



Volume 84 No. 1 MELBOURNE, JANUARY-MARCH 2001 A NEW YEAR MEDITATION

At the beginning of another year it is appropriate that we should remember the Psalmist's words, "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." — Ps. 90: 12. It is a time to take stock, to consider the gains and losses, to accept and remember the lessons of past experiences and to make plans for the future. Before plans can be formulated there must be a clear objective, a definite purpose in view. Then there must be a proper valuation of the ways and means at one's disposal, and in order to secure success and satisfaction there will need to be a steady application, a diligent pursuing, with unflagging earnestness and zeal, toward the purpose desired.

Christians, from the commencement of their lives as new creatures in Christ, determine their course. They determine that henceforth "for me to live is Christ" and that they will devotedly seek God's will only. They recognise that the Divine will for them is their "sanctification," or in other words that such a transformation of mind and heart shall be, wrought in them that they will be drawn away from and become out of conformity with this world, and on the contrary be drawn more and more towards heavenly things and transformed in character into the image of God's dear Son.

While the New Testament so plainly states the matter, it is astonishing how few there be that walk the narrow way in the same manner as the Master, or as Paul or the Apostles followed Christ. With many who have started the Christian way in all earnestness and with clear perception of the separateness from the world that is indicated in the teachings of Christ, the seductive influences of the world, the flesh and the Adversary have in time, sometimes a very short time, dulled their perceptions and induced a compromising attitude, permitting associations and indulgences which at the first would have been avoided. Zeal has eased off, love for the Lord and His people and His cause has cooled, hope has been less sure, and faith weakened.

It is well for all seeking to make their calling and election sure to take stock in this way, and consider whether they have been growing in knowledge and in grace, or whether indeed they have been losing ground. In this day of rush and turmoil and excitement of pleasures and thrills of new accomplishments, it is so easy to find the mind so taken up with the things of time and sense that the quiet moments for study and contemplation of the higher things of God are almost unconsciously being neglected, and once the drift commences it may soon drift on, further and further, and require the more effort to check the course and make a new start.

Experience as well as the Divine word agree that "He Who has begun the good work in us" will not quickly forsake those whom He has called. He is faithful that promised grace and strength for every need. "Faithful is He that calleth you who also will do it." Some way or other, experiences come which pull us up or bring to our attention our slackness or error, or it may be by the recurring of a New Year that we begin to consider how much we are progressing, or how much we may have slipped and gone back. It is well that such times do come, and that we look back and trace once again just what things have been helpful to us in our Christian endeavours, or what associations or experiences, what friendships or influences or fellowships, have helped or hindered us.

There are things to forget and things to remember. While we are not to look back like Lot's wife to the things that used to please self, we are not to forget experiences which have taught us valuable lessons, but remembering the lessons of the day by day life, year in and year out, we are to press along toward the mark looking forward—reaching toward those things which are before. "Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same things." (Phil. 3: 16), i.e. those things that have enabled us to make progress hitherto, and let us avoid the things which have, on the contrary, been hindrances.

It is here that the necessary valuation of things comes in. If we find that certain associations or friendships or

certain business conditions seem rather to "quench the spirit," it would be "applying our hearts unto wisdom" as far as may be possible to avoid such contact, and, on the contrary, to seek to encourage such friendships and associations, or such studies or reading matter as seem to lift us heavenwards. While we may realise that if left to ourselves we could never gain the required, the predestined character to receive the full reward, yet we learn more and more to truly value the Divine aids. He Who has promised is able to perfect what He has begun, and to bring us unto Himself. "Him that is able to keep us from falling and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy."

He has given us His word to enlighten, to comfort, to strengthen us and enable us to meet the tempting of the Adversary with, "It is written," as did the Captain of our Salvation. He has provided us with the robe of righteousness, with the appropriation of the sweet incense of the Saviour's perfect life and with His advocacy that we may, having received also the spirit of adoption, come with confidence to the throne of grace that we may find mercy and grace to help in time of need. (Heb. 4: 16). A proper valuation of ways and means leads us to take courage and to go forward confidently for "If God be for us who then can be against us."

The chief purpose of the Christian life is then clearly understood to be that we add grace to faith, and grace to grace, until we may be perfected in the character likeness of Jesus. How deplorable it is when we hear some express sentiments which would indicate that they are endeavouring to grow into His likeness, to be like Him, to do as He would do, to think and speak as He would, while their actions and words are often out of accord with such profession, both in their dealings with the world and in their conduct in the fellowship, and in the business of the Church. It is not for us to judge one another, but it is for us each to judge ourselves and see that our words and thoughts and doings are not such as to bring dishonour to the name we love. None of us is perfect, but our general conduct should be such that people may take note of us that we have higher standards of life and kinder spirit, and a truer life than others, "indeed, that we have been with Jesus and learned of Him."

It is worse than useless for us to preach Christ if we do not strive to live as Christ lived. It must be with us as with Paul, "For me to live is Christ." "That we may apply our hearts unto wisdom," seems to be the principal thing from the Psalmist's viewpoint. "The reverence of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," and without that heavenly wisdom which we are assured God is ready to give to those who ask, we shall never be able to fill our days to His praise. To apply our hearts unto wisdom will be to endeavour to perceive the Divine will and purpose, and to conform to it, and thus to see things from the Divine viewpoint of justice, righteousness, love, kindness and power, for with God nothing is impossible.

So may the New Year find us with hearts pure and determined to spend our days to good purpose and to make this year with all that it may bring us a year of progress spent to God's glory. He is able to do for us far more than we can ask or think. He is able to keep that which we have committed unto Him against that day. What good reasons we have as we consider our ways and means for going forward courageously, full of hope and confidence, for "all things shall work together for good to them that love God and are the called according to His purpose."

IMPLICIT TRUST

(A NEW YEAR PRAYER)

Can I trust Thee for all my needs, dear Lord,
Through the length of the opening year;
And wherever its pathway leads, dear Lord,
Need I ever doubt or fear?

My needs are so many and great, dear Lord,
I stumble, and slip, and fall;
If for fleshly assurance I wait, dear Lord,
I shall never find rest at all.

I need wisdom to walk in the light, dear Lord,
And strength both to will and to do;
And courage to stand for the right, dear Lord,
With patient endurance too.

When clouds overshadow my way, dear Lord
And Thy face I'm unable to see;
I need faith to permit me to say—"Dear Lord,
You know what is best for me."

But Thy promise is rich and large, dear Lord,
Thy storehouse is boundless too;
Will "my need" be too heavy a charge, dear Lord,
For One who is "Faithful and True"?

Has there aught of Thy word e'er failed, dear Lord,
In Thy way with me hitherto;
And has not Thy grace availed, dear Lord,
When nothing else would do?

Then bring to Thee all my needs, dear Lord,
Through the length of this new born year;
And wherever its pathway leads, dear Lord,
I'll have never a doubt or fear

And whatever it holds in store, dear Lord,
(A secret known only to Thee)

I shall clasp Thy hand once more, dear Lord,

"Whence Cometh My Help"

“I will lift up my eyes to the hills –from whence cometh my help?” Psalm 121:1

One of our Lord’s messages of special application and comfort in these days is found in Luke 21:28 – *“When these things become to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh.”* The things to which He referred, signs in the heavens and on earth, distress, fear and so on, are very evident in our world today and so Jesus’ words are particularly fitting for our time when world events of recent years and still today are unprecedented and to those who think about them very frightening.

If we were to let our minds dwell only on such things, we should certainly be living in a state of constant gloom and despair. There is a need for all of us to be aware of what is going on in the world, if we are to become understanding and compassionate towards others here and now and to be prepared for greater work in the kingdom. But more importantly, there is and always has been a need to look up, to lift up not only our heads but our eyes and our hearts, so that we may recognise just what God is doing and see present world distress in the context of His eternal purposes.

To keep our eyes downcast is to see only the dusty pavement, the bustling crowds, the busy traffic of life. To lift up our eyes physically and spiritually will show us the wonders of our Heavenly Father in the trees, the hills, the clouds, indeed in all the masterpieces of the Creator and His grand design. These are the permanencies in our insecure world and no doubt something of the abiding presence of the hills of Palestine was in the Psalmist’s mind when he composed the lovely 121st psalm, from which the text is taken – *“I will lift up my eyes to the hills; from whence cometh my help?”*

DAVID’S EXPERIENCE

Perhaps his words flow out of his own lonely experiences as a shepherd boy in Israel, when at the close of day, with his sheep settled for the night, he was able to reflect upon the unchangeableness and providential care of the God of Israel for the nation and for himself. More probably, the psalm may be the product of his experiences as a fugitive from the anger of Saul. His life was in danger, privation was his regular portion and so he looked for some assurance of help and security. For all of us, as for David, life itself is a transient scene; the only rock foundations of certainty and permanence are our Heavenly Father and His eternal plans.

