate that it should be uttered in such a voice and manner as to enable those about to appreciate and intelligently join it. Jesus said, in connection with one of the few of his recorded sayings, “Because of them that stood by I said it.” (John 11:42.) Paul exhorts those who lead the company in prayer to seek to do so in such a manner that all may be able to hear and acquiesce in it. (1 Cor. 14:14-17.) And in all things whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. R. 799

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.

Ephesians 6:18

The Apostle Paul exhorts the saints that they “pray always, with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, watching thereunto with all perseverance.” These words do not signify that we should be always upon our knees or continually uttering a prayer. But we should never cease to pray, and our prayers should be *in the spirit* – earnest, sincere. The children of God are not to “say prayers,” they are to *pray*. There is much formal prayer – much saying of prayers – which do not get higher than the head of the one who repeats the words. The Scriptures speak of this as drawing near to God with the lips when the heart is far from Him. It would be better that we should not approach the Lord at all than that we should do so in an improper manner.

It is a most wonderful privilege to draw near the great Creator and Lord of Heaven and earth; and we should come in the spirit of reverence and devotion. Our Lord declared that the Father seeketh such to worship Him as worship Him in spirit and in Truth. We must come only in the name of Christ. He is the only Way of approach. And we must come thoughtfully and earnestly. We should not think of uttering a single word that we do not mean and have not thought upon. We believe a great many have done themselves injury by going through a form of words in a mere formalistic manner. This is not prayer. True prayer is the language of the heart. Therefore the greater our earnestness, the more acceptable the prayer will be, and the greater blessing shall we receive. R. 5835

When we pray to God, we are to “watch thereunto, with all perseverance” – having importunity in prayer, not soon growing weary if our petitions do not seem to be quickly answered. We are not to pray for the things that the Word of God does not justify us in believing are the Lord’s will, but for the things which we believe are His will; and we are to really desire what we ask for. Then we are to watch for the fulfillment of our prayers, and thus be prepared for the blessing when it comes. Our Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask Him. – Matthew 6:32,8. R. 5745

See also *Watch and Pray*, pp. 306-315

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

Philippians 4:6

“Be careful for nothing” is the next exhortation; but since our English word *careful* has lost its original meaning, there is danger of error here. The word originally had the thought of being full of care – anxiety, trouble. The Apostle’s words correspond exactly to our Lord’s injunction, “Take no thought,” and signify, Be not anxious, burdened, full of care. It is proper that the Lord’s people should be careful, in the meaning of the word careful as used today. We should not be careless, indifferent, loose in our conduct or words, but be circumspect.

Anxiety and burdens are unavoidable to those who are depending on themselves, their own wisdom, their own strength, their own skill; but the members of the body of Christ, accepted in the Beloved, adopted into the divine family, sons of God, are assured over and over again in the Word that if they abide faithful all things shall work together for their highest welfare. Why should they be burdened? Why should they feel anxious? He who guards their interests slumbers not. When Christians find themselves anxious, fearful, burdened, the evidence is that they are lacking in faith, and the probability is that they have either never grown to the point of having the proper faith in the Lord, or that they have allowed “earth-born clouds” and cares of this life to come between them and the Lord, so that they no longer have confidence that they are abiding in his love and in his care. All in such condition should go at once to the throne of heavenly grace, and to the divine promises, and obtaining mercy at the former, and feeding upon the latter, they should grow strong in the Lord and in confidence in him, and their corroding cares will give place to faith, confidence, peace of heart, whatever the outward conditions.

Such is the counsel of the Apostle – that instead of continuing in the anxious condition, we should lay all of our affairs before the Lord, supplicating his promised providential care, acknowledging our own lack of wisdom; – and gladly accepting his wisdom and the provisions of his love, we should make every request in a spirit of thanksgiving. This spirit of thanksgiving implies a recognition that the circumstances and conditions in which we are, have been supervised of the Lord, and that we are appreciative of his care and trust it for the future. Thanksgiving for what we have, and a full appreciation of the Lord’s leadings hitherto and now, will preclude any anxiety for the future; for the thankful heart will conclude that he who favored us and redeemed us while we were yet sinners will much more favor and do for us now that we are his through the adoption that is in Christ Jesus. R. 3128

**Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving.
Colossians 4:2**

We have many reasons for giving thanks – the heart that gives thanks will find itself more and more in a thankful attitude. At first when we begin to give thanks, we do so for the more pleasant things; but as our experience increases, we find joy in the afflictions and the persecutions of life; for these experiences refine our hearts and make them more susceptible to the right as against the wrong – the Truth as against the error, the purity as against the impurity.

Not only should we pray frequently and with regularity, but we should be always in the attitude of prayer. The children of God should be in that attitude of heart which looks to the Lord for Divine guidance in every perplexity and every experience. Just as the needle turns to the pole, so our hearts should turn to the Lord. If there is pain or trouble or difficulty in our pathway, we should look to Him. If there is privilege of serving the Lord, we should not think ourselves competent for the service without turning to the Lord for help. In other words, the Christian's prayer should ascend not only in the beginning of the day; the atmosphere of prayer should surround him continually. It should not be a mere sense of duty, but an appreciation of a great privilege.

Those who appreciate the Lord at all could not afford to be without this privilege. Those who do appreciate this privilege rejoice to go to the Heavenly Father many times a day. Our advice to all who are seeking to walk the narrow way, would be that they forget not this privilege. But in their families or in their rooms with their roommate, the prayer should be in such a form as would be reasonable and proper, according to what would be their best judgment of pleasing the Lord – and not to be an intrusion in any sense. R. 5203

**Pray without ceasing.
1 Thessalonians 5:17**

“Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed.” It is a complete definition, for sometimes we pray with groanings that cannot be uttered.

*Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.
Romans 8:26*

As the Christian goes through the world he finds various things to distract his heart. But since he finds that the Lord has promised that peace he should look for that peace, should expect it. We should pray to God for the things that we think we ought to have. But we are to take His superior wisdom as expressed in His Word as our guide; and we are to ask according to His Word. If we have a measure of peace and of blessing, we should pray all the more for the fulness of joy. While we have been cleansed from original sin by the precious blood of Christ, we must remember that we have daily trespasses; and we should pray daily, “Forgive us our trespasses.” This request the Lord answers on condition that we ask for forgiveness of our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. So the Christian will find a great deal to pray for in all of life’s affairs.

The Christian, however, should not be so absorbed in meditation that he cannot do his work. But the spirit of prayer should be with him, so that in every affair of life, in every perplexity, he would be ever ready to turn his mind toward the Lord for His blessings and to look to the Lord regarding all daily interests; for we are the Lord’s. This course would be a life of prayer without ceasing. We do not cease to ask for the coming of the Kingdom simply because we have asked for it once. We do not cease to pray for our daily food. We acknowledge that all good things come from Him. We recognize that “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17); and that He who gave His Son for us is ever ready to give to those who seek to serve Him.

This attitude of heart is praying without ceasing. Sometimes the thought may only flash through the mind, but, nevertheless, it brings a blessing to us. All of God’s dealings with the Elect class are for their development; and one feature of this development is to learn to know whence our blessings come and to appreciate the fact that God is the Giver, and that “no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.”

R. 4883

**Brethren, pray for us.
1 Thessalonians 5:25**

The Lord has many blessings at His disposal, and from certain Scriptures we might infer that He is pleased to grant some blessings in response to prayer. Therefore the Apostle said to some in his day, "Brethren, pray for us." He did not mean he could not pray for himself; he did not mean that the other Apostles could not pray for themselves; he did not mean they could not pray for each other; he did not mean he had lost fellowship with the Father and the Father would not hear him. He said, Brethren, pray for us that a door may be opened unto us whereby we may have opportunity of spreading the Gospel of Christ.

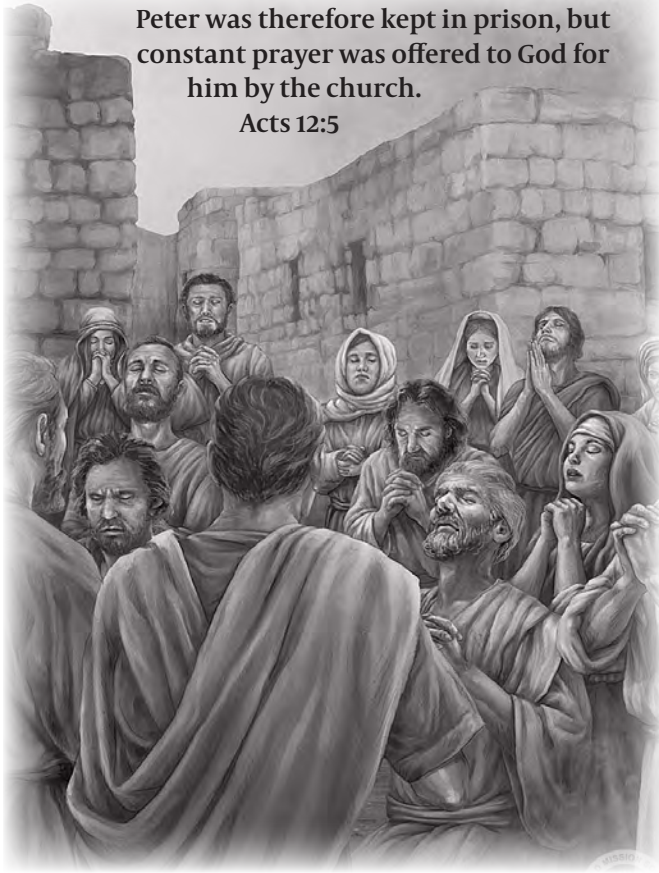
Do you suppose the Apostle meant that merely as a formality and he thought it did not make a particle of difference, but just said, Pray for us, pray for us, as meaning nothing but merely a form? No, we prefer not to suppose that the Apostle was merely using a form; we would rather prefer to suppose he is teaching a certain lesson, that a certain blessing would come through remembering the Apostles in prayer.

I presume that God who is rich in mercy, and has plenty of blessings to give, is pleased to encourage His people to pray, is pleased to have us pray. Why would God be pleased to have you pray? Is He just sitting there watching to see whether little you or little I kneel down to pray or not? Oh, no, that is not the thought at all! But God sees it will do you a great deal of good if you will exercise faith in the matter of prayer, and it will do me a good deal of good if I will exercise faith in prayer. Therefore He arranges as part of the means by which He would bless you and me that He will be inquired of concerning these things that He desires to do for us. He would thus encourage us to pray.

As, for instance, when St. Peter was in prison and the Angel of the Lord came to him and waked him up, he was not praying. The Angel smote off the shackles from his hands and led him out, the doors opening before them, and the keepers being asleep, then the Angel sent him on his way rejoicing, and Peter, hardly realizing whether it was a dream or what it might be, walked down the street; he knew the street very well, and presently he came to the door where there was a meeting being held; it was late at night, but the meeting was going on; they were praying for Peter, and saying, Oh, Lord, the Apostle James is slain and now the authorities are threatening our beloved brother Peter. What will we do if all the Apostles are taken from us? They were having an all-night prayer meeting.

And when St. Peter got to the door and knocked and the little maid came and looked out and saw St. Peter there, she did not know whether she had seen a ghost or not. Of course she heard about ghosts and she ran back to say that St. Peter was at the door. Why, nonsense! Peter is in prison! Their prayers had been answered. Do you not think that God gave them a great blessing in answer to their prayer? Do you think if they had

Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.
Acts 12:5



The Early Church prayed all night for Peter.

not prayed they would have had as much blessing? The Lord might have set St. Peter free, but when in answer to prayer it meant such a blessing to those dear disciples, such a strengthening of their faith, and such joy and blessing.

So whoever falls in line with the Lord's arrangements and prays and remembers the Lord's work in various places is getting a blessing in his own heart, and the Lord intimates indirectly that this will have some effect.

I cannot understand the philosophy of it at all, I do not pretend to, but somehow we are given to understand that God will be pleased to not change His plan for your prayers and mine--no, no, God is not going to change the Universe around to suit us; we are not wise enough to

tell Him in our prayers what He should do, but He is so wise He can hear our prayers and give us blessings. So He has arranged in proportion in which we have loyalty, faith, etc., we are to have prayer. The Lord's people who have not learned the power of prayer are weak Christians. So the Scriptures everywhere encourage the Lord's people to pray always; to be in the spirit, the attitude of prayer at all times, and full of thanksgiving to God. Q541

Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you.