Whether the first verse of the psalm should be read as a statement or, at least in part, as a question is not agreed on by translators. Certainly, the Psalmist, as can be seen from the succeeding verses, is not suggesting that his help comes literally from the hills. But he seems to be letting his thoughts travel from the everlasting hills around him to the abiding help and care of Jehovah. In Psalm 125:2, David again takes up this theme – *“As the mountains are about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even for ever”*

The following verses of Psalm 121 go on to tell us the source of David’s help – verse 2 reads: *“My help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”* It would seem therefore that David’s words in the latter half of verse 1 are by way of a question, leading on to the idea of God’s surrounding presence. Something of the same thought of permanence can be seen in the use in scripture of hills and mountains to represent kingdoms and earthly powers, and the kingdom of God in the next age. *“It shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it.”* *Isaiah 2:2.*

But the hills and mountains not only speak to us of abiding stability in a changing world but they are a symbol of elevation, of lifting up and out of the daily routine of life with its pressures and cares. It is notable that our Saviour often retired into a mountain apart to pray and to commune with the Father, and while most of us are not able literally to do this, there is a need to come aside from the world and its affairs. It is good that not only privately but also in the company of others of the Lord’s people we climb the hills together, as it were, away from the busy clamour and turmoil of society and as the hymn writer says – “Bid our souls on soaring wings, ascend into a purer clime.”

Still today, as we read the psalm, we can rejoice with the Psalmist in his meditation upon the watch-care of God over His people. He is still the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning. As the hills overshadowing Jerusalem pictured His protection of natural Israel, so the same God, the Father of all who come to Him by Christ Jesus, is ever careful for His children. “There is an eye that never sleeps beneath the wing of night; there is an ear that never shuts when sink the beams of night. There is an arm that never tires when human strength gives way; there is a love that never fails when earthly loves decay.”

“HE CHANGETH NOT”

This psalm, which is a favourite of many Christians, is a poem and in poetic form it conjures up pictures of One who is all-powerful, all-compassionate and eternal in His care, One upon whom we may rely for every phase of life, One who is as everlastingly sure and steadfast as the hills which David looked upon. These characteristics of our Heavenly Father and our God are the sure foundation of our comfort and consolation.

Without them, the remaining promises recounted in the psalm would have no value. These fundamental qualities of God are clearly set out for us in verses 2, 4 and 8 especially, and are the surety of His faithfulness.

In verse 2, we see that the Psalmist, having declared that his help comes from Jehovah, goes on to speak of His creative power – “the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” What can be beyond the power of such a source of help? *“When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained, what is man that thou art mindful of him or the son of man that thou visitest him?” Psalm 8:4.* This question we might well ask with the Psalmist and it is surely a reasonable one.

The wonder of it all is that God is mindful of all His creation, He so loved all mankind that He gave His Son to be their Saviour. He who dwells on high moreover is ready to dwell with all who are of humble spirit and contrite heart. Again in Psalm 19:1, we see David meditating in the night watches on the glory and power of Jehovah – *“The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork”* – and we marvel with the Psalmist that the same Almighty, the Creator, is the answer to His query “Whence cometh my help?”

The prophet Isaiah tells us that the Creator faints not, neither is weary, nor is there any limit to His understanding. But more importantly for each one of us, it is He who gives power to the faint and to those without strength it is He who gives His strength. (Isaiah 40:28,29) As Paul discovered, His grace is sufficient, for when we are weak, when we recognise our own inability, then we can be strong in His strength.

David’s reliance for strength and help then is on Him who, as Creator and Sustainer of the universe, has unlimited power to save and keep. There have been many mighty and powerful human rulers but we would be very loath to look to them for help even in small ways, much less in the matters of life itself, as David was looking. *“My help cometh from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” (Verse 2)* – this is his sure answer.

HIS WATCHCARE

Verse 4 of the psalm goes on to tell us *“He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber or sleep”*. This is plainly much more than just continual wakefulness, rather God’s care and concern for His people are clearly shown as active and constant. *“The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous and His ears are open to their cries.” (Psalm 34:15)*

What a rich privilege it is for us who live some 3000 years later than the psalmist and have come to know God’s love and care by Christ Jesus, the Good Shepherd who knows and cares for each one of His sheep.

“Like as a father pitith his children, so the LORD pitith those that fear Him; for He knoweth our frame. He remembereth that we are dust.” (Psalm 103:13.14) “Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” (Isaiah 49:15,16) These were His assurances to His faithful ones of old, so too His children of this Gospel Age are never out of His memory, never out of mind – always before Him, constantly the objects of His oversight and love and care.

David’s God, our Heavenly Father, is then all-powerful, all-seeing and all-caring. Is this not enough? The best human love and care may tire or be diminished by the folly or waywardness of the object of that love, but God’s care and help, praise Him, are not like that. Turning to verse 8 of the psalm, we realise that, like the Creator Himself, His care and over-ruling are eternal. *“The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth and even for evermore.”* The writer to the Hebrews reminds us of His promise – *“I will never leave thee nor forsake thee!” (Heb. 13:5)* “Never” is a very long time, all that we will ever need.

We can be sure then that His keeping and protecting power will be over all of our life’s journey. What full sufficiency there is here for us! More than ample provision has so freely been made for us. From whence does David’s help and ours come? Truly it comes from Him who is not only all-powerful but all-caring – the eternal, unchanging One. Our help truly comes from the Lord and from Him alone. Let us look then at those promises of help to which the Psalmist refers in the following verses of the psalm. There seems to be a pattern to these:

First – He will not suffer thy foot to be moved (Securing)

Second – 3 times – He will be thy keeper (Sustaining)

Third – He is thy shade by day and night (Protecting)

Fourth – 3 times – He will preserve thee (Guarding)

PRECIOUS PROMISES

(1) “He will not suffer thy foot to be moved” The devil is ever anxious to draw God’s people away from

the stand they have taken. This is very true today, perhaps even more so than it was for David, who also met and succumbed at times to temptation, yet was forgiven when he later repented. We who have come to God by Christ Jesus have been given His “whole armour” so that we may in His strength be able to stand in the evil day and having done all to stand (Eph 6:13) This armour must be put on and *kept on* – behind it stands the guarantee of God – “He will not suffer thy foot to be moved.”

“Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had quickly dwelt in silence. When I said, my foot slippeth, thy mercy O Lord held me up.” So David testifies to the truth of this promise of God and surely we could also testify of His securing power in our lives. He is able to keep us from falling as we trust Him; the help we need to stand firm in the storms of life truly comes from the Lord.

(2) “He will be thy keeper”. The thought of God’s keeping power is introduced from three points of view. First, as we have seen, it is unfailing, second, the Lord is the keeper of His people in every age and third, He is *thy keeper*, not just a constant, caring keeper of His people as a whole but of each one. This is at the heart of both Old and New Testament teaching – our Father’s personal care. So David can say “The Lord is MY shepherd”, not just a national shepherd but David’s own. And we can say with the writer to the Hebrews, “The Lord is MY helper (not just of the whole Church of God, though this is so) and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” (Heb 13:6) Indeed, all His promises can and should be claimed personally.

(3) “The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand, the sun shall not smite thee by day nor the moon by night”. The words are reminiscent of Psalm 91, which so beautifully speaks also of God’s protection over His people – “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty”. What a lovely picture this conjures up, the shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land, a refuge in the time of trouble. Here there is protection from the fierce and burning trials of life’s active days and the subtler testings and fears of the silent midnight hours. Truly, He is our comfort by day and our song in the night!

(2) “The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil, He shall preserve thy soul”. The thought is similar to that in the earlier verses that speak of God’s keeping power, but David now expands on how the Lord will personally watch over each one of His own. First, He will preserve from all evil, from all harm, from evil-doers and their efforts to injure or waylay. There may be setbacks or losses on the way but nothing can harm the eternal welfare and blessing of each trusting child of God. The promise of Psalm 91:10,11 is – There shall no evil befall thee... for He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways”. “My times are in Thy hands”.

These assurances will not mean automatic immunity from all troubles and trials, life for the Christian, as for David, is not like that. But God’s preserving and protective and keeping power is always there amid all life’s circumstances. Our Lord’s prayer for His people was I “pray not that Thou should take them out of the world but that Thou should keep them from the evil one”. (John 17:15).

Second, He shall preserve thy soul, thy life. Our lives are already hidden with Christ, whatever experiences we may have to go through. So we should be able to echo the apostle’s words in 2 Timothy 4:18 “The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work and will preserve me unto His everlasting kingdom”. That is surely His promise, realised and treasured by the Psalmist so long ago; and it still holds today.

Third, He shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth and even for evermore. In all our affairs, God is there! “Whither shall I flee from Thy presence?” asks the Psalmist and indeed there is nowhere that the trusting child of God can be placed where the Father’s hand cannot reach. How important that we remember and always seek His presence and keeping power in the daily round and common task, by the still waters and in the valley of the shadow. Surely, His presence and power, with His goodness and mercy, will follow us all the days of our lives.

“LIFT UP YOUR EYES”

In this end of the age, the Lord’s people have so much cause to LOOK UP, to LIFT UP their eyes to see by faith their redemption drawing near. All the signs about us, viewed in the light of God’s word, tell us this so graphically. It was never more true that “now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand” (Romans 13:11,12) Let us look up and rejoice daily in the glorious prospects ahead for God’s gospel age children and for all mankind.

Above all, let us look up to Him who is our Rock and our Fortress, from whom alone our help comes. Let us lift up not only our eyes but our heads and our hearts and our voices to praise and magnify our Heavenly Father and to honour His dear Son, our Saviour, who is our living help and strength. Our Heavenly Father is abundantly able to keep us each one and for each one His grace is sufficient.

“Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.”

The Gift of Wisdom

“Whence then, comes wisdom and where is the place of understanding? It is hid from the eyes of all living.” “God understands the way to it, and he knows the place thereof.” “Behold, the fear of the Lord that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.” “Oh that God would speak... and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom.” So cried the prophet in a past dispensation. “Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand, where he loth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand that I cannot see him.”

With the coming of Christ, light has been shed on the Scriptures which are able to make one wise unto salvation, for Jesus Christ is made unto us wisdom, justification, etc. This could be described as the heavenly wisdom, first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. This wisdom, like faith, is a gift of God, from the Giver of every good and perfect gift. But this gift of wisdom is different from many other gifts of God, inasmuch that before it may be enjoyed, it is withheld from all but those who are prepared to ask for it. It is not like the sun that shines, the rain that falls, on just and unjust; not like the wonderful air we breathe, available for righteous and unrighteous; nor like the fruitful seasons providing food for saint and sinner.

All these gifts are available freely, without money and without price, no charge made by the Giver; in fact one is compelled to accept them. The earth yieldeth her increase; there is good food and drink, good sense, sight, hearing, smelling, etc., ours to use and enjoy, gifts already in our possession without asking for them. How we receive and employ those gifts is another story. If we employ them wisely, “this man is blessed in his deed.” If we choose to employ them foolishly and find ourselves floundering it would not avail much to ask for added wisdom when all that is necessary is to correct foolish behaviour. But of this gift of wisdom, there is a reservation attached to its possession. Of those for whom it has been reserved, each one is obliged to ask for it.

“IF ANY LACK WISDOM”

James sets it out – “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.” Those not needing any, along with those who have enough, *do not ask*. Automatically, they exclude themselves from a rich heritage. People indifferent about gifts seldom put them to good purpose. They stow them away in some out of the way place, out of sight. If wisdom is employed in the daily problems weightier trials will not seem so formidable. No trial can successfully be endured; no lesson can be learnt, without wisdom. “God giveth liberally,” but not to all those who do ask. The motive for the request is considered, and if it is found selfishness would be served, “they ask amiss” and might well wonder why they do not receive.

There are two important qualifications necessary before the gift will be bestowed: faith - “let him ask in faith, nothing wavering” – in conjunction with a sense of lack. Where there is a conscious sense of lack, self-examination is always under consideration. In the morning we ask for wisdom to guide us through the day ahead. But there may be no lack apparent covering that day’s experiences. It is a different story at the close of the day; reflecting, we see where we have erred, where we may have done better – many places in the day’s activities, with maybe one huge blunder weighing heavily in our assessment of folly versus wisdom. Faith may now take a bold step. We have the requirements necessary to ask for the gift, confidently expecting an answer, a favourable answer, that some portion of the gift of wisdom will now be granted. It is no haphazard, no routine request, this asking for wisdom; it is a living faith and a consciousness of lack that assures the suppliant of a liberal supply.

No one could refer to Wisdom and not think of King Solomon. Universally acknowledged the wisest of men, whence cometh this wisdom of his, thought of as being supernaturally endowed? “To him that hath, more shall be given.” A previous and, in this case, generous possession of wisdom being put to use qualifies for more. “He giveth wisdom unto the wise” (Dan. 2:21), those wise enough to exercise what they already have. Most people would be familiar with some of the marvelously wise things done by Solomon. It would be very interesting to hear answers to the question, “What was the wisest thing Solomon ever did? Our reply would be, when he requested the gift of wisdom above every other consideration. He *wisely* asked for “a wise and understanding heart, wisdom to govern this great people.” He already had enough, as his request shows, of wisdom to value above everything, an increase of the same gift, to help him govern. God was so pleased with his desire that He granted benefits Solomon had not asked for; wealth, power, length of days – all given without request.

Yet Solomon with all his wisdom, failed to take his own good counsel. Of the many causes contributing to his failure, without doubt, one was the inability to take criticism. He would pursue his own sweet way, excusing in himself all manner of folly. How true his own words in Eccl 10:1. The apothecary was one who manufactured sweet and precious ointment. This ointment, in containers, was placed on shelves to await

buyers. Sometimes a few flies were trapped in the stickiness and died in the ointment. The precious ointment was not only spoilt, but emitted a foul smell. A little folly in one of good reputation becomes a great blemish. True wisdom is true honour. It gains a reputation likened to precious ointment: pleasing, valuable. This kind of reputation, like the sweet-smelling ointment, is obtained with great care and difficulty. Both are rendered valueless, repulsive, obnoxious, by a few dead flies in one case and a little folly in the other. A little folly at any stage in consecration, even at the end of a long and faithful service, should it be left unattended, could foul the whole effort.

“LET HIM ASK IN FAITH”

Faithful and loyal service do not guarantee immunity from the effects of folly any more than good works can atone for indiscretion. “Oh that God would speak and show thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is.” The gift of wisdom will differ in its prescription for each individual. If the requirement of wisdom could be printed on cards for distribution, each member would have a card differing from his neighbour’s; no two cards would be alike, nor would they be transferable. Each card would be like the white stone in Revelations, having a particular and personal character. “Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering,” this recommendation confirms the idea that a request for wisdom comes AFTER its lack is painfully apparent. One in this state would be emotionally disturbed, and for that reason more prone than otherwise to waver and doubt and be discouraged. Remorse retards an unwavering faith. Yet the gift of wisdom is conditional on this faithful approach to the problem. Jesus insisted on some healing occasions for this unwavering faith, – “Believest thou that I am able to do this?” We may even be asking for wisdom to overcome a trial similar to one or more earlier experiences. But we are assured – “He giveth to all, liberally and upbraideth not.”

What a priceless gem is wisdom! Do we value its excellency, see our need and the unspeakable advantages it carries? It cannot be purchased with all the wealth of the world; it cannot be willed in an inheritance for another. It is written of a well-known Bible commentator – He was near the end of his earthly course and recorded: “I have now disposed of all my property to my family; there is one thing more I wish I could give them, and that is the Christian religion. If they had that and I had not given them one shilling, they would be rich; and if they had not had that and I had given them all the world, they would be poor.” Nor does wisdom pass to us through the traits of heredity. It is a gift of God, and excels folly as much as light excels darkness.

History records many travelling great distances in search of wisdom. They crossed the seas, deserts, mountains to visit seats of learning in quest of what Paul describes – the hidden mystery of God. (1 Cor. 2:6,7.) One outstanding figure was the Queen of Sheba. She had heard from others of the great wisdom and fame of Solomon. “There came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth which had heard of his wisdom.” It is commonly known how in the telling of strange and wonderful things there is a tendency, especially where fame is concerned, to exaggerate. The queen decided to discover for herself. She was so confounded and amazed at such wisdom and skill that “there was no more spirit in her.” Solomon “gave her of his royal bounty.” He instructed a diligent pupil concerning this gift of wisdom, which was so appreciated she in return gave out of her treasures gold, precious stones, and of spices a very great store.

Jesus alluded to her. “The Queen of the south came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon,” and no doubt He was saddened by the disregard of the princes of this world for the Greater than Solomon. However, as He imparts to those with the ears to hear something of God’s wisdom, does it not also leave us floundering, amazed, “with no more spirit in us”? The Queen said of what she thought was an exaggerated report, that not only was it true, but the half was never told. She expressed her appreciation in gifts. We may lack the silver and gold she was able to give, but what about the spices? The Wise Men of the East gave of such to our Lord. Have we any spices to give in gratitude?

THE CONTRAST

It is interesting to contrast earthly wisdom with heavenly wisdom. Both these influences present claims to our affections. Their methods and what they have to offer are set out comparatively in Prov. 9... The heavenly has a sacrifice, bread and wine, and from the highest places invites the simple (those seeking instruction) to eat and drink bread and wine, and at the same time to forsake the foolish and live anew, in the paths of understanding.

Earthly wisdom, pictured as a foolish woman, also occupies a prominent and respectable high place of esteem in the city of men. She also calls to the simple passengers out of their way, seeking, seeking, something... the advice these unfortunate people are given is that “stolen waters are sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.” This so-called wisdom is earthly, sensual; that is, appealing to natural appetites, to a sense of pleasure and desire of gratification. If gratified, conscience and love (with all its wonderful attributes) are slowly but surely strangled by envy, strife, hatred, confusion and every evil device.

Heavenly wisdom is satisfying and entire for all the understanding; it glows with a light and purity; is a guidance for will, cleansing for the conscience and still more, strength for a practical expression of a Christian life. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness and her paths are peace". "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom – wisdom is the principal thing," because a "man of understanding hath wisdom."

While it is our intention that these columns be used for teachings strictly in accord with the Lord's Word, we cannot accept responsibility for every expression used, either in the correspondence or in the sermons reported.

God's Inheritance in the Saints

"The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his (God's) inheritance in the saints." (Eph. 1:18.)

When we read and think about the subject of inheritance as presented in the Bible, our minds generally dwell upon the reward that the followers of the Lord will receive upon their proving faithful unto death. This we have stated in the latter part of Revelation 2: 10 – "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

This is quite understandable, for the majority of New Testament passages referring to an inheritance do apply to the heavenly reward of the saints of this Gospel Age. We believe that our text in Ephesians 1: 18 is one of the few in the New Testament which refers so directly to the thought, not of the saints' inheritance, but to God's inheritance in the saints. Some people may ask, Is there really any difference in the two thoughts? A careful examination will show that the Lord and the Apostles revealed quite a difference, even though it is not apparent on the surface.

To illustrate, let us examine two texts of Scripture applying to the next age. Firstly, in Psa. 2: 6-8, we have the prophetic record of God saying to Christ – "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." Christ has purchased the whole human race, and He is going to ask for them to be His inheritance in God's due time. Secondly, in Matthew 25: 34 we have the reward for the world of mankind at the end of the Millennial Age revealed. "Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Here we have the Lord assuring those who are of the "sheep" class that they will inherit this wonderful kingdom on the restored earth, whereas in the Psalm we see mankind is to be given to Christ for an inheritance.

In another comparison of texts which apply to the saints of this Gospel Age we have Daniel 7: 22 and Mal. 3: 17. In Daniel we read: "The Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom." In other words, they are shown as entering into their inheritance, the wonderful heavenly reward; whereas in Malachi it is stated — "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels." Does this mean that the saints become the possession of God only when they are "made up" as the Bride of Christ? No, indeed, they are prospectively His inheritance, His possession, from the beginning of the Christian way, but as there is a possibility of coming short or falling away, they are not fully His until proved faithful unto death.

Let us note some texts which help us to see that we really become the possession or inheritance of our Heavenly Father right from the beginning of the first impulses of the Christian life. In John 6: 44 our Lord says — "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." We see here the Father's drawing influence upon those in a right heart condition, those who are yearning for something better than the present life. The Father acts upon their hearts and minds, drawing them towards the One whom He has sent to be the Saviour of the world. So accepting Christ, they become justified by faith.

We read further in Romans 12: 1, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." God has drawn these to Jesus. In presenting their bodies now, they are acceptable to God. He is the One who is vitally and overall interested in them because they have accepted the sacrifice of His Son, the means of approach to Him, and they really become God's possession when they present their lives to Him.

In 2 Cor. 1: 21, 22 we read, "Now he which establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the spirit in our hearts." When we grasp the meaning of the word "sealed" we begin to realise what a relationship is implied in being a member of God's inheritance. It means to stamp with a signet or private mark, for security or preservation. This of course implies a marking as of ownership, and the same Greek word is used with reference to our Lord Jesus, as is used for the saints.

In John 6: 27 we have a reference to our Lord's own sealing—"For him hath God the Father sealed." We may ask, But did not Jesus always belong to the Father, even as the Logos? If so, what is implied by the Father sealing Him?

This undoubtedly refers to the begetting of our Lord Jesus when He was 30 years of age for the highest inheritance of all, the divine nature. And in being begotten for that heavenly inheritance He also became God's inheritance or possession of the highest order; and this is the same sealing for possession or inheritance upon every member of the saints, who are walking in the steps of Christ.

Let us note Eph. 1: 13, 14 in this connection. "In whom (Christ) ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance." This refers to a foretaste or prepayment of our inheritance "until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."

Of our Lord Jesus we read in Heb. 1: 9, "Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." Of course, our Lord Jesus was anointed above all others, but we notice that these "fellows" are also anointed with the same "oil of gladness." Just to realise that to the full! And we do well to ask ourselves, How is the "oil of gladness" working in our lives? Is it provoking us unto love and to good works amongst our "fellows" who are also members of God's inheritance? We know it is possible for the work of the "oil of gladness" to be somewhat hindered by our own will, by self getting in the way, restricting the lubrication, so to speak, of our hearts and minds. A blockage in the lubrication system of any machinery is serious, and especially is this so in the hearts and minds of those called to be members of God's inheritance.

The Apostle exhorts us along this line in Eph. 4: 29-32. This helps us to cooperate with God in appreciation of the holy spirit dwelling in our hearts. Reading from verse 29—"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers. And grieve not the holy spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

2 Cor. 6: 16, 18 helps us to see the favour of the Lord to those so blessed as to be invited into this wonderful inheritance of God, by the indwelling of the holy spirit. "Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And I will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

Joshua, Son of Nun

PARENTAGE AND EARLY LIFE

The leader of the Hebrews in the conquest of Palestine was Joshua, a prince of the tribe of Ephraim (Num. 13: 2). His pedigree is preserved in a more perfect form than that of any of his contemporaries (1 Chr. 7: 20-27), and it reaches back through some ten generations to Joseph. His father was Nun, of whom only the name is known. His grandfather, Elishama, marched through the wilderness of Sinai at the head of his tribe (Num. 10: 22), and probably had the immediate charge of the embalmed body of Joseph, which was carried up for interment at Shechem (Ex. 13: 19; Josh. 24: 32). Joshua was born in the land of Goshen, the cradle of the Hebrew nation, in the reign of that long-lived Rameses II., who figures in history as the national hero of the Egyptians (the Sesostris of the Greeks), and the oppressor of the Hebrews. The favourite palace of the king was in Goshen, at Rameses-Tanis, the Zoan of the Bible (Num. 13: 22), where there was also a vast idol-temple which he restored at immense cost. Joshua must therefore have been familiar from his youth with the sight of palaces, temples, obelisks, sphinxes, and other signs of the ancient civilization, and seen how his countrymen had yielded to the spell of the established idolatry during their long sojourn in the land of the Nile.

One of his last appeals to the heads of the people reminds them how "their fathers worshipped other gods in Egypt" (Josh. 24: 14), just as from the age of the captivity a voice recalls how the Hebrews "defiled themselves with the idols of Egypt," and their maidens committed shameless sin (Ezek. 23: 8; 20: 7, 8). The hard conditions of his early life, spent in cruel bondage, not less than his contact with a civilisation which fitted Israel for an independent national existence, were a qualification for the great task assigned him in the providence of God. His name was originally Oshea or Hosea, "salvation," but Moses added a syllable containing the name of Jehovah, as if to imply that the son of Nun was to be the instrument of God's salvation to the Hebrews (Num. 13: 16). It was a singular honour that he should be the first to bear the name which is "above every name" (Phil. 2.9).

EARLY ACHIEVEMENTS

Joshua steps forth suddenly out of obscurity. His name first occurs in Scripture in connection with the defeat of Amalek in the first days of the desert life (Exod. 17: 9). This fierce border tribe, occupying the peninsula of Sinai and the wilderness intervening between the southern hills of Palestine and the border of Egypt, fell upon the rear of the Hebrew host, which was encumbered with women, children, and baggage (Deut. 25: 18). Joshua had the task of repelling the attack. He won a decisive victory after an obstinate battle, which saved the Hebrews from all further molestation in the peninsula. From this day forward he takes the position of "minister" or attendant of Moses (Exod. 24: 13). He ascends the mountain range of Sinai along with his master at the first giving of the law (Exod. 32: 17).

He is next heard of rebuking the prophesying of Eldad and Medad (Num. 11: 28). When Moses resolves to send twelve spies from Kadesh-Barnea to search out the land of Canaan, Joshua is one of the twelve, standing, no doubt, at the head as the most distinguished (Num. 13: 1-10). Joshua and Caleb alone of all the spies brought a favourable report, and encouraged the Hebrews "to go up and possess the land" (Num. 14: 6-9). We know nothing of Joshua during the weary years of the wandering in the Arabian desert. We can well suppose that none of the lessons of that singular period would be lost on the man whom Moses selected by God's command as the military leader who was in less than seven years to lay six nations and thirty-one kings prostrate at his feet (Num. 27: 22, 23).

CHARACTER AND FITNESS

Joshua stands before us simply as a godly warrior, designated to his work by a Divine call. He is "the first soldier consecrated by the sacred history." He was "strong and of a good courage" (Josh. 1: 6). The keynote of his character was a remarkable simplicity of faith joined to a severe simplicity of life, an intense patriotism, a courage that feared no danger, and a cheerful and unselfish devotion to duty. He ruled the tribes constitutionally by consulting their representatives in all matters of moment (Josh. 21: 1). Though they were divided by jealousies, he was able to win their confidence and to secure their co-operation in carrying out the great work of his life. We shall see that he was a splendid strategist in war. There is nothing, however, more remarkable in his life than his complete self-effacement in presence of the tremendous events of the conquest. Scripture is often reticent about its heroes. It is a surprise, however, to find that Joshua's name occurs in no later part of the Old Testament, though the transactions of the conquest are often referred to.

Only twice in the New Testament is he mentioned (Acts 7: 45; Heb. 4: 8). Yet he was the greatest Hebrew character between Moses and Samuel — a period of four hundred years — and he alone, we are told, of all the heroes of Israel after the time of Moses, survives in the traditions of the Samaritans. There is something like solitude in his position at the end of his busy life — "a lonely man in the height of his power, separate from those about him, the last survivor, save one, of a famous generation" — and the silence of Scripture almost warrants the supposition that he was without wife or child or heir. This was the man so highly gifted by nature, by grace, and by opportunity, whom God raised up to lead the Hebrew tribes into Palestine.