1 Thessalonians 3:1

14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:14-16

When we realize that we are not always successful in resisting temptations, we are to remember that we have a Throne of Grace, to which we may come and find mercy and grace to help in time of need. We may come to our great High Priest. The high priest of old held a very high and honorable position. Our High Priest is far more highly exalted. In considering this, we might at first be inclined to think of Him as very austere, not easily approached. But the Apostle says that we are to remember that this is the One who is our Savior, the One who died for us; and that although He is so greatly exalted and seated upon the Throne of Glory, yet His Throne is also a Throne of Mercy.

Coming to the Savior's Throne is not the same as coming directly to the Father's Throne. Jehovah's Throne is a Throne of **Justice**, but Jesus' Throne is a Throne of **Mercy**. Here we may obtain mercy if we fail to come up to the highest standard. We are to remember that our merciful High Priest knows just what kind of trials we have. If we have **tried** to do **our best**, and have been overtaken in a fault, He knows how to make allowance for us and to be very sympathetic. We are to remember that this Mercy Seat is for this very purpose – to show mercy to us.

Thus as we realize that in our temptations and trials the Lord is for us as He sees our earnest struggles and endeavors, it makes us the stronger in resistance another time. "He knows, and loves, and cares." Therefore we should never grow discouraged, but come to Him again and again, remembering that He is never weary of our coming and that He will not turn us away empty. R. 5966

See also *Privileges of The Throne of Grace*, pp. 358-362

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

James 1:5-6

If your trials seem heavier than you can bear, and likely to crush you, take the matter to the great Burden-bearer, and ask his help in bearing whatever would do you good, and release from all that would not do you good, but which would injure you. If your heart is full of a desire to obey the Lord's injunction and "forget not the assembling," and you are unreasonably hindered in a way that you have tried to overcome but cannot, take the matter to the Lord in prayer, and watch and wait and strive according to your prayer, and you will soon see a manifestation of divine power on your behalf. If you see a true brother, a true "soldier" faltering and in danger, let your heart be so full of love for all of the Lord's "brethren" that you will not only run to his relief, but also supplicate the throne of the heavenly grace unceasingly, until you have regained him, or until in his wilfulness he has renounced the "narrow way" entirely. And should the fault be your own, your prayers and efforts will surely be blessed and overruled to your own profit. If you have no burning zeal to preach the good tidings of great joy, pray earnestly and faithfully and persistently for it, and strive for it, and you will soon have it. If you have a zeal and love for the gospel, and lack ability to present it, pray for the ability while you make full use of what you have. If you have the zeal and the ability and lack an opportunity, take it to the Lord in prayer as soon as you can, telling him that you are faithfully using all the opportunities you have. Then watch for more opportunities without slacking your hand to use the very humblest and smallest within your reach.

Have you a quarrelsome disposition, or other bad habits, which you realize are a burden to your home and family, and to your brethren in the Lord's household? Take it to the Lord in prayer, asking grace and help to overcome, and meantime using your best diligence and effort in harmony with your prayer.

Do you lack wisdom, so that your efforts to serve the Lord and the truth are usually failures? Take it to the Lord in prayer, remembering the promise, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not." – James 1:5.

Have you business complications brought about by your lack of judgment, or the dishonesty of others, or your generosity to the poor, etc.? And do these perplex you and hinder your progress in spiritual matters, and thus threaten your welfare as a "new creature?" This surely is a proper matter to lay before the Lord at the throne of the heavenly grace. And although it would not be right for you to attempt to dictate how your relief shall come, and you should not expect the Lord to work a miracle to prosper your imprudent venture, yet you can ask his wisdom to guide and overrule in the results, better than your wisdom could do it. R. 2006

See also *Ask, Believing*, pp. 274-275

**You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that
you may spend it on your pleasures.**

James 4:3

When we recall that St. James said of some of his day, “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss” (James 4:3), we feel that we should be careful what we ask for. Our Lord instructed His Apostles that it is very important to abide in Him and to see that His words abide in us, if we would have our prayers answered. His words are, “If ye abide in Me and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” (John 15:7.) In other words, petitions according to the Lord’s will shall be answered, but those contrary to His will shall remain unanswered.

To ask selfishly for the things of the earth would not be true prayer. Many Christians have a mandatory way of telling the Lord what they would like to have Him do for them – that so many should be converted to Him at a meeting; that this meeting should be thus prospered; etc. Our prayers should be along higher lines than these. Temporalities should be presented in a casual way. We should have the desire to subsist in such a manner as would be pleasing to the Lord and should be thankful for whatever His providence may give us – whether much or little.

It has been suggested that to pray for anything which God is *willing to give* is entirely proper. We may pray for the Holy Spirit, for more love, more gentleness, more patience, more wisdom from on High. We may pray that all these things will work together for our good; for He has promised that this shall be. We may pray for guidance from the Lord as may be best in His sight. But we may not *tell Him what to do*; for we have no means of knowing what is His will in matters in general.

Our Lord did not pray in a mandatory fashion. With His petitions, He said, “Not *My* will, but *Thine*, be done” – I have no will of My own; for I have given up My will and I desire to have Thy will done. This is a prayer of full submission. It did not mean that our Lord did not pray in faith, nor that He would not get what He desired. It meant that He desired to learn the Father’s will; and He learned that the Father willed that He should drink the cup of suffering to the very dregs.

If we are submissive, our prayers will become more and more messages of thanksgiving. We shall increasingly desire to walk in the Master’s footsteps. We shall desire that His will be done in us rather than anything that we could attempt to tell Him. Everything will be according to His Plan, which will come to pass, and which He will not alter for us nor for anyone else in the world. Those who have reached this development of Christian living will realize that it is not necessary to pray that God will save this or that one; for has He not promised to save all the people of the earth who will come to Him in His appointed way? R. 5203

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

James 5:13-15

“Is any among you suffering [afflicted], let him pray,” says the Apostle (James 5:13). This counsel will apply to all the trials and afflictions of God’s people, mental and physical, especially such as are of the first class or the second class. Such sufferers may take all their troubles of every kind to the Lord direct, and be assured of his sympathy and grace to help and sustain. Such need no elders to pray for the forgiveness of their sins, as in the following verses (14,15), where, evidently, the third class afflictions are referred to, – sicknesses the result of rebukes from God for sins, and not sicknesses of the class first described, in which we may rejoice. James says: “Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; **and though** he have committed sins they shall be forgiven him. **Therefore** confess your **sins** one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.”* The prayer, as we understand it, should be for the **forgiveness of the sins** of which the sickness is a punishment or rebuke, rather than for release from the deserved punishment. But if the sickness was a judgment or discipline for sin, we should expect that when the sin had been confessed and truly repented of, the Lord would remove the chastisement and raise up the penitent son from the affliction, either partially or wholly. – Compare Matt. 9:2-6; John 5:14; and 1 John 5:16.

* Old Greek MSS. read *therefore* and *sins*.

But let us remember that this statement does not refer to the various small aches and annoyances to which we, in common with the world in general, are subject; and which serve us a good purpose in the development of patience and sympathy for others. We know this, first of all, by the calling in of the elders of the Church [the senior, or chief, or official members] to pray over and anoint the sick with oil: because such extreme measures would be quite improper for a slight ailment. We know it secondly by the Greek word used for **sick** in verse 14, which has the significance of **helpless** or impotent. R. 2008

The Apostle James speaks of some who are “sick.” He says to let such a one call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, and that the prayer of faith shall recover him to God’s fellowship – and he adds: “He that converteth [recovereth] a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death.” (James 5:20.) Apparently that soul is in death’s throes; but if he manifest a sufficiency of faith, and will call in some true brethren and humbly confess his sin and ask for prayers, he would seem to be taking a step that would be considered favorably by the Lord, who might give him a further opportunity and trial. R. 5453

**Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another,
that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a
righteous man avails much.**

James 5:16

THIS text represents a general principle of humility and willingness to make acknowledgment when we commit a fault, particularly to the one against whom the fault or wrong has been committed, with due apology and reparation so far as possible. It is quite proper for us to freely concede that we are not perfect, and no one should attempt to pose as perfect, but rather to acknowledge what the Scriptures declare that “there is none righteous, no, not one”; that we are merely righteous in our intentions and efforts and are trusting for full covering in the sight of God through the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There might be times when the confession of a fault should be made publicly to the advantage of others and if we feel sure that the telling of our own shortcoming would be of advantage to others, we should not hesitate to tell of the matter in a proper way with a view to assisting others; but our thought is that in general we do well, not only to hide our imperfections, but that it should be our daily endeavor to put our faults away completely.

In this passage, however, the Apostle has a deeper thought; he is discussing here the case of one who has committed a sin that has alienated him from God, causing a cloud to come between them. It has been a repetition of sins, or something to this effect. He is spiritually sick, whether physically sick or not. The prescription for him is that he call for the Elders of the Church that they may pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. “The prayer of faith shall save the sick” (the spiritually sick, we think), “and though he has committed trespasses or sins they shall be forgiven him.” The brother is not in a condition to advocate his own cause with the Lord, and the Lord therefore arranged it so that we should feel a sympathy with our brother and go to his relief and make intercession for him. Not that our intercessions would avail of themselves; it must be the intercession of our Advocate that would avail for the wrongs and imperfections before justice; but our Advocate may at times thus withhold himself for the good of one in error and for the sake of drawing out the sympathy of the brethren who have knowledge of the case, that they may seek to assist, remembering themselves lest they also should be tempted, lest they also should fall from their steadfastness, and that therefore the spirit of sympathy and mutual helpfulness may be encouraged in the Church.

There is nothing that would be in the way of an Elder Brother in the Church praying for one of the fellow-members of the Body of Christ or against the members of the Church praying for each other in general without special request. This would be entirely proper. If one should see a brother taking a wrong course, he should not only pray for him, but should seek to restore such a one in the spirit of humility by calling attention to the course he has taken, as wisely as he may be able; but of course the matter could not go so far under such circumstances as under the circumstances above recited – that the

sick one should call for the Elders to pray for him, realizing his own need.

Not merely should the Elders pray for those whom they see going astray, but the Lord has put a special responsibility upon every member of the Church, every member of the Body, to look out for all other members to the extent of ability and opportunity, yet there could not be the same degree either of responsibility or of propriety in a younger brother in the Church attempting to correct and rebuke and exhort, etc., an Elder Brother. The Apostle says to Timothy, "Rebuke not an Elder, but entreat him as a father"; thus we see what a younger brother in the Lord's family might do, if he saw what he thought to be a deflection from the proper course. But he should feel a hesitancy about approaching the matter and feel also that he would be laboring under a disadvantage and would not be as likely to accomplish good results as if he were one of more experience. Therefore it would be wise for him to pray for the person in secret for a while, rather than be too free about giving advice. But if he finally thought it necessary, it would perhaps be wiser for him to speak to some of the Elders of the Church and ask them for their opinion; or if they thought it would be wise that the brother be spoken to by them.

We are not supposing that he is imagining evil – "evil speaking" – about the person, but that he has some absolute knowledge about some wrong qualities of disposition, wrong course of life, something he knows to be wrong, something that is outwardly seen, something that is not merely imagined. We realize that many of the things that comprise evil speaking, etc., are purely imaginary, such as, "I thought he was going to do so," and "I thought she was doing so," or "I thought she might have been intending to do" thus and so. These things are classed with evil speaking. In these cases the brother should make the subject a matter of prayer to see that he is not busy-bodying in other people's affairs; that he is not setting up his judgment in a matter that is of no great importance; that it is something really serious and disastrous to the brother and dangerous to his interests as a New Creature in Christ Jesus.

The general course, however, should be to go to the person alone, as our Lord instructed in Matthew 18:15; the going to an Elder would be only in the case of some very serious matter in which the person felt that his own power to set the matter right was entirely insufficient. It is our belief that those instances would be very few. If the matter is a trespass against himself, it would be his duty to go to the person alone; if it is something against the Church or that is outwardly immoral or wrong or a violation of some recognized principle of righteousness, it would seem to be on a little different plane and would call for someone who would be more in authority, since it is not the rights of the individual that are trespassed upon, but the interests of the Church or the Truth or the Lord's cause. In such cases the Elders would no doubt be the better able to judge and would know better how to approach the matter. R. 4597

Our thought is that, ordinarily, there would be no need for the individual to confess his trespasses to any one, unless it were to a person who had been trespassed against, and to whom, therefore, apologies would be due. Otherwise our sins are to be confessed only unto the Lord, unless under extreme circumstances, where one had lost fellowship with the Lord, and felt that there was nothing for him otherwise but complete alienation from God. In the latter case, we would advise such a brother to call in the Elders of the Church and make a confession, that his sin against the Holy Spirit may be canceled.

R. 5453

For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers. But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.

1 Peter 3:12

Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. John 14:23

The thought which this promise [John 14:21-23] of the abiding presence of the Father and Son conveys to our minds is that their thought and care and interest will be constantly upon us, and that at any instant we may engage the special attention of either or both. The same idea is also conveyed by the words of the Apostle Peter (1 Pet. 3:12) – “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers.” And we are urged to be “instant in prayer,” to “pray always, and not to faint,” to “pray without ceasing;” for “Like as a Father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him; for he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust.” “As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him,” and “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.” Yea, “the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children, to such as keep his covenant and to those that remember his commandments to do them.” – Rom. 12:12; Luke 18:1; 1 Thes. 5:17; Psa. 103:13,14,11,12,17,18.

We cannot come too often, then, to the throne of the heavenly grace, if we are of those who can claim the abiding presence of the Father and the Son – if we are of them that love him and keep his commandments and who recognize the Lord Jesus as the only way of access to the Father. R. 1865

The providence of God over these, his sons, is a very particular providence: – All their steps are ordered of the Lord (Psa. 37:23); and the very hairs of their head are all numbered (Luke 12:7.) His eyes are ever upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers. (1 Pet. 3:12.) All the angels are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to these heirs of salvation. (Heb. 1:14.) All things are made to work together for good to these, who love God and are called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28); and no good thing is withheld from them. (Psa. 84:11.) How wonderful and particular is this care; and they have the promise of it to the end of their trial state. God is indeed a Father to all that put their trust in him; but there is a wide difference between those who are his sons, and those who remain aliens, and even enemies.

While we thus view the present providence of God and his opposite attitude toward the world and toward those who are now recognized as his sons, we may rise to a still higher altitude. Here we observe the breadth and scope of the divine plan, and see that even now, while God does not and cannot treat the world as sons and grant them his fatherly grace and blessing, he is nevertheless preparing to bless them with his favor as soon as they come to the proper attitude of sons. R. 1561

24 You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. 25 Who have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.

Psalm 73:24-25

But the end of all things is at hand. Therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.

1 Peter 4:7

Remembering that eighteen centuries have passed since Peter gave this counsel to the church, he might be considered as somewhat premature in regard to the proximity of the time of the end; but considering the great week which commenced with the creation of man and ends with his full restitution to the image and favor of God, each of whose days is a thousand years (2 Pet. 3:8), and that Peter was living in the fifth day of this great week, we see that from this standpoint his words were true. The end of the old order of things – the end of the dominion of evil, is to be in the close of the sixth day (the sixth thousand years), and thus was indeed at hand, as was also the second coming of the Lord and the setting up of his kingdom.

While this and all similar expressions, referring to their time as the last days, were thus true then, the apostle himself probably did not so understand it; for the significance of the time-prophecies was in all probability wisely hidden from their view, as it was from the prophets, since the length of a single one of these days would have seemed very long and consequently a cause of discouragement to them. But the spirit which inspired the words of the apostles and prophets could see that while from God's standpoint the end of all things was at hand in the fifth day of the week, and these words were, therefore, true in this sense when declared to the early church, would also be true from the human standpoint when fully understood by the church in the end of the age. . . .

In view of these things, how apt the Apostle's counsel to watchfulness and sobriety; for what a lamentable calamity it would be to any of the saints, who had thus far run well for the prize of their high calling, to become discouraged and falter and fail when so near the realization of their glorious hope. Let us, therefore, be sober; let us guard against the worldly spirit and its stupefying and intoxicating influence upon our spiritual life. Refuse the first draught of the wine of worldly-mindedness and you will not be tempted to take the second. If you take the first, it may revive the old appetite and thus quickly and suddenly precipitate your fall.

Therefore, watch unto prayer: pray for divine assistance, to resist even the slightest encroachment of the enemy, and bear in mind that to the watchful and prayerful is promised grace sufficient to overcome the world. R. 1187

**My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not
sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father,
Jesus Christ the righteous.**

1 John 2:1

The New Creature needs an Advocate. Even though it is in full relationship with the Father, and even though as a New Creature it has no sin – the sins cancelled at Calvary were those of the old creature only. Is it asked why the New Creature, begotten of God, sinless, needs an Advocate? We reply that it is because he has the treasure of the new mind in an earthen vessel that is very imperfect through the fall. The sins of his mortal body were all cancelled through the imputation of the Advocate's merit and at that moment the old nature died and ceased its responsibility. He that is dead "hath ceased from sin." (1 Pet. 4:1.) The New Creature, which at that moment was begotten and as a new mind or new will took possession of the mortal body reckoned dead, is held responsible for its conduct in exactly the same manner that the owner of a dog is responsible for him. Whatever violence the dog may do, the owner is responsible, because he should have chained him up. So we, as New Creatures, are responsible for our hands, our feet, our eyes, our tongues, in what they may do. If the tongue slander another through weakness, force of habit, etc., the New Creature is responsible and must give an account. If other wrongdoings be committed, there is a similar responsibility in every case.

The New Creature cannot claim that the merit of Christ has cancelled these imperfections of his flesh in advance. He can merely claim in the Apostle's words, "The forgiveness of sins which are past, through the forbearance of God." (Rom. 3:25.) What, then, must he do in respect to these daily deflections – trespasses of omission and commission due to the imperfections of his flesh? The Apostle's answer is, "If any man (in the Church) sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous." (1 John 2:1.) "Having such a high priest over the house of God (the antitypical priests and Levites) let us draw nigh to God in full assurance of faith, that we may obtain mercy and find help in time of need." We thus pray, "Our father which art in heaven. . . forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." If as New Creatures our Lord and Advocate sees that we are cultivating his Spirit of mercy towards others, he will at once advocate our plea and secure for us Divine cancellation of the errors of our flesh, to which we, as New Creatures, were not a party and did not consent. . . .

Our Lord will continue to be the Church's Advocate with the Father down to the moment when the last member of his Body and of the Great Company shall have finished his course and passed beyond the veil to be a member of the "Church of the First-born, whose names are enrolled in heaven." Then they will no longer need an Advocate, because their resurrection change will make them perfect and the good intentions of their wills as New Creatures will find no impediment in their new bodies. They will be like their Lord, partakers of the divine nature and sharers of his glory and of his work.
R. 4585

3 Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand.

Revelation 8:3-4

What is the lesson here shadowed forth for the antitypical priesthood, the truly consecrated and anointed Church of Christ? The special lesson to all such is, Beware of presumptuous sins! The offering of incense by Aaron, the typical High Priest, and made by fire from the altar of sacrifice, represented the sweet odor unto God of the perfect obedience of Christ, our great High Priest, even when tried in the fires of the altar of sacrifice. As thus on the day of atonement, after the offering of the sin-offering, Aaron burned the incense in the holy place before the Lord, so Christ, after offering his great sacrifice for us, entered into heaven itself with the sweet incense of his perfect obedience, and his sacrifice was therefore acceptable to God on our behalf. (Heb. 9:24; Rev. 8:3.) And as the offering of the sacrifice with the incense was on behalf of the under-priests and of all Israel as well, so the offering of Christ is for the priesthood, the Church, as well as for the whole world. (1 John 2:2.) True, we are to be laid with him on the altar of sacrifice; but our sacrifice would avail nothing were it not for his sacrifice and the sweet odor of his personal merit ascending God with our prayers for a share in his meritorious covering. – Rev. 8:3.

We, the Church, the antitypical under-priests, must therefore beware of the presumptuous sin of offering strange fire, strange incense, before the Lord, of presuming to approach God in our own righteousness. Only in acknowledgement of the sweet savor of Christ's righteousness, applied to us by faith in his blood, are we acceptable with God. Another lesson is that we should pay our vows unto the Most High with scrupulous exactness, and, to this end, keep the head clear and the heart right by obediently abstaining from the intoxicating spirit of the world; but "Be ye filled with the spirit" – the spirit of obedience and of a sound mind. (Psa. 19:13; Eph. 5:17,18; 2 Tim. 1:7.) In so doing we shall not be tempted to offer strange fire before the Lord, but will humbly trust in the acceptable incense of Christ our Redeemer, and ever observe a well defined line between the holy and the unholy, the clean and the unclean. – Lev. 10:9-11. R. 1836

See also the following chapter:

PRAYERS OF THE SAINTS: Sweet Incense

Sweet Hour of Prayer

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
That calls me from a world of care,
And bids me at my Father's throne
Make all my wants and wishes known!
In seasons of distress and grief
My soul has often found relief,
And oft escaped the tempter's snare
By thy return, sweet hour of pray'r.
And oft escaped the tempter's snare
By thy return, sweet hour of pray'r.

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
Thy wings shall my petition bear
To him whose truth and faithfulness
Engage the waiting soul to bless.
And since he bids me seek his face,
Believe his word and trust his grace,
I'll cast on him my ev'ry care
And wait for thee, sweet hour of pray'r.
I'll cast on him my ev'ry care
And wait for thee, sweet hour of pray'r.

— *Hymns of Dawn*, 274

8.

PRAYERS OF THE SAINTS: Sweet Incense

Incense in biblical symbolism has a double significance.
It may represent:

- 1) the prayers (Psa. 141:2) of the saints (Rev. 5:8), and also
- 2) that which makes those prayers acceptable (Rev. 8:4).

Both of these, however, are comprehended in the life which is a prayer—i.e., the life in which the heart's sincere desires to do always those things which please the Father (John 8:29) is ever being manifested. Such a life will continually be yielding—and this more particularly under the heat of trials, a sweet savor unto the Lord. So was it with Jesus whose life was so much a prayer that it was not even necessary for him to express his heart's desire in formulated words, for God could read his own will—Jesus' sanctification, in the faith, love, obedience and praise of his beloved Son. (John 11:38-42) – *Anton Frey*

*Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.
Revelation 5:8*

Exodus 30:1-10,30-34

1 “You shall make an altar to burn incense on. You shall make it of acacia wood.

2 “A cubit shall be its length and a cubit its width—it shall be square—and two cubits shall be its height. Its horns shall be of one piece with it.

3 “And you shall overlay its top, its sides all around, and its horns with pure gold, and you shall make for it a molding of gold all around.

4 “Two gold rings you shall make for it, under the molding on both its sides. You shall place them on its two sides, and they will be holders for the poles with which to bear it.

5 “You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold.

6 “And you shall put it before the veil that is before the ark of the Testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the Testimony, where I will meet with you.

7 “Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it.

8 “And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.

9 “You shall not offer strange incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering, nor shall you pour a drink offering on it.

10 “And Aaron shall make atonement upon its horns once a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonement. Once a year he shall make atonement upon it throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD....”

34 And the LORD said to Moses: “Take sweet spices, stacte and onycha and galbanum, and pure frankincense with these sweet spices. There shall be equal amounts of each.

35 “You shall make of these an incense, a compound according to the art of the perfumer, salted, pure, and holy.

36 “And you shall beat some of it very fine, and put some of it before the Testimony in the tabernacle of meeting where I will meet with you. It shall be most holy to you.

37 “But as for the incense which you shall make, you shall not make any for yourselves, according to its composition. It shall be to you holy for the LORD.