LAST WORK (JOSH 23 & 24)

After the conquest and division of the land, Joshua retired to his modest inheritance at Timnath-serah, among the hills of Ephraim, appointing no successor to his dignities, and spending the closing years of his long and eventful life in simple but honoured privacy. He claimed no higher authority over the tribes than to call them together after the lapse of some eighteen years — "a long time after that the Lord had given rest to Israel from their enemies round about" — when he gave two parting addresses, one to the rulers, probably at Shiloh, the other to the assembled tribes at Shechem. They were both memorable meetings. He was, perhaps, the last link to connect the generation of the conquest with the generation of the exodus. He reminds the Israelites of the Lord's past goodness, exhorts them to courage and constancy, and warns them gravely against the dangers of intercourse with the heathen. His affectionate appeal was immediately answered by a solemn engagement on the part of the tribes to serve the Lord; and, as a visible memorial of the covenant, a large stone was set up "under an oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord" — the place consecrated ages before by Abraham as he passed through the land. This was the last public act of Joshua. His work both of war and of peace was done. Nothing remained for him but to die.

DEATH AND BURIAL (JOSH 24: 29, 30)

We have no account of the circumstances of his death; merely this brief record — "Joshua, the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being a hundred and ten years old," just the age of his great ancestor Joseph. Five-and-twenty years after he had crossed the Jordan, he died at his own inheritance, full of years and honours. Like many another great warrior, he ended his days in peace. Then "they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-serah, which is in Mount Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash." This hill is mentioned again (2 Sam. 23: 30; 1 Chron. 11. 32), but its site has never been discovered. It is supposed by

some that the tomb of Joshua is still to be seen at Tibneh. But later investigation is more doubtful about this identification, and favours the Jewish tradition, which fixes the site at the modern Kefr Haris, seven miles north of Shiloh.

The soil of Palestine, already so rich with the dust of the good and great, would be henceforth dear to all who would venerate the name of Joshua. But death did not end his usefulness, as we infer from the suggestive sentence — “And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua.” His last act was to bind the people firmly to God’s service, and long after his death his earnest piety and zeal survived in the recollection of a people who were thus kept faithful to their obligations. The influence of his character is not yet exhausted. “He being dead yet speaketh.” Christian thought now looks back with admiration upon a character without a parallel in the history of conquest. He must ever hold a foremost place among those Hebrew worthies who “through faith subdued kingdoms,” and remain an example to all ages of that pre-eminent power of looking upward which strengthens all right means in carrying out God’s work. (Prof. Croskery)

Christian Fellowship

“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you that ye may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” “If we say we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness we lie and do not the truth; but if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.” (1 John 1:3, 6, 7.)

In these verses it is stated that our fellowship as Christians is with the Father, with the Son and with the brethren. There is also fellowship in prayer and praise, in knowledge, in study and in purpose, in service, in joy, in sympathy, in hope, and so on. According to Strong’s concordance, the word fellowship means – participation, partnership. A dictionary meaning is – communion, intimacy, joint feeling or interest, joint participation. In the Bible, distribution of worldly goods or substance for the benefit of others is also spoken of as fellowship. (Rom. 12:13; 15:26; Phil. 4:15).

All are familiar with the fact that fellowship implies kindred qualities of mind and heart. For instance, the generous love the generous, the noble and upright love the noble and upright, the honest love the honest, and the meek the meek, etc. We can only enter this Divine fellowship by accepting Christ as the sacrifice for our sins and ceasing to be sinners. Then we realize that *God* is our friend and we also become friends of others similarly regenerated, and as we grow by partaking of God’s Holy Spirit, we begin to love the brethren.

There are two planes of fellowship a natural plane on which people of like qualities are drawn together, and a spiritual plane on which those who may be unlike in natural qualities, but alike in spiritual hopes, aims and ambitions are drawn still more closely together by a new tie and a fellowship that binds not by fleshly ties but their hearts in Christian love and unity.

THE BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP

What then is the basis of Christian fellowship? The term Christian, from a Biblical viewpoint, is quite an exclusive one. What is necessary in order to become a Christian is clearly taught. Christians are those who not only believe that Christ is the Saviour, but have gone further and shown their faith by offering themselves by full surrender in consecration to God. They die to self and take up their cross and walk, even as Jesus walked, in new life. The basis of Christian fellowship is a mutual relationship with Christ and through Christ with all who are in sympathy with Him, joined together as fellow members of His Body. There is at once a joint interest and feeling, a partnership, a participation in Christ.

In 1 Cor. 1:9, it is stated that God has called us unto the fellowship of His Son. This is not something reserved only for the future, it begins already, now. Paul in his letter to the Philippians desired to know Christ, to realise deeply the power of His resurrection, and to comprehend the fellowship of His sufferings (Phil. 3:10); not a merely superficial knowledge of Him, but an intimate acquaintance through deep knowledge and experience. This same thought of fellowship is mentioned in 1Cor. 10:16, 17, a fellowship, a participation in the drinking of the cup and breaking of the bread.

Christian fellowship then is something deeper and stronger than mere fellowship of belief, because our Heavenly Father gives us to partake of things beyond our own nature. We fellowship with Him in His plan, for He has made known unto us secrets that were hidden from generations in past ages. He promises us fellowship in His own Divine nature, meanwhile working in us to do His good pleasure as we work with Him to do His will. We might have a degree of fellowship with all believers, but it would not be full Christian fellowship, which is “fellowship in the mystery.” This is illustrated in the tabernacle services. It is a fellowship of priests in the Holy, not just with the Levites in the Court, who can come no further.

The Christian fellowship is a family fellowship, “For in love God has predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:5). “They are all of one (Father), for which cause Jesus is not ashamed to call them brethren”. (Heb. 2:11). Jesus did not need to grow into this fellowship, for He was always in fellowship with the Father, and there is only one way we can come into this family fellowship, i.e., by accepting the terms laid down by Jesus – faith and obedience.

In John 14:23, it is stated that both Father and Son will come to us and “take up their abode with us”, if we keep His commandments. This is a very precious thought – partaking of food together – lodging together. The same thought is given in Rev. 3:20; also in Luke 12:37, which is especially applicable at the end of this age. Jesus will, if we respond, come in and sup with us, and will also spread a feast for us. Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son.

PREREQUISITES OF FELLOWSHIP

Seeing then that Christian fellowship is the portion of all consecrated believers, are there any further requirements for a permanent, workable and beneficial fellowship? How can we best answer this, seeing there are so many individuals and classes of persons who would all say they are consecrated Christians and yet if asked what they believed would express quite a variety of doctrines and practices. Is fellowship under such conditions likely to be either possible or profitable? It should be possible if all recognise certain essentials.

(A) Uniformity of faith, not in a humanly prescribed creed nor recognition of any earthly authority or control whose word must be obeyed as the voice of the Lord, not a seeing eye to eye on mysterious parts of Scripture, types or symbols, but a unity of faith – one faith.

(B) Recognition of the clear and essential teachings of the word of God. Unity on essentials must be maintained, but liberty on non-essentials be granted to all. We would, of course, have fuller fellowship with those who see many points of truth as we do, than we would with those who see only the fundamentals, but we must receive in fellowship those who have taken the necessary steps in harmony with the first essentials and have as much fellowship with them as possible.

We do not fellowship with each other because of non-essentials, nor because of personalities, but because of each being justified and consecrated and living in harmony with the fundamentals of the word. “If we walk in the light we have fellowship one with another”. (1 John 1:7)

There is another essential without which there could be no profitable fellowship. The Christian is to have no fellowship with darkness or error; he is to do more, “rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11) also (2 Cor. 6:14). “What fellowship has light with darkness.” A further essential necessary to helpful fellowship would be as stated in Rom. 8:9, “If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.

Those not having the Spirit of Christ have nothing in common with the consecrated Christian, there is no fellowship of love.

UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

In Eph. 4: 1-3, it is stated that each should walk worthy of His calling, but also endeavour to keep the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace. Christian fellowship is thus spoken of as a unity of spirit, a participation in Christ’s anointing – a fellowship of love. The Spirit of Christ will manifest itself prominently in brotherly love, and must be a special feature of Christian fellowship. When mutual love becomes established among brethren, there comes a sense of rest and naturalness in each other’s company, which is the very essence of fellowship. A Christian writer has expressed this thought as follows:- “O the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person, having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words, but pour them all right out, just as they are, chaff and grain together, knowing that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and then with the breath of kindness blow the rest away.”

That is the abiding condition of friends of Jesus, no necessity for reserve or hiding in this absolute confidence borne by the certainty of high unselfish love. Let us then endeavour to keep the unity of the spirit, then there will be much building up of each other, rejoicing with them that rejoice, and weeping with them that weep.

All will probably agree then, that these four essentials are necessary:-

- (1) That all be consecrated to God.
- (2) That there be a uniformity of faith in the Word of God.
- (3) That all be aiming to walk in the light.
- (4) That all possess the Spirit of Christ and brotherly love.

MAINTENANCE OF FELLOWSHIP

In the maintenance of Christian fellowship there is, as already stated, a call for effort by each and all. All should endeavour to keep the unity of the spirit, and follow after things that make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. (Rom. 14:19; Heb. 10:24, 25). Fellowship cannot be maintained, except self and self-will be kept under, and in its place the mind of Christ be developed as pointed out in Phil. 2: 1-5, "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." Nevertheless there will be tests also in connection with fellowship, as stated in 1 Pet. 4: 12, "Think it not strange of the fire among you". (Diaglott).