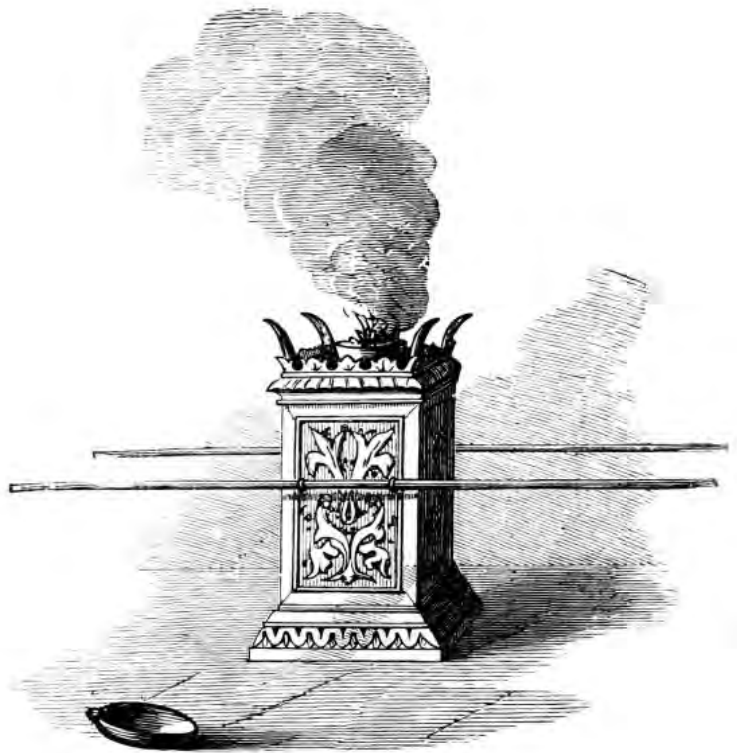
38 “Whoever makes any like it, to smell it, he shall be cut off from his people.”

Leviticus 16:11-13

11 “And Aaron shall bring the bull of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his house, and shall kill the bull as the sin offering which is for himself.

12 “Then he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, with his hands full of sweet incense beaten fine, and bring it inside the veil.

13 “And he shall put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the Testimony, lest he die.



Incense Altar

THE THREE BURNINGS - SACRIFICES

In the type the fat, etc., were put upon the brazen-altar in the Court and all the remainder was burned, except the blood, outside the camp. The high priest took the blood, and his two hands full of incense and the fire from the altar and passed immediately into the holy, into the light of the golden candlestick. On the altar, which stood between the candlestick and the shewbread, he placed the fire and then crumbled the incense upon it. We read that the incense penetrated into the Most Holy. This was necessary. The significance of the statement is that the incense offered by the high priest was another picture, as seen by the Almighty. It was a sweet incense to God. It went before our Lord into the Most Holy and there rested upon the mercy-seat. Notice, then, the three burnings.

1. The one in the Holy represented the Divine view of the sacrifice of Christ during the three and a half years of his ministry.
2. The burning of the fat on the brazen-altar in the court represented our Lord's sacrifice as seen by his disciples and faithful followers, the justified ones – about five hundred brethren. And all who since have come into this condition of justification have by faith seen that same sacrifice.
3. The burning of the carcass outside of the camp represented our Lord's sacrifice as viewed from the standpoint of man. To them it is an improper use of time and energy. To them his life had an evil odor, as they considered him a companion of publicans and sinners.

The three burnings, outside the camp, inside the court and in the first of the holies, together represented our Lord's sacrifice from these widely different standpoints. When one ended, all ended – when our Lord was crucified. His sacrifice was finished then. He passed beyond the veil in the resurrection to follow. Yet our Lord's work was not finished at Calvary in another sense. It was merely begun. He had finished the first part of his sacrifice – the sacrifice of his own person, the body prepared. But he had a larger work yet to do, namely, according to the Father's plan, the acceptance and sacrifice of a Church class – “the Church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.” The Head of this Church had finished his sacrifice and become the Lord of glory, but the remainder had yet to pass through similar experiences to his – walking in his footsteps. R. 4427

11 For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. 12 Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. 13 Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. 14 For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. 15 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

Hebrews 13:11-15



In seeking for the lessons of the Tabernacle types we should remember that they represent both progress and completion. In reality, all those saved during this Gospel Age are called to be priests – no one is called to be of the “great company,” the antitypical Levites. Those who will become members of the “great company,” the antitypical Levites, will be such as have been called to the priesthood and who took certain steps in harmony with that call, but failed to make their calling and election sure. Eventually, as shown in the type, only a “little flock” of priests, will attain the condition typified by the Tabernacle itself. Eventually a large number, begotten of the holy Spirit, will fail to manifest sufficient zeal as **sacrificers** and will be accounted only as Levite **helpers**. Their place will be in the Court, as shown in type.

Now let us view the processes by which the antitypical priests and Levites reach their fixed positions represented by the Tabernacle and the Court. All who are feeling after God and righteousness may be said to draw near to the Tabernacle. To such the great altar and its sacrifice will be manifested. By faith they may then enter in through the gate and be behind the curtain in the Court. They are in the Levite attitude or position, but are not yet really Levites in the finished sense. Passing the altar they proceed to the Laver and see its water and their privilege of washing, putting away the filth of the flesh. As faith alone did not determine them to be Levites, neither does the washing or putting away of sin. They must additionally approach the Veil, which symbolizes consecration – they must stoop to this Veil and pass under it before they can belong to the spirit-begotten class.

Inside the Veil they are nominally priests. And if they will, they may proceed to enjoy the privileges of the shewbread and of the light from the golden lampstand and proceed to the Incense Altar antitypically by responding to all the opportunities and privileges granted them of laying down their lives for the brethren – presenting their bodies daily, hourly, living sacrifices in the Lord’s service, “a sweet odor.” If faithful even unto death they then will pass beyond the rent Veil into the Most Holy condition. As members of the High Priest’s Body they will then have free course, full privilege to the Tabernacle condition forever. Or rather, as shown in the other type, they become living stones in the glorious spiritual Temple.

But those who made the consecration and who fail to burn the incense on the Golden Altar may not remain in the Tabernacle – they must go out again into the Court. They lose the priestly privileges, but not their Levite privileges and right to remain in the Court condition. Only a willful, deliberate rejection of the Lord’s grace and turning to sin – anger, malice, hatred, envy, strife, etc., works of the flesh and of the devil, which would mean their utter destruction in the Second Death – would exclude them from the Court of favor. Those who pass the Gate and the Altar, some of them going, perhaps, so far as to use the Laver but refuse to make consecration of themselves, will be ultimately rejected from the Court condition. They will be thrust out and become parts of the world, to be dealt with by the Great Redeemer during his Mediatorial Reign – to have all the privileges of the remainder of the world and no more. R. 4579

Notes from Anton Frey

Normally, it was the duty of the High Priest to offer the incense at the Golden Altar. This occurred at least twice daily, in connection with the care of the Golden Candlestick (the Lamps), according to Exod. 30:7,8. But it occurred also on the Day of the Atonement, just prior to the High Priest's entering the Most Holy with the blood of his own sacrifice (the bullock), according to Lev. 16:12,13. In the latter, he represented Jesus and Jesus alone as our High Priest. However, there is a sense in which each and all of the consecrated are expected of the Lord to offer incense at the Golden Altar:

"We now find ourselves as 'new creatures' in the 'Holy'—in the first of the 'Heavenlies' or Holies (Eph. 2:6—Diaglott), and begin to be enlightened by the 'Golden Candlestick' (God's Word) respecting spiritual things—'the deep things of God'—and to be refreshed and strengthened daily with truth as represented in the 'shewbread' lawful for only the Priests to eat. (Matt. 12:4) And thus enlightened and strengthened, we should daily offer up sacrifices at the Golden Altar, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ—a sweet perfume to our Father. —1 Pet. 2:5." (T22)

"But those who made the consecration and who fail to burn the incense on the Golden Altar may not remain in the Tabernacle—they must go out again into the Court. They lose the priestly privileges, but not their Levite privileges and right to remain in the Court condition. Only a willful, deliberate rejection of the Lord's grace and turning to sin—anger, malice, hatred, envy, strife, etc., works of the flesh and of the devil, which would mean their utter destruction in the second death—would exclude them from the Court of favor." (R. 4579)

Before considering the ingredients of the sweet incense specifically, it is worthy of note that the fragrance, the sweet aroma, resulted from contact with coals of fire. As if to say, the "sweet incense" which prepares our access into the presence of God is not constituted of a faith untried; nor a love which has not suffered, but still is kind; nor an obedience which has not endured the contradiction of sinners against itself and has overcome evil with good; nor a praise, save such as might arise from the stricken, as does the fragrance from the flower whose petals have been crushed. All this and more is suggested by the four ingredients of which Moses was instructed to make the sweet incense.

"[STACTE] The Hebrew nataph signifies to drop or distill. As the exudation of all gums is in drops, the etymology does not help us. But it is evident from the context in Exodus that a fragrant gum is intended. Many identify the stacte here mentioned with the gum from the libneh. . . But stacte means primarily myrrh. . . It is most likely then that nataph, and its LXX and Vulgate equivalent stacte, refers to myrrh in drops or tears which is the purest form." (*Hastings, Dictionary of the Bible*)

As suggested, stacte corresponds to the first "ingredient" of the "sweet incense"—**faith**. But this faith is not the mere intellectual or mental assent or belief in the existence of God; but, rather, that heart appreciation of God, whom it has found to be its comfort and solace in all of the bitter and trying experiences of life. Is it not this that is suggested by the tear-like exudation of this myrrh plant? Myrrh itself means bitter. In this connec-

tion it is necessary only to think upon those Ancient Worthies who obtained a good report through faith, because they failed not to believe in and trust in God, despite the bitterness of their trials and experiences. Surely, a faith that will manifest its trust in God when undergoing severe trial, cannot help but inspire all who are called upon to witness it. Thus does its fragrance cling to the “garments” and permeate the very atmosphere through which it moves. How often have others breathed in the “fragrance” of our faith as it was emitted in some deep sorrow or trial of life, when we, like Job of old, have declared, “though he slay me, yet will I trust him.” (Job 13:15)

“[**ONYCHA**] The operculum of a shell fish. . . When burned it emits a pungent aromatic odor, from the combustion of the animal matter which it contains.” (*Hastings, Dictionary of the Bible*)

This second ingredient corresponds to **love**, and not a love which is either sentimental or sensual. Nor is reference here to the *phileo* or duty love. It is rather to that love which comes closest to being like God’s and whose “fragrance” is evidenced in suffering long, but still being kind. It is that love—the *agape*—which moves us to lay down life itself in the service of our brethren. In this connection let it be particularly noted that the fragrance (the pungent aromatic odor) of the onycha resulted from the combustion of the “animal matter” which it contained. What a precious thought is this!

“The second substance is a pulverized shell of a mollusk, something obtained by crushing; the meaning of this is readily understood, vid. Psa. 51:19 (17). ‘According to modern authorities, when burnt alone it [the onycha] has a bad odor; but everywhere . . . it is made the fundamental ingredient of incense, and imparts to the materials of the incense their real strength’ (Knobel).” (*Lange, Commentary, Exodus-Leviticus, p. 128*)

“[**GALBANUM**] A gum resin, *Ferula galbaniflua*. . . It occurs in the form of tears and lumps. . . Pliny and Virgil (Georg iii-415) say its smoke drives away serpents.” (*Hastings, Dictionary of the Bible*)

This ingredient corresponds to **obedience**, but not an obedience which costs nothing. Quite to the contrary, this obedience is “learned” by way of suffering (Heb. 2:10; 5:8). It is not always easy to hold one’s peace, to be quiet, to say nothing, not to retaliate, not to revile, when all manner of evil is spoken against us, falsely; or when mean and unjust things are done unto us. But it is from the overcoming of just these things that the “sweet incense” of the life of prayer arises unto the Lord, and merits for us the abundant entrance into His presence.

We cannot know how true the statement of both Pliny and Virgil may be, but we do know that a positive, a deliberate, a firm, determined, definite stand, taken in obedience to the Divine Will, will spare us much that is evil and injurious, which might otherwise overtake us.

“[**FRANKINCENSE**] This gum is obtained in Arabia, and is of a bitter taste. It comes from a tree bearing flowers with five petals and ten stamens; the fruit is five-sided, and there are five species of the plant. It grows upon almost bare marble

rocks, deriving its sustenance from these. The gum is obtained from incisions, and is very valuable. Besides being in demand for incense, it is useful as a medicine, and an antidote for poison." (Ridout, *Lectures on the Tabernacle*, p. 370)

This last ingredient corresponds to **praise**; but as suggested, a praise that arises from the soul which in the midst of trial or difficulty recognizes that "all things" work together for its good, and that the trial or difficulty is God's will—permissive or otherwise—concerning it. So, like the great Apostle Paul, it will glory even in tribulation. Yea, we ought always to praise God for our trials, for are they not the chastenings which prove that God is dealing with us as sons (Heb. 12:5-8)? If, then, this type of praise is essential as an "ingredient" of the "sweet incense" which must arise with the prayers of the saints, it is quite evident that no murmurer can ever expect to get into the presence of God. Let us see to it, then, that we neither murmur nor repine at what the Lord's providence may permit, since faith can firmly trust Him, come what may.

Often one's attitude of praise to Jehovah will react like a medicine to cure another's thoughts of bitterness and self-pity; and such thoughts do come at times to each and every one of us, to rob us of our peace with God. Any thought which thus deprives us of the joy we should ever be having in Him is a poison, for which the praise of Jehovah for all of His goodness to usward is the best antidote.

"Frankincense representing praise." (R. 3703)

"Frankincense—of heart, adoration, appreciation, and gratitude." (R. 3703)

**"So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may
daily perform my vows." (Psa. 61:8)**

Such then, must the prayer life, the life of prayer be, that it glorifies God, and ministers to our brethren. Thus, it calls for the deepest sincerity; and any simulation is but hypocrisy—an abomination unto the Lord. This is the reason why those of old were forbidden to make unto themselves anything like this "sweet incense" (Exodus 30:37,38), under penalty of being cut off from among the people of God.

" 'Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense.' [Psa. 141:2] This is the same thought elsewhere expressed in the Bible—that the prayers of God's people rise before him as a sweet perfume. (Rev. 5:8) And, by the way, we remember that the incense of old, which typified the prayers of the saints, was composed of a rare mixture of spices, giving forth a particularly sweet odor; and that nobody was allowed to make that incense except the priests who were to offer it. (Exod. 30:34-38; 37:29)" (R. 5692)



LORD, Here I Bring Myself

LORD, here I bring myself,
‘Tis all I have to give,
My heart’s desire is wholly this,
Henceforth for Thee to live;

To own no will but Thine,
To suffer loss or shame,
All things to bear, if only I
May glorify Thy name;

Henceforth mine every power
Each day for Thee to use,
My hands, my feet, my lips, mine *all*,
As Thou, my Lord, shalt choose.

Dear Lord, my constant prayer
Is for increase of grace,
That I *by faith* may walk with Thee,
Till I behold Thy face.

– Gertrude W. Siebert

Psalm 141

1 A Psalm of David. LORD,

I cry out to You. Make haste to me! Give ear to my voice when I cry out to You.

2 Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

3 Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth. Keep watch over the door of my lips.

4 Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men who work iniquity, and do not let me eat of their delicacies.

5 Let the righteous strike me. It shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me. It shall be as excellent oil. Let my head not refuse it. For still my prayer is against the deeds of the wicked.

6 Their judges are overthrown by the sides of the cliff, and they hear my words, for they are sweet.

7 Our bones are scattered at the mouth of the grave, as when one plows and breaks up the earth.

8 But my eyes are upon You, O GOD the Lord. In You I take refuge. Do not leave my soul destitute.

9 Keep me from the snares they have laid for me, and from the traps of the workers of iniquity.

10 Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I escape safely.

PRAYERS THAT ARE HEARD – R. 5692

PSALM 141

MANY MAY WORSHIP, FEW MAY PRAY – ONLY THE SANCTIFIED IN CHRIST JESUS – THEIR FREQUENT NEEDS – “GOD’S EAR OPEN” – THEIR PRAYERS ARISE AS INCENSE TO HIM – LEARNING TO PRAY – WHAT TO PRAY FOR – WATCHING FOR ANSWERS – THE BREATH OF LIFE SPIRITUAL.

“Keep me from the snares which they have laid for me.” – Psalm 141:9

WHEN we think of the greatness of the Creator, Maker of Heaven and earth and all therein, and when we think of our own littleness, our weaknesses and imperfections, we are amazed that our God has made any provision whereby even the best of His creatures might hold communion with Him in prayer. We should not fail to note the difference between worship and praise, which anybody may render to the Lord, and prayers and supplications, which are acceptable only from the Lord’s consecrated people and their children while still minors.

To illustrate: It is one thing that the populace may cheer a governor or a king, may remove their hats or bow their heads, but it is quite another thing for that same conglomeration of people to be received by the king or the governor into association as his friends or to have communion with him, to tell him about their matters, to have his counsel and guidance. So, while God has an interest in the whole world of mankind, a deep interest, it is not the same interest that He has in His Church. And by His Church we mean, not any sect or party or denomination, but those individuals who, regardless of sectarian lines, have entered into a heart covenant with the Lord, renouncing their own wills and accepting, instead, the will of God in Christ. These are the Bible Church, whose names are written in Heaven. (Hebrews 12:23.) These are the ones addressed in the Bible as the saints of God, and respecting whom it is declared, “All things are yours; . . . and ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.” – 1 Corinthians 3:21-23.

This Church of God, in all the world, is not numerically strong. As the Bible says, it contains not many rich, not many wise, not many learned, but chiefly the poor of this world, rich in faith, heirs of the Kingdom. (1 Corinthians 1:26; James 2:5.) Their reigning, their power and their control in the world’s affairs will not come until they shall have experienced the resurrection change, and Messiah’s Kingdom shall be fully inaugurated. Then these shall live and reign with Christ a thousand years. – Revelation 20:4.

WHO MAY PRAY

Strangely enough, many seem to have gotten the thought that anybody, at any time, may rush into the presence of the Almighty God with his requests. The intimation even seems to be that God is unhappy because people do not come to Him thus. Such views of prayer indicate a lack of Bible study, Bible information. The Bible teaches that prayer is a great privilege.

Jesus declared, “No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.” Furthermore, He indicated the restrictions upon those who would approach the Father through Him – they

must be His disciples; and to become His disciples, they must take upon themselves certain obligations or vows. They must renounce their own wills, and accept the will of Jesus. They must lay all upon the altar; otherwise they cannot be accepted, cannot be presented to the Father, cannot be begotten of the Holy Spirit, cannot be styled or treated as sons of God, cannot be joint-heirs with Jesus Christ in His coming Kingdom – cannot have the privilege of sons of God in the present life either – the privilege of prayer and of Divine fellowship, communion, instruction.

All these special blessings the Bible reserves for those who become especially, peculiarly, the sons of God. Even in respect to these who have become sons of God, Jesus intimates a danger of their losing the privilege of prayer. He says, “If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye may ask what ye will” – not otherwise. – John 15:7.

We believe that misinformation on this subject of prayer has worked disadvantageously to many. The majority, holding intercourse with evil, only occasionally flee to the Lord in some trouble, and that without entering into any covenant with Him or receiving any recognition as sons, and without desiring this. If they were rightly informed, the effect upon their minds at first would be to stun them. They would awake suddenly to the realization that they are without God in the world; that their affairs are not subject to His supervision; but that as part of the world, they are under the general curse, or sentence of death.

The highest qualities of the human mind, which lie at the very top of our craniums, are the organs of worship, reverence, veneration, spirituality. Even the wicked, at times, feel that they will please God by praying to Him and asking Him for some favors. They have not learned that God has addressed them, saying, “Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do, to take My Covenant into thy mouth, seeing thou hatest instruction and castest My words behind thee?” – Psalm 50:16,17.

It is high time that the difference between the Church and the world shall be more distinctly discerned, and that the privileges of the Church shall be appreciated. The effect would be to awaken in others a sense of their need for God. Then, in their hours of distress, realizing that they have no God, would they not be the more likely to seek Him earnestly in His appointed way, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through a full consecration – the only terms upon which Jesus would accept them and be their Advocate with the Father, and secure for them the title and privilege of sons of God, valuable both for the present life and for that which is to come?

INCENSE, PRAYER, BEFORE GOD

The Prophet David, in this lesson, pictures the Christian in his distress coming to God in His appointed way: “O Lord, I cry unto Thee: make haste unto me; give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto Thee. Let my prayer be set forth before Thee as incense.” This is the same thought elsewhere expressed in the Bible – that the prayers of God’s people rise up before Him as a sweet perfume. (Revelation 5:8.) And, by the way, we remember that the incense of old, which typified the prayers of the saints, was composed of a rare mixture of spices, giving forth a peculiarly sweet odor; and that nobody was allowed to make that incense except the priests who were to offer it. (Exo. 30:34-38; 37:29.) Thus again the Lord shows us that the privilege of prayer, of approaching Him in an

acceptable manner, is confined to the antitypical priests, called by St. Peter the Royal Priesthood. – 1 Peter 2:9.

Only those of the Lord's people who have consecrated their lives to Him, even unto death, are thus represented as members of the sacrificing Priesthood, to whom the Apostle wrote, saying, "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, and your reasonable service." (Romans 12:1.) The Lord has pledged to this particular class that He will hear them, yea, that He will answer them – not necessarily according to their natural preferences, but He will heed the spirit of their cry and give to them, according to His Wisdom, the experiences and blessings most helpful.

WHAT WE SHOULD PRAY FOR

Our prayers should be in harmony with our endeavors. Thus in our lesson the Church of Christ are represented as praying the Lord to set a guard over their lips. The thought is that they are striving to keep their lips, their mouths, from utterances that would be injurious to others; and that, on the contrary, they may be helpful to humanity and honoring to God. Also, because they are striving for heart purity and to avoid practising wicked works with evil doers, therefore they pray in harmony, "Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity; and let me not eat of their dainties" – assist me in my determination of opposition to all these things.

How appropriate that the Lord's consecrated people should scrutinize their lives when they come to their Father in prayer! How appropriate for them to note to what extent their blessings, luxuries and dainties have come to them contrary to the principles of justice and love – contrary to the Golden Rule! Whoever intelligently thus prays will surely be examining his life to rectify his business relations, so that he may not eat of the dainties which would come from injustice or oppression, but, on the contrary, rejoice in the commonest things of life if they be the best procurable in harmony with the principles of righteousness, the principles of love.

"LET THE RIGHTEOUS SMITE"

The class that are thus in fellowship with God, through prayer and through seeking to be obedient to His arrangements and laws, are so fully engaged that they are able to say, as in this Psalm, that they will take no offense if reproved by the righteous – rather the reproofs of such will be to them like an excellent oil, such as a guest received from his host in ancient times. The true Christians, the class who have the fellowship with God through prayer, have the qualities of heart which the Apostle describes as the fruits of the Holy Spirit; namely, meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, brotherly-kindness, love. (Galatians 5:22,23; 2 Peter 1:5-8.) And because possessing these, they are not easily offended, but indeed are glad to have such experiences and lessons as the Lord's providences may direct to them – especially if these come through the brethren, and particularly if the brethren who use these administer their rebukes in a Christian manner – in meekness, remembering themselves, lest they also be tempted. – Galatians 6:1.

In such cases, the reproof will be a blessing from the Lord – if given in that spirit

*But you are
a chosen
generation,
a royal
priesthood,
a holy
nation, His
own special
people, that
you may
proclaim
the praises
of Him
who called
you out of
darkness
into His
marvelous
light.
1 Pet. 2:9*

and received in that spirit. Neither their heads nor their hearts are broken by such Scriptural reproofs; and they themselves learn to administer admonitions to others in similar manner, so as not to injure, but to help. Their prayers are for each other in what seem to be calamities; and in harmony with the Lord's promise, these seeming calamities and all the affairs of life shall operate together for good to those who love Him, to the called ones according to His purpose.

The American Revision gives the wording here differently: "As oil upon the head; let not my head refuse it: for even in their wickedness shall my prayer continue."

In hyperbole the Prophet declares the distress of the Church as affecting them even to death. "Our bones are scattered at the mouth of Sheol (the grave), as when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth" – like the fragments made by the wood-cutter, who considers the chips not worthy to be gathered. But while this may be the estimation of God's saints from the worldly viewpoint, not so is it with God, as the following verse implies: "But mine eyes are unto Thee, O God the Lord: for in Thee is my trust; leave not my soul destitute."

But whatever affliction God's consecrated people may have in the present life, whatever rejection may be their experience at the hands of the great or the wise of this world, they have God's promise of glory, honor, immortality, in the future. In Him they trust, and He will not leave them desolate. He has declared, "The gates of Hell (Sheol, Hades) shall not prevail against them"; that is to say, the power of the grave shall not prevail against the Lord's Anointed, Christ and the Church – they shall come forth from the power of the tomb glorious in the First Resurrection majesty to reign a thousand years. – Revelation 20:6.

"KEEP ME FROM THE SNARES"

Satan is represented as a fowler, a hunter, who is seeking after the Lord's people even as earthly hunters are prone to hunt after speckled birds. Before the invention of powder, the hunters more particularly entrapped their prey with snares and pitfalls. While Satan is represented as being the great Arch-enemy, he also is accredited with using agents. Chief amongst his agents, according to the Bible, are those fallen angels of whom he is the prince – "the prince of devils." But he has amongst men many workers of iniquity. These are his servants whether they realize it or not.