Trials will come among us because of our inherent weaknesses, conflict with other members' viewpoints or lack of judgment; but fellowship is not a theory, it is a condition that no amount of discussion can bring about or hinder. In nature, birds of a feather will flock together, so it is with the Lord's people. Creed fences or obstacles are no barriers to those who desire and will have fellowship.

Satan, however, will attack the spirit of fellowship and misconstrue that which is good and beautiful. What shall we do then? Be rightly exercised by it and stand up to our experiences. We remember how Peter disfellowshipped himself from Jesus, denied that he knew Him, but it was turned to good account by Jesus, who had prayed for him. We learn by experiences not to flee from difficulties, but seek the Lord's help and guidance. Think of those who have stood their tests, the steadfast, patient, plodding Christians, through good report and through evil report, so different to those who have not stood their test and have been discouraged and lost fellowship.

What helpfulness is derived from Christian fellowship? We might answer this by another question. What benefit does a person get in the gathering of live coals together in the fireplace? He soon gets comfort and warmth out of the glowing coals. So in the gathering together in Christian fellowship there is that comfort of love and fellowship, of hope, a sympathy in suffering, a strengthening of faith, patience and humility, a stimulating joy, a lightening of care, and a sharing of spiritual food. Just as a live coal separated from the mass would soon grow cold, so those straying from the fellowship of Christians would be in danger of growing cold or lukewarm, missing much of development and instruction and stimulation.

Neither should fellowship be regarded as a duty merely, which we owe to other follow-members, but should be regarded as a precious privilege, not with the thought only, "How much can I gain there," but also "How much can I help in the giving." Why should we meet together? That we might have spiritual fellowship. Why should we consider the Word of God? That we might grow in grace and knowledge and love, grow in preparation for the fellowship in the everlasting future. May the Lord help us to appreciate, more and more His Divine fellowship.

not force it upon any. Those who accept must do so upon His terms, namely, acceptance of Jesus as their Ransomer and obedience to God, We must do our Heavenly Father's will. This has all been made clear to us now, in the next age it will be made clear to all mankind. Many find it hard to understand why the world in general is not on trial now, why they are not being judged for their actions. There is a very simple answer, that is, accountability. How accountable are they? Only those who are fully enlightened are fully accountable.

We think of the case of Jonah who was sent to preach to Nineveh. When the Ninevites repented and God did not destroy them, Jonah was most upset and displeased with God. We find God's reply in Jonah 4:11, "and should not I spare Nineveh that great city wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand and also much cattle." This is true of the world today as far as spiritual things are concerned, they cannot discern between their right hand and their left. The sparing of Ninevah seems to typify the salvation that is coming to the world in the next age. Jonah, in this illustration, would picture a class that is not very pleased with the thought non-Christians of this age will receive an opportunity in the next. But we rejoice that God's plan is one of universal opportunity for salvation, for the church in the present age, those whom God is calling and drawing to Jesus, and for the remainder of mankind in the next age.

Heb 6:4-6 makes it very clear that the unbelieving world is not on trial at present. We are given there a list of things that must occur before they are placed on trial, before there is any possibility of their coming under the ultimate penalty. Firstly, they must have been once enlightened, that is, fully enlightened as to all the details of the divine plan. Then it says, "and, have tasted of the heavenly gift", that is understood the call and purpose of the church, the exceeding great and precious promises that are ours. The passage goes on, "and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit". This narrows it down to those whom God calls and draws to Jesus. Those who accept that call, and only those, are made partakers of the Holy Spirit. The portion ends, "and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come." It is crystal clear that at the present time God is not dealing with or judging those he has not called and enlightened. That is why there is to be a resurrection for these in the next age, that is their day of judgement and testing. As Jesus said in John 12:47-48, "if any man hear my words and believe not, I judge him not, for I came not to judge the world but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him, the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." This confirms again that those who do not believe, those who are unenlightened, are not being judged now but will be judged in the last day, the 1000 year millenial day. They will be judged by the words of Jesus which, as our Lord said, were not His own words but God's words. These will then taste of the good word of God, come to understand it, and have to conform their lives to the righteous principles contained therein, if they wish to obtain everlasting life on earth.

We have further confirmation of this in Romans 11:31-32, "even so have these also now not believed that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy, for God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all". This passage is speaking of the nation of Israel but the same principle applies to both Jew and Gentile. Even though they might have failed miserably in this life to come up to the divine standard, if they did so in unbelief, God can show mercy to them in the next age. This is just the opposite to the belief of many, who say God will have no mercy on those who do not believe in the present life.

No one of course can receive eternal salvation in unbelief. When these who are now in unbelief come back in the resurrection, they will then believe on Jesus Christ and the value of his ransom sacrifice will be applied for them. During the gospel age, God is selecting those who are rich in faith, accept His word, and are prepared to believe without seeing the actual evidence with their own eyes. In the next age it will not be a matter of faith to the same extent as it is today. Who can fail to believe, when they see the glory and power of God displayed by the resurrection, when they themselves, their friends, their relations, are brought back from the grave?

Some say "if there is to be a resurrection for all regardless of how they behaved at the present time, why bother to consecrate our lives to God and walk in the narrow way of self sacrifice? Why not live now for our own enjoyment, eat, drink and be merry and wait for our opportunity in the next life?" There are several answers to that question. Firstly, today is the only day of salvation for joint heirship with Christ as a member of His Bride. We are called to something that is very special, not just an ordinary calling, but as the scriptures describe it, "a high calling", and a "so great salvation". We are called to be part of God's own family, the divine family on His plane of existence, immortality. Not that we have any desire for honour or preeminence but we know this is what God has called us to, this is what God wants for us. So to be pleasing to our Heavenly Father we strive to be worthy to have part in the first resurrection as a member of his own Heavenly family, His spiritual children. Nevertheless our attitude should be that we will be happy and content with whatever position we are allocated. As the Psalmist says, even if it is only a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord. The motivating factor in running in the race for the prize of the high calling should be one of service, that is what we have been called to, at the present time especially service to the brethren, in the next age to all of God's family on the earthly plane. Also we receive a blessing at the present time, as our Master said in Mark 10:30

“ye shall receive a hundred fold now in this time”. We have the joy of fellowship with our brethren, a fuller and richer life, and the peace of mind that the knowledge of God’s plan brings, especially in the difficult days that we live in.

For another answer to the question, as to why become a disciple of Jesus now, let us look at Revelation 20:6. “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him a thousand years.” Look at that one little sentence “on such the second death hath no power.” In John 5:29, our Lord indicates that two classes are coming forth in the resurrection, one to a resurrection of life, the other to a resurrection of judgement. The class mentioned in Revelation 20:6 upon whom the second death has no power, are those who receive the resurrection to life. What a wonderful blessing! This alone is sufficient reason to become a disciple of our Master now. What a joy when we awake on resurrection morning to know that we have life in the full sense of the word, life that will not be taken away from us again; to know that our period of test and trial is over. This is in contrast to those who have part in the later resurrection, the resurrection to judgement. When they awake, their period of testing and trying is just beginning and it seems that it may not be fully complete until the thousand years are over, and Satan’s little season of release is finished.

We have been looking at the logic of why the world is not on trial for life or death at the present time. We saw one reason is that they have not been enlightened by receiving the Holy Spirit. Another very basic reason is that they are already under a death sentence, the Adamic death sentence. This is what our Lord meant when He said, “let the dead bury the dead.” There are two classes of people in the world, those who have life, the true church, only these yet come under the provisions of the ransom. As- it says in Hebrews 9:24, “Jesus has appeared in the presence of God for us,” i.e. the Church. The value of His ransom sacrifice has been applied to these, so they have been released from the Adamic death sentence. The world must also be released from this death sentence, before they can be placed on trial. The church must be completed before this occurs, then the value of the ransom will be applied to the remainder of mankind, and their trial for life begin.

The understanding that the unbelieving world cannot die eternal death at present is very strongly implied in the term “second death”. Right from Adam’s day until now, all have died in Adam, which is the first death, so no one can become subject to second death until released from first death, the Adamic death. Can we not see how reasonable our gracious Heavenly Father’s plan is in giving all these a resurrection and opportunity for everlasting life in the next age. Not only is it reasonable but it is scriptural as we have already seen.