As Jesus declared, "His servants ye are to whom ye render service." In consequence of this rule, we understand that many are professedly servants of God who are deceiving themselves, who are really the servants of the Wicked One; for his works they do, as Jesus said. They colabor for the upbuilding of unrighteousness, iniquity, injustice, and in holding down the Truth and in misleading the people.

The Lord will help His people, He will deliver them from the various snares of the Adversary; and eventually Satan and all his cohorts will fall into their own snares. Thus, in ancient times, when the Egyptians thought to capture the Israelites at the Red Sea, the Lord opened the way for the Israelites and they escaped; while their enemies pursued after them, and were themselves entrapped and overwhelmed.

Similarly, in the great Time of Trouble that is approaching, apparently Satan and his servants will be overwhelmed in that trouble in a manner not expected by them. The Church will escape those things coming upon the world and will stand before the Son of Man, changed in the power of the First Resurrection and called to be with Him as His Kingdom class. But the world will be ensnared in that great Time of Trouble. Yet, thank God, it will be for their advantage as they learn the ways of the Lord more fully, and great will be the blessings of the Almighty coming to them!



Since there is nothing in the account in Leviticus that says that the incense was offered a second time, it is rather improbable that it was offered twice. And yet the thought is there that the sacrifice of the Church, made acceptable by the Atonement effected through Jesus' death, must continue to be presented until death, that these members might eventually be received into glory. "As our Lord was, so are we, in the world." As He was rendering obedience day by day, so are we rendering obedience day by day. As the spirit of loving zeal was demonstrated in His case, so in our case; otherwise we should not be permitted to be members of that Body.

So we might say that the incense which He offered up, in a certain sense and to a certain degree, represented the whole Church, which is His Body; for in harmony with the Divine intention, before the foundation of the world, He was to be the Forerunner, the Representative and the Advocate of those who would be accepted as His members. Hence, in offering up His own perfections, He was offering up that which would, by imputation, be our perfection, as His members.

In view of the fact that nothing was said about offering the incense the second time, and since we do not go into the Holy as individuals, but as members of His Body, we are safe in saying that we are, "in Christ, a sweet savor to God," though a bad savor to the world. "Be ye, therefore, followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us and hath given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor." "For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ." (Eph. 5:1,2; 2 Cor. 2:15; Rev. 8:3,4.) R. 4922

*Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to
God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.
Hebrews 13:15*

A PROPER FEAR

Excerpt from R. 5711

After the Jewish high priest had crumbled the sweet incense upon the fire of the golden altar, after its fragrance had penetrated beyond the second veil and had covered the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat, he then himself passed beneath the veil. Every time the high priest raised the veil thus to pass under it he probably feared; for in case he had failed in any particular to carry out his sacrificial work acceptably he would have died as he passed under the veil. So our Lord Jesus knew that His work must be acceptable in the most absolute sense, else He would forever forfeit His existence. He would become as though He had not been; He would lose all.

There was no earthly being to give our Lord encouragement along this line. There was no one to say, You have done everything perfectly; you could not have done better. So the Master went alone to the Father for this assurance and for strength and courage. He prayed, "Not My will, but Thine be done"; and the Father heard His prayer and gave Him the needed assurance and strength. He was heard in respect to that which He feared; and during all that night and the following day, up to the hour of His crucifixion, He was calm and courageous.

So the Lord's people should have a proper fear. Proper fear is good for them. But it should not proceed to the point of hindering their efforts and dissipating their courage. They should have the fear enjoined by St. Paul when he said, "Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of us should seem to come short of it." (Hebrews 4:1.) This proper fear the Master had. He never became discouraged, never held back from the work which the Father had given Him to do. His fear was a filial one, which engendered a watchfulness and care, a circumspection of walk and of life, that He might be wholly pleasing to the Father. This all Christians should have. We should watch lest we neglect some privilege or duty.

This proper fear will lead us to careful inspection of ourselves. We should ask ourselves, "What do I believe? Why do I believe it? We should go over the ground again. We should again go over in our minds the proofs of the correctness of our Faith. By so doing, the Lord will strengthen us in the Faith, He will strengthen our heart. If any hope in themselves, and lean upon their own strength mainly, it will be to their advantage that the Lord shall allow them to come to the point of discouragement, that they may become more timid, may lose all self-assurance, may realize their utter helplessness and weakness and their need of leaning wholly upon the Lord, of looking constantly to Him for guidance and support. As the Lord's children thus learn to wait upon Him, to them is fulfilled the promise,

*But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength. They shall
mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary.*

They shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:1

THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER

*We thank thee Father we may pray
And seek thy presence day by day.
Take thee the burdens we can't bear,
And come away and leave them there.
Like little children in a storm,
Can take thy hand without alarm.
When faith seems weak and trials severe
To feel that thou art always near.
These things are for our good we know,
For thine own Word hath told us so.
We want our prayers to always be
An incense very sweet to thee.
Prayed as our Lord and Master taught
With purity of heart and thought.
Not for requests, but to adore
And praise thy name forevermore.
For thou hast called us by thy grace
To share thy throne and see thy face.
So help us each our vows fulfill,
And pray according to thy will.*

- Alice M. Ripper

9.

PRAYERS OF THE WORLD IN THE AGES TO COME

During the Millennium, as *intellectual belief* gives place to *knowledge*, the heart-reliance of those who are loyal to the principles of righteousness will increase proportionately. It will *always* be in order to trust in God. The Great Creator is the Great Upholder of the Universe; and all of His creatures will ever be recipients of His bounty. If we understand the Scriptures, the only ones who will have deathlessness will be the Lord Jesus and the Church, which is His Body. (1 Cor. 15:53.) All others will have dependent lives, and so will be objects of Divine care. In order to have everlasting life, they will need to have a heart-reliance upon their Creator. The more they learn of the unchangeableness of the Divine promises and character, the greater will be their trust. R. 5116

JEHOVAH'S CHARACTER MANIFESTED IN HIS GREAT PLAN OF THE AGES

– R. 5429

WHY was Jesus Christ called upon to suffer and die? Could not the great God have accomplished the salvation of humanity in some other way, without the agony and death of His Son? These are questions which often present themselves to the thoughtful student of God's Word, and which can be answered very satisfactorily. God could have arranged the matter very differently; He is not an unresourceful God. He is an All-Wise God, an All-Powerful God. We can see, for instance, that God could have decreed that Adam should be excluded from the Garden of Eden for a time, and that after he had suffered somewhat for his disobedience, and had thereby learned a lesson, he should then be restored to favor. By that experience Adam would, no doubt, have been taught a very good lesson. So all of Adam's children might have undergone some penalty, some purging experiences, whereby they might have profited, and then have come back again into harmony with God.

But the Wisdom of God is a Mighty Deep, and He has a great and wise Plan! He had purposed that all of His intelligent creatures – angels, cherubim, seraphim, and humans – who would gain eternal life, must be absolutely loyal to Him, and hence that they should all be tested in respect to their loyalty. They must all be tried and tested characters. It was His purpose, therefore, that all His intelligent creatures in Heaven and on earth should be brought to perceive His goodness and worthiness of all praise, that they might be able to exclaim from the heart: “Blessing and honor and might be unto Him that sitteth upon the Throne. . . forever!”

Those who prove their loyalty to the Creator shall live everlastingly. Those who will not prove their loyalty shall die – go into absolute extinction. Up to the time man was created, God had not made known this feature of His Plan. He then declared that death should be the penalty for sin, in order that all might know the Law of His Government – that only the righteous shall live, and that all sinners shall eventually be destroyed. Hence God arranged beforehand that man's sin, which He foreknew, should bring upon Adam and his posterity the extreme penalty of His Law.

Many would not have chosen sin if they had known its sure results, and had been born with perfect ability to choose the right. But God purposed that Adam's posterity should come into the world under fallen conditions, as the result of his disobedience. He purposed to make manifest here on the planet Earth what is the natural tendency and certain outcome of sin. Sin's tendency is always downward; and not only so, but it aggregates itself, and leads to ruin and death.

God designed that this great lesson of the evil results of sin should be witnessed by the angels also, who before the creation and fall of man were surrounded by such conditions as presented no special temptation to sin.

TEMPTATION COMES TO THE ANGELS

God desires the worship of only such as worship Him in spirit and in truth. Any who

will not worship from this motive shall eventually be destroyed. We see that God allowed sin not only to enter the world through the machinations of Satan, but to be a source of temptation to the angels. We see how all the angels became exposed to a peculiar temptation in connection with fallen mankind. (Genesis 6:1-5; Jude 6.) We believe that Satan instigated this temptation, as he did the temptation of Mother Eve. He himself was the first transgressor.

Some of the angelic host succumbed to this temptation, and some remained loyal to God. So we know that all the angels of Heaven were subjected to a great test as to their obedience to their Creator. All those angels who are in harmony with God, according to the Bible, have stood their test. These, we understand the Scriptures to teach, have been granted the reward of everlasting life, because they proved faithful and obedient and demonstrated their loyalty. Those who fell were bound in chains of darkness unto the Judgment of the Great Day – now present, we believe.

GOD'S ECONOMICAL PLAN

Man has for six thousand years borne the penalty, “Dying, thou shalt die” – the penalty which the Bible declares to be the wages of sin – death and all the weaknesses and depravities of mind and of body which are its accompaniments. But God purposes that all shall have a full opportunity of recovery from this condition of sin and death; and the provision for man's recovery has been made in Christ. This provision is the most economical one that could have been arranged. If a thousand perfect men had sinned, it would have required a thousand perfect men to redeem them – one redeemer for each sinner. “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,” a man's life for a man's life, is the requirement of God's Law. – Exodus 21:23-25; Deut. 19:21.

Before the creation of our first parents God had arranged that only one man should have the opportunity to fall and to be sentenced to death, that thus only one man would be required as a Redeemer. This Divine arrangement was most economical because it will bring all the masses of humanity back to life at the cost of but one human life as the redemption-price. No fallen man could be a ransom, a corresponding price, for the perfect man Adam. Therefore God purposed from the very beginning that His Only Begotten Son, the First-born of all creation, should become man's Redeemer and that in order to become the Redeemer He should become a man.

The death of an angel could not have redeemed man. Divine Justice required that a perfect human life must be given for a perfect human life. And God, knowing all this, sent His Son to carry out His great Plan of human Redemption and Restitution. Neither was there anything unkind or unjust to His Son in this, although for the Almighty to have forced the matter upon His Son would have been an injustice; and God could not be guilty of injustice.

Thus the Scriptures inform us that the coming of the Logos into the world was a voluntary matter. He did this “for the joy that was set before Him,” by the Almighty. The Father set before the Son that if He would suffer the ignominy of the transference of His being from the higher plane to a lower, a human plane, in order that He might redeem the lost race of Adam, He should be highly exalted, next to Jehovah; He should be made a partaker of Jehovah's nature – the Divine nature. All this was the inspiration

of our Lord's course – the joy of doing the Father's will and of having His approval; the joy of restoring mankind and of being exalted to His Father's glorious nature. He who thus humbled Himself to become a man and die the ignominious death of the cross, has indeed been highly exalted as promised, and has sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on High. – Hebrews 1:3.

INFINITE WISDOM OF GOD'S GREAT PURPOSE

Thus we see that the Plan which God has adopted furnishes opportunity for the manifestation of the principles underlying His own glorious character, which neither angels nor men could so clearly have understood by any other means. When the great work of restoration is fully accomplished, angels and men will see the Justice of God – a Justice which permitted the penalty of death to be executed upon our race for six thousand years – a Justice which provided a Redeemer to pay this penalty for Adam, that he and all his posterity might go free – a Justice, too, which provided a great reward for the faithful Son who carried out, at such a cost to Himself, the Father's Purpose! This is the highest conception of Justice of which men or angels could conceive!

By this means God will also manifest His sympathetic Love, which otherwise neither angels nor men might ever have known. Had there been no sin, no death, no sorrow, no pain, they might never have known the depths of Divine Mercy. After sin had entered the world, the angels beheld the Love of God, in that He "gave His Only Begotten Son, that whosoever [of mankind] believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life" for another! The Father's Love was thus shown in His Plan to send His Son to die for the world. This Love will be manifested to all men in the incoming Age, now very near at hand.