A very clear statement is that of our Lord in John 5:28,29, already referred to. “Marvel not at this for the hour is coming in which all that are in the grave shall hear His voice and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgement”. Many seem to feel that God cannot be this kind and merciful and that they must find some way of changing this passage. There can be no exceptions to this statement that “all in their graves are to come forth”, apart from those already mentioned, who have had a full opportunity, have been spirit begotten and have later deliberately rejected Jesus as their Saviour. This may seem at variance with the statement before us that all in their graves are to come forth, but we are not always given all the truth in any one place, we find a little here, a little there. We formulate a doctrine on the basis of the scriptures as a whole. We harmonise scripture with scripture, we modify one scripture with another. (e.g. Matt. 21:22 with 1 John 5:14)

So we read John 5:28 in conjunction with the scriptures as a whole. Nowhere in the scriptures are we told of any other class that will not come forth in the resurrection, so to say that those drowned in the flood, those destroyed in Sodom and Gomorrah, those who die in the time of trouble, are not to receive a resurrection has no scriptural backing. We could term this a man-made doctrine. In fact, the scriptures indicate that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah will come back in the resurrection, (Mark 6:11, Matthew 10:15, Ezekiel 16:53.) Some have insisted that not all the dead are meant in John 5:28,29, but only those that God has in His memory. This thought is based on the fact that the Greek word translated “grave” literally means “memorial tomb”. The Greek word concerned is translated - grave 8 times, sepulchre 28 times, tomb 5 times. It seems clear that no such thought of God’s memory is intended. This is simply the regular word of that day denoting a grave. For example in Mark 5:1-3, we have the account of the man with the unclean spirit who made his dwelling among the tombs. This is the same word again. It is plain that it applies to all in the graves, regardless of who was buried there. Vines dictionary says of this word that “it primarily denotes a memorial, also a monument, anything done to preserve the memory of things or persons. Among the Hebrews, it was generally a cavern closed by a door or stone, often decorated”. Obviously this was done to preserve the memory of a loved one, just as we erect a tombstone or a plaque today. Clearly, the term “memorial tomb” has nothing to do with God’s memory but human memory of departed loved ones.

The apostle Paul, in Acts 24:15, confirms once again the resurrection of two classes. He says “and have hope towards God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust”, meaning believers who have been justified and unbelievers who have not been justified.

Paul said this is the hope he has; he obviously means hope for both classes, not only for the just. And we could consider other such scriptures as Heb. 2:9 "that He (Jesus) by the grace of God should taste death for every man," and John 1:9 "this (Jesus) was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

Many say, yes we accept that life is offered to all, to any who become believers and accept Jesus, but they must do so in this life. We can answer with such texts as 1 Timothy 4:10 which tells us that God is "the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe." This text is very plain because it contrasts the two classes. True, in the present age, God's special interest is in believers, but He is the Saviour of all men not just those who believe at the present time. As we read in 1 John 2:2, "He is the propitiation of our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." He is the propitiation at the present time for the Church's sins, but in addition to this, for the whole unbelieving world in the next age.

Those who say that there is no hope for father Adam do not fully understand the workings of the ransom. While Jesus tasted death for all mankind, he did not die for each person individually, but for Adam, thereby redeeming all in Adam. As we are told in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, "for since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead, for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." The all that are made alive in Christ are the same all that die in Adam i.e. all mankind. Romans 5:14 shows that Adam was a type of Jesus, and in 1 Corinthians 15:45, Jesus is described as "the last Adam". In 1 Timothy 2:6, we are told that Jesus gave Himself a ransom for all. The Greek word here translated "ransom" means corresponding price. Adam was a perfect man before he sinned, the perfect man Jesus was the corresponding price, hence He is described as the last Adam. How could the first Adam not benefit from the provisions of the ransom when it was exactly a corresponding price for him? Had Adam not sinned, he would have been the life giver and father of all mankind, but since he did sin, the second or last Adam took his place and became their life giver and father. This is the thought in Isaiah 9:6, where Jesus is described as the "everlasting father". Some translations render this passage the "father of the age to come." What a beautiful thought that is, the father of the age to come! Surely the resurrection and opportunity for all is one of the things that attracted us to the truth. This doctrine above all others displays our gracious Heavenly Father's true character and His love for all His human family. (JGT: 1993)

"O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! or who has known the mind of the Lord? or who has been His counselor? or who has first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto Him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Rom:11:33-36)

"If God seems far away, guess who has moved." (Wayside Pulpit).

Daniel, The Beloved

(Convention Address)

DANIEL is certainly one of the great figures of the Old Testament. Like Joseph, he rose to a position of high authority in an alien land and served with great distinction. He is spoken of three times as a man greatly beloved of God and a review of his life, his piety and his utter consistency of character clearly show why he was so highly esteemed and much used by God.

Outside of the book which bears his name, little is known of Daniel. Interestingly, he is mentioned by Ezekiel, an approximate contemporary, as a standard of righteousness, along with Noah and Job, and of wisdom. He is not recorded by name among the illustrious band of faithful ones in Hebrews 11, but would certainly be among "the prophets, who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions." Heb.11:33.

His lifetime spans the whole of the Jewish captivity in Babylon, where Daniel was taken, with other hostages, on the orders of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, after he had taken Jerusalem and subjugated Jehoahaz, king of Judah. Some indication of Daniel's background is probably to be gained from Dan.1:3,4, where it states that Nebuchadnezzar directed that the hostages be taken from those of noble birth, skilful, well-educated and able to conduct themselves in a royal court.

Considering the long period of Daniel's stay and service in Babylon, he must have been quite young at the time of his being taken there, and historians and scholars suggest that he would have been only about 16 or 18 years of age at that time. He was nevertheless evidently already well informed not only in secular subjects but also in the religion of the true God of Israel. This becomes apparent quite early in his determination not to be defiled with the foods provided for the hostages but even in this matter to serve God.

The earliest years of Daniel's life woad have been spent under the reign of Josiah, one of the good and faithful kings of Judah. The record of his reign reads, in brief - "he did that which was right in the sight of the

Lord, and walked in all the way of David, his father, and turned not aside to the right hand nor to the left.” 2 Kings 22:2. He saw how the nobles and people of Judah had so grievously departed from God’s ways and sought earnestly to restore true worship, so that it was said that “like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might - neither after him arose there any like him.” 2 Kings 23:2.

Despite all Josiah’s endeavours during his 31 years reign, however, the nation soon lapsed back under his son, who reigned only 3 months before being deposed by Pharaoh-Nechoh, king of Egypt, who installed Jehoiakim as his vassal king over Judah. Only 3 years later, Nebuchadnezzar came up against Jerusalem, as already seen. All this happened within 4 years of Josiah’s death, in fulfilment of earlier prophecies, of Isaiah to King Hezekiah, as recorded in Isa.39:6,7 and of Jeremiah in Jer.25:11.

The early formative years of Daniel’s life would have therefore been spent during the latter years of the good king Josiah. If as seems probable Daniel was of noble birth, he would no doubt have thus become acquainted with the ideals and endeavours of Josiah. For it was during his reign that the book of the law had been re-discovered in the house of Jehovah, and in this Josiah read the warnings against the waywardness and disobedience of his people. This he sought valiantly to turn round, but alas without any lasting success.

It was accordingly only a few years after Josiah’s death that Daniel and all the other hostages were taken into the Babylonian court and the account given in the book of Daniel begins to unfold. Three other young men among the captives are also brought to our attention; these were also possessed of remarkable faith in the power of their God and their testimony under trial (Dan.3:17,18) stands as their monument and as a challenge to the Lord’s people of every age - “If it be so, our God is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king, but if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image thou hast set up.” Our God is able, but if not!” What faith is there.

In passing, the meanings of the names of the four young men are interesting and suggestive of Godly parentage:

Daniel “God is my judge.”

Hananiah “God is gracious.”

Mishael “This is as God.”

Azariah “God is a helper.”

It is no doubt significant that these names were very soon changed in the Babylonian courts. Whose is the name we bear, as Christians? Do we always honour it as we might, for our Lord is also able?

For us, being invited to partake of the food and drink provided in the royal court would probably not present any very great problem, though most Christians would generally favour a simpler diet. But for a pious Jew, the law made specific provision as to what was clean and permissible and needed to be observed carefully as an act of obedience and as a mark of separateness from other nations. To avoid partaking in Daniel’s circumstances would present a problem in the ordinary course, but we read that “God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.” Dan.1:9. As a result, the young Hebrews were allowed to adhere to their preferred vegetarian diet, which had proved superior.

For the Lord’s people of every age, there is a need of separateness, and for great care over the nourishment we take in. In place of the world’s delicacies and delights, our Heavenly Father has provided in His dear Son, the pure Water of Life and the Bread of Life for our sustenance. For the young in Christ, He has given the pure milk of His word and for the more mature the meat of the word for our growth and development. As the hymn-writer puts it - “My table is furnished with bounty so free, My soul on Thy word is well fed.” This is better fare than in any earthly royal court.

Already the character of Daniel, under the hand of the Lord, was becoming evident and had made an impression on the master set over him. We are warned in the New Testament to beware when all speak well of us; this may well indicate too close identification with the worldly and failure to stand up for our faith. But at the same time our behaviour, our demeanour, should always be such as to command at least the respect of reasonable people and we read of Jesus in His early years that He “increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man.” This is of course the right order - God first.

Because of their faithfulness, God gave all four young men knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom, but Daniel was also given understanding in all visions and dreams. Much of the book of Daniel, from Chapter 2 on, is taken up with accounts of these means of prophecy and these reach right down to our own day and even beyond. It has been said that the book of Daniel not only preserves links in the chain of world history but also provides vital keys to interpretation of all prophecy, including the final book of our Bible - the Revelation

of Jesus Christ, given through the beloved apostle John.

We might indeed see a character link between Daniel, the man greatly beloved of Jehovah and the beloved apostle of our Lord, whose visions recorded in Revelations and given some seven centuries after those of Daniel are, as it were, a continuation and fuller development of them. Both men greatly loved God and were greatly loved for their faithfulness, both were used to bring messages to God's people, not only of immediate local significance and encouragement but of universal and dispensational importance. Both lived to a very great age, both were given final messages of personal assurance.

After a training period of three years, Daniel and his companions were brought to stand before the king but very soon a test of faith was to come upon them. The king had had a most disturbing dream but could not recall it. So he asked his local wise men to tell him what it was and what it meant. Not surprisingly none could and the king ordered all his counsellors, including the four Hebrews, to be put to death. But Daniel and his companions prayed and we read that God answered and further that Daniel blessed the God of heaven for that answer. Thankfulness to our Heavenly Father not only for specially answered prayer but for His daily care - how important it is.

The vision itself, we are now all familiar with - a great image of a man, with head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron and feet of part iron and part clay. But even more significant for us - a stone cut out of a mountain, not by human means, that smote the image on the feet and brought the whole image down and itself, that is the stone, became a great mountain filling the whole earth. What a truly remarkable panorama of world history there is in what God made known to Daniel, bringing us right down to the final setting up of God's kingdom.

We might think it strange that such a far-reaching vision or dream should be given to a heathen king and in keeping with his times no doubt a rather despotic one. But it did have an influence on Nebuchadnezzar even at that time for he had to acknowledge that Daniel's God was a God of gods and a Lord of kings. So he set Daniel and his companions over the affairs of his kingdom, with Daniel himself in the presence of the king, who was himself pictured in the image's head of gold. But of what far greater blessing and enlightenment has the dream and its interpretation been to God's people particularly in these last days, when we see the signs of the nearness of the setting up of that great stone kingdom of God.

For we, who live in these last days, have as it were an unbroken link with Daniel the prophet greatly beloved of God, who lived and prophesied so long ago in that first world empire period pictured in the head of gold. We clearly are living in the days of the ten toes kingdoms, when the marvellous stone of no human devising will shortly cast down and replace all the kingdoms that have gone before. John writes in Rev.11-15 -"the seventh angel sounded, and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever." How sorely that everlasting kingdom of peace and righteousness is needed today.

For the revealing of the dream and interpretation to the king, Daniel took no credit to himself - "this secret is not revealed to me of any wisdom that I have more than anyone else"; rather he gave thanks: "blessed be the name of God for ever and ever; for wisdom and might are His. "Any service that we can render for our Lord or for His people is a gracious privilege and no cause for pride for "what have we, that we did not receive?" "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." 1 Cor.4:7, 2 Cor.4:5. This is the true perspective of all God's servants and was the spirit of Daniel.

After Nebuchadnezzar's death, the kingdom under Belshazzar soon fell to Darius the Mede, who set over the kingdom three presidents answerable to himself. Of these, Daniel was first in rank, indicating that Darius also recognised the skills and qualities of Daniel, the testimony to him being that "an excellent spirit was in him." This soon provoked envy among the other presidents and the 120 princes set under them and they sought to find fault or error with Daniel but could not do so.

Their final conclusion was - "we shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God." Dan.6:5. Though not meant that way, what a wonderful testimony to Daniel's conduct and consistency of life this was. It sets the standard for the people of God in every age. Daniel's life was open for all to see, yet his detractors could find nothing to accuse him of. While evidently continuing to maintain his own religious duties, his attendance upon the king's business was complete and loyal. Yet all the time his heart was with God's chosen people, as we see later in the account.

The Lord's people are always to be peaceable, law-abiding, diligent and conscientious, seeking to comply not only with the letter but also the spirit of the laws under which they live and which in turn protect them to at least some extent. The only limitation is that which led Peter and John to proclaim - "we ought to obey God rather than men" - when they were ordered to cease preaching the gospel. So it was with Daniel, who was confronted by the statute which the king had been deceived into signing - "that whosoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of thee (the king himself), shall be cast into the den of lions." No doubt

the king's vanity had been appealed to.

The conspirators had well read Daniel's character, and we are not surprised to read - "now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees, three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime." Dan.6:10. In those days, observance of religious duties was more open and the structure of dwellings would have added to this, making Daniel's actions very obvious.

It has been suggested that Daniel may have been able to comply with some lesser requirement, such as praying less openly but there could be no compromise for Daniel nor can there be for any of the Lord's people in the matter of the One they are to worship. Unlike other nations, Israel's law was very clear - "the Lord our God is one Lord" and "thou shalt have no other gods before me (Jehovah) thou shalt not bow down thyself to them or serve them." So Daniel continued his habit and pattern of prayer "as he did aforetime". While he did nothing extra to provoke trouble, his loyalty to the one true God of his people did not falter.

It is unfortunately possible for Christian people to bring trouble upon themselves needlessly and there is no credit with God in suffering for folly or wrongdoing. The Christian standard, as it no doubt was for Daniel too, is - "as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all".... "be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good".... "render to all their dues." To suffer for righteousness' sake is praiseworthy in God's sight and Daniel's faithfulness and stedfastness were wonderfully rewarded by God, as we read in Dan.6:19-23.

Even Darius, who quickly realised that he had been deceived, sought by every means to save Daniel from the lions, and when he could not, he spent a sleepless night, concerned for this man whose noble qualities of character, so different from those of his other counsellors, he had come to appreciate. But God still had further work for Daniel and we read - "so this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian." Dan.6:28. Daniel indeed lived on to a great age, his final vision being received when he would have been nearly 90 years of age.

But before this, further visions were given to him concerning the four great world empires that would ultimately be overcome by the all-consuming kingdom of God, and of events that would occur during those periods. Through it all, we cannot fail to note his deep love and concern for his own people. Though a faithful servant of the powers that be in Babylon, his heart was at all times with his people in their captivity and we read in Dan.9:2 - "in the first year of his (Darius') reign, I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish 70 years in the destruction of Jerusalem."

As a true patriot and as a worshipper of Jehovah, Daniel felt great sorrow over the nation's punishment at His hands and so he besought God that, now the 70 years foretold had come to an end, the nation's return might be no longer deferred. What a wonderful response Daniel received through the angel Gabriel - "at the beginning of thy supplications, the commandment came forth and I am come to show thee, for thou art greatly beloved." Dan.9:23. Still today, our Heavenly Father knows before we ask the desires and intents of our hearts and waits ready to answer and bless the prayer of faith that first and foremost seeks to know His will.

As well as the assurance of his prayer being answered, Daniel was also given a remarkable prophecy of events that would affect his people right down to the time of Messiah the Prince. Students of the Bible are agreed on the accuracy of this prediction of Messiah's advent at the end of the 69th week or 483 years taking a week to represent 7 years, and the further prophecy of the nation and temple being left desolate. But this grim picture, as far as Israel was concerned, was not left as God's last word to the greatly beloved Daniel - he was assured that at the time of the end and after great trouble, Michael (Who is as God), the great Prince who "standeth for the children of thy people" would come and that 'at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.' Dan.12:1.

God's closing words to Daniel furthermore speak of the resurrection to everlasting life being given to those found worthy, of the "wise" shining as the stars and leading many to turn to righteousness. How these assurances to Daniel remind us of our Lord's words in Matt.13:43 - "then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" - and of the grand times of restoration or restitution spoken of by Peter. Though no doubt much comforted by the assurances given to him, Daniel was not granted full understanding of them; rather he was told to "shut up the words and seal the book even to the time of the end; many shall run to and fro knowledge shall be increased."

The personal promise to this man beloved of God concludes the record - "go thou thy way till the end be, for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." Dan.12:13. Daniel heard the words of the Lord but was not given to fully understand, as was the case with all the prophets of old, who wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit prophesying of the grace that should come upon the gospel age heirs of salvation and testifying of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. Meantime, Daniel was to rest in the sleep of death, awaiting that "better resurrection" which the faithful ones of old all looked forward to.

In many ways, the prophecies of Daniel provide the key to the understanding of Bible prophecy in general. How all-embracing they are! They cover an outline of world history, the first and second advents of Jesus, his rejection and the casting off of Israel, later their restoration under Michael their Prince, and the resurrection and restoration of the “many” of mankind. How wonderfully was this saint of God used! Over 2500 years later, we rejoice to see what he heard in secret becoming plain and the signs of the soon fulfilment of the glorious things foretold.

One commentator has said that “Daniel’s undeviating integrity as a worshipper of the one God in an alien, dissolute society, as first minister in the first of the world empires, gives him a place among the highest and holiest the world has seen.

To be used by God, even in smaller ways, requires that the child of God be separate from the world, single-minded in faith and devotion to His service, of humble mind, diligent in searching the scriptures, instant in prayer. In all these ways, Daniel stands out as a shining example. When he stands in his lot at the end of the days, what a wonderful guide and standard he will be to the world of mankind, along with all the faithful of old times! These were not offered a heavenly reward, but we are told that they looked for a city which has foundations whose maker and builder is God. How well Daniel will be equipped for service in that everlasting kingdom!

The same faithfulness, as that of Daniel, is required of us who have been blessed with a heavenly calling. May each of us, in our day, stand as Daniel did for truth and righteousness. (DS: 1992)

Dare to be a Daniel,

Dare to stand alone,

Dare to have a purpose true -

Dare to make it known.