Through His Plan God will manifest His Power also; for while His Power has been shown in the creation of the worlds, of men and of the various orders of angels, still this manifestation of energy is small in comparison to the Power which He will yet exercise. This Power will restore every individual of the race to his former condition; every soul of man will be awakened from the tomb. This will be a manifestation of Power that is beyond the comprehension of humanity.

Then, too, God's Wisdom will be wondrously manifested. When the grand outcome of the Divine Plan of the Ages shall have been seen in its glory and majesty by all the created intelligences of God, all will hail Him as the infinitely Wise One – who fittingly ordained that every creature formed in His image should be tested as respects absolute loyalty, that only the loyal and obedient should have life, and that all others should be destroyed!

Thus we see that in His wonderful Program for dealing with sinners, angelic and human, God chose the very best way, the one most profitable to angels and to men, the one which most redounds to His own ultimate glory and honor. "Who shall not reverence Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? . . .

All the nations shall come and worship before Thee, when Thy judgments are made manifest!" – Revelation 15:4.



The kingdom or rule of earth, is the kingdom that has been in preparation for **mankind** from the **foundation of the world**. It was expedient that man should suffer six thousand years under the dominion of evil, to learn its inevitable results of misery and death, in order by contrast to prove the justice, wisdom and goodness of God's law of love. Then it will require the seventh thousand-years, under the reign of Christ, to restore him from ruin and death, to the perfect condition, thereby fitting him to "inherit the kingdom prepared for him from the foundation of the world."

That kingdom, in which all will be kings, will be one grand, universal republic, whose stability and blessed influence will be assured by the perfection of its every citizen, a result now much desired, but an impossibility because of sin. The kingdom of Christ during the Millennium will be, on the contrary, a theocracy, which will rule the world (during the period of its imperfection and restoration) without regard to its consent or approval.

The brethren of the Gospel Church are not the only "brethren" of Christ. All who at that time will have been restored to perfection will be recognized as sons of God – sons in the same sense that Adam was a son of God (Luke 3:38) – **human sons**. And all of God's sons, whether on the human, the angelic or the divine plane, are **brethren**. Our Lord's love for these, his human brethren, is here expressed. As the world now has the opportunity to minister to those who are shortly to be the divine sons of God, and brethren of Christ, so they will have abundant opportunity during the age to come to minister to (each other) the human brethren. . . .

...the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God. Luke 3:38

Since all mankind will not be raised at once, but gradually, during the thousand years, each new group will find an army of helpers in those who will have preceded it. The love and benevolence which men will then show to each other (the brethren of Christ) the King will count as shown to him. No great deeds are assigned as the ground for the honors and favors conferred upon the righteous: they will have simply come into harmony with God's law of love and proved it by their works. "Love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10), and "God is love." So, when man is restored again to **the image of God** – "very good" – man also will be a living expression of love. R. 2607



The Lord does not explain the particulars of how those who have gone into the prison precincts of the tomb shall be brought forth, so that they may hear the voice of the Son of Man, and by obeying they may live. (John 5:25) We may not, therefore, arbitrarily decide just what the nature of the procedure will be. Evidently it is not necessary for us to understand the particulars of this matter. Nevertheless, it is interesting for us to think of it, and we may assume that it will not be offensive to the Lord that we should imagine a little respecting the procedure. Our conjecture has already been briefly stated,* that each one who is the recipient of favor, as he grows in knowledge and in love will be desirous of co-operating as much as possible in the blessing of others, especially those near to him of kin, and that the general channel of approach to the Lord on the subject would be by prayer and preparation, in response to which the awakenings will take place. We surmise that the world will then approach the "Royal Priesthood" for help in sickness, etc., even as the Jews typically applied to the Mosaic priesthood. Hence prayer will be the usual channel for blessings. F701

"Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. John 5:25

*See Vol. 4, p. 640

Revelation 21:1-10;22-27

1 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.

2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.

4 "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

6 And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts.

7 "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.

8 "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

9 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife."

10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. . . .

22 But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

23 The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.

24 And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it.

25 Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there).

26 And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.

27 But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

IN THE PARADISE OF GOD – R. 2832

REVELATION 21:1-7,22-27

“He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God and he shall be my son.”

PARADISE, the garden of God, was applicable as a name to the Garden of Eden, in which our first parents resided while they were still in harmony with God, before their disobedience; and the same term is Scripturally applied as a name to the new earth when restitution blessings shall, during our Lord’s second presence (the Millennium), be brought to perfection as the fit abode of those who, under divine favor, shall then prove worthy of life everlasting. It was to this paradise that the Apostle Paul was in vision “caught away” when given a glimpse of various features of the divine plan, not then due to be understood by the Church in general – “things not lawful to be uttered.” (2 Cor. 12:4.) John the Revelator was similarly caught away in vision, and shown some of these wonders of the Paradise epoch; but only in symbols, which he was permitted to report, and which have been comparatively misapprehended until now, in the Lord’s due time, the holy spirit is guiding his people into the truth on this subject, as well as others, because it is now nigh at hand, and “meat in due season” for the “household.”

Our Lord refers to this paradise in language which identifies it with the first paradise of Eden, saying, “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” (Rev. 2:7.) It will be remembered that all the trees in Eden were trees of life, but that the one in the midst of the garden was then a forbidden tree, the disobedient eating of which brought death on Adam and his race. That tree in the midst of paradise was called the tree of knowledge, and our Lord’s promise is that the overcomers of this present age shall have full liberty to partake of that tree of knowledge, and under most blessed and satisfactory conditions, when the knowledge will be of benefit to them under divine approval, and not bring a curse. It is this same paradise of the future on this earth that our Lord referred to when addressing the penitent thief, he said, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee this day, Thou shalt be with me in paradise.”

This Paradise, we recall, is elsewhere referred to by the Apostles as “the third heaven” – “a new heavens and a new earth.” (2 Cor. 12:2; 2 Pet. 3:13.) They are not referring to new worlds, nor to heavens ranged one above another, as many have supposed, but, as already shown,* what is termed the first heavens and earth or order of things, passed away at the flood; and that the heavens and earth “which are now,” the present order of things, are reserved of God to pass away with a great fire of trouble, revolution, etc., which shall utterly destroy them – the present spiritual powers and the present earthly or social arrangements. “Nevertheless, we according to his promise look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” This will be the third heavens, and third earth, or the new heavens, and new earth, which will differ from the present condition of things in that it will be righteous, whereas the present is unrighteous, imperfect. The “new heavens” will consist of the new spiritual ruling powers of the future, Christ and the glorified Church, as the present heavens consist of the nominal religious systems, which, claiming Christ for their Head, in a very large degree bow to Antichrist, the god of this world, the prince of this world, “who now worketh in [through] the children of disobedience,” and who is captivating and blinding

the whole world with the exception of the few, the eyes of whose understanding have been opened, who are under special blessing and leading, and are taught of God, – the “little flock,” “heirs of the Kingdom.” – Eph. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:4.

*MILLENNIAL DAWN, VOL. I., pp. 66-70:1,318.

It is to this new heavens and new earth condition, this paradise, that our lesson introduces us. As the “new heavens” does not mean a new place of God’s throne, and a new throne of God, but new conditions, and signify the spiritual power and control of Christ and his Church in glory, so the “new earth” does not mean another planet, but a new social order on this planet. The declaration is that the former heavens and former earth (which are now) will then have passed away and be no more. All present institutions are to utterly perish in the great time of trouble with which this age is very shortly to end. “And there shall be no more sea.” As we have already seen, the sea is a symbol for the masses of people in a restless and unstable anarchistic condition, just as the land represents the social order, and as the mountains represent the kingdoms of the present time. As there is no reference to the physical earth and physical heavens being destroyed, so there is no reference to the physical sea being obliterated. The symbol signifies that under the new arrangement, under the control of the new heavens or spiritual powers, the reconstructed social order will be so satisfactory, so complete, so thorough, that there will be no more sea-class, no more restless people, no more dissatisfaction, no more anarchists; everything will be reduced to law and order; and law and order will under the new regime secure justice to every creature, obliterating the differences of wealth and power as they now exist.

THE NEW JERUSALEM.

In the symbolism of Scripture a city represents a government; as for instance, symbolic Babylon is denominated “that great city [government] which ruleth over the kings of the earth.” The New Jerusalem, as a symbol, represents the new spiritual government of the Millennial age. It is not earth-born, it is not reared by men, but, as here pictured, it descends from God out of heaven – it is spiritual in every sense of the word – of God and not of men. It is for this kingdom, this government, that our Lord taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come – thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven.” The declaration that the city is adorned as a bride for her husband implies its grandeur and beauty and perfection, as a bride’s adornment on such an occasion is particular and elaborate to the last degree. But additionally to this it reminds us that in the government of the future, the judges of the world are the saints, now being selected through faithfulness in trial and tribulation, and that these are frequently called the Bride, the Lamb’s wife and joint-heir in the Kingdom. The Revelator elsewhere strikingly brings this thought to our attention: the angel calls to him, “Come hither, and I will show thee the Bride, the Lamb’s wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God.” – **Verses 9-11.**

We are not to think of this holy city as being composed of literal stones, coming down through the air; we are to remember, on the contrary, that the saints of this present time are “living stones,” as the Apostle Peter explains. (1 Pet. 2:4-7.) This glorious city will not be visible to the natural eye – neither Christ nor the saints in glory can be seen

of men; only those “changed” from human to spiritual nature see these matters in the full; but the whole world will be quickly made aware of the fact that a new government has been instituted, – a government of righteousness, and with all power, and that thereafter whosoever doeth righteousness shall be blessed, and whosoever doeth evil shall be punished.

THE GLORIFIED TEMPLE.

The **third verse** of our lesson associates this city with the other figure of a symbolic Temple, which the Lord is now preparing, of which the saints will constitute the “living stones” and “pillars;” for it is declared that the tabernacle (dwelling) of God shall be with men in this city (government or kingdom). God will dwell in this glorious city or government – it will be his Temple, and the world of mankind will approach God in it to receive the divine blessings, as Israel approached the typical Tabernacle and the Temple in their typical religious services. Thus God, represented in his Church (the Christ, Head and body) will dwell with men (the world of mankind during the Millennial age) and they shall be his people; – all mankind will be treated from the standpoint of reconciliation, the propitiation price for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2) having been paid at Calvary, and the due time having then come for the manifestation of divine favor, all peoples shall be treated as the Lord’s people; none of them shall be treated as aliens, strangers, foreigners from God and his promises and his blessings.

While the Millennial Kingdom will be the Kingdom of God’s dear Son, it will also be the Kingdom of God, because God’s dear Son and his joint-heir, the Church, will be in absolute accord with the Father, and all that shall be done under their control will fully and completely represent the divine will respecting men. Nevertheless, it will be a separate Kingdom from that of the remainder of the universe, as the Apostle Paul indicates. (1 Cor. 15:24,25,28.) “He must reign until he hath put all enemies under his feet. . . . And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also be subject to him that did put all things under him. . . . Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father,” – at the close of the Millennial reign.

Since God is the Author of all the blessings of redemption and restitution, and since every good and every perfect gift cometh down from our Father in heaven, it is with appropriateness that the record declares that “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” – from the eyes of mankind. Though it will be Christ and the Church who will be doing it, nevertheless, the Heavenly Father will be recognized as the first cause, the fountain of every blessing. The wiping away of tears implies a gradual work, such as we see will be the process of that glorious time. Man will not be exempt from every weakness and trial and difficulty at the beginning, but if he will conform to the laws of the Kingdom, all cause for distress will gradually pass away, as restitution blessings will lift him out of death into perfect life. “They that hear [obey] that prophet [teacher, the Christ, Head and body] shall live; but it shall come to pass that whosoever will not hear that prophet [not render hearty obedience to his requirements] will be cut off from amongst the people [in the Second Death].” – Acts 3:23.

Other Scriptures show us that the work of the Kingdom will begin with those who

remain over at the time of its establishment, and that these, under condemnation of death, will at once be blessed with the knowledge and opportunities provided through the ransom, and if they accept these they will immediately be released from condemnation, that they may at once go on and upward on the way of holiness, toward perfection; and subsequently those who “sleep in the dust of the earth” shall come forth to more or less of shame and lasting contempt, as they begin to realize their mental and physical decrepitude, the results of their depravity. Nevertheless, these also, under the blessings of the Kingdom, may make progress up to perfection, losing their sin-blights, and simultaneously losing the “shame and contempt,” – whose lasting will be only so long as their cause continues. Thus these may progress in the way of righteousness, so that only those who sin wilfully shall die, and then each for his own sins only, and not the father for the son’s sins, nor the son for the father’s sins. – Jer. 31:29,30; Dan. 12:2.

The whole work of the Millennial age is summed up in few words, and we are brought to its culmination in the declaration, “There shall be no more death; neither sorrow nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.” What a glorious sun-burst of blessing is in these words! What a grand fulfilment will be there of the Apostle’s declaration respecting “times of restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began!” This declaration, however, applies to the very end of the Millennial age, and not in full to any previous time in that age, for other accounts show us unmistakably that there will be imperfections and chastisements and stripes throughout the age, while mankind is being **lifted up**; or as our Lord expressed it, the raising up of mankind throughout the Millennial age, step by step, will be a “resurrection by judgment,” chastisements, disciplines. (John 5:28,29.) And even at the close of that age we are shown, in another pen-picture of that time, that there will be a severe trial and testing to demonstrate to what extent the enforced obedience of that age shall have rightly affected the hearts of those who experience its blessings, so that their love will be for righteousness, and that they will hate iniquity. (Rev. 20:7,8.) All who in that final test shall manifest that his heart contains anything aside from full loyalty to the Lord and the principles of righteousness will have his part in the Second Death.

“BEHOLD, I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW!”

The **fifth verse** of our lesson comprehensively grasps the entire Millennial age; our Lord Jesus, then in the throne of earth’s dominion, declaring, “Behold, I make all things new.” This expression does not relate merely to rocks and trees, etc., but to the great work which our Lord undertook; **viz.**, the regeneration of humanity – of so many of Adam’s race as would, under favorable conditions of knowledge, experience and assistance, develop characters in full accord with the divine will. The end of the Millennial age will see the work completed; – all the wicked destroyed, all who will not hear the voice of that prophet, teacher, governor, cut off from amongst the people in the Second Death, and all the willing and obedient made new, brought to the complete perfection contemplated in the original divine plan.

John was to write this matter, because the testimony is true, is faithful, as is the one who has promised. This asseveration of faithfulness and truthfulness implies what we see to be the case; **viz.**, that present conditions seem so contrary to all this grand restitution outcome that it cannot be fully believed and trusted by any except those

who have learned to walk with the Lord, and in their weakness to lean upon his might, – to trust to his power to accomplish all the exceeding great and precious things which he has promised. To all others these things will appear untrue, and God will appear unfaithful, and the matters which we are here discussing will seem “idle tales,” as fables and golden fancies: but to us who believe these promises are precious, and he from whom we receive them is precious, correspondingly as we know him and trust him. – 1 Pet. 2:7.

The one enthroned (the Christ) declares at the conclusion of the Millennial age, “It is done;” my great contract is accomplished; “I am the Alpha and the Omega [the A and the Z], the beginning and the end.” It was the Father’s good pleasure that the Blessed One, the Only Begotten of the Father, should accomplish the entire program of redemption and restitution; and that incidentally, by his obedience in the things which he suffered that he should prove himself worthy to be forever the associate and representative of the Father, through whom and by whom all things should continue, as he was the one through whom all things were made that were made. It is this one who, during the Millennial age, will extend to all the willing and obedient the water of life, everlasting life – the privilege of perpetual existence. But they must thirst for it, must desire it; and this desire must be manifest in obedience to the terms, the laws, upon which it will be supplied freely. Our Lord declared to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life,” and that anyone believing him, trusting him, tho he were dead, yet should he live, – attain to perfect life, escaping from death conditions, until at the close of the Millennium he shall have life in the full, unrestricted sense. And he who thus liveth (attains to life) and still believeth, trusteth in the Life-giver, and is obedient to his directions, ***shall never die.***

Our Lord adds, “He that overcometh shall inherit ***these*** things, and I will be to him a God, and he shall be to me a son.” Those addressed are not the Bride class, selected during the Gospel age, but the sheep class of Matt. 25, – such of mankind as during the Millennial age become the Lord’s sheep and obey his voice. To these at the end of the Millennial age, in harmony with the Father’s plan, he says, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” They are not invited to inherit the Kingdom prepared for us, in joint-heirship with the Lord, the heavenly Kingdom. But they shall inherit the earth, the purchased possession – they shall come back into all the good estate of father Adam, which he lost for himself and his children through disobedience, but which Jesus redeemed with his own precious blood, and will restore at the close of the Millennium to all the children of Adam who shall have accepted his gracious favors and been regenerated by him, and thus become his sons, and he their God – their “father.” – Isa. 9:6.

THE HEAVENLY CITY RESPLENDENT.

Here our lesson turns to a consideration of the city, the glorified Church, the kingdom class, who, during the Millennial age, will be “kings and priests unto God, and reign upon the earth,” “a thousand years.” (Rev. 5:10; 20:4.) This City class, the glorified Church, it is declared will have no need of the sun or the moon. Nothing in this statement indicates that the world will not have and need both sunlight and moonlight during the Millennial age, and subsequently, “as long as the sun and moon endure.” (Psa. 72:5.) And while it will be true that the Church, as spirit beings, will not have

need of literal sunlight and literal moonlight, nevertheless, this is not the thought. The sun and the moon here are symbolical, as in Chapter 12:1; the sun signifies the light of this Gospel age; the moon signifies the typically reflected light of the Gospel in the Law and the prophets of the previous dispensation. The glorified Church will have no need of the light which in the present time she so much enjoys through the Word and spirit, and the Law and the prophets. She will have, instead of these, a much more excellent glory, to which the Apostle refers when he says, “Now [with all the light, privileges and opportunities which we enjoy, both as respects the representations of God through the Law and the prophets, and through the instructions and leadings of the spirit in the present] we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now we know in part; then we shall know even as we are known.” – 1 Cor. 13:12.

The Church, the Temple of God, will be so filled with all the fullness of God, when made like unto the glorious Lord, that nothing could add to their blessing of knowledge and divine favor; – will be so filled with the glory of God that from her, as from the Sun of Righteousness, shall proceed the light of the glory of God, which shall heal and bless the world during the Millennial age. This is the Sun of Righteousness to which our Lord referred in Matt. 13:43, “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father” – our Lord Jesus, the Head of the Church, of course being included. The same Sun of Righteousness is mentioned by the Prophet, saying, “The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his beams.” (Mal. 4:2.) Nevertheless, while so filled with the Lord’s glory we are not to lose sight of the fact which the Apostle impresses upon us, saying that Christ is the Head of the Church, even as the Father is the Head of Christ Jesus. Hence the Lord Almighty and the Lamb will always be an inner Temple in this great Temple, which God has provided for the world’s blessing during restitution times. – **Verse 22.**

When this Sun of Righteousness shall shine forth, its blessings of healing, refreshment and life, mental, moral and physical, upon the world of mankind, the nations shall walk in the light of it. (The words “of them that are saved” are not in old MSS. Indeed, it is because they are not saved that they need this special light during the Millennial age, in order to their enlightenment, their salvation, their restitution.) “And the kings of the earth do bring their glory into it.” (The words, “and honor” are not found in old MSS.) The expressions “nations” and “kings” are not to be understood as signifying that the world of mankind during the Millennial age will be divided into nationalities and kingdoms as at present: the word “nations” here signifies peoples, and is intended to show that all peoples, and not merely the people of Israel, will be thus favored under God’s Kingdom. The word “kings” represents those princes or chief ones of the earth who, during the Millennial age, will be the chief representatives of the heavenly, spiritual, invisible Kingdom of Christ. These princes, as we have already seen, will be Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the faithful prophets of the previous dispensation, who, loving God before the call to the Kingdom and to the Bride class, cannot be of it, but because of their faithfulness will be the princes whom the Lord will establish in all the earth – first making them perfect individuals, and qualifying them for their office, as a reward for their faithfulness to God in the dark times in which they lived – their manifestation of love for righteousness and trust in the Omnipotent One.

The bringing of their glory into the city, the Kingdom, signifies their acknowledgment of this heavenly Kingdom, their rendering of tribute of praise, thanks, worship and

obedience to it as God's agency. And this rendering of glory to the Kingdom will continue throughout the entire Millennial age, as the princes throughout the earth will make known to the people that not in their own names or authority do they rule and execute judgment and establish righteousness, but in the name and as the ministers and representatives of the glorified Christ. The result will be that all the people will ascribe honor and praise and majesty and glory to the Lord's Anointed, through whom their redemption and restitution was and is being accomplished; and this is indicated in **verse 26**.

Then, in consideration of the fact that this book of symbols, while relating to the future, is addressed to God's consecrated elect Church in the present time, and in view of the fact that this message would be communicated to and more or less understood by those who would seek to make their calling and election sure to a part in the glorious city, the **27th verse** is added, declaring that "In nowise shall there enter into it anything common, or he that doeth abomination and falsehood – but only they who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life." The Lamb's Book of Life we must understand to include those, and only those, who attain to position of joint-heirship with Christ, whose names are written in heaven during this age, and who are faithful to their covenant. What a glorious incentive we have here to faithfulness! What a warning against the slightest sympathy with anything unclean, untrue, or in anywise contrary to the divine standard of holiness! If we appreciate the glorious things of the divine provision for the Church and for the world, these promises and offers will have their influence upon us, and under their influence we are expected to keep our garments unspotted from the world; to be without spot or wrinkle or any such thing; to hate every contamination of the flesh upon our robe of righteousness; and to seek immediately in prayer for the removal of any spot or wrinkle or any such thing from our wedding garment, – that thus we may abide in the Lord's love, and in the due time be "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light."

*9 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not
cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the
knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding,
10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing
Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the
knowledge of God, 11 strengthened with all might, according
to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with
joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be
partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.*

Colossians 1:9-12



Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar. For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.

Isaiah 56:7

When we think of the Church as the Temple under construction, it impresses upon us the thought that there is a future work to be accomplished. Why construct a Temple, and then not use it? Serious injury came to us through various errors of the past: for instance, the thought that the Church alone is to be saved and all the remainder of mankind to be lost; and a further thought, that at the Second Coming of Christ the world is to be burned up, and the Divine Plan ignominiously terminated. With such a view, the construction of the Church as the great Temple would seem to be a waste; since there would be nobody to be blessed by it.

20 Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:20-22

However, as our eyes of understanding open more and more clearly, we begin to see beauty in the Divine Plan and arrangement. So far from God's Plan terminating at the Second Coming of Christ, it will merely begin there, so far as the world is concerned. The Church, in one figure, will be the Royal Priesthood for the blessing of all the families of the earth. (Galatians 3:29.) In the other figure, the Church will be the great Temple through which all the world of mankind may have access to God and return to harmony with Him.

Thus, eventually, this glorified Church, or Temple, will be the House of Prayer for all people, all nations – not that they will pray to a house, but that they will approach God through the glorified Church, in which His Presence will be manifested and His mercy will be available to all. From this viewpoint, the Temple with its Shekinah glory represented the Church in the glory of the future, in association with Christ; and God will dwell in and operate through that glorious Church for the blessing of the world, represented by all those who will worship God looking toward His Holy House. R. 5713

The angelic sons of God “shouted for joy” (Job 38:7) in the dawn of earth’s creative week, and after witnessing step after step in the development, finally saw man, its king, made in the divine image. Then came the fall by disobedience into sin and death, and the frightful experiences of fallen angels who kept not their primary estate, and man’s selfish and bloody history under the reign of Sin and Death. Then successively follow the redemption, the selection of the Anointed One (head and body) through sacrifice, and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom with its wonderful restitution of all things spoken by God through the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. No wonder indeed that there should be a Jubilation in heaven and in earth when all of Jehovah’s intelligent creatures shall thus behold the lengths, heights and breadths and depths, not only of God’s Love, but also of his Justice and Wisdom and Power. F52

Surely the New Song can then be sung by all of God’s creatures, both in heaven and in earth, saying:

*“Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God, Almighty!
Just and true are thy ways, thou King of the ages!
Who shall not reverence thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name?
For thou only art bountiful.
For all peoples shall come and worship before thee,
Because thy righteous doings are made manifest.”*

Revelation 15:3,4

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.
Revelation 22:21*



